

Present Situation, Problems, and Policy Solutions Concerning the State of Teacher Quality in Low-Income, Rural West Virginia

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Introduction

West Virginia lies within the heart of Appalachia, overwhelmingly encompassed by and entrenched in poverty. With the federal poverty line drawn at 21,200 dollars per year for a family of four, the median household income for a West Virginia family in 2007 was 37,057 dollars.¹ This dollar amount lies deceptively above the poverty line because of pockets of wealth primarily found in the state capital, Charleston, and the eastern panhandle suburbs of the District of Columbia. In rural counties the median income falls at a much lower point. An example of this difference appears when comparing rural Webster County's median family income in 2008, which was 30,059 dollars to that of more urban Kanawha County, where the median family income was a much higher 55,513.² Compared to other states, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that even though Webster County registers above the poverty line, it falls well below the national median family income of 50,740 dollars.³ In 2007, 17.1% of West Virginians were living below the poverty line, compared to the national percentage of 13.⁴ With the current state of the economy, it is probable that this number will have increased greatly when more recent statistics are released.

¹ West Virginia Quick Facts From the US Census Bureau, 1

² Webster County (WV) January 2009 Demographics Working Commuters. Economic Development Intelligence System, 1

³ West Virginia Quick Facts From the US Census Bureau, 1

⁴ Webster County (WV) January 2009 Demographics Working Commuters. Economic Development Intelligence System, 1

The 2000 census reports that of people in West Virginia over the age of 25, 75.2% are high school graduates, which is approximately 5% lower than the national average.⁵ Even more striking, only 14.8% possess a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to a national average of 24.4%.⁶ Especially in rural areas where employment opportunities are scarce, the highest paying jobs generally necessitate a bachelor's degree. The pay-scale tends to reward higher education with higher paying jobs. Professor James Ziliak writes: ““Labor economists estimate that the inflation-adjusted rate of return to an additional year of schooling is about 10% on average⁷.” This statistic exemplifies the concept that with increased education, students will have greater opportunities to break the cycles of persistent poverty common in West Virginia.

With a limited number of positions, someone without at least a high school degree finds employment options scarce or, in the current economy, possibly non-existent. Additionally, Ziliak finds that “[h]igher educational attainment translates into a workforce more capable of effectively exploiting modern technologies that fuel economic growth and development⁸.” Therefore, education levels play a large role in the perpetuation of poverty in West Virginia. As education levels increase, the area will produce a more effective workforce, making it a more attractive option for economic developers.

Possession of a high school diploma alone does not guarantee preparation to enter a competitive job market. If one only looks at graduation rates, those in West Virginia do not seem particularly low; in fact, they are surprisingly high with the 2005 state average

⁵ West Virginia Quick Facts From the US Census Bureau, 1

⁶ West Virginia Quick Facts From the US Census Bureau, 1

⁷ Ziliak

⁸ Ziliak

at 72.8%.⁹ Unfortunately, the graduation rates alone do not tell the entire story. In rural Webster County, of students classified as having low socioeconomic statuses, 34% scored below mastery level or lower in math and 26% scored below mastery in reading.¹⁰ This paper argues that the one primary contributor to these low test scores and sub-par numbers of students meeting the mastery level standards is the state's failure to attract and retain high quality teachers in these low-income rural areas within the state. Formulating a plan to address the issue of hiring high quality teachers proves especially important to West Virginia now. In 2008, the West Virginia Department of Education reports that almost six thousand of West Virginia's twenty-four thousand teachers are eligible for retirement.¹¹ The remaining teacher population is also aging, with 67% of the state's teachers over the age of 50.¹²

Since 40.6% of West Virginia schools are rural and 43.5% of the state's students attend these rural schools, it becomes incredibly important to scrutinize the functioning of the education system outside of the state's more urban areas.¹³ This separation into rural and urban gains even more importance upon learning that 54.8% of students attending rural schools in West Virginia receive free or reduced price lunch, a commonly used measure of childhood poverty.¹⁴ The fundamental nature of rural schools differs markedly from urban counterparts and calls for a distinctive plan to address teacher quality in low-income schools.

