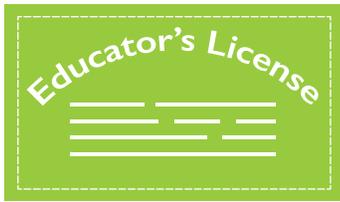


Ready for Day One:

Teachers Weigh in on Teacher Preparation



**TEACH
+PLUS**



Massachusetts

Introduction

The Teach Plus Policy Fellows -- a diverse group of 26 teachers from high-need schools and districts across the Commonwealth -- are committed to ensuring that students and teachers can thrive from a teacher's first day in the classroom. We have first hand experience with a range of educator preparation programs, such as traditional graduate programs, Teach for America, the Boston Teacher Residency and many more. This range of experience, in addition to the research we have done, provides us with strong insights into the specific elements of an educator preparation program that lead to the development of highly-effective teachers.

Research shows that teachers' success in their classrooms in the first year of teaching is one of the best indicators of how they will perform in their subsequent years as educators.ⁱ Yet 75 percent of Massachusetts teachers recently surveyed by Teach Plus reported that they were insufficiently prepared to meet the needs of their students in their first year.ⁱⁱ

While there are some programs that effectively prepare teachers, many program participants are leaving their programs feeling inadequately prepared. It is essential that preparation programs do a better job of preparing their candidates for the teaching profession in order to ensure that students have a chance to maximize their learning every year. The effectiveness of teacher preparation particularly affects low-income students, because students at high-poverty schools are more likely than their peers in wealthier schools to be taught by first-year teachers.ⁱⁱⁱ

Executive Summary

Seventy-five percent of Massachusetts teachers recently surveyed by Teach Plus reported that they were insufficiently prepared to meet the needs of their students in their first year. This lack of preparedness can be catastrophic for students -- especially low-income students who are far more likely than their more affluent peers to be assigned a first-year teacher.

Section I: Rigorous Content and Pedagogical Training for Diverse Learners

Recommendation 1: All educator preparation programs must enable their graduates to provide deep content and skills instruction to diverse learners including English language learners, special education students, and students with social and emotional needs. In addition, we recommend that teaching candidates receive significant practical training in classroom management.

Section II: High-Quality Experiential Training with an Effective Mentor

Recommendation 2: Full-Year Practicums

We recommend that candidates in teacher preparation programs successfully complete a full year of experiential training starting with the first day of school.

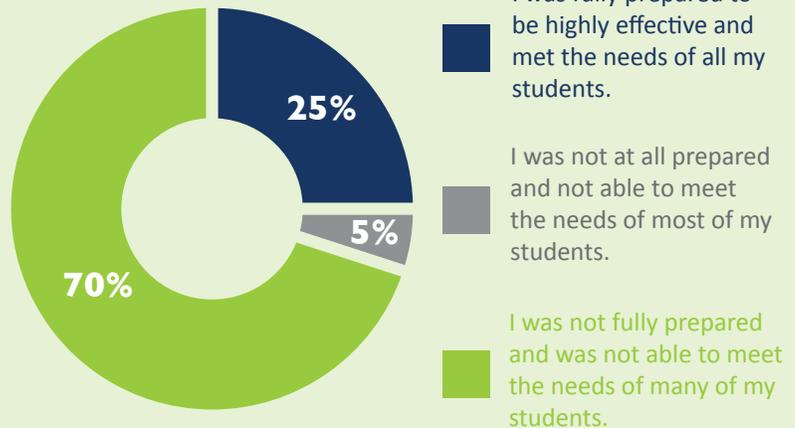
Recommendation 3: Applying Teaching Practice to an Authentic Setting

Teaching candidates should participate in experiential training in settings that reflect the classrooms in which they will ultimately teach. Urban teacher residencies are particularly effective.

Recommendation 4: Outstanding Mentor Teachers

We recommend that preparation programs improve the screening process and training of mentor teachers and provide these teachers with incentives or compensation.

75 percent of Massachusetts teachers reported that they were unprepared to meet the needs of all of their students in their first year as teachers.



Source: Online survey of 230 Massachusetts teachers conducted by Teach Plus in October, 2014.

