

Seminar Summary

March 26, 2010

*The Next Decade: Preparing and
Retaining Teachers for High Need Schools*

What follows are notes reflecting the major items covered at the seminar. Particular emphasis is given to suggested areas for possible action by the NYSED.

Setting the Scene: Dr. Nicholas Michelli, Presidential Professor, CUNY Graduate Center

Dr. Michelli opened the day by noting that the current administration’s use of federal policy to shape education comes with its own challenges and opportunities. The Secretary of Education has at times voiced criticisms of the structure and function of many schools of education. Those of us working in higher education should, therefore, be mindful of public perception and misconception while also remaining open to new ideas in our ongoing discussions about how best to prepare the nation’s teachers.

Partnerships between K-12 districts and institutions of higher education will be an essential part of our efforts to educate pre-service teachers in the next decade. Additionally, we need to be prepared to confront new and innovative uses of education data. Dr. Michelli argued that the data we are being asked to use could push us further away from what we should be doing and could also continue to result in a narrowing of the curriculum. He asked, “Are we measuring the right things? What should we measure that we currently aren’t?”

Dr. Michelli indicated that the success of the next ten years will be measured by whether we allow ourselves to be distracted by short term fixes or instead choose to study and implement challenging, complex solutions to our problems. Most importantly, we should always bear in mind the question: “Are we preparing students to be active participants in a democratic society?”

The State’s Perspective and Activities: Joe Frey, Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education, NYSED

The Deputy Commissioner provided a summary of the New York State Education Department’s plans and current activities regarding teacher and leader effectiveness. New York’s efforts are consistent with the federal agenda and are driven by two key goals: improved performance and increased accountability. These goals will be addressed using competition, innovation, and research.

The Deputy Commissioner also identified seven specific priorities of the New York State Education Department:

1. Developing a performance assessment for teacher candidates
2. Designing professional performance reviews for teachers and principals
3. Developing a P-16 data system

4. Tightening the timeline for teacher hearings
5. Developing clinically-based programs for preparing teachers
6. Examining the rigor of content specialty tests
7. Developing professional standards for teachers

Lastly, the Deputy Commissioner cited the importance of this seminar and his pleasure at being in attendance.

* * * * *

Panel

A multi-disciplinary panel discussed several key issues related to the conference theme, “The Next Decade: Preparing and Retaining Teachers for High Need Schools.”

Highlights

Collaboration

Partnerships between K-12 schools, schools of education, and the arts and sciences are essential to ensure the effective preparation, recruitment, and retention of teachers. Schools of education can collaborate with arts and sciences faculty to ensure that our teacher candidates have solid content knowledge. Additionally, institutions of higher education can engage with K-12 schools beyond the student teaching experience by contributing to professional development and strengthening schools as professional learning communities. Ongoing support during the induction process can help to improve retention in the high need schools that will benefit the most from experienced, and committed teachers.

Community

Teacher candidates may not understand the context in which students and schools operate. Many of our candidates also may not understand their own cultural histories and the connection between their histories and the students they’re teaching. Teachers should be prepared to help students leverage their rich cultural legacies and available neighborhood resources to transform their schools and communities.

Innovative Uses of Data

A P-16 data system can provide a deep insight into the efficacy of preparation programs beyond the accreditation process—but linking data systems isn’t enough to positively affect teacher candidates and students. Teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to help candidates develop their assessment literacy; we need to teach our candidates to successfully navigate a data-rich environment. Teachers should use data to help them ask good questions about their students and their teaching, while at the same time understanding the limitations of data as only one indicator of student affect and progress. Institutions of higher education might work with NYSED to develop modules to introduce new data systems to our teacher preparation candidates.

Louisiana provides an interesting case study of how to use data in innovative ways. Louisiana uses multiple measures to assess teacher preparation programs. The state generates “effect estimates”^{*} for its teacher preparation programs (including alternative pathways) and associates the estimates with particular content areas. This allows the state to tell teacher preparation programs how their candidates are performing in specific areas in relation to the “average experienced teacher.” Additionally, Louisiana includes a teacher satisfaction survey as part of its accountability system. The state recently found that teachers with the highest effect estimates tend to evaluate their preparation programs more harshly than teachers with the lowest effect estimates. In other words, effective teachers in Louisiana tend to be more critical and reflective about the needs of their students and themselves, leading to expressions of lower satisfaction in surveys about their preparation programs.

