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AFGHANISTAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROPOSAL FOR A PROCESS FOR TEACHER CREDENTIALING:

A 3 TIERED SYSTEM BASED ON ASSESSED COMPETENCY LEVEL

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CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL
Building Education Support Systems for Teachers



Executive Summary

Proposal for a Process for Teacher Credentialing: A 3 Tiered System based on Assessed Competency Level

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Proposal for a Process for Teacher Credentialing – A 3 Tiered System based on Assessed Competency Level

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Introduction

This paper analyzes issues and options regarding development of a teacher credentialing system in Afghanistan. It builds on Ministry of Education initiatives and is offered to facilitate the progress of such initiatives.

A teacher credentialing system is a tool for assuring quality education for students by helping teachers and school administrators understand the role of teachers in that effort. It must address Afghanistan's needs and skillfully use available resources. A teacher credentialing system based on competencies will provide a shared understanding of what is required of teachers; assist in teacher recruitment, selection, and hiring; illuminate needed teacher support in different schools and for different learners; enable teacher assessment; and guide teacher professional development, support, remuneration, and supervision.

This paper focuses on a credentialing system primarily based on teacher performance in competency areas identified in the Afghanistan Teacher Competency Framework rather than on the nature of certifying institutions. It presents various credentialing designs and a set of recommendations tailored to Afghanistan. It concludes with a discussion of challenges that must be met and suggests a series of “next steps.”

II. The Concept of Credentialing and How it Relates to Expectations for Education Quality

Credentialing is used to assure the quality of service providers in diverse but vital endeavors. In education, credentialing clearly delineates the knowledge, skills and behavior requirements of a competent teacher in order to ensure that students receive a quality educational experience. All credentialing systems must meet certain criteria. There are various means to address these criteria but the criteria themselves are not debatable. They include: **Relevance**—Credentialing acknowledges ability rather than factors such as age, gender, or family relationships. Credentialing systems are based on what and how teachers are expected to teach students. They weigh factors necessary to predict quality teaching and exclude factors that do not. **Reliability**—Credentialing systems must neither fail to identify incompetent teachers nor fail to certify competent teachers. **Validity**—Credentialing processes and procedures must recognize teacher competence or the lack of it in diverse locations and despite the involvement of many evaluators. **Fairness**—Credentialing systems must be transparent, reflect consideration of the conditions faced by different groups, and be fair and unbiased toward each of them. **Feasibility**—A credentialing system for Afghanistan cannot be elaborate or expensive. Processes and procedures must be implemented within the scope of available resources. **Usefulness**—A credentialing system should be a tool that provides direct, observable

benefits for teachers and other education stakeholders. **Acceptance**—Teachers and other stakeholders should be involved in developing the system to gain their support and willingness to engage in its process and procedures.

There are two basic approaches to awarding a teaching credential. In the first approach credentialing often involves institutions that prepare and/or test individuals before they assume a professional role. Most institutions require prescribed course work, practical experience, and a demonstration of required knowledge and skills. Their authority to award credentials is granted by government only when graduating students are demonstrably able to meet professional expectations. However, *alternative credentialing strategies* in various countries provide teachers with certification on the basis of their experience and/or verifiable competency. Many governments or educational governance boards use a combination of these two approaches.

Thus far Afghanistan has not systematically accredited institutions that certify teachers based on performance expectations. Therefore, it is important to give greater weight to teacher experience and demonstrated competency than to educational qualifications. This in turn requires specifying required teacher performance and outcomes in the form of competencies as well as committing resources to support and nourish effective teaching and learning.

Failure to implement effective teacher credentialing has many negative consequences. It leads to poor student performance which increases the overall cost of educating the population in the long run. Resulting knowledge gaps among students increase national social, health, and economic costs as they fail to meet workplace expectations, or work unsafely. Public confidence in and support for education wanes. The resources and potential of teachers are wasted.

