

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Teachers often leave at-risk schools (high-poverty, low-performing) because they have not been adequately prepared to teach in high-need urban areas or isolated rural locales. Programs that address the diversity and the challenges that teachers may face, including teaching students with special needs, are crucial to improving teacher effectiveness in the classroom and increasing student learning.

The regional comprehensive assistance centers often have relationships in their states and regions that can open doors to begin the necessary conversations about setting goals for teacher preparation programs to revise their curricula and develop K–16 collaborative relationships that target some of the schools and districts in the state with the highest need. The regional comprehensive assistance centers also have resources that can support bringing people together in K–16 partnerships with a focus on preparing highly effective teachers for at-risk schools. The biggest hurdle is often the simple act of getting organizations with complementary missions into the same room to agree on a shared set of goals and outcomes. This neutral convener role can be a critical function in moving state policy and program conversations forward, and it is one that the regional comprehensive assistance centers are well positioned to play.

For example, the New York Comprehensive Center recently convened a symposium in which higher education faculty were joined by school district and state education agency representatives to hear Catherine Snow discuss *Knowledge to Support the Teaching of Reading*. In the afternoon, the higher education faculty participated in discussion groups about higher education syllabi and the use of scientifically based research. A second convening is being planned for spring 2007.

This edition of the *TQ Research and Policy Update* addresses the topic of preparing teachers to teach students in at-risk schools through in-depth articles that explore how teachers currently are prepared and offer strategies for preparing and supporting teachers differently for the realities they will face in the nation’s most challenging schools.

As a place to begin in reforming teacher preparation, I offer the following programmatic and policy strategies as ways to raise student achievement, break the cycle of outdated teaching methods and low expectations, create stability and growth by retaining teachers, recruit qualified teachers, and avoid the blame game.

Strategy 1: Emphasize family involvement as an important part of teacher preparation to teach in at-risk schools.

Strategy 2: Design teacher preparation programs with supports for teacher candidates of color and curricula for working with diverse students.

Strategy 3: Provide opportunities for teacher candidates to gain field experience early on in at-risk schools and ensure that a strong network of support is in place to nurture the teacher’s growth over time.

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Strategy 4: Require that teacher education faculty preparing teachers for at-risk schools have experience in those settings and receive their own ongoing professional development for continuous learning.

Strategy 5: Develop high-quality teacher preparation programs in at-risk areas.

Strategy 6: Evaluate teacher preparation programs and track new-teacher experiences over time.

Strategy 7: Create collaborative partnerships between school districts and teacher preparation programs.

Unfortunately, none of these strategies will be effective if you also do not do the following:

- Evaluate your beliefs and expectations concerning at-risk students; and require teacher education faculty, school leaders, policymakers, current teachers, and teacher candidates to do the same.
- Keep pushing. If teacher preparation programs are producing low-quality teachers for at-risk schools, form state-school-higher education partnerships to foster improvement. If this does not work, require teacher preparation programs to meet certain standards, help them meet the standards, and close them down if they do not. If this does not work, create new teacher preparation programs designed specifically for at-risk school districts. Too many people give up on improving teacher preparation, and at-risk students are the ones who suffer.
- Close teacher preparation programs that prove unable to produce high-quality teachers for at-risk schools.

Most readers of this newsletter have graduated from a teacher preparation program, teach in one, or are working on reforming these programs. Unless we find ways to work together to ensure that the next generation of prospective teachers get the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in at-risk schools, we are doing a great disservice to our neediest students and the families who trust that their schools employ effective teachers. This issue of *TQ Research and Policy Update* is a starting place for the discussion, and I look forward to the reform we can accomplish together to improve the quality of teacher preparation for at-risk schools.

For more information about the strategies presented here and additional information on the topic of preparing teachers to teach in at-risk schools, visit NCCTQ's [TQ Tips and Tools: Emerging Strategies to Enhance Teacher Quality](#) and go to the section on Teacher Quality in At-Risk Schools.

Sincerely,
Sabrina Laine, Ph.D., NCCTQ Director

Focusing Teacher Preparation on At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Many teachers begin their careers in at-risk or hard-to-staff schools because these schools have the most openings. For a variety of reasons, these teachers often leave their positions at these schools at the first available opportunity. One explanation for this early departure is that their teacher preparation programs have not adequately prepared them for teaching in challenging urban or isolated rural areas.

On September 21, 2006, the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) hosted a live, interactive webcast that provided insight into the real roots of the problem and offered the promising efforts being undertaken to address it at the national, state, and district levels. The expert panel included Michael Barry Allen, National Academies; Susan Moore Johnson, Harvard Graduate School of Education; C. Kent McGuire, Temple University; and Michelle Rhee, The New Teacher Project.

The following questions, with answers provided by the expert panelists, were submitted by participants as part of the webcast.

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Teacher Preparation

What are things teacher educators can do to better prepare preservice teachers to teach effectively in at-risk, hard-to-staff schools?