Reflections: Dr. James Hennessy, Dean, Graduate School of Education, Fordham University

Dr. Hennessy stressed that it is important that the highly motivated and difficult work being done in teacher preparation institutions be recognized. While remaining open to constructive criticism, teacher preparation schools should not be accountable for solving all of the problems that beset American education. He urged that we focus upon and support the productive and innovative work currently taking place in many schools and colleges of education. Lastly, he suggested that gatherings like this seminar provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to interface and share thoughts on those teacher preparation issues of mutual concern.

Small Group Break-Outs

The small group discussants were charged with developing actionable recommendations for the NYSED.

The results are as follows:

Recommendations

Creating Effective Partnerships between IHEs and LEAs to Enrich the Cooperating Teacher Experience

Recommended NYSED Actions:

^{*} Effect estimates identify the degree to which students taught by new teachers met achievement of similar students taught by experienced teachers.

1. Promote LEA/IHE partnership initiatives, such as a roundtable of IHE and LEA representatives to define the benefits, issues, and requirements associated with partnerships.
2. Help LEAs and unions to negotiate specifics regarding the role of cooperating teachers, such as formalizing a career ladder for teachers, establishing uniform expectations of cooperating teachers, and recognizing and rewarding the work of cooperating teachers.
3. Promote the development of non-traditional and flexible placement arrangements, such as utilizing two cooperating teachers in separate classrooms per each student teacher.

Redesign of Teacher Preparation Programs: The Need and the Challenge

Recommended NYSED Actions:

1. Develop a cohesive plan to normalize the two-tiered system of alternative and traditional teacher preparation in terms of funding and required academic coursework for certification.
2. Convene the stakeholders involved in teacher preparation to collaborate on embedding flexibility in the structure and number of course hours required for undergraduate and graduate level teacher preparation programs. This collaborative effort should emphasize results as opposed to “seat time.”

Achieving Equitable Distribution to Meet Teacher Shortages in High Need Schools and Subject Areas

Recommended NYSED Actions:

1. Widen the opportunities for clinical practice within teacher preparation programs to be sure that teachers are prepared for the schools in which they will be working
2. Expand the incentives for faculty from institutions of higher education to work in K-12 schools
3. Recognize the value of the work that mentor and cooperating teachers do in collaboration with institutions of higher education
4. Strengthen the induction process to transition teachers smoothly into the schools of highest need
5. Reconfigure professional certification for undergraduate and graduate programs to assess the work of which candidates are capable in the field
6. Enhance professional development after certification to support teachers as lifelong learners who can evaluate and incorporate pedagogical innovations

Effective Utilization of Data to Inform Teacher Preparation, Induction, and Retention

Recommended NYSED Actions:

1. Ensure a comprehensive and fair-minded P-16 system of accountability
2. Allow outcome measures to include data related to pedagogical content knowledge and skills
3. Incorporate information on student characteristics and demographics for differentiated analysis
4. Effectively interpret and vitalize the implications of data for ongoing school improvement
5. Provide a data system that has utility for multiple audiences, including district officials, IHEs, and student bodies
6. Explore best practices regarding systems to collect data on family engagement

Reflections on the Day: Dr. Deborah Shanley, Dean, School of Education, Brooklyn College

Dr. Shanley thanked the contributors of today's program for providing insightful and useful perspectives on areas of common concern. She stressed the importance of including young people in the ongoing dialogue since they will be charged with the "heavy lifting" over the long haul. Dr. Shanley also indicated that the problem of attracting and retaining good people is a continuing challenge and that we all bear some responsibility for making it happen. She concluded her remarks by suggesting that ongoing collaborative efforts as exemplified by this seminar are essential to the ultimate achievement of our shared goals.