

## Education Professors' Goals and Values

Idealism, good intentions, and progressivist thinking suffuse all that education professors strive to impart to prospective teachers. Their primary goal is preparing future instructors to be both change agents and lifelong learners. But these values, which are sincere and intensely held, are often in tension with policies that school districts and states pursue in their public schools. Further, teacher educators show only mild concern for real-world challenges such as managing classrooms and student discipline, implementing differentiated instruction, and working with state standards—even though K–12 teachers often say these are among the most difficult elements of teaching.

### ACTIVE, LIFELONG LEARNING

Professors of education convey a deep-seated idealism about their work. Strongly held and longstanding progressivist values, such as a love of learning and child-centered education, drive the lessons they hope to impart to prospective teachers. To them, education is more than just a vehicle for shaping students into functioning members of society; it is an enduring passion, a purpose unto itself. For example, 82 percent say it is absolutely essential to develop teachers who are themselves lifelong learners. As one professor in our focus groups put it, “I want my students to walk away knowing that it’s a continual process. They will have to become lifelong learners....It doesn’t just stop when you leave college.”

Teachers of teachers also believe that learning requires active participation and engagement. The proper role of the teacher is to be a “facilitator of learning” (84 percent), not a “conveyor of knowledge” (11 percent). “I’ve seen the curriculum change from when memory was all you had to do. If you had a good memory, you could survive in college anywhere in the world,” one education professor explained. “Today, it’s more critical thinking. That’s what we are trying to produce, teachers who are critical thinkers who can teach their students to be critical thinkers.”

In the minds of professors, education is a subtle, complex, and continuous enterprise, not something that can be easily reduced to a simple set of goals, standards, and metrics. When asked whether they would rather have students struggle with the process of finding the correct answers than actually know

the right answers, a vast majority (66 percent to 20 percent) would rather that students struggle. (Another 14 percent are unsure.)

These views define the core values and fundamental orientation of professors toward teaching and have shifted very little since the questions were first posed more than a decade ago (see Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> This stability and continuity in values contrasts sharply with sizable shifts in views toward hot-button issues, which we discuss in Chapter 2.

### VALUES CONFLICT WITH REAL-WORLD EXPECTATIONS

Because they feel so strongly about fostering student engagement and a love of learning, professors' views are often at odds with today's dominant policy trends and educational practices.

State standards are one example. Since 2002, NCLB has required states to set and implement standards, tests, and accountability systems. Moreover, as of August 2010, more than three-quarters of the states had adopted *common* academic standards in English language arts and mathematics, as put forth by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers.<sup>8</sup> Yet only 24 percent of professors participating in this survey believe it absolutely essential to produce "teachers who understand how to work with the state's standards, tests and accountability systems."

### CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT—NOT A PRIORITY

New K–12 classroom teachers sometimes complain about getting too much theory and not enough training in classroom management or student discipline.<sup>9</sup> But such practical matters are not a top priority for education professors:

7. Farkas, Steve and Jean Johnson, with Ann Duffett. 1997. *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education*. New York: Public Agenda.

8. See Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/>.

9. In a recent national survey of first-year teachers, 45 percent reported that their education training put too much emphasis on the theory and philosophy of education, 3 percent said it put too much emphasis on handling the practical challenges of teaching, and 50 percent said it struck the right balance between the two. National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda. 2007. *Lessons Learned: New Teachers Talk About Their Jobs, Challenges and Long-Range Plans*, Washington, D.C. and New York: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda. [http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/lessons\\_learned\\_1.pdf](http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/lessons_learned_1.pdf).

Figure 1

ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

Teacher education programs can impart different qualities to their students. Which of the following qualities do you think are most essential and which are least essential? (Percent responding “absolutely essential”)



Percentages in figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or omission of answer categories. Question wording may be edited for space, but full question wording is available in Appendix B. Small discrepancies between percentages in the text and those in the appendix are due to rounding.

