

[<<Back to Delaware Education News](#)

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IN THIS ISSUE:

[New Teachers: 'I Wasn't Prepared for the Challenges of Teaching in a Diverse Classroom'; Third in Series of Reports on First-Year Teachers Identifies Two Insufficient Areas of Training - Teaching in Diverse Classrooms and Working With Special-Needs Students](#)

[Public Schools As Good As Private Schools in Raising Math Scores, Study Says](#)

[One Quarter of Science and Math Students Have 'Out-of-Field' Teachers: Students in Higher Poverty Schools More Likely to Have Such Teachers](#)

[Parental Involvement Strongly Impacts Student Achievement](#)

[New Teachers: 'I Wasn't Prepared for the Challenges of Teaching in a Diverse Classroom'; Third in Series of Reports on First-Year Teachers Identifies Two Insufficient Areas of Training - Teaching in Diverse Classrooms and Working With Special-Needs Students](#)

Public Agenda and the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality has released research that points to two specific areas where teacher training may be lacking, according to rookie teachers in the trenches and fresh from training: preparedness for the diversity of the contemporary American classroom and teaching students with special needs.

Seventy-six percent of new teachers said that teaching an ethnically diverse student body was covered in their training. But only 39 percent say that their training in this area helps them a lot now that they are in the classroom, which puts their evaluation of the effectiveness of this aspect of their training

near the bottom of the list of subjects the new teachers had studied. The survey covered 12 areas of teacher training ranging from direct instruction to their study of history, philosophy and policy debates in public education. No other factor examined in the Public Agenda research showed nearly as great a gap between how many received training in a given area and new teachers' assessments of the effectiveness of said training.

This final report of the "Lessons Learned" series, "Teaching in Changing Times" focuses on the strengths and possible deficits of the training new teachers say they receive. The new report and complete questionnaire are available to media prior to release at:

<http://www.publicagenda.org/LessonsLearned3>

The first report in the "Lessons Learned" series (<http://www.publicagenda.org/LessonsLearned1>) described the differences between the views and experiences of new secondary and elementary teachers. The second looked at the views of teachers coming into the field from three prominent alternate route programs (<http://www.publicagenda.org/LessonsLearned2>).

Many new teachers also reported inadequacies in the training they received for teaching children with special needs. Most new teachers (82 percent) say their training in had covered this aspect of teaching, but only 47 percent say their training helps a lot. This is a particularly important area for training, the report notes, because nearly every new teacher reported having at least some children with special needs in their classroom - only 5 percent reported having no students with special needs.

The entire "Lessons Learned: New Teachers Talk About Their Jobs, Challenges and Long-Term Plans" series is online at:

<http://www.publicagenda.org/LessonsLearned>

Suburban Surprise

The anxiety about dealing with diverse classrooms - the sense of being unprepared and untrained in this area - is greater among new teachers in more upscale communities. Most new teachers working in both high-needs and in wealthier schools say they were taught how to teach in an ethnically diverse student body, but new teachers who work in high-needs schools are significantly more likely to say that their training does, in fact, help them, with nearly half (47 percent) saying that their training helps them a lot. By contrast, less than a third (32 percent) of the new teachers in more affluent schools find their training in this area helpful.

Training is Otherwise "Comprehensive and Useful"

Experts and school critics have sometimes attacked teacher-training programs for being out of touch with reality, but many first-year teachers do not agree. They report that their training covered a wide number of topics from teaching specific subject areas to knowing how to manage a classroom and maintain discipline.

Ninety-two percent say their training included coursework on children's cognitive, emotional and psychological development and roughly half (49 percent) find it to be helpful in the classroom. When it comes to direct instruction, of the 84 percent who learned the technique in training, 68 percent say it helps them a lot now. And on classroom management and discipline, large majorities (78 percent) said their training addressed the subject, with 58 percent reporting that their training was helpful.

Everyone Wants Smaller Classes

The challenge of diverse classrooms is also reflected in the judgments new teachers make about what would really help them improve teaching and student learning. The researchers presented new teachers with a list of 14 proposals to improve teacher quality. Two items topped the list and were significantly ahead of all the others. Seventy-six percent of new teachers say reducing class size would be very effective at improving teacher quality, and 63 percent say the same about preparing teachers to meet the needs of a diverse classroom.

The first edition of the "Lessons Learned" series ("They're Not Little Kids Anymore: The Special Challenges of New Teachers in High Schools and Middle Schools") reported that, for strong majorities of the new teachers regardless of their grade level, the same two items topped their list of recommendations for improving the profession overall. In the second edition of the series, focusing on the experiences of teachers who come to teaching through alternate routes rather than traditional university teacher training programs ("Working Without a Net"), both new alt-route teachers and new traditionally-trained teachers placed smaller class size at the very top of their reform wish list, and there was substantial interest in beefing up preparation to teach in ethnically diverse schools and classrooms.

Public Schools As Good As Private Schools in Raising Math Scores, Study Says

Students in public schools learn as much or more math between kindergarten and fifth grade as similar students in private schools, according to a new University of Illinois study of multi-year, longitudinal data on nearly 10,000 students.

The results of the study appear in the May issue of the influential education journal Phi Delta Kappan.

