

2008-09 Principal Feedback Summary from Institutional Reports

During fall 2008-winter 2009, each teacher preparation institution in Michigan was asked to gather input from school principals about the preparation of new teachers and to share the resulting information with teacher preparation faculty.

Thirty-one institutions reported to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), identifying the type of data collection (survey or focus group), how they identified the principals and the resulting response/participation, and findings. Of the 31 institutions, fourteen held focus groups and seventeen carried out surveys (In a few cases, the institutions relied on existing advisory groups or regularly collected surveys rather than more specific principal-only reporting devices). Response rates ranged from 10% to 86%, with all but nine institutions having response rates below 50%.

There were two consortia approaches to this work. The metropolitan Detroit consortium consisted of Wayne State University, University of Detroit Mercy, University of Michigan-Dearborn and Marygrove College, who collaborated on a joint focus group with representatives of districts they all serve. As well, an Upper Peninsula consortium consisted of Lake Superior State University, Northern Michigan University and Michigan Technological University, who contacted all Upper Peninsula principals for feedback. The consortium approach is a way to reach principals without overburdening them with requests from multiple colleges in their region. Findings from consortia approaches were weighted by the number of institutions involved for these rough trend data. Note that a few feedback efforts did not have much detail on the findings.

Institutions shared with the MDE a few broad themes that principals identified during this activity. MDE staff reviewed the reports, identified categories of themes and looked for patterns of common response. The following is a summary of themes identified across at least five institutions.

1. Principals expressed overall satisfaction with new teachers from Michigan institutions but many noted that their districts are not hiring or have not hired in the last couple years. In some cases, this satisfaction is based upon observations of student teachers and interns as well as new employees.
2. Positive statements about teacher preparation were noted in the following arenas:
 - Knowledge of content area
 - Technology
 - Professionalism
 - Reflective practice
 - Knowledge of federal/state initiatives

- Collaborative approaches/teamwork
 - Establishing a positive classroom environment
 - Classroom management
 - Work ethic/dedication
 - Several institutions heard that their graduates were exceptionally able and sought after
3. Areas principals identified for preparation institutions to improve candidate ability now include:
- Classroom management and time management
 - Applying research-based strategies to monitoring and assessing student progress, including using assessment results to inform instruction
 - Applying differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms (ELL as well as other), including cultural awareness re English as a Second Language students
 - Communicating with parents
 - Modeling professional behavior
 - Teaching reading to all students/ diverse students
 - Emphasizing practice over theory
 - Needing multiple grade level placements, experiences before student teaching
4. Areas principals identified as especially needed for the future of teaching/school success include:
- Creativity and problem solving
 - Professional learning community expectations
 - Even more integration of technology to support instruction
 - Emphasize relationships/ teamwork
 - Reaching - and caring about - all students
 - Using assessment results to make classroom instruction effective
5. Common themes:
- Importance of mentors--good new teachers need excellent mentors
 - New teachers need reflection on own progress and goals.
 - "Student teachers need more experience talking with parents"

The presence of overall satisfaction with preparation, the relatively low numbers of new teachers hired in Michigan at present, and the earnest efforts of preparation institutions to identify and use principal input suggest that this low-stakes approach to principal perspective is sufficient at present. It is not recommended that the MDE require more uniform methods, teacher-specific data or a common metric unless and until Michigan schools are able to hire more of the state's newly produced teachers. Without sufficient hiring, common metrics would suggest a degree of precision to the effort that is not warranted.