C. Kent McGuire: Knowing your students is key. From a curricular point of view, this could mean a number of things but certainly means addressing issues ranging from child or youth development to the interplay of parent and family dynamics on readiness and school performance. Developing assessment and diagnostic skills is also important because if you can't pinpoint what is getting in the way of learning, you can't develop instructional strategies to address these impediments. And developing a broad repertoire of instructional strategies is key. While we might not expect a brand-new teacher to master differentiated instruction, we do think preparing teachers with both a sense of these strategies and when and how to employ them is important. The good news is there are strategies we know are effective in, for instance, reading instruction or mathematics; and we can—through a combination of practicum and classroom instruction—help candidates develop these techniques. There is no substitute, however, for practice. So we think getting in the field early and often is important. We're spending a great deal more energy at Temple [University] guiding students toward the field setting where we think they will get a challenging but well-supported experience. Practically speaking, we get a great deal of feedback that teachers need more help with classroom management. We—like I imagine a number of places—run practicum courses on this to prepare our students for the challenges they will no doubt face when they first start teaching.

What are the most salient, critical skills and knowledge that need to be addressed in teacher preparation?

Michael Barry Allen: To some extent, this depends upon the grade level being taught. Strong subject-matter knowledge is certainly critical for secondary teachers. Also important is the ability to teach subjects

effectively, some of which may be learnable preservice and much of which probably needs to be honed on the job. Elementary teachers need this same knowledge about how to teach basic subject matter effectively. In addition, they need to have a solid understanding of child development and be able to recognize the learning needs of students who may still be at different developmental stages. Good teachers at all levels know how to make learning interesting and rewarding and how to provide feedback that motivates students to learn.

Susan Moore Johnson: New teachers not only have to know their subjects but also know how to teach them. They need to know basic strategies for having a well-organized classroom in which everyone focuses on learning. They need to know how to use a curriculum effectively—if they have one—and how to develop one from available resources if they don't. They need to know how to teach to students who learn in different ways or at different rates. They need to be familiar with communities in which they might work and personally aware of the assumptions [they] bring as individuals—particularly when they are working in communities that differ significantly from the ones they have experience with. If new teachers are to influence their own working environment, they need to understand their school as an organization. Most teacher education programs ignore this, and most teachers are focused only on their own classrooms. But understanding the school as a workplace can give new teachers great insight into the difficulties and opportunities they may encounter.

What are the most important experiences for a preservice teacher to have prior to student teaching?

Michael Barry Allen: This depends to a large extent on the structure of the program. But, in general, it's helpful if teacher candidates have enough exposure to the real-world classroom—either through observation or actual practice teaching—that they can be confident that teaching is the right career choice for them. Students probably also should observe really good

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teachers in action, especially in challenging urban classrooms so they have a sense that successful teaching under those circumstances is possible. But, in addition to “experiences,” teacher candidates have to have a good grasp of the subject they’re teaching.

Susan Moore Johnson: I’d suggest working informally with students of the age the teacher hopes to teach—tutoring, coaching, etc. Also, many new teachers have never observed a large number of teachers at work. Observing in a school before beginning teacher education can enhance the learning while in the program.

What are some tactics for preparing teachers for difficult schools without scaring them away from teaching?

Michael Barry Allen: My sense is that teacher candidates have to want to teach in challenging schools, or they’ll find themselves too stressed to cope well. So they first have to know what they’re getting into. They have to see examples of successful teaching in those schools. And they have to have the opportunity to work with low-income, minority students either one-on-one or in small groups. But some schools are dysfunctional, and veteran teachers would have a tough time teaching in them, let alone inexperienced teachers. It is not a good idea to place inexperienced teachers in schools that are really difficult. It’s hard enough to learn how to teach in schools with high-performing students and good support. Once beginning teachers have mastered the basics of teaching and feel some confidence, then it might be the time to think about teaching in more difficult environments.

What are current best practices from the field and from research on preparation and retention for teachers in at-risk and hard-to-staff schools?

Michael Allen: The research is very thin. We know that teachers leave principally because they experience poor leadership support and a lack of autonomy. There’s also some evidence that good induction and

mentoring programs are successful in increasing teacher retention. Placing beginning teachers in dysfunctional schools with poor mentoring support is a recipe for disaster, so this practice should be avoided. Some schools refuse to place student teachers in tough schools, reasoning that it’s hard enough to learn to teach well in an average environment.

Susan Moore Johnson: Good preparation calls for strong subject-based pedagogy and the ability to differentiate instruction. Having a good clinical experience that allows a prospective teacher to try out strategies for classroom management, group work, or discussions is very valuable. Retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools rests on having a well-organized and -managed school where the experienced teachers work closely with new teachers both in their induction and in school improvement generally.

How will these fast-track preparation programs address issues of ELL [English language learner]/ESL [English as a second language] learners?

