



Removing a Teacher Licensure Exam as a Requirement Doesn't Address Why Some Teachers of Color Aren't Passing

By Educator Barnes – April 9, 2019

Last week, a [*Chalkbeat Indiana* article](#) caused much debate in education circles but especially in education circles of color. Educator responses ranged from asserting that teachers do not need to pass a test to educators feeling offended that the article seemed to suggest educators of

color could not pass a standardized test. Check out the exchange of two people who commented on the article on *Chalkbeat's* Facebook page.

BG Cole: I've never read something so racist in my life! Are you saying people of color can't pass tests??

Susie Etchison Bailey: BG Cole that is what caught my eyes also...what a bunch of bs

I am an educator of color who took and passed the basic skills test as well as other educator exams. I am licensed in five areas: English/Language Arts, Reading, English as a New Language, Library/Media, and School Administration. For each test, I purchased the study guide and then took and passed the exam, but I know this is not the case for many educators who look like me. This is a huge problem because there has been a push for more educators of color to enter the classroom.

However, no one should be surprised by this situation. We know that schools are failing students of color. We know about the achievement gap between white students and their black counterparts. We know that the workforce of teachers is overwhelmingly white and that the belief gap persists where some teachers don't believe students of color have the ability to achieve at high levels. So, why are we surprised that our school system produced teachers of color who cannot pass a teaching exam?

I was an adjunct instructor at IUPUI for five years. I taught mostly juniors and seniors in the school of education. When the few students of color I taught saw that I looked like them, they felt more comfortable being transparent about their struggles. Some of them graduated at the top of their class in high school but were struggling in college. College exposed the skill gaps that some of them didn't realize they had until they got to college and struggled with coursework. If you don't already know this, an A at one school is not necessarily equal to an A at another school. Being top of your class at one high school could be average in comparison to the rigor at another high school. This is the experience that too many students of color have when they decide to become teachers. They were failed by our education system, and if they are able to graduate from college, the next barrier and potential roadblock they face is trying to pass the licensure exam.

A couple of years ago when I wrote the article, "[Aspiring Teachers Cannot Pass Licensure Exams](#)" educators of color reached out to me to tell me their stories. One teacher shared how he had taken the exam several times and still couldn't pass it. Another teacher mentioned she

couldn't pass the exam and had an emergency license. She was upset because her students' academic data was better than her colleagues who had passed the exam. This sentiment was pointed out in the recent *Chalkbeat* article. "Many of those exams are not necessarily related to eventual teacher effectiveness."

But, I'm a parent. Even though I know a teacher could potentially help my sons achieve academically without passing the licensure exam, I not willing to take the gamble with my sons' education. Moreover, scrapping the test will potentially perpetuate the educational cycle of failure of students of color. Some people who cannot pass the test do not possess the knowledge base to be in front of students. There are other professions where you must pass an exam or earn a certification outside of your degree to obtain employment, so why lower the bar for teachers?

Instead of scrapping the exam, I believe we have to do a better job of preparing students of color if they chose education as a career path in college. I consider myself a mentor to some educators currently in college and those who are early in their careers. Some of them still haven't passed the licensure exam. It's a small action, but it is not enough. We have to stop putting a bandage on stuff. I have been hired at a few schools, including the one where I am currently employed, where people have made comments that I was hired just because I was black. It is hard enough to brush that negativity off, so the last thing we need to add is you were also hired without passing or taking the licensure exam.