

Research compares new teachers, veterans

By WILL SENTELL

Capitol news bureau

Published: Aug 25, 2006

Up to half the colleges and universities in Louisiana are preparing new teachers whose impact on student achievement is similar to veteran teachers', an LSU professor told the state Board of Regents on Thursday.

Which schools are producing the best teachers and which are struggling will not be identified until next year, said George Noell, an associate professor of psychology at LSU who is leading the research.

The early findings are based on one year of data.

Noell said he needs at least two years of data before the strengths and weaknesses of schools are released.

"I know there are people anxious to have names now," he told the state Board of Regents, which launched the effort two years ago.

The board is the top governing authority for higher education in Louisiana.

Louisiana could be the first state in the nation to rate teacher training based on how students fare in the classroom. The ratings are part of a push that began in 2001 to overhaul teacher training.

The state also could use the new findings to get teachers into classrooms where they are needed the most. Teacher quality is considered a huge factor in student performance.

One of the initial results has challenged the long-held view that it generally takes four or five years in the classroom for teachers to gain the effectiveness of a veteran.

Noell's figures show 45 percent to 50 percent of the teacher preparation programs studied are preparing teachers whose contribution to their students' achievement is comparable to veterans.

Up to 20 percent of the teacher training programs produced teachers who are raising their students' achievement significantly below the level of experienced teachers, the data shows.

Another 30 percent or 40 percent of the programs are listed as producing teachers who are

somewhat below experienced educators in their impact on student achievement.

Noell said he is surprised that up to 50 percent of teacher training programs are preparing teachers whose initial classroom impact is comparable to veterans'.

In earlier studies, students with teachers who lacked classroom experience generally scored a few points below those with proven educators.

A new teacher is defined as one who has taught for one or two years.

Experienced teachers have been in the classroom for three or more years.

Noell said students of teachers who are new to the classroom generally score a few points below those led by experienced teachers on a key state test.

“Beginning teachers need some time to find their way around,” he told regents.

Noell said pinpointing which schools are producing top-flight teachers will allow state policymakers to see what kind of training is working.

He said identifying college preparation programs where teacher impact is significantly below long-serving teachers can pave the way for improvements.

The early data is based on test results for 200,000 to 250,000 public school students in 66 school districts statewide in 2004 and 2005.

The data involves students in grades 4-9 and includes scores for LEAP, a test that fourth- and eighth-graders must pass to move to the next grade, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, which measures scores of Louisiana students compared to others nationally.

Allowances are made for demographic, poverty and other factors, Noell said.

The review involved about 10,000 teachers from 16 public and private colleges and universities with teacher preparation programs.

Among the biggest producers of teachers are LSU, the University of New Orleans and Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond.

State officials expected to find wide differences on the quality of teacher preparation programs among Louisiana colleges.

Another surprise finding was how the quality of programs differed within the university, said Jeanne Burns, associate commissioner for teacher education initiatives at the Board of Regents.

That means one school might do a good job of producing English teachers but not so good a job preparing math teachers.

Noell's initial data also shows that teachers show the most improvement in their first two years in the classroom, not the first four or five years.

The findings show that, after the initial two years, teachers showed little improvement between the third and eighth year.

Story originally published in *The Advocate*