

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Higher Education and Workforce Training

Chairman Rokita, Chairwoman Foxx, Congresswoman McCarthy, Congressman Hinojosa, and Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for inviting me to talk with you about Vanderbilt University's teacher education programs. I serve as Associate Chair for Teacher Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Vanderbilt's Peabody College, and work closely with the faculty across two departments charged with preparing early childhood, elementary, secondary and special education teachers. (Please note that my testimony reflects my own views, and not necessarily those of Vanderbilt University.)

Let me start by setting the context for our work, and describing how this context has shaped our approach to teacher preparation. I will then give some specific examples of what we are doing at Vanderbilt to prepare teachers who are not only effective but also "stayers." Finally, I will point to ways that federal policy leaders might support the ongoing development of successful models of teacher preparation to ensure that every child is taught by an effective teacher.

Setting the Context

In my comments today, I want to push beyond the easy dichotomies between traditional and alternative pathways, and beyond a view of teacher preparation as a set of more or less useful courses required for licensure. Instead, I invite you to think about teacher preparation – and about challenges of *recruiting* teachers, providing training that is *relevant* to today's classrooms, and having a positive *impact* on learning – as part of a larger system of schooling intended to prepare our youth to flourish in higher education, in the world of work, and in civic life.

In our country, this larger system currently faces profound challenges. Let me point to three that particularly shape and motivate my work as a teacher educator:

- First, a bimodal distribution of school performance, with schools at one end that are doing quite well with respect to achievement, and a significant number of

schools, typically at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, that are not doing well at all on this measure.

- Second, a teacher workforce for which the modal number of years of experience has shifted from fifteen to one in just over two decades. That means that of all teachers currently teaching, more have taught for only one year than have taught for two or five or ten. While retirements account for part of this shift, three other factors press against the retention of intelligent and committed individuals in the teaching profession:
 - the absence of a real career path that would allow one to grow and advance while remaining engaged in the work of teaching,
 - low levels of respect and compensation,
 - an imbalance of interest in test scores that saps motivation.
- And third, system “churn” caused by:
 - the very real challenges of teaching in struggling schools, and
 - increasing reliance on “temporary teachers” – young, bright and very talented individuals who are entering teaching for the short term, as a proving ground rather than as a profession.

At Vanderbilt, our goal is to prepare teachers who have the knowledge, skills, vision and stamina to effectively challenge and support their students’ learning, and to stay in the profession. As a leading research university, we are fortunate to have a highly talented applicant pool – our students are admitted to the program based on strong academic achievement, evidence of commitment to and successful experience working with children and youth, and demonstrated desire to learn and grow in teaching. How can we increase the odds that they will succeed and persist in the profession?

Partnering with Schools to (re)Center Preparation in Practice

We believe that our chances of success are intertwined with the fortunes of the schools – and in fact the broader system – we serve. To address the challenges above, schools must become sites of ongoing learning and growth not only for students *but also for the adults who teach them.*

Central to our strategy, therefore, is the development of partnerships with schools that attend to the interests and challenges of school and university simultaneously. To the extent that we can align our interests, frame problems as issues of shared concern, and then figure out ways to work on many challenges at once, we believe that these partnerships will be robust and productive.

So for example, with our partner principals, we are designing intensive and extended field experiences that enable teacher candidates to learn through practice – to work side by side with experienced mentors and other novices as they learn:

- to establish positive relationships with children and/or adolescents;
- to create safe yet challenging learning environments; and
- to continuously assess student progress, and
- to design responsive learning activities that build on students' knowledge and experience and help them access and master challenging subject matter.

In our current pilot models, these field experiences extend over the course of a year, positioning candidates as reliable members of the school community – not simply drop-ins. As candidates learn, they act as mentors and tutors for preK-12 students, and as increasingly able assistants for master teachers. In turn, master teachers develop and refine new skills as they support the development of novices. Yet another resource for candidates and the school is the routine coaching provided by clinical faculty members who possess deep expertise in both subject matter and pedagogy.

Increasing the ratios of adults to children allows for more personalized attention and differentiated instruction so that all students – including English learners and students with identified special needs – have access to rigorous curricula. Importantly, our candidates and clinical faculty offer not just extra pairs of hands (although that's critical), but also bring deep understanding of subject matter and new ideas and tools that open up possibilities for school innovation.

Thus, by matching our candidate's needs for real-world experience and models of practice with schools' needs for many skilled and caring adults to work with learners, we can improve and expand the resources available to schools – especially in schools in which resources are scarce. Again, we are positioning the task of teacher education in relation to a bigger project of building school capacity to serve all learners well.

