The Status of Teaching in the Southeast: Measuring Progress, Moving Forward

Barnett Berry, John Luczak, & John Norton

America’s has over 90,000 public schools that must address the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 by the school year of 2005-2006. In order to sufficiently implement No Child Left Behind, states must address issues such as teacher induction training, greater teacher compensation, the creation of more supportive work environments, and increased opportunities for professional development. Based on Education Week’s Quality Counts 2003 report on the status of teaching in the U.S., this article summarizes the data set forth by the Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000 (SASS) as it relates to the current status of teaching in the Southeast states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia).

Working to expand upon the Quality Counts 2003 report, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (SECTQ) developed additional assessments of the teaching profession that focus on teacher preparation, professional development, testing and accountability, and working conditions. This article reports six crucial findings of SECTQ with respect to the SASS data on the above assessments.

The initial two findings address the amount of practical experience preparation new teachers (less than five years experience) possess and the degree to which new teachers participate in, and receive continued support from, teacher induction programs. Seven areas, including classroom management, subject matter, lesson planning, and the use of computers measured the amount of preparation to teach. While teachers in the Southeast did report higher levels of preparedness than their colleagues in other regions of the nation, less than half of Southeastern teachers reported that they were “very well prepared” in these seven areas. Additionally, teachers in the southeast participated in more teacher induction programs than their national counterparts, though the degree of participation and the quality of these supportive programs vary greatly from state to state.

Working conditions varied greatly across the southeast, as SECTQ’s third finding reports that only 47% of southeastern teachers feel supported and encouraged by their principals. In addition, very few teachers (only 5%) are “strongly satisfied” by their salaries. Additional attempts at compensating teachers fall short as well, with only 30% of the southeastern teachers “strongly agreeing” that they are recognized for “job(s) well done.”

The heavy emphasis on testing accountability in the southeast is expressed, as this region reports using state and district standards to guide instruction more often than the national average. While teachers in the southeast are more likely to base their teaching on statewide standards and standardized test scores, “only two-thirds report ever receiving the test scores in their school.” Additionally, over 40% of the south’s teachers report being “worried” about job security because of the region’s testing environment.

The fifth find reports a significant deficiency in the number of teachers instructing students with learning challenges versus the number who have undergone the proper training (defined as at least eight hours). Finally, the SASS survey notes that teachers in the southeast are “less satisfied in their jobs and less likely to remain in the profession.” More than one-fifth of the region’s teachers report that they would “probably or certainly not become a teacher again.”

The implications of this study are forthright. While the Southeast leads the nation in several categories of teacher quality, this region still has not made a “strong showing.” Although data implies that teachers in the South are “more likely” to make use of standardized test data, “more likely” to get support to teach special needs children, and “more likely” to be recognized for good job performance, the reality is that “most (teachers) do not.” The authors conclude by stating “leaving no child behind begins with leaving no teacher behind.”

Results of this study were published by The Southeast Center for Teacher Quality, 2003, 1-9.

Abstracted by Benjamin Dotger