PREPARED TO TEACH?

KEY FINDINGS

OF THE

NEW YORK CITY

TEACHER SURVEY

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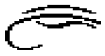
NEW VISIONS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS was founded in 1989 to help improve public education in New York City. Its programs focus on such critical areas as creating and supporting small public schools, restoring school libraries, improving math instruction and literacy and working to spread successful practices to schools throughout the City. New Visions programs have been adopted by the New York City Board of Education and by other school systems around the country.

THE NEW YORK CITY TEACHER SURVEY, made possible by a generous grant from the Ford Foundation, was part of a collaborative effort between New Visions, the national commission on Teaching and America's Future, the United Federation of Teachers, the New York City Board of Education and the Leading Change Taskforce, a committee consisting of the deans of education of New York State's colleges and universities.



PREPARED TO TEACH?

KEY FINDINGS OF THE NEW YORK CITY TEACHER SURVEY

AS PART OF A LOCAL AND NATIONAL EFFORT to strengthen teacher preparation and enhance professional development, New Visions for Public Schools conducted a survey of 2956 New York City teachers who entered the school system between 1994 and 1997. The results of the teacher survey indicate the following:

- New teachers in New York City's public schools plan to continue teaching for as long as possible and value opportunities for professional development to improve their craft. But:

- The vast majority of new teachers do not feel well-prepared when they enter the classroom.

The quality of teacher preparation, while not a new concern, has recently taken on a new urgency. The New York City Public Schools needs to employ large numbers of new teachers every year. In the last four years, the Division of Human Resources has hired more than 20,000 teachers, and is expected to hire more than 30,000 in the next four years. Conditions such as an aging teacher population, school climate, the quality of life in New York City, inadequate preparation to face the demands of teaching in New York City classrooms, and lack of support for new teachers, contribute to high attrition rates among new teachers. Filling vacancies is only part of the problem. The greatest challenge is hiring, developing, and retaining highly qualified teachers who can ensure that New York City students, with all their diversity and range of needs and abilities, can reach the high academic standards being instituted by the City and State.

New York City teachers and the educational programs that prepare them are all under increasing pressure to improve. The New York State Board of Regents recently passed a proposal to raise teacher standards. To retain their teaching licenses, teachers will be required to participate in continuing professional development throughout their careers. Teacher education programs will be held accountable for their students' performance on teacher licensing exams. Programs will risk losing their certification if 80 percent of their graduates do not pass the three required tests. Given this intensive focus on pre-service education and in-service professional development, it is imperative that colleges and universities, as well as school district administrators, better understand and are responsive to the professional development needs of teachers. The New Visions' Teacher

Survey was developed as a first step toward understanding these needs from the point of view of teachers.

This paper, the first in a series of reports on the New York City Teacher Survey, presents an overview of the key findings of the study. It is not intended to be a final word on the preparedness of New York City teachers. Rather, its purpose is to stimulate discussion and generate questions for further research and analyses.

The New York City Teacher Survey, which was funded by the Ford Foundation, was part of a collaborative effort between New Visions, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the New York City Board of Education (BOE), and the Leading Change Taskforce, a committee consisting of deans of education of New York State's colleges and universities. Dr. Josephine Imbimbo of New Visions directed the research and Dr. David Silvernail of the Center for Educational Policy, Applied Research, and Evaluation at the University of Southern Maine conducted the data analyses and prepared the statistical report on the findings.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

THE NEW YORK CITYTEACHER SURVEY was adapted from a survey used in a national study of teacher education programs conducted in 1997 by the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST).[1] New Visions worked with NCTAF and a subcommittee of the Leading Change Taskforce to modify the NCREST survey for use in the New York City teacher study. The revised survey consists of five sections: (1) current teaching status; (2) professional knowledge and skills; (3) in-service professional development participation; (4) teacher satisfaction and efficacy; and (5) demographic information. Few changes were made to the sections that reflected teachers' perceptions of their preparation and their attitudes about teaching, in order to allow comparisons of the New York City data with that of the NCREST study. The survey sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of NYC teachers with regard to their professional preparation; and do teachers' attitudes differ depending on the type of preparation they received prior to entering the classroom?