Section III: Accountability and Evaluations of Programs

Recommendation 5: Data on Teacher Preparation Programs

In addition to the data currently available and planned for the near future, we recommend four additional metrics. We also recommend that these metrics be incorporated into the state’s accountability system for preparation programs:

- a) Volume and quality of practice-based coursework for teacher-candidates
- b) Volume and quality of content-specific coursework for teacher-candidates
- c) Aggregate of student growth measures for program graduates
- d) Survey data of program graduates and their employers indicating how well programs prepared their graduates to drive student achievement

Section I: Rigorous Content and Pedagogical Training

Recommendation 1: Educator preparation programs should equip all of their graduates to provide deep content and skills instruction to diverse learners -- including English language learners, special education students, and students with social and emotional needs.

According to the Teach Plus survey, forty-three percent of teachers reported feeling that their preparation program was inadequate in preparing them to work with children with special needs and children who are English language learners, and forty-six percent of teachers felt they were not prepared to effectively use classroom management strategies that would develop children socially and emotionally, especially children who have experienced trauma. It is clear that teachers are not learning how to meet the needs of their diverse learners.

Programs must shift from providing coursework on the theory of teaching to providing coursework that focuses on the practice of teaching and the strategies that teachers can use in their classrooms. Given the research that shows children in high poverty districts are more likely to have a first-year teacher, we recommend that the coursework in educator preparation programs should prepare teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners frequently served by high-need districts.

English Language Learners

In 2011, the ELL population in Massachusetts schools had grown to over 70,000 students -- an increase of 57 percent since 2000^v. With more training, teachers would enter the field with a stronger foundation of secondary language acquisition and instructional strategies, which would lead to more gains for students in this growing population.

The state of Massachusetts has identified English Language Learners as a priority demographic that has been historically underserved in school systems. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has identified that in order to close this existing proficiency gap, “teachers need to have the skills and knowledge necessary to instruct ELLs” in their classrooms. To close these proficiency gaps amongst educators of ELLs, Massachusetts developed the Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative and through this the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) category trainings. The mandatory SEI trainings provide an overview of secondary English language acquisition and applicable strategies for teachers to use in the classroom, focusing more on theory than on practical application. Thus, pre-service teachers should also complete a more substantial and in-depth course of study with emphasis on practice of essential skills such as: 1) applying WIDA Can Do Descriptors into academic content classes to plan curriculum, instruction and differentiation of ELL students at various proficiency levels, and 2) applying research-based strategies to instruct and support literacy development.

Special Education

More than 17 percent of kindergarten through 12th grade students in Massachusetts are eligible for special education services, and the rate is much higher in districts serving primarily low-income students. For example, according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Boston Public Schools had 10,690 students with disabilities in the 2013-2014 school year alone. Massachusetts’ high rate of identification for special education service eligibility is the second highest in the country, behind Rhode Island.^v

Teacher preparation programs should require all classroom teachers to demonstrate skill-based competency in the domains of knowledge necessary to appropriately meet the needs of students with disabilities. Specifically, programs should ensure that their candidates can: 1) understand and apply appropriate special

education terminology; 2) demonstrate an ability to implement good pedagogical practices; 3) appropriately differentiate curriculum, and 4) know when and how to implement a response to intervention (RTI). The state of Massachusetts should provide an endorsement of mastery of these skills. Candidates could earn these endorsements through a pedagogy test aligned to professional standards or a completion of a state-approved course. We are particularly supportive of the use of performance-based assessments, which measure teachers' ability to translate knowledge into use in the classroom.^{vi}

General education teachers play a large role in the life of a student with a disability. They are responsible for administering a response to intervention for students they believe might be eligible for special education services, and often, these teachers are the ones who provide the initial referral for services. Further, since federal law requires that these students be given a “free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment,” many general education teachers are also responsible for meeting the needs of special education students in their classrooms.

In order to meet the needs of these students, teachers must be able to implement a student's individual education plan (IEP), to understand the special education terminology often found within the student's IEP, and most importantly, know how to differentiate or modify the classroom's curriculum to reflect the needs outlined in a student's IEP. Merely understanding the importance of differentiating curriculum is not enough – rather, it is the ability to differentiate curriculum effectively that has an impact on student growth and achievement.^{vii} This skill requires time, practice, and familiarity with application of special education pedagogy.

Massachusetts already requires that all classroom teachers meet the diverse needs of their classroom's English language learners (ELLs), by requiring teachers and teaching candidates to earn a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Teacher Endorsement. Massachusetts should require no less for the many classroom teachers who teach students with disabilities.

