Research Brief

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Teacher Preparation Program Best Practices

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Abstract

In the United States, enrollment in teacher preparation programs (TPPs) declined by roughly a quarter million students between 2008 and 2020 (Will, 2023). There were similar enrollment trends in Mississippi where the number of student completers in traditional TPPs declined by 31% from 2010-11 to 2017-18, even though more students were graduating from state colleges (Ballard & Canter, 2020). This manuscript reviewed the research literature regarding recent findings on best practices for increasing TPP enrollment and teacher workforce diversity. Some best practices identified as potentially increasing TPP enrollment and workforce diversity included providing financial assistance to boost enrollment and encourage candidates to teach in high-needs school districts; strengthening partnerships with local school districts and universities; developing and implementing strong induction and mentoring components to support student learning and workforce activities; recruiting members of the local community to assist with recruitment, retention, and employment activities; and prioritizing adequate teaching experiences designed to improved student completion and workforce placement rates. Taking a systemic approach designed to address multiple obstacles facing teacher preparation programs and their participants provides a research-grounded approach to improving the success of teacher preparation programs and workforce diversity initiatives here in Mississippi and across the United States.

Background

Teacher preparation programs (TPP) play a vital role in training aspiring teachers to join the workforce. However, enrollment in TPPs has declined since 2010-11(Stohr et al., 2018). In the United States, TPP enrollment declined by roughly a quarter million students between 2008 and 2020 (Will, 2023). There were similar trends in Mississippi where state colleges were graduating more students overall, but not in teacher preparation programs (Ballard & Canter, 2020). For instance, the number of student completers at traditional TPPs in Mississippi declined by 31% from 2010-11 to 2017-18 (Ballard & Canter, 2020). Mississippi's HBCUs (i.e., historically black colleges and universities) saw the sharpest decline of traditional TPP completers, dropping by 69% (Ballard & Canter, 2020).

Declining enrollment in TPPs can impact the availability of a more diverse teacher workforce. As of 2018, 18% of teachers in the United States were persons of color (Stohr et al., 2018). Daniels (2022) identified barriers that people of color face when entering the teacher workforce. Some of those barriers included the teaching profession lacking the prestige and earning potential of other careers; alternative certification programs enrolling a greater percentage of people of color compared to traditional TPPs; growing cost burden of college debt; difficulty passing certification/licensure exams; and teachers of color more frequently working in schools in high poverty areas that have higher turnover rates (Daniels, 2022). To address the issues of declining TPP enrollment and the need for a more diverse teacher workforce, this writing reviewed current research on possible solutions to those issues. The following sections present best practices by topic areas identified in the research literature as having the potential to boost TPP enrollment and teacher workforce diversity. This research brief concludes by presenting several recommendations for utilizing those best practices in Mississippi.

Financial Assistance

Researchers point to the need for financial assistance as a way to increase TPP enrollment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020; Stohr et al., 2018). For instance, TPP initiatives need sustainable funding to be most effective. Such programs typically receive funding from grants and/or state legislatures (Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020). Providing increased funding to these programs can go towards utilizing paid personnel, developing partnerships, program development, mentorships, and candidate incentives (Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020).

Incentives are especially important for providing financial assistance to candidates in the form of scholarships and loan forgiveness programs. Such incentives make TPPs more appealing to prospective candidates because they offset the high costs of pursuing their education. Service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs are two types of incentives which cover the cost of a TPP in exchange for three to five years of service in the teaching profession. If students do not complete the service requirement, then they have to repay the loan with interest (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Research indicates when these kinds of programs cover a significant amount of tuition/living costs, they bring more professionals into the communities where they are needed most (Darling-Hammond et al, 2019). Similarly, Kenyatta and Irvine (2020) argue

that the size of financial incentives matters, and amounts that range from $1,000 to $3,000 a year are often ineffective at addressing student loan debt.

