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Teacher Preparation: Answering the Call of Educational Reform

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Introduction
An increasing part of the education reform movement is looking at institutions that prepare teachers. The following article outlines the major lines of thought and then provides insight into what the Grand Valley State University College of Education is doing to respond to this call.

Recommendations for the Preparation of Educators
In the executive summary of Educating School Teachers by Arthur Levine (2006), “A schism is discussed between those who believe that teaching is a profession like law or medicine, requiring a substantial amount of education before one becomes a practitioner and those who think teaching is a craft which is learned principally on the job.” (p.1) This conflict in beliefs has created contrasting models for educating teachers and school administrators making the quality of teacher and school administrator preparation dependent on the quality of the higher education institution. As a result Levine provided five recommendations for strengthening teacher preparation:

1. Transform education schools from ivory towers into professional schools focused on school practice;
2. Focus on student achievement as the primary measure of the success of teacher education programs;
3. Make five-year teacher education programs the norm;
4. Establish effective mechanisms for teacher education quality control;
5. Close failing teacher education programs, strengthen promising ones and expand excellent programs. Create incentives for outstanding students and career changers to enter teacher education at doctoral universities.

Michigan Department of Education’s Actions
To improve higher education and teacher preparation in particular, strong empirical data systems that link teacher effectiveness to student success are being developed. Although the data are confounded by many variables such as socioeconomic status, family systems education and support, and school resources, the development and implementation of this system sends clear messages to teacher preparation programs. First, measures of student achievement associated with graduates of preparation programs will be used to measure the effectiveness of teacher education programs. Second, teacher preparation programs will be asked to report on whether program graduates are hired into teaching positions, particularly in shortage areas, and whether they stay in those positions for multiple years. Third, surveys of program graduates and their principals will directly tie teacher preparation programs to schools and their graduates’ students. In the most critical sense, the assumption is that failing schools imply failing teacher preparation programs.
Additionally Michigan Department of Education has incorporated the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards into teacher licensing, program approval, and professional development. Based on these standards, knowing student strengths and needs and pairing these with tailored content knowledge will be expected of teachers. In addition these new standards is stressed in the INTASC model as well as project experience, cross-curricular activities, and problem solving. The proposed revisions called for an adoption of the newly revised InTASC model core teaching standards. The Michigan Office of Professional Preparation Services conducted a review of the InTASC Standards and an alignment between the proposed standards and the current PSMT with recommendations for revisions in the professional standards for teachers. Following public hearing regarding the proposed changes in the standards, the recommended revisions were returned to the SBE and the review and discussion of the comments began in December 2011.

The revised Michigan Teacher Tenure Act has incorporated InTASC and educational reforms by including an assessment system that links teacher success to student performance and in turn teacher success to teacher preparation programs which includes alternative routes for teacher education. This assessment system is based on two measures: students’ performance on standardized tests and second on principals’ evaluation of teachers in areas outside of standard performance (Teacher’s Tenure: Act, 1937).

New Preparation Models

In order to succeed in implementing these new regulations, preparation programs for both teachers and school administrators need to consider new educational models to prepare their students for the new standards. One consistent recommendation in the literature is the linking of content areas and education courses to school partnerships (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; NCATE 2010; Zeichner, 2010). This recommendation is often referred to as a clinical model for teacher and administrators preparation. The model serves to move the preparation of teachers and school administrators from the ivory tower to an actual school focus. Within this clinical model, students are always experiencing a mix of theory and field practice and faculty are active in schools partnerships. Articles from Darling-Hammond (2006), NCATE (2010), and Zeichner (2010) suggest that the

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Standards for all teachers and teacher preparation programs include:

- Teachers need knowledge and skills to customize learning for learners with a range of individual differences;
- Teachers need to recognize that all learners bring to their learning varying experiences, abilities, talents, and prior learning, as well as language, culture, and family and community values that are assets that can be used to promote their learning;
- Teachers need to assign learners a more active role in determining what they learn, how they learn, and how they demonstrate their learning;
- Teachers must have a deeper understanding of their own frames of reference, the potential biases in these frames, and their impact on expectations for and relationships with learners and their families;
- Teachers need to have greater knowledge and skill around how to develop a range of assessments, how to balance use of formative and summative assessment as appropriate, and how to use assessment data to understand each learner’s progress (The Interstate Teacher, 2013).