An effective teacher credentialing system is only one part of an overall commitment to effective schools and student learning that must also extend to credentialing school administrators and assuring that school conditions support effective instruction.

III. Design of a Teacher Credentialing Process for Afghanistan - 3 Tiers of Teacher Competency

A system for credentialing new teachers will evolve as Teacher Training Colleges grow, the capacities of education administrators develop, and local school directors and teachers more effectively screen teacher candidates and provide new teachers with better initial supervision. Meanwhile, it is critical to assess, describe, and certify the competency of the more than 123,000 existing teachers of Grades 1-12. To do this requires a multi-dimensional competency framework such as the Afghanistan Teacher Competency Framework (ATCF) developed by BESST in collaboration with the Teacher Education Department. This framework clearly articulates what is expected of teachers in all areas of their work to teach effectively and it meets the basic criteria discussed earlier—relevance, reliability, validity, fairness, usefulness, and acceptance. It is necessary to

adhere to these criteria in the credentialing system and in its *implementation* as much as in its design. Another challenge is to ensure that articulated and assessed teacher functions clearly include practical, day-to-day aspects of instruction and other activities that support student learning.

Meeting these challenges will provide useful guidance for teachers, supervisors, and in-service teacher training programs by diagnostically assessing the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and providing direction for professional development. The proposed system would assess teachers as falling into one of three categories: Currently Not Adequately Qualified (Marginal)—teachers who do not meet expectations but, with effort and guidance, may well improve; Adequately Qualified—teachers who meet basic expectations but should strengthen abilities in areas of weakness; Highly Qualified (Superior)—teachers who exceed standard expectations and capable of functioning as master teachers in areas where they are especially strong.

A competency-based process differs from the present approach in two ways. First, in regard to unqualified teachers, the proposed process provides mandatory in-service training and a program of self-improvement for individuals who are not adequately qualified. Presently, Afghanistan requires that individuals must have 9 years of schooling in order to teach. This policy excludes almost one-fifth of Afghanistan's teachers who may well possess good experience, skills, and motivation. Second, in regard to teachers who are adequately qualified, the proposed process recognizes that requirements and standards for teachers cannot remain static. Teachers must be encouraged to continually assess and develop their skills.

The immediate task must be to address teachers who need immediate mandatory in-service training to become qualified. This is a feasible approach that will allocate limited resources to a manageable proportion of the teacher population with the greatest effect.

The proposed credentialing process would also provide a “road map” for designing training tailored to address the most common set of needs identified for each level of teachers. It will also provide a cost-effective means for delivering training by using superior teachers to deliver training to those who are not adequately qualified. It would also enable school administrators to keep those committed teachers who need to improve by assisting, rather than terminating, them and avoid the effort to find qualified new teachers.

The proposed credentialing system will also provide a way to recognize and communicate teachers' value. This will promote public confidence in and support for education that will lead to better remuneration for teachers. It will also enable supervisors to set immediate goals and standards for teachers and enable teachers to articulate the complexity and value of their responsibilities to supervisors.

IV. Key Challenges in Developing A Practical and Useful Teacher Credentialing System

Procedures for assessing teachers' competency must be sound to provide reliability, validity and fairness. Substantial technical expertise will be required to both design the assessment procedures and simultaneously maintain a system that is easy to understand and use. Assessment involves four measures of competency based on 1) experience, 2) educational attainment, 3) testing, and 4) observation of performance in an actual classroom ("authentic" assessment). Current practice in Afghanistan heavily weighs educational attainment and experience. Unfortunately, these two aspects alone poorly predict teacher performance. BESST recommends a system that relies upon a combination of testing and authentic assessment. Developing it would involve analysis of several design options followed with open discussion among stakeholders to understand the pros and cons of each.

