



POLICY BRIEF

TEACHER PREPARATION IN TENNESSEE

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S C  R E
State Collaborative on Reforming Education

TEACHER PREPARATION IN TENNESSEE

WHY TEACHER PREPARATION MATTERS

Thousands of new teachers step into Tennessee's classrooms each year and begin working with students. The way Tennessee prepares teachers has important consequences for the academic growth of the state's students.

Studies have shown that there can be more than a year's worth of academic growth for students who receive highly effective teaching compared with those who receive ineffective teaching.¹ Research also has shown that students of color and low-income students are more likely to be served by an early-career teacher, and ineffective preparation may widen achievement gaps.²

Although the first years in the classroom will present challenges for any teacher, educator preparation programs (EPPs) are crucial to ensuring that early-career teachers can positively impact student achievement. Only seven of Tennessee's 40 EPPs score in the top performance category on the 2016 Teacher Preparation Report Card based on measures such as observation scores and student growth data.³ Considering relevant research, and Tennessee EPP performance, the state must focus on policies and practices to improve educator preparation in Tennessee.

Research indicates many practices can improve educator preparation. For example, strong student teaching experiences paired with highly effective mentor teachers can ensure that early-career teachers are better prepared for their classrooms.⁴ A racially and ethnically diverse teaching workforce that better reflects the student population can have a positive influence on students from all backgrounds.⁵ Though Tennessee has been a leader in raising teacher quality, and has made dramatic student achievement gains, there is much work to do in educator preparation. To meet our ambitious goals as a state, all students must have access to effective teaching.

The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) released *Prepared for Day One: Improving the Effectiveness of Early-Career Teaching* in October 2016. SCORE spent four months engaging 159 different partners statewide, including half of Tennessee's educator preparation programs, to learn about promising practices and potential gaps of educator preparation in the state. This brief summarizes the report's findings about current educator preparation, licensure policies, and promising practices, plus eight recommendations to improve educator preparation in Tennessee, beginning on Page 3. For more information, please consult the full report:

<http://tnscore.org/research-reports/policy-memos/>

THE TENNESSEE EDUCATOR PREPARATION POLICY LANDSCAPE

In Tennessee, The General Assembly has granted authority to the State Board of Education (SBE) to set policies related to educator preparation and licensure. Two main SBE policies govern educator preparation: the Tennessee Educator Preparation Policy and the Educator Licensure Policy.

In 2014, the SBE revised the Tennessee Educator Preparation Policy, raising expectations for how preparation programs are reviewed and approved and changing program admission requirements. Now, in addition to comprehensive reviews that take place every seven years to approve programs, programs may also undergo interim reviews on a more frequent basis if they do not meet state standards for approval.⁶

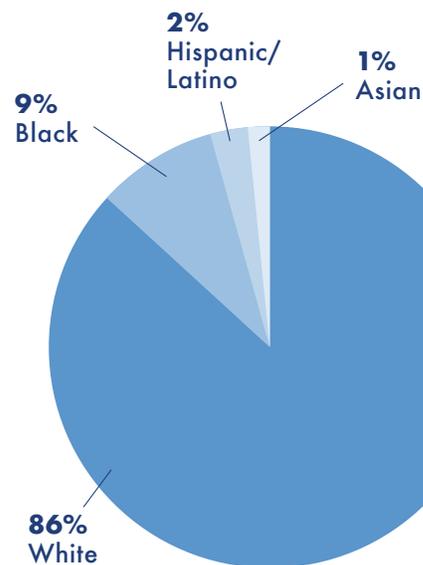
Tennessee's Educator Licensure Policy requires teacher candidates to be recommended by a state-approved EPP, and earn a bachelor's degree to obtain a teaching license. Candidates must also pass required Praxis content knowledge tests, and other licensure assessments.⁷

EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN TENNESSEE

Background of Program Completers.

During the years 2013-15, Tennessee EPPs graduated 8,044 new teachers, of whom 77 percent were female and 23 percent were male. In addition, 86 percent were white, 9 percent were black, and 2 percent were Hispanic or Latino.⁸ Tennessee's K-12 student population in 2015-16, however, was 64 percent white, 24 percent black, and 9 percent Hispanic or Latino.⁹ The racial and ethnic background of Tennessee's teachers currently does not reflect that of its students, and several EPPs as well as scholarship programs are attempting to address this mismatch.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE TEACHER CANDIDATES, 2013-15



Source: Tennessee Report Card on the Effectiveness of Teacher Preparation Programs, 2016

Admission Requirements. Through the 2014 Educator Preparation Policy, the SBE adopted the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards, which led to changes in admission requirements. Teaching candidates must have a GPA of 2.75 and an ACT/SAT score of 21/1020 for admission to an EPP. Candidates can also use the Praxis Core Academic Skills Test, the Graduate Record Examination, or the Miller Analogies Test. Candidates who do not meet these criteria can also be admitted through an appeals process.¹⁰ To date, research is mixed on the relationship between academic admission requirements, and teacher candidates' later effectiveness levels.¹¹ Some EPP programs also use disposition data, such as interviews, to assess candidates for admission.¹²

Clinical Experience. SBE policy requires teacher candidates to complete at least 15 weeks of clinical practice. These practice opportunities can be either student teaching, or a year-long internship, teaching residency, or job-embedded experience.¹³ All candidates typically have mentor teachers as part of their clinical experience. SBE policy requires mentor teachers to be a level 4 or 5 on the Tennessee teacher evaluation system and have a license in the teacher candidate's desired endorsement area.¹⁴