Susan Moore Johnson: For the most part, these programs do not address ELL/ESL issues. But this is not strictly a shortcoming of fast-track programs. Many traditional programs offer little assistance to teachers on this. Given the variation in school composition, it seems likely that the best support for teachers would be at the school or district level in appropriate professional development opportunities that are tailored to the local situation.

What is being done to make teacher preparation programs accessible to low-income students, especially when they will become the first generation of college students?

Michael Barry Allen: There are, of course, programs in colleges that cater to low-income students, such as [those at] many of the City College of New York campuses. In addition, there is an increasing number of community colleges offering some courses in

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teacher preparation and providing vocational support for students contemplating teaching careers.

How can teacher preparation institutions fundamentally change the way teacher education faculty are selected, developed, and rewarded?

Michael Barry Allen: They will only fundamentally change these when they fundamentally change the way they *teach* teacher preparation. Moreover, it's not only teacher educators who need to be considered. Most teacher candidates receive their subject-matter courses in the college of arts and sciences, and faculty there also probably need to change the way they approach their subject—at least for prospective teachers.

How can teacher candidates get experiences working with students and teachers in hard-to-staff schools before they become employed by one?

Michael Barry Allen: Some teacher candidates attended such schools and are at least comfortable in the climate and understand what to expect. Some programs provide teacher candidates with opportunities to observe teachers in at-risk schools or to tutor students in those schools one-on-one or in small groups. And some programs arrange student teaching in those schools, though without top-notch cooperating teachers and mentors, this could be counterproductive.

Can you provide one or more exemplary examples of a residency-type approach to teacher training? And are there any good examples of such an approach being integrated into a district- or school-based induction program?

Susan Moore Johnson: [The] [Boston Teacher Residency](#) program is several years old and seems to be working well. Information about it is available on the Boston Public Schools website.

Michelle Rhee: The New Teacher Project's Teaching Fellows programs utilize a residency-type approach to teacher training to prepare career changers to become teachers in some of the country's largest cities. More information about these programs is available at www.tntp.org.

Teacher Induction, Retention, and Motivation

Pay-for-performance and other compensation issues often are raised as major barriers to getting high-quality candidates to enter the teaching field. What are some good incentives that both state policymakers and district administrators should consider to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools?

Michael Barry Allen: The Chattanooga, Tennessee, experience is instructive. They offered positions at their low-performing schools only to top teachers so it became a badge of honor to be selected. They gave these teachers a lot of public recognition. And they gave them substantial salary increases. Many experts believe that increases of \$10,000 annually or more are necessary; small incentives are not adequate to attract and retain good teachers in those schools. Even more fundamental, especially for younger teachers for whom salary is a little less important, are opportunities to develop their careers. This means providing good school leadership and strong support for instruction that includes mentoring and work-related professional development.

Beyond induction and mentoring for new teachers in hard-to-staff schools, how can we keep them inspired?

Michael Barry Allen: Strong school leadership, opportunities to participate in important decisions that affect their teaching, [and] good work-related professional development [are important]; also important appears to be strong peer-networking groups.

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How can teacher empowerment in decision making assist in retention efforts?

Michael Barry Allen: Research by Richard Ingersoll, in particular, indicates that perceived lack of autonomy is one of the principal reasons teachers leave schools. So, particularly when issues of instruction are involved, it's important for school administrators to bring the faculty into key decisions. This increases their buy-in, their sense of autonomy, and their sense of self-worth. And it makes good sense; teachers, after all, are the ones who know the most about what is and isn't working in the classrooms.

What does the research say regarding what has worked in regard to improving the working conditions in hard-to-staff schools?

Michael Barry Allen: Some research indicates that lack of autonomy and poor support from school leadership are the principal complaints teachers have about school climates. Addressing these would be critical. Also important is enabling hard-to-staff schools to be environments where teachers can learn to improve their teaching. This requires building the instructional capacity of those schools, either ensuring that there is a cadre of more accomplished senior teachers who can share their knowledge with less experienced teachers or creating regular opportunities for mentoring and instructionally focused professional development by skilled teachers and teacher educators from the outside.

How does district and school administration influence teacher satisfaction and retention in hard-to-staff schools?

Michael Barry Allen: By ensuring there [are] strong leaders in those schools who are supportive of teachers and involve them in important decisions that affect classroom instruction. By setting up strong peer support and induction and mentoring programs. By trying to erase the stigma attached to those schools and recognizing teachers for their good efforts and, where possible, their success. One city, Chattanooga, was

able to turn teaching in its lowest performing schools into a status assignment by allowing only top teachers to teach in those schools, paying them a higher salary, and [giving] them a good deal of praise and recognition.

How do we motivate aspiring teachers to commit to hard-to-staff schools?

Michelle Rhee: The New Teacher Project has found that the key to this is targeting recruitment messages to the types of people who are motivated by the challenge of teaching in hard-to-staff schools. In order to attract these individuals, recruitment messages must be honest about the challenges and the need for excellent teachers, rather than painting a falsely rosy picture. We have also found that creating highly selective programs to recruit teachers to hard-to-staff schools tends to attract high achievers who are drawn to these programs' aura of selectivity and professionalism.