Financial incentives can also help to increase enrollment among persons of color. The high cost of TPPs have been found to disproportionately discourage candidates of color from enrolling because those candidates tend to have more student loan debt than White students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Stohr et al. (2018) suggest developing scholarships specifically for candidates of color to enroll in TPPs. Other recommendations to increase diversity in TPPs include tuition reimbursement programs (Daniels, 2022).

One example of a financial assistance program is the *North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). This scholarship program recruits high school graduates into an in-state university TPP if the students agree to teach for a minimum of four years in North Carolina. The program awarded students yearly scholarships of $6,500 for four years. Students in the program were found to have a high retention rate once they became teachers. Compared to their peers, these teachers were more effective at teaching based on student test scores (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Overall, providing financial assistance to TPP candidates could benefit school districts by increasing the number of teachers of color and encouraging new teachers to work at high-needs schools.

Partnerships and Networking

Establishing partnerships between universities and school districts could help strengthen TPPs in terms of curriculum development, mentorship activities, job placement and workforce development initiatives, and funding opportunities (Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020). Fostering such partnerships could help to expand and strengthen the services offered by a TPP such as trainings, clinical practice experiences, and supportive services assisting with the certification process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020). For instance, some TPPs create professional development schools where teacher candidates work under a teacher mentor at a local school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

Universities can also provide opportunities to grow their TPPs by establishing satellite locations and other continuing education programs targeting aspiring teachers (Williams et al., 2020). Such programs can maximize teacher candidates' time by allowing them to gain both teaching experience and course credits. In addition, predominantly White institutions that operate TPPs can partner with HBCUs as a way to increase diversity in the teacher pipeline (Daniels, 2022).

Partnerships could also help increase diversity in the teaching profession by growing the networks of aspiring teachers of color. Daniels (2022) recommends expanding support networks for teachers of color as a way of fostering inclusive school environments. Another suggestion is having TPPs take a more relationship-oriented approach to recruiting by prioritizing prospective applicants of color and providing them with support (Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020). TPP administrators and school districts can also partner to provide job placement pathways to candidates of color (Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020). Overall, developing partnerships and networking

with school districts and universities could help TPPs create more educational support and job placement opportunities.

Induction and Mentoring Programs

One way that TPPs could foster partnerships and networks is by developing induction and/or mentoring programs. Induction programs are composed of supports and learning opportunities that are given to novice educators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Offerings from induction programs include mentorships, professional development trainings, observation and feedback opportunities, and a reduced teaching load in some cases (Keese et al., 2023). Comprehensive induction programs have been found to have positive effects on student achievement and teacher retention (Keese et al., 2023). For instance, studies have shown that for students of teachers who participated in an induction program, they scored higher on their academic achievement test (Glazerman et al., 2010; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Darling-Hammond et al., (2019) found that high-quality induction programs have the following characteristics: teachers have a mentor from their same field; they share common planning time with other teachers in the same field; there is ongoing collaboration with other teachers; and they have an external network of teachers.

Induction and mentoring programs have positive effects on variables like teacher practices, teacher retention, and student achievement (Keese et al., 2023). One recommendation for developing quality induction and mentoring programs is to conduct a formalized needs assessment to design programs based on the specific needs of particular schools (Keese et al., 2023). These assessments should consider the educational experience of the teaching workforce and the student population (Keese et al., 2023).

Teacher mentoring is a partnership between a novice educator and an experienced mentor (Keese et al., 2023). Researchers have found that working with an experienced mentor can have the following benefits for novice educators: providing emotional support; increasing effectiveness of novice educators; and lowered attrition rates (Keese et al., 2023). Mentoring can also be a part of clinical training activities provided in TPPs. For instance, TPPs have been found to promote teacher quality if they provide carefully mentored clinical experiences lasting 30 weeks or more (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). These experiences give candidates an opportunity to be mentored by an expert who provides close guidance and feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Overall, induction and mentoring programs can improve teacher retention and student achievement by increasing the skills, knowledge, and experiences of TPP candidates.

