

# Recruiting Talented and Diverse People Into the Teaching Profession

## *Archived Information*

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# **Recruiting Talented and Diverse People Into the Teaching Profession**

The demographics of today's changing teaching force are stunning: one-third of today's teachers have more than 20 years of experience; and two-thirds are at least at mid-career. At the same time, K-12 enrollment is the highest it has ever been in the United States, surpassing the explosive enrollment of the baby-boom years.<sup>(7)</sup> The 52 million students expected by 1998 will stretch the capacity of the nation's schools for many years to come. Schools already unable to recruit enough talented teachers, particularly in fields such as math and science, shudder to contemplate how they will deal with that burden.

In the past, school districts often relied on recruiting back former teachers who had dropped out to raise families or to try other careers, but in recent years this strategy has yielded little. Currently, only about 7 percent of former teachers each year are returning to teaching.<sup>(8)</sup>

## **Shortage of Minority Teachers**

The gap between the diversity of students in the schools and the racial and ethnic characteristics of the teaching force has become another recruitment issue. About 86 percent of the teachers in public schools are non-Hispanic Caucasian, while more than 32 percent of the students in K-12 schools are minority.<sup>(9)</sup> This gap is growing larger. In 1995, 1.3 percent of bachelor's degrees in education were granted to Asian/Pacific Islanders, 6.27 percent were granted to African Americans, 3.2 percent were granted to Hispanics and .79 percent were granted to Native Americans.<sup>(10)</sup>

Furthermore, urban areas that have enrollment majorities of students of color and students from families whose home language is other than English, have the most difficulty recruiting new teachers.

These statistics indicate that the supply of minority teachers will continue to be far out of proportion in relationship to the percentages of minority students in classrooms unless great efforts are made to recruit more minority teachers.

## **Hiring Standards Must Remain High**

Fortunately, many of those involved in setting long-range policies and practices are emphasizing quality before quantity as they recruit new teachers. Until recently, little effort went into recruiting highly capable middle and high school students for teaching careers or into reaching out to special groups. But such initiatives are now happening, usually as a part of overall state policies to improve the quality of teaching or as foundation/institution projects to encourage the best to enter teaching.

The success of the rest of the continuum of teacher development depends on aggressive recruitment efforts. Recruitment should begin early with students who show interest in teaching. They should be encouraged to tutor their peers and younger students as early as middle school, to be camp counselors in

the summers, and to complete classes in education theory. They should be introduced to the option of teaching as a profession and exposed to role models. Efforts should also target professionals from other fields to encourage mid-career men and women to pursue a career in teaching.

Aggressive recruitment policies provide the foundation for a strong teaching profession but will take time to have an impact on quality instruction in classrooms. Recruiting and retaining talented and diverse candidates will require an ongoing consistent effort if quality teachers are to be available to all students.

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## Norfolk State University

### *The Pathways to Teaching Careers Program*

*"This project has provided a marvelous opportunity for teacher aides and other paraprofessionals to become certified teachers. For the school systems it has provided a pathway to increase minority teachers."*

Denise Littleton  
Director, DeWitt Wallace Pathways to Teaching Careers Program

The public school system in Norfolk, Virginia, is facing a growing disparity between the diversity of its student population and the diversity of the available teaching force. Approximately 61 percent of the students served by the Norfolk Public Schools (NPS) are African American, while only 37 percent of the available teaching force is African American. Furthermore, 1992-93 projections indicate that at least 166 African American teachers will be eligible for retirement by the year 2000. In response to this growing disparity, the Pathways project at Norfolk State University was initiated, in collaboration with Old Dominion University (ODU) and Norfolk Public Schools (NPS), "to enhance the educational opportunities and achievement of children in the Norfolk Public Schools." Funded by a grant from the DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund, this program focuses on recruiting teacher aides, substitute teachers, and other paraprofessionals--specifically targeting minority and male applicants--and returning them to the Norfolk Public Schools as well-prepared teachers.

Before admission to the program at Norfolk State, participants go through a careful screening and selection process. To ensure their ability to complete the program within the time frame of the grant, applicants must have more than 60 transferable credits toward completing the teacher education program and a minimum 2.3 grade point average. Applicants must already be employed by NPS and are expected to have strong recommendations; they also must complete a satisfactory personal interview with a selection committee representing school faculty and principals, community members, and NPS personnel. Most important, applicants must have a demonstrated commitment to children in urban areas, as well as an interest in primary education, special education or secondary education.

Once admitted, Pathways Scholars progress through a teacher education program specifically geared to meet their needs. One academic course, for example, assesses scholars' specific needs and weaknesses relative to the National Teachers Exam (NTE). Ongoing curricular development activities inspired a course on community volunteerism, as well as instructional modules on an array of urban education topics. Courses are available in the evenings and over the summer to accommodate participants'

schedules. Finally, the program is structured to emphasize all cultures--with a specific focus on the urban student--and to build on the real-world experiences of the participants.