## 1. Political Identification and its Impact on Professors' Point of View

Education professors view their work through a broader ideological and political lens. Democrats outnumber Republicans among survey respondents by a 4-to-1 ratio (65 percent to 16 percent), and partisan leanings show higher correlations with survey responses than any other demographic variable:

- About a third of both groups have a positive view of alternative teacher certification programs, with 35 percent of Republican and 33 percent of Democratic professors agreeing that such programs are “a good way to attract unconventional talent to the public schools.” But when the issue is framed as an Obama administration initiative to open up as many avenues as possible to recruit new teachers, differences emerge: 51 percent of Republicans oppose the idea compared with 35 percent of Democrats.
- Fifty-nine percent of Republican professors, compared with 29 percent of their Democratic counterparts, believe that public schools’ primary goal for students who are new immigrants should be to “absorb America’s language and culture as quickly as possible,” even if it means neglecting their native language and culture.
- Far more Republicans than Democrats (63 percent to 44 percent) believe that teacher tenure is an obstacle to improving schools.

So long as teachers rely on engaging instructional techniques that tap their students’ allegedly innate love of learning, behavior and classroom management will happen naturally. Fewer than half (42 percent) say it is absolutely essential for teacher education programs to produce “teachers trained in pragmatic issues of running a classroom such as managing time and preparing lesson plans.” Even fewer (37 percent) believe it is absolutely essential to focus on developing “teachers who maintain discipline and order in the classroom.”

As one Ohio professor explained: “If you are engaging the students, and the students are considered members of a learning community, then you don’t need to worry that much about the discipline. It takes care of itself.” Half of the professors surveyed (50 percent) believe that “when a public school teacher faces a disruptive class, it probably means that he or she has failed to make lessons engaging enough.”

## PHONICS AND MATH FACTS—NOT A PRIORITY

Most education professors are reluctant to endorse instructional strategies such as phonics or memorization of math facts, likely because these conjure images of students engaged in “rote” work or dull repetition. Just 36 percent of education professors say it is absolutely essential to “teach math facts such as memorization of the multiplication tables” in the early grades and only 44 percent say it is absolutely essential, in the early grades, to “teach phonics and phonemic awareness when teaching literacy” (see Figure 2). Not only do these attitudes likely put professors at odds with conventional wisdom, but they contradict the recommendations of national panels that have explicitly endorsed these instructional techniques for the early grades.<sup>10</sup>

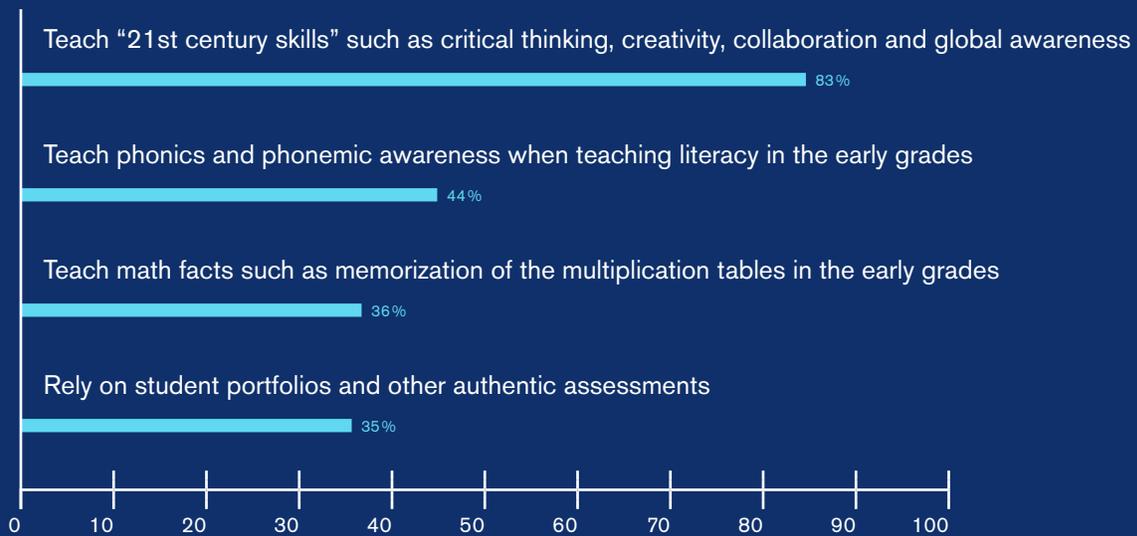
In the same vein, teaching “21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and global awareness” in the public schools is absolutely essential, according to 83 percent of professors. But just 23 percent say it is absolutely essential to impart to their students “the importance of stressing correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.” Interpersonal and critical skills clearly trump practical knowledge in terms of professors’ priorities.

