Transformations in Educator Preparation: Effectiveness and Accountability

June 22, 2011
The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) is prompting policy makers, teachers, parents, and many other education stakeholders to carefully consider the current state of schooling in the United States and how federal policy can best generate and support efforts to ensure a strong education for all children. Students must graduate from high school ready to enter college or begin a career, yet too often, they are not adequately prepared. Today, many students are required to take remedial courses when they enter college, and those that enter the workforce directly after high school often find themselves without basic knowledge and relevant skills to find a career that offers opportunities for professional growth and a living wage. In both cases, these high school graduates are at significant risk of not maximizing their employment and earning potential over time. Not only are these individuals disadvantaged by this reality, but our country suffers economically and socially when its citizens are not able to fully contribute to their community.

In response, federal, state, and local policy makers are focusing on education reform and ensuring that our students have the skills and knowledge they need in an increasingly competitive world. As policy makers work to improve the education system, educator preparation and the effectiveness of our education workforce must be the central focus of this effort. Research makes clear that a fundamental driver of student achievement is the quality of a child’s teacher.¹

Unfortunately, the most effective teachers are unevenly distributed among schools. Students with the greatest needs often have the least access to the best teachers. Extensive research attests to the fact that children in high-poverty schools are much more likely than their more advantaged peers to be assigned new teachers, teachers who lack knowledge of their subjects, and teachers with lower academic skills. These factors contribute to lower achievement for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.²

The abundant research points to one undeniable fact: Properly preparing new teachers is essential if we are to increase stu-
dent learning and close the achievement gap for disadvantaged children. All new teachers must be prepared to implement high-impact instruction designed to realize attainment of demanding objectives for all learners, including low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELLs).

**Why Educator Preparation Must Be Transformed**

As Congress works to reauthorize ESEA and HEA, transforming educator preparation and strengthening accountability for preparation programs is vital to ensuring that high school graduates are college- and career-ready. More effective teachers mean higher student achievement and higher rates of college persistence and completion. Also, teachers are providing instruction and expected to raise student achievement among an increasingly diverse population of students, including ELLs and students with disabilities.

The Nation's Report Card, or the National Assessment of Education Progress, has shown some improvement in recent years. However, serious achievement gaps remain, especially between minority and nonminority students, students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers, and ELLs and their English-speaking peers. In addition, whether students receive instruction from an effective teacher greatly impacts the likelihood of their taking remedial education courses in college.3, 4

Diversity in the general education environment has only increased since the last reauthorization of ESEA, dubbed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). With NCLB’s requirements to hold schools accountable for the achievement of subgroups of children—including ELLs and children with disabilities—schools have increasingly focused on providing instruction to all students through general education teachers. This has resulted in general education teachers being responsible for providing instruction to a much more diverse student population than they taught a decade ago.5
The Current Federal Investment in Educator Preparation

The bulk of any effort or investment to affect reform within the profession should be directed to higher education if the goal is to achieve systemic and impactful change. Currently 90% of new teachers are prepared in institutions of higher education (IHEs), and even those preparing to be teachers through nonprofit, state or district programs usually receive some of their preparation through IHEs. The schools of education at IHEs offer both undergraduate preparation programs and alternate programs at the graduate and postbaccalaureate level that lead to initial certification. More than 1,400 institutions—and thousands of programs within them—prepare teachers, principals, school counselors, and other education professionals. Clearly, higher education is at the core of educator preparation in this country.

The current federal investment in educator preparation is primarily made through three levers: TEACH grants, Teacher Quality Partnership grants, and the accountability provisions for educator preparation programs.* These programs and provisions provide funding for teacher candidates and the programs that prepare them and require programs to report on their quality.

The TEACH grants, authorized in 2008, provide up to $16,000 for undergraduate teacher candidates and up to $8,000 for graduate teacher candidates to support tuition and other school-related expenses for their preparation. Upon completion of their programs, recipients must teach for 4 years in a high-need school and high-need field. To be eligible for a TEACH grant, applicants must maintain a 3.25 GPA or have scored in the top quartile of a college admissions test such as the SAT or ACT. To date, $234,000,000 in TEACH grant monies has been disbursed.