2. Do the perceptions of NYC teachers about their professional preparation differ from those held by a national sample of teachers, and from teachers who graduated from a sample of exemplary teacher education programs?

To provide answers to these questions the responses were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. To address the first question, the total sample of NYC

teachers was divided into three sub-samples: (a) teachers who were not state-certified; (b) teachers who received their state certification through successfully completing a teacher education program; and (c) teachers who received their state certification through transcript analysis (i.e., taking the prescribed set of education courses without matriculating in a degree program at a college or a university). In the second phase of analysis, data obtained from the NYC teachers who had obtained state certification through completing an education program were compared with data from two sub-groups of teachers who were included in the NCREST survey: 551 teachers who had graduated from seven nationally recognized education programs,[2] and a random sample of 420 teachers who had graduated from education programs across the country supplied by the research department of the National Education Association.

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS

- Most (60%) of the teachers who responded to the survey had been teaching two years or less.
- A little over half (54%) of the teachers had at least a Masters degree.
- Almost three-quarters (74%) of the teachers were NYS-certified. Of the certified teachers, two-thirds (66%) had completed an education program; while the rest (34%) obtained their certification through transcript analysis.
- Of those teachers who had completed an education program, almost all (96%) had attended a college or university within New York State; and 41% completed teacher preparation programs in the City University of New York (CUNY) system.

KEY FINDINGS

THE SURVEY GENERATED extensive data on NYC Teachers' attitudes and perceptions on the profession. Below we report on a portion of the findings, which we have organized by a series of key questions.

HOW COMMITTED ARE NEW TEACHERS TO THE PROFESSION?

- Nationally the attrition rates are generally highest for new teachers. However, 85% of the teachers responded that they planned to continue teaching for as long as possible; and 79% of the teachers surveyed indicated that they would probably or certainly become a teacher if they had to do it over again.
- Teachers overwhelmingly (85%) felt that they were making a difference in the lives of their students.

WHAT TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS WERE MOST CRITICAL TO TEACHERS WHEN ASSESSING THEIR LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS AS THEY ENTERED THEIR FIRST TEACHING POSITION?

Using a regression analysis we identified three groups of questions that were most strongly related to teachers' overall feelings of preparedness as they entered their first teaching position. These questions and categories are listed below:

SUBJECT AREA KNOWLEDGE AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Teach subject matter concepts, knowledge, and skills in ways that enable students to learn
- Understand how different students in your classroom are learning
- Develop curriculum that builds on students experiences, interests and abilities
- Choose teaching strategies to meet different student needs
- Use a variety of assessments to determine student strengths, needs, and programs

PROFICIENCY IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

- Using technology to increase student interest and learning
- Using technology to assess and track student achievement
- Using technology to enhance group collaboration and teamwork

EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

- Maintain an orderly and purposeful learning environment

HOW WELL PREPARED DO NYC TEACHERS FEEL THEY ARE WHEN THEY FIRST ENTER THE CLASSROOM?