10. National Reading Panel. 2000. “Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction.” *Report of the National Reading Panel*, 9. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. See also, National Mathematics Advisory Panel. 2008. “The Final Report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel,” xiv. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

Figure 2

## ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL PRIORITIES FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

How important is it for teachers in public schools to do the following in their classes?  
(Percent responding “absolutely essential”)



Percentages in figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or omission of answer categories. Question wording may be edited for space, but full question wording is available in Appendix B. Small discrepancies between percentages in the text and those in the appendix are due to rounding.

### 1. Political Identification and its Impact on Professors' Point of View (continued)

On issues of pedagogy, political identifications drive sharp rifts in the data:

- Republican professors are more likely to believe that it is absolutely essential for public school teachers to teach math facts, such as memorization of the multiplication tables, in the early grades (50 percent versus 33 percent of Democrats) and that early use of calculators can hamper math learning in the elementary school grades (52 percent versus 37 percent).
- Similarly, Republican professors are more likely to believe that it is absolutely essential to teach phonics and phonemic awareness in the early grades (56 percent versus 41 percent of Democrats) and that “competition for rewards such as spelling bees or honor rolls is a valuable incentive for student learning” (54 percent versus 27 percent).
- Professors who identify as Democrats, however, are more likely to think it absolutely essential for public school teachers to rely on “student portfolios and other authentic assessments” (40 percent of Democrats versus 21 percent of Republicans) and for teacher education programs to prepare teachers to address the challenges of high-needs students in urban districts (41 percent versus 25 percent).

Even age-old, seemingly innocuous, school activities like “competition for rewards such as spelling bees or honor rolls” run into resistance, with only 35 percent of professors willing to say they can be valuable incentives for student learning. Professors want school-age students to seek knowledge because they are curious and love to learn, not because of a seemingly crass desire for rewards. Encouraging team work and collaboration is preferable to competition that results in winners and losers.

### HIGH-NEEDS, URBAN SCHOOLS

Since improving low-performing, inner-city schools is arguably the chief education challenge presently facing policymakers and the nation, one might expect education professors to emphasize teaching strategies as they relate to disadvantaged students. But this is not the case: Just 39 percent think it absolutely essential “to create teachers who are trained to address the challenges of high-needs students in urban districts.” In addition, by a larger than three to one margin (73 percent to 20 percent), they say that, for the U.S. to live up to its ideals of justice and equality, it is more important for public schools to “focus equally on all students, regardless of their backgrounds or achievement levels” rather than to “focus on raising the achievement of disadvantaged students who are struggling academically” (see Figure 3).<sup>11</sup>

In fact, discussion of the “achievement gap” was not initiated by professors in any of the focus groups. When moderators asked the Ohio group why this was so, one professor explained it thusly: “We discuss the achievement gap so much among ourselves....Behind every single comment that was made, was really the schools that are struggling the most are urban schools and the achievement gap is certainly greater in those areas.”