Teacher Residencies

Teacher residencies are another possible solution to increasing TPP enrollment and workforce diversity. Teacher residency programs are modeled after medical residencies. In these programs, a teaching resident spends an academic year working in a classroom with a mentor teacher. During this time, the resident teacher takes graduate courses from a partnering university, and will typically apprentice in a high-need classroom (Stohr et al., 2018). Residency programs have been found to recruit, retain, and place talented teacher candidates into high-need

fields and school districts, and have also been found to increase racial diversity in the teaching workforce profession (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Stohr et al., 2018). For instance, during the 2022-23 school year, 69% of teacher residents identified as persons of color (National Center for Teacher Residencies, 2023).

Guha et al. (2016) identified eight characteristics of high-quality teacher residency programs that can increase TPP enrollment and workforce diversity. Those eight characteristics are as follows: (1) residencies should have strong partnerships between universities and school districts; (2) residencies need to recruit strong candidates to meet the hiring needs of school districts in areas experiencing teacher shortages; (3) residents should receive a full year of clinical practice where they teach with an expert mentor; (4) residents should receive coursework that is integrated with clinical practice; (5) mentors should be trained to co-teach with residents; (6) residents are placed in "teaching schools" that are designed to help residents learn and model good practices; (7) residents are provided with ongoing mentoring and support; and (8) programs should provide residents with financial assistance such as stipends and student loan forgiveness in exchange for teaching in a sponsoring district (Guha et al., 2016). These qualities echo some of the solutions listed in previous sections such as providing financial assistance and mentoring activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

Grow Your Own

Grow your own programs are another possible way to increase TPP enrollment. These programs recruit local graduates and residents with existing ties to the community. As such, these programs have shown success in recruiting and retaining diverse teachers in schools that had previously been harder to staff (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). National grow your own programs like the *Pathways to Teaching Careers Program* have been found to produce teachers who remain in the profession longer than typical beginning teachers (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). These teachers in the *Pathways to Teaching Careers Program* also tend to teach in high-needs schools at a higher rate than typical beginning teachers (Clewell & Villegas, 2001).

Another example of a grow your own program is the University of Colorado at Denver's *Pathways2Teaching*. This program focuses on encouraging 11th and 12th grade students of color to learn about teaching by framing it as an act of social justice, and it also allows students to earn college credit (Stohr et al., 2018). The *Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program* in California is another type of a grow your own program (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). During its operation, 92% of the program's graduates remained employed in California public schools. The program also increased teacher diversity due to 65% of its participants being people of color and bilingual (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Overall, grow your own programs provide a way for local communities to increase workforce diversity and teacher retention.

Traditional TPPs Versus Alternative TPPs

Research conducted by Zhang and Zeller (2016) identified three main types of teacher preparation programs: (1) traditional programs offered at college/university-based institutions

that are accredited and lead to a four year education baccalaureate degree; (2) lateral entry alternative licensure programs where participants can begin teaching immediately after completing specific courses that lead to licensure; and (3) special alternative licensure programs generally targeting non-education majors who want to enter into the teaching profession after taking a limited number of graduate-level education courses. As related to this research brief, the above types of teacher preparation programs can basically be placed into two groups --- traditional preparation programs (TPPs) and alternative preparation programs (APPs). The effectiveness of both types of programs can depend upon many factors that include the quality of educational content, experiences of participants, level of support provided to participants, and the self-motivational levels of participants (Zhang and Zeller, 2016). This section briefly examines how differences between traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs can impact teacher enrollment and workforce diversity.