Creating a Safe, Organized and Supportive Learning Environment

Teaching requires the content knowledge and the skills to effectively relay information to children. It also requires an ability to manage an entire group of learners to ensure that children are engaged in activities, act appropriately with their peers, and acquire all the information they need to be college and career ready. Thus we also recommend that teaching candidates receive significant practical training in classroom management. Programs such as the Relay Graduate School of Education and the Sposato Graduate School of Education at Match Education place heavy emphasis on teaching classroom management and other tools that will directly impact student achievement. These programs rely on more prescriptive methods of teacher training to develop what Match Education calls “highly effective rookie teachers.” Novice teachers entering these programs are equipped with technical experience that they continue to hone and refine in order to become proficient first-year educators. Consider Match Education's description of its program:

“We feel like we're in a race to prepare you so that once you become a full-time teacher, you're unusually well prepared. A traditional Ed School might be a better fit for you if you're looking for an intellectual exploration of lots of different ideas. In our program, it will be more akin to music or sports training you've gotten—the coaching is very prescriptive . . . Practice, practice, practice. Whereas students at traditional Ed Schools spend more time writing papers and reading theory, MTRs [Match Teacher Residents] spend more hours practicing the specific moves that make first year teachers successful.”^{viii}

Social Emotional Learning & Trauma-Sensitive Practices

More than a quarter of children in the United States will witness or experience a traumatic event before they turn four.^{ix} Based on the policy recommendations stated in *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*^x and our own classroom experience, we believe that training in ways to support social-emotional learning should be included in all educator preparation programs.

The authors suggest:

State certification regulations for administrators and teachers from preschool through high school should require completion, at the pre- and post-certification levels, of coursework that includes the following: identifying trauma symptoms, understanding the impact of trauma on learning, approaches to partnering with parents of traumatized children, and classroom strategies that enable traumatized children to succeed academically, behaviorally, and socially. Administrators and teachers should also be educated in how to establish effective linkages and collaborations with mental health professionals and other experts.

Section 2: High-Quality Experiential Training with an Effective Mentor

Candidates of teacher preparation programs are most successful when they complete a full year of experiential training with a highly-qualified mentor teacher in a setting that allows the candidate to apply teaching practice to a diverse set of learning needs.

Recommendation 2: Candidates in teacher preparation programs should successfully complete a full year of experiential training starting with the first day of school.

Current Massachusetts licensure requirements mandate that teaching candidates spend only 300 hours in a practicum out of the 900-1000 hours in a typical school year. In order to be classroom-ready from the first day of school, teaching candidates need a year-long practicum. Most practicums' student-teaching experiences consist of only a few weeks or months in a classroom and do not require the student teacher to experience the first days or even weeks of the school year. By observing various classrooms for extended amounts of time, "preservice teachers [can] identify, confront and challenge their preconceived notions about students and teaching."^{xii}

The first day of school is the most important day of the year, because the teacher's actions can determine the success or failure of the rest of the school year. According to Tom Russell in the *Journal of Teacher Education*, "placing candidates in schools on the opening day not only provides their candidates with insight into what it takes to prepare for the first day of school, but also provides the best possible preparation for the candidates' own first day as a newly qualified teacher the following year."^{xiv}

Recommendation 3: Teaching candidates should participate in experiential training in settings that reflect the classrooms in which they will ultimately teach. Urban teacher residencies are particularly effective.

Providing teachers with authentic experiential training will more effectively prepare teachers and their students for the demands of school. Currently, many pre-service teachers enter the classroom having little or no experience with the populations that they will serve. Teachers enter with little cultural competency and no experience with struggling schools or underperforming populations. These gaps stem from preparation programs' heavy focus on theory rather than technique. Though theory is important, experience in the classroom is imperative to a new teacher's success. Research has shown that new teachers who have experienced intensively supervised clinical experience are more likely to stay in teaching longer than those who enter the profession with limited clinical experience.^{xvi}

Experiencing teaching in authentic, diverse settings, whether through observations or student-teaching, will also better prepare teaching candidates for the challenges and diversity of current classrooms. Teachers who enter the profession should be better prepared to make significant impact in the settings and with the populations with whom they will work.

A fundamental principle of urban teacher residencies is the interconnectedness of classroom experience and classroom practice. Urban teacher residencies utilize an approach that combines a meaningful clinical experience with a tightly-prescribed sequence of coursework. For example, a teacher resident in the Chicago Teaching Resident program may engage in coursework around building strong lesson plans, and then work with his/her mentor teacher to create, implement and reflect on a lesson for a classroom.^{xvii} A course through the Boston Teacher Residency (BTR) program may require a resident to bring in student work or a video of classroom instruction in order to support an instructional practice being studied in class.^{xviii} Due to strong preparation, these programs have experienced high retention rates; 90 percent of BTR teachers remain in the classroom after three years.^{xix}

Recommendation 4: Preparation programs should improve the screening process and training of mentor teachers and provide these teachers with incentives or compensation.

