

CENTER
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Improvements are Needed:

Minnesota Principals, Superintendents, and Parent/Community
Advocates Assess Teacher Preparation

by

**Joe Nathan, Stella Cheung
and Debra Hare**

December, 1998

Hubert H. Humphrey Institute
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SUMMARY

The 1998 Minnesota Legislature asked about the quality of teacher preparation - an especially important issue because thousands of Minnesota teachers will be retiring in the next decade. This study gathered information by contacting every Minnesota public school principal and superintendent, along with selected parent/community groups. More than 1100 people responded, including more than 50 percent of Minnesota public school administrators.

Strengths of Teacher Preparation Program

- Administrators say that most recent graduates of teacher preparation programs know well the areas they have been hired to teach (73% of principals and 79% of superintendents say recent graduates are "well prepared" or "very well prepared" in this area).
- Administrators also rate recent graduates relatively high on creating a positive learning environment, promoting active learning, and knowing how to use computers.

Weaknesses of Teacher Preparation Programs

- Most school administrators express considerable concern about recent graduates' knowledge of Minnesota's graduation standards.
- Many administrators are not satisfied with recent graduates' knowledge of special needs students, or their ability to work with parent/community advocates and agencies.
- Many administrators say that recent graduates do not know how to teach their subjects.
- Parent/community advocates are even more concerned than administrators about recent graduates' skills in various areas.

Recommendations

- Increase college/school/parent/community collaboration in teacher preparation.
- Improve "student teaching," making it longer and stronger.
- Allow a limited number of K-12 schools, which have improved student achievement, to offer a Master in Teaching Degree to those who hold a college degree in any field.

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to help answer questions Minnesota legislators asked earlier in 1998. Minnesota Laws 1998, Chapter 398, Article 5, Section 41 require that the DCFL develop and present a report which: 1) assesses whether teachers entering the workforce are prepared to meet the basic skill and higher learning needs of students under the state's results-oriented graduation rule; 2) identifies teacher skills crucial to the success of students in a knowledge-based economy and determines if Minnesota colleges/universities are teaching those skills adequately to teachers; 3) examines the ability of Minnesota colleges/universities to provide training to existing teachers who are seeking further staff development experiences in order to meet the students' needs under the graduation rule; and 4) identifies resources and organizations outside of the colleges/universities that can provide training and teaching experiences necessary to meet the needs of students under the graduation rule.

The DCFL named one of the co-authors (Nathan) to the statewide task force that it created in September 1998 to help answer these questions. The CSC volunteered to help gather the views of administrators and parent/community advocates regarding the training of teachers (The DCFL agreed to survey teachers).

Minnesota Representative Betty Folliard, who chairs a Legislative committee on teacher preparation, was interviewed. A draft questionnaire was prepared and reviewed by the DCFL committee and staff. After making revisions based on reviewers' comments, CSC information gathering began September 30, 1998. Methodology used in this study is described in the next section.

This research continues the CSC's interest in teacher training issues. Several years ago the CSC surveyed the last twenty Minnesota Teachers of the Year (Hinz & Nathan). Among other issues, the survey asked how many had been asked to teach a course in a college of education. Only half said they had been asked, and none had ever been asked more than once. Teachers of the Year appear to be an under-utilized resource for teacher preparation. Other CSC studies have examined whether prospective teachers and administrators have learned to work closely with families (Radcliffe & Nathan). Research supports this as one of the most important things educators can do to increase student achievement (Henderson & Berla). Other studies suggest that the best predictor of family involvement is what the school does to encourage it (Epstein). The CSC conducted several studies on this issue. One CSC study concluded that most states, including Minnesota, do not require most prospective teachers and administrators to learn anything about working with parents. The report recommended that they should learn how to promote and encourage family involvement. United States Secretary of Education Richard Riley highlighted these findings in a report on the subject.

METHODS

Survey questions were based on the latest national recommendations from the Interstate Teacher Consortium about what should be included in teacher preparation. The CSC mailed the survey to all 1730 public school principals and 354 superintendents in Minnesota. Elmer Koch (Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association), Robert Schmidt (Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals), and Wayne Jennings (Minnesota Association of Charter Schools) contributed cover-letters encouraging involvement. The CSC staff conducted telephone follow-ups to ask administrators to complete the surveys. Overall, 1110 of 2084 surveys were returned (898 from principals and 212 from superintendents). The response rate for administrators was 53%. The CSC also sent the survey to eight parent/community advocates from the Urban Coalition, Urban League, PACER Center, Minnesota State PTA, Chicano/Latino Affairs Council, Council of Asian/Pacific Minnesotans, Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, and the Council of Black Minnesotans. The Council of Black Minnesotans and PACER Center both distributed the survey to various parent/community advocates. As a result, 11 surveys were returned. The 1121 surveys collected were entered and analyzed using Microsoft ACCESS and SPSS. The preliminary results are limited by the sample, response rates, and survey instrument.

