

**REL Mid-Atlantic Teacher Effectiveness Webinar Series**  
**Pathways into Teaching**  
**Q&A with Dr. Pam Grossman**  
**November 7, 2013**

*This webinar explored several elements of teacher preparation pathways, including the history, popularity, and quality of various routes to certification, as well as the impact of these various pathways on teacher quality and retention and student achievement. This Q&A addressed the questions participants had for Dr. Grossman following the webinar. The [webinar recording](#) and [PowerPoint presentation](#) are also available.*

### Questions

- 1. How much do teacher qualifications (e.g., what college you went to, SAT scores, etc.) affect acceptance, and what are programs doing to seek out particular skills and dispositions of teacher candidates?**

The issue of teacher qualifications has been a huge topic in teacher education for a long time. One of the challenges of teacher education is that we need so many teachers. We could never fill all of the teaching positions from the top 10 percent or even the top 25 percent of college graduates. To even get close to being able to fill classrooms with teachers who come from that population, we would need people to go only into teaching and not into any of the other professions. So part of what we have to think about is the ways in which preparation can address wherever people come in and how to make them stronger.

At the same time, research suggests that qualifications do matter. The extent to which you select people who have stronger academic qualifications, stronger certification scores, or stronger SAT scores individually may not be predictive, but collectively, that cluster of things is predictive, according to some of the work my team has done.

Selection and recruitment is one potential mechanism to affect the production of effective teachers. One of the ways you can develop high-quality teachers is to select people based on the attributes that you think will matter in terms of their teaching performance. Some pathways focus on the issue of selection and recruitment into that particular pathway, such as Teach for America (TFA), which tends to recruit and select individuals with higher entering academic qualifications. The attributes of individuals going through TFA help explain the results across multiple studies that suggest TFA teachers have greater impact than teachers from other pathways on secondary math achievement but less impact on elementary literacy. TFA teachers are much more likely to have taken more math in high school, and so they come in with some mathematical strengths that may translate into being more effective. The impact of TFA, however, is lessened by the high attrition of teachers. It is necessary to account for differences in retention rates across pathways when looking at this type of evidence.

When considering the qualifications of the candidate, it is also important to think about the

nature of the program and where people will be teaching. Effective preparation is a combination of the characteristics of the candidate, the characteristics of the school or district and what it is looking for, and the characteristics of the program. Some programs focus on people coming in with a lot of experience; work by Susan Moore Johnson has examined programs that look at the characteristics of the individuals and what they bring from that experience. For example, there are programs to prepare paraprofessionals who work in school districts to become classroom teachers. These paraprofessionals can build on their knowledge of students and of the district and perhaps of students' families. They might need a different emphasis in their program than somebody who is coming in straight out of undergraduate school and has very little experience in schools.

## **2. What can we learn from the research about effective teacher preparation programs?**

Research suggests there is tremendous variability in achievement gains within pathways. Because of this finding, it is more important to focus on the quality of preparation than on which pathway is better. That is, the solution to designing the best preparation program and producing high-quality teachers is learning from what each of those pathways does well and making those elements more common across pathways.

First, we can learn much about selection and recruitment from some of the alternative pathways. We have done a good job of increasing interest in teaching, getting more diverse candidates to apply, and finding people who have strong academic ability to come into the classroom. At the same time, we can learn more about kinds of professional knowledge for teaching (teaching reading is a good example) and how best to prepare novice teachers to give high-quality instruction in those early years in the classroom.

Second, it's important to think about both retention and impact on student achievement. There's a lot of emphasis right now on student achievement and the outcome of teacher education programs and building that into accountability measures in teacher education programs. We also need to attend to the retention issue because, as we have seen from our own studies, high attrition weakens a pathway's impact on student achievement over time. Thus, as we think about holding teacher education programs accountable, we need to think about both of those issues: impact on student achievement and impact on retention.

Third, we need to think hard about being responsive to labor market needs. Alternative routes took off in part because colleges and universities were not nimble in responding to the needs of districts and particularly their difficulties in staffing either certain schools or certain subjects.

Part of what we can learn is how to work more in partnership with the districts and schools that hire our graduates so we can become responsive to school needs and know the kind of teachers they are seeking. Again, this is something we can learn about across the different pathways.

In addition, it is important to realize that how teachers are prepared is only one piece of this broader issue related to the teacher workforce. Some factors in teacher quality include what teachers bring into preparation programs, state requirements, career intentions, and school context. Therefore, when defining an effective pathway, you need to consider at least three aspects: candidate quality, recruitment, and selectivity; preparation; and retention and

impact. To maximize the production of the most effective teachers, the quality of candidates does matter. Programs and pathways tend to recruit for a variety of qualities related to academic qualifications and the ability to work in challenging settings. Effective preparation is a collection of features and practices, including the characteristics of the school or district, characteristics of the program, leadership, coursework, etc.

Research suggests there are preparation features and practices that benefit teachers in their first year and can be linked to subsequent student impact. In one study, Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Wyckoff, and I (2008) examined teacher qualifications, retention, and student achievement in New York City. We used administrative data, survey data, and interview data from 1990–2006 to compare the structure (e.g., undergrad, graduate, length), content (e.g., specific preparation), and practices of teacher preparation programs serving New York City public schools, and linked this data with value-added measures of student performance in math and English Language Arts to analyze how the program differences influence student achievement and retention. We did two different analyses of what features of preparation related to student achievement: one based on what we learned about the programs, from the program documentation itself, and the other based on the survey responses of those graduates.

