TEACHER QUALITY
Moving toward more effective instruction
Teaching matters.

So do teachers…

Whether in cities or rural schools, in elementary classes or secondary subject areas, our nation simply does not have enough effective teachers to prepare all students for the demands of the 21st century and the rapidly developing knowledge economy. Overcoming this national challenge, of course, will not be simple. While persuasive evidence shows students benefit from excellent instruction, we have yet to identify the best strategies for recruiting, preparing and retaining top-notch educators — including how to define and measure what makes them high quality. “We need to keep experimenting,” says Suzanne Wilson, chairperson of Michigan State University’s Department of Teacher Education. As head of a National Academy of Education panel presenting a peer-reviewed white paper on teacher quality early in 2009, she is asking the government – including new President Barack Obama – to invest in efforts that allow all of us to learn from experience. To understand the most powerful policies for enhancing teacher quality, Wilson and her co-authors call on educational leaders to implement programs grounded in research on a graduated basis, and to employ more systematic data collection along the way.

When it comes to understanding teacher quality, MSU has much to offer. Wilson oversees a rigorous five-year teacher preparation program and conducts research alongside several of the nation’s leading scholars on teacher quality. The College of Education was founded with a commitment to determining what makes great teachers. That commitment continues today with innovative programs for prospective educators, studies to inform many aspects of teacher education, and research that serves the people most concerned with excellent instruction – K-12 school leaders, parents, students and, of course, teachers.

The NAE white paper offers a framework for policymakers to think about enhancing the teaching workforce. Wilson provides key points from each focus area identified by the panel on the following pages, which are intended to illustrate the many valuable, and sometimes ground-breaking, contributions made by the MSU College of Education.
Meanwhile, the partnership with DPS also includes a summer preparation program with a commitment to return to teach in their own home communities or in other urban settings. Many of those participants have enrolled in the MSU teacher preparation program as juniors, the College of Education now admits a growing number of freshmen into specialized programs that have been designed for the needs of today’s changing education workforce. The Urban Educators Cohort Program places students who share an early passion for teaching in city schools together in special course sections and service-learning experiences during the first two years. Similarly, the Global Educators Cohort Program recruits and connects students who want to teach in multicultural or international contexts. Cohort members continue participating in activities that emphasize particular teaching settings and competencies throughout the five-year teacher certification program. They also have extra incentives; students in cohort programs get priority consideration for scholarships and hiring recommendations from the dean.

MSU faculty members recognize that placing good teachers in the schools that really need them is ultimately a responsibility they share with school district leaders and policymakers. So, they strive to infuse their curricula and student interactions with realistic information about career prospects and, more importantly, the knowledge, skills and dispositions students will need to land a job they love.

In the recruiting toolbox
Michigan State University also connects promising potential teachers with loan forgiveness and networking opportunities, such as:

Full-year teaching internships in 67 Michigan school districts plus Chicago Public Schools.

The National Science Foundation’s Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program: Up to $12,750 for mathematics or science majors who will teach in high-needs urban or rural school districts for two years or more.

The federal Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant Program: Up to $4,000 per year for students who intend and agree to teach in schools serving low-income families for at least four years.

Developing the Detroit pipeline
MSU offers Detroit high school students a unique opportunity to explore teaching, thanks to a partnership with Detroit Public Schools (DPS). Rising 11th and 12th graders come to campus each summer for a four-week residential program that helps them prepare for college, with a focus on careers in education. Many of those participants have enrolled in the MSU teacher preparation program with a commitment to return to teach in their own home communities or in other urban settings.