What contributes to a teacher's decision to leave or stay in a hard-to-staff school?

Michael Barry Allen: A variety of factors [contribute]. Difficult working conditions, poor support from the school principal, and poor student achievement are commonly cited as factors motivating teachers to leave.

Michelle Rhee: The New Teacher Project's internal research has shown that some of the key factors cited by those who choose to leave are student discipline, stress, and school leadership.

What kinds of support and incentives are being offered (or should be offered) to teachers who choose to teach in hard-to-staff schools, particularly in an era of high accountability and high-stakes testing?

Michael Barry Allen: Financial incentives tend to play a larger role for older teachers than they do for younger teachers. Younger teachers are often overwhelmed by the challenge of teaching, period;

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and placing them in hard-to-staff schools may increase that challenge. So strong support and opportunities to grow professionally are very valuable for younger teachers, in particular. Ultimately, what's critical for all teachers is that their work be satisfying, and, to the extent that working conditions in a school thwart that satisfaction, teachers will be reluctant to remain there.

What strategies are most important for teachers who will be working in these settings?

Michelle Rhee: The New Teacher Project believes it is critical first for these teachers to understand the realities of the situation they will be facing. It is essential for these teachers to receive training in what to expect in a hard-to-staff school and how to overcome challenges. We base our curriculum on real experiences teaching in hard-to-staff schools, and we focus on real situations—What happens when your classroom management system fails on Day 2? What happens when a fight breaks out in the room? What happens when it is the fourth week of school and you still have no books?

Specific Programs

Is there longitudinal information about the success of The New Teacher Project measured in terms of how long the teachers recruited stay in the profession and, more importantly, how long those teachers teach in hard-to-staff schools in urban districts?

Michelle Rhee: Two recent studies of teacher certification pathways and teacher effectiveness [Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006] in New York City showed that NYC Teaching Fellows recruited by The New Teacher Project demonstrate retention rates that are comparable to, or better than, those of traditionally certified teachers. In addition, these studies showed that Teaching Fellows perform just as well as or even better than traditionally certified teachers in all subjects and grades studied by their second or third year in the classroom. Both findings are especially remarkable given the fact that Teaching Fellows are

much more likely than other teachers to work in high-poverty schools with disproportionately low rates of academic success and disproportionately high rates of absenteeism.

Did the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers research include Teach For America? And if so, what were the findings for this specific organization?

Susan Moore Johnson: Although there are some Teach For America teachers who have participated in our surveys, we haven't yet studied them as a group.

Is Temple University doing anything to encourage mid-career professionals or students who are noneducation majors to consider teaching in hard-to-staff schools?

C. Kent McGuire: Temple University has a number of students at the master's level who are coming to teaching as a second career. Temple has not designed anything specific (e.g., alternative certification) for these students, except in the areas of math and science where they are hoping to join forces with the biotech and pharmaceutical firms in our region to create efficient pathways to teaching.

Hard-to-Staff Rural Schools

How do the topics addressed regarding teacher preparation for entering urban high-need schools compare to staffing preparation strategies in high-need rural schools?

Michael Barry Allen: There are similarities and differences, and not all rural schools are the same. There are still a few rural schools with multigrade classrooms. Other rural schools may require teachers to teach both middle and high school students. A related challenge in many rural schools is the lack of adequate faculty to have specialists in all subjects and especially to give Advanced Placement classes in high school. So this may imply the need for rural teachers to be more interdisciplinary, to be more comfortable with multiage classrooms or with a variety of grade

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levels, and to be creative in using technology (e.g., online courses) in the classroom. Increasingly, there are ethnically diverse classrooms in rural areas, with a significant number of English language learners.

Are special policies and strategies necessary to serve the needs of hard-to-staff schools in isolated rural areas?

Michael Barry Allen: Some experts believe there are. These include (1) the need to offer appropriate recruitment incentives for teachers to teach in rural schools in what has become an increasingly urban culture; (2) the need to offer both professional and social support to rural teachers who often feel isolated from other teachers and from the members of the community to whom they may seem like perpetual outsiders (some rural areas have attempted to set up networks of support between rural teachers in different districts or counties); (3) the need to help prospective rural teachers from outside the region understand more about the culture into which they will be moving; (4) efforts to focus teacher recruitment on individuals who grew up in the area so that they will be better able to relate to students and the community and feel more at home; and (5) training in teaching in multilingual classrooms, as rural school districts increasingly enroll children of Hispanic, Asian, and other immigrant [populations].

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Michelle Rhee serves as chief executive officer and president of The New Teacher Project, a nonprofit organization that partners with school districts, state departments of education, and other educational entities to enhance their capacity to recruit, select, train, and support highly qualified teachers for hard-to-staff schools.