⁹ Staff Article

¹⁰ WV Report Cards

¹¹ Task Force

¹² White, 1

¹³ Johnson and Strange

¹⁴ Johnson and Strange

Many factors such as family background, school resources, and poverty-related issues that affect children both in and out of school influence students' educational performance. A virtue of rural schools stems from the smaller size and often close-knit, more homogenous communities they serve. Issues like family background and poverty-related problems like hunger and economically based stigmatizing of students are far easier to combat than in urban counter-parts. School cooks usually come from low-income backgrounds and very effectively stretch ingredients and may use discretion to give certain children larger portions or second helpings. Because most students come from lower-income backgrounds, the relative standard of affluence falls at a much lower place than in many public schools. Since the locations are often relatively isolated, there is little emphasis on expensive clothing, and having "name-brand" items may actually be more stigmatized than not.

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Do teachers matter?

Although the nature of the student body and social norms in low-income rural schools differ from schools in more affluent areas, many elements of the educational system must be addressed regardless of school type. One of these issues receiving attention from scholars and government alike involves teacher quality. Before turning to a discussion of teacher quality in low-income rural schools, it is necessary to analyze the importance of teacher quality to student successes or failures. According to Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges, teacher quality plays an important role in student achievement, especially in schools serving students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Another study argues that:

No other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable, skillful teacher can make in the learning process. At the same time,

nothing can fully compensate for weak teaching that, despite good intentions, can result from a teacher's lack of opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skill needed to help student's master curriculum.¹⁵

This quotation provides an intriguing argument for examining and discussing teacher quality, especially when considering the high graduation rates combined with the sub-par test scores.

Defining 'High-Quality' for low-income rural schools

The final issue that must be addressed before turning to attracting and retaining high quality teachers lies in defining "high-quality." Many different methods have been proposed for dealing with this measurement. Currently, the most commonly used measure results from the No Child Left Behind Act, which lays the framework used by the federal government to determine whether a teacher is deemed highly qualified.

According to No Child Left Behind, a highly qualified veteran teacher must have:

Obtained the full state certification as teacher (including alternative certification) or passed the state teacher licensing exam; Hold a license to teach in a state; and Not had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary or provisional basis.¹⁶

In Webster County, West Virginia for the 2005-2006 school year, highly qualified teachers, as classified by No Child Left Behind, taught 91.6% of classes.¹⁷ Since this number seems contradictory to the sub-par test scores of students in these schools, it becomes important to examine the accuracy of this measurement.

Karen Eppley argues that the skills required to be a highly qualified teacher in a rural school differ markedly from those in larger schools. She cites a teacher with experience in both urban and rural schools as believing that in a rural school "successful

¹⁵Thompson, 219 and Nye et.al.

¹⁶No Child Left Behind Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements

¹⁷State Totals

teaching required that she worked as a mediator between the curriculum and the lived experiences of the children in her classroom.¹⁸” She elaborates that it is

essential that she both understands the children’s relationship with their place and, simultaneously, use[s] her adult point of view to help them understand their relationship with [the] larger world. [The conditions weren’t met, learning would not occur.¹⁹

Eppley, from accounts like the one above, concludes: “a homogenous definition of teacher quality is neither advisable nor possible and the provision must be resisted.”²⁰

Clearly, Eppley advocates a more flexible and qualitative definition of teacher quality than that delineated by the federal government in the standards of No Child Left Behind.

Most scholars on rural education agree that the definition of high quality educator adopted by No Child Left Behind falls short when dealing with rural schools, especially seeing the high amount of seemingly high quality teachers beside the strikingly low achievement levels of students. For the purpose of this examination, I will review the qualities deemed essential to teach in a rural setting. These characteristics form the basis for defining effectiveness of teachers within the rural school setting. Rural schools need a special type of teacher to fill the unique role. The ideal type for a rural teacher has certification to teach multiple subjects or grades at the same time, ability to educate students with varied abilities in the same classroom, ability to overcome cultural differences and add to students’ understanding of society, willingness to supervise

¹⁸ Eppley, 1

¹⁹ Ibid,1

²⁰ Ibid, 2

multiple extracurricular activities, and ability to adapt to life in a rural community.²¹ They should also be creative with developing their own materials to teach with, coping well with few resources, and be highly invested in teaching children.²² From these job descriptions, it is clear that teaching in a rural school could provide challenges for even outstanding teachers.

