
Variability in Clinical Experiences across the California State Universities

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California State University Fullerton has participated in the national-level Mathematics Teacher Education Partnership (MTE-P) since its inception. However, additional members from five other CSU campuses joined MTE-P at the Annual Conference in Milwaukee, June 2014. The feedback from the MTE-P conference attendees and the innovative approaches to research on best practices that MTE-P embodies led the CSU Office of the Chancellor to open the invitation for participation of all 22 CSU campuses with teacher preparation programs. In addition, the Chancellor's Office began sponsoring separate CSU MTE-P events in order to focus the approach to the unique qualities of the California teacher preparation context. This created the largest team in the MTE-P organization.

As part of the CSU MTE-P structure, a Measures Group was formed internal to the CSU team. The purpose of the group was to collect and organize data from across the CSU system and determine what, if any, measures could be implemented across the CSU teacher preparation programs. Analysis of the data collected could be used to identify best practices and areas for improvement.

The first step in the process was to investigate how similar or different teacher preparation programs were within the CSU system. The Measures Group considered various components of teacher preparation programs (e.g. methods courses, field experiences) and developed a survey to collect information about the specific components. The Measures Group posited that common measures across programs could lead to highly variable results based on programmatic structures as opposed to differences in fundamental programmatic approaches to teacher preparation. In addition, the manner in which the measures are applied could vary tremendously based on structures as well.

These same issues related to structural differences across programs are present in the larger MTE-P community as well. California is somewhat unique in that teacher preparation programs are post-baccalaureate programs, with the exception of the rare "blended" programs in which students can take some teacher preparation coursework during their undergraduate years. The vast majority of other states have teacher preparation programs at the

undergraduate level such that students can graduate with a degree and be recommended for a teaching credential simultaneously. Fieldwork components are different lengths and have different intensities. Content methods coursework varies in number and curricular depth of math content. Consequently, whatever the CSU MTE-P Measure Groups can learn from its investigation can be applied, in theory, to the larger MTE-P entity.

Description

To collect information about the structures and practices across CSU teacher preparation program, the Measures Group created a survey that was distributed to CSU MTE-P representatives at all 22 campuses. The survey included items related to the campus's subject matter waiver program for foundational level and full math credentials, whether the campus is on a semester or quarter calendar, details about the math methods coursework, the field experience, mentor teachers, university supervisors, frequency of observations, observation protocols, and student teaching evaluations. The survey was distributed through an online site and data was amassed in the same password-protected online environment. The raw data was translated into pie charts and bar graphs and later presented to the campus representatives at a CSU MTE-P meeting during which adjustments to the raw data were made due to original misunderstandings of the questions or simple errors in responses. Once the data was accurate, the Measures group shared it again with the CSU MTE-P community and planned to present it to the larger MTE-P membership.

Results

Of the 22 campuses surveyed, 18 responded. The survey questions and their responses are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Survey Results of Secondary Mathematics Teacher Preparation Programs in the CSU

| Question | # | Response |
|---|----|-------------|
| 1. Does your campus have an approved waiver program for foundational level mathematics? | 11 | No |
| | 7 | Yes |
| 2. Does your campus use a semester schedule? | 4 | No |
| | 14 | Yes |
| 3. How long is your student teaching experience? | 4 | 1 Semester |
| | 9 | 2 Semesters |
| | 1 | 1 quarter |
| | 2 | 2 quarters |
| | 1 | 3 quarters |
| 4. Do your teacher candidates (TCs) take a math methods course concurrent with their student teaching experience? | 4 | No |
| | 14 | Yes |

| Question | # | Response |
|---|----|-------------------|
| 5. How many units is the methods course, if you have one? | 1 | 1.5 units |
| | 4 | 2 units |
| | 8 | 3 units |
| | 4 | 4 quarter units |
| | 1 | 5 quarter units |
| 6. How many mentor teachers do your teacher candidates student teach with? | 10 | 1 mentor teacher |
| | 8 | 2 mentor teachers |
| 7. What are your Master/Mentor Teachers paid for working with teacher candidates per semester? Choose the closest match. | 7 | Nothing |
| | 11 | \$50–\$250 |
| 8. During the teacher candidate’s student teaching experience, are they required to be supervised by someone who is/was a credentialed teacher of secondary math? | 6 | Yes |
| | 12 | No |
| 9. How often are your teacher candidates formally observed during the first semester? | 1 | Once a semester |
| | 4 | Twice a sem. |
| | 1 | Three times |
| | 7 | Four times |
| | 1 | Five times |
| | 1 | Six times |
| | 1 | Eight times |
| | 1 | Ten times |
| | 1 | Ten times |
| 10. How often are your teacher candidates formally observed during the second semester? | 1 | Twice a sem. |
| | 2 | Three times |
| | 4 | Four times |
| | 3 | Five times |
| | 5 | Six times |
| | 2 | Eight times |
| 11. When the teacher candidate is observed, what sort of observation protocol is used? General? Subject specific? | 9 | General |
| | 4 | Both |
| | 4 | Neither |

Conclusion

From collecting information from all CSU campuses that offer teacher preparation programs, we learned that there was high variability in all aspects of mathematics teacher preparation clinical experiences. Key components included the number of units required in mathematics methods coursework, the number of hours and semesters/quarters of fieldwork experiences, the number of mentor teachers and supervisors a candidate has throughout the teacher preparation program, the qualifications of mentor teachers and supervisors, the number of formal observations supervisors make each quarter/semester, and the amount of

money (if any) mentor teachers are paid. While some components on the surface may seem inconsequential, for example the amount of money mentor teachers are paid, all components play a role in the development of a teaching candidate such as recruitment of mentor teachers in this example. Consequently, the results of measures utilized by MTE-P, Research Action Clusters (RAC), and sub-RACs must be carefully analyzed in light of this programmatic variability.

As a CSU local partnership, the Chancellor's Office expressed interest in identifying common measures to be used across the CSU teacher preparation programs to determine program effectiveness. However, with such tremendous variability in the programs, it would be difficult to make program by program effectiveness comparisons before determining how different program configurations impact measures outcomes.

However, new California Commission on Teacher Credentialing teacher preparation program standards for clinical experiences will reduce the variability in many program elements, but not all (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016). For example, a minimum of 600 hours of fieldwork will be required across the arc of each post-baccalaureate teacher preparation program. In addition, each candidate must be formally observed 4 times each quarter or 6 times each semester by a supervisor who has expertise in the subject area the candidate is teaching. While the new program standards reduce the variance in many aspects of the teacher preparation programs, others remain such as those associated with methods coursework.

If such large-scale variability exists within the CSU system, imagine the scale across the MTE-P participating universities. While all RACs will be using several common MTE-P measures, we must be mindful of what the outcomes indicate and to what extent they are the result of "best practices" or programmatic differences.

References

Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2016). *California Teaching Performance Expectations*. Retrieved from www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/TPA-files/TPEs-adopted-2016.pdf