Preparing Teachers for At-Risk Schools: The Roles of the State and Federal Governments

By *L. Jeanne Kaufmann and Tricia Coulter, Ph.D.*
Education Commission of the States

Teacher preparation programs are responsible for training teacher candidates and equipping them with the knowledge they need to educate youth. However, the skills teachers need for success may vary dramatically depending on the type of school into which they are hired. This is particularly important when considering the challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers into at-risk schools.

“To help diverse learners master much more challenging content, teachers must go far beyond dispensing information, giving a test, and assigning a grade. They must themselves know more about the foundations of subject areas, and they must understand how students think as well as what they know in order to create experiences that produce learning” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996, p. 8).

Teacher education programs are tasked with preparing generalists—teachers who will be sent to all types of schools. This becomes a challenge for teachers going into at-risk schools where they will likely find a high concentration of linguistically and culturally diverse students. They need to be adequately prepared for these students if we expect them to be effective and remain in these schools.

The Federal Role

Teacher preparation traditionally has fallen under the realm of the states. However, the federal government increasingly is taking a more active role through Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and Title II of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and through financial support of programs designed to increase the supply of teachers.

Higher Education Act (HEA)

Title II of the HEA (1998) includes the stated purposes of improving the “quality of the current and future teaching force by improving the preparation of prospective teachers” (§201.a.2) and holding “institutions of higher education accountable for preparing teachers who have the necessary teaching skills and are highly competent in the academic content areas in which the teachers plan to teach” (§201.a.3). Through Title II, states are able to apply for funding to support efforts to reform teacher preparation, certification and licensure requirements, professional development, and recruitment efforts. In addition, Title II explicitly offers support for alternatives to teacher preparation (§202.d.3) and alternative routes to state certification (§202.d.4).

Accountability measures are specified in the legislation. Institutions responsible for teacher preparation are required to submit annual report cards to the state and general public pass rates for teacher preparation students, information about the preparation program, a statement on the accreditation status of the program, and whether the program has been designated as low performing (HEA, 1998, §206).

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It is important to note that while Title II focuses on the preparation of teachers, the legislation does not specifically require the types of preparation that may assist teachers in at-risk schools nor hold that as a stated goal. The HEA currently is due for reauthorization and requirements may change.

NCLB Act

The most recent and most far-reaching federal legislation addressing teaching quality is the NCLB Act. This act sets out specific requirements by which teachers are considered highly qualified. To be considered *highly qualified* under NCLB, a teacher must (1) have a bachelor's degree; (2) be fully certified as defined by the state department of education; and (3) be able to demonstrate subject area competence in any core subject taught. In addition, NCLB holds as a fundamental goal that there is equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers to all schools, including those at-risk. The focus of NCLB is student achievement rather than teacher preparation. While these clearly are linked, more specific guidelines and accountability measure related to preparation appropriately are included in HEA rather than NCLB. Specific to the preparation of teachers, NCLB (2002) does include support for professional development (§2113.c; §2123.a.3), mentoring (§2113.c, §2123.a.4), and teachers who become highly qualified through alternative routes to certification (§2123.a.2.C).

The federal government also supports several alternative preparation programs targeted at at-risk schools, such as Troops to Teachers (www.proudtoserveagain.com) and Teach For America (www.teachforamerica.org).

State Policy

Several states have enacted policies requiring teacher preparation programs to include specific coursework and field experiences that address diverse student populations. Examples include the following:

- **Alaska, Connecticut, Iowa, Louisiana, and Michigan** require teacher candidates to take specific classes in multicultural or cross-cultural education and intergroup relations.
- **North Dakota** requires the study of multicultural education and strategies for teaching and assessing diverse learners.
- **Nebraska** requires coursework leading to the “ability to relate effectively to other individuals and to groups in a pluralistic society other than the teacher’s own” (Nebraska Department of Education, 2003, p. 1).

A few states also require that field experiences or student teaching occur in schools with diverse populations. Examples include the following:

- **Alabama** requires all candidates to participate in field experiences or clinical practice that includes students from diverse ethnic, racial, gender, and socioeconomic groups.
- **Louisiana** includes field experiences in schools of varied socioeconomic and cultural characteristics in its requirements.
- **Washington** also requires that field experiences occur in settings with diverse student representation.