During the practicum experience, the mentor teacher is the bridge between practice and theory and has the potential to greatly impact the long-term success of the student teacher. However, many student teachers are not being mentored by effective cooperating teachers. This has a detrimental effect on new teacher effectiveness and retention. In fact, ineffective mentoring is one of the top reasons that teachers leave the classroom and that many pre-service teachers feel unprepared for the realities of the classroom.^{xx} Preparation programs need to develop screening processes to identify clinical teachers who are positively impacting student growth and train these teachers to serve as transformational mentors.^{xxi}

Frequently, teacher preparation programs do little to screen how effective mentor teachers are in the classroom or if they have the skills to be a good mentor. The National Council on Teaching Quality (NCTQ) estimates that a little over half of effective classroom teachers have the ability to mentor effectively.^{xxii} Mentor teachers must be trained by the teacher preparation institution. Additionally, there is little communication between the teacher preparation institution and the placement school or district. In fact, according to an NCTQ survey, more than half of principals did not know the standards and requirements of the teacher prep

institution for mentor teachers besides number of years experience, even though it is often the placement school that chooses the mentor teacher.^{xxiii} Preparation institutions have very little say in the selection of the mentor teacher; 52 percent said the only say they have in the selection of a mentor teacher is to occasionally reject those who have received negative feedback.^{xxiv}

There are several ways to ensure that highly effective teachers are identified and trained to become effective mentor teachers. At the College of William and Mary, mentor teachers fill out applications that identify the teacher's strengths. Additionally the principal rates the teacher on a scale of 1-5. Northwestern State University of Louisiana requires letters of recommendation from principals where principals must speak to a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.^{xxv} Furman University has an orientation with student teachers, mentor teachers, and supervisors, during which all are trained in the state's evaluation system.

A key strategy for recruiting highly-effective mentor teachers is to provide incentives. NCTQ recommends publicizing excellent mentor teachers as done by the Rodel Exemplary Teacher Initiative in Arizona, which places 100 student teachers with highly effective mentor teachers in high-poverty, high-need schools. Mentor teachers who are in the program for three years and work with six student teachers get a \$10,000 savings bond, media coverage, and are honored at a banquet.^{xxvi} The University of Texas at Austin gives mentorship training to mentor teachers and invites the best ones to join committees to design field experiences. This significantly contributed to the recruitment of effective mentor teachers.^{xxvii}

Section 3: Accountability and Evaluations of Programs

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is doing important work to increase transparency of teacher preparation programs by publishing additional data on all programs. We believe that there is more to be done.

Recommendation 5: In addition to the data currently available and planned for the near future, the state of Massachusetts should publish the following data on teacher preparation programs:

A) Volume and quality of practice-based coursework for teacher-candidates

The clinical experience is an essential component of a strong teacher preparation program. Therefore, data must be gathered on the quality of the clinical experience aspect of each program, including length of practicum, diversity of settings, and quality of mentor teachers. Quality should be measured based on the components of a high-quality practicum described in Section 2 above.

Teaching is a craft that is honed through practice, making the hands-on clinical experience the key component of a teacher preparation program. Teachers who have had strong oversight of their practicum are significantly more effective in their first year of teaching. Diverse clinical settings help candidates prepare to teach no matter where they accept a teaching job and ensure that a teacher's first experience working with students with disabilities or low-performing schools is not in his/her first teaching job. The opportunity to observe an effective teacher and receive feedback from a skilled mentor is an equally critical component of the clinical experience.

B) Volume and quality of content-specific coursework for teacher-candidates

A recent study by the Education Trust notes, “Teachers cannot teach what they do not know.”^{xxx} While research shows that teachers with strong content knowledge achieve meaningful learning for their students, too many teachers lack deep content knowledge -- especially in high-poverty schools. According to the analysis by the Education Trust and Richard M. Ingersoll, 27 percent of classes in high-poverty schools are taught by a teacher out of his or her content area. Moreover, research has shown that a teacher preparation curriculum with sufficient content-based content correlates significantly with student achievement outcomes in a teacher’s second year in the classroom.^{xxxi}

The demands of the Common Core and other standards require teachers to be more fluent in their content area than ever, and evidence has already revealed a meaningful connection between a program’s content-specific offerings and student achievement. Thus, it is essential that teacher preparation programs report data regarding their content-specific coursework.