Really making a difference for students requires more, however. To do so, we must move beyond rigid, egg crate models of schooling in which individual teachers work in isolation in their classrooms. And to recruit and retain capable teachers, we need to find ways to make quality preparation and professional learning affordable. This means:

- Reconfiguring schedules and teacher assignments so that teachers can work and learn as teams – teams led by master teachers, grounded by established teachers, and assisted by novices; teams that given differentiated expertise and more hands on deck, can nimbly respond to data on student progress by flexibly regrouping to match students to “just right” challenges and supports.
- Developing new staffing compensation arrangements such that both mentors *and* prospective teachers are paid for their efforts. Compensating novices, rather than asking them to put income on hold while paying tuition, can help us recruit and retain a more diverse and talented teaching workforce.

Given these kinds of arrangements, we can both serve learners well, and create rich opportunities for novices and more advanced teachers to learn in and through their work with students and colleagues.

The Role of Research and Theory

As we ratchet up candidates' engagement in practice, and work with schools to reorganize for student and teacher learning, we are not backing off attention to theory and research: these provide the foundation that enables teachers to make sense of their students' learning and to plan sound next steps. Note that the ability of universities to build and support that foundation is part of what makes universities so important in this enterprise.

Therefore, in our programs we couple immersion and graduated responsibility (rather than a fire hose of demands all at once) with opportunities to step back and reflect on what is happening with students and why.

For example, in "video club" our candidates videotape their work with learners, and then present their video and receive critical feedback from both instructors and peers. In these discussions, faculty and candidates draw connections between what candidates experience in the field and cutting edge research on learning and teaching. These connections help candidates develop principled understandings, illustrated by real world examples, to guide their future practice. In these discussions, candidates learn not only to "see" what is going on in their classrooms and why, but also to participate in the kinds of data-informed, collegial conversations that can drive learning throughout one's career.

Assessment on Dimensions that Matter

To this point I have located teacher preparation within a broader system of public education, and described our work to make teacher preparation relevant within that system. We have designed and are continuing to build opportunities for teacher learning that are embedded in school-based team structures, deepened through individual content-focused mentoring, justified and strengthened in coursework and seminars, and tested in a cycle of practice and reflection.

So how do we know we have succeeded in preparing candidates to serve learners well? Today there is a press to assess the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs based on the value-added scores of their graduates. We agree that programs must be accountable for outcomes, and a critical outcome is graduates' ability to make a positive difference in the learning and achievement of their students. As a parent as well as

teacher educator, I want to know that from day one, whoever steps into a classroom has the knowledge and skills to work effectively with all children.

One important move that we have made is to require all prospective teachers to pass a performance assessment of teaching before they enter the classroom – much like a road test for drivers, or more aptly, the practical component of the board examination for physicians. Once novices become teachers of record, we want to continue to gauge their effectiveness. For both substantive and technical reasons, we find current value-added measurement approaches highly problematic. Aside from challenges in methodology, and the documented unreliability of these measures, value-added estimates cannot provide insight into why things are working or not, or how to improve. We need assessments that provide credible and concrete indicators of our candidates' abilities to support student learning.

There are ongoing efforts to develop more appropriate measures of teaching effectiveness. At Vanderbilt, we currently rely on two kinds of measures, and are experimenting with two more.

- Before they graduate, candidates in early childhood, elementary, secondary and music education must pass the edTPA, a national, externally scored, performance-based measure of candidates' abilities to plan, enact, and assess teaching and learning of rigorous content. While our candidates' performance on this assessment has generally been strong, our early work with the edTPA prototype suggested that candidates struggled to analyze student work systematically and give students usable feedback. In response we increased attention to these areas in coursework and field assignments, and have since seen improvement both on the assessment and in candidates' actual teaching. (Based on very preliminary results, we find that strong performance on edTPA is correlated with strong ratings of teacher effectiveness. This demands larger scale study.)
- Once candidates take positions teaching, we collect survey data on employer and graduate satisfaction – one, three, and five years out from graduation. These surveys ask principals and graduates to rate graduates' readiness to teach in their subject area, work with diverse learners, translate theory into practice, establish safe and productive learning environments, navigate school structures, adapt curriculum and differentiate instruction, manage behavior, etc. We are gratified to have a return rate of over 70% on these surveys. The data indicate that our graduates feel very well prepared for the classroom, and are highly satisfied with both courses/field experiences and the faculty and students with whom they worked. Employers similarly rate graduates as very well prepared, and indicate that they would definitely hire another graduate from our institution.
- We have begun to experiment with surveys of student perceptions of the

classrooms in which our graduates teach. Recent studies show interesting correlations between the degree to which students feel challenged and supported and their achievement.

