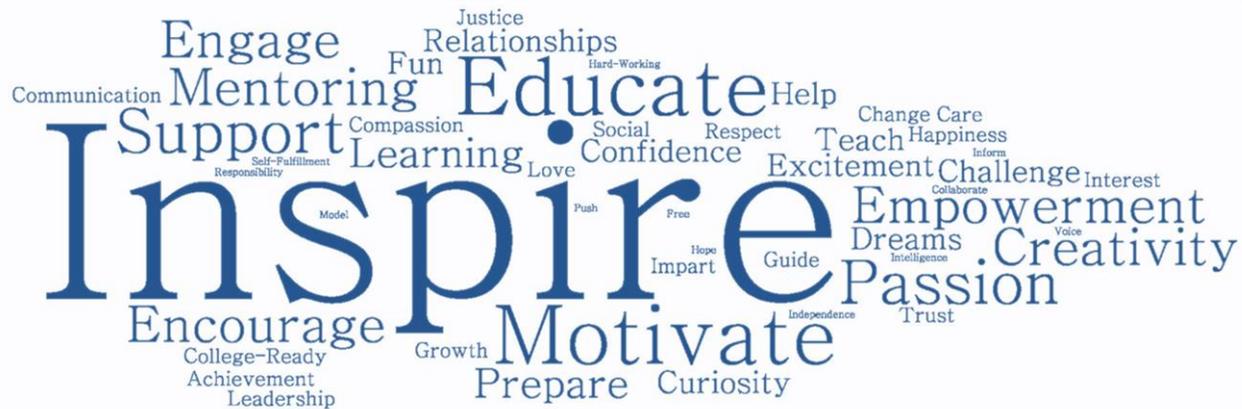




# EDUCATION POLICY GROUP



## RETHINKING TEACHER RECRUITMENT AT HARVARD

THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SPRING 2013 INSTITUTE OF POLITICS EDUCATION POLICY GROUP

**AUTHORS:**

Co-chairs: James Curtin, Jr. '16 and Colin Diersing '16<sup>1</sup>

Members: Constanza Vidal Bustamante '16, Bernadette Lim '16, Alejandro Jimenez '16, Miles Malbrough '16, Jaramillo Connor McKnight '16, Maya Park '16, Ella Park-Chan '16

**IOP STAFF:** Trey Grayson '94, IOP Director; Catherine McLaughlin, IOP Executive Director; Laura Simolaris, IOP Director of Youth Engagement.

**IOP POLICY PROGRAM:** Co-chairs: David Mazza '14 and Valentina Perez '15

<sup>1</sup>For correspondence, please contact [cdiersing@college.harvard.edu](mailto:cdiersing@college.harvard.edu) or [jamescurtin@college.harvard.edu](mailto:jamescurtin@college.harvard.edu)  
Image: Words survey respondents associated with a teaching career. *wordle.net*

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## SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Communicate accurate information about teacher salaries.**
- 2. Address concerns about classroom management.**
- 3. Sell potential teachers on student impact.**
- 4. Begin recruitment early.**

## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the findings of the Harvard Institute of Politics' Education Policy Group for the Spring 2013 semester. The group focused on teacher recruitment policies on Harvard's campus and surveyed students seriously considering teaching after graduation to determine how recruitment programs could be better directed at the needs, concerns, and desires of undergraduates interested in entering teaching.

The findings are presented in hopes of better informing teacher recruitment practices on elite college campuses such as Harvard College. With a clear need to improve teacher quality and retention in the United States and significant attention within education policy focused on improving the status of the teaching profession, recruiting students from elite colleges such as Harvard has become an increasing focus for programs including teacher residency programs, high performing charter schools, and Teach for America (TFA). However, these programs present a range of recruiting practices and lack a consistent understanding of what truly attracts potential teachers from Harvard to a potential program. The policy recommendations in this report should help to align recruitment practices with our findings about what motivates undergraduates considering teaching.

This report contains information on the methodology of the survey, a summary of findings not included in policy recommendations, and four policy recommendations to improve teacher recruitment at Harvard and other similar colleges.

## METHODOLOGY

After reviewing existing recruitment literature and recruitment practices on Harvard's campus (APPENDIX I), committee members drafted a set of thirty-nine questions to be administered as a survey to students seriously considering teaching after graduation (APPENDIX II). The questions were divided into five categories: personal background, academic background, current (Harvard) education, plans for a career in teaching, and future goals.