The program offers scholars both financial and academic support services. Scholars' financial needs are largely covered (80 percent) by the grant from DeWitt Wallace Readers Digest Fund. Academic supports include an initial orientation, special seminars, and workshops. Scholars also receive academic advising, tutoring, and counseling. In addition, family orientation and day care services are available. The program closely monitors grades, requires a supervised field experience (in addition to regular employment with NPS), and evaluates in-class performance at least twice per semester.

Upon program completion, graduates seek employment with NPS, fulfilling a pledge each scholar makes upon entry to the program. The employment process is facilitated by the fact that NPS is involved in the initial selection of Pathways Scholars; continued communication between program staff and NPS during the employment period is another facilitating factor. Once graduates have gained employment, Norfolk State continues to monitor them informally and offers special seminars and annual workshops.

The careful selection of participants and the comprehensive nature of the Pathways program at Norfolk State show very positive results thus far. To date, the Pathways program has enrolled 106 scholars. Only eight left the program before completion, and the retention rate is 92 percent. The Norfolk Pathways program graduated 87 percent of its scholars (92 of 106), 66 of whom are fully certified teachers. Many of those who are not yet certified are either waiting to take the National Teachers Exam or are awaiting results of the exam.

Finally, 69 graduates found placement in NPS; three of these are substituting regular teaching for their student teaching requirement, and are thus not yet certified. Most important, the program has provided a unique avenue to teaching for a pool of candidates with backgrounds and experiences that make them well suited to address specific teacher shortages in the Norfolk Public Schools.

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## **Colorado State University** *Project Promise*

*"These participants...are not burn-outs from other careers, but rather individuals who have a strong and sincere desire to have a positive influence on young people."*

Founder, Project Promise

Until recent efforts to entice college graduates to switch from other careers to teaching, changing careers often meant starting over completely. Those who wanted to become teachers needed to take a sequence of expensive courses that often delayed them from teaching for several years even though they already held a college degree or even a graduate degree. When the enormity of the teacher shortage became known to state policy makers and others, many called for greater flexibility in hiring practices, pushing through legislation that often allowed non-certified personnel from other academic fields to enter teaching immediately. Special recruitment campaigns targeted the military and/or recent college graduates.

Promised supervision of alternate-route teachers turned out to be less than desired, as did the teachers'

knowledge of basic classroom practices. In order to retain the valuable contribution of alternate-route teachers, more recent initiatives have focused on better recruitment policies and more structured preparation for classroom teaching as well as continued supervision. More than 200 higher education institutions now participate in such programs.<sup>(11)</sup>

The founders of Project Promise at Colorado State University believe that candidate selection is a major factor in this program's success. Because the program is experimental, it serves a limited number of candidates even though its promotion stimulates more than 300 applicants a year drawn from such fields as law, engineering, medicine, and government service. One-third already have a master's degree or first professional degree.

### **Selection of Candidates**

A preliminary application given to applicants asks general questions: "Why do you want to enter teaching?" or "How would you describe an especially rewarding teaching experience you have had?" or "How could students be motivated to work harder?"

Finalists take part in interviews with several faculty members on campus that include simulations to assess the candidate's ability to be student centered and to handle power issues in the classroom. At the end of this process, 20 candidates become the Project Promise cohort for the year. They are eligible for limited scholarship assistance, either from the university or through donations from individuals and foundations. With the assistance of a Programs of Excellence grant from the state, the program distributed \$34,000 in scholarship aid for the 1996-97 school year.

Grade-point averages or test scores are not as important to the Project Promise staff as are a candidate's mission, empathy, involvement in voluntary service and experiences with young people. Data are kept on each incoming candidate's strengths and reviewed at the end of the program to see if the staff's original assessments were right.

The candidates enter into an intensive but compressed program lasting 10 and a half months under the supervision of the same faculty and graduate assistants throughout. They enroll in distinct student teaching placements--rural, urban, middle school and high school. Their total time as student teachers is about 22 weeks, but instead of an evaluation at the end of the process, those in Project Promise may receive up to 50 observations and specific feedback from university faculty. This feedback allows them to gain insight on the spot about their teaching.

Abstract theory, such as philosophy or foundations courses, usually given at the beginning of teacher preparation, come at the end of Project Promise. The staff reasons that older, experienced candidates are more focused on gaining experience in the classroom early than on learning theories.

The program faculty continue to work officially with the program graduates for two additional years, creating professional development plans cooperatively with the principals of the schools where Project Promise's graduates are placed.

