Where Are They Now?:
Career Paths and Perspectives of Urban Teacher Enhancement Program Graduates

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Abstract

Available evidence suggests that inequities exist in the distribution of qualified teachers within high-poverty urban schools, and further, that such inequities adversely affect student achievement in these schools. This paper highlights the role of teacher education in addressing this challenge by describing the findings of a study of the graduates of University of Alabama at Birmingham's Urban Teacher Enhancement Program. The career paths of program graduates who began teaching in urban schools were examined at the first-, fifth-, and tenth-year mark to investigate their longevity in urban schools, their perceptions of their greatest rewards and challenges, their perspectives regarding their reasons for entering and/or staying in urban teaching, and their thoughts about the role their teacher education program played in their career trajectory. Findings indicate that retention rates of study participants compare favorably with national averages, and that program participants felt that their teacher education program had a positive influence on their longevity in urban teaching.

Keywords: urban teacher preparation, teacher career paths, urban schools

Preparing teachers who can thrive in high-poverty urban schools and remain committed to careers in urban teaching is an important challenge in educator preparation programs (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016). Available evidence suggests that inequities exist in the distribution of qualified teachers throughout high-poverty schools. Findings of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2017) indicate that the percentage of less experienced teachers in a school rises with the poverty level of the school, with the poorest schools being staffed by the least experienced teachers. NCES (2015) also found that teacher attrition was greater in high-poverty urban schools, where 10% of teachers leave teaching in a given year, in comparison to six percent of teachers in low-poverty schools. Likewise, Holme et al. (2018) examined both short-term measures, such as annual turnover rates, and long-term measures, such as chronic instability, and found that high-poverty and high-minority schools have elevated turnover rates in both of these categories. Holme et al. noted "troubling disparities in turnover patterns for schools serving low-income students and students of color. Our data show that high-poverty, high-minority, and low-performing schools struggle with much deeper turnover problems than the annual turnover rates suggest" (p. 69).

Aside from higher teacher turnover rates, the Alliance for Effective Education (2014) found that high-poverty schools employ more teachers who are not fully certified. Schultz (2014) found that school poverty level was negatively correlated with percentage of fully certified teachers, as well as the percentage of teachers who held advanced degrees. Similar negative correlations were found in schools with high percentages of students of color (correlation coefficients ranging from .471 to .296). Based on these findings, Schultz (2014) concluded that "less qualified teachers continue to be located in schools with higher percentages of students of color and students with lower SES backgrounds" (p. 9-10).

The consequences of these inequities in access to schools staffed by stable teams of experienced, highly qualified teachers are reflected in student achievement. According to one report, teacher impact on student learning increases each year for the first five to seven years of teaching (Carroll & Foster, 2010). On this issue, Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) asserted, "schools that lose new teachers and replace them with other novices ensure that instruction, on average, will be persistently weak" (p. 11). In a comprehensive study of the effect of teacher turnover on student achievement, Hanushek et al. (2016) found that loss of teacher experience due to turnover resulted in depressed learning outcomes, particularly in lower-achieving schools. However, diminished exposure to experienced teachers is not the only mechanism through which higher rates of teacher

turnover can impact student achievement. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) found that higher rates of turnover not only produced depressed student achievement in the classes directly affected by turnover, but also in the classes of other grade-level teachers who had not left. Ronfeldt et al. concluded: "Thus, turnover must have an impact beyond simply whether incoming teachers are better than those they replaced—even the teachers outside of this redistribution are somehow harmed by it" (p. 31). Ronfeldt et al. conjectured that the mechanism for such impact may lie in factors such as a potential negative influence of teacher turnover on collegiality amongst teachers, as well as the possible loss of institutional knowledge within affected schools.

Inequities in Teacher Distribution: The Role of Teacher Education

Teacher preparation programs have an important role to play in disrupting the deleterious patterns in teacher distribution outlined above. A national survey of new teachers found that those teaching in urban areas reported feeling less prepared than did their rural and suburban counterparts with respect to a variety of basic teaching functions, such as classroom management, teaching subject matter, and meeting content standards (NCES, 2018). Similarly, a survey of the graduates of teacher education programs in Pennsylvania revealed that 72% of those teaching in Philadelphia felt unprepared to teach in urban schools (Kuriloff et al., 2019). Evidence has suggested that teacher perceptions of preparedness can impact teacher job satisfaction and thus longevity in teaching (Green & Munoz, 2016; Grissom, 2011; Kokka, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

In order to address issues related to preparedness and retention, many teacher education programs have worked in partnership with urban school districts in the recruitment, preparation, and induction of new teachers. Consistent with the emphasis of this article, the balance of this review will focus on such programs, along with evidence of their efficacy in preparing and retaining urban teachers. There are a number of design features that are common to many programs of this type. These features include an emphasis on recruiting diverse populations of teacher candidates, the infusion of content related to teaching diverse populations, and extended field placements in urban schools. The programs described below include these features, along with other unique components.

