
Rethinking the Teacher Lottery

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The Need

There are numerous factors that impact urban student achievement, but none as important as the caliber of the adults in a school. The role of the principal is crucial, primarily because the principal is best positioned to ensure an excellent teacher in every classroom. But at the end of the day, it is the quality of the interactions between teacher and student, in every classroom and in every school, which matters most.

A lack of accountability tied to results. Though a number of states are no longer suffering from teacher shortages, nearly every urban district struggles with teacher quality. Central to this challenge is the abiding educational culture, which makes little connection between teachers' performance and students' results. At the moment, the best way to gauge whether teachers will be effective is to assess whether they have been effective. Though some pre-hire characteristics may have a relationship with student achievement, none have been able to help districts screen ineffective candidates out of the workforce (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2008). This inability to predict effectiveness, combined with ineffective tenure processes and state certification criteria tied largely to coursework, virtually ensure that new teachers will end up with rights to a teaching position for life, regardless of their ability to improve student performance. Without information (or interest) about how individual teachers perform, schools and districts also can't make strategic choices – tied to outcome data -- when they need to staff their neediest schools, support their neediest students, or determine whom to promote to leadership positions.

A new teacher quality gap. The de-coupling of performance from results permeates every aspect of the educational enterprise, extending into teacher preparation programs. Despite the recommendations of numerous reports, many teacher education programs continue to set low program entry standards. Equally problematic, there is little attrition from teacher education programs. Because education programs vary widely in what they teach, and in the rigor of their coursework, new teachers begin teaching with enormous variation in their knowledge and ability.

A transformational human capital strategy

The Urban Teacher Center (UTC) offers a breakthrough solution to the dual challenges of teacher expertise and teacher accountability. We accomplish this through a pioneering model of teacher preparation, and by linking program continuation and completion to student performance. UTC is an alternative teacher preparation program that requires applicants to make a four-year commitment: an intensive up-front residency year followed by a three-year teaching commitment in a high-need urban school.

Building on lessons learned by other teacher preparation programs, UTC's selective recruitment, intensive preparation, and ongoing performance measures will provide districts with candidates who have already demonstrated success in the classroom.

What makes UTC different?

Traditional teacher certification programs have long relied on extensive theoretical coursework to prepare individuals to teach in the classroom. Often lasting as long as three years to complete, traditional programs typically prepare their candidates by combining academic exercises and brief student-teaching experiences. While some of these programs provide rigorous background in pedagogical issues and content learning, none of them can guarantee that all of their graduates will be successful with a class of students on their first day as a full-time teacher.

Alternative certification programs have provided a growing share of new teachers in recent years. Some alternative certification programs select teacher candidates with excellent inputs, including those who have attended highly selective colleges and have demonstrated leadership abilities in other fields or activities. While these are important, alternative certification programs still graduate teachers with wide variation in their ability to raise student achievement (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006). Some of their teachers go on to have tremendous success with their students, and others fare far worse.

What all the current teacher certification programs have in common is their inability to measure the outputs of their selection and training. One study of teachers and students suggests that the difference in achievement growth between students with a “good” teacher and students with a “bad” is as much as a full grade equivalency in one year of instruction (Hanushek, 1992)¹. While all strive to prepare the best teachers, none have been able to quantify how well their teachers do before they enter the classroom. The traditional means by which districts select teachers - college selectivity, performance in academic coursework, success in an interview or a model lesson - have done little more than enter them into the teacher quality lottery. Sometimes the ticket is a winner, and the hired teacher performs well with students. Other times, the ticket is a loser because a candidate who seemed promising on paper is not effective in the classroom.

How does UTC select, train and certify teachers?