Building a strong teacher workforce requires recruiting high-quality prospective teachers. Historically, teaching benefited from the fact that women and minorities had limited access to many professions. But as opportunities have expanded for all U.S. citizens, teaching has paid the price. As a result, there has been considerable experimentation in the last 15 years in terms of recruiting new teachers. Alternative routes and certification programs have been established, as well as policy innovations like signing bonuses and loan forgiveness for new teachers who make a commitment to teach in high-need schools for a specified period of time. Although we have not always collected good information about the effectiveness of these programs, we do know that innovations in recruitment can draw a broader and more diverse group of people into teaching.
The MSU program

As home to one of the nation’s university-based teacher preparation programs, Michigan State University never stops moving forward. Leaders are constantly re-evaluating the required courses and the balance of fieldwork. Faculty members, who are often veteran teachers themselves, infuse the curriculum with core principles for effective instruction and progressively hands-on classroom experiences. They are guided by research conducted on their campus and throughout the world as they make day-to-day and sometimes historic decisions such as the establishment of a full-year post-bachelor’s degree teaching internship in the 1990s. The College of Education works closely with partnering school districts and mentors who play a critical role in preparing teacher candidates for their careers.

Overall, the teacher preparation program at MSU is designed to produce educators who have deep content knowledge and who can demonstrate the best methods for teaching that content. This commitment, fueled by the goal to improve learning for all students, remains steady despite the patterns of change.

MSU’s most recent innovations include an emphasis on the skills and dispositions teachers need to handle international and urban contexts, through both general teacher education skills and dispositions teachers need to handle international contexts, through both general teacher education and dispositions teachers need to handle international contexts. This includes developing a sense for social justice in education. Opportunities for students to experience classrooms have thus expanded to more diverse locations, from Detroit and Chicago to Malaysia and China.

Teachers for a New Era

Michigan State University was one of the first four pioneering institutions selected to participate in the Teachers for a New Era (TNE) initiative, a landmark effort by the Carnegie Corporation to restructure teacher education and set national standards for excellence. Seven years later, faculty members participating from the colleges of Education, Natural Science, Arts and Letters, and Social Science are ready to share their collective new insights for improving university teacher preparation. They expect to publish a book in spring 2010, around the same time more than $3 million in grants from Carnegie and the Annenberg, Rockefeller, and Ford foundations officially wrap up.

However, program changes and data collection efforts developed through Teachers for a New Era will persist at MSU long after the formal project, says Robert E. Floden, associate dean in the College of Education. “We are committed to collaboration with disciplines across campus and helping students develop the subject-matter knowledge they need to really teach effectively,” he said. “Our work is being institutionalized in the core content areas.”

For example, teacher education Professor Cheryl Rosaen and colleagues from the university’s English and writing departments (Marilyn Wilson and Julie Lindquist) have revamped the content preparation for elementary education students who major in language arts. Their revised course requirements, to be implemented in fall 2009 pending approval, reflect current thinking about literacy in many forms beyond print-based text and consumption. They offer a richer student experience by focusing on both what pre-service teachers know about each subject, such as writing, and how they experience learning in that subject, giving them more direct experience as writers, for example. The group is now exploring steps to improve secondary English teacher preparation.

In mathematics, the Teachers for a New Era team created a new required statistics course specifically for K-8 teachers after determining that MSU was not adequately preparing elementary educators to teach data analysis—a critical piece of the state curriculum.

TNE also fostered a commitment to collecting better data about MSU teacher candidates and the pupils of graduates, in all content areas. Another notable accomplishment has been the development of model for working with teachers in their first years on the job. (see page 10).

www.teachersforanewera.org

A global teacher prep study

Michigan State University is the headquarters for a collaborative worldwide effort to study the mathematics preparation of future primary and secondary teachers. Using national representative samples from 17 countries, the Teacher Education Study in Mathematics (TEDS-M) aims to tell us if what teachers learn in teacher education leads to more effective knowledge of mathematics for teaching.

Principal investigators Maria Teresa Tatom, John R. Schwille and Sharon Senk of MSU are working with the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and institutions in each nation—with MSU’s William H. Schmidt representing the United States—to analyze policies governing mathematics teacher education, curricula in teacher education and their correlation with primary and secondary school curricula, program opportunities to learn, and intended and achieved outcomes of teacher education programs.