Most rural schools in West Virginia are located in areas of persistent poverty, which leads to a high rate of turnover compared to more affluent area schools.²³ The difficulties of teaching in rural school systems results in a well-documented disparity between low-income rural educators and their more affluent peers. These teachers often have below-average numbers of highly trained teachers and are considerably less likely to have attended elite colleges or universities.²⁴

After seeing the intense skill sets needed to perform well as an educator in a low-income rural school, one wonders what prevents these schools from hiring the best possible teachers to fill these positions. Multiple factors influence teacher hiring and can lead to schools not hiring the most effective teachers. Funding constraints, the timing of the hire, biases for extra-curricular advisors or coaches, extent of ties to the community, the complex nature of rural scheduling, and the power of teachers' unions can all contribute to decision making that leads to less than optimal educators²⁵. Research also consistently shows that multiple factors contribute to lower-quality teachers from less prestigious colleges and universities congregating in rural schools. The most important

²¹ Lemke, 2

²² Ibid,2

²³ Guarino; Lemke, 2

²⁴ Monk, 159

²⁵ Diette

factor results from the high levels of poverty associated with these rural areas. Often, for low-income school districts containing rural schools, attracting teachers becomes challenging because they offer lower salaries, have less access to adequate funding and other resources, lack desirable physical conditions, and may have a more difficult student population.²⁶ The potentially difficult student population proves a result of the low-income district because there are generally fewer, less-specialized teachers, and less access to specialized services like special education.²⁷ Location also plays a significant role in the difficulty of attracting and retaining teachers, since many young new teachers desire the environment of a larger city or city suburb.²⁸ Attracting teachers from higher quality programs, which initially sounds desirable, may not be the most effective method for improving teacher quality.

While defining desirable characteristics does not equate to formulating an alternate method of evaluating teacher quality, other manners of assessing teacher quality have been proposed. Andrew Wayne and Peter Youngs analyze the impact that four categories of teacher characteristics have on student performance and use these as measurements of teacher quality. They utilize “college rating, test scores, degrees and coursework, and certification status” as important factors in evaluating teacher quality.²⁹ College rating concerns the selectivity of the university from which the teacher obtained his or her degree, degrees and coursework measure the level of education the teacher has obtained above the minimum requirements, test scores reflect performance on certification exams,

²⁶ Beeson and Strange, 8; Monk 161, Johnson and Birkeland; Lemke, 2

²⁷ Monk 160,163,165

²⁸ Guarino, 105

²⁹ Wayne and Youngs

and certification status regards the different organizations the teacher has been certified from on both the state and national level.

In his research, Professor Timothy Diette finds that experience is the best single indicator of teacher quality.³⁰ Although he makes a strong case for his findings, in my experience with rural West Virginia schools, this is not always the case. While many of the highest quality teachers do have years of experience, so do many of the worst educators. Attending school in a system where seniority and ties to the community trumped education and performance, many teachers were ineffective. This ineffectiveness was sometimes unintentional, but it often reflected a blatant disregard for the sanctity of teaching by the educators. Instead of preparing and presenting lessons, teachers chose to show movies only vaguely or not at all related to the course or provide “free time.” This unconcealed disrespect for the learning process hurts students, yet because of low accountability standards and an emphasis on seniority happens in the same classes year after year.

One easily obtained and tangible measurement often utilized by researchers focuses on the achieved education level of a teacher. No Child Left Behind, as well as the more inclusive studies each pay some attention to the level and type of education a teacher has completed. State policy takes level of education into account by rewarding teacher’s who have completed master’s degree programs or are currently enrolled in graduate studies with salary increases proportional to the education obtained beyond the required bachelor’s degree. Wayne and Youngs report that an increase in certification or education level with a coinciding increase in compensation, leads to higher student

³⁰ Diette, Teacher Experience

performance. Higher student achievement serves as another typically cited, yet extremely controversial, method to evaluate teacher quality.

In order to use student performance as a means of evaluating teachers, standardized testing must be utilized. This practice brings with it many hindrances to using student achievement to assess teacher quality or performance. In order for a standardized test to accurately reflect the performance of both students and teachers it must be objective, value-added, be reported as an average gain, be balanced across the curriculum, take measurement errors into account, and scores must be disaggregated.³¹ If these difficult tasks are accomplished, exams can serve to measure the progress of students, which can lead to an accurate measurement of teacher merit. The problems with using standardized exams stem from measurement. If measurements are faulty and utilized to reflect teacher-quality, the wrong teachers may be rewarded leading to lower teacher morale. Also, if a great deal of emphasis lies in test score analysis, an incentive formulates for teachers to cheat. While potential exists to utilize standardized tests in measuring teacher performance, alone they cannot fully serve to correctly group teachers into high and low quality groups.