* Other federal programs that support the preparation of educators, either as part of the grant or in whole, are Math and Science Partnerships (the U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation), Transition to Teaching, School Leadership, Elementary and Secondary School Counseling, and Teachers for a Competitive Tomorrow (although this was eliminated in the final FY 2011 appropriations bill).
to more than 35,000 teacher candidates. In the 2010-2011 school year, the first group of TEACH grant recipients entered classrooms as teachers in math, science, special education, and other shortage areas.

Another federal lever used to enhance educator preparation is the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant program, which provides funding to partnerships of IHEs, high-need school districts, and high-need schools to improve and strengthen teacher preparation and student achievement. Under TQP, institutions benefit from working closely with school districts that are essentially customers for the teachers they produce. School districts benefit because they get access to university-based education leaders who can improve the effectiveness of their teachers. The TQP program holds the clinical experience of teacher candidates as the core preparation component that leads to new-teacher effectiveness.

Currently the TQP program is funded at $43 million, and through this, 40 grantees* are redesigning their undergraduate teacher preparation programs, implementing master's-level teacher residency programs, and building school leadership preparation programs. The partnerships funded through TQP are producing dramatic and positive results. More than 10,000 teacher candidates and 500 high-need schools are benefitting from these grants. Grantees are using these funds to improve their preparation programs by evaluating the effectiveness of their graduates, implementing targeted changes based on graduates’ experience, and strengthening and evaluating clinical practice.

Unfortunately, the accountability requirements for teacher preparation programs under Title II have not had the same impact as the TQP grants on improving preparation programs. While every institution and state has annually submitted the data required by the statute regarding the quality and productivity of preparation programs, the data are primarily focused on program inputs rather than on program outcomes. Additionally, the statute requires states to report the names of the low-performing

* 12 of the grantees are funded through ARRA funds.
programs and the criteria by which their performance is judged. In the nearly 13 years since the enactment of this statute, the vast majority of states have failed to identify their low-performing programs. In addition, those programs identified by states as low-performing tend to stay on the low-performing list year after year. Many states have only vague criteria for how the performance of their teacher preparation programs is judged.

Improving teacher preparation and the effectiveness of our teachers should be a top priority for policy makers as they work to reauthorize ESEA. The drive of states, school districts, schools, and parents to increase achievement makes these issues even more important than when ESEA was last reauthorized 10 years ago. This drive, coupled with research showcasing the critical link between preparation and effectiveness, prompts us to offer the following key recommendations to strengthen teacher preparation and effectiveness in the upcoming reauthorization of ESEA.

**Policy Recommendations**

Following are AACTE’s policy recommendations for ESEA reauthorization. The recommendations encompass a wide range of areas within teacher quality that impact educator preparation: programmatic support, accountability provisions, and statewide data systems.

**Recommendation #1: The Teacher Quality Partnership program should be renamed the Educator Quality Partnership program and be revamped to focus on supporting the educator preparation and staffing needs of the partner schools and districts.**

Federal support for improving how IHEs prepare teachers is primarily provided through the TQP program under Title II of HEA. With the demands being placed on school districts to improve teacher effectiveness, educator preparation—and specifically the TQP program—needs to be supported and improved.
For this reason, we urge Congress to include the TQP program in ESEA reauthorization with the following key changes:

- Expand the focus of the program to include preparing and supporting teachers, principals, school administrators, psychologists, and other key education personnel.
- Require that activities funded under the program be guided by an assessment of the actual needs of the school district partners.
- Integrate key activities to improve educator preparation in the areas of turning around struggling schools; meeting the needs of ELLs; reducing discipline problems; improving the use of data by educators; and building stronger induction and mentoring programs for new teachers.
- Maintain existing features of the TQP program such as
  » Requiring at least a one-year clinical experience in preparation programs.
  » Collaborating closely with the arts and sciences as appropriate.
  » Requiring a program match and maintaining the existing waiver authority.
  » Closely following program graduates into the classroom.
  » Focusing on preparing educators for high-need schools and high-need subject/field areas.

