

The Importance of Data for Improving Teacher Preparation

Jim Wyckoff

October 11, 2016

Teacher preparation has the potential to profoundly improve teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. In 2010, the National Research Council Report *Preparing Teachers, Building Evidence for Sound Policy* found that a primary obstacle to understanding how to improve teacher education is the lack of national and state data systems. Unfortunately, that finding is no less true today. That Report went on to say, "... there would be a high-quality, well-defined state data system in every state that gives explicit attention to collecting baseline information about teacher education and its effects."

The most promising ingredient for improved teacher preparation is the systematic development of relevant data. Teacher education programs, state certification offices and school districts have little to no comparative information regarding preparation candidates and graduates. As a result, there is little basis on which judge performance and make corresponding adjustments.

Building a robust understanding of how and for whom teacher preparation "works" is predicated on developing rich and sustained data systems about prospective teachers as they move through teacher preparation and into the field. What we know is very limited because data on teacher candidates and graduates is often siloed across multiple organizations and rarely assimilated. As a result, most teacher preparation programs have no idea where their graduates take jobs, how long they teach in that initial placement, the types of students they teach or how well they perform. Most school districts and states departments of education know some of the elements.

Building strong data systems on the preparation and careers of teachers may be the single best way to improve teacher preparation. Surprisingly, it is far from simple. Prep programs, state departments of education and school districts all have their own issues and data to improve teacher education often is not near the top of the list. Indeed each employs such data most often for compliance purposes rather than as a source of program improvement. Without systematic and focused external pressure from organizations like SREB, CCSSO, or Deans for Impact little is likely to change. This Commission has the real potential to have a lasting impact on teacher preparation by planting the seeds that develop into data systems designed to foster program improvement.

Jim Wyckoff, University of Virginia professor and consultant to the SREB Teacher Preparation Commission, prepared this issue summary in advance of the Commission's December 2016 meeting.