Reforming Teacher Education

Spotlight on the University of Virginia

In summer 2001, the Carnegie Corporation of New York launched an ambitious initiative, Teachers for a New Era (TNE), to fundamentally reform teacher preparation in the United States. The foundation was persuaded to do so by a growing body of evidence showing that teachers have discernible, differential effects on student achievement and that those effects appear to persist across years. The aim of this initiative is to stimulate development of excellent teacher education programs that are guided by a respect for evidence, are based on close collaboration between education and arts and sciences faculty, and provide strong clinical training and support. These principles have been espoused by other reform efforts, but TNE differs from those past efforts in two important ways: (1) It explicitly requires that teacher education programs base continuous improvement efforts on evidence of the “value added” that their teaching graduates bring to the classroom in terms of gains in student achievement, and (2) it requires that both teacher education and arts and sciences faculty members provide support to their new education graduates during a two-year “induction period.”

Four institutions—Bank Street College of Education in New York City; California State University, Northridge; Michigan State University; and the University of Virginia (UVa)—were selected in summer 2002 as the first TNE sites. Those schools are each receiving $5 million over a period of five years and technical assistance to reform their teacher education programs to align with TNE principles.

The Rockefeller Foundation retained the RAND Corporation and Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation (MRDC) to jointly conduct a national evaluation of the TNE initiative as it is being implemented by the first four grantees. A new RAND report, Reforming Teacher Education: A First Year Progress Report on Teachers for a New Era, offers a look at first-year implementation of the initiative. This research brief focuses on first-year implementation and underscores the role of a supportive state policy environment in advancing the goals of this reform.

The University of Virginia and TNE

Currently, Virginia has about 90,000 full-time classroom teachers. About 2,600 new teachers are produced in state by approved teacher education programs each year. The University of Virginia produced about 124 education graduates in 2002, making it the eighth-largest producer of teachers in the state.

Enrollment in UVa’s Curry School of Education teacher education programs has been growing...
in recent years. The Curry School of Education and UVa’s College of Arts and Sciences offer a five-year integrated Teacher Education Program, which leads to a subject matter baccalaureate and a master’s of teaching (MT) degree. In addition, the Curry School of Education offers a two-year MT option for students with baccalaureate degrees.

UVa proposes to become a Research I institution dedicated to producing great teachers. During the first year of TNE, UVa focused on assessment, creation of new courses, and induction. UVa has been in communication with the Virginia state administration to obtain student test data that are linked with teacher data, and is examining the use of other measures of student-learning outcomes, such as measures of students’ motivation to learn. UVa has funded various faculty-led studies to assess a number of areas of teacher education, including the value added to public education by the UVa teacher education program. UVa has also piloted an electronic portfolio system that collects data on the progress of teacher education candidates through all components of the teacher education program. UVa will use these multiple sources of data for continuous program evaluation and redesign. In addition, the UVa provost is hosting a series of faculty seminars designed to raise awareness of assessment techniques and to encourage a dialogue between education and arts and sciences faculty.

As part of the TNE program, UVa has piloted a number of new courses. “Common Courses” in the arts and sciences are interdisciplinary courses open to all students that offer a discussion section that focuses on teaching. “Counterpoint Seminars,” designed for teacher education candidates, are linked to a survey course and focus on how the content of the course can best be taught in secondary schools.

UVa arts and sciences and education faculty are now developing new models for optimal academic advising that could be sustained through a new teacher’s induction period. In addition, UVa plans to offer professional support for all new teachers in its two neighboring school divisions (Virginia’s equivalent of school districts) during a two-year induction period.

**State Policy Environments Have Important Implications for TNE Implementation**

The TNE initiative is meant to spur innovative, out-of-the-box thinking from the selected educational institutions. However, these institutions must comply with state policies and regulations, which could either support or inhibit their ability to substantially reform their teacher education programs.

States can help to support the reform effort. For example, to produce evidence on the effectiveness of their graduates in improving student learning, the TNE sites must be able to track their teacher graduates and to link student test score data with teacher data. The sites will be seeking the cooperation of state officials to do so. Virginia is moving ahead with a centralized teacher data system under its Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant. Access to these data would assist UVa greatly in its TNE work.

Induction is an area in which the sites must coordinate their TNE programs with state-mandated or district-run programs. In the second year of the TNE initiative, UVa will be designing an induction program for all new teachers in its two local school divisions that is based on the Santa Cruz New Teacher Center induction model. The choice of the Santa Cruz model was largely due to Virginia’s interest in it and the enthusiasm it has generated among the local school divisions.

This research brief describes work done for RAND Education documented in Reforming Teacher Education: A First Year Progress Report on Teachers for a New Era by Sheila Nataraj Kirby, Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Scott Naftel, Heather Barney, Hilary Darilek, Frederick Doolittle, and Joseph Cordes, TR-149-EDU, 2004, 172 pages, $30, available online at http://www.rand.org/publications/TR/TR149/. A research brief on the overall report is available online at http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB9063/. Research briefs on the other three sites featured in the report are available at http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB9059/, http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB9060/, and http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB9061/. These documents are also available from RAND Distribution Services (phone: 310-451-7002; toll free: 877-584-8642; or email: order@rand.org). The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.
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