

## **Examining Teacher Preparation: Does the Pathway Make a Difference? Executive Summary**

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Teacher Policy Research (TPR) is a partnership between the University at Albany and Stanford University that examines the behavior of teachers and administrators with the goal of developing policies that will attract and retain high-quality teachers and leaders, particularly in low-performing schools. The research covers a broad range of issues in teacher education policy such as teacher preparation, teacher labor markets, how teachers are distributed across schools, and teacher retention. TPR aims to provide policymakers with current and useful information so that they are able to make informed policy decisions. The research is funded by organizations that want to evaluate existing education policies, identify ways to improve these policies, and develop new policies as needed. TPR has support from the Carnegie Corporation, the City University of New York, The National Science Foundation, the New York State Department of Education, the Spencer Foundation, and the United States Department of Education.

The Teacher Pathways project is the team's central research project. The project is a multi-year study of teachers and teacher preparation programs to examine characteristics of teacher education and pathways into teaching and to identify attributes that impact student outcomes in New York City schools.

Research identifies teachers as the most important factor in improving student outcomes. However, there is virtually no systematic, methodologically sound research that indicates the attributes of preparation programs and pathways into teaching that lead to improved student outcomes. Our research addresses this issue by examining the following:

- What attributes of preparation pathways are most effective in improving student outcomes?
- How are the attributes of teachers and their pathway into teaching related to:
  - Who teaches where and why?
  - Who stays in teaching and why?
  - Who transfers, why, and to where?
  - Who quits teaching and why?

We have built a rich database that contains detailed information on teachers in New York City public schools, including attributes of their preparation pathway, traditional and non-traditional (such as New York City Teaching Fellows and Teach for America), school in which they have taught, and students they have taught. We have supplemented this data with annual surveys of teacher preparation participants and teachers in New York City as they enter and move through the early years of their careers. The surveys provide valuable information on teacher preparation, experiences, and attitudes and preferences. The data help us understand the context in which teacher preparation occurs and in which teachers work, as well as the effect of preparation on teachers' abilities to educate students.

### **Some of our early findings:**

#### **The Pathways Project**

- Teach for America teachers and NYC Teaching Fellows succeed in attracting and selecting teachers with strong academic backgrounds, as measured by selectivity of undergraduate institution and various test scores.

- Alternative route teachers (TFA and Teaching Fellows) are in large part replacing teachers who previously had been uncertified and in many cases are providing higher student achievement gains.
- When compared to teachers from traditional preparation programs, alternative-route teachers often initially provide smaller gains in student achievement. However, most of these differences in achievement disappear after a few years of teaching.
- Based on this analysis we believe that different pathways bring different strengths to teaching.

#### Additional Findings

- Urban schools typically employ teachers with lower qualifications.
- Low-income, low-achieving, and non-white students typically have the least skilled teachers.
- Teachers, especially highly qualified teachers, are more likely to transfer or quit when teaching lower-achieving students.
- Teachers prefer to teach in schools that are closer geographically, pay more, and have fewer students in poverty and of a different race.
- In seeking their first teaching jobs, many teachers search very close to their hometowns and in regions that are similar to those where they grew up.
- Teachers who live farther from their school prior to beginning their job are more likely to quit or transfer.
- Teachers from more selective colleges have higher quit rates.
- Employers have a preference for teachers with stronger academic achievement.

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