What are the Characteristics of a Successful High School Graduate?

In the most idealistic sense, a successful high school graduate is one who proceeds to attend college or another institute of higher education, complete the program of study, and enter the workforce. This should be the long-term goal of increasing teacher quality, since obtaining a level of education higher than high school is essential in

³¹ Diette

the modern economy. In a recent speech given to Congress, President Obama asserted that:

Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation. And half of the students who begin college never finish.³²

Until attending and graduating post-secondary education become a realistic measurement, other factors can be used to determine the success of graduates. In 1991, then President Bush ordered the Department of Labor to conduct a study of skills necessary for high school graduates to transition into the workforce. The results provide a basic framework to understanding the abilities high school graduates should possess.

The findings were split into three levels defined as follows:

Basic Skills- reading, writing, arithmetic, and mathematics, speaking, and listening;
Thinking Skills- thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning;
Personal Qualities- individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity.³³

This discussion provides a broad set of characteristics to include in a discussion of successful graduates. Test scores could measure the category labeled basic skills, but as previously stated, is independently not enough to fully understand graduate success. Thinking skills and personal qualities, while more difficult to measure, are essential to entering the workforce. Possible methods of measurement could include providing courses and assessments that focus on presenting real world situations, studying careers,

³² White House Press Office, 1

³³ Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 3

and reenacting and responding to hypothetical situations that could occur in a real employment situation. Another aspect of this could be exit interviews with guidance counselors or psychologists, either from within the school or a more objective group, who could provide a more student specific analysis of the thinking skills and personal qualities the school's graduates have obtained.

It is important to conclude that the measurement of success previously discussed must be temporary, as schools strive to increase college attendance and graduation rates. In ten years, almost all students should be pursuing some form of post-secondary education. The performance of students in these programs compared to peers from other programs will provide the most accurate lens through which to scrutinize student performance.

Improving Teacher Quality

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While little has been done to actively examine and improve teacher quality, a task force was formulated to combat the upcoming exacerbation of the area's teacher shortage. Members of the state Legislature, teacher's associations, college representatives, county superintendents, personnel directors, teachers, and State Department of Education employees compose the task force.³⁴ This group has been charged with producing policy proposals to help reduce the teacher shortage. The primary recommendation of the task force argued for a rise in teacher salary.³⁵ They also suggested a recruitment and retention campaign, loosening certification restrictions allowing elementary school teachers to teach in middle schools, as well as utilization of Praxis exams to expand certification to other fields, providing financial incentives in the

³⁴ Task Force, 1

³⁵ Task Force, 1

form of loan forgiveness and signing bonuses, improve working conditions, formulate alternative routes to teacher certification, and increase continuing education opportunities.³⁶ These suggestions mirror those most strongly supported by the existing research to combat the shortage, but are vague and lack suggestions for implementation. Relaxing certifications seems to be the most problematic suggestion because while it may increase supply, it will cause a further decrease in teacher quality. Other proposals have been brought forth on the national and state level to attract and retain teachers without sacrificing quality.

Federal and State Proposals:

With this background information, it becomes possible to begin looking at potential methods being considered by the Federal and State government to providing and keeping better teachers in low-income rural schools. Rural areas often have enrollment that is too low to support charter schools--the isolated location prevents successful use of vouchers, and recent college graduates utilized by Teach for America often request placement near cities. Because these techniques have only been proven viable in urban areas, students in low-income rural schools often still attend classes with ineffective educators. Fortunately, both the Federal and State governments are formulating policy proposals to encourage effective teachers for all students, regardless of economic demographics or location.

Although I have mentioned aspects of state and national policy relating to teacher quality in rural West Virginia, it stands essential to further evaluate the steps being taken by both governments to improve teacher quality. First, an analysis of federal policy

³⁶ Task Force, 1

regarding teacher quality must be undertaken. The most notorious federal attempt to address and regulate teacher quality emulates from the No Child Left Behind Act of the Bush era. As previously discussed, it attempts to define teacher quality, and from there lays out a plan to improve the problem areas. Unfortunately, since the working definition of quality fails to fully account for teaching in rural schools, many of the policies resulting from the act leave much to be desired in rural education.

