

Support quality teacher preparation

Teacher preparation programs are the first critical link in building a quality teacher workforce.¹ Ideological debate persists about the components of effective teacher preparation. However, research defines several components of high quality teacher preparation.

PSEA Recommendations

PSEA believes that policies and programs in Pennsylvania need to ensure that all new teachers are prepared in high-quality, university-based comprehensive teacher preparation programs that are designed by colleges and universities to ensure all teacher candidates meet the standards delineated in the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Program Approval Guidelines. In order to increase the likelihood that all students will be taught by teachers prepared in excellent preparation programs, lawmakers and policymakers in the Commonwealth should support the following initiatives.

- Insist on curricular balance within preparation programs among content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and monitored clinical experience.
- Create incentives for institutions of higher education to build training for teaching in urban and rural areas into the preparation program.
- Provide incentives for “grow your own” programs that link institutions of higher education with hard-to-staff districts to encourage local residents to enter teaching.
- Extend teacher preparation into the first years of teaching with high-quality, state-funded new teacher induction programs that include links to the teacher preparation institution.
- Resist “fast-track” programs such as Teach for America, the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, and other programs that fail to ensure full participation of teacher candidates.

High-quality teacher preparation

High-quality teacher preparation programs include study of academic content and pedagogy paired with significant monitored clinical experience. Critics of traditional teacher preparation programs have suggested that individuals with academic content make good teachers. Research does demonstrate a correlation between teachers' academic preparation and their impact on student achievement. But higher levels of teacher pedagogical knowledge also correlate with higher levels of student achievement. Consequently, relying solely upon evidence of an academic major or related work experience as a proxy for teacher content knowledge may not represent all of the knowledge and skills new teachers require. Effective teacher preparation programs insist that candidates combine academic content knowledge with pedagogical expertise and significant clinical practice.²

High-quality teacher preparation provides focused, well-structured clinical experience. Clinical experience is no substitute for academic preparation. However, when teacher candidates' clinical in-classroom experiences dovetail with academic preparation, clinical practice is one of the most powerful elements of a comprehensive teacher education.³

High-quality teacher preparation programs are comprehensive, which means they usually take time. Alternative preparation programs that "fast-track" candidates into the profession often have several unintended negative consequences. For example, one study in New York City concluded that graduates of college-based comprehensive teacher preparation programs were significantly more effective math teachers than teachers lacking full certification, including teachers from Teach for America.⁴ In Houston, teachers who entered teaching as temporary or emergency hires or via alternate routes were less effective than fully-prepared beginning teachers.⁵ Finally, a survey examining three alternative programs (Troops to Teachers, the New Teacher Project, and Teach for America) found that only half of the alternate route teachers felt prepared for their first year of teaching, compared to eight out of 10 teachers prepared in traditional university-based programs.⁶

High-quality teacher preparation programs are designed to prepare teachers to work where they are most needed. Teacher shortages in Pennsylvania are neither chronic nor widespread. Rather, teacher shortages are specific and targeted. Urban districts find it particularly difficult to attract graduates from high-quality, comprehensive teacher preparation programs. In Pennsylvania, where many public institutions of higher education are located in rural areas and small towns, preparing teacher candidates for positions in the schools that need them most can be particularly challenging.

Comprehensive teacher preparation should be a priority

High quality, comprehensive teacher preparation reduces teacher attrition. Attrition rates among beginning teachers who have not attended a comprehensive preparation program are twice as high as among teachers with extensive preparation (18 percent versus 9 percent), after controlling for confounding variables.⁷ National data show that 49 percent of uncertified or fast-track entrants left teaching after five years, compared to only 14 percent of those who entered teaching fully prepared.⁸ State policies requiring extensive teacher preparation rather than fast-track programs clearly contribute to the continuity of instructional programs and avoid the persistent and high costs incurred by districts forced to replace teachers who leave.

Graduates from comprehensive teacher preparation programs achieve higher student outcomes than graduates from fast-track programs. Research confirms that graduates of comprehensive university-based teacher preparation programs are significantly more effective than teachers lacking certification or graduates of many alternative, fast-track teacher preparation programs.⁹ A comprehensive analysis of 57 studies found consistent positive relationships between comprehensive teacher preparation and teacher effectiveness.¹⁰

(01/10)

¹ National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1996). "What Matters Most: Teaching and America's Future," NCTAF.

² Wilson, S., Floden, R., & Ferrini-Mundy, J. (2001). "Teacher Preparation Research: Current Knowledge, Gaps, and Recommendations," Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy: A University of Washington, Stanford University, University of Michigan, and University of Pennsylvania consortium. <http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/TeacherPrep-WFFM-02-2001.pdf>.

³ Wilson, S., Floden, R., & Ferrini-Mundy, J. (2001). "Teacher Preparation Research: Current Knowledge, Gaps, and Recommendations," Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy: A University of Washington, Stanford University, University of Michigan, and University of Pennsylvania consortium. <http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/TeacherPrep-WFFM-02-2001.pdf>.

⁴ Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2006). "How changes in entry requirements alter the teacher workforce and affect student achievement," *Education Finance and Policy*, 1(2), 176-216.

⁵ Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2006). "How changes in entry requirements alter the teacher workforce and affect student achievement," *Education Finance and Policy*, 1(2), 176-216; Darling-Hammond, L., Holtzman, D. J., Gatlin, S. J., & Heilig, J. V. (2005). "Does teacher preparation matter? Evidence about teacher certification, Teach for America, and teacher effectiveness," *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13(42). Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n42/>.

⁶ Rochkind, J. Ott, A., Immerwahr, J., Doble, J. and J. Johnson. (2007). "Working without a Net: How New Teachers from Three Prominent Alternate Route Programs Describe their First Year on the Job," *Public Agenda*.

⁷ Boe, E.E., Cook, L.H. R.J. Sunderland. (2006). "Attrition of Beginning Teachers: Does Teacher Preparation Matter?" Center for Research and Evaluation in Social Policy.

⁸ Henke, et al. (2000). "Attrition of New Teachers among Recent College Graduates," NCES.

⁹ Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., Rockoff, J. & Wyckoff, J. (2008). "The narrowing gap in New York City teacher qualifications and its implications for student achievement in high-poverty schools," Working Paper 14021, National Bureau of Economic Research.

¹⁰ Wilson, S., Floden, R., & Ferrini-Mundy, J. (2001). "Teacher Preparation Research: Current Knowledge, Gaps, and Recommendations," Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy: A University of Washington, Stanford University, University of Michigan, and University of Pennsylvania consortium. Available: <http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/TeacherPrep-WFFM-02-2001.pdf>.