The Professional Development School (PDS) movement, which came to prominence more than 30 years ago, served as an important impetus for the establishment stronger, mutually beneficial partnerships between P-12 schools and universities for the

preparation of teachers (Pasch & Pugach, 1990). Many of today's partnerships between urban school districts and urban teacher preparation programs have their roots in the PDS movement. Taymans et al. (2012) described George Washington University's Urban Initiative Professional Development School model, whereby the university partnered with the District of Columbia Public Schools. Design elements of the program included recruitment and screening of applicants for dispositions and experiences favorable to urban teaching, onsite coursework in designated spaces at the participating school, full-year internships at the participating school, and ongoing support and mentoring throughout the program. Through surveys, observations, work sampling, and interviews, the impact of the program on preparedness to teach in urban schools was assessed by comparing the performance of beginning interns to that of program completers. Results indicated that program completers demonstrated greater ability to accommodate diversity of student skill levels and reported higher levels of self-efficacy in their urban teaching environments (Taymans et al., 2012).

Mustian et al. (2017) discussed a model used by Illinois State University in partnering with Chicago Public Schools. A signature component of this collaboration was community immersion, which involved:

> (a)centering the needs of the community and the specific schools as the priority; (b) aligning activities to at least one objective of each undergraduate course in the sequence; and (c) fostering a reciprocal shared leadership model in which in service teachers, K-12 students, teacher candidates, and community members all gain new knowledge and skills as a result of the partnership (p. 469).

Pre and post assessments were used to measure program impact on the participating teacher candidates. Findings indicated enhancements in candidates' teaching efficacy in working with culturally diverse students and an increase in the intent to teach in urban environments.

Burstein et al. (2009) outlined a partnership between California State University, Northridge and the Los Angeles Unified School District that resulted in the development of the Accelerated Collaborative Teacher (ACT) Preparation program. ACT design features included elements such as cross-institutional positions, an emphasis on recruiting teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds, and an accelerated program delivery model that allowed the program to be completed within one year. A follow-up survey of program completers was conducted to determine their perceptions of program efficacy in preparing them for urban teaching, and to ascertain their retention rates in the Los Angeles Unified

School District. Results indicated that the majority of program completers felt well-prepared in the areas that were the focus of the survey, including classroom management, instructional planning, and assessment. The five-year retention rate for participating program completers was 74%.

As is evident from the examples above, teacher education can play an important role in addressing inequities in teacher distribution. Since an important goal of the Urban Teacher Enhancement Program (UTEP) was to prepare teachers who would remain in urban teaching, the authors, as faculty members at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), were particularly interested in examining the teaching longevity and career patterns of the graduates of UAB's UTEP.

UAB, in partnership with Birmingham City Schools, worked to develop and implement UTEP as a means of recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers for high-needs Birmingham schools. The development and implementation of UTEP was supported by grants from the US Department of Education's Office of Post-Secondary Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, and Office of Special Education Programs. UTEP prepared candidates in elementary education, secondary education, and special education through its undergraduate program and alternative master's program, which was designed for those with undergraduate degrees in non-teaching areas. UTEP's design features are outlined in Appendix A. Additional discussion regarding these design features can be found in (Voltz, 2012).

The recruitment strategies described in Appendix A assisted UTEP in recruiting a diverse group of preservice teachers. These efforts reflect those of school districts across the country, particularly in urban areas, as these districts seek to employ a teaching force that reflects the diversity of the students served. Research has shown that doing so has academic and behavioral benefits, particularly with respect to students of color (Dee, 2004; Egalite et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2017).

This study sought to examine the career patterns and retention rates of UTEP graduates over time, and to determine their perceptions with respect to their motivations for entering, staying in, or leaving urban teaching, as well as their perceptions regarding the influence of their teacher preparation program on their career trajectories. This work adds to the emerging body of research in this area by focusing on an urban teacher preparation program in a mid-sized city in the US Deep South. It includes the career patterns and perceptions of graduates who completed the program five to ten years prior to the time that

the study was conducted. These features provide insight into less commonly studied settings and provide for a longer term view of retention than is often the case in studies of this nature. Additionally, this study provides insight into program graduates' perspectives regarding the impact of their teacher preparation program on their career trajectory. In summary, the novelty of this study lies in its context, the longer-term view of retention over time, the more detailed analysis of career paths, and the inclusion of the perspectives of program graduates. The specific research questions addressed include the following:

> *Research Question 1:* What are the career paths of UTEP graduates who began teaching in high-poverty urban schools? What are the first-year, fifth-year, and tenth-year retention rates of these educators?

> *Research Question 2:* What factors influenced UTEP graduates to begin teaching in urban high-poverty schools? To continue teaching in such schools?

> *Research Question 3:* What do UTEP graduates who began teaching in high-poverty urban schools see as the greatest challenges and rewards of their work?

> *Research Question 4:* How do UTEP graduates who began teaching in high-poverty urban schools feel that their teacher preparation program influenced their career trajectories? What aspects of their teacher preparation program do they feel were most and least helpful in preparing them to teach in high-poverty urban schools?

