

## **Examining Teacher Preparation: Does the Pathway Make a Difference? Executive Summary**

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Policymakers at every level of government and the public understand that few issues are more important than improving the performance of America's K-12 students, especially those in urban, low-performing schools. Increasingly research supports common sense in identifying teachers as the most important contributor to improved student outcomes. Surprisingly, there is virtually no systematic, methodologically sound research that indicates the attributes of teacher preparation programs and pathways into teaching that improve student outcomes. (See Wilson, Floden and Ferrini-Mundy, 2001 for a review of this literature.)

Our research addresses this lack directly by examining the following research questions:

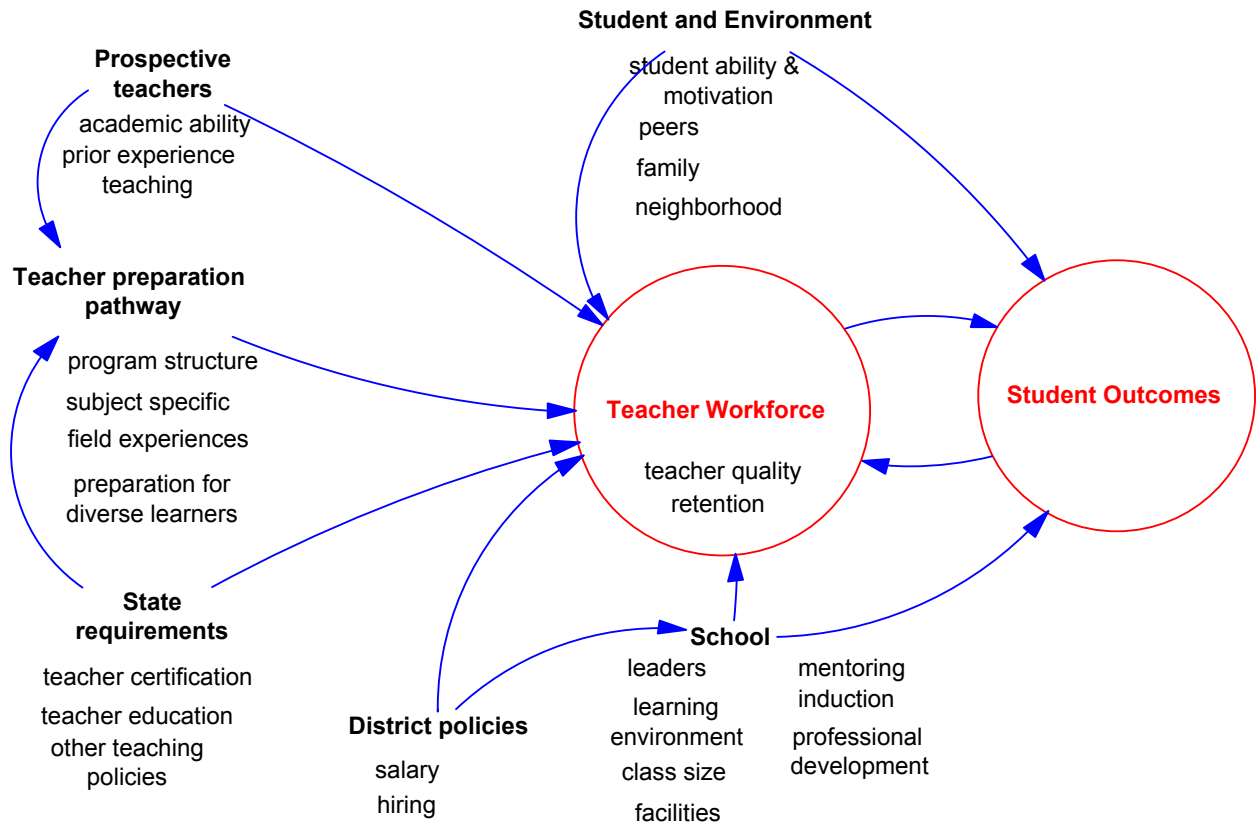
- What attributes of preparation pathways and on-going development are most effective in improving student outcomes?
- How are the attributes of teachers and their pathway into teaching related to:
  - Who teaches where and why?
  - Who stays in teaching and why?
  - Who transfers, why and to which schools?
  - Who quits teaching and why?
- What is the cost effectiveness of various pathways into teaching?

The research will assess the role that pathways into teaching, both traditional and nontraditional (such as the New York City Teaching Fellows Program), do and can play in both improving the quality of the teacher workforce and equalizing the distribution of highly qualified teachers across urban schools. The attributes of teacher preparation programs cannot be examined in isolation from longstanding and well-defined characteristics of teacher labor markets. Teacher salaries, teachers' preferences about schools (such as characteristics of students, teachers, leadership, community, and facilities), and school district hiring practices all can affect teacher career paths and effectiveness. It is especially important to take these labor market characteristics into account when attempting to understand how to improve teaching in difficult-to-staff urban schools, because there are often enormous school-to-school and district-to-district differences in working conditions in urban areas.

Working closely with the New York City public schools, the City University of New York and schools of education at other institutions that supply teachers to New York City, and with support from the New York State Education Department, we are examining teacher preparation in New York City. We have built a rich database that contains detailed information about teachers in the New York City public school system over the last 15 years including the attributes of their teacher preparation pathway, the schools they have taught in, and the students they have taught. We will supplement administrative data, beginning in 2004, with annual surveys of a large subset of teacher preparation program participants and teachers in New York City as they enter and move through the early years of their careers. The surveys will provide valuable information on teacher preparation and teaching experiences, and on teachers' attitudes and preferences. The data help us understand the

contexts in which teacher preparation occurs and in which teachers work, as well as the effect of preparation on teachers' abilities to educate students. The figure below describes our approach to understanding teacher preparation in the context of New York City.

## Teacher Preparation and Outcomes for Teachers and Students



The results of this research will be valuable to state policymakers, urban school systems, schools of education, teacher organizations, researchers, and others. Many groups have expressed tremendous interest in and support for the project. We are particularly grateful to the City University of New York, the New York State Education Department, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Spencer Foundation, and the National Science Foundation for providing the financial support needed to make this project possible.