Under a new administration, education policy has again taken a prevalent place in political discourse. Barack Obama has been a staunch supporter of improving education from his early days in the Illinois State Senate. Obama and his administration consistently espouse the importance of education to our country. He emphasizes the essentiality of education, often stating, "Education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success, it is a prerequisite."³⁷ On the campaign trail, Obama promoted a plan for revamping the state of the education system, which he elaborated upon further after his election. Many of the fundamental elements of his proposal concern recruiting and rewarding effective teachers.

In order to attract, recruit, and retain educators, Obama wants to implement a scholarship fund for perspective teachers, which would provide payment for "four years of undergraduate or two years of graduate teacher education...in exchange for teaching for at least four years in a high-need field or location."³⁸ Since rural West Virginia would most certainly classify as high need, Obama essentially hopes to subsidize teacher education for people willing to teach in these schools. The appeal of this policy stems from the idea that an economically burdened, intelligent student interested in gaining a

³⁷ Jackson, 1

³⁸ Organizing for America

degree in education and returning to his or her rural home area to teach would not be deterred from attending or forced to accept employment at a higher paying institution to manage excessive debt. It also provides incentive for other graduates to relocate to a high-need school.

Another suggestion presented by Obama relates to teacher education programs. He argues that all teacher education programs should be accredited and champions a “voluntary national performance assessment ...[to] be sure that every new educator is trained and ready to walk into the classroom and start teaching effectively³⁹.” He also advocates creation of a Teacher Residency Program “that will supply 30,000 exceptionally well-prepared recruits to high-need schools.⁴⁰” Obama also hopes to establish mentoring programs for new teachers with financial awards for experienced teachers who elect to serve as mentors. This would theoretically help new educators with the transition from a teacher education program into the classroom.

The most controversial proposition found in Obama’s education plan concerns rewarding teachers with a merit pay system. This idea has traditionally been vehemently opposed by teacher’s unions, but Obama believes, “It is possible to find new ways to increase teacher pay that are developed with teachers, not imposed on teachers.⁴¹” Instead of using standardized tests to determine merit-based pay, Obama’s system would take into account extra effort expended by teachers, such as serving as mentors, teaching in underserved areas, increased levels of education and other skills beneficial to student

³⁹ Organizing for America

⁴⁰ Organizing for America

⁴¹ Meckler, 1

success, and consistent excellence in the classroom.⁴² This measurement may prove less controversial with teachers' unions than previous proposals based solely on standardized test scores.

West Virginia agrees with President Obama on the importance of mentors to new educators or educators in new positions. A state board of education policy demonstrates this shared value as it "Ensure[s] that mentors are provided for first year teachers and administrators, and teachers moving into assignments in a different endorsement area and/or programmatic level,"⁴³ Although the existing mentor program in West Virginia lacks financial incentives for mentors, it does attempt to create a smooth transition into the field for new teachers. If Obama's funding plan is enacted, this program could prove even more beneficial as more experienced teachers find an incentive to participate.

Additionally, West Virginia governor Joe Manchin asserts the importance of education to his state. He is currently attempting to progress West Virginia legislation, giving more power to principals and administrators in teacher hiring. Supporters believe it provides administrators with the leeway necessary to pick applicants who best fit the needs of the school. Opponents argue that this proposal will lead to increased nepotism and provide further opportunity for lower quality teachers to be placed in classrooms. Members of the House of Representatives Committee on Education chose not to consider this bill and have watered-down or ignored many others, causing the governor to articulate "...that he was frustrated with House education leaders because several of his initiatives were moving too slowly. He implied that committee members didn't want to

⁴² Education.com

⁴³ West Virginia Legislature

change the educational system because many are teachers.⁴⁴ His underlying argument in this statement stems from the fact that many teachers are satisfied with the status quo.

Other Suggestions for Promoting Enhanced Teacher Performance

A synchronic approach to enhancing the performance of educators fails to address the complex nature of the problems. In order to provide the greatest level of effectiveness, teachers must be seen as a diverse group with different routes to increasing quality. Improving teacher quality in rural West Virginia must be a comprehensive undertaking, addressing each of these diverse groups individually, as well as the teacher work-force as a whole. By approaching the problem from three different angles, results should prove most beneficial.