Methods

Positionality of the Authors

The first three authors have been professionals in urban K-12, higher education, and communities for the entirety of their careers. They worked collaboratively with other faculty and administrators to establish the UAB Center for Urban Education (CUE) and its signature UTEP, each serving in various leadership roles. Therefore, this study is critically reflexive and evaluative in many respects. The fourth author is a mid-career higher education and nonprofit professional and former UAB doctoral student who was not involved in the CUE or UTEP. This author brought an outsider perspective to the project, especially during the interviewing, data collection, and data analysis phases of the study, which helped to enhance the study's validity (Creswell, 2014, p. 202).

Study Design and Procedure

This non-experimental research study employed mixed methods that included survey and telephone interview approaches. Survey data was analyzed to determine teacher longevity in urban settings, as well as the nature and level of movement from school to school. Interview data was designed to ascertain graduates' perspectives on their experiences in the program.

Qualtrics was used to send electronic survey instruments to the last known email addresses of the 121 individuals who completed UTEP from 2007 to 2012. Survey instruments asked participants to provide a listing of their teaching positions since program completion, including names of school districts, names of schools, grade levels taught, areas of teaching, and duration of employment. Survey respondents also were asked to indicate whether or not they began teaching in a high-poverty urban school after program completion. The following definition was provided for the term high-poverty urban school: "a school located in a metropolitan area with a population of 250,000 or more (including schools in surrounding suburbs) where student participation in the free/reduced price lunch program was 40% or higher." Poverty status of listed schools was independently verified by the researchers. If respondents indicated that they began teaching in a high-poverty urban school, they were asked to indicate if they would be willing to participate in twenty-minute follow-up interviews. If so, they were asked to provide a preferred telephone number and timeframe.

A reminder email was sent two weeks after the deadline in the initial email to those not responding. If a response still was not received after the reminder email, hardcopies of the survey instrument were sent to the last known mailing address. A postage-paid return envelope was included to return completed survey instruments. Survey instruments were coded to track returns. Data from completed survey instruments was compiled and analyzed using the NCES (2015) definitions for "stayer," "mover," and "leaver" to classify the career patterns of participants. The framework applied by Freedman and Appleman (2009) also was used to further describe the nature of participants' movement in terms of whether they drifted from high-poverty schools to more affluent schools or shifted from one high-poverty school to another. Likewise, Freedman and Appleman's framework was used to describe the movement of leavers, examining whether they shifted to non-teaching roles in urban schools, or left the field of education altogether.

Survey participants who indicated that they began teaching in high-poverty urban schools, and who expressed a willingness to be interviewed, were contacted by phone to

conduct telephone interviews of approximately 20 minutes in length. Interview questions solicited the perceptions of participants regarding: a) factors that they felt contributed most to their decision to begin teaching in a high-poverty urban school; b) the greatest rewards and challenges of urban teaching; c) factors that contributed to them staying in (or leaving) urban teaching; d) the impact of their teacher preparation program on their decision to enter, stay in, or leave urban teaching; e) most and least helpful aspects of their teacher preparation program with respect to preparing them for urban teaching; and f) additional training they needed after program completion. Telephone interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Table 1

Percentage of Survey Participants by Race and Gender (n=40)

	Male	Female	Total
African American	7.5	57.5	65.0
White	10.0	25.0	35.0
Total	17.5	82.5	100.0

Table 2

Percentage of Survey Participants by Certification Area and Level (n=40)

	Graduate	Undergraduate	Total
Elementary	10.0	12.5	22.5
ESL	2.5	0.0	2.5
Secondary	35.0	0.0	35.0
Special Education	30.0	10.0	40.0
Total	77.5	22.5	

Participants

Forty-five individuals returned usable survey instruments, representing a return rate of 37.1%. Forty of the 45 individuals (85%) began teaching in high-poverty traditional public schools (pre-dating the 2015 Alabama charter school law), most of whom were in Birmingham City Schools. The responses of these 40 individuals are the focus of this paper. Demographic information, generated from program enrollment data, for these 40 individuals can be found in Tables 1 and 2. These participants included 17.5% males and

82.5% females, 65% African Americans and 35% whites. Both undergraduate and graduate pre-service teachers in the alternative master's program ("5th year" program) were included. Of these 40 participants, 29 agreed to participate in the follow-up interviews. Demographic information for interviewees can be found in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Percentage of Interview Participants by Race and Gender (n=29)

	Male	Female	Total
African American	6.9	58.6	65.5
White	10.3	24.1	34.4
Total	17.2	82.7	

Table 4

Percentage of Interview Participants by Certification Area and Level (n=29)

	Graduate	Undergraduate	Total
Elementary	13.8	13.8	27.6
ESL	3.4	0.0	3.4
Secondary	37.9	0.0	37.9
Special Education	20.7	10.3	31.0
Total	75.8	24.1	

Data Collection and Analysis

All four authors, along with a fifth researcher, who agreed to a limited role on this project due to assuming new administrative duties, interviewed the 29 participants using a semi-structured protocol and assumed responsibility for the transcription of the interviews. The authors employed thematic analysis, which is a systematic, qualitative approach to "identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). After the transcription process, the first, second, and fourth authors of this study coded all of the interview data independently and began establishing preliminary themes loosely using a 10%-agreement approach (i.e., three similar responses noted by an individual coder). The coders then conferred for intercoder agreement, to determine similarities and dissimilarities between their themes and concur on final main themes (Creswell, 2014). Intercoder reliability was established at 84.6% by determining the percentage of the themes listed in Table 5 that were

reflected in the initial coding of each of the three coders. The third author was involved in the peer debriefing sessions with the coding authors and helped to further refine interview themes.