C) Aggregate student growth measures for program graduates

We support the Commonwealth’s decision to publish aggregate evaluation ratings of program graduates (both overall ratings and ratings on individual standards), scheduled for June 2015.

A strong teacher preparation program will equip program graduates with the skills necessary to be effective educators who have a positive impact on student learning. We believe that this impact can be measured using the multi-measure evaluation tool that incorporates student growth being implemented in Massachusetts, and that evaluation ratings on program graduates should be collected during their first two years of teaching.

In a study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research, researchers observed a correlation between practicum experience and first-year teacher effectiveness, as well as content preparation and second-year teacher effectiveness.^{xxxii} The data collected through this study clearly demonstrates that the teaching effectiveness of program graduates varies across institutions and should be used when evaluating the effectiveness of preparation programs. States such as Louisiana, Florida, and Texas affirm their belief in this claim by including teacher effectiveness in preparation program oversight;^{xxxiii} however, Massachusetts has not yet created a plan that will draw correlations between the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs and student achievement data.^{xxxiv}

A few additional states are beginning to create plans that will also use measures of student growth to hold preparation programs accountable for student learning, and Massachusetts should do the same (ensuring that data is aggregated and not traceable back to individual teachers).^{xxxv} Gathering and sharing this data, in addition to the data gathered from the newly-implemented teacher evaluation system, will lead to more transparency regarding the effectiveness of programs in preparing teachers to have a positive impact on student growth and learning during their first two years of teaching.

D) Survey data indicating how well programs prepared their graduates to drive student achievement

According to a recent study by the Center for American Progress, feedback surveys from preparation program graduates and their employers should be an element of teacher preparation program accountability.^{xxxvi} The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is drafting stakeholder surveys to gauge the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. We encourage the development of high-quality surveys and a strong effort to secure high response rates on these surveys. Since not every teacher’s experience within

a preparation program will be the same, such surveys allow for graduates to share detailed insight into how well they believe their program prepared them to teach, and can also allow employers to rate graduates' classroom-readiness. The Center for American Progress offers several examples of strong survey instruments and programs currently in use, including examples in California, New York and Chicago.

In another example, researchers from the National Bureau of Economic Research used a comprehensive survey instrument in their analysis of teacher preparation programs in New York City.^{xxxvii} The authors found that their use of survey data allowed them to gauge elements of a teacher preparation program's course offerings. Survey respondents in this case were asked specific questions regarding their opportunity (or lack thereof) to engage in meaningful elements of a practice-based and content-driven curriculum.

Recommendation 6: Once this essential data has been gathered, it must be made accessible for stakeholders and be used to recognize high-quality programs and hold low-performing programs accountable.

A strong data-reporting system will provide relevant information to preparation program in order to inspire continuous improvement, inform the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's program approval process, and provide necessary data to prospective teaching candidates. According to the Center for American Progress, "Less than 2 percent of all teacher education programs in the United States have been flagged as low-performing by the state in which they operate since Congress required each state to develop and implement a set of criteria to identify low-performing programs in 1998."^{xxxviii} Massachusetts can lead the charge in holding teacher preparation to a higher bar and spur improvement in the quality of new teachers and their impact on students.

In addition to using results for accountability purposes, the state of Massachusetts should publicize the results widely to ensure that they inform the selection of preparation programs by prospective teachers and the hiring of teachers by school districts and school leaders.

Conclusion:

Our economy has changed, and our students are relying on their teachers to build the skills necessary to be ready for careers that will support them and their families. As more is expected of teachers, it is essential that preparation programs keep up. The above recommendations -- increasing the rigor of content and pedagogical training, extending and improving experiential training, and expanding transparency and accountability for preparation programs -- will help to ensure that new teachers are ready to teach from day one.

First-Year Coaching Helped Me Serve Eduardo and Other ELLs

By Farida Mama

I can remember the minute I fell in love with Boston. I fell in love with the promise of a brighter tomorrow--the opportunity to continue my education in a city renowned for its education. As a newly minted Teach for America corps member, I would learn that the city I loved had a Janus face. A face divided in two by the Orange Line train station. On one side lay a wealth of opportunity, on the other, profound poverty masked from tourists and newcomers.

