

# **FOCUS: A State-wide Initiative to Select and Retain Transition Teachers**

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## *Abstract*

*Through Focus on Change in Understanding Staff and Staffing Systems in Georgia Public Schools (FOCUS), over 500 teachers of record were recruited, selected, and placed in Georgia's high-need schools. Teachers in the first three cohorts were retained at very high levels as well as achieving full certification. Project outcomes also included the consolidation of Georgia's six alternative pathways to certification under one area and the development and implementation of a hybrid model of teacher preparation. Additional sustainability initiatives include the development and launch of two new technological tools to be used by local education agencies to predict and prepare for staffing needs.*

*Keywords: alternative teacher certification, transition to teaching, nontraditional teacher preparation, transition teacher recruitment, staffing high-need schools*

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## Introduction

Schools in rural and high poverty areas have a difficult time maintaining quality teachers (Collins, 1999; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). Often referred to as high-need, these schools have higher turnover rates than other schools, and the teachers who leave these schools are typically more qualified than the teachers who stay (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that a 50% increase in the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches at a school (i.e., a school in which 25% of the students received free and reduced-price lunches compared to a school in which 75% were in receipt) increased the risk of new teachers leaving after their first year by nearly 50%.

In these schools, teachers report that they are least satisfied with school facilities; leadership; professional development opportunities; and the extent to which they are involved in decision-making, supported as risk-takers, and recognized and respected as professionals (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Further, low-income schools often have a lower percentage of certified teachers, and more teachers with weaker education backgrounds than other schools (Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2007; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). To interrupt this staffing pattern in Georgia, educational leaders at the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) submitted a proposal based on best practices in the field to the United States Department of Education (US DOE) for funding under the 2009 Transition to Teaching Grant that was subsequently funded. The purposes of this article are to describe the project, its objectives, and outcomes.

Strategies for retaining teachers in high-need schools vary, but several studies noted the impact of providing monetary incentives, such as signing bonuses or pay increases, for attracting and retaining teachers at low-income, high-poverty schools (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012). Kirchoff (as cited in Curtis, 2012) found that although financial incentives are often provided to make positions in high poverty or rural schools more attractive, higher attrition still exists in those areas than in other schools, and additional research indicates that financial incentives are not the only factor influencing teacher retention. In one survey of teachers at rural high-need schools, teachers reported that while offering more money would make positions at high-need schools more attractive, teachers already working in these schools place value on non-financial elements, such as their level of caring and greater exposure to high-need schools in their preparation programs (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012).

Ingersoll (2012) found a link between novice teachers' participation in induction programs and their retention, though the impact of the effect on retention depended on the types and amount of support that new teachers received. The factors with the strongest impact on retention were having a mentor teacher from the same subject area and having common planning or collaboration time with other teachers in the same subject area (Ingersoll, 2012). A related study determined that having a mentor in the same field of study decreased a teacher's risk of leaving after the first year by nearly 30%, while a mentor from a different field reduced risk by about 18% (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Greenlee and Brown (2009) noted the way teachers were prepared often affects the retention incentives they find most appealing. They determined that teachers who were prepared by a traditional method wanted an increase in financial support to remain in high-need schools, such as differential pay, tuition reimbursement, and performance

bonuses. Alternatively, teachers who were prepared by an alternative route indicated that more authority in the school (site-based management) and opportunities for professional development were more attractive enticements to remain in challenging schools.

According to the most recent data from the US DOE (2013), alternative certification programs currently comprise 31% of teacher preparation programs. In a review of the literature, Blazer (2012) found in order to be effective, alternative certification programs should include a strong academic coursework component; rigorous candidate screening; opportunities for practice teaching; a support system for teachers after they enter the classroom; and community partnerships with local school districts, universities, or non-profit institutions.

Potential transition teachers may be found among displaced workers, recent graduates of traditional colleges and universities who did not complete educator preparation programs, and those enrolled in Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) programs. Williams and Forgasz (2009) found that people who enter teaching after service in another career field most often do so for intrinsic and altruistic reasons rather than extrinsic ones. Specifically, people in their study believed that they possessed the necessary attributes to be good teachers. Further, they expected a higher degree of job satisfaction from their work with children. Similarly, Manuel and Hughes (2006) found that “teaching as a calling” was a strong motivator for career-changers, and that while material rewards were important to their survey respondents, they were not a primary motivating factor for those considering the teaching field.