The authors employed six phases of thematic analysis, which included familiarizing themselves with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report (Nowell et al., 2017). Intertwined with these phases were efforts to establish trustworthiness of data by following these criteria and processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): 1) credibility, established through prolonged engagement with the data through repeated listening of audio-recordings, readings of transcripts, and online peer debriefing sessions; 2) transferability, presented through thick descriptions of the data; 3) dependability, achieved by auditing the process through note-taking, reflexive journaling, documentation of peer debriefing, and archiving all iterations of data coding and emails associated with this study; and 4) confirmability, a constantly referring back to the interview data and the literature review when making decisions about themes. It also entailed keeping a record of all themes, inclusive of those that did not fit within dominant categories.

Table 5
Themes in Interview Responses

Interview Questions	Themes	Percentage of Respondents
What factors contributed most to your decision to begin teaching in a high-poverty urban school?	Personal background/experience Desire to work where most needed Desire to give back Calling/mission	48 38 21 14
What do you see as the greatest rewards of urban teaching?	Seeing student success/progress Connections/relationships with students	62 31
What do you see as the greatest challenges of urban teaching?	Parent involvement Poverty/societal issues Administrative issues	34 24 24
What factors contributed most to your staying in urban teaching? (n=25)	Need Positive regard for students Calling/mission	36 24 16
Reflecting on your initial certification program, would you say that it contributed in any way to your decision to enter or remain in urban teaching? If so, in what way?	Enhanced sense of preparedness/confidence Fostered development of cultural competence Enhanced professional networks Provided helpful information about urban schools	21 17 17 10
What aspects of your initial teacher preparation program do you feel were most helpful in preparing you for urban teaching?	UTEP cohort courses/seminars Fieldwork Mentors	38 14 14
What aspects of your initial teacher preparation program do you feel were least helpful in preparing you for urban teaching?	Some coursework unrealistic/lacking in depth Need for more fieldwork/fieldwork in appropriate settings	24 21
What additional training do you feel was needed after you entered teaching?	Classroom management training Training on everyday non-teaching duties Mentors	21 17 17
Are there any additional thoughts you'd like to share?	UTEP's positive impact/appreciation for program Suggestions for enhancing the program	52 28

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Findings

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This section details the responses of the 40 survey participants who began their teaching careers in high-poverty urban schools and describes their career paths in education. A discussion of the themes that emerged in the responses of the 29 interview participants is also provided.

Research Question One: Career Paths

As described in the Methods section, NCES (2015) definitions for "stayer," "mover," and "leaver" were used to classify the career patterns of participants. The discussion below provides further depth to these classifications by also employing the framework used by Freedman and Appleman (2009) to describe the nature of participants' career changes. Table 6 displays the career paths of survey participants. As is shown, at the end of their first year, 90% of these individuals were "stayers," who remained in the same school where they began; 10% were "movers," who had all shifted to other high-poverty schools by the end of the first year. None of the survey participants had drifted to more affluent schools or left classroom teaching altogether by the end of their first year of teaching.

Table 6
Percent of Survey Participants by Career Path

	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
End of First Year (n=40)	90.0	10.0	0.0
End of Fifth Year (n=40)	30.0	57.5	12.5
End of Tenth Year (n=11)	0.0	63.6	36.4

By the end of the fifth year, the majority of survey participants (57.5%) were "movers," having moved from the school where they began teaching to another school. The vast majority of these movers (91.3%) had shifted from one high-poverty school to another. However, there were two movers who did drift to more affluent schools by the end of their fifth year of teaching. Thirty percent of survey participants were "stayers," having remained through the end of their fifth year at the same school where they began. By the end of the fifth year, 12.5% of participants had left classroom teaching for some period of time. Of these leavers, two remained in urban education in administrative or other positions outside of classroom teaching; two left education at some point, but returned to urban teaching by

the fifth year; and one individual had drifted out of education altogether and did not return by the end of the fifth year.

Eleven survey participants completed their programs early enough to have had ten years of teaching experience at the time that the survey was conducted. Of these 11 individuals, none were stayers, with the majority (63.6%) being movers who left the schools where they initially began and were teaching in other schools. The vast majority (85.7%) of these movers shifted from one high-poverty school to another. However, one mover drifted to a more affluent school by the end of the tenth year. A minority (36.4%) of those in this ten-year group left classroom teaching at some point. Two of these leavers returned by the end of the tenth year. Two other leavers remained in urban education, but shifted to administrative or other non-teaching positions. Of the 11 survey participants who completed their programs early enough to have had 10 years of teaching experience, none left education altogether by the end of the 10th year.