As a brand new teacher, it sometimes felt as if I was building an airplane while trying to fly it at the same time. Throughout my first year teaching, I relied on my grad school curricula as well as the ongoing professional development offered to me by Teach for America to build the airplane that was my first classroom. Most importantly, I relied on my mentor, a teacher who had taught in inner city Baltimore, for advice on classroom management and sheltered English Instruction. My mentor served as my lifeline, and would take frantic phone calls as early as 6am to ensure that I felt ready to take on the day's challenges.

Despite these challenges, I loved the surprises that each day brought. One day, in February, I learned that I would be welcoming three newcomers into our classroom community, one student being Eduardo. Eduardo was especially vigilant about spending hours after school to perfect assignments that he had difficulty with. I learned that Eduardo had been a top student in his home country and wanted to become a doctor in the U.S. I also learned that despite significant language barriers, Eduardo would do WHATEVER it took to improve his academic language.

One day, approximately two months after his arrival, in the midst of a discussion on simplifying fractions, Eduardo raised his hand, with some hesitation and said, "Ms. Mama, I solve." Though he labored through his explanation, Eduardo told me, in his best English yet, how to reduce a fraction to lowest terms. After he finished, there was a brief pause. Then, all of his classmates broke into applause as well as choruses of "yays" and "yaaa, super scholar!"

After he finished, I was struck with silence. Here was a student, who just eight short weeks before I had communicated with (sometimes unsuccessfully) through Google Translator. Now, Eduardo had successfully communicated an academic concept, to a room full of his peers...in English! Fast-forward four years later, I regularly run into Eduardo around the neighborhood. He is proud to tell me that he is at the top of his class in high school and earned a scholarship from MIT due to his incredible athletic ability and stellar academic performance. I was by no means an exemplary teacher when Eduardo was in the classroom; however my new teacher preparation equipped me with a variety of supports that gave me access to the resources that I needed to best support Eduardo and other ELLs in my classroom.

A Strong Cooperating Teacher Made the Difference for My Teaching

By Lindsey Hugo

The sound of the bell echoed through the corridor as I stood next to Sarah, my cooperating teacher. As teenagers began to flood the halls, I looked over at her for a reassuring smile. Through the jumble of noise, I kept hearing the same words: "Welcome back! Ready for your senior year?" And that was when it hit me: this was my senior year too, my senior year of college. I was only a few years older than the young people who were about to become our students in literally two minutes.

Throughout my year of student-teaching, Sarah taught me more than I expected. Aside from helping me understand exactly what went into lesson planning, executing lessons, and grading, she taught me how to welcome our students during their first week back from summer vacation and how to prepare them as best we could for the challenges they would face in the coming school year and in life. She taught me how to have high expectations, both academically and personally, for every one of our students. She taught me how to not give up on them, even if it seemed like everyone else in the world had. That year, Sarah taught me things I never could have fully learned reading textbooks or listening to lectures; she taught me exactly what it meant to be a teacher.

Looking back, I realize the successes I felt during my first year of lead teaching were a direct result of everything Sarah taught me. She prepared me, and as a result, I was ready for everything that year threw my way. I was far from a pro, but at least I had done this once before with her by my side.

Now, five years later, every morning when I greet my students, I think of the reassuring smile Sarah gave me on my first day of student-teaching: the smile that told me that I could do this. I've learned a lot since then. I've become a much better teacher, but one thing hasn't changed. I greet my students every morning. Only this time, I am the one giving them the reassuring smiles.

Unprepared by Teacher Prep

By Colleen Mason

I attended a four-year college to get my degree in Psychology and Elementary Education, followed immediately by a one-and-a-half year Master's program in Early Childhood Education. I spent \$120,000, received all straight A's and received the top rankings on my student teaching evaluation from both my mentor teacher and my university supervisor. I may sound like I'm bragging, but I'm trying to tell you, by all accounts, I was considered "prepared" to meet the needs of my future students. Anyone in my position must be "prepared." Right?

Wrong. Many educator preparation programs are failing their graduates and sending them into the field unequipped.

I graduated in December from my Master's program and on my final day of class, I also got the call to tell me that I got a job. I could not have been more excited. I was going to be teaching a class of 21 kindergarten students in Boston, in a low-income school with students who spoke many languages at home other than English, and with students who may have disabilities but were not yet identified. These were five-year-old students whose lead teacher was fired and whose substitutes were like a revolving door. These students were ready for a fresh start, but had been let down so many times they weren't going to make it easy.

