INTRODUCTION

"We only think when we are confronted with a problem," John Dewey once said. The professors who walk the halls of our nation's education schools must be thinking a lot these days. For such institutions and professors, these are challenging times.

The very essence of their mission—training tomorrow's K–12 classroom teachers—has come under fire. President Obama's Secretary of Education says that schools of education need "revolutionary change." A study led by Arthur Levine, former president of Columbia University Teachers College, concludes that "taken as a whole, the nation's teacher education programs would have to be described as inadequate."[4] Nor are such challenges confined to the speeches and research studies of policymakers and education leaders. Alternative teacher preparation and certification programs are launching across the country, directly challenging the bread and butter of these institutions.

This is an excellent time, therefore, to go to the best informants possible—education professors themselves—and ask for their perspectives on the challenges they confront. How do they view their own roles and those of their institutions? How do they respond to criticism? How open are they to reform ideas? What do they think about alternative programs—their competition?

Much of what we find reveals a great deal of churn, ambivalence, and even confusion. Education professors evince divided opinions on many issues, some defensiveness, and a remarkable willingness to criticize educator-preparation programs such as their own. Many of the questions we pose are repeated from a 1997 Fordham-initiated survey of professors of education and reveal shifts in attitudes that are fairly unusual in their size and consistency of direction.[5] Other attitudes have barely budged. Two subsets within the professoriate are so intensely different that we have named them Reformers and Defenders. In several areas, the views of teacher educators conflict with the policies that school districts and states pursue in today's public schools—and with the express needs of new teachers themselves.

This is a study of teacher educators—that is, the instructors and professors who prepare our children's classroom teachers. The survey that informs *Cracks in the Ivory Tower?* covered a wide variety of topics, including the quality of teacher-education programs; preferences in terms of pedagogy; opinions on NCLB, teacher tenure, state and national standards, and other measures of accountability for students and teachers; as well as views on alternatives to the traditional system of teacher education.

4. Levine, Arthur. 2006. *Educating School Teachers*. Washington, D.C.: The Education Schools Project. http://www.edschools.org/pdf/Educating_Teachers_Report.pdf.
5. Farkas, Steve and Jean Johnson, with Ann Duffett. 1997. *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education*. New York: Public Agenda.

STUDY METHODS

The FDR Group's approach to opinion research is to include qualitative research at the initial phase of a project before designing closed-ended survey questions. In this case, by interviewing teacher educators face to face—whether in focus groups before the survey was crafted or during the pre-testing stage, or via telephone after the survey was fielded—we placed great emphasis on giving teacher educators a chance to talk in their own words about the things that matter to them. As a result of their participation, the questionnaire was improved, the topics covered more pertinent, and the word choice more appropriate.

Two things made this study unusually tricky to accomplish. First, the issues covered in the survey are complicated; inevitably, some professors felt that a survey with closed-ended questions would result in over-simplification of complex viewpoints. As one professor wrote after completing the survey, "There were many questions where the answer I would have given lies somewhere in the middle." Consequently, many reported that they chose the "not sure" category rather than be forced into answers that didn't capture their complete views. We take these concerns seriously; thus, we make sure to report "not sure" responses in the text when their percentages are unusually large, and we include direct quotes from the focus groups to illustrate survey findings and tease out finer distinctions.[6] Second, a few study participants suspected that the research was politically inspired and would be used to assault education schools. It is certainly true that these are politically charged times for education in general and schools of education are no different. Throughout the study, we sought to reassure those professors who had doubts. We believe that this report stands on its own as a fair, nonpartisan rendering of the views of education professors.

The study is based on survey findings from a nationwide, randomly selected sample of 716 teacher educators from four-year colleges. While they may not teach exclusively in education departments, each teaches college students who are training to be elementary, middle, or high school teachers. The margin of error for the overall sample is plus or minus four percentage points; it is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups. The findings also are based on qualitative data from three focus groups conducted in Ohio, North Carolina, and California. In general, the findings from the focus groups serve to contextualize the survey data and provide illustrative examples of professors' personal experiences. The complete methodology is included in Appendix A, and the entire questionnaire and survey results are included in Appendix B.

6. Appendix B includes "not sure" responses for all questions on the survey.