Research Question 2: Factors Influencing Entrance and Persistence in Urban Teaching

Table 5 presents the themes that emerged in the responses of the 29 interview participants. When asked what factors contributed most to their decision to begin teaching in high-poverty urban schools, the largest group of respondents (48%) noted factors associated with their personal background or life experiences. For example, one respondent noted:

> Well, the biggest factor that contributed to that was my own personal educational experience. I've always lived in urban settings...so I was familiar with it. It was just a natural—when I thought about becoming a teacher, I thought about those schools first.

Another common response noted by 38% of interviewees was the desire to work where they felt they were most needed. One interviewee noted simply: "It's nice to go somewhere you're needed." Others (21%) reported the desire to give back played a major role in their decision: "Well, I wanted to give back to my community, and being that I was a product of Birmingham City Schools, I wanted to be able to give back to the school system that I came out of." It should be noted that only African American female interviewees expressed the desire to give back in response to queries about factors that contributed to their decision to begin teaching in urban schools, thus this theme reflects the voices of only this group. Still others (17%) said that they were motivated by a calling or sense of mission: "It was a spiritual calling, I guess, or calling from God because this was my second career."

Twenty-five of the 29 interviewees (86%) remained in urban classroom teaching for the first five years after beginning teaching. When these 25 individuals were asked what contributed most to them staying, many of them offered responses similar to those they provided when queried about their decision to enter urban teaching. For example, need continued to be a top reason (cited by 36%) to remain in urban teaching. In the words of one interviewee, "Well, I mean it's the same reason that I was drawn to this urban setting—because I have had other job offers—it is the need...the driving force is the need." Affinity or positive regard for students also was mentioned by some (24%): "I love the kids...they're brilliant. Their heart, their beauty. It's just the children...they are the reason." The notion of responding to a calling or mission also resurfaced as a reason for staying offered by some (16%): "I did have other opportunities to go to the other school districts, but I decided to stay in Birmingham City Schools because I felt that was my calling."

Research Question 3: Rewards and Challenges of Urban Teaching

When asked about the greatest rewards of urban teaching, the majority of interviewees (62%) noted factors associated with seeing their students succeed, or being able to stimulate intellectual curiosity in their students. One interviewee stated it this way: "When a student can go from uneducated to educated—no matter what the poverty level is—that for me is the greatest.... It's like blinders go off their eyes." Whereas seeing student progress was the most common theme in the responses of interviewees as a group, it should be noted that it does not reflect the perspectives of the male participants, as no male interviewees made remarks related to this theme in response to queries about what they saw as the greatest rewards of urban teaching. Some interviewees (31%) also framed rewards in terms of the connections that they have with their students: "The greatest reward for me was developing a relationship with my students and their parents."

In discussing their greatest challenges in urban teaching, 34% of interviewees noted issues related to parental involvement. In the words of one interviewee: "I would say it was a lot harder to get the parents in or to get to talk to them. A lot of them were working more than one job or working late hours, so it was hard to get them." Challenges also were framed by some (24%) in terms of poverty or other deleterious societal issues: "It's hard to move a child who is being evicted...or didn't have lights on.... It's hard for them to get to learn, if they're having those factors at home." Still others (24%) framed challenges in terms of administrative issues within the school or district: "At the administrative level, high turnover of administration, superintendents, folks coming in that had their plan, and that was so different from the previous person's plan."

Research Question 4: Perceptions Regarding the Influence of UTEP

While only a minority of interviewees (14%) specifically mentioned that UTEP influenced their decision to enter teaching, all of those who stayed in urban teaching for at least five years indicated that it did influence their decision to remain. When asked how the program influenced their decision, some (21%) indicated that the program had provided an enhanced sense of preparedness or confidence. One interviewee said it this way:

> It gave me a foundation that I otherwise wouldn't have had. When I started teaching my very first year, I actually felt prepared and very successful…. I had a great first few years teaching experience compared to some of the other people who talked about their first year of teaching being the hardest thing they've ever done.

Other interviewees (17%) noted that the program fostered the development of cultural competence, which they saw as helpful in establishing staying power as an urban educator. In the words of one interviewee:

> And a lot of people think because you're Black you can deal with inner-city or urban, or like, you should just know. But I come from a different culture and so to be exposed to what I've been exposed to over this time, it has really helped me to understand a little bit better the culture and the mindset of the people that I serve.

A number of interviewees indicated that the program had assisted them by enhancing their professional networks: "It was the best decision for me and I think it definitely changed the course of my future…providing me with really great…networks." It should be noted that only female interviewees cited professional networks as influential to them remaining in urban teaching, as male participants did not make remarks related to this theme. Still other interviewees (10%) noted the provision of information about urban schools as being helpful:

> If you know what the issues are and possible ways that you can prevent them and deal with them, you're more likely to be successful. And I feel like that's what UTEP did for me…. It was like an extra support that helped me to understand some of the things that I would encounter going into urban schools.