### **FOCUS: Transition to Teaching Program**

Focus on Change in Underrepresented Staff and Staffing Systems in Georgia Public Schools (FOCUS) was a statewide partnership program established to address and implement solutions to documented conditions inhibiting the recruitment, selection, certification, placement, and retention of those entering the teaching ranks from other professions (transition teachers). Specifically, the project aimed to place and retain a diverse workforce to teach critical subject areas and teaching fields in high-need schools in high-need Local Education Agencies (LEAs). Some research indicates that turnover in such schools is 50% higher than for those in affluent areas (Ingersoll, 2001).

The extensive partnership list built over the life of the project included the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), the Special Education division of the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), 60 eligible Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs), LiveText, Inc., International Business Machines (IBM), the Georgia Department of Labor (GaDOL), Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs).

The specific purposes of FOCUS were to:

- Expand the pool of transition candidates;
- Revamp transition preparation program approval and assessment procedures and policies;
- Build the capacity of LEA leadership in high-need schools and critical content areas;
- Implement a model for the support of transition teachers in high-need schools;
- Align and streamline certification and preparation standards and rules; and

- Implement a new model of certificate enhancements that results in improved skills and differentiated teacher incentives in high-need schools.

Five program outcomes were proposed consisting of recruitment and selection, preparation, placement, support, and certification of transition teachers. There were originally 41 supporting strategies designed to achieve the five objectives.

To achieve the objectives for recruitment and selection, the project staff maintained a database of prospective transition teachers derived from the many prospects generated through teacher recruitment events. Specifically, recruitment events included meeting with LEA human resources personnel to identify hiring needs and identify potential candidates, attending job fairs, presenting and/or attending conferences, holding information sessions to recruit potential transition teacher candidates, and collaborating with Georgia Department of Labor and Georgia Division of Special Education Services to identify prospective transition teachers.

Rule changes enacted by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) reduced the time to certification for transition teachers. Participants, most often mid-life career changers, enrolled in alternative preparation programs approved by the GaPSC. Although the GaPSC did not offer coursework directly, the project supported activities, resources, and stipends to offset the costs of instruction and mentor services for nontraditional educator preparation programs. Specifically, a blended model of instruction (face-to-face and online options) in key areas of teacher preparation was developed and delivered through LiveText for transition teachers enrolled in Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) programs and the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP), a preparation program delivered by providers approved by the GaPSC (e.g., local school districts and regional service agencies). The modules included in the model provided instruction, resources, and assessment of practice in areas previously identified as necessary to entry level teachers (e.g., classroom management).

Numerous opportunities for leadership training, with a focus on selection of transition teachers, occurred each year. Online training for administrators and leaders through TeachGeorgia as well as face-to-face opportunities through conferences and the RESAs were developed and implemented. For example, during project year two, 48 persons participated in the Leadership Support Initiative and Master Teacher training at the Best Practices Conference held in September 2011. During project year four, leadership initiatives focused on acquainting program providers and employers with the resources available to them and their transition teachers via LiveText. In project year five, a web-based training was provided on Georgia's Transition to Teaching Program: Formula for Success through the website:  
<https://college.livetext.com/doc/9066733#9066733>.

Ongoing training for eligible LEA leaders has been provided through their RESA. Additionally, combining all transition programs with GaTAPP creates a repository of qualified applicants from which leaders in high need schools may recruit.

FOCUS strategies such as those cited previously also supported retention efforts. Specifically, each enrollee participated in a supervised one-year internship and an intensive coaching experience upon entry into the program. To further assist with retention during the probationary

period, online resources were provided as content and pedagogy refreshers for enrollees. Additionally, all participants received a stipend of \$1000 to help defray expenses associated with preparation. Best practices were disseminated through conferences and web-based platforms (e.g., LiveText), and financial support for a mentor for each enrollee was provided.

Not all objectives and strategies were operative in each year of the program. Activities under each objective and strategy, and the evaluation of them, were reported to the US DOE annually. Data were collected, analyzed and reviewed annually to track progress toward the attainment of the specified outcomes. Criteria for determining whether the purposes were achieved were outlined in a five-year evaluation plan that included formative assessments used to make program improvements where indicated. FOCUS staff made changes or adjustments in strategy in order to achieve improved outcomes based on these data.

