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Rather Than Resisting Higher Expectations, Teachers Colleges Are Driving Them

By Sharon Robinson

The *New York Times* editorial "Help Teachers Before They Get to Class" (October 15) repeats outdated canards about teacher preparation that are as misguided as the new federal regulations celebrated in the editorial. Far from resisting higher expectations, teachers colleges are driving them.

Higher education institutions and states have raised program entry requirements in recent years, and the academic qualifications of admitted students have increased apace. By referencing an outdated and widely discredited report, the editorial misses this fact, reflected in publicly available federal datasets: today's undergraduates preparing to be teachers have an average GPA of 3.2 *on college work required for admission to the program*.

More importantly, institutions have been working with their states to increase expectations *at program exit*: in the past 5 years, over half of the nation's educator preparation programs have started using new, rigorous performance assessments of aspiring teachers. Students demonstrate their job readiness using documented evidence, including classroom video, that is evaluated by third-party observers who are themselves practicing teachers or scholars of teaching. These assessments, developed by top education researchers, provide valuable new data for programs' and states' improvement efforts, and the benefits will multiply as additional states and institutions adopt them.

The new regulations do rightly identify the need for better systems of data sharing. Institutions and states have been collaborating to develop these systems, embracing high standards as well as robust frameworks of ongoing quality assurance and improvement. Programs are clamoring for this kind of information, and most cannot access information about their graduates' job performance without state support.

The editorial's claim that many new teachers lack experience working with students in poverty is puzzling: every preparation program in New York State (as most in other states) provides candidates with clinical experience in high-need schools. Nationwide, dozens of programs have been awarded federal Teacher Quality Partnership grants, which both recognize and strengthen partnerships between preparation programs and local schools,

and hundreds more use the professional development school model to assure candidates have an authentic and robust clinical experience—most often with high-need schools.

The most baffling myth is the endlessly recycled claim that the math and science teacher shortage is somehow the fault of preparation programs. In a market economy where math, science, and technology skills bring a premium in the job market, any expectation that teacher education programs can convince young people to sell their skills below market value is absurd. It is more to the point to praise the many career-changer programs at colleges and universities that have created career transition programs for engineers, accountants, coders, and technology workers who have decided they are ready to forgo higher salaries for other rewards. Solving the problem in every community will require collaboration and the strategic use of every resource, not the creation of new boutique providers.

The newly released regulations, like the editorial lauding them, mostly take aim at yesterday's problems and ignore today's progress; we will do well to take care that they do not diminish or delay tomorrow's promise. At best, the new regulations may catalyze the creation of data-sharing systems, but there is no cheap way to accomplish their requirements. In order to determine institutions' eligibility for one program of federal student financial aid, the new regulations require each state to design a rating system that is valid, reliable, and highly consequential for programs. Absent a real partnership in the design of these systems, and meaningful support for the many emerging innovations, the new regulations will amount to a costly distraction that obstructs rather than supports the pervasive momentum in the field toward beneficial change.