Forty-eight students who self-identified as 'seriously considering teaching K-12 after graduation' completed the survey. Staff members at Harvard's Undergraduate Teacher Education Program and Teach for America assisted the committee in finding participants involved in those two programs. The survey was also circulated using residential house and extracurricular group mailing lists, a standard practice at Harvard. Participants were informed they would be entered into a drawing to win a gift card. A randomly selected group of participants was also asked to participate in open-ended questions. Their answers were recorded and are referenced in this report. Although the small sample size has cautioned the committee from drawing conclusions about statistically insignificant differences, some data suggests they are representative of the whole population. They mirror almost exactly the racial breakup of Harvard's student body (TABLE 1) and are similarly likely to receive financial aid. The full responses are available upon request.

## SUMMARY OF RELEVANT FINDINGS

Findings that may be relevant to recruiters or interested parties but that do not lend themselves to immediate policy recommendations include:

- ❖ The vast majority of participants (92%) indicate an interest in teaching grades 7-12 over elementary school. (TABLE 2)
- ❖ The vast majority of participants (77%) reported planning on teaching in an urban school. All but one of the remaining indicated an interest in suburban schools, leaving only 2% interested in rural school districts. (TABLE 3)
- ❖ Participants were evenly split on whether they wished to join a teacher's union or not.
- ❖ A majority (61%) wished to teach in a public districted school, while similar groups of 15% and 13% planned on teaching in private and charter schools, respectively. Compared to the current rates of school types, new teachers disproportionately wish to teach in charters, and do not wish to teach in private schools. (TABLE 4)
- ❖ Recurring themes in open-ended answers about participants' major concerns about teaching included insufficient resources, low salaries, burn-out and lack of sleep, leaving systematic problems unaddressed, and lack of effectiveness
- ❖ Recurring themes in open-ended answers about goals for teaching included inspiring students, encouraging creativity and creative thinking, and instilling a passion for learning.

## RECOMMENDATION ONE: COMMUNICATE INFORMATION ABOUT SALARIES

Students surveyed expressed considerable concern about salary and pay. When asked to list two words that described their concerns about teaching, participants frequently mentioned salary or pay. In an attempt to gauge the financial opportunity cost of teaching, the survey also asked them to estimate their pay as a first year teacher and their pay in the first year of their second choice career. Fewer than 10% estimated a higher starting salary as a teacher than their second choice profession, while a clear plurality estimated a lower starting salary as a teacher than their alternative career. Meanwhile, a majority estimated that they would work more hours in their first year as a teacher than in their first year in their second choice profession.

When compared to actual starting salaries of teachers, however, the majority of participants underestimated their likely salaries in their first year (GRAPH 1). Among those who plan on teaching in an urban school district (the easiest to compare to outside statistics), half anticipated making less than \$40,000 a year. About a third estimated they would make \$30,000 a year or less. Actual starting salaries in urban school districts, however, are well above these estimates. In New York City Public Schools, a starting teacher can expect to make at least \$45,530<sup>1</sup>; in D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) \$51,539<sup>2</sup>; and in Chicago approximately \$47,000<sup>3</sup>.

Those who overestimated their earning potential as a teacher did so by less than those who underestimated their earning potential. Only two estimated a higher earning potential than offered in DCPS. When the projected second choice job salaries were compared to the first-year salary at DCPS, many participants who previously estimated they would make less as a teacher would actually make more as a teacher than they estimated they would make in a second choice job.

This gap between perceptions and actual earning potential offers an important opportunity to recruiters attempting to persuade students to teach instead of entering second choice careers. Information about teaching salaries should be provided early and often in the recruiting process so as to correct for the under-estimates. Ideally, information about actual salaries should be distributed to students early on so that they do not rule out teaching based on faulty information about financial tradeoffs.

Based on the nature of employment opportunities frequently pursued by Harvard graduates, it is impossible for teacher recruitment programs to compete with high paying second-choice careers when salary is the sole concern. Frequently, however, respondents perceived that having to live on a teacher's salary would negatively impact their quality of life. Increasing information about salary may not convince those who are set on pursuing high paying jobs to become teachers, but it may be the deciding factor for someone who has already considered a career in teaching but has been discouraged by what they see to be a limiting factor to their quality of life.

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<sup>1</sup> [New York City Department of Education](#). Accessed July 28, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> [District of Columbia Public Schools](#). Accessed July 28, 2013

<sup>3</sup> [Chicago Teaching Fellows](#). Accessed July 28, 2013

## RECOMMENDATION TWO: ADDRESS CONCERNS ABOUT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

When asked to identify what area(s) of teaching most concerned them (respondents could choose more than one response) from four common options (classroom management, content knowledge, instruction ability, and career advancement), an overwhelming majority (74%) were concerned about classroom management. In comparison, only 4% were concerned with content knowledge and only 30% were concerned with instruction ability. When asked to identify why they had chosen a particular preparation program, many identified a program's in-classroom training and classroom management training components as important to their choice. When listing words associated with their greatest concern for teaching, iterations of classroom management, discipline, and behavior were frequent responses.