- We are attempting to work with graduates to gather their administrators' ratings of their classroom teaching as measured by state-approved observation protocols.

This collection of measures, combined with benchmark assessments throughout our programs, provide faculty with invaluable data to check impact and support program improvement.

How Can Federal Policy Advance Teacher Preparation?

Before I close, let me call out and briefly describe two areas in which federal policy makers can help support improvement of teacher preparation.

- Incentivize partnerships between schools and preparation programs;
- Streamline reporting to focus on data that will help answer questions that can move the field, and seek efficiencies in reporting.

Incentivize Partnerships and Innovation

At Peabody we are fortunate to have several school partners who are working seriously with us to innovate around school organization, a large pool of academically accomplished applicants, and the flexibility that comes with relatively small size. However, growing this work beyond small pilots will require that more institutions and districts are freed up to innovate; learning from this work will require ongoing investment in design-oriented research that allows us study the kinds of partnerships I've described above – not only in places like Vanderbilt, but also in the large public universities that prepare the vast majority of teachers in this country. Legislation that incentivizes partnerships and supports research is vital.

Streamline and Focus Reporting

Federal policy makers would also help by ensuring that reporting requirements are targeted and productive, efficient and fair.

When we invest time in collecting data, it should be the sort of data that will help us ask and answer questions that will improve our work locally, and move the field more broadly. Currently much data is collected, but it is unclear what is used and what is useful. We need to know: who is entering teacher preparation, what kinds of programs prepare them to be successful, and in what kinds of contexts? These are questions of recruitment, relevance, and impact. Current Title II elements that can begin to help us unpack the question of who is attending and succeeding in what kinds of programs include:

- basic demographic data about graduates by institution and field and pass rate data from credentialing exams;
- comparable information for alternate routes (recognizing that the definition of “alternate route” should be further studied as states define them differently and one state’s “alternate route” may be another state’s “traditional program”)
- entry requirements along with actual data on program entrants performance in relation to these requirements (e.g., GPA, test scores, etc.)

Getting at questions of impact is trickier. State capacity to link learning outcomes with teachers, and teachers with preparation programs varies greatly. As state data systems come online, useful data will include:

- evidence of student learning
- job placement of program completers within 12 months of graduation
- retention of program completers in teaching after three years
- results of teacher evaluation

I should note that there is promising work on this question underway in the states and professional associations. In Tennessee for example, the Department of Education and Higher Education Commission have partnered with universities to make available to campuses more and better data on graduate performance, and to expand the range of program effectiveness indicators tracked in the State Report Card on Teacher Education. The goal is more accurate, finer grained and more usable information with which to improve programs. At a national level, after rolling out a set of rigorous standards for educator preparation, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) is now working with states and institutions to press hard on the question of what constitutes evidence of effective practice. These collaborations should be supported.

University-based educator preparation programs typically gather and report data for four or more monitoring bodies. The type of data is fairly similar, e.g., enrollment, demographics, completer numbers, as well as measures of program quality. However, varying reporting windows (for example, capturing completers from September 1 – August 31 vs. July 1 – June 30) exponentially increase the workload, especially as program sizes increase. Over the past few years, different monitoring agencies have begun to better align definitions and windows, but there are still discrepancies. Federal policy guidelines should encourage common data definitions and reporting windows.

Finally, reporting and accountability demands must be applied consistently across preparation pathways and models. Larger public universities have many fewer resources and yet face the most burdensome requirements for reporting and providing evidence of impact. If reporting and evidence requirements are intended to make the system better, it only makes sense for those regulations to apply in equal measure to all preparation organizations. Specifically, states should be required to report data for *all* teacher preparation providers (university, non-profit, school districts, etc.) in order to

track the performance in each route.

Final Thoughts

I began my remarks highlighting three challenges that define the context for teacher preparation: a growing gap in student outcomes that aligns with the deepening divide in wealth and opportunity; a workforce that is increasingly comprised of newcomers; and the inability to (re)build instructional capacity because of high levels of churn in schools that most need stability. Teacher preparation is not the sole solution to these challenges, but rather must be seen as part of a systemic response. Research tells us that well-prepared teachers stay in schools longer; that teachers who have at least five years of experience are more effective. Schools that support teacher learning and development both retain effective teachers and increase student achievement. For these reasons, at Vanderbilt we are redesigning our programs from a systems view, betting that our preparation programs will improve as we find ways to align our needs and resources with those of our school partners, and to think synergistically to address many problems at once.

The stakes are high. Our nation's global competitiveness will hinge on our ability to ensure that all children have the opportunity and resources to learn – including teachers who have the commitment, knowledge, skills and staying power to enable student success. Thank you for your consideration and efforts on behalf of learners and teachers, and for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.