Initially, one must evaluate the state of current educators in West Virginia's rural schools. As established earlier, these teachers differ in quality ranging from highly qualified and effective to negligent and bordering on incompetence. It seems especially important to note that there are both high and low quality teachers in most schools. This paper does not assert that all teachers in low-income rural schools are low performing. It only purports that some are less effective, and steps must be taken to increase their level of effectiveness. Consideration of progressive continuing education and enhancement programs, as well as stricter requirements for obtaining and maintaining tenure afford the opportunity to propose ideas for increasing the performance of these currently practicing teachers.

The next important group consists of new teachers or students within the state's teacher education programs. Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher

⁴⁴ Knezevich,1

Quality claims that: “Schools of education fall short both in the quantity and quality of the teachers they prepare because they are attracting fewer and fewer teacher candidates who are themselves academically able.”⁴⁵ Since most teachers return to their home school districts to teach, improving the preparation they receive and the academic rigor of the program may prove invaluable to improving the effectiveness they insert into the school system upon graduation. I will present a case study of Glenville State College, which is a major contributor of educators within the state. Through an examination of its current teacher education program, its strengths and weaknesses will be ascertained. This analysis will be followed with recommendations for improving the program. If teacher education programs within the state produce more effective teachers who are more likely to remain in the immediate area, these advances should serve as a method of increasing teacher quality.

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Finally, I will scrutinize the challenges and benefits of attracting and retaining new teachers from outside the areas into the rural schools of West Virginia. Following the earlier establishment of the unique characteristics necessary to successfully teach in this environment, it will be prudent to scrutinize the desirability of attracting outside teachers and the structural obstacles that must be overcome for their success. I will frame this discussion around Teach for America, arguing that while beneficial, it would be incredibly difficult to incorporate these teachers into the current environment of rural West Virginia schools.

By addressing each of the groups above separately, I hope to establish a clearer view of the best ways to improve the quality of different teacher factions. After the

⁴⁵ Walsh, 7

conclusion of these arguments, I will discuss structural changes on a governmental level, like enhanced incentive programs, increased measures of accountability, and stricter certification requirements. Comprehensively, these measures will promote my suggestions for improving teacher quality, and ultimately, student performance in West Virginia.

The Role of Teacher Education Programs in Producing High-Quality Teachers

Many different institutions prepare educators to enter the teacher work force in West Virginia. One of these institutions that provides a large percentage of the state's teachers is Glenville State College, an institution that trains large numbers of teachers who reenter schools in rural areas throughout the state and plays a fundamental role in preparing the state's educators. In their course catalog, Glenville State College's Education Department asserts, "Currently, there are successful GSC graduates teaching in every county in the state."⁴⁶ The catalog goes on to claim that, "Upon completion of one of our programs, candidates not only understand the methodologies and techniques critical to becoming effective teachers, but they also realize the importance of caring for the students in their classrooms."⁴⁷ As praiseworthy as this concept seems, the coursework necessary for a Bachelor of Arts in Education seems less challenging than one might expect. There are many classes concerning pedagogy and methods of teaching, but the actual general education classes are very basic. For math, to earn an education degree prospective teachers must complete college algebra, geometry, and a statistics course. These classes are clearly beneficial to educators, but pale in comparison to the calculus course required of all Washington and Lee students. Calculus may be

⁴⁶ Glenville State College Course Catalog, 109

⁴⁷ Ibid, 109

unnecessary for those individuals planning to teach elementary students, but in order to create the best teachers, they must be held to high intellectual and academic standards.

Glenville also requires a one-semester internship spent in a school under a practicing teacher. This aspect of the program provides valuable experience before the teacher begins to work alone in a classroom. The teacher should be observing as well as doing a limited amount of teaching. It gives new teachers a more fluid transition from the role of student to the role of teacher.

Although this program is comparable to many others across the nation, I argue that it fails to fully prepare teachers. By placing more emphasis on pedagogy than on academic enrichment, it creates teachers who are not as educated as would be ideal. A course of general liberal arts study should be incorporated with the Teacher Education program to facilitate intellectually well-rounded teachers. Future teachers should also be required to major or minor in the area they plan to instruct.