Responses clearly indicate that potential teachers are concerned about their ability to effectively manage a classroom of students. Strikingly, training on how to handle classroom management and discipline situations was absent from many promotional materials reviewed by the committee. Future attempts to recruit teachers to a particular program could be made more persuasive by incorporating training dedicated to classroom management strategies and displaying those components in prominent locations.

The academic environment at Harvard and current recruiting practices can explain why the other common concerns were not as commonly held. If GPA is any indication of an individual's familiarity with content knowledge, it is clear why so few individuals noted this as a concern (GRAPH 2). Significantly more than half of students (63%) self-reported their GPA as greater than 3.5. This jumps to 94% when we consider those who have a GPA higher than 3.25. In addition, while a significant number of respondents were also concerned with instructional ability, pedagogy is currently well covered in many teacher recruitment programs. Many respondents had already received instruction in this area or were confident based on their research into teacher preparation programs that they would be well trained in this area. While significantly fewer respondents noted career advancement as a concern, those that did generally planned on spending less time teaching. Six of eight individuals that noted career advancement as a concern also reported that they would be teaching for less than 15 years. While this is not a significant concern for programs like TFA, programs that are looking for longer-term teachers may also be well advised to emphasize varied paths for career advancement and other ways teachers in the classroom can be recognized for their commitment to the profession.

## RECOMMENDATION THREE: SELL POTENTIAL TEACHERS ON STUDENT IMPACT

When asked whether they would prefer to teach students they believe to be well prepared to learn or students who they believe to be underserved by most schools, a striking 73% of participants report preferring to teach students who they believe to be underserved by most schools. When asked to list concerns, a theme of 'small scale impact' or persistent systematic injustice

occurred. Clearly, those surveyed respond to and believe in a narrative of teaching as an issue of social justice and equity. Recruitment strategies should address this clear desire to find a teaching job that maximizes social impact by explaining the importance of teachers to student life outcomes and offering placements and support necessary for success in challenging assignments.

Such strategies can draw from the relationships perspective teachers had with their former teachers. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents an insignificant role played by high school teachers in later success and 5 represents a very significant role, a vast majority believed their former teachers were very influential in their success. More than half (52%) gave their teachers the highest rating of 5 and an additional 31% rated them a 4. While the majority of prospective teachers did not experience the forms of social injustice that they would like to help eliminate, using recruiting strategies that draw on the support they received in the classroom and show ways they could effectively give back in the future may be an effective message to target young graduates.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOUR: BEGIN RECRUITMENT EARLY**

When asked to describe when they first decided they wanted to pursue teaching, 44% of participants identify having decided to become a teacher before entering college. Another 29% report having decided they wanted to become a teacher during the first two years in college. With notable exceptions, the majority of teacher preparation and recruitment programs do not begin to contact students before their junior or senior year (GRAPH 3). Unlike successful recruiting programs for consulting firms or investment banks, teacher programs expect to recruit students late in their college career. The evidence that a majority have already decided to pursue teaching before this time suggests that programs could more effectively recruit students by beginning to make contact with them early. It is likely that there is a pool of individuals who considered (or would have considered) teaching as a career early on in college, but did not consider it a viable option because they were never asked to teach or developed misconceptions about the profession due to a lack of information. This contact could come in the form of summer opportunities or simply providing information about a specific program to ensure that students are aware of it as an option when making future choices.

## CONCLUSION

Ample data supports the conclusion that improving public education in America will involve a relentless focus on and sustained effort to improve teaching quality in American public schools. This offers the best opportunity to improve student outcomes and equity in the American education system. One possible strategy may involve increasing the number of students who enter teaching from highly competitive universities such as Harvard.

Programs such as Teach for America have proven that focused and intensive efforts can successfully recruit talented young graduates to teaching. The results presented in this survey offer suggestive evidence that recruitment efforts could be improved with a clearer focus on data about the interests, beliefs, aspirations, and apprehensions of undergraduates considering teaching.

By focusing on beginning recruitment early, selling undergraduates on student impact, addressing concerns about classroom management, and communicating accurate and precise information about salaries, recruiters and policy makers should be able to improve recruitment of talented and capable young people into the teaching profession. In doing so we believe they will be able to improve recruitment and, ultimately, the educational and life outcomes of American students.