Sound assessment of teaching skills will require the development of observation protocols for different task areas and careful training of observers. Testing, to assess knowledge, will require careful design of the examinations themselves to distinguish between more and less qualified teachers. BESST acknowledges that the recommended three-tier credentialing system, will present challenges. A first step would be to articulate what behaviors and knowledge characterize each level—for discussion among policymakers and stakeholders. Then, follow-up BESST exploratory research would provide statistical analysis of observed teacher behaviors in order to establish "cut points" for each tier. The number of teachers in each category will have major impacts on training, student results, teacher morale, supervision, and public attitudes.

Given the configuration of Afghanistan's schools, the most effective credentialing approach would be to issue credentials for a) primary teaching, b) secondary teaching, and c) both primary and secondary teaching. An assessment system that addresses both teaching skills and knowledge will be most useful in allocating one of these three credentials to teachers. For example, those strong in teaching skills may be good primary teachers, even if they have not completed nine grades.

To meet the challenge of system feasibility, BESST recommends a goal of 40,000+ certifications per year over three years, limited reliance on central administration staff, sorting teachers into one of three tiers rather than giving each a precise "grade," streamlined appeal procedures, and certification waivers for older teachers to teach another 3-5 years. It will be important for the Ministry of Education to broadly communicate teacher standards, acknowledge its accountability for the credentialing system, and prepare provincial officials for its implementation.

Maintenance of teacher credentialing data will require a substantial investment. Records must be secured with carefully delineated rules for who has access to them while also remaining well organized and available for authorized, practical use. To plan and advance their own professional development, teachers must have access to their credentialing information, as should their supervisors. Safeguards against arbitrary information changes and procedures to correct mistakes must be in place. Records should be standardized nationally so that they can be used in analyses of overall competencies, training, and training results, as well as provide guidance for strategic plans and training

programs that respond to teachers' needs. They should also include initial credential status, information about follow-up training, and subsequent changes in status.

Procedures will need to motivate teacher professional development and guide their efforts for self-improvement. These include mandatory in-service for teachers who must improve mastery of the subjects they teach as well as optional in-service opportunities for qualified teachers to expand their knowledge and skills. A system of waivers can be instituted to take special circumstances into account, such as working in remote areas or a lack of training opportunities. Provision may also be made for older or female teachers.

It is not feasible to immediately transition into a new system of teacher credentialing. In-service training can be implemented to quickly upgrade existing teachers' skills. The credentialing system itself will provide tools for moving ahead. A new performance-oriented system will require statutory authority. Parliamentary stakeholders, as well as others, should be involved in planning for the system. Issues surrounding teacher remuneration for expanded skills and knowledge must also be addressed.

V. Process Options and Recommendations

The design and implementation of a teacher credentialing system will require a systematic process for defining, discussing, selecting, or blending various options that simultaneously engages a core of TED planners and Ministry leadership in efforts to secure stakeholder buy-in, consider technical proposals, and secure parliamentary and executive support. A first step is TED formation of a Teacher Credentialing Discussion Group charged with timely review of and suggestions regarding specified technical working papers (listed in Exhibit 1 of the full report) prepared by a Technical Support Group staffed by BESST. It is strongly recommended that the immediate focus of these groups be on retroactive certification of the current teaching labor force and the design of associated in-service training. It is also recommended that BESST work closely with TED to develop scenarios regarding competency framework development and "cut points" for credentialing tiers that are in turn reviewed and tested by teacher educators, administrators, teachers, and policy makers. Procedures developed for retroactive certification would also provide a starting point for the secondary task of developing pre-service training leading to a teaching credential.

VI. Summary and Conclusions

Afghanistan's strategy for developing a teacher credentialing system should be based on careful consideration of the country's education system, the demographics of and distribution of skills within the current teaching labor force and the skills needed for effective elementary, middle, and secondary school teaching.

It will be crucial to effectively and practically certify that credentialed teachers actually have the competencies required to teach well. Also, a proposed system must be able to operate with the resources likely to be available.