EPP and District Partnerships. Tennessee requires all EPPs to have at least one primary partnership with a school district to encourage better communication about local district needs.¹⁵ SCORE's conversations with EPPs indicated that not all programs and districts have these close partnerships as intended, either because they do not communicate often enough or they have different goals. Beginning in 2016, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) piloted an inaugural Network for Educator Preparation Partnerships, which includes five Tennessee EPPs and their partner districts. The goals of the pilot are to test different partnership planning documents the TDOE has created and establish expectations for future partnerships.¹⁶

Report Cards and Annual Reports. In 2007, the Tennessee General Assembly directed the SBE to create a report card on the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs.¹⁷ The SBE released an updated version of the Teacher Preparation Report Card in December 2016. The report card provides clear information about each Tennessee EPP's ability to prepare teachers effectively. SBE policy also requires the TDOE to produce an annual report on each EPP in the state.¹⁸ These reports, used internally by EPPs, will provide information on overall EPP performance, and inform continued improvement of programs. EPPs received their first set of annual reports in spring 2017.

Licensure Assessments. SBE policy requires teacher candidates to take and pass a content assessment for their desired endorsement area.¹⁹ The TDOE and SBE are exploring Tennessee standards-aligned content assessments for teachers, which 16 other states have already implemented. According to the SBE, this approach could encourage closer alignment to the Tennessee Academic Standards.²⁰ As other states have implemented custom licensure assessments, one important area of focus has been creating reciprocity policies to ensure that out-of-state teachers are able to teach in those states.²¹

Beginning in January 2019, Tennessee also will require all teacher candidates to pass edTPA, a performance assessment that measures teacher candidate performance in the classroom, as well as their planning, instruction, and assessment practices.²² Created by the Stanford Center for Assessment Learning and Equity, the edTPA assessment has several benefits, and TDOE research indicates candidates who receive higher edTPA scores typically receive higher evaluation ratings, compared to candidates with lower scores. One concern with requiring edTPA is its cost. The test costs \$300, compared to \$146 for the current assessment, the Praxis PLT.²³

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING EDUCATOR PREPARATION

SCORE offers the following recommendations to advance educator preparation and improve the effectiveness of early-career teaching in Tennessee:

1. Improve the licensure assessment system in the state. Tennessee should develop custom, standards-aligned licensure assessments for reading, secondary and middle grades math, and Spanish. The TDOE and the SBE should continue to identify other subject areas that will need a custom assessment. In addition, the TDOE, Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Tennessee Board of Regents, and the University of Tennessee system should provide guidance to EPPs on helping students, especially those who are Pell-eligible, cover edTPA costs.

2. Increase staff capacity at the TDOE. The TDOE needs additional staffing in the educator preparation division to ensure that educator preparation policies are implemented with fidelity. Increased staff capacity is needed to support EPP and district partnerships, improve the diversity of the teaching population, and support implementation of edTPA.

3. Enhance the racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching population. Recruiting and retaining a racially and ethnically diverse teaching population must be a state priority pursued with a sense of urgency. The TDOE should create an ambitious, statewide goal for recruiting racially and ethnically diverse teaching candidates into the teaching population. EPPs should collaborate with the TDOE to develop goals for recruiting teacher candidates of color. Finally, the SBE should report on progress toward these goals.

4. Increase access to and transparency of data on EPPs. The state should improve reporting and transparency of data about the effectiveness of educator preparation programs. Access to clear, transparent data can give EPPs important information about the performance of their programs. Partnership agreements between EPPs and school districts should include data-sharing strategies, such as information to match student teachers with mentor teachers who can help teacher candidates grow.

5. Strengthen classroom-based experiences for teacher candidates. Improving the quality of support that teacher candidates receive during their clinical experience, especially with a mentor teacher, would better prepare early-career teachers for the classroom. The SBE should require mentor teachers to have at least three years of successful teaching experience. School districts and EPPs also must find ways to incentivize highly effective teachers to become mentor teachers, such as by providing stipends.

6. Improve the quality of the student admissions process for EPPs. The SBE should improve the transparency of the admissions process by requiring EPPs to report detailed data about how candidates are admitted. The SBE should limit the percentage of candidates EPPs can admit through an appeals process. The SBE, in partnership with other stakeholders, should encourage EPPs to use disposition data for admission, providing programs multiple measures to assess potential candidates.

7. Increase collaboration between EPPs and school districts. Partnerships between EPPs and districts are critical to ensuring that candidates receive high-quality field experiences before they enter the classroom. The state should highlight and provide examples of promising practices to improve EPP and school district collaboration.

8. Develop a clear process for reviewing and approving EPPs. The SBE should create a rigorous policy for interim reviews when data indicate an EPP is below standards. The state should also encourage school districts to be involved in the review process for EPPs.



CONCLUSION

Effective educator preparation remains critical to accelerate gains in student achievement that Tennessee has made. Though there are many promising practices across the state, there is still much work to do to ensure that every student has access to effective teaching. Tennessee EPPs, the TDOE, the SBE, local districts, policymakers, and other stakeholders can all engage in meaningful ways to improve educator preparation. Through these recommendations, SCORE believes that Tennessee can take important steps to improve the way the state prepares early-career teachers, and ensure that all teachers are prepared for day one in the classroom.

ENDNOTES

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