

Coming Soon: A Bar Exam for Teachers

Written by Staff

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If you ask a teacher about her job, she'll tell you that she's underpaid, overworked, under appreciated, that her job is the most challenging and important one in the world (second only to being a mother), and by the way, have you seen how much professional athletes make?

But if you were to ask the American Federation of Teachers about the job, they'd tell you that teachers freaking suck at it. That's why the AFT, along with the national teachers' union, and the Department of Education are pushing for a "bar exam" for teachers. [[NPR](#)]

One of the root causes of teachers graduating unqualified to teach is that education programs operate with largely open admissions policies. According to NPR's Claudio Sanchez:

There are huge differences in how we attract and select people to become teachers and lawyers and doctors. Law schools and medical schools have really tough admissions standards; education schools don't.

To anyone who's gone to law school, that might seem shocking, as law students tend to think it's just medical schools that have real admissions standards. The joke goes that when you take the MCAT it's to see if you get into medical school, and when you take the LSAT it's to see which law school you get in to. But, lawyers are perhaps living in a bit of an intellectually elite bubble. The lowest LSAT 25th percentile at an ABA accredited school is 143, at Southern University. That's low, but it's still the 20th percentile. Only 13 schools have LSAT 25s below 149, the 40th percentile. And when you consider that a lot of substandard students self-select out of the law school dream and never take the LSAT, that further pushes up admissions standards.

At Harvard's Education Masters program, [the average GRE verbal score was only at the 83rd percentile](#). A law school with similar standards would at best place in the mid-40s, but most likely be second tier. You can get in to a top education grad program with a 3.0 UGPA. That low and applying to law school? You'll either need to be an LSAT/GPA splitter, or else learn to lie about what law school you're attending.

The teacher's "bar exam" wouldn't actually look like the bar exam at all. It's just a term used

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because the lady leading the effort used to be a lawyer. Rather than a general knowledge exam, it would be a single subject test to become qualified to teach in that particular area.

We expect to see teachers and local unions lining up behind the idea, primarily because it will cut off the flow of cheaper, younger teachers into the market, and help boost the reputation of the profession. Though, if current teachers are expected to also pass the exam, we can expect that the whole thing will be scrapped and decried as an effort to demean and terrorize the hardest working people in the country, and you're probably union-busting to boot.

And by the way, [average starting salaries for teachers](#) look a whole lot like the left side of the bi-modal distribution of starting salaries for lawyers. Less debt, less stress, shorter hours, summer vacations, union protection, and a shiny pension plan. If you can get into a mediocre law school, you can probably get into a top education program with a pile of funding. So if you're wondering "what else can I do with my BA in English and Poli Sci," consider going into teaching instead.