TEDS-M, expected to release a report in 2010, will pay particular attention to links between teacher education policies, practices and outcomes, allowing participating nations to conduct research on their own systems and to learn from other approaches.

The US TEDS study will generate a comprehensive and national portrait of elementary, middle and high school mathematics teacher preparation against the international
Teachers become more effective over the first three to five years of their careers. But unfortunately, many teachers leave the profession quickly—estimates are between 20-50%. This creates a Catch-22-like problem: Teachers do not stay in teaching long enough to become effective. Turnover must occur in high-need schools and in urban areas, while some leave because they learn that they do not want to be teachers, the costs are still considerable, both personally and materially. Currently, school districts are experimenting with a range of policies and incentives among them. There is also some reason to believe that working conditions matter. Teachers may be more likely to stay in schools where there is strong principal leadership and collegial work environments, while we have learned a great deal about how to recruit new teachers to the profession we know much less about how to retain them. We need to know much more about what Richard Ingersoll has called this “leaky bucket” problem.

**Keeping high-need teachers**

Policymakers and teacher education leaders have been supporting broad efforts to recruit and prepare teachers specifically for today’s top-priority areas, such as mathematics, science, special education and early literacy. But what happens to these educators once they enter the profession?

Analysis by Sharif Shakrani, co-director of the Education Policy Center at MSU, showed that, for the first time in 2007, a larger percentage of MSU graduates certified in high-need subject areas left Michigan to take teaching jobs than the percentage that remained in the state. “When you lose them to another place, you are subsidizing other states,” Shakrani said, noting both economic conditions and collective bargaining agreements limit Michigan school districts’ ability to hire new teachers in critical content areas. “There are people teaching subjects who are maybe not the best qualified.”

Shakrani’s research also included a study of new 7th grade math and reading teachers who graduated from MSU (experimental group) and other teacher training institutions in Michigan (control group). The research, funded by the Teachers for a New Era initiative, examined differences in MEAP test scores obtained for pupils in the teachers’ classes. Results showed that both groups had a similar and higher proportion of students who reached proficient levels in mathematics compared with the state average. In reading, the pupils of MSU grads made higher gains than the control group and the state average.

More importantly, Shakrani notes, most recent graduates were employed by public schools that are performing better than the state average to begin with. Most low-performing schools in core urban areas and some rural areas were not hiring new teachers due to steady or declining enrollment.

**It’s not just about the money**

According to Suzanne Wilson and the white paper panel, the incentives that initially attract new teachers do not necessarily keep them. Work relationships with colleagues and supervisors may be important considerations for new teachers deciding whether to stay in a challenging school or leave. To find out more, Peter Youngs and Kenneth Frank are investigating the effects of mentors, colleagues, collective responsibility and relational trust on the commitment and retention of beginning teachers in 10 urban school districts.

Funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, their longitudinal study includes more than 200 general and special education teachers in grades 1-8 and more than 500 formal mentors and colleagues who work in the same Michigan and Indiana schools.

Youngs is an assistant professor of teacher education who is focused on policies affecting teacher quality; Frank is a professor of measurement and quantitative methods and an expert in social network analysis. “This is the first empirical study to employ social network data to examine the supports and pressures experienced by new teachers,” notes Youngs. Preliminary findings from the study indicate that the degree of social-psychological fit between beginning teachers and their colleagues has a greater effect on the commitment and retention of novices than either the expertise of their mentors or the nature of their interactions with mentors and colleagues. The same is true of the level of relational trust in their schools.

Guarino discovered the ECLS-K data “show that time spent on math, math content emphasis, and math pedagogy in kindergarten and first grade vary systematically” by several factors, including teacher background characteristics, teacher attitudes and professional development activities. She has also found that pre-service preparation and the individual efforts teachers make to prepare for lessons are positively associated with their active engagement in mathematics teaching. In the next part of her study, Guarino will trace how well the particular practices she has identified raise student achievement.
A model for intensive mentoring

MSU Associate Professor Randi Stanulis shifted the culture for cultivating new teacher support in Lansing’s urban schools by introducing a district-level, university-led induction model three years ago. Her initial study of 24 beginning educators showed that participants made more significant instructional improvements in their first year than non-participating peers. Now she is sharing the pilot program — a product of the landmark Teachers for a New Era initiative (see page 6) — with Georgia’s Fulton County Schools and other educational leaders across the nation.

