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EXPLORATORY RESEARCH: WHAT TEACHERS WANT FROM A NEW MASTER'S PROGRAM  
RESULTS OF ONLINE SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS WITH CLASSROOM TEACHERS  
FOR THE CENTER FOR BETTER SCHOOLS BY THE FDR GROUP  
(EXCERPTS FROM FULL FINAL REPORT)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The FDR Group conducted this research on behalf of The Center for Better Schools. It includes findings from two focus groups and an online survey of 852 classroom teachers. The main goals of the research are:

1. To determine overall level of interest in a new model of advanced teacher training being proposed by The Center for Better Schools
2. To tease out which components of the model are more appealing and less appealing
3. To identify the key questions that distinguish great teachers from those who are merely good, and find out what parts of the program resonate with the great teachers
4. To compare various sub-groups of this sample of classroom teachers

The overarching purpose of the study is to provide information to help The Center for Better Schools design its Advanced Teacher Training Academy. The working assumption is that these findings are for planning and internal use. The findings should not be interpreted to be representative of all teachers but rather a rendering of the range of attitudes and experiences that may exist among teachers. The conclusions and insights rendered in this report are suggestive, not definitive.

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS

### A. Current disappointment with existing Master's programs.

We heard it in the focus groups and we found it in the survey data. As one early career teacher told us, "The education that I received simultaneously when I was starting to teach was not where I learned to be a good teacher at all. It was very

I forget that I have the MA degree... In part the MA program that I went through... just the way it was run, they didn't even give us real education school professors... Other people that taught our classes had the same degree that we had and they were maybe worse teachers. It just didn't feel very serious.

subpar I just did what I needed to do to get by and got A's and it didn't prepare me at all." This

From most of what I heard, a lot of education programs ... seemed not very good.... So circumventing that traditional route was appealing to me.

disenchantment with the offerings that currently exist in graduate level education

programs could be viewed as major validation of the opportunity for an Advanced Teacher Training Academy concept. Learning which types of teachers are especially dissatisfied may help position the new Academy versus other programs.

- ### B. Target market validation for the proposed Advanced Teacher Training Academy concept. If such an advanced teacher training program existed, how much interest would there be? Approximately 1 in 7 across the board say they found the description very appealing. And similar numbers say they would be/would have been very likely to seriously consider the program as described when choosing a graduate degree in education. This suggests potential opportunity for The Academy.

[in a Master's Program give me] ... people who are passionate. People who are driven. I don't like the idea of people being in a perfect master's degree who are just kind of figuring it out or doing it because it's free or doing it because it's something to do.

Since it is being designed to appeal to highly ambitious and highly motivated teachers who have shown genuine promise in the classroom, it makes sense that it would not appeal to most teachers

but rather only to a select few. Too much interest would indicate that the design is not challenging or selective enough, while too little interest would indicate that there is no market.

I don't know what the perfect one would be but it would not be as much time with as much non-practical, non-helpful, not developing you as a teacher stuff.

**C. Overall support for specific components of the Academy.**

A hierarchy of interest emerged, with components such as working in concert with others, affordability and quality rising more or less to the top. The findings will be helpful in designing the core program, as they provide insight into the educational needs and career interests of these

[in grad school] the people who are teaching you are far removed from it. One of the things I'd want to have is more voice from people on the ground.

As long as I knew I was going somewhere to observe teachers who were really of the highest caliber and then getting feedback from those same amazing teachers and coaches.

teachers. Sub-group analysis revealed meaningful differences between teachers categorized as great versus other teachers on the appeal of certain core elements of the model.

**D. Identification of markers of great teachers.**

The data strongly suggest that classroom teachers who share specific attitudinal and experiential characteristics stand out as more likely to “score” higher on various measures of teacher quality, to have a non-traditional mind-set about classroom teaching, and to find the proposed model for advanced teacher training as very appealing.

I am constantly thinking about my classroom...I would want to go to a master's program that taught me about my classroom right now and how I can be a better teacher...

The challenge, of course, is to figure out how to spot these great ones during the early years of their career and guide them to the Academy. Those that met our working definition of Great comprised

That you are constantly improving....Constantly learning about myself as a professional. What worked, what didn't, how can I make it better...

14% of the sample. The working definition includes survey items that measure such things as perseverance, commitment to alleviating the achievement gap, willingness to constantly change plans in the classroom

to improve effectiveness, and leadership experience, as well as teacher self-estimates of above average gains on their students' achievement tests.

**E. A non-traditional mind-set seems to draw some entrants to the profession.**

Overcoming challenges. Academic or behavioral. As a teacher you have to problem solve in your head how you are going to deal with it. The challenge is being continuous and consistent with it. When you see that glimmer of hope that there's a change in behavior or some consistency, then that was worth it.

The overall data suggest that most teachers chose teaching because it was something they knew they always wanted to do, and that most think the best thing about being a classroom teacher is either “the children” or their “love for teaching.” But a deeper look into the data uncovers significant numbers of more reform-minded teachers – those with a non-traditional mind-set – who are driven by “a commitment to equity” or “the challenge,” and who believe that a great teacher is one whose students consistently and objectively demonstrate academic improvement. They also choose the profession either by chance or decided on it in college (as opposed to the more conventional “it was something I always knew I wanted to do”).

# Findings – Focus Group Sessions Held in March, 2010

## Summary Highlights of Early Career Teacher Focus Groups Conducted by the FDR Group for THE CENTER FOR BETTER SCHOOLS

### Comments about current choices for existing Masters Programs

- It is hard to teach in a high poverty setting, particularly when you are new and then to try to sit through night and week-end course work (and be interested or pay attention).
- I only did it because it was free
- I did it because it was mandatory
- Disappointment in the actual learning experience
  - Of limited value, terrible, useless
  - Not well connected to my daily work, too theoretical
  - No consistent mentoring resources
  - No time to do it well
  - Even the “good ones” (programs) are still controlled by state mandates and watered down from what they could be, so they are of limited value to my work
  - “Certification is a flawed concept.”

### An Ideal Masters Level Program and its Content:

- Work with expert, practicing classroom teachers and
  1. Watch them.
  2. Have them watch and critique my teaching.
  3. And also review and critique video of my teaching
- Give me access to multiple master/mentor teachers so I get different points of view, and see different styles of teaching, and hear multiple voices of input
- I need immediate feedback on my practice, shorten the feedback loop
- Any master/mentor teachers must be very integrated into the program, not separate
- Collegial aspects of the program are important. I want other committed, passionate, driven classmates to interact with and learn from
- I want a program that will give me enough “space” to hone my teaching skills
- A program that helps me climb the competency ladder
- The next level of subject content (i.e., math, science, literature and how to teach it)
- More on how people learn and how I should teach differently to different learners
- Some outside the classroom stuff, like ed policy and reform for classroom teachers
- How to share lessons more collegially beyond my classroom
- How to teach adults (other teachers)
- How to understand and develop curriculum
- A program with strong follow on support

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT  
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