Personalization, or differentiation, to ensure student success is emphasized versus the “one size fits all” approach

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most successful way to create these partnerships is through programs with direct ties to school districts in the university’s service area.

Research on the clinical model is extrapolated from research in the areas of service-learning, experiential learning, action learning and place-based education. This research also provided data on effectiveness of this approach (Donnison & Itter, 2010; Knutson Miller & Gonzalez, 2010). Research by Gonzalez and Knutson Miller (2010) concludes that service-learning experiences (in schools) for pre-service teachers have a positive impact on academic achievement, connecting theory to practice, and students reported being better prepared for their teaching careers.

A second model is the education of administrators and in-service teachers in the Teacher as Leader model that is “The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Old norms of teachers working in isolation are replaced with new norms of collaboration and teamwork. This requires a clear articulation of school-wide goals, training of principals as well as teachers to understand the role of teacher leaders and support for teachers and other education professionals to work together to serve the needs of all students in the school. The teacher leader needs recognized responsibilities, authority, time to collaborate, and support from school administrators to assume leadership roles. Michigan Teacher preparation programs can facilitate this change in their education and certification of school administrators and in their provisions of high quality current professional development for in-service teachers.

This model sees teacher leaders as educators respected by their peers, model effective practices, support collaborative team structures in schools, and collaborate with principals. Literature has shown that providing opportunities to exercise leadership roles encourages teachers to actively engage in, contribute to, take responsibility for and become accountable for what is happening in their schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Schools that develop cultures of collaboration and professional inquiry have success in improving student learning (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2005). In fact, Stigler and Hiebert (1999) concluded from their study of mathematics teaching in the U.S., Japan, and Germany that Japan’s “collaborative lesson study” model, in which teachers regularly work together to improve practice, appears to be a key strategy enabling Japan’s students to be consistently ranked in the top 10 countries in Programme for International Student Assessment and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study. States involved in promoting Teacher Leader model includes Kansas, which has adopted teacher leader standards and is in the forefront of developing the nation’s first assessment of teacher leadership. States such as Ohio and Kentucky are redesigning their school leader preparation programs to support team-based approaches to school leadership.

The promotion and rewarding of teacher leadership provides the ability to:

1. Increase the capacity for states and local districts to create staffing models that include differentiated career options for teachers;
2. Develop new structures for licensing and/or credentialing teacher leaders;
3. Engage teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in developing criteria-based models for the selection of teachers to serve in formalized leadership roles
4. Develop systems for reward and recognition of the contributions of teachers in formal and informal leadership roles;

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5. Establish compensation systems that recognize teacher leadership roles, knowledge, and skills;

6. Establish a performance management and evaluation system that is consistent with the identified and varied roles of teacher leaders and promotes national certification of teachers in Michigan.

**Conclusion**

In addressing the changes in the rules and regulations Michigan teacher preparation programs it is concluded that a clinical model for teacher preparation that integrates an experiential or service learning component into teacher preparation will serve as best practices in teacher education. In addition, the literature and the new regulations recommend increased mentoring within teacher preparation leveraging the best K-12 educators as mentors and teacher educators in preparing the next generation of teachers as well as creating connections between universities and school districts to meet the needs of school districts. Michigan teacher preparation programs may similarly wish to redesign school administrator preparation programs to support team-based approaches in schools and to educate and assist principals in their extensive role in the evaluation of teachers in the new regulations through an understanding of the teacher leader model.

**References:**