In discussing the aspects of the program that they found most helpful, UTEP cohort courses/seminars were mentioned by the largest number of interviewees (38%). One interviewee reported:

> The classes that we took that made me realize some of this stuff…. I was the only white person in the entire school, and that's when I was like, "Okay, I need to remember back and think how was it [discussed in UTEP classes]. There's a different way to approach this than how I'm approaching this." And once I

remembered some of the things that I've learned, I could approach it that way and it worked. It was a cultural difference in the way that I was going after it.

Program fieldwork also was mentioned by some (17%) as most helpful: "So I would say the most helpful aspects were the actual practicum and placements in urban schools...so really that practical application and experience." A number of others (14%) noted mentors as being among the most helpful aspects: "Mentorship...if I didn't have that, I possibly would have left after the first year and not come back." It should be noted, however, that only African American interviewees mentioned mentors as most helpful; no white interviewees cited this program element in response to queries about what they saw as most helpful.

When discussing aspects of the program that they found least helpful, some interviewees (24%) reported that some coursework was unrealistic or lacking in depth. On this issue, one interviewee said it this way: "I think some of it was, I used the word 'surfacy', but it was kind of surfacy in a sense." Such remarks reflect the perspectives of female interviewees only, as no male participants made remarks consistent with this theme. Others (21%) noted the need for more fieldwork, or fieldwork in more appropriate settings: "Well, I do feel that maybe increase the time in the schools during the program."

To further investigate potential gaps in the program, interviewees were asked to identify any additional training that they felt they needed after they entered teaching. In response to this query, 21% of interviewees cited classroom management as an area of need for additional training. One interviewee reported:

> I would say the additional training that I ended up needing came from a classroom management standpoint.... The hard thing about classroom management is it changes for every class, for every child. So it's really hard to prepare someone for every classroom management issue that comes up.

Training on everyday non-teaching duties (e.g., paperwork, record-keeping, etc.) emerged as a second area of need in the responses of some interviewees (17%): "We need a component where students could see the things that they would be doing on a day-to-day basis. Even the fact of collecting money for a field trip, doing field trips, and other things." Although not a training need in the sense intended by the question, some interviewees (17%) also mentioned the importance of mentors:

> My mentor...he really saved me, you know. And I still talk to him like every single day...like that one on one designated person in my building that taught the same thing that I taught, that worked with me every day. Like when I needed, you know,

> methylene blue, I knew who I could run to and he could tell me how to order it.... Like that was the most important thing for me.

Notably, only African American female interviewees cited mentors with respect to needs for additional training.

When asked to share any additional thoughts about the program, the majority (52%) of interviewees offered words of appreciation for the program, or expressions of their positive regard for the program. In this vein, one interviewee stated, "I still have great appreciation for UTEP.... I think it really, really...did help me to stay." Some interviewees (28%) also offered additional suggestions for enhancing the program. Interestingly, these suggestions came only from female interviewees, and were related to areas such as course content, fieldwork, and stress management. With respect to the latter issue, one interviewee noted:

> I think it could be good for many teachers to understand and build in time for their own emotional health in these situations.... Making sure they understand that it's okay to set good boundaries and be careful of when helping can hurt and be harmful and enabling.... Make sure they have good mentors and building good systems to take care of themselves so that they can continue for a long time.

Discussion

Overall, several findings of the study were encouraging. The first- and fifth-year retention rates of the participating UTEP graduates surpass national averages. A national study of teacher attrition indicated that 10% of new teachers leave the profession before the beginning of their second year of teaching, with 17% doing so before the beginning of the fifth year (NCES, 2015). By comparison, none of the UTEP graduates in this study left teaching before the beginning of their second year, and 13% left at some point (with two returning) by the end of their fifth year. UTEP five-year retention rates also compare favorably with other studies, such as the Burstein et al. (2009) study discussed above. The current study's findings related to retention rates, in combination with the responses of the interviewees, provide some evidence that teacher education programs that focus intentionally on the needs of urban school teacher staffing have an important role in reducing the deleterious effects of higher teacher attrition rates in high-poverty urban schools.

The potential impact of the program on churn, or teacher movement from one school to another, is a different matter. NCES (2016) reported that 11% of teachers who had four

to ten years of experience moved from one school to another between the academic year 2011-12 and 2012-13. However, by the end of the UTEP graduates' fifth year, nearly 58% of them had changed schools at least once since their first year of teaching. While these data are not directly comparable, they do suggest higher churn rates among the participating UTEP graduates. Thus, this study does not provide any evidence of program effect in reducing churn rates. As discussed earlier, churn, aside from attrition, can also have a negative impact on student achievement. However, many of the factors that affect churn rates, particularly involuntary school changes and teacher layoffs during periods of financial uncertainty, may be beyond the reach of teacher education programs.

Our partner district, where many of our graduates were employed, did experience financial challenges that resulted in disruptions to the employment of some beginning teachers during the period of time that was the focus of this study. Often, affected teachers were released at the end of the academic year, but sometimes were rehired in other schools within the district once the new academic year began. This factor may have elevated churn rates among study participants.