Nor are education professors keen on the idea of a “scripted” approach to teaching inner-city students, a current trend in some low-performing schools and districts. More than half (54 percent) reject the view that “lower-income students in inner-city schools have a greater need for structured, teacher-directed instruction than middle class or suburban students.” (Almost four in ten [39 percent], however, say the statement comes close to their view.) One Los Angeles

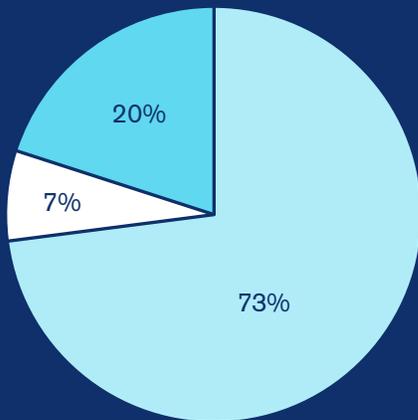
11. A survey of third through twelfth grade public school teachers shows a margin that is even wider: 86 percent versus 11 percent. See Steve Farkas and Ann Duffett. 2008. *High Achieving Students in the Era of NCLB: Results from a National Teacher Survey (Part 2)*. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

Figure 3 COMPETING PRIORITIES OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

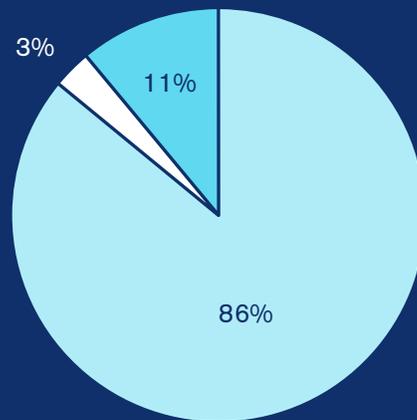
For the public schools to help the U.S. live up to its ideals of justice and equality, do you think it's more important that they:

- Focus on raising the achievement of disadvantaged students who are struggling academically
- Focus equally on all students, regardless of their backgrounds or achievement levels
- Not sure

Education Professors



Public School Teachers



Percentages in figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or omission of answer categories. Question wording may be edited for space, but full question wording is available in Appendix B. Small discrepancies between percentages in the text and those in the appendix are due to rounding.

## 2. Minority Education Professors

About one in ten education professors responding to the survey are minority—that is, mostly African American and Hispanic. Their views differ from those of their white colleagues across a number of questions related to disadvantaged students:

- Minority education professors are more focused on training teachers to address the challenges of high-needs students in urban districts (58 percent versus 37 percent of whites).
- They are much more likely to want public schools to focus on raising the achievement of struggling, disadvantaged students rather than on raising the achievement of all students (45 percent versus 17 percent).
- And they are more likely to say it is absolutely essential for teachers to have high expectations of all their students (78 percent versus 68 percent).

Minority professors are also more likely than their white peers to:

- Believe that the public schools should maintain the language and culture of students who are immigrants rather than focus on absorbing American culture and language (65 percent versus 44 percent).
- Support the idea of alternative certification—that is, to think alternative programs “are a good way to attract unconventional talent to the public schools” (46 percent versus 31 percent), and to think the Obama administration’s initiative to “open up every avenue possible to recruit new teachers” is on the right track (59 percent versus 38 percent).
- Support Teach For America (75 percent versus 62 percent).

participant remarked, “Part of being a teacher is the intuitive understanding of where a kid is and just kind of holistically where they are in the process of gaining knowledge. And if you are tied to a script, tied to a lock-step pattern, there isn’t any movement for being able to adjust to the needs of your class.”

## TEACHING YOUNG IMMIGRANTS

When asked about how best to approach teaching students who are new immigrants, education professors stand apart from a different group of “experts”—the immigrants themselves. Professors are more likely to believe that public schools should help young immigrants maintain their original language and culture (47 percent) rather than “absorb America’s language and culture as quickly as possible, even if their native language and culture are neglected” (36 percent).<sup>12</sup> Another 18 percent say they are not sure. These results differ sharply from a national survey of immigrants, in which 74 percent thought it more important for schools to teach new immigrants English “as quickly as possible,” even if that meant falling behind in other subjects.<sup>13</sup>

## DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Half of the education professors surveyed (51 percent) say it is absolutely essential to train teachers to differentiate instruction in their classrooms. But here again the ideal appears disconnected from the practical—and the professors appear to know it. The vast majority (81 percent) acknowledge that it is difficult to tailor instruction to match the individual needs of students on a daily basis in the classroom.<sup>14</sup>

The disparity between the ideal and the real leads education professors to sympathize with the plight of classroom teachers. As one professor explained, “We are asking teachers to be more integrative, to be more focused on the interests of the children, to be more focused on individualizing.... Yet we are still talking twenty-

12. Interesting divides appear in these data when broken out by political affiliation. Fifty-nine percent of Republican professors—compared with 29 percent of their Democratic counterparts—believe that public schools’ primary goal for students who are new immigrants should be to “absorb America’s language and culture as quickly as possible, even if their native language and culture are neglected.”