“These data provide strong, longitudinal evidence that public schools are at least as effective as private schools in boosting student achievement,” according to the authors, education professor Christopher Lubienski, doctoral student Corinna Crane and education professor Sarah Theule Lubienski.

The new study is the first published study to show that public schools are at least as effective as private schools at promoting student learning over time, they say.

Combined with other, yet-unpublished studies of the same data, which produced similar findings, “we think this effectively ends the debate about whether private schools are more effective than publics,” said Christopher Lubienski, whose research has dealt with all aspects of alternative education.

This is important, he said, because many current reforms, such as No Child Left Behind, charter schools and vouchers for private schools, are based on that assumption.

After controlling for demographic differences among students and schools, the researchers’ found that public school students began kindergarten with math scores roughly equal to those of their Catholic school peers. By fifth grade, however, they had made significantly greater gains, equal to almost an extra half year of schooling.

Part of the explanation, Sarah Lubienski said, might lie in the fact that Catholic schools have fewer certified teachers and employ fewer reform-oriented mathematics teaching practices – something they found in research for another study, accepted for publication in the American Journal of Education.

Public school students also “rivalled the performance of students in other (non-Catholic) private schools,” the researchers wrote. After adjusting for demographics and initial kindergarten scores, they found that achievement gains between kindergarten and fifth grade were roughly equal.

Put another way by Sarah Lubienski, "school type alone doesn't explain very much of why these scores vary ... in truth, whether the school is public or private doesn't seem to make that much difference."

The researchers go on to write that they "personally see private schools as an integral part of the American system of education" and "there are many valid reasons why parents choose private schools and why policymakers may push for school choice."

Academic achievement, however, may no longer be one of those reasons, they write. "Claims that simply switching students from one type of school to another will result in higher scores appear to be unfounded."

They suggest "moving away from a simple focus on school type and instead examining what happens within schools."

One Quarter of Science and Math Students Have 'Out-of-Field' Teachers: Students in Higher Poverty Schools More Likely to Have Such Teachers

Twenty-six percent of secondary-level science and math students in public schools were taught by teachers who did not have "in-field" majors or state certification in the 2003-04 school year, according to a new Child Trends study, *Qualifications of Public School Teachers for Science, Mathematics, And History*. Students in higher poverty schools and students with less experienced teachers were more likely to be taught by "out-of-field" teachers.

Among secondary-level science and math students in the 2003-04 school year:

- 58 percent had a teacher with a postsecondary major in the specific science or math field that they were teaching.
- 61 percent had a teacher with an in-field regular state certification.
- 45 percent had a teacher with both qualifications.
- 26 percent had a teacher with neither qualification.

Students of both math and science in lower poverty schools (where fewer than 50 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) were more likely to be taught by teachers with in-field qualifications than were students in higher poverty schools (where 50 percent or more of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch).

- 64 percent of students in lower poverty schools had teachers with an in-field state certification, compared to 53 percent of students in higher poverty schools.

- 23 percent of students in lower poverty schools had a teacher with no in-field certification or major, as opposed to 35 percent of students in higher poverty schools.

Students of veteran teachers (with 6 or more years of teaching experience) had in-field certified teachers more often than students of newer teachers (with 5 or fewer years of experience).

- 67 percent of students of veteran teachers had an in-field certified teacher, compared to 45 percent of students with newer teachers.

- 11 percent of students with veteran teachers were taught by teachers without a regular certification in any subject, compared to 58 percent of students of newer teachers.

The study also examines secondary-level history teachers. Among history students in the 2003-04 school year:

- 62 percent had a teacher with a postsecondary major in the specific science or math field that they were teaching.

- 79 percent had a teacher with an in-field regular state certification.

- 53 percent had a teacher with both qualifications.

- 12 percent had a teacher with neither qualification.

Parental Involvement Strongly Impacts Student Achievement

New research from the University of New Hampshire shows that students do

much better in school when their parents are actively involved in their education.

Researchers Karen Smith Conway, professor of economics at the University of New Hampshire, and her colleague Andrew Houtenville, senior research associate at New Editions Consulting, found that parental involvement has a strong, positive effect on student achievement.

The research is reported in "Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement," which appears in the spring 2008 issue of the *Journal of Human Resources*.

"Parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, and the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is substantial. We found that schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than \$1,000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement," Conway said.

Parents seemed particularly interested in the academic achievements of their daughters. The researchers found parents spent more time talking to their daughters about their school work during dinnertime discussions.

"There are a number of theories about why girls seem to garner more attention from their parents than boys. One possibility is that girls are more communicative with their parents so these conversations about academics are easier for parents to have with their daughters," Conway said.

The researchers also found that parents may reduce their efforts when school resources increase, thus diminishing the effects of improved school resources.

"As an economist, I look for reactions to a specific action so it is not surprising to me that parents may scale back their involvement with their child's education when a school adds resources. As a result, increasing school resources may not be as effective as we expect since they may diminish parental involvement," Conway said.

The researchers used national data from more than 10,000 eighth-grade students in public and private schools, their parents, teachers, and school administrators. The researchers were particularly interested in how frequently parents discussed activities or events of particular interest to the child, discussed things the child studied in class, discussed selecting courses or programs at school, attended a school meeting, and volunteered at the child's school.