As mentioned above, the quality of educational content in both TPPs and APPs is often an important factor in determining teacher retention and workforce diversity levels. For instance, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) found that teachers from alternative TPPs were 25% more likely to leave their schools compared to teachers from traditional TPPs. One possible reason is that teachers from alternative TPPs typically receive less pre-service coursework compared to those in traditional TPPs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). In addition, teachers from alternative TPPs are not as likely to have any experience teaching students before they begin their teaching career (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). These findings have implications for teacher workforce diversity due to teachers of color being more likely to enroll in an alternative TPP than a traditional one (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

One way to strengthen all types of teacher preparation programs across institutions is by ensuring they have adequate coursework preparation and student teaching experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). This finding is important because teachers of color are more likely to enroll in alternative TPPs, suggesting that teachers in alternative TPPs may not be receiving adequate training due to less pre-service coursework and no experience teaching students. However, these implications likely depend on the nature of the alternative TPP. For instance, if an alternative TPP has an adequate amount of pre-service coursework and teaching experiences, then there may be less of a difference in comparison with traditional TPPs. To obtain a more definitive answer, additional research is needed to explore these nuances between alternative and traditional teacher preparation programs.

Another way to strengthen TPPs is to ensure they include the following opportunities for teacher candidates: opportunities for practice teaching; opportunities to build teaching knowledge and study classroom practice; and opportunities to learn from expert mentors (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). A recommendation related to building teaching knowledge is ensuring TPPs have strong supports for certification exam preparation (Daniels, 2022). Certification exam preparation can increase teacher diversity by helping educators of color successfully become licensed once they compete a TPP, overcoming the obstacle that certification exams pose to educators of color (Daniels, 2022). Overall, research suggests that traditional TPPs yield more positive outcomes in teacher retention rates when compared to

alternative TPPs. This discrepancy could be reduced if alternative TPPs adopt more coursework preparation and student teaching experiences.

Legislative Solutions

In addition to improving TPPs at the program level, there are examples of legislative policies that may also help improve TPPs enrollment, retention, and employment rates. In Mississippi, Ballard and Canter (2020) recommended revamping the *Mississippi Critical Teacher Shortage Act of 1998*. That Act works to provide incentives to educators to direct them to areas with a critical teacher shortage. One of these incentives was a scholarship program that offered full-forgivable loans. However, some of the provisions in the Act have ended since it was introduced in 1998. Ballard & Canter (2020) have recommended the Act be improved by introducing a grant that amounts to at least half the net price for undergraduate students in TPPs. In exchange, students would commit to teaching in a district experiencing a critical teacher shortage. Another way the Act could be improved is by offering an annual loan repayment assistance of up to $3,000 for each year a teacher serves in a district experiencing a critical teacher shortage. This loan repayment assistance would be given for up to four years of service (Ballard & Canter, 2020).

Still another option to bring more teachers into districts experiencing a teacher shortage is to pass legislation that creates competitive and equitable salaries across a given state (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). This type of legislation could help prevent teachers from avoiding low-income school districts because of low salaries compared to districts paying higher salaries. Teacher salaries could also be made more competitive with legislation that adds a base salary increase for teachers who become board certified. North Carolina enacted such legislation in the 1980s and 1990s by adopting a 12% increase in teacher salary once they became certified, and it also helped increased the number of certified teachers in the state (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Overall, properly adopted legislative solutions that provide financial assistance and competitive salaries could help increase the number of teachers employed and retained in Mississippi.

Summary of Key Research Findings

This review of TPP best practices identified several key research findings related to increasing teacher enrollment and workforce diversity. The first finding is the high costs of TPPs tend to discourage candidates of color from enrolling due to those students typically having more student loan debt than White students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). This finding highlights the need for financial assistance as a way to increase student enrollment overall, and in particular for students of color. The second finding is that TPP candidates having access to mentors can be very beneficial towards increasing teaching effectiveness and lowering teacher attrition rates (Keese et al., 2023). This finding suggests that mentorship is an important component of successful TPPs. The third finding is that teachers in traditional TPPs are more likely to keep teaching than teachers from alternative TPPs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). One of the main reasons identified is that traditional TPPs provide candidates with more pre-service coursework and experiences teaching students (Zhang & Zeller, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