Launch into Teaching Through Comprehensive Induction, or LIT, was started as a way to ensure that MSU teaching graduates continue using what they have learned about theory and practice in their own classrooms. Stanulis studies how novices learn to teach, particularly in the first three to five years when up to 50 percent of the nation’s new teachers leave the profession, according to some estimates.

“Many times they say, ‘I don’t know what I’m doing tomorrow. I feel like I’m just surviving,’” she said. She believes too many schools simply send new teachers to one district orientation session and (maybe) match them with a veteran teacher. “When someone graduates, even from the best teacher preparation program, they really haven’t finished learning how to be a great teacher,” Stanulis says. “They have only just begun.”

Often, conversations with mentors focus only on emotional support and managing the classroom. Launch into Teaching is “super-focused” on improving instructional practices and, therefore, student learning. Mentors — and principals — also take more active responsibility toward meeting those goals, spending time observing new teachers in action and attending intensive, ongoing training sessions.

Along with her positive empirical evidence, Stanulis also has promising feedback from mentors who say the program re-energized their own practices and new teachers who fear they would have quit their jobs without it. She published these findings, with MSU colleague Robert E. Flood, in the March/April 2009 edition of the Journal of Teacher Education (http://jte.sagepub.com).

Michigan’s economic troubles have unfortunately limited Lansing School District’s ability to hire beginning teachers. Fulton County Schools in Georgia, a district with many high-poverty schools, hires a large number of brand-new teachers and provides the first opportunity for Stanulis to scale up the research. She is incorporating more beginning teachers (86 compared to 12) and collecting data on student learning for the first time using a task that measures children’s high-level reasoning and communication skills. The partnership with Fulton County launched in fall 2008 and will continue through at least 2011.

Meanwhile, MSU scholars led by Stanulis also have packaged their knowledge about supporting beginning teachers into online modules for teachers, mentors and principals. School districts, including Frisco Independent School District in Texas, contract with MSU to offer the professional development to their employees. More than one million people have visited the ASSIST (Advocating Strong Standards-based Induction Support for Teachers) Web site. Also developed by MSU faculty, the free site gives new teachers, mentors and principals deeply layered links to tools and examples for classroom management, lesson planning, different learning styles and much more.

International insights on induction

The need to help new teachers adjust to the challenges of working in schools is not unique to this country. Lynn Paine, professor of teacher education, has spent her professional career investigating this and other issues related to teacher quality from an international perspective. Her work in teacher induction includes an National Science Foundation-funded study of teacher induction in five countries with well-established systemic policies and programs: France, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland and China (Shanghai). Paine and her colleagues wanted to understand the links between teacher recruitment, induction and professional development.

They found the induction programs they studied differed from one another yet shared three characteristics that most programs in the U.S. lack: First, induction programs in the countries Paine studied are comprehensive, rigorous and seriously monitored, with well-defined roles for staff developers, administrators, instructors and mentors. Second, these programs focus on professional learning, growth and professionalism, and consider induction to be only the beginning of a teacher’s lifelong learning process. Third, collaborative group work is an integral part of the professional culture and fostering this collegial approach to teaching and learning is a primary goal of induction.

Along with colleagues from MSU and abroad, Paine has now turned her international perspective to explore another type of professional growth known as a lesson study, to understand more clearly the kind of learning teachers gain from this activity and its potential for improving teacher quality in this country.


Entering the profession of teaching

Teacher induction programs have multiplied across the country in the last 10 years, and for most of those, mentoring is the centerpiece. Not so at the Exploratorium, one of the world’s most expansive hands-on learning centers.