The findings suggest there are a variety of things related to student achievement across programs and pathways. In math, we could link four features of preparation to student achievement: (1) whether the candidates were asked to do some kind of a Capstone experience, which was often creating a teaching portfolio; (2) the quality of the oversight of field experience, which had to do with the number of times the supervisors observed candidates and how the supervisors were attached to the program; (3) the percentage of tenured faculty or tenure line faculty who were teaching the math methods course; and (4) the number of required math courses. In ELA, the Capstone project and oversight of field experience were both related to student achievement.

Another interesting finding from the New York City study is that people who had lots of experience in another field were not necessarily more successful in teaching. This means they might need a different kind of preparation to be successful.

### **3. How are teacher prep programs preparing for the Common Core implementation?**

Teacher education programs in the states that adopted the Common Core are thinking about how to prepare for it right now. There are two parts to consider. The first part is making sure that teachers know how to align the work they are doing to the standards. A standards-based approach is not new as teacher education programs have been responsible for ensuring the standards within their particular state for a while. For example, the Stanford teacher education program makes sure that students know how to align the work they are doing with the California State Standards, and in other states, teachers are required to list the state standards they are addressing, even in the syllabus. The second part, and what will be different, of course, is the nature of the standards. The standards in the Common Core and New Generation Standards are much more ambitious. The standards state what students should be able to achieve, but don't actually state what teachers need to do in order to help students achieve. Part of the work needed is to think hard about what core practices new teachers will need to master for teaching to those standards. For example, cutting across all of the standards is the expectation that students

will be engaged in much more ambitious kinds of classroom discussion in which they are asked to respond to each other's ideas and to construct evidence-based arguments. This is quite a sophisticated notion of classroom discussion that, research suggests, is at odds with what most kids are currently doing. I participated in the Measures of Effective Teaching studies and viewed lots and lots of video of classrooms. In most classrooms, kids have very few opportunities to talk. So that is an example of something that teacher education programs are going to have to think about: how are we preparing our teachers to conduct and orchestrate the kinds of rich classroom discussions envisioned by the Common Core standards? Another example is the mathematical practices component of the math standards. Prospective math teachers will need to understand not only what those practices are and what they look like, but also what kind of teaching supports the use of those practices. Candidates need to be familiar with the expectations (e.g., what does high-quality work towards those standards look like?) and then understand what core practices novices need to develop in order to help kids succeed. In addition, it is important to prepare instructional leaders who know how to support novice teachers. As part of the survey of first year leaders in New York City, we found mentoring mainly focused on emotional support and classroom management instead of instructional support or meeting the needs of English learners, for example. In schools where more teachers reported positive things about the administrators and administrative support, those teachers were more likely to get mentoring on instruction. Leaders need to ensure that resources support new teachers and that those resources are focused on instruction.

**4. What do you see as the first step in a strategic plan that a traditional teacher prep higher education program should take to be more responsive to the labor market and new student needs?**

One step is having strong connections to the districts that hire your graduates and having mechanisms for ongoing conversations about what the districts are looking for and sharing data about their likely needs five years out. When I was teaching at the University of Washington, we had a professional education review board that consisted of school district officials and staff from the teacher education program. We met regularly to talk about the needs of those districts and their perception of how well we were doing in preparing teachers to meet their needs. So a good step is putting structures in place that allow you to have that conversation with districts. Generally, districts can begin to see where they are going to need teachers a year or two years out. Therefore, getting that information by engaging districts in conversations where they can say "these are the ways in which we think you are doing a really good job and these are the places where we feel you are not producing the teachers we need" will allow your program to be more responsive.

**Action Steps**

**Participants responded to the question "As a result of today's webinar, what action steps do you plan to take?" and some of their responses are listed below.**

- *Investigate correlation of field experiences with placement for teaching internships.*
- *Incorporate creative and intentional responsiveness to teacher candidate and labor needs and requirements.*
- *The increase in the number of teachers entering through alternate routes will probably*

*continue. It is important to continue to examine the appropriate preparations, school placements, continued professional development and retention factors.*

- *We need to collaborate more with school districts about the placement of new teachers.*
- *Elizabeth's comment [about classroom management and professional learning] has me thinking about the need for interns to reflect more about and discuss with their mentor teachers the management strategies they use. Many subtle strategies may never even be observed by the intern; but these are critical to their future success.*
- *Having great leadership. Have teachers who know why they are teaching and have an actual passion for teaching rather than "just need a job with good benefits."*
- *Teachers need to be well versed in computer skills. Teaching is moving away from the blackboard and onto the computer-based learning. There are several school districts like X who have home schooling that is computer based.*

#### **Additional Resources**

- Center on Education Policy Analysis: <http://cepa.stanford.edu/tpr/overview>
- Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2008). *Teacher preparation and student achievement*. National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w14314.pdf>
- Susan Moore Johnson: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/directory/faculty/faculty-detail/?fc=178&flt=j&sub=all>