Action Steps for Policymakers

Ensuring that highly qualified, well-prepared teachers are graduating from teacher preparation programs and are able to teach effectively in at-risk schools is an ever-increasing necessity as well as requirement for states and schools. In efforts to address this challenge, policymakers should consider the following steps:

- **Identify the problem.** Does your state have a shortage of teachers in hard-to-staff schools? Do teachers in hard-to-staff schools feel adequately prepared?
- **Identify the contributing factors.** If your state has a shortage of teachers in hard-to-staff schools, is this a problem of attrition or recruitment? If it is a problem of attrition, do you know why teachers are leaving? Lack of support and inadequate preparation require different responses. A lack of support may indicate a need for the implementation of induction programs or professional development for school leaders to create collaborative working environments. Inadequate preparation requires the involvement of teacher preparation programs.
- **Assess teacher preparation systems in your state for potential weaknesses related to preparing teachers for at-risk schools.** Do the preparation programs adequately train teacher candidates, through coursework and field experiences, to teach effectively in schools with culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse students? If not, what courses or practices need to be implemented?
- **Assess and/or implement systems of collaboration.** Are K–12 and postsecondary education systems working together to ensure consistent understanding and agreement about the types of preparation courses and experiences that would prepare teachers for the challenges they may encounter in at-risk schools? If not, implement a system of collaboration.
- **Identify a system for evaluation of efforts and continual improvement.** Determine what data to gather to adequately evaluate efforts to improve teacher preparation for at-risk schools. For example, intermittent surveys with teacher graduates can determine whether they view their preparation as adequate after the first, second, and third years of teaching. In what specific ways might they modify their preparation programs? Different or additional courses? Different or additional field experiences?
- **Assess current state and district policy and practice to determine whether it supports or inhibits these efforts.**

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High-Quality Teachers for Students With Disabilities: A Call for Significant Shifts in Teacher Preparation

By Jean Hess
 Learning Point Associates

An overwhelming majority of students with disabilities participate in general education classrooms for most of their schooling since states have been required, for several years, to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. In addition, as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, states are required to establish teacher quality standards so teachers are qualified to educate *all* learners.

According to the most recent annual report to Congress regarding the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), approximately 95.9 percent of all students with disabilities are served in regular schools. Of these students, 47.3 percent are served outside the general education classroom less than 21 percent of the school day.

This article focuses on preparing teachers to effectively teach students with disabilities through intentional instruction of classroom management and describes a promising new technical assistance initiative developed jointly by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) and REL Midwest to assist states, districts, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) in reflecting on their efforts to increase teacher effectiveness and quality.

Preservice Teachers Need More Classroom Management Training

With the diverse populations of students in today’s classrooms, both general and special education teachers need to be skilled and prepared—not only in their content area but also in classroom management. In fact, the most common concerns expressed by beginning teachers about their preparation and capabilities relate to classroom and behavior management (Ladd, 2000), ranging from organizing the classroom and prompting positive behaviors to dealing with mild to severe behavioral issues and losing instruction time because of behavior management or discipline problems (Meister & Jenks, 2000).

Classroom management “implies more than eliciting student cooperation in maintaining order” (Brophy & Alleman, 1998, p. 56). “Effective classroom managers are thoroughly prepared and keep their students actively involved in the teaching and learning process” (Stronge, 2002, p. 26). Being an effective classroom manager requires a thorough understanding of theory and research as well as practical experience (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). Therefore, preservice instruction in classroom management and behavioral interventions should be intentional rather than accidental so it becomes an integral part of a teacher’s instructional behaviors and classroom routines.

Unfortunately, classroom and behavior management often are addressed only as a portion of educational psychology and/or child development courses. Thus preservice teachers entering student teaching often arrive with little depth of knowledge regarding classroom management and diverse populations who contribute to the challenges of effective classroom management (Lacina-Gifford, Kher, & Besant, 2003).

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In addition to limited knowledge about classroom management, many preservice special education teachers enter their in-service practice harboring mistaken attitudes and beliefs (misconceptions), shared through “untested theories or unsystematic individual testimonials about ‘what works best for me’” (Good & Brophy, 2000, p. 123), containing much contradiction and little research base. These misconceptions are likely to persist unless they are addressed through coursework and field experience (Brophy, 1988). “The policy implications are that teacher’s colleges and in-service training need to include specific training in classroom behavior management as an important part of the socialization role of the classroom” (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998, p. 182).

REL Midwest Research Focuses on Special Education Preservice Preparation

Better preparation in the areas of classroom organization and management will be useful to the regional comprehensive assistance centers and state education agencies (SEAs) as they work with IHEs and other teacher preparation programs to ensure high-quality preparation that translates directly into higher student achievement.

To address the needs identified earlier—classroom-management training and full certification—REL Midwest will evaluate and synthesize information obtained from IHEs across its seven-state region (i.e., Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin) to determine the varying characteristics of special education preservice preparation programs in the areas of classroom and behavior management.

In 2006–07 NCCTQ and REL Midwest will develop rubrics for examining the content of preservice training programs in classroom organization and behavior management in the form of *innovation configurations*—within the rubric, different levels of implementation of each key principle are defined and weighted differentially.

The key feature of the rubric is the delineation of appropriate steps to improve the practice of research-based instruction. NCCTQ and REL Midwest will develop an innovation configuration for classroom organization and behavior management that will have at least 15 research-based items and four to five different levels of implementation for each item. The item content will come from a comprehensive review of classroom organization and behavior management research, practitioner-oriented texts, and professional development documents. The various levels of implementation occurring on a continuum similar to the innovation configurations then will be used to evaluate course syllabi collected from IHEs to determine the depth and breadth of the inclusion of key principles of classroom management and behavioral intervention into special education preservice programs.