### **Methods**

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected throughout the project to inform program improvements and to follow the progress made toward attaining program objectives. The data collection methods were selected for suitability and appropriateness to measure the program outcomes. Evaluations were conducted on professional learning opportunities offered to LEA leaders and program participants. Additionally, transition teachers and their mentors were surveyed in the fourth year. Databases were maintained throughout the project with detailed information about participants' progress, and the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) Certified Personnel Information (CPI) database was accessed to track participant retention and certificate type across the life of the program. The recruitment staff maintained databases detailing their activities from which data were extracted annually. Each of the five program components included objectives (recruitment and selection, preparation, placement, support, and certification of transition teachers) to which specific performance measures were connected. Results of these measures were monitored on an annual basis.

### **Performance Measures**

#### **Objective 1: Recruitment and Selection**

Recruit a pool of highly qualified mid-career professionals and recent college graduates from which 100 candidates will be hired each year, become teachers of record, and be enrolled in the FOCUS program as transition teachers in high-need schools in 60 eligible high-need LEAs in Georgia, with priority given to recruitment of underrepresented populations.

**Performance Measure:** Each year of the project, 100 transition teachers will be recruited, become teachers of record, and be enrolled in the FOCUS program in high-need schools in 60 eligible high-need LEAs. In each cohort of enrollees, the percentage from underrepresented groups will be 10% more than the percentage of underrepresented groups in the Georgia educator workforce each year.

**Objective 2: Preparation**

Enhance transition pathways to certification to enrich, streamline, and increase program accessibility in preparation for transition teachers in order for them to receive full certification within three years.

**Performance Measure:** Each year of the project, 90% of the cohort of 100 enrollees will receive full certification within three years of enrollment in FOCUS, with percentages reported in the third, fourth, and fifth years.

**Objective 3: Placement**

Build the capacity of school and LEA leadership to examine and change staffing systems, processes, and policies in order to implement research-based recruitment, selection, placement, and support strategies for transition teachers.

**Performance Measure:** Each year of the project, leaders in 80% of the LEAs will receive training in research-based strategies on recruitment, selection, placement, and support of transition teachers.

**Objective 4: Support**

Develop and implement a model for the mentoring and support for transition teachers during the certification process in order to enhance their classroom performance; and to retain 90% of FOCUS teachers-of-record while tracked from “cohort” entry through the third teaching year.

**Performance Measure:** Each year of the project, 90% of FOCUS enrollees will be retained in high-need schools in high-need LEAs the next year; and in the third, fourth, and fifth years the members of the first three cohorts will have been retained for at least three years.

**Objective 5: Certification**

Align and streamline Transition to Teaching programs and policies to implement a model to enable certificate enhancements that impact differentiated incentives for teachers in high-need schools.

**Performance Measure:** By the end of project year four, PSC rule and policy changes and IHE policy changes listed in the strategies of Objective 5 have been accomplished.

**Results*****Recruitment and Selection.***

The evaluation of recruitment strategies was documented through enumeration of the type and frequency of events via quarterly reports submitted by recruiters. The recruitment plan was revised going into project year four in order to capitalize on the strategies that resulted in the highest placement of transition teachers, such as collaboration with human resource personnel in LEAs that had vacancies.

In all but one of the project years, the goal of 100 new teachers of record was achieved (see Table 1). Additionally, the target goal of 90% retention for three years was achieved in years two and three, with 86% three-year retention for project year one enrollees. Outcomes of the targeted recruitment strategies designed to increase the number of teachers from underrepresented groups is reported in Table 2. The placement of enrollees identifying as Black has been particularly successful, achieving the target of 10% above the Georgia educator workforce in each year. The target was also met for male teachers in project years two to four.

Table 1  
*Focus Enrollees and Three-Year Retention Rates*

Cohort	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	3-Year Retention
Cohort 1	100		86			86%
Cohort 2		99		90		91%
Cohort 3			100		94	94%
Cohort 4				108		N/A
Cohort 5					100	N/A

Table 2  
*Comparison of FOCUS Enrollees Representativeness with Georgia Educator Workforce (GEW) Representativeness by Project Year*

Category	%PY1 (N=100)	%PY2 (N=99)	%PY3 (N=100)	%PY4 (N=108)	%PY5 (N=100)	% GEW
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	26	*31	*40	*38	26	20.0
Female	74	69	60	62	74	80.0
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Ethnicity</i>						
Asian	1	0	1	0	3	1.0
Black	*49	*51	*33	*54	*53	21.8
Latina/o	6	7	4	4	2	1.7
White	41	39	59	37	40	69.2
Mixed Heritage or Race	1	2	2	1	1	2.6
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1	0	0	0	1.0
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0	0.1
Other or Unidentified	1	0	1	4	1	2.6
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*Meets or exceeds target of 10% higher than state.