The research reviewed in this writing identified a variety of best practices Mississippi TPPs could adopt as a way of increasing student enrollment and teacher workforce diversity. Below are some recommendations for consideration regarding possible best practices that may work to increase teacher enrollment and workforce diversity in Mississippi:

- Provide financial assistance to both TPPs and TPP participants. Increased funding for Mississippi TPPs can help strengthen programs in terms of partnerships and mentorships, and it can provide financial assistance to participants through loan forgiveness and scholarship programs that appeal to candidates and help alleviate the burden of student debt (Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020).
- Create partnerships with local school districts and universities as a way to foster mentorships, candidate support, and job placement opportunities. These partnerships can strengthen TPPs by offering more teaching experiences and course credits to candidates (Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020).
- Develop induction and mentoring programs that can help increase teaching effectiveness and lower student attrition rates. It should be noted that research suggests successful induction and mentoring programs are best designed on the specific needs of each particular school (Keese et al., 2023).
- Utilize more teacher residency programs so that candidates can gain additional experiences working in a classroom and receiving mentoring activities. Teacher residency programs tend to draw more candidates of color and help place such candidates into high-need classrooms (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).
- Implement *Grow Your Own* programs as a way to increase teacher workforce diversity in Mississippi. Such programs have been found to be successful at recruiting and retaining teachers in high-need school districts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).
- Where feasible, prioritize recruiting candidates to traditional verses alternative programs due to traditional programs demonstrating higher student completion and retention rates. Some research has found teachers from alternative programs are 25% more likely to leave their schools than teachers from traditional programs due to alternative program candidates being less likely to receive adequate pre-service coursework and less likely to have experiences teaching students (Zhang & Zeller, 2016); Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).
- Adopt legislative solutions such as full-forgiveness loan incentive programs, and creating competitive and equitable salaries for school districts across the state of Mississippi. Equitable and competitive salaries in the state can help increase the number of teachers in high-need school districts (Ballard & Canter, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).
- Depending upon the number and types of issues confronting each TPP, Kenyatta and Irvine (2020) suggest taking a systemic approach designed to address multiple obstacles facing teacher preparation programs and their participants. Those obstacles could include such varying issues as obtaining college access, ensuring quality educational content is being delivered, providing financial aid sufficient to offset high college costs, and increasing passage rates for licensure certifications.

- At the very least, Mississippi TPPs should include adequate coursework preparation, sufficient financial aid, induction and mentorship programs, and ample student teaching experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Ballard & Canter, 2020; Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020). This recommendation is especially important for alternative TPPs that enroll candidates of color who are more likely to teach in high-need school districts.

Conclusions

With teacher preparation programs across the United States facing declining enrollment rates and a teacher diversity shortage, more needs to be done to improve TPPs and their success rates. Reviewing current research on these issues reveals several promising best practice strategies for increasing TPP enrollment and workforce diversity. These strategies include providing financial assistance to encourage candidates to attend TPPs and teach in high-needs school districts; strengthening partnerships between local school districts and universities; developing and implementing strong induction and mentoring components; recruiting members of the local community to assist with recruitment, retention, and employment activities; and prioritizing adequate teaching experiences designed to improved student completion and workforce placement rates. Instead of just choosing one solution, researchers suggest taking a systemic approach that addresses multiple obstacles to increasing enrollment and workforce diversity rates (Kenyatta & Irvine, 2020).

The goal of this research brief was to provide a wide-ranging examination of possible best practices that could be used to help increase enrollment in teacher preparation programs, and increase teacher workforce diversity. As mentioned in the recommendations listed above, taking a systemic approach designed to address the multiple obstacles facing teacher preparation programs and their participants provides a research-grounded approach to improving the success of teacher preparation programs and workforce diversity initiatives here in Mississippi and across the United States. Improving such programs could very well help determine the social and economic success of this state and the nation for decades to come.

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