From the Outside In: Attracting and Retaining Teachers from Different Areas

After discussing the specific skill set necessary to perform successfully as a teacher in a rural school, it is clear that the task is daunting. While attracting and hiring teachers from elite universities and bringing programs like Teach for America initially seem like great solutions to the problem, understanding the obstacles these individuals will face is essential. Since most teachers have been members of the community their whole lives, the community will most likely not enthusiastically receive outsiders who attempt to change the status quo and without connections to the community. A fundamental problem in rural West Virginia educational communities results from a mentality embracing the norm, the idea that whether right or wrong, it is the way it has

always been done, so there is no need to change. This discussion is not to assert a lack of value to this approach to improving teacher quality. It only attempts to establish that it is not the obviously most effective approach that many may believe it to be. To some extent attracting teachers from outside of the community may be a good thing, if they are prepared to deal with working in a system where community ties play an important role and are up to facing and overcoming this challenge.

In order to attract these outside teachers and programs to the community, some have argued for providing financial incentives. Increased financial incentives have been shown to have a positive correlation to recruitment and ability to retain teachers, and may be enough to recruit and/or keep teachers even if working conditions are less than ideal.⁴⁸ While the difficulties associated with teaching disadvantaged students cannot be changed, it seems that the answer lies in compensation.

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In a study of Virginia school districts, rural districts with high incentives hired 78% of teachers hired in these areas.⁴⁹ Support for financial incentives include reports that a teacher who is considering whether or not to accept or continue in a job with a low-level of satisfaction, can be persuaded, to some extent, to disregard the negative aspects of the position with a higher salary.⁵⁰ In fact, salary is shown to be a significant determinant in the ability to retain teachers. One study by Allred and Smith determined that of the teachers who left rural districts at the end of the 1984 school year, 43% left primarily because of their salary.⁵¹ This data provides sufficient evidence to indicate that

⁴⁸ Guarino 89, 92

⁴⁹ Reed and Busby

⁵⁰ Guarino, 105

⁵¹ Allred and Smith

some sort of financial compensation may be an effective tool in increasing teacher supply and retention in rural areas.

A common misconception is that teacher's unions could find financial incentives problematic. Unions such as the American Federation of Teachers have traditionally argued for an across-the-board pay scale. In reality, this is not the case; even the major teacher's unions support financial incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff schools.⁵²

It is important to acknowledge that not all researchers provide evidence supporting financial incentives for teachers working in low-income school districts. Some argue that using financial compensation may not be the most effective way to address the issue. Opponents of financial incentive plans believe rural schools can attract teachers with the positive aspects such as smaller classes, natural beauty, and greater ability to form interpersonal relationships.⁵³ Others cite evidence that teachers generally return to areas near where they grew up to teach as support for programs like Future Teachers of America.⁵⁴ These programs, often labeled "grow-your-own programs," encourage high school students to pursue teacher training by attending college and later returning to their home areas to teach.⁵⁵ While these programs may be very valuable, alone they are probably not enough to significantly ease the recruitment and retention issues facing rural schools. Additionally, they cost very little to implement and could easily be done along side greater financial incentives.

⁵² Prince, 14-17

⁵³ Monk, 160; Lemke, 3

⁵⁴ Monk, 169; Guarino, 109

⁵⁵ Guarino 108, 109

A minority of statistical studies is critical of providing financial incentives, claiming that they do not provide a statistically significant result. This argument draws on a study by Galchus that in certain school systems in which rising salaries existed, teacher quality did not increase.⁵⁶ Guarino attributes this result to a decrease in teacher demand because districts were willing to sacrifice quality to hire lower cost and less-qualified teachers.⁵⁷ They also purport that since job satisfaction seems very important to teachers, enhancing working conditions may be more effective than raising salaries.⁵⁸ Another criticism stems from the cost; it could be too expensive to provide the necessary amount to be an effective incentive, and even if teachers agree to work because of the incentive, it does not guarantee they will be effective.⁵⁹ While these may be potentially valid criticisms, it seems doubtful that they could prove to make providing financial incentives unsuccessful.

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It is important to note that providing financial incentives is not limited to salary increases. Although that alone could be effective, in order for the salary increase to be significant in the decision of where to accept a job, it might have to be larger than a state with West Virginia's limited budget can afford. Currently, 44.19% of West Virginia's budget funds public education.⁶⁰ The West Virginia State Lottery also contributes significantly to the funding of public schools.⁶¹ Therefore, additional aspects of financial compensation should be considered. The most important of these include bonuses for staying in low-income rural schools for a significant amount of time, educational loan

⁵⁶ Galchus

⁵⁷ Guarino, 94

⁵⁸ Guarino, 105

⁵⁹ Monk, 167

⁶⁰ West Virginia State Budget Office; General

⁶¹ West Virginia State Budget Office; Lottery

forgiveness programs, assistance with housing costs, financial subsidies for continuing education, child-care and transportation subsidies, and financial incentives for increased certifications.⁶² None of these incentive suggestions is mutually exclusive. In fact, ideally, a combination should be employed.