13. Bittle, Scott, and Jonathan Rochkind, with Paul Gasbarra and Amber Ott. 2009. *A Place to Call Home: What Immigrants Say Now About Life in America*, 53. New York: Public Agenda and Carnegie Corporation. <http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/Immigration.pdf>.

14. A similar number of third through twelfth grade public school teachers (84 percent) report that differentiated instruction is difficult for them to implement in their own classrooms.

five kids in a classroom and one teacher....We don't have homogeneous classrooms anymore and our teachers are still being treated as if everybody is homogeneous, so it doesn't work." In the focus groups, some called for more money or smaller classes to make differentiated instruction more feasible—both of which seem unlikely in tight economic times. No professor asked whether education schools need to change their ways, and no one suggested a modified approach to make differentiated instruction more workable in today's classrooms.

## AGENTS OF CHANGE

From state standards to classroom management, from technology to pedagogical issues, education professors pursue objectives that sometimes ignore—and even contradict—the policies and challenges that their students will face as actual teachers.

The K–12 school system sometimes resists. In the focus groups, for example, a few education professors reported that districts and classroom teachers are refusing to work with their student teachers, concerned that the agenda of the education school will hinder efforts to meet accountability requirements. One professor said, "We are trying to get our students to get out and do what research is showing to be best practice....But the teachers are [saying], 'I still have to do this chapter in the math book. I have to do this topic in science because that's what the Ohio standards say I have to do this year.'" Another said, "We are having school districts refuse to have us come in because of the accountability and the assessment process. Because the teachers are saying, 'I'm held responsible for this student, for my class. My scores are what are published.' [sic]"

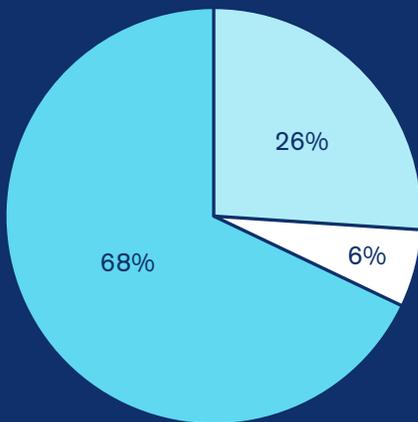
But despite this pushback, most education professors appear comfortable with their approach, perhaps because they do not define their mission as training teachers for actual classrooms. For instance, when asked to choose between two competing philosophies regarding the role of teacher educator, just 26 percent prefer that of preparing their students "to work effectively within the realities of today's public schools"; the majority (68 percent) choose the philosophy of preparing students "to be change agents who will reshape education by bringing new ideas and approaches to the public schools" (see Figure 4).

Professors appear to be saying that it is the real world that needs to change, not them. As they see it, each wave of new teachers they send into the nation's classrooms should challenge the status quo and provoke change. Thus, the disconnect between the real world and the ivory tower is not only one of their own making, but conscious and purposeful.

Figure 4 TEACHER-EDUCATOR PHILOSOPHIES

Which comes closer to your own philosophy of your role as teacher educator? To prepare future teachers to:

- Be change agents who will reshape education by bringing new ideas and approaches to the public schools
- Work effectively within the realities of today's public schools—e.g., state mandates, limited budgets, and beleaguered administrators
- Not sure



Percentages in figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or omission of answer categories. Question wording may be edited for space, but full question wording is available in Appendix B. Small discrepancies between percentages in the text and those in the appendix are due to rounding.