Recommendation #2: Two levels of teacher definitions should exist—Qualified and Effective

The enactment of NCLB introduced the concept of a “highly qualified teacher” to the education lexicon. Teachers all across the country sought to meet this standard and school districts worked to implement its requirements. While reinforcing the importance of state certification and subject matter competency, these requirements produced little evidence that they were driving student achievement as the law requires no demonstration of the impact on student learning. Rather than focusing solely on inputs measures, we recommend establishing a set of baseline criteria...
that determine if new teachers are “qualified” and veteran teachers are “effective.” Specifically, AACTE proposes:

- A new “qualified” teacher definition that serves as a base set of criteria for teachers who are entering the profession for the first time. This definition would not discriminate based on the teacher preparation program or pathway an individual teacher attended. All existing teachers who are currently highly qualified would meet this definition. A “qualified” teacher has:
  » Obtained full state certification or licensure.
  » Completed a state-approved teacher preparation program.
  » Passed a state-approved performance assessment.

- A new “effective” teacher definition that would apply to all existing teachers and those teachers who have taught previously. An “effective” teacher has:
  » Obtained full state certification or licensure.
  » Demonstrated evidence of success through multiple measures, including evidence of student learning gains and evaluations, as defined by the state.

- School districts are not permitted to hire nonqualified and noneffective teachers with Title I funding. Rather, school districts could use their own state or local funding to hire teachers who have not met these definitions. This recommendation is consistent with the existing requirements related to highly qualified teachers under current law.

- School districts that hire teachers who do not meet the qualified or effective definitions would have to:
  » Publicly report on the number of teachers who have not met these definitions and whether these teachers are located in schools that receive Title I funding.
  » Provide adequate supervision for teachers without a “qualified” designation with an effective teacher.
  » Equitably distribute teachers who do not meet these definitions across all schools in the district to avoid concentrations in high-poverty schools.
Recommendation #3: Teacher evaluation efforts should incorporate multiple measures of assessment including impact on student learning, classroom observations, peer reviews, and school-wide progress on meeting key indicators of success.

Coupled with an expanded focus on teacher preparation is the equally important issue of evaluating teachers on their impact...
on raising student achievement. Many states and school districts have established teacher evaluation systems with differing levels of specificity and focus. ESEA must take a role in helping shape fair and effective teacher evaluation systems that allow school officials to accurately assess a teacher’s impact in the classroom. To accomplish this, AACTE recommends that ESEA encourage the development and implementation of fair and effective teacher evaluation systems. Specifically, ESEA should encourage the development and implementation of evaluation systems that:

- Use performance assessments.
- Measure growth in student achievement based on state and district assessments and teacher-generated assessments.
- Take into account the performance of a school’s students as a whole in addition to the impact of individual teachers on individual students.
- Include multiple measures of effectiveness as determined by the state or school district.
- Require school districts to develop a plan to ensure the equitable distribution of teachers within the district.

The Teacher Incentive Fund also plays an important role in promoting a culture of teacher effectiveness through the grants that districts, state agencies, and national organizations such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards have received under this program. To date this program has not been formally authorized by Congress, despite having been funded through annual appropriations. Authorizing this program would enhance Congress’ ability to conduct thoughtful oversight that could further strengthen the strong foundation that this program has created and inform practices as well as policy. In order to continue to enhance teacher effectiveness, we recommend the Teacher Incentive Fund be authorized as a separate program within ESEA.
Recommendation #4: Current accountability provisions in Title II of HEA should be streamlined and focused on program outcomes, and the federal government should actively enforce provisions regarding the identification and closure of low-performing and at-risk programs.

AACTE and its member institutions are committed to preparing educators who are ready to be effective in schools, and we support using statewide data systems for program improvement. The federal role in holding preparation programs accountable is carried out by requiring institutions and states to submit annual report cards that capture data on pass rates and scores of teacher candidates on certification exams, demographic information on the teacher candidates, information on clinical components of programs, and efforts to prepare teachers to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

Current law requires states to identify low-performing teacher preparation programs and to provide technical assistance to them. It is up to each state to determine its criteria for low-performing programs and the length and type of technical assistance made available to low-performing programs. Since 2002, less than half of states reported having “at-risk” or “low-performing” programs, and in states that have identified such programs, many of the institutions maintain those designations for several years. AACTE urges the Department to consider how it can more actively enforce the accountability provisions, particularly around the identification of low-performing and at-risk programs.