The development of these rubrics ultimately will result in tools that will allow SEAs and IHEs to better understand the status of preservice special education programs. NCCTQ plans to offer the innovation configuration tools and training to the 16 regional comprehensive assistance center staffs during the next year. In this manner of “training of trainers” technical assistance, each regional comprehensive assistance center then can build capacity to strategically address issues of teacher quality in the states it serves.

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The work of NCCTQ and REL Midwest promises to open up exciting possibilities for the future with potentially vast implications for student achievement and teacher quality:

- With an understanding of what special education teachers are being provided in preservice training about classroom and behavior management, REL Midwest can assist states in determining how, when, and where general education preservice teachers are learning about the same topics.
- There can be an examination of the differences between coverage of these topics among special education, elementary education, and secondary education preservice programs.
- Meetings of policymakers from the REL Midwest state education agencies (SEAs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs) can be convened to raise awareness of research findings and to facilitate conversations about the issue and appropriate avenues for action.
- Potential research using these innovative measurement tools is a longitudinal investigation of how preservice teachers' coursework interacts with their practice as they become first- and second-year teachers—to determine what coursework best prepared teachers to face the realities of their first independent classroom experiences.
- Teacher professional developers can use the innovation configuration as an observation tool to provide targeted feedback concerning each teacher's level of engagement with each of the key principles of the rubric.
- REL Midwest will be able to report to its regional SEAs and IHEs the kinds of coursework and field experiences that are most relevant and useful to beginning teachers. This deepened understanding has the potential to drastically improve the preparation and, in turn, the effectiveness of new teachers as they work with special-needs students.

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Narrowing the Teacher Quality Gap: Strategies for Preparing and Supporting Teachers in At-Risk Schools

By Katherine Bassett and Laura Goe
 ETS

While many in the education community are immersed in efforts to address the very real and substantial student achievement gap, a more subtle gap with an equally significant impact is occurring in schools in every state in the country—the teacher quality gap—which many believe is the root cause of the achievement gap. States are struggling to attract and retain effective teachers for students with special needs and in high-poverty, low-performing schools that tend to serve a high proportion of minority students.

The teacher quality gap is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a critical challenge and one that was to be addressed in states' revised state plans that were due in July 2006. The Department of Education's (ED's) review of these plans, as well as a review conducted by The Education Trust, show that the vast majority of states are struggling with several aspects of the problem, including collecting the necessary data to determine the areas of greatest inequity. For more information about the ED and The Education Trust reviews, see the following resources:

- *U.S. Department of Education Releases Results of State Plans for Highly Qualified Teachers in Every Classroom* (August 16, 2006) <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2006/08/08162006a.html>
- *Missing the Mark: An Education Trust Analysis of Teacher-Equity Plans* (August 2006) <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/5E2815C9-F765-4821-828F-66F4D156713A/0/TeacherEquityPlans.pdf>

As states revise their plans—which 43 states currently are required to do—and outline specific steps toward providing the most needy students with highly qualified teachers, one strategy is to provide stronger preparation and support for teachers to work in at-risk schools and in the field of special education. Certainly, inadequate preparation of new teachers for the unique challenges faced in high-need schools and for working with students with special needs leads to a sense of dissatisfaction that contributes to turnover rates that can exceed 40 percent (Ingersoll, 2003).

Approaches focused on preparing and supporting new teachers to succeed (and stay) in high-need schools and with students with special needs include the following.

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Offer Extensive Field Experiences

In their report, *Building a Profession: Strengthening Teacher Preparation and Induction*, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (2000) noted that clinical experiences are too brief and that insufficient attention is paid to ensure that the needs of beginning teachers are addressed. Many teacher preparation institutions already offer teacher candidates high-quality, extensive field experiences in high-need schools.

Temple University in Philadelphia (www.temple.edu/education/student/prospective.html) and Montclair State University in New Jersey (cehs.montclair.edu/academic/cop/about.shtml) have built relationships with the K–12 districts in their communities. Rather than offering a single student-teaching experience, these teacher candidates are in the K–12 community schools early in their preparation and throughout their student-teaching tenure. Research has shown that this type of exposure to challenging schools during teacher preparation can positively affect preservice teachers' attitudes (Wolffe, 1996).

Institutions also are beginning to take a cadre approach to placing students in schools so students have a support group to share experiences, brainstorm solutions to problems, and offer encouragement. Placing teacher candidates in high-need schools or in classrooms with students with special needs early in their training, as well as offering them consistent opportunities to work in these schools, prepares them for the challenges that these placements present. Candidates thereby are cued to the challenges they will face once they are responsible for their own classrooms and will have at the ready a set of skills on which to build to face these challenges effectively.