THE SAMPLE

The table below explains the number and percentage of schools/districts from rural, suburban, and urban regions compared to statewide numbers and percentages. For example, one hundred and seventy-two urban principals responded, comprising 19.8% of the sample. Urban schools actually represent 20% of Minnesota's public schools. Rural principals are somewhat over-represented and suburban principals are somewhat under-represented in the responses.

Table 1: Region

Region	Number and Percent Returned		Actual Statewide Number and Percent of Schools/Districts	
	Principals	Superintendents	Principals	Superintendents
Urban (Minneapolis St. Paul, Duluth, St. Cloud, and Rochester)	172 (19.8)	3 (1.4)	350 (20)	5 (1.4)
Suburban (Seven County Metro Area)	256 (29.4)	27 (12.9)	710 (41)	47 (13.3)
Rural (All other)	442 (50.8)	179 (85.6)	670 (39)	302 (86.1)
Total	870 (100)*	209 (100)**	1730 (100)	354 (100)

* 28 surveys were returned with insufficient information for analysis

** 3 surveys were returned with insufficient information for analysis

RESULTS

This section contains the response frequencies and percentages for each question in the survey, as well as statistical comparisons. The table below shows the responses from 898 principals, 212 superintendents, and 11 parent/community advocates.

Table 2: Frequencies of Responses

<i>How well do most recent graduates of Minnesota teacher preparation programs:</i>		Very Well Prepared <u>1</u>	Well Prepared <u>2</u>	Adequately Prepared <u>3</u>	Not Very Prepared <u>4</u>	Not At All Prepared <u>5</u>	Other	Blank
a. Know the content area(s) they are licensed to teach?	P*	220 (24.5)	434 (48.3)	151 (16.8)	10 (1.1)	0 (0)	10 (1.1)	73 (8.1)
	S*	44 (20.8)	124 (58.5)	27 (12.7)	4 (1.9)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	11 (5.2)
	C*	0 (0)	3 (27.3)	8 (72.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
b. Know how to integrate the Minnesota Graduation Standards into their classroom?	P*	10 (1.1)	65 (7.2)	184 (20.5)	442 (49.2)	100 (11.1)	16 (1.8)	81 (9)
	S*	1 (0.5)	6 (2.8)	35 (16.5)	122 (57.5)	29 (13.7)	5 (2.3)	14 (6.6)
	C*	0 (0)	1 (9.1)	1 (9.1)	5 (45.5)	3 (27.3)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)
c. Understand how children learn?	P*	78 (8.7)	319 (35.5)	331 (36.9)	88 (9.8)	1 (0.1)	10 (1.1)	71 (7.9)
	S*	6 (2.8)	75 (35.4)	90 (42.5)	26 (12.3)	1 (0.5)	3 (1.3)	11 (5.2)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (27.3)	8 (72.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
d. Understand how to adapt their teaching style so that they can reach students who learn in various ways?	P*	63 (7)	238 (26.5)	331 (36.9)	189 (21)	3 (0.3)	5 (0.5)	69 (7.7)
	S*	6 (2.8)	49 (23.1)	95 (44.8)	44 (20.8)	4 (1.9)	1 (0.5)	13 (6.1)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)	8 (72.7)	2 (18.2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
e. Understand how to create a positive learning environment, and to successfully manage a classroom?	P*	104 (11.6)	373 (41.5)	262 (29.2)	71 (7.9)	3 (0.3)	15 (1.6)	70 (7.8)
	S*	15 (7.1)	87 (41)	81 (38.2)	12 (5.1)	2 (0.9)	2 (0.9)	13 (6.1)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (45.5)	4 (36.4)	1 (9.1)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)
f. Understand how to promote active, hands-on learning?	P*	104 (11.6)	334 (37.2)	272 (30.3)	102 (11.4)	2 (0.2)	13 (1.4)	71 (7.9)
	S*	7 (3.3)	80 (37.7)	79 (37.3)	30 (14.2)	0 (0)	3 (1.4)	13 (6.1)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (27.3)	7 (63.6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)
g. Know how to evaluate student understanding using a variety of measures?	P*	44 (4.9)	215 (23.9)	367 (40.9)	181 (20.2)	4 (0.4)	12 (1.3)	75 (8.4)
	S*	2 (0.9)	49 (23.1)	90 (42.5)	56 (26.4)	1 (0.5)	2 (0.9)	12 (5.7)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (18.2)	7 (63.6)	1 (9.1)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)
h. Know how to involve parents and families?	P*	43 (4.8)	177 (19.7)	347 (38.6)	231 (25.7)	13 (1.4)	12 (1.3)	75 (8.4)
	S*	4 (1.9)	22 (10.4)	91 (42.9)	71 (33.5)	9 (4.2)	3 (1.4)	12 (5.7)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)	7 (63.6)	3 (27.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
i. Know how to involve community members and agencies?	P*	14 (1.6)	88 (9.8)	274 (30.5)	374 (41.6)	61 (6.8)	7 (0.8)	80 (8.9)
	S*	2 (0.9)	13 (6.1)	63 (29.7)	98 (46.2)	21 (9.9)	3 (1.4)	12 (5.7)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)	5 (45.5)	5 (45.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)
j. Know how to work with ESL students?	P*	7 (0.8)	55 (6.1)	218 (24.3)	342 (38.1)	89 (9.9)	9 (0.9)	178 (19.8)
	S*	1 (0.5)	7 (3.3)	54 (25.5)	90 (42.5)	22 (10.4)	2 (0.9)	36 (17)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8 (72.7)	2 (18.2)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)
k. Know how to work with students with special needs (includes students covered by special education and gifted and talented services)?	P*	24 (2.7)	164 (18.3)	335 (37.3)	274 (30.5)	19 (2.1)	13 (1.4)	69 (7.7)
	S*	3 (1.4)	31 (14.6)	89 (42)	70 (33)	6 (2.8)	1 (0.5)	12 (5.7)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)	7 (63.6)	3 (27.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
l. Know how to work with students from diverse ethnic backgrounds?	P*	37 (4.1)	167 (18.6)	387 (43.1)	188 (20.9)	11 (1.2)	10 (1.1)	98 (10.9)
	S*	2 (0.9)	27 (12.7)	106 (50)	52 (24.5)	2 (0.9)	1 (0.5)	22 (10.4)
	C*	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (54.5)	5 (45.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)
m. Understand how to use computers appropriately to help students develop strong academic skills?	P*	81 (9)	363 (40.4)	265 (29.5)	97 (10.8)	5 (0.6)	9 (0.9)	78 (8.7)
	S*	14 (6.6)	70 (33)	81 (38.2)	32 (15.1)	1 (0.5)	2 (0.9)	12 (5.7)
	C*	0 (0)	1 (9.1)	5 (45.5)	2 (18.2)	1 (9.1)	0 (0)	2 (18.2)