In the Beginning Teacher Induction Program based at the San Francisco museum, novice teachers are treated like their more senior colleagues and given a broader array of choices to learn about teaching. Among these, new teachers immerse themselves in exhibits, workshops, curriculum resources and joint work with science teachers and scientists.

“The centerpiece really is the socialization of new teachers into teaching as a profession,” says Suzanne Wilson, teacher education chairperson at MSU. Her study of the unusual induction program, with Jodie Galasy, Jamie Mikeska and Jeff Rozelle, will document what participating new teachers learn about science content and pedagogy at the Exploratorium.

Each fall about 25 beginning middle and high school science teachers volunteer to participate in the two-year program. They work with experienced science teachers associated with the Exploratorium who observe, mentor and coach them. They also select their own teaching seminars and group meetings to attend.

During the summer they participate in an intensive institute in which they take classes in science and science teaching and work shoulder-to-shoulder with experienced colleagues and research scientists. By program’s end, they join more than 2,000 alumni of the Exploratorium’s Teacher Institute and can return for other advanced training opportunities.

“Entering the Guild,” as the researchers named the $3 million National Science Foundation study, will supply valuable information about the effects of teacher professional communities as educators across the country experiment with widely varying forms of induction and professional development. It is also a model for collaboration between university faculty and professional development programs based in informal learning environments because all assessments have been designed in collaboration with Exploratorium staff and are administered during sessions at the museum.
will need – stronger understanding of central algebra concepts and deliver virtually the same kind of in-depth content teachers and principals for principals and teacher leaders happen first and are made in teachers’ ongoing learning. Here too we are coming out of a 15-plus-year period of considerable innovation in the design and delivery of professional development and a new commitment to documenting the effects of various approaches. While research is still limited in this domain, there is some evidence that good professional development: a) is focused on content and how students learn that content; b) is sufficiently long to allow teacher learning; c) is coherent with the current policy environment in which teachers work and with teachers’ current levels of knowledge and skill; d) is designed to support principals in struggling schools by focusing on the instructional core – the interaction between teacher, student and content – as a way to build capacity for improving student achievement in the school and among its staff. “Our mission,” explains Barbara Markle, assistant dean for K-12 outreach, “is to connect the research of the faculty to the practitioners in the field.” The Coaches Institute, a companion program, prepares a cadre of other educators who are skilled in facilitating adult professional learning and key for providing on-site support to principals. The purpose is to create a highly interactive and coherent learning experience that will increase the principals’ and coaches’ capacity to lead teacher learning and ultimately improve student achievement.

A capacity-building model

Teachers often point to their principals when they don’t feel supported. Add a high-stakes expectation for student achievement and unprepared educators look for help from their surrounding school team even more. Or at least they should be able to, says a team of MSU researchers. Mathematics education scholars Mike Steele and Beth Herbel-Eisenmann, with teacher educator Cynthia Carver, are testing a capacity-building model for professional development within a critical content-area: algebra. Many Michigan school districts are struggling to ensure all students can pass Algebra I and II under Michigan’s new high school graduation requirements (effective for the class of 2011).

The research team is partnering with six urban and rural Jackson County school districts from which identified secondary teachers, teacher leaders and principals will each undergo at least 30 hours of professional development. The key is that separate study group sessions (up to 20 meetings and retreats) for principals and teacher leaders happen first and deliver virtually the same kind of in-depth content teachers will need – stronger understanding of central algebra concepts and improved skills for teaching algebra to diverse learners.

Next, those multi-school district leadership groups will convene over the summer to develop their shared vision and plan for offering sustained professional development sessions to math and special education teachers at the building-level. “We think there is going to be something very powerful in this process of reaching shared understanding that will lead to improved teaching as well as improved learning for students,” Carver says.