A teacher credentialing system cannot address immediate concerns about the qualifications of current teachers. In any case, it is not useful to remove large numbers of current teachers from the available labor pool. A credentialing system should motivate all of Afghanistan's teachers to continue with lifelong learning and personal development—those who are marginally qualified, those who are adequately qualified, and even those who have superior qualifications.

Teacher credentialing must be accompanied by extensive and flexible in-service training. This system must effectively respond to the new demand for in-service training sparked by credentialing requirements. It will need to provide marginally-qualified teachers with in-service training to maintain their teaching credential and it will need to assure that the education system enables teachers to bolster efforts that expand schooling to 9th grade, as guaranteed by the Constitution.

BESST recommends that both the design of and planning for the teacher credentialing system be open enough to engage a broad range of education stakeholders. At the same time, we caution that the process must not focus on itself; it must facilitate a substantive, informed, and responsible dialogue about options and opportunities, not administrative issues. The dialogue will also need to be specific, reference available evidence, and include careful attention to the costs and benefits of competing options.

A summary of policy issues that need to be addressed by the Ministry in order to develop and adopt a systematic and deliberate strategy for attracting and maintaining high quality teachers include those in Exhibit 2 of the full report which is added as an appendix to this Executive Summary.

The development of a teacher credentialing system has the potential to greatly enhance the quality of education in Afghanistan and to assure educational equity for its children. All students should not simply have access to a school but, also, to effective teachers and genuine opportunities to learn. The costs of developing a teacher credentialing system are significant. Hopefully, the Ministry of Education will commit the investment of time and energy needed to secure success.

APPENDIX:

Exhibit 2: Policy Issues to Address In Order to Move Forward with Teacher Credentialing

- **Decision on Using a Competency Approach to Defining Teacher Quality** – This entails that the competency approach is accepted as the approach that will define teacher quality in Afghanistan. This has implications for teacher training curriculum development, accreditation of training programs and credentialing of teachers. The competency framework will form the basis of future teacher training curriculum and policy will need to be formed on how to develop future curriculum and what to do with current curricula. When looking to accredit teacher training programs, a central piece of the accreditation process will have to be the incorporation of the competency framework within the program. Policy will need to be developed on the weight given to this part of the accreditation process and what happens to programs that do not incorporate and address the competencies in their programming. Finally the evaluation of teachers in the credentialing process will have to be based on the competencies that they have mastered. It is crucially important to develop policies that identify competencies that must be met in-order for a teacher to be considered adequately qualified and competencies that are required for teachers to be considered master teachers. Although there is a technical element in the identification of these cut off markers, the decision is very much a policy decision.
- **Decision on National or Provincial Credential-Granting Authority**—While we very strongly recommend national credential granting authority, a policy decision must be made as to whether Afghanistan wants to have this authority vested in the Ministry of Education and, if so, whether this is a power the Minister can delegate to his designated subordinate, and if so, whether this might be a special credential-granting board or not.
- **Affirmation of Credential-Granting Authority**—A review of the legal framework is required and, quite possibly, statutory authority is required to confirm the Ministry of Educations authority to grant teachers credentials for Grade 1-12 instruction and to adopt the organization provisions regarding where within MoE this is to happen.
- **Affirmation of Process for One-Time Retroactive Credential Granting**—It is probably desirable to have a policy framework affirming the need for special procedures to grant credentials to 120,000-140,000 current teachers. The need to credential individual teachers rather than to credential institutions to grant teaching credentials stems from the current unique situation in part. This will distinguish the currently proposed process from an ultimate process which may involve licensing institutions such as TTC's to grant credentials as the result of pre-service training participation. The policy framework will need to give attention to issues re “grandfathering” (special provisions for groups of teachers who did not have an opportunity to attend teacher training, go to school etc.)
- **Decisions Re Scope of Credentials**—These decisions should be partially technical but also they have policy elements related to use of credentials for human resource management (recruiting, training, supervising, assigning teachers). For example, maybe there might be a “Lower Grades-Elementary Credential”, an “Upper Grades-Elementary Credential”, and a “Secondary Credential Subject Area(s) Credential” (since subject-matter mastery becomes so much more demanding at the secondary level). The decisions here will be very important for teachers and will need to be synchronized with procedures for upgrading. Additionally a policy decision needs to be made in regards to the number of years a teacher credential is valid for. We strongly recommend that teachers' credentials be periodically reviewed and renewed.
- **Decisions Re Credential Upgrading Procedures**—The procedures for upgrading from a “marginal” to an “adequate” (unrestricted) credential will need to have policy components as well as technical components. For example, logistically, it might be desirable, while MoE retained the authority to grant initial credentials, to delegate to provincial education departments or TTC's the authority to review people's performance in skills areas where they were assessed as weak (or certify them based on successful in-service course completion). It will be crucial to understand that a teacher credentialing system is inherently complex—due to both technical requirements, practical, and political ones.
- **Decisions Re Waivers to Credential Upgrading Requirements**—The model put forward in our paper is that the requirements to upgrade from “marginal” to “qualified” credential should allow a grace