* P= Principals **S=Superintendents ***C= Parent/community advocates

Table 2: Frequencies of Responses continued

Q1. How important is it to you that teachers can appropriately integrate computers into the classroom? (*Circle one.*)

	Very Important 1	Somewhat Important 2	Not Important 3	Other	Blank
Principals	619 (68.9)	196 (21.8)	7 (0.8)	7 (0.8)	69 (7.7)
Superintendents	171 (80.7)	30 (14.2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	11 (5.2)
Parent/Community Advocates	8 (72.7)	3 (27.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Q2. On average, how well prepared are recent graduates when compared to teachers in general? (*Circle one.*)

	Better Prepared 1	About the Same 2	Less Prepared 3	Other	Blank
Principals	286 (31.8)	395 (44)	115 (12.8)	7 (0.8)	95 (10.6)
Superintendents	65 (30.7)	103 (48.6)	30 (14.2)	0 (0)	14 (6.6)
Parent/Community Advocates	2 (18.2)	7 (63.6)	1 (9.1)	0 (0)	1 (9.1)

Q3. Name the three most important things you consider when hiring a new teacher?

Categories and Codes	n			Sample Code Statement
Internal Qualities	P*	S**	C***	
Valued Behaviors	521	109	9	"Flexibility/willingness to handle new situations and problems"
Positive Attitude	310	84	1	"Enthusiasm for teaching/learning/love for kids"
Rapport/Empathy	101	25	1	"Ability to relate to students"
Knowledge				
Content Knowledge	258	75	2	"Do they have a good knowledge base in their area?"
Teaching skills/techniques	358	43	1	"Knowledge of teaching strategies"
Classroom Management	139	20	1	"Ability to handle discipline"
Academic Record				
Work experience	159	43	0	"Their education background and work background"
Social Interactions				
Interaction With Others	282	66	3	"Ability to collaborate as a team"

* P= Principals **S=Superintendents ***C= Parent/Community Advocates

Q4. What do you see as the greatest strengths of teacher preparation in Minnesota?

Categories and Codes	n			Sample Code Statement
Knowledge				
Teaching skills/Techniques	140	11	0	"Students know a variety of teaching techniques"
Content Knowledge	206	4	0	"Students know the material"
Academic Influences				
Program/Training	232	42	2	"Emphasis on solid liberal program prior to teacher preparation program"

* P= Principals **S=Superintendents ***C= Parent/Community Advocates

Q5. What do you see as the greatest weaknesses of teacher preparation in Minnesota?