**Preparation.**

The percentage of those achieving clear and renewable certificates within the first three years, signifying successful completion of preparation programs, exceeded the target of 90% in cohort two (see Table 3).

Table 3  
*FOCUS Enrollees' Time to Achieve Certification*

Cohort	Enrollees	% 1 Year	% 2 Years	% 3 Years	Total % Earned in 3 Years or Less
Cohort 1	100	20	49	20	89
Cohort 2	99	28	56	1	94
Cohort 3	100	30	35	11	92
Cohort 4	108	10	8	N/A	N/A
Cohort 5	100	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	507				

**Placement.**

Although it is difficult to verify that the targeted 80% of the LEAs participated in teacher selection training annually due to the varied approaches to providing it, project leaders are confident that training was available annually in the region, face-to-face or online, for 100% of the eligible LEAs.

**Certification.**

No rule or policy changes have been enacted at this time.

**Support/Retention.**

An Enrollee Evaluation of FOCUS Services survey was developed in the spring of 2013 and administered in project year four. In this survey, respondents ( $N=36$ ) were asked to rate the services (e.g., mentor assignment, stipends, blended model of instruction, etc.) that were most helpful on a scale of 1 (least helpful) to 4 (most helpful) as they transitioned into the classroom. The two supports identified as most helpful, and therefore most effective, were the Teacher Mentor ( $M=3.6$ ) and Online Resources and Courses ( $M=3.09$ ). Asked to identify the most useful to them personally, 38% of the teachers identified teacher mentors as the most helpful support; 33% identified the \$1000 stipend; and 19.4% identified the online pedagogy and content.

The online resources included self-paced learning opportunities in pedagogy, classroom management, teacher evaluation, time management and planning, data-driven decision making, ethics, legal issues, learning theory, human development, technology, cultural competence, working with parents, record-keeping, crisis intervention and more. Further evidence of effectiveness of these resources can be found in teachers' ratings of their preparedness to teach in their subject areas ( $M=3.60$ ) and effective in classroom management ( $M=3.58$ ). Teachers also credited their preparation programs, largely Regional Education Service Areas (RESAs) with preparing them to work effectively with high-need students ( $M=3.54$ ) in high-need schools ( $M=3.47$ ).



A FOCUS Mentor Evaluation survey was developed by project staff in the late summer of 2014 and administered by program providers in project year five. Respondents ( $N=58$ ) were asked to rate their mentor experiences (e.g., overall experience, likelihood of serving again, likelihood of recommending this to a friend, etc.) that were most positive, helpful, and likely on a scale of 0 (least positive, helpful, likely) to 5 (most positive, helpful, likely) as they worked with their mentee(s). Survey content was based on the support services mentors had been prepared by project staff and program providers to offer their mentees. The three items rated the highest were the Mentor Experience ( $M=4.5$ ), Overall Mentor Experience ( $M=4.5$ ), and How the Mentor Experience Impacted Future Interactions with New Teachers ( $M=4.5$ ). The remaining questions all yielded a mean of 4.0 or greater.

The FOCUS Mentor Evaluation survey included questions about the likelihood that one would recommend being a mentor, serving as a mentor again, and how helpful the mentor experience had been to one's professional development as teacher and leader. Further evidence of the effectiveness of the mentor experience can be found in teachers' ratings of these three questions ( $M=4.4$ ). Mentors also rated how the mentor experience had affected them personally. Overall, they indicated that the mentor experience had been a positive experience ( $M=4.1$ ). Although the mentor experience was generally positive, 84.5% (49/58 respondents) indicated that the stipend they received did not help the mentors spend more time with their mentee(s). The success of these strategies is measured by the retention rates of transition teachers enrolled in the first three years of the project. Specifically, 86%, 91%, and 94% of enrollees were retained for at least three years.

### ***Sustainability.***

With support from FOCUS, the GaTAPP program has institutionalized data collection processes and implemented the blended model courses for transition teachers. Both of these strategies will continue in support of transition teachers after grant funds are no longer available. The course development, design of assessments, data collection rubrics, and procedures provided by FOCUS established the foundation that will allow GaTAPP to continue these services. Additionally, two new planning tools were developed and implemented as described below.