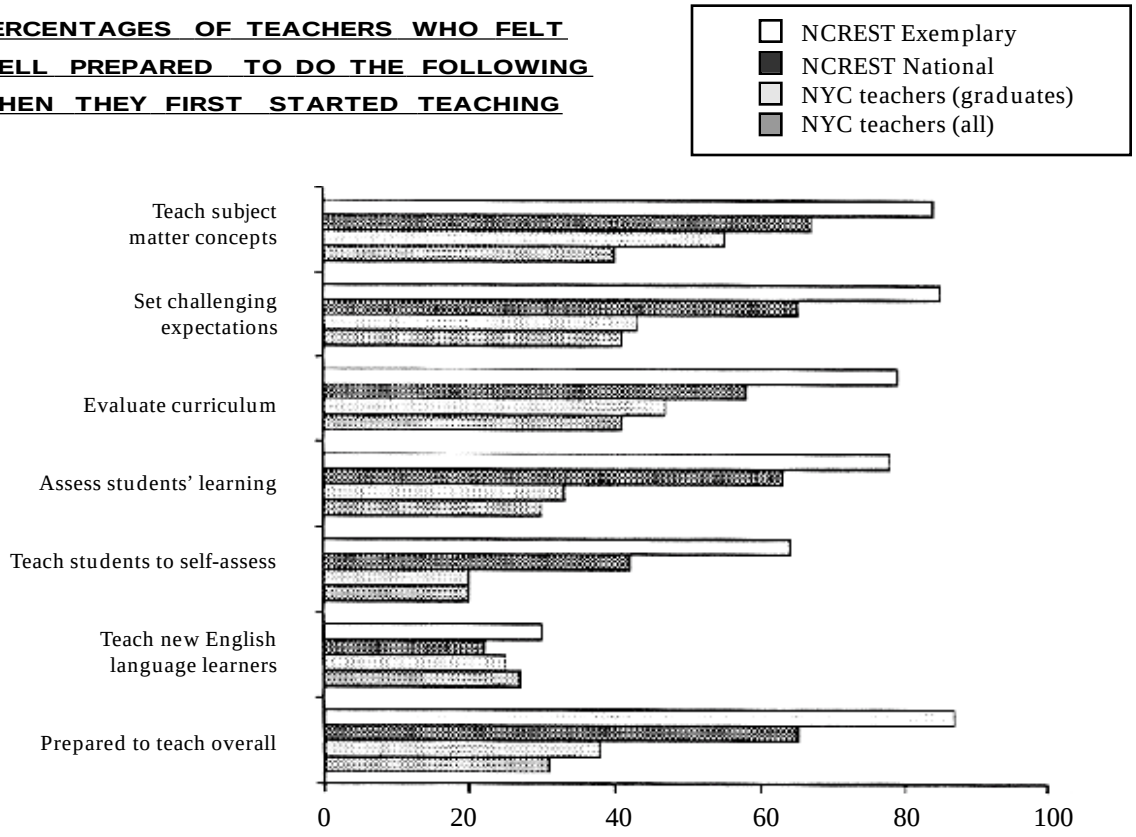
- Most NYC teachers do not feel well prepared to teach when they first enter the classroom. When asked to rate their overall preparedness on a scale from 0 (not at all prepared) to 4 (very well prepared), slightly less than one-third (31%) of New York City teachers indicated that when they first started teaching that they felt well prepared to teach.

- Teachers who did not have state certification felt significantly less prepared[3] than certified teachers. On average, they rated themselves in the poor range (1.86), while certified teachers fell in the adequate range (2.09).
- Completing an education program made a difference in teachers' overall feeling of preparedness. Among the certified teachers, those who had successfully completed a teacher education program felt significantly better prepared, overall, than those who

had been certified through a process of transcript review. On average, the program graduates rated themselves in the adequate range (2.14), while those who were certified through accumulating education credits, rated themselves as less than adequately prepared (1.99).

- NYC graduates of education programs felt significantly less prepared to teach than a sample of teacher education graduates nationwide, or to an even greater extent to a sample of graduates of exemplary education programs. About a third (34%) of NYC teachers who had graduated from education programs felt well prepared to teach, while almost two-thirds (65%) of the graduates nationally and 86% of the exemplary program graduates felt they were well prepared.

PERCENTAGES OF TEACHERS WHO FELT WELL PREPARED TO DO THE FOLLOWING WHEN THEY FIRST STARTED TEACHING



DO NYC TEACHERS FEEL THAT THEY HAVE THE ESSENTIAL PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE TO HELP STUDENTS ACHIEVE HIGH STANDARDS?

- Most NYC teachers felt that they were not well prepared to teach in ways that would help all students to achieve high academic standards. Teachers rated their preparedness on 14 questions that were related to promoting a high standard of student learning on a scale from 0 (not at all prepared) to 4 (very well prepared). NYC teachers, on average, rated themselves in the adequate range for each of the items.

- Less than half the teachers surveyed felt they were well prepared to teach their subject area effectively (40%), set challenging expectations (41%), evaluate curriculum (41%), or use their knowledge of subject matter, curriculum, and student development to plan instruction (45%). Less than a third indicated that they were well prepared to assess students' strengths and needs (30%) or to teach students to assess their own learning (20%).

- Certified teachers rated themselves as being significantly better prepared than teachers who did not have NYS certification on 12 of the 14 questions that related to promoting a high standard of student learning.