UTC teachers must successfully pass through four performance gates before they receive certification. First, all candidates must have promising prior backgrounds and pass through an initial interview process. Second, during the residency year (year 1), they must demonstrate the ability to boost the reading skills of a small group of students in another teacher’s classroom. Third, they must successfully complete their masters’ degree, including both clinical observation and course work, and last, they must demonstrate their ability to increase learning of all students in their own classrooms for two years. Through this stringent screening, preparation, and evaluation, UTC will permit only those teachers who improve student performance to complete their program – and therefore to receive a full state teaching license.

Urban Teacher Center | **Accountability Design**

YEAR ZERO	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
Application year	Residency year	Teaching year 1	Teaching year 2	Teaching year 3
Minimum GPA & experience Entrance exam in math & English Performance based interview	Improving student performance in small literacy group (of 6 – 8 students) Successful coursework completion	Pre- & post test literacy data (yr. 1 of 2) Formative Assessment literacy data (yr. 1 of 2) Successful coursework completion	Pre- & post test literacy data (yr. 2 of 2) Formative Assessment literacy data (yr. 2 of 2)	Begin to lead peer support
GATE 1: Rigorous acceptance process	GATE 2: Continuation in program and placement as teacher	GATE 3: Masters conferral (end year two)	GATE 4: Program completion (end year 3)/ certification	
Teachers do not complete the program unless their students demonstrate an average gain of one year in each of two years (years 2 and 3)				

Gate 1: Applicants will engage in a multi-step screening process designed to select residents who are fully invested in UTC’s mission, and who have the skills to be successful. Successful applicants may be recent college graduates or college graduates with a work history. They must meet a minimum GPA standard, and pass several entrance exams that assess their literacy and numeracy skills. UTC is seeking individuals with a demonstrated record of success, high levels of personal responsibility and an ability to work collaboratively.

UTC will develop and execute a recruitment campaign to attract the best candidates to apply for UTC admission. This initial selection process is crucial to the success of the program. UTC will not be for every aspiring teacher: only those who are interested in intensive support and a high degree of accountability will be interested in the rigors of this program. While using only pre-hire characteristics to select candidates will not guarantee teacher effectiveness, finding candidates with the right experience and personal characteristics will ensure that our candidate pool holds promise of containing many effective teachers-to-be.

Gate 2: During their first year of the program, residents take a series of modules and courses, which are fully integrated into a year-long clinical experience, for which they will be compensated with a living stipend. During this year UTC candidates will work intensively with students in a variety of classrooms in a “host school” - a school with similar characteristics to the one in which they will ultimately be placed. At the heart of the clinical experience will be in an intensive, small-group seminar setting embedded in a host teacher’s classroom. All residents work with a small group of students over the course of five months, gaining deep understanding of how individual students struggle with and master reading strategies. In this setting, candidates will have the opportunity to apply their coursework and gain first-hand experience helping individual students become better readers.

At the end of this year, residents will be assessed on their performance in three areas: successful coursework completion; demonstration of practice during student teaching and the small group setting; and improving the small group’s skills.

This first assessment point represents the program’s commitment to prioritizing student achievement gains as one key measure of teacher quality. We will measure baseline student performance at the beginning of each resident’s work with the small group and measure student performance again at the end of the five months using parallel forms of a nationally-normed reading test [TBA]. The average difference in the students’ baseline and end performance will generate a hypothesis about individual residents’ future effectiveness. Residents able to demonstrate four or more months of gain (in this five-month timeframe), we predict, will have higher likelihoods of being effective teachers when they work in their own classroom. Residents whose students gain less than four months of reading skills will need deeper support in their first year as teacher of record.

To decide which residents will continue in the program, UTC will calculate a score for a resident as follows:

Score = (mo. of progress with small group) + 3* (course work GPA)

For example, for a resident who made five months of progress and had a perfect, 4.00 GPA, their residency scores would be 17 (= 5 + 3*4). For residents with a perfect 4.00 GPA but who only make four months of progress with their small group, their score would be 16, and residents who make four months progress with their students and who have a 3.67 GPA would have a score of 15. This formula gives equal weight to one month of gain with students and a half-letter grade GPA increase (e.g. A- to A).