The Instructional Capital Planner (ICP) shows real time school staffing data and offers related information to assist schools and school systems in planning for future school staffing needs. In its first phase, the ICP shows core subject staffing in middle grades and high schools. The data include:

- Currently staffed educators by school;
- Credential and other professional attributes of current educators across schools/school systems statewide;
- The broad range of talents in the current workforce at school/school system, regional, and state levels;
- A supply pool of traditional and non-traditional teacher candidates; and
- An Educator Supply and Demand Index (ESDI) to provide a three-to-five year *early warning system* for projecting overall demand and hiring needs.

ICP access is available through [GAPSC.org](http://GAPSC.org) for human resource officers, superintendents, designated principals and other school system designees, and for RESA directors and designated

RESA staff. A level of access will also be available for traditional and non-traditional preparation program leaders, as well as for designees in the Georgia Department of Education and the Technical College System of Georgia.

The Georgia School Staffing Survey of Certified Personnel Vacancies (GS3) collects and reports certified personnel vacancies in schools. The purpose of GS3 is to identify school staffing needs that, if not met, may potentially impede student achievement and graduation rates. In addition, statewide GS3 data may provide policy makers with data needed to make school personnel funding decisions.

The GS3 replaces a former statewide Vacancy Reporting System (VRS) implemented in 2004 in which the PSC collected personnel vacancies by certificate types. Georgia schools/school system-based personnel asked the PSC to refine the collection instrument to provide a stronger picture of “true vacancies” than was reported in the former VRS. In the new GS3, a “True Vacancy” is a certified educator position allotted and required by the state and LEA that is:

- Vacant (unfilled);
- Vacant of highly qualified and professionally certified personnel, resulting in non-highly qualified short- or long-term assignments;
- Vacant and accommodated by a combination of coverage strategies that require some educators to teach, lead, and/or provide student personnel services that are not in a standard assignment load for comparable educators in a school and/or LEA;
- Vacant and accommodated by adjustments to student graduation pathways due to the elimination or reduction of course and other offerings; and

GS3 provides a snapshot of true certified personnel vacancies in all schools systems. Collections coincide with the FTE and CPI counts, beginning in October 2013. As indicated above, the FOCUS Transition to Teaching project has contributed to workforce development efforts in Georgia that are intended to reach beyond the five-year life of the project.

### **Conclusions**

This project was highly successful in the recruitment, selection, placement, and certification of transition teachers. Although some of the very ambitious performance measures were not met every year, they were very nearly met in every circumstance (i.e., retention), and exceeded in others (i.e., overall recruitment). Further, the ability to sustain and continue the gains made in workforce development through tools and resources such as the GS3 and ICP, centralized online training resources for providers, teachers of records and LEAs, and the consolidation of all alternative pathways to certification into GaTAPP represent significant, ongoing value added to the educational systems in Georgia.

#### ***Recruitment and Selection.***

The resources leveraged to support recruitment of potential candidates included a cadre of collaborative partners, such as recruiters, local and regional education agencies, GaTAPP, Department of Labor, GaDOE Division of Special Education Services, and various institutions of higher education. This proved to be effective in the recruitment and selection of over 500 transition teachers to serve in high-need schools. The innovative use of technologies, such as LiveText, and numerous databases, such as Certified Personnel Information (CPI), as well as

stipends for participating transition teachers to offset the cost of transition training were also effective. The hiring of FOCUS regional recruiters and the partnership with Georgia Department of Labor (GaDOL), through their regional centers, have proven to be particularly successful ventures and have resulted in expanding the recruitment efforts of potential teachers, particularly in STEM fields. Recruitment through GaDOL regional centers, follow-up by recruiters, and enhancements made to the TeachGa.org website, have also contributed to the achievement of recruitment targets.

Effective selection strategies were defined in this project as those that led to enrollment of transition teachers into FOCUS ( $N=507$ ). Over the course of the project, the selection criteria did not change; however, involving GaTAPP providers in recruitment and selection of FOCUS enrollees greatly enhanced the quality of teacher enrollees and expedited the process for verifying eligibility. As well, the recruiters increased their efforts to solidify and expand partnerships with local LEA human resource officials in years three to five. The downward trend in recruitment and selection evident in project year two, coinciding with a statewide reduction in force, was reversed during the final three years of the project. Additionally, the recruitment plan as modified in project year four streamlined and focused the process for recruitment and selection. Although no direct relationships were established between specific recruitment efforts and recruitment and selection, the experiences of recruiters detailed through their annual reports led to more streamlined and targeted efforts. Again, targets were achieved overall and annual targets achieved in four out of five years.