In a few cases, those who exited classroom teaching did so to assume administrative roles within the same urban school district. In these cases, such transition could prove to be a benefit to both the school district and the transitioning teacher. That teacher would experience upward mobility in his or her career, and the district would benefit by being able to apply the expertise of one of its master teachers across a broader base of its students. Even in instances when teachers leave education altogether, in some cases, it can be argued that there is some benefit for all involved, as such departures could allow those teachers to pursue opportunities better aligned with their needs, abilities, and interests. In this case, staying could be more of a disadvantage than leaving, despite the negative effects of teacher attrition discussed above.

When looking deeper at the factors that teacher education can impact, the interviewees in this study provided helpful insights. Only a small minority of interviewees indicated that the program had influenced their inclination to teach in urban settings. Rather, the majority of the interviewees suggested that such inclination is what drew them to the program. This finding is significant, considering that the program provided tuition support. Possibly, the tuition support served more as an enabler, allowing participants to access and complete the program, rather than as the major enticement for them to consider a career in urban teaching. This finding suggests that, while tuition support is important to recruitment and retention, adequate screening measures are essential to identify those with

an intrinsic commitment. Such screening may enhance the likelihood that participants will remain in urban teaching beyond the period required by the funding source, as was the case with the vast majority of the participating UTEP graduates.

Interview participants also provided helpful insights into the components of their teacher preparation program that were most supportive in sustaining them in urban teaching. Coursework specifically designed around the urban context, grounded in the realities of urban schools, and informed by successful urban practitioners emerged as particularly important, along with placements in high-quality urban field settings. Participants repeatedly underscored the importance of understanding intercultural as well as intracultural differences, and the use of culturally responsive approaches. Similar to the findings of Mustian et al. (2017) outlined above, these factors enhanced the confidence level and degree of self-efficacy experienced by UTEP graduates.

Interviewees often mentioned the importance of supports, including mentors during the initial years of teaching, professional networks, and continuing relationships with UAB faculty liaisons who assisted them throughout program completion. Based on participant responses, these were the most critical design elements of the program. However, as discussed above, there were some notable differences in participant responses by race and gender in terms of mentoring and networking, with African American and female participants more often citing the benefits of these components. Literature in the area has suggested that race and gender can play an important role in the mentoring process (Dingus, 2008; Louis et al., 2018).

The responses of the interviewees with respect to their greatest challenges, least helpful program aspects, and perceived needs for additional training after program completion also provided helpful insights with respect to urban teacher education program design. Understanding the pervasive impact of poverty and ways to mitigate against its injurious effects was something that many participants continued to grapple with throughout their careers. Enhancing parental involvement, which is in some ways intertwined with issues of poverty, also was mentioned as a frequent struggle. Other studies have identified similar challenges (Loder-Jackson et al., 2014). While these areas often are perennial challenges that may be difficult to sufficiently address within a pre-service program, this study suggests their importance and the need for particular emphasis in urban teacher education. The complexities of navigating large, urban school districts, and managing frequent administrative changes are other areas that may not fit entirely within the context of a pre-service program, as is the case with classroom management, given its

high level of specificity to particular classrooms, individual students, and the teacher's personal interactive style. Nevertheless, this study suggests that it is imperative for pre-service programs to tackle these issues in the most authentic and substantive ways possible, providing teacher candidates with solid frameworks (Voltz et al., 2010) and tools that can help them throughout their careers.

The importance of fieldwork also frequently emerged in the comments of interviewees. While some noted their fieldwork as one of the most helpful aspects of their preparation program, others underscored the need for more of it. At the time study participants experienced UTEP, approximately 150 hours of fieldwork were required prior to the fifteen-week culminating student teaching placement. Pre-student teaching field hours typically were not completed in the same school as the culminating student teaching experience. However, recent studies have suggested that full-year residencies provide for more cohesive, impactful field experiences than do traditional student teaching models (Gatti, 2019).

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that the urban teaching competencies undergirding UTEP, particularly those related to socio-cultural competence, were important to thwarting early departures from urban teaching contexts. These competencies provided participants with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they needed to feel confident as they began their urban teaching careers, and to experience a sense of efficacy as they continued teaching in those settings. These competencies reflect important considerations as teacher educators grapple with decisions regarding what teachers should know and be able to do.

Not surprisingly, the value of establishing strong partnerships with urban districts also was evident in the findings of this study. Our partnership with Birmingham City Schools allowed administrators and master teachers from the district to be fully integrated into all aspects of UTEP. From the recruitment and selection process, to co-teaching program coursework and hosting field students, to evaluating and celebrating candidate progress, and, finally, to mentoring UTEP graduates during their first years of teaching, our district partners were co-equal participants in the preparation and support of UTEP teachers. This partnership enabled program elements cited by participants as particularly helpful, such as fieldwork, mentoring, and the establishment of professional networks. This

is a critical design element that should be considered as teacher educators work to enhance teacher preparation programs.