Categories and Codes	n			Sample Code Statement
Knowledge				
Graduation Standards	179	66	0	"Most recent graduates are not prepared to deal with the grad rule"
Teaching Skills/Techniques	167	28	0	"Students need more experience in actual classroom techniques"
Classroom Management	143	21	0	"Inability to control a class - lack of student management skills"
Academic Influences				
Program/Training	166	33	0	"Preparation is limited by a four year degree"
Social Interactions				
Diversity	66	12	5	"Ability to work with diversity"
Interaction With Others	47	23	5	"Lack of contact with the K-12 teachers and administrators"

* P= Principals **S=Superintendents ***C= Parent/Community Advocates

A study conducted earlier this year reached similar conclusions. "Several participants in administrative focus groups supported one school administrator's experience that when we articulated concerns about teacher preparation to colleges, and suggested changes, our relationship with higher education ended" (Sheldon, Bau, Margaret, Schuh Moore, & Munnich).

About half of the parent/community advocates reported that they had met with teacher education professors, and that they had talked in a teacher preparation class at least once during the last three years. Communication is important. But as the results section shows, these parent/community advocates continue to have very strong concerns about the preparation of teachers. The parent/community advocates surveyed are based in the Twin Cities. Future research might examine if parent/community advocates in other parts of the state share similar concerns.

Priorities in hiring a new teacher: Administrators made many observations about the three most important things they consider when hiring a new teacher. "Knowledge of subject matter" was named by a large number of principals (258) and superintendents (75). But several other factors were named more frequently. "Commitment to the growth of children" was most frequently cited by 521 principals and 109 superintendents. Knowledge of teaching methods and child development was second most important for principals (358) and fourth for superintendents (43). "Enthusiasm" (or a positive attitude) was second most important for superintendents (84) and third for principals (310).

Recent graduates compared to teachers in general: Approximately half of the superintendents (49%) and principals (44%) rated recent graduates "about the same as other teachers" in terms of preparation. About 30% rated recent graduates as "better prepared" than most teachers; about 14% rated recent graduates as "less prepared." Sixty-three percent of the parent/committee advocates rated recent graduates "about the same as other teachers," and 9% rated recent graduates as "less prepared."

Most new teachers are trained by Minnesota teacher preparation programs: Sixty-six percent of principals reported that 70% or more of their recent hires graduated from Minnesota preparation programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parent and community groups should be much more heavily involved in teacher preparation. Significant percentages of administrators said that prospective teachers do not have enough information about working with parents or community groups. Given the research about the importance of family involvement, this is a critical area. Colleges of education need to form new alliances with parent and community groups which feel left out of, and dissatisfied with, teacher preparation.

2. **The student teacher experience needs to be improved.** Administrators often reported that young teachers know their subject well, but do not know how to teach it. Some administrators believe that the student teaching experience is too short. But more time with an ineffective supervisor won't accomplish much. Incentives need to be increased for outstanding teachers to supervise student teachers.
3. **Prospective teachers need far more information about, and experience with, Minnesota's graduation requirements.** State officials and colleges of education need to devote much more time to collaborative efforts in this field. Districts and the state currently are offering workshops for teachers, using the best examples of school districts implementing graduation standards. The state and colleges of education might, for example, explore ways prospective teachers can participate in these sessions.
4. **Colleges of education should expand involvement of principals and superintendents in teacher preparation.** Large majorities of administrators said they were eager to meet with college/university faculty to discuss teacher preparation, and to make presentations in teacher preparation courses. Education departments should make use of this openness and expertise. Conferences set up by each of these groups - university faculty members, administrators, principals, and parent/community members should include many more workshops in which information and ideas are shared.
5. **The state should periodically gather information about what parents and community groups, along with administrators, think are the strengths and weaknesses of teacher preparation.** Good decisions rely, in part, on good information. The state should periodically gather information about whether key groups think teacher preparation is improving, and where improvements are needed.
6. **The state should build on favorable research on alternative routes into teaching by creating several Master of Teaching programs in K-12 schools which have demonstrated the ability to make major measurable improvements in student achievement.** Several administrators proposed an alternative route in which effective K-12 schools could be put in charge of teacher preparation. A 1998 National Association of State Boards of Education report concluded that alternative routes into teaching have been "highly successful." Alternative routes increased minority representation in teaching, increased staff levels of urban and high-poverty schools, increased the pool of teachers competent in high-demand educational specialties, and decreased the need for emergency credentialing (NASBE).

The Minnesota Legislature could work with the DCFL to identify schools that are having a significant, positive impact on student achievement. Several of these schools could be asked to consult with teachers, parent/community advocates, and universities to create a teacher preparation program. The state could authorize these effective schools to grant a Masters in Teaching degree to a person already holding a college degree in any field.

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