I thought, okay, I took a course on teaching English Language Learners, and I took some Special Education classes at my college....I should be fine. Students were arriving and I was getting excited to begin.

Then, I walked "Andrew." No one informed me that Andrew had both learning disabilities and had experienced severe trauma in his life outside of school, and at this time in his development, placing demands on him was a trigger for a breakdown. When I started Morning Meeting, Andrew came running at me, lifted a chair over his head, and screamed, "I hope you %!&*ing die, ^&*#!"

I froze.

I was in the classroom for 20 minutes, and I already knew, I wasn't prepared.

In the moments that followed, I learned more than I had in the five years of my expensive education. I debriefed with a skilled counselor in the school about how to react to situations like this, next steps I could take to support Andrew, and how to provide a safe environment for the rest of the students in my class. In the six months that followed, I had many meetings with behaviorists from the district, school psychologists, highly trained exemplary co-workers on my kindergarten team, and became a stronger teacher. I learned how to advocate for children with severe emotional regulation concerns and a variety of needs.

While Andrew made much emotional and academic progress in the six months I spent with him, I still stay up at night imagining how much more effective I could have been if my educator preparation program provided me with the education I needed. And while I continue to learn something new every day in my current classroom, I still stay up at night hoping that future teachers don't have to learn everything after they get hired, but rather, they can be prepared to be ready for day one.

ELLs Deserve More from Teacher Prep

By Lindsey Mayer

It was my first year as a teacher and Wilmer's first year as a student in the United States. He had arrived from Guatemala in September earlier that year.

Wilmer was a special kid. And he said something one day that has stuck with me, years later.

"Miss," he started. "The people who clean... They are all Spanish?"

This observation—from a sixth grader—caught me completely off guard.

"What makes you say that?" I asked him.

"All the people I see cleaning speak Spanish...like me." He paused, then said the words that still echo in my ears. "That's why I want to be a doctor. I want to show that people like me can do more than just clean like that."

This was a wake-up call. This job is about people—kids with dreams and the adults who either have or lack the knowledge and skills to make those dreams a reality.

Wilmer was an English language learner (ELL). On top of learning a new language and culture, he was also tasked with learning standard sixth grade topics—geography, earth science, ratios and so on. Wilmer represents the fastest growing population of students in the United States today. Today, he would be one of the 64 ELLs in the school where I teach, in an urban district just north of Boston. Our students represent nearly 20 different countries and a dozen different languages. They bring with them different cultural backgrounds and educational experiences. And, like Wilmer, they all come in search of the opportunity to learn English, get a good education, and have a better future.

Despite these clear goals, this group of students is also consistently failing in our school systems. When not in their English as a Second Language class, our ELLs are often placed in mainstream classrooms, mixed with English-proficient peers. Even newcomers (newly-arrived students with minimal to no English skills) are placed in mainstream environments, where content teachers (with little to no training on second language acquisition) must do their best to integrate these students into their classrooms and provide comprehensible instruction, which, of course, will be assessed on formal standardized assessments. This is hardly fair for anyone involved.

As I think about the students that sit in front of me each day, I think about the ways in which their language shapes their world. I think about the words they have in English and those they have not yet acquired. Importantly, I think about how these words will either grant or deny them access to the academic world we expect them to navigate as learners in Massachusetts. Wilmer would be a junior in high school this year. For many students, junior year marks an important time in a one's academic trajectory, with high school halfway completed and college on the horizon. Is that true for Wilmer? Or, like for so many other ELLs, have we failed him, too?

Mentor's Advice: Be a Teacher, Not a Mom

By Colleen Labbe

"You need to be less like their mother and more like their teacher." When my supervising professor said those words after an observation, I thought to myself, "They're only five years old!" Four years later, these words remind me that I'm not doing my students any favors by coddling them.

The most challenging part of my student teaching was learning how to meet the needs of a classroom full of young learners with various academic and social-emotional needs. Along with my students who were ELLs and those with special needs, for most of my kindergarten students, this was their first time in school. Several students lived in homeless shelters, and all of my students qualified for and received free breakfast and lunch. As a parent, I instinctively wanted to "take care of them." The five-year-olds in kindergarten wanted to play with my "yellow" hair, paint, play with blocks and have recess all day. The academic and social demands of a long school day were extremely difficult for most of the students. I sometimes found myself wanting to "give them a break." After all, David couldn't practice his sight words because he was just too tired when he got home. I was torn...but not for long.