Cost is also an important consideration in developing and sustaining approaches to urban teacher education such as UTEP. Budget models used in higher education are often reliant on credit-hour production and do not accommodate expenses associated with program components such as school district cohort course co-teachers and mentors for the initial years of teaching. Residency approaches, despite their promise for enhanced outcomes, often involve even greater expense, given that they generally provide a living wage to participants during the residency year. These realities underscore the importance of partnering with other entities, including local foundations that may be able to help offset some of these expenses. Some limited funding also may be available at the state or federal level. However, if proposals such "Budget for America's Future" (Executive Office of the President, 2020), which includes over $6 billion in education cuts, are adopted, it seems inevitable that federal funding will be diminished to support teacher preparation. In this era of teacher shortages and electing shortcuts over quality teacher preparation, it is of critical import to recognize that children, families, and communities not only require but deserve the talent, determination, and persistence of all those in the teaching enterprise. The individuals most directly affected by education budget cuts will be the most vulnerable among us, who have historically relied on schools to provide opportunities for enhanced life outcomes. This would include many of the students in high-poverty urban schools.

Conclusion

This study adds to the growing body of evidence suggesting that context-specific teacher preparation programs designed to prepare urban educators can be an effective tool in addressing inequities in the distribution of highly-qualified, experienced teachers in high-poverty urban schools. By recruiting, preparing, and supporting strong teachers who are grounded in urban schools, and who have a commitment to teaching in these schools, teacher educators can play a significant role in enhancing urban student achievement.

In order to accomplish this important goal, teacher educators will need to forge partnerships with local urban school districts, businesses, and foundations, thereby encouraging shared responsibility for teacher education. It behooves all teacher educators to examine and unpack long-held convictions about high-poverty schools and the communities they serve. Research is the platform that can tease out the anomalies that will

both inform and provide fodder for moving forward. Given the state of education and waning opportunities for those who are underprepared, there is a compelling need to bolster our teacher education programs to best secure the potential of our most vulnerable populations. The African proverb sometimes adapted to the education field, "It takes a village to prepare a teacher," is as true as it is trite. As evidence mounts that teacher education has a vital role in addressing inequities in the distribution of teachers in urban schools, the moral imperative to do so grows ever stronger.

Appendix A
UTEP Design Features

UTEP Component	Description
Recruitment and Screening Strategies	Recruitment efforts included partnerships with a local historically black college and a community college for the purpose of sharing UTEP information and hosting recruitment events. Recruitment events also were held at school sites in partnering districts, and paraprofessionals within these districts were targeted for recruitment. Master teachers and administrators within the partnering districts served on admission screening committees, alongside university faculty. The first phase of screening UTEP applicants involved traditional factors such as grade point average, entrance examination scores, and completion of prerequisite coursework. In addition to these traditional factors, UTEP applicants were screened via interviews conducted by admission committees. These interviews focused on assessing candidate aptitude in terms of criteria found to be critical to successful urban teaching: persistence/commitment; organization and planning; valuing of student learning; ability to connect with diverse groups; attribution for success; fallibility; and ability to navigate bureaucracy.
Candidate Support	A variety of types of support were provided to UTEP candidates. Faculty liaisons served as ombudsmen to candidates after they were admitted to the program by assisting them in negotiating any challenges, academic or non-academic, that they may have encountered in working towards program completion. UTEP candidates also received scholarship support through federal grants. Based on the source of funding used for tuition support, candidates were required to complete a teaching obligation upon program completion in either a high-poverty school, or as a special education teacher in any public school.
Program Competencies	In addition to the traditional program competencies, UTEP candidates were required to master additional competencies associated with urban teaching. These competencies are organized in four strands: a) sociocultural competence, which focuses on helping candidates to better understand the students and families with whom they will work, and the communities in which they will teach; b) affirming attitude, which focuses on developing the expectations, optimism, caring, and resilience that are needed to foster high student achievement; c) collaborative skills, which focuses on strategies for building effective relationships with the variety of persons with whom urban teachers must work in order to be effective, including those within schools (e.g., administrators, counselors, other teachers), as well as those external to schools (e.g., parents, social service agencies); and d) pedagogy for diversity, which focuses on strategies for accelerating diverse student achievement, including culturally and linguistically diverse learners, as well as students with disabilities.

Semi-Cohort Structure	UTEP candidates completed the program through a semi-cohort structure, and were required to take four of their core teacher education courses with their UTEP cohort groups: Curriculum Methods and Instruction; Classroom Management; Assessment; and Survey of Special Education. The UTEP competencies were infused into these courses. In delivering these core courses, teams of university faculty and exemplary district practitioners co-taught the content.
Enhanced Fieldwork Experiences	Program candidates completed extensive fieldwork in urban schools that were involved in ongoing professional development associated with the program.
Mentoring and Other Induction Support	Trained mentors were provided to UTEP participants during their first three years of teaching. Mentors worked directly with beginning UTEP teachers through activities such as observing and coaching, collaborative planning and problem-solving, and sharing resources. In addition to mentors, beginning UTEP teachers received other induction services, such as seminars in reported areas of need.

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