Supporting school leaders

If research shows that the teacher is the key to student success, it also shows that the principal is the key to school success. The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires states to assist schools that repeatedly fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals, and Michigan has turned to the MSU College of Education and its Office for K-12 Outreach Programs to provide that assistance. The Michigan Principals Fellowship is designed to support principals in struggling schools by focusing on the instructional core – the interaction between teacher, student and content – as a way to build capacity for improving participating school districts, including student achievement, teacher knowledge and curriculum analysis. Each course is designed and facilitated to deepen teachers’ knowledge of the mathematics and science students are expected to learn according to the state standards, expectations and benchmarks.

The summer academies help teachers understand mathematics and science concepts taught two grades below and two grades beyond their class so they can tie together these concepts in their classrooms and help students understand broad themes that unfold in the disciplines.
One elementary teacher said before she attended a PROM/SE summer academy she could not imagine spending a whole week studying fractions. But after attending a special course taught by Hung-Hsi Wu, an internationally recognized expert on mathematics education, she explored fractions from every angle including comparing, ordering, equivalence and operations in connection to whole numbers and algebra. She now has a deeper understanding of how important it is to not only teach mathematical rules and processes, but also to help her students understand why those rules and processes make sense.

www.promse.msu.edu

Looking for links to practice
In her ongoing National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) study of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten data (see Preparation section), Cassandra Guarino has gathered empirical evidence that could guide policy decisions about professional development. Of the many activities Guarino has examined in the data, several—such as follow-up support, peer observation and feedback, and participation in workshops, college courses, or conferences—showed significant associations with practice, while others—such as in-service days or instruction from outside consultants—showed no association. Now Guarino is studying how well the particular practices identified raise student achievement.

National Board certification
As the National Academy of Education white paper on teacher quality points out, the past 20 years have seen considerable innovation in the design and delivery of professional development. Perhaps the most ambitious design (and among the more controversial) is the professional development teachers undergo while pursuing certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Many of these teachers consider the assessment process to be the best professional development they have ever had.

There are now more than 50,000 board-certified teachers in the U.S., enough to investigate their impact on a school system. A team of MSU researchers, including professors Kenneth Frank and Gary Sykes and associate professors Raven McCrory and Dorothea Avgoustopolous, has investigated the effect of having National Board-certified teachers in schools and found that they are more likely to provide instructional help to colleagues than non-certified teachers. “We think National Board Certification is an important mechanism for cultivating localized support to improve teaching practices,” explains Frank. The team is preparing other findings about how this certification supports teaching and learning in schools and how the presence of certified teachers affects school leadership functions.

Still, the National Board's certification assessment is a lengthy and costly process intended only for established teachers. One unanswered question is whether aspects of this assessment process can inform the development of a teacher evaluation process suitable for use early in a teacher’s career.

Sorting out assessments
“Probably no profession is subjected to more assessments with less effect than the teaching profession,” observes teaching scholar Mary Kennedy, who is finishing a new broad-sweeping volume on the topic. The Handbook of Teacher Assessment and Teacher Quality, to be published by Jossey-Bass in late 2009, will explore and critique all forms of teacher assessment, including often-controversial measures of beliefs and values. Fellow MSU faculty members Peter Youngs, Gary Sykes and Robert Floden also will contribute chapters.

Kennedy, who is editing the handbook, continues a long line of research in the interest of sorting out definitions of teacher quality and finding evidence of what influences it. Teachers face quality-control checkpoints at many stages in their careers; from different institutions: universities, states, districts; and for multiple reasons: hiring, job evaluation, equal allocation to high-need schools. In a September 2008 Phi Delta Kappan article, Kennedy notes there are many interpretations of teacher quality — credentials, classroom practices, test scores and personality traits to name a few — but that education professionals and policymakers lack a coherent strategy for assessing and ultimately enhancing the “qualities” we care about most.

What about VAMs?
Progress on the first problem may come from Kennedy’s colleagues Mark Reback and Cassandra Guarino, who are hard at work on a study of value-added measures (VAMs) of teacher effectiveness. Together with University Distinguished Professor Jeff Wooldridge in the MSU Department of Economics, Reback, a professor of measurement and quantitative methods, and Guarino, an associate professor of teacher education, are looking at ways to make VAMs more trustworthy indicators of the quality of a particular teacher.