Improving the Performance of Current Teachers

The performance of teachers already in the classrooms of rural West Virginia schools presents another element necessary to examine. Since these are the educators currently afforded the task of working with the students who have earned less than mastery achievement levels, clearly, in some cases, alterations should be made to the teaching styles and methods they utilize. Increased continuation of education opportunities should be provided and encouraged, but should also be given incentive. By making them appealing to teachers on a personal level, as well as on the level of their students, teachers will be more likely to participate.

Teachers should also be informed of and given the resources to implement tactics research has shown to be effective in improving student performance, like hands-on activities and small group work. Teacher quality, while the most important factor in student achievement, must not be studied without acknowledging the role lack of resources plays in low student achievement levels. The fundamental method of improving teacher quality in rural West Virginia, applies to all three groups of teachers, but especially to those already in the classrooms.

Accountability and Rewards

⁶² Guarino, 90

As has been proposed by President Obama, merit pay and increased accountability if implemented efficiently could provide incentives for teachers to perform to their highest capacity level. Currently, the seniority system proves most important in determining whether teachers are retained. This is problematic because, as discussed earlier, experience does not necessarily correlate to quality.

I propose a system of increased accountability, where teachers are continually evaluated and challenged to excel. After teachers have gained certification and seniority within their district, there is a great risk for complacency. Combating this complacency should begin as soon as teachers enter the field. This should be done in two ways: positive reinforcement for high performance levels and sanctions for failure to perform at a satisfactory level. This statement begs the question of how to evaluate teacher performance to determine quality. As determined earlier, testing and experience alone are not enough, but each does have a place in this discussion.

When a new teacher is hired, he or she should be given a two-year probationary period during which he or she is evaluated by value added tests given to students at the beginning and end of the year. The teacher should also be given skills tests in all areas they are teaching, if they are teaching fifth grade or higher. A team of randomly selected teachers and administrators with at least one representative from outside of the school district should observe and evaluate the teacher's pedagogical skills and other aspects of classroom performance. Parents and students should also have the opportunity to provide feedback, as are college students when a professor seeks tenure. From this evaluation, at the end of two years, the teacher should either be retained, released, or remain on probation. If they remain on probation, they should have one more year to improve,

during which they should be participating in continuing education, assigned a mentor, and observing teachers who have been retained and deemed effective. They should be reevaluated after the one-year period and if they have not improved enough to be retained, should be released.

For teachers already in the system, their experience should be appreciated, but accountability must still increase. Each teacher should receive the same evaluation as a new teacher receives after two-years to establish a base analysis of the performance level. Students should be tested; the teacher should pass a skills test in the area(s) he or she is teaching, and should be observed. They should also receive the benefit of being kept, released, or placed on probation with a chance to improve. After this initial screening for new and experienced teachers, those retained should be reevaluated every five years.

These measures designed to increase accountability would not prove popular to many teachers without incentives, which is why it must be implemented with a complementary merit-pay system. Teacher pay in West Virginia is currently based on education level and experience, both important factors in teacher performance. As education level or experience increases, they should be rewarded with salary increases. Teachers who chose to work in low-income schools should have a yearly bonus added to their base compensation. There should also be bonus options for teachers who volunteer as mentors to other teachers, club heads, sports coaches, or take more than the required amounts of continuing education. After the two-year tenure review for new teachers and the initial evaluation for practicing teachers, those retained and deemed effective should receive a pay increase. Those placed on probation should remain at their current salary for the one-year probationary period. After the initial two-year evaluation, the teacher

evaluations move to five years, and with each of these evaluations the teacher should receive a salary increase if still deemed effective. By rewarding teachers in this manner, they will be encouraged to go above and beyond the basic responsibilities of the job.

Conclusion

By employing a multi-faceted approach to the issue of improving teacher quality and increasing the level of accountability and rewards within the profession, the performance of teachers could improve greatly. This improvement would benefit individual students, as well as the rest of the rural area's residents. If being a graduate of a high school in a low-income rural area provides skills employers' desire, the economy of the area will improve, helping to alleviate the grasp of poverty on the area.

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