AACTE believes that preparation programs that fail to produce effective teachers who raise student academic achievement should close. To achieve these goals, we recommend that ESEA require:

- Strengthened accountability provisions related to teacher preparation programs under Title II of HEA:
» States, in developing criteria for identifying low-performing teacher preparation programs, must allow for public comment on such criteria, and any finalized criteria should be made publicly available.

» States must continue to identify low-performing teacher preparation programs as required under current law, but also include student achievement attributable to graduates of individual programs (as appropriate) as a factor in determining whether a program is low performing. Other factors to be considered include placement and retention of graduates, candidate success in passing valid performance assessments, and principal evaluations.

» The statute must establish a period of time by which low-performing programs will be reviewed for program improvement. If these programs continue to be identified as low performing, they should be closed.

» States that do not develop, implement, and publicly disclose their criteria for low-performing programs would lose a portion of the administrative funds they receive under ESEA programs.

» All educator preparation programs (university-based, nonprofit, for-profit, state, and local) must be subject to the same accountability provisions to ensure consistency in the effectiveness of graduates.

• All providers of educator preparation must submit report cards on program quality with all existing reporting requirements applying to all educator preparation programs (university-based, nonprofit, for-profit, state, and local).

• States, rather than IHEs, must report on the number of individuals who have been certified or licensed to teach.

• All teacher preparation programs must set annual goals for preparing teachers for high-need subject areas and ensure teachers are prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners.
Recommendation #5: The federal government must invest in statewide data systems that include a link to teacher preparation programs and that track key aspects of programs that lead to effectiveness.

Data allow for both oversight and improvement of preparation programs and are a critical tool for educators in understanding what instructional techniques produce consistent student achievement. Given the current state of accountability for educator preparation programs, it is clear that the capacity for institutions and states to collect data, beyond the current input data, varies significantly from place to place. Moreover, in most cases, the capacity to follow graduates into the classroom to collect placement, retention, and effectiveness data does not exist at this time. One of the most important tools to assist in this effort is statewide data systems.

A Promising Statewide Data System

Many states have begun to embrace the need for meaningful accountability that leads to reform of teacher preparation programs. The Louisiana Board of Regents has developed a Value-Added Teacher Preparation Model to examine the effectiveness of its teacher preparation programs. The model predicts student achievement in grades 4-9, compares the prediction to student performance on several standardized tests, and compares the achievement of students taught by program graduates to that of similar students taught by certified teachers who have taught for 2 or more years. Through this model, the Regents have found that varying levels of effectiveness exist within and across teacher preparation programs and that certified teachers are more effective than teachers who are not certified to teach the content. Institutions in Louisiana have used the data produced from this model to better understand the quality of their programs and to modify their programs.
There is much focus on enabling these data systems to collect information on students and teachers. Little attention, though, is given to building in links to teacher preparation programs and collecting data on key characteristics of preparation programs that lead to preparing effective educators. AACTE, the Data Quality Campaign, and many other organizations have collaborated to develop a template that states can use to ensure data on teacher preparation are built into these systems. AACTE urges the Department to consider this template as it supports the development of statewide data systems. Further, AACTE recommends the following ESEA requirements:

- Educator preparation programs should be given access to data and other measures used to evaluate the performance of their graduates, both to ensure accuracy and fairness and to improve the quality and effectiveness of the programs.
- States should work closely with teacher preparation programs in determining the data elements needed in any statewide data system.
- As statewide data systems develop, they must allow for tracking student achievement attributable to individual teachers for purposes of accountability and program improvement.
- Statewide data systems should include the ability to track educators’ career paths, induction experiences, and performance measures (such as impact on student achievement, evaluation results, merit pay, and observational measures).
- States should ensure the privacy of both student and educator data.

**Conclusion**

The need to strengthen educator preparation and the accountability of its programs is vital to ensuring that students are career- and college-ready when they graduate from high school. Reauthorization of ESEA and HEA presents an important opportunity to support further transforming educator preparation. AACTE’s recommendations in this area address critical steps to bring about this transformation.
Endnotes


American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
1307 New York Ave., NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005
www.aacte.org

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education is a national alliance of educator preparation programs dedicated to the highest quality professional development of teachers and school leaders in order to enhance PK-12 student learning. The 800 institutions holding AACTE membership represent public and private colleges and universities in every state, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam. AACTE’s reach and influence fuel its mission of serving learners by providing all school personnel with superior training and continuing education.