

Committee on Education and the Workforce

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Good morning, Chairwoman Foxx, Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. As a high school principal, I have witnessed firsthand where the traditional methods of teacher prep programs are struggling to meet the evolving needs of not only our students, but the needs of educators as well. The current model of teaching, where one teacher works individually with a group of learners in a classroom, or a small box inside of a larger box that we call school, promotes unrealistic expectations by assuming individual teachers working in isolation can meet the needs of all students. Unfortunately, the teacher prep programs not only promote this, but exacerbate it as well by selling the idea that one person can do the job of many and meet the needs of all students.

Today, I will discuss my story about building team-based models in schools and their benefits, as well as some concerns associated with the current traditional teacher preparation programs that limit our ability to hire a workforce to meet the needs of our students.

Restructuring our learning environments is necessary to not only meet the needs of the students, but the working conditions in which our teachers work as well. Developing team-based models was our entry point. This model emphasizes working in teams, a specialization in skills and pedagogy, and pathways for community members to contribute to the learning environments.

When we began to think about team-based teaching in our school, a few tenets were established:

1. A team will have multiple adults with distributed expertise.
2. Shared roster of students.

During our first iteration of building teams, we noticed our teachers collaborating more, solving problems, and working synergistically at deeper levels to improve the outcomes for not only

students, but their own working conditions. We saw an increase in job satisfaction, innovation, and perhaps most important, on the job professional development.

As we partnered with Arizona State University and their initiative called the Next Education Workforce, we were able to have a thought partner in what the design of our teacher workforce could be. To that end, we began to place student teachers on teams at our school. In short, our student teachers who were on teams grew as professionals and were more prepared to meet the needs of a 21st century student body than teachers who were not on teams.

This is a good start. However, there is work to be done. As I interview teachers year in and year out, it is evident that teacher prep programs are still producing teachers that are suited for a one teacher, one classroom model.

A few areas that stand out:

1. There is a focus on scripted, one-size fits all lessons.
2. The focusing is on a specific grade level and content area only.

These constraints present problems when trying to hire educators, especially in a team-based model. Instead of being able to hire a specialized teacher in project-based learning, differentiated assessments, or competency based learning, and placing them on a team, I am confined to hiring a 9-12 general math teacher.

Because of this approach, teachers who are prepared in the traditional teacher prep programs are expected to be all things to all students. This simply isn't possible. Teachers are often ill-prepared and graduate from a program with a strong passion for content knowledge, but not a continuum of specialized teaching skills.

Where can we improve teacher preparation programs?

1. Focus certifications on skills and pedagogy rather than rigid grade-level bands and content areas only
2. Specialization in critical areas such as literacy, numeracy, assessment design, real world application, relevancy, and design thinking.
3. Prepare student teachers to work collaboratively, reflecting the realities of the job today. By experiencing teaching in teams during their preparation, aspiring teachers can learn to leverage the strengths and expertise of their colleagues, enhancing their own learning.

4. Create more opportunities for working adults in our community to obtain specializations and contribute to the learning experience without undergoing an exhaustive preparation program.

These are all transferable across grade levels and content areas, broadening the potential impact and expanding the pool of educators. By moving towards specialization, and creating pathways for community members to contribute, the conditions to build a more robust and effective teacher workforce can begin.

When school reform or redesign is on the table, school leaders often create and establish lofty goals. However, author James Clear, states, “you don’t rise to the level of your goals; you fall to the level of your systems.” As such, a more intentional focus should be placed on improving our teacher prep programs if we want to improve our outcomes for students and teachers.

In closing, I ask you to consider the potential of team-based models in schools, and support the efforts to transform teacher preparation for the benefit of our educators, our students, and the future of our educational system.

Thank you.