



Why did TEGAC Commission TNTP to do Focus Groups on Teacher Perspectives Around Teacher Preparation?

When it comes to raising student achievement, nothing in school matters more than the quality of the teacher in the classroom. In Texas, in 2014 approximately 230 preparation programs trained and certified roughly 27,000 teachers. Our student achievement is not where it needs to be. For example, the average eighth grade score for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading exam was a 261 out of 500, with only five states scoring lower. Across the state, only 28 percent of eighth grade students scored at or above Proficiency in Reading.

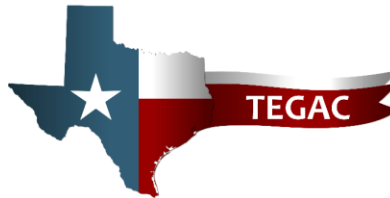
TEGAC member Educate Texas developed the Texas Teacher Preparation Collaborative in 2016. The Collaborative brought together Deans of Education, Alternative Certification leaders, teachers, principals, superintendents and advocacy leaders committed to improving teacher preparation. The Collaborative provides a platform for practitioners and policymakers to focus on teacher prep and highlights best practices and policies that Texas can adopt.

TEGAC, in collaboration with the Texas Teacher Preparation Collaborative, wants to elevate teachers' voices in the ongoing conversation about the quality of teacher preparation in Texas. TEGAC commissioned research partner TNTP, a national nonprofit seeking to end educational inequality, to conduct a series of focus groups over the summer of 2016. TNTP solicited input from approximately 50 diverse teachers (diverse in years of experience, type of preparation program, student population, and race/ethnicity) from six locations throughout Texas who have been recognized for their excellence in the classroom. TNTP asked teachers about their experiences, level of preparedness, most and least effective structures and supports, and proposed policy or programmatic modifications, amongst many others.

What Were the Findings of the TNTP Research?

A common theme throughout the teachers reflections, regardless of their range of experiences in their preparation programs, was that most teachers recalled feeling shock at the transition from their preparation programs and into their careers as teachers. The teachers described a monumental gap between the expectations of teacher preparation programs and the expectations of classroom teachers to raise student achievement.

- TNTP found that teacher candidates did not have a consistent or realistic sense of their readiness for the classroom.
 - Only 25 percent were able to clearly identify a metric or tool that was used to assess their effectiveness and preparedness to enter the classroom.
- Teachers perceive very little to no alignment between expectations set by their preparation program and by the state or district.
 - According to the focus group participants, (1) their preparation programs did not focus on the skills needed to drive student achievement, and (2) classroom evaluations conducted by their program were inconsistent and informal.



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- Teachers believe that first-hand classroom experience, exposure to a variety of settings, and high-quality mentors were critical to their preparation.
- Teachers found their coursework did not prepare them to effectively teach rigorous, standards-aligned content nor to respond to the cultural needs of their students. Teachers found their coursework did not prepare them to effectively teach rigorous, standards-aligned content nor to respond to the cultural needs of their students.
 - When asked whether their coursework was a good use of preparation time, average agreement ratings were a 4 on a scale of 1 to 10.
- Teachers identified a number of less tangible skills that are critical to teacher development, but most often left unaddressed by preparation programs, such as finding one's "teacher voice" and becoming a continuous learner.

What Policy Recommendations Were Included in the Report?

Across all teacher preparation programs, regardless of the supports they received, there was little to no evidence of how ready teachers were for the classroom. To respond to this need, there is work that can be done state-wide to better identify and monitor for the most critical levers in developing teachers.

- **Ensure the bar for entry into the classroom assesses teacher candidate readiness by establishing a competency-based, tiered licensure system.** The licensure criteria should include a performance screen to assess preparedness that is used consistently across programs.
- **Ensure programs are producing effective teachers by holding them accountable to their outcomes.** The state should establish multiple-measure system of evaluation for preparation programs that aligns to student outcomes, while also better holding programs accountable to standards already in existence.
 - The state should enhance the Texas Educator Preparation Program evaluation system to increase accountability and provide public transparency on EPP performance.
- **Identify key preparation program levers—and modify policy accordingly.** The state should identify key levers for preparing teachers and adapt policy to encompass these levers.
 - One way to accomplish that is by establishing a Texas Educator Preparation Evaluation and Innovation Alliance to direct and oversee ongoing evaluations of educator preparation in Texas.

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