### ***Preparation.***

FOCUS staff members were not directly involved in preparation; however, they maintained successful partnerships with the 21 approved GaTAPP providers to establish easily accessible resources and tools used both during and after the internship year. For a list of providers, see the website: <http://www.gapsc.com/EducatorPreparation/GaTAPP/Providers.aspx>. Grantees supported and enhanced the GaTAPP pathway to certification by including a blended model of face-to-face and online options for coursework. The online resources included self-paced learning opportunities in pedagogy and classroom management. Specifically, online modules were developed to offer *The Teaching of Reading* and *The Identification and Education of the Special Needs Child*, special courses required for Georgia certification. These courses were included in the blended model for GaTAPP. Additionally, two GaTAPP programs offered Pre-TAPP in the second year. Pre-TAPP afforded candidates the opportunity to begin preparation for teaching prior to securing a teaching contract. Transition teachers and providers rated these resources favorably. Evidence of the effectiveness of these resources can be found in teachers' ratings of their preparedness to teach in their subject areas ( $M=3.60$ ) and effectiveness in classroom management ( $M= 3.58$ ). Teachers also credited their preparation programs, largely Regional Education Service Areas (RESAs), with preparing them to work effectively with high-need students ( $M=3.34$ ) in high-need schools ( $M=3.47$ ). Although an "ask an expert" dedicated email resource was rated moderately helpful ( $M=2.42$ ), only one of the 36 respondents identified that support as one he/she used. This finding was carefully considered as resources needed to sustain the transition to teaching program were identified.

### ***Placement.***

Through the Leadership Support Initiative (LSI) training project, staff prepared decision makers to identify and select teachers of record based on “best fit.” Further, a statewide task force, Educator Workforce Planning and Development (EWPAD), was established and will continue to meet to address educator workforce development efforts in Georgia. Clearly, one indicator of successful placement is the continued hiring and retention of alternatively prepared teachers in Georgia. In addition to meeting the goal of enrolling an average of 100 of these teachers each year, high percentages of these teachers have been retained suggesting that hiring agents are successfully identifying teacher candidates who “fit” their particular demands. Consequently, the expectation is held that the practice of hiring alternative preparation teachers in targeted areas by high-need LEAs will continue. Placement, specifically the ability of decision makers to select and place the teacher candidate who best fits the needs of their schools and districts, is intuitively linked to transition teacher retention and attainment of full certification.

### ***Certification.***

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) requires that any professional serving in the public schools must hold a current, valid certificate appropriate to the field of employment. The Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) paths take from one to three years for completion. To assist enrollees in becoming certified and retained, courses have been made available on the PSC website that satisfy Georgia’s special requirements for certification through pre-TAPP; additionally, enrollees participate in a one-year supervised internship and coaching experience upon entry into the program. Refresher courses are provided online for enrollees to brush up on content and pedagogy. For the first three years of the project, 89%, 94%, and 90% of enrollees attained certification within the three-year timeframe.

### ***Limitations of the Evaluation.***

Due to the unexpected changes in evaluation staff, a number of data collection efforts planned for years one to three were delayed. Although the majority of performance measures were achieved, these delays resulted in a lack of information that may have been used early in the project to make improvements. Further, the response rate to the measure assessing transition teachers’ perceptions of the program and its supports had a very low return rate due to many of the teachers having finished with their preparation programs at the time the survey was administered. Consequently, there was no single, structured vehicle for contacting them. The emails for many had changed since first recorded upon enrollment so the surveys were undeliverable. Additionally, the placement performance measure, specifically training 80% of leaders annually in effective selection models, was difficult to track due to the varied methods, locations, and documentation of training. Consequently, inferences are drawn between the success of candidates (e.g., retention and achievement of certification) and the hiring agents’ abilities to select the “best fit” teacher of record.

### ***Next steps.***

As stated previously, sustainability initiatives were an important feature of the FOCUS programs. Incorporating all alternative pathways to certification under the GaTAPP umbrella, a program supported by the agency that regulates teacher certification (i.e., GaPSC), ensures that many of the successful recruitment, selection, and retention activities will continue to support transition teachers as they prepare to enter Georgia classrooms. Additionally, Georgia is

expected to fully implement a teacher preparation effectiveness measure in 2015-2016. This assessment will make it possible to connect student growth, teacher evaluation scores, and teacher retention with the individual educator's preparation program, providing useful information about the effectiveness of alternatively prepared transition teachers. Finally, many of the strategies employed through FOCUS might be replicated in other states and/or systems to increase the teacher workforce for high-need schools, systems, and students.

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