Place Preservice Teachers With Strong Mentors and Offer Incentives for Mentors Who Work With Preservice Teachers

The AFT report (2000) also advises paying more attention to placing preservice teachers in classrooms with strong mentor teachers for field experiences. The report states, “The cooperating classroom teachers with whom prospective teachers are placed [should be] chosen on the basis of excellence determined by a peer review process; these classroom teachers should be adequately trained to assume this responsibility, and well rewarded for undertaking it” (p. 8).

Provide Opportunities for Reflection on Experiences in High-Need Schools

Teacher preparation programs need to build in time and structure for preservice teachers to engage in reflection and discussion about their field experiences. This ensures that questions, fears, misconceptions, and general concerns are aired in appropriate settings, and it enables teacher candidates to see how their own thinking is changing through their experiences in these schools.

Offer High-Quality Programs for Alternative-Route Teachers Working in High-Need Schools or Special-Needs Assignments

The conference paper, *Placing Beginning Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools: Dilemmas Posed by Alternative Certification Programs* (Chin, Young, & Floyd, 2004), describes several high-quality alternative-route programs and notes that, while the alternative-route model solves a problem by eliminating the need for a series of substitutes or long-term substitutes because the teachers in the process of getting certified through an alternative route may work full-time in schools, there is not yet sufficient evidence to know whether such teachers provide an effective education for students. Because alternative certification programs vary widely, it is crucial that districts and states oversee these programs to ensure that candidates meet high standards and receive adequate training for placements in high-need schools.

Provide a Seamless System of Support for Teachers in Their First Few Years in the Classroom

In the report, *Learning the Ropes: Urban Teacher Induction Programs and Practices in the United States* (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999), researchers examined numerous urban teacher-induction programs to determine whether there is a difference in retention rates between schools that offer induction programs and those that do not. They found that teachers who went through a structured induction program for at least their first year were less likely to leave their schools because they felt more supported. Quantitative evidence provides support for this as well. Researchers Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that beginning teachers who were assigned a mentor in his or her field and received other induction elements were much less likely to leave their schools after their first year of teaching than teachers who did not receive such support. To ensure a seamless support system for novice teachers as they grow from being a student of teaching to a teacher of students, more teacher training programs should take a role in designing, conducting, and even staffing support systems for new teachers in their initial placements. Such work not only promises to increase retention rates of new teachers but would provide immediate feedback on how effectively the preservice training program is preparing its graduates.

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Highlights

NCCTQ Supports State Effort to Improve Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) Plans

- Webcast: *Innovative Ideas and Practical Suggestions for Improving the State Highly Qualified Teacher Plans***
 On September 7, 2006, NCCTQ and the U.S. Department of Education hosted a live, interactive webcast to help states improve their state plans for highly qualified teachers in every classroom. A [recording of the live webcast](#) is available for viewing (Replay No.: 1494142925).
- [Model Components for Revised State HQT Plans](#)**
 NCCTQ has developed *Model Components for Revised State HQT Plans* to help states working to improve their revised state HQT plans. This document captures the components submitted by the nine states that successfully met all six criteria outlined by the U.S. Department of Education.
- [Tool to Help States Revise Plans to Have Highly Qualified Teachers in Every Classroom](#)**
 This HQT tool for states streamlines access to the nine state plans that were accepted by reviewers and provides review comments. State plans can be accessed in two ways: (1) by state, which reports the entire state plan and reviewer comments for each state selected; or (2) by requirement, which reports on each requirement, allowing the user to compare text and reviewer comments on specified requirements across selected states.
- [Revising the Equitable Distribution Component in Your State's Plan for Highly Qualified Teachers](#)**
 Revised and easier to use, NCCTQ has enhanced the original March 2006 version of this equitable distribution data tool. The planning tool can assist states as they (1) take stock of the types of data collection, analysis, and reporting procedures they currently have; (2) consider the types of data they may want to collect in the future; and (3) determine future analysis and reporting procedures.

Focusing Teacher Preparation on At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools

On September 21, 2006, NCCTQ hosted a live, interactive webcast on the topic of preparing teacher for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools. More than 180 participants logged on to hear the panelists discuss the topic and field audience questions. A [recording of the live webcast](#) is available for viewing (Replay No. 1494145408). Additional resources and information about this topic, including the webcast presenters' presentations, are available at <http://www.ncctq.org/webcasts/teacherPrep/>.

NCCTQ Annual Conference to Explore Ways to Increase Student Achievement in High-Need Schools Through Teacher Quality

NCCTQ will hold its annual What Works Conference on November 8–9, 2006, at the Doubletree Hotel, 151 Rhode Island Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. The conference will focus on the connection between highly qualified teachers and student achievement with keynote presentations, concurrent sessions, and opportunities for networking and information sharing.

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U.S. Department of Education Launches Website Dedicated to IDEA Regulations

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, has launched a [new website](#) dedicated to helping interpret and implement the new IDEA regulations. Visitors can browse major topic areas, including highly qualified teachers, alignment with the No Child Left Behind Act, and private schools.

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