The selection process and intensive performance-based preparation apparently account for the high placement and retention rate of Project Promise graduates. Over 90 percent of the graduates find teaching jobs each year (in 1996, all graduates signed contracts). Follow-up studies indicate that 80 percent stay in teaching for at least five years and that they are highly satisfied with the preparation and support they received. Furthermore, surveys indicate that hiring officials in school districts that employ these teachers have preference for Project Promise graduates over other candidates available to them.

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# South Carolina Center For Teacher Recruitment Teacher Cadet Corps

*"In part, the Teacher Cadet Program's success is found in providing students meaningful opportunities to learn about and engage in teaching."*

## Research report on the Teacher Cadet Corps

To ensure a qualified teaching force necessary for the comprehensive education reforms adopted in South Carolina, the state legislature and then-Governor Richard Riley established the South Carolina Center for Teacher Recruitment at Winthrop University in 1986. Starting with a blank slate, the center quickly filled and began a series of focused efforts to recruit highly qualified young people, especially minority students, into the teaching profession.

The center drew on the expertise of current teachers to design the recruitment efforts and to carry them out in high schools throughout the state. Its most well-known program, adapted by a dozen other states, is the Teacher Cadet Program.

At 148 high schools, teachers volunteer to conduct a yearlong course open to interested students with a high grade-point average. This is not a typical high school offering--it is a mixture of solid content (history of education, principles of learning, child development, current issues in education) and hands-on opportunities to observe, construct lessons plans, tutor younger students, and practice teaching. A 600-page handbook written and constantly modified by teachers serves as the core curriculum for all of the high school classes. It contains suggestions for course content as well as engaging assignments such as designing an ideal early childhood environment or presenting evidence at a school board meeting.

Almost 20 partner higher education institutions provide lecturers and, in some cases, college credit for the high school course. Also, several Teachers-In-Residence receive fellowships each year to supervise the program from the center and "ride circuit" among the participating high schools. One of these Teachers-In-Residence focuses exclusively on recruiting minority students for the center's programs.

## Pro-Team Program

A second initiative is the Pro-Team Program for middle school students. Through a course and club activities, it recruits seventh- and eighth-graders in the top 40 percent of their classes, hoping to interest them in teaching before they get turned off to a teaching career. Through the 1997-98 school year, the Pro-Team Program had introduced more than 7,000 students to teaching; approximately 65 percent were from minority groups. One unique feature of this initiative is a teacher-developed curriculum for a workshop for parents of the Pro-Team students. Parents then have avenues for more involvement, such as supporting Pro-Team Clubs or accompanying students on college campus visits.

## Measures of Success

By the end of the 1997-98 school year, about 21,000 academically talented young people were graduates of the Teacher Cadet Program in South Carolina. About 35 percent of them are teaching or are in teacher

preparation programs. In addition, South Carolina has become the only southeastern state with an increase in the number of minorities entering teaching, almost tripling the number between the 1988-89 and 1994-95 school years.

The success of the recruitment programs turns up in more than numbers. Outside evaluators have studied the program regularly, finding that former Cadets were more realistic about the conditions of teaching and entered college with a jump-start in the content of teacher education programs. Their knowledge has raised standards for their classmates, according to professors in teacher education. Those teaching also reported at a higher rate than beginning teachers nationally that they were likely to remain in the profession.<sup>(12)</sup>

After two years of working with 47 Pro-Team sites around the state, the 1995-97 Pro-Team Specialist Libby Ortmann was buoyed by the dedication of teachers to "growing their own" in South Carolina. She said the teachers who sponsor the Pro-Team and Teacher Cadet programs are "modeling every day what it will take to prepare the next generation of classroom teachers." <sup>(13)</sup>

The center's work has expanded to include a college hotline for prospective students, a job bank for school districts in the state, and a Teacher Forum intended to encourage leadership and retention among current teachers. The Forum brings together the teachers-of-the-year from school districts for conferences and other collaborative activities. More than 500 teachers are in the Forum now, and regional forums have been organized as well.

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## **Characteristics of Promising Teacher Recruitment Initiatives**

Successful recruitment efforts attract talented teachers who meet high standards and reflect the diversity of the students they will teach. Some recruitment goals follow:

- Recruitment of potential teachers begins early, often through organized groups and activities in the middle grades.
- Pre-collegiate recruitment programs provide substantial information about careers in teaching for candidates, balancing both the changes taking place and current realities that often dissuade those with teacher preparation from actually entering the field.
- Current master teachers are directly involved in the recruitment and career counseling of potential teachers.
- Policies focus on recruiting future teachers from under-represented minority groups and from students with special interest in the fields where there are great shortages, such as math, science, bilingual education and special education; state and institutional policies provide incentives for undergraduates to teach in these fields for a specified time after college graduation.
- Programs that recruit potential teachers from other careers combine both course work and supervised classroom experiences, either before the recruits are placed in classrooms or during their first year or two of teaching. These mid-career candidates have access to financial aid.