Residents’ scores will be used as follows:

Score	Action
15 ≤ score	Resident passed on to next year with strong recommendation. ²
13 ≤ score < 15	Resident passed on to next year with supplemental support.
Score < 13	Resident may not be recommended for program continuation. Exceptional circumstances in classroom setting may allow a resident with this score to continue in the program.

² Residents whose GPA is lower than 2.33 (C+ average) will not be allowed to continue in the program, regardless of their overall score.

Gate 3: In their second year of the program, our teachers are placed as teachers of record in their own classroom and will work to complete their Masters of Education degree with continuing faculty support in their placements. Only through successful completion of all coursework and demonstrated effective teaching practice will teachers be recommended for masters degree conferral from UTC’s partnering university.

Student performance data is collected throughout this year which will aid in the final assessment of the teacher’s ability to improve student achievement. (See below for more details.) This data collection occurs across years two and three of the program, to allow for the significant learning that new teachers do in their early years. Residents are expected to achieve nine months of growth in achievement over the course of the school year. However, only teachers who make less than 6 months of growth will be deemed “at risk” of not completing the program. Because final determination is made only after an additional year of data is collected, this designation does not formally jeopardize their candidacy. However, UTC will provide them additional support in their second year to help them attain better classroom results.

Gate 4: At the end of their second year as teacher of record, all UTC teachers must demonstrate that their students’ reading performance has improved an average of one grade equivalency for each of the past two years. If teachers have accomplished this, they will receive full program completion, and therefore full state certification in both elementary and special education. If teachers are close to this goal but fall short, they may be recommended for extension, with one additional year of data collection. Teachers who have not met student performance expectations will be released from the program.

To determine whether their students have gained at least one year in their reading ability, we will administer a nationally-normed test of reading [TBA]. Again, using parallel forms of the same test at the beginning, middle, and end of the year, we will be able to determine how much each teacher’s students have progressed under their instruction. The growth will be measured by the difference in the students’ first assessment score and final assessment score in each year; teachers whose students, on average, have progressed by one year will be given full program completion. While not every student in the classroom must achieve a full year of growth, 90% of students in the teacher’s second year must progress by no less than seven months. Taking the average of students’ progress eliminates some of the measurement error in the students’ test scores, while ensuring that a large majority of students must make at least 7 months of progress holds the teacher accountable for the learning of every student in their classroom.

For teachers who come close to making seven months of progress in a year (out of ten months), UTC will provide the opportunity for the candidates to stay an additional year. Essentially, these teachers will repeat their third year in the program, receiving mentoring support in their classroom and measuring student progress. At the end of this year, student growth data will be assessed. If the teachers have succeeded in adequately raising their students’ reading ability, they will be awarded UTC program completion. If they fail to do so they will leave the program and therefore not receive full state certification.

Why should schools invest in UTC-licensed teachers?

UTC builds on the work of other teacher training programs. We understand that recruiting candidates with the best leadership ability, academic credentials, and character traits is a vitally important first step towards putting high quality teachers in the classroom. We also think that rigorous coursework, grounded in the latest research on pedagogy and child development, is important to train candidates in how children learn, and we know clinical residency in classrooms should be at the heart of how teachers learn their craft. However, despite the best selection process, training program, and student-teaching experience, no other program has yet been able to guarantee the effectiveness of each teacher it certifies (insert Gordon, Kane, & Staiger; Mathematica study; Loeb et al).

UTC will change this, requiring demonstration of student achievement gains for all its teachers. In this way, we can identify and reward only those individuals who truly help children learn. While the variation in teacher performance from other certification pathways is wide, each of UTC's graduates will have met a high minimum standard of performance, a signal to schools that they will make a difference for students.

Gordon, R., Kane, T. J., & Staiger, D. O. (2006). *Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job. Discussion Paper 2006-01*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

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