- NYC teachers who had successfully completed their education programs felt significantly less prepared to teach to high standards than a national sample of teachers who had completed education programs or, to an even greater extent, to a sample of graduates of exemplary education programs.

NEW YORK CITY TEACHERS ESPECIALLY DO NOT FEEL ADEQUATELY PREPARED IN THE USES OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY.

- NYC teachers rated their preparation to be in the poor range in the area of using technology. Only about a quarter of all teachers (24%) felt prepared to access the Internet to support research and analysis. Less than a third felt prepared to use technology to help interest and engage students (32%), to use technology to communicate with others (28%), or enhance group collaboration (28%).

- Teachers preparation in education technology is changing rapidly. The less experienced teachers rated themselves as significantly better prepared in all areas of educational technology than more experienced teachers (i.e., teachers with four years experience). Among teachers with one year or less experience, NYS-certified teachers felt significantly better prepared in the area of educational technology than non-certified teachers. This may indicate that more recent graduates had educational technology included in their education programs.

TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY PREPARING TEACHERS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF NEW ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

- New York City teachers, exemplary program graduates, and the national comparison group all indicated that, on average, they felt poorly prepared to meet the education needs of new English language learners. In this particular area, New York City teachers felt as prepared as the exemplary program graduates, and significantly better prepared than the national comparison group.

WHAT TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ARE VALUABLE TO NEW TEACHERS ONCE THEY ARE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Teachers were asked to rate the in-service professional development activities that they had experienced over the past year on a scale from 0 (not at all important) to 4 (extreme-

ly important). It was clear that NYC teachers value opportunities for professional development. All 15 items received a rating in the moderately to extremely important range.

- The topics and activities with the highest average ratings were classroom management (3.76), addressing the needs of individual learners (3.65), teaching methods, and in-depth study of a content area (3.51).

- The teachers most frequently participated in the in-service activities involving new curriculum or instructional materials (87%), understanding or using the new standards (87%); teaching methods (86%); and addressing the needs of individual students (85%).

- In-service activities having the lowest rates of participation were visits to other schools (51%), systematic review of student work with other teachers (64%); mentoring (64%) educational technology (65%); and peer observation and coaching (66%).

CONCLUSION

THE RESULTS OF THE NEW YORK CITY TEACHER SURVEY support the view that New York City teachers feel they need to be better prepared before they enter the classroom. The findings also confirm that adequate teacher preparation, particularly certification through a teacher education program, does make a difference in teachers' own sense of preparedness. These findings will come as no surprise to individuals working in both the area of educational preparation and administration. Indeed, the New York City Board of Education, the State Board of Regents, and Deans from the education programs statewide are currently working to address the issue of teacher preparation. However, the survey findings are particularly useful in pinpointing the topics and areas within teacher education that need special attention (e.g., content knowledge, educational technology, and the needs of English language learners). The results also raise the question of why NYC teachers who have graduated from education programs feel so much more unprepared than the graduates nationally or those from the exemplary education programs. Is it related to the quality or characteristics of the educational program, the conditions of the NYC schools versus schools nationally and/or other factors? This is one area we will pursue in future investigations.

It is noteworthy that regardless of their level of preparation, the overwhelming majority of NYC teachers wanted to continue teaching for as long as possible, and that they valued highly the professional development opportunities available to them. Our challenge is to find ways to build upon this commitment and motivation. These survey findings can be used to inform the process for providing professional development opportunities for teachers. For example, while a large majority of teachers indicated that they attend-

ed staff development pertaining to the new standards, few of them participated in professional development focusing on the review of students' work, which is at the core of standards implementation. These topics will be pursued in more depth in future papers and research.

ENDNOTES

[1]The NCREST survey items were based upon Linda Darling-Hammond's (1992) description and analysis of learner-centered standards for schools, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 1994) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium standards (INTASC, 1992).

[2]These programs, selected by a national nomination process, were (1) Alverno College, Wisconsin; (2) Bank Street College, New York City; (3) Trinity U., Texas; (4) U. of California, Berkeley; (5) U. of Southern Maine; (6) U. of Virginia; and (7) Wheelock College, Massachusetts.

[3]Because of the large sample sizes and the large number of individual statistical significance tests conducted, the statistical significance level was set at .001.

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