Exhibit 2: Policy Issues to Address In Order to Move Forward with Teacher Credentialing

period of perhaps 3 years. However, the model also suggests the need to examine the question of waivers. This requires further discussion—e.g. as to whether there should be waivers for teachers who can't be expected to participate in in-service training because none has been offered in their area. This discussion has political as well as technical dimensions. For example, should female teachers have modified requirements via waivers to take into account the special problems they face in attending distant in-service training courses? If, for example, there are waivers for teachers in provinces which do not have adequate access to in-service training, then who determines the lack of access—the MoE Central Administration or the provincial officials? What is a reasonable balance to credentialing as a tool for quality assurance vs. equity for teachers who cannot reasonably manage to upgrade their skills without help?

- **Decisions Re Benchmarking for Credential Issuance**—The analysis in the paper notes that the Ministry of Education, in consultation with stakeholders, has a range of options in setting benchmarks. There is NO perfect way to do this as there are trade-offs. However, in principle, there should be a decision regarding the likely distribution of “marginal”, “qualified” and “master” teachers resulting from different cut-points in assessing current teachers' current competencies and the weights given to each sub-domain of competency (e.g. subject matter competency vs. instructional competency) and available training resources. There are also decision which must be made as to whether the typical jagged profile of competencies in different sub-areas will be averaged to a final composite score which determines the level of credential authorization granted or whether some areas have required minimum scores (i.e. can a 3rd grade teacher have a credential listing him as fully qualified based on a satisfactory composite score although he knows virtually no math?). These decisions inter-relate to decisions about the scope of a credential—since gradations in limiting scope (e.g. to a sub-range of subjects) provide a way to assure that teachers ARE used as resources in some areas where they can perform well but NOT in others. These are “policy” decisions in large measure because they interact with other facets of system functioning—e.g. amount of \$ available for in-service training, needs for teachers in different sub-areas of the education system (for example, there may well be an over-supply of secondary school teachers so the system could afford to maintain high standards in that area while relaxing standards in primary)

- **Decisions Re Weighting of Components for Credential Issuance**-- This is, of course, crucial also, as eventually credentialing may not rest solely on teachers' demonstrated competency but, also, experience, and/or educational attainment. The decision about which weight to give to each element is both technical (because even direct performance assessment, while better than educational attainment and experience at predicting classroom competency, may be imperfect) but also because of political considerations.

- **Decisions Re Credentialing School Principals and/or Other School Management Team Members**—This, too, has technical and policy components. Interestingly, despite the development of a School MT competency framework, it is probably necessary for there to be a policy review of this framework to address a number of issues which are of political significance but which are not properly part of our technical framework (e.g. how old does someone have to be in order to be a principal? Do they need teaching experience or not?)