“‘We face two substantial problems,’” Kennedy says. “First, we need to find a solid technology for measuring differences in teacher effectiveness; then we need to figure out why those differences exist, what teachers are doing that creates these differences in outcome.”

More information!
A secondary algebra assessment

School districts and teacher education institutions across the country are beginning to use a unique assessment for secondary mathematics education created at MSU. The KAT, or Knowledge of Algebra for Teaching, project brought together scholars from mathematics education, mathematics, and measurement and quantitative methods to develop a tool for measuring aspects of teachers’ mathematical knowledge that are believed likely to support effective algebra teaching in middle and high schools.

Over the course of a three-year study funded by the National Science Foundation, the researchers wrote, adapted and validated an assessment covering three critical areas: basic knowledge (what students might be expected to know), advanced knowledge (such as abstract or linear algebra), and teaching knowledge (e.g., knowledge of student errors and misconceptions about specific topics). Until recently, most of the work on knowledge for teaching mathematics was confined to the lower grades.

“Everyone agrees that teachers’ knowledge of mathematics is critical for effective algebra instruction,” said Robert E. Floden, the project’s principal investigator. “But we aren’t sure what specific aspects are most important for teachers to know. Having a measure, like our KAT assessment, that focuses on mathematical knowledge for teaching algebra is essential for research that will help us understand what knowledge is key to better teaching.”

Raven McCrory, Sharon Senk and Mark Reckase served as co-PIs. Joan Ferrini-Mundy, now on assignment with the National Science Foundation, was PI during the early stages of the project.

Measuring our own teaching

Each College of Education degree program is crafted to prepare only the highest quality educators, and therefore, each instructor must be a model for the kind of teaching that fosters interest, engagement and mastery. The Center for the Scholarship of Teaching honors education faculty members and graduate students with the Excellence in Teaching Awards each year. Selected by a committee of peers based on powerful evidence, the recipients’ innovative practices and materials are then circulated and serve as a public reminder of MSU’s commitment to high-quality teaching. “We have, in the university, a lot of knowledge about how to teach, but one of the problems is that (our) teaching is mostly invisible and really private,” said Suzanne Wilson, who directs the center. “We wanted something that would help us increase our capacity to teach well, as a college.”

The Center for the Scholarship of Teaching also tested two alternatives to the university’s Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) during the 2008-09 academic year with the hopes of adopting a system that assesses the quality of on-campus teaching and learning more effectively by 2010-11.

Wilson explained: “The current SIRS are neither flexible enough to accommodate a range of teaching styles and class arrangements nor focused on what students learn. We need much better data… if we are to use student feedback to inform program redesign and faculty evaluation and promotion.”

Related doctoral programs...

STUDY TEACHER QUALITY AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Better principal evaluation

Educators hoping to develop better teacher quality assessments might benefit from research on the evaluation of principals just completed by assistant professor Peter Youngs and graduate student Min Sun. Youngs and Sun looked at the relationship between how principals are evaluated and how they behave as school leaders. They investigated the principal assessment practices in 13 Michigan school districts.

Using Hierarchical Multivariate Linear models, the two researchers compared survey results from principals with the evaluation practices of their districts – specifically, Youngs and Sun analyzed the behaviors principals reported in light of the purpose and focus of the district’s evaluations and the leadership activities they assessed.

The researchers found that principals were more likely to engage in learning-centered leadership behaviors when the purpose of the district’s evaluation included principal professional development, school restructuring and accountability; when the focus of evaluation was related to instructional leadership; and when evaluation addressed leadership in school goal setting, curriculum design, teacher professional development and evaluation, and monitoring student learning. Youngs and Sun believe these findings, to be published in an article in an upcoming issue of the journal Leadership and Policy in Schools, have important implications for improving district evaluation policies and practices.
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