After my first observation at the beginning of my practicum, my supervising professor immediately reminded me that coddling my students was not doing them any favors. In fact, it was irresponsible. She was right. Learning to read and write is hard. Mathematics requires critical thinking and reasoning skills. Building stamina takes effort and energy. It was my job to teach them and their job to learn.

Her words enabled me to shift my thinking. I became a more effective teacher as a result of her meaningful feedback: You need to be less like their mother and more like their teacher.

As a kindergarten teacher in the Boston Public Schools, my evaluations have included my ability to be "strict and warm" as one of my biggest strengths. Holding students accountable while providing love and emotional support is a challenge, but it's not impossible. Although many of our students are faced with the challenges that poverty brings, I know that when children are held to high academic expectations and are supported and encouraged by their teachers, they will achieve at their highest potential.

The time I spent in the classroom, along with the guidance, support and feedback from my mentors was invaluable. Although we no longer work together at the same school, my mentors remain in my life today. I will be forever grateful for their patience and the time they spent in and out of the school day, preparing me to teach. The honest feedback I received over the course of my training is something I cherish today. It's also something I've learned to give.

Strong Mentor Taught Students They are Worth It

By Heather McCarthy

My first student teaching placement was in inner city Buffalo, NY. I was born and raised in the city, but I had spent little time in many areas of the city due to their violence and high poverty. But when the bell rang that early September morning, I was confronted head on, actually almost trampled, by residents of the highest-need neighborhoods running through the classroom door.

To say I learned a lot during that student teaching placement is an understatement. It wasn't best teaching practices or management techniques that were my big takeaways from this experience, but the children's stories and background knowledge, the way my mentor teacher was able to connect with the students, and the heartbreaking barriers these children faced day after day. My mentor teacher lived on the very street that some of our students did. She hung a mirror near the classroom door so that every morning as the students entered they would look in the mirror and say, "I am smart, kind and worth it." I learned that for many of the students, school was the only place they would eat, feel safe, or be warm during cold Buffalo winters.

Teaching at that school prepared me for teaching better than at least half of the courses I took during my dual masters program. I was prepared to teach in urban schools from day one of my teaching career. Because of my student teaching placement I am able to connect with my students on a personal level and push them to succeed.

Teach Plus Massachusetts Teaching Policy Fellows, 2014-2015

*Denotes lead authors

Jennifer Aponte, David A. Ellis,
Boston Public Schools

Hayden Frederick-Clarke,
Charlestown High, Boston Public
Schools

Lisa Nguyen, Thomas J. Kenny,
Boston Public Schools

Rachael Conway, Mattahunt,
Boston Public Schools

Jeffrey Cipriani, Orchard Gardens,
Boston Public Schools

Ivana Perez-Redondo, Excel High
School, Boston Public Schools

*Carli Fleming, Salem Academy
Charter School

*Amy Howland, Academy of the
Pacific Rim Charter School

*Molly Howard, Codman Academy
Charter Public School

*Colleen Labbe, Lee Academy,
Boston Public Schools

*Heather McCarthy, William A.
Berkowitz Elementary, Chelsea

Gwendolin Bandi, John J. Doran
School, Fall River Public Schools

Brianne Brown, Eliot Elementary,
Boston Public Schools

*Marjorie Pita, Rafael Hernandez,
Boston Public Schools

Kalimah Rahim, New Mission High
School, Boston Public Schools

Julia Beaufait, Arthur D. Healey
School, Somerville Public Schools

*Lindsey Hugo, Edward Brooke
Charter School

*Farida Mama, UP Academy
Charter School of Boston, Boston
Public Schools

Wing Leung, Boston Latin, Boston
Public Schools

*Colleen Mason, Lee Academy,
Boston Public Schools

Lindsey Mayer, Garfield Middle
School, Revere Public Schools

Aaron Stone, Boston Day and
Evening Academy Charter School

*Daniel Adler, UP Academy
Leonard, Lawrence Public Schools

Daniel Hackett, Boston Latin
Academy, Boston Public Schools

*Brittany Vetter, Excel Academy
Charter School, Chelsea

*Natalie Khalatov-Krimnus, Revere
High, Revere Public Schools

Bernadine Lormilus, Channing
Elementary, Boston Public Schools

Lindsay Sobel, Executive Director, Teach Plus Massachusetts

Diane Grinnell, Senior Policy Program Lead, Teach Plus Massachusetts

Sasha Zuflacht, Policy Program Associate, Teach Plus Massachusetts

End Notes

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