FIGURES AND TABLES

TABLE 1

	Survey Respondents %	Class of 2016 %
<b>Non-Latino White or Caucasian</b>	60.4%	56%
<b>Latino</b>	10.4%	11%
<b>African-American or Black</b>	8.3%	10%
<b>Asian</b>	18.8%	21%
<b>Other</b>	2.1%	2%

TABLE 2

Preferred Teaching Level	# Respondents	Respondents %
<b>Pre-K</b>	0	0%
<b>K-3</b>	4	8%
<b>3-6</b>	0	0%
<b>7-8</b>	7	15%
<b>9-12</b>	37	77%

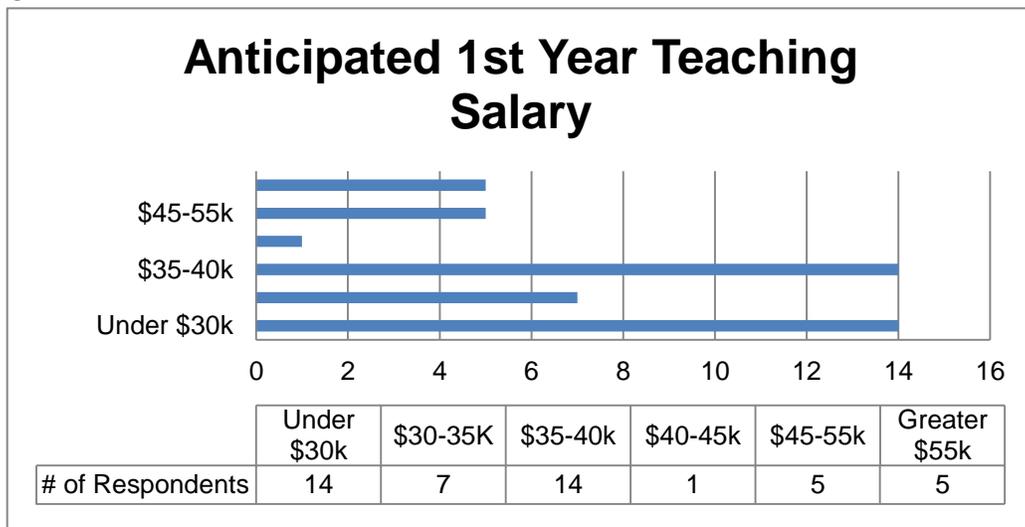
TABLE 3

Preferred District Type	Respondents %
<b>Urban</b>	71%
<b>Rural</b>	2%
<b>Suburban</b>	21%
<b>Other</b>	6%

TABLE 4

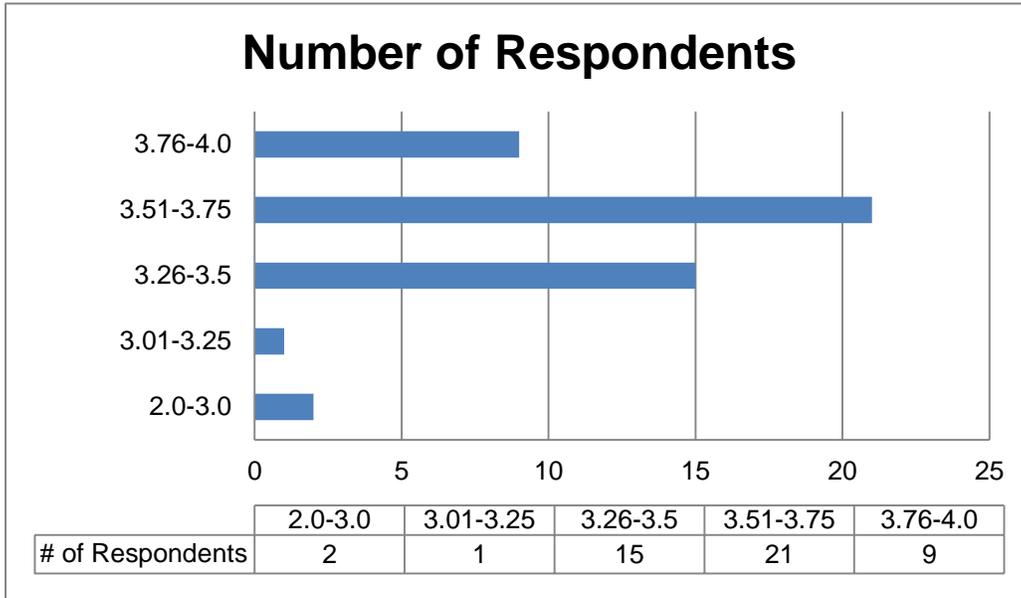
Preferred School Type	Respondents %	School Types in the US % <sup>4</sup>
<b>Public</b>	61%	69%
<b>Private</b>	15%	26%
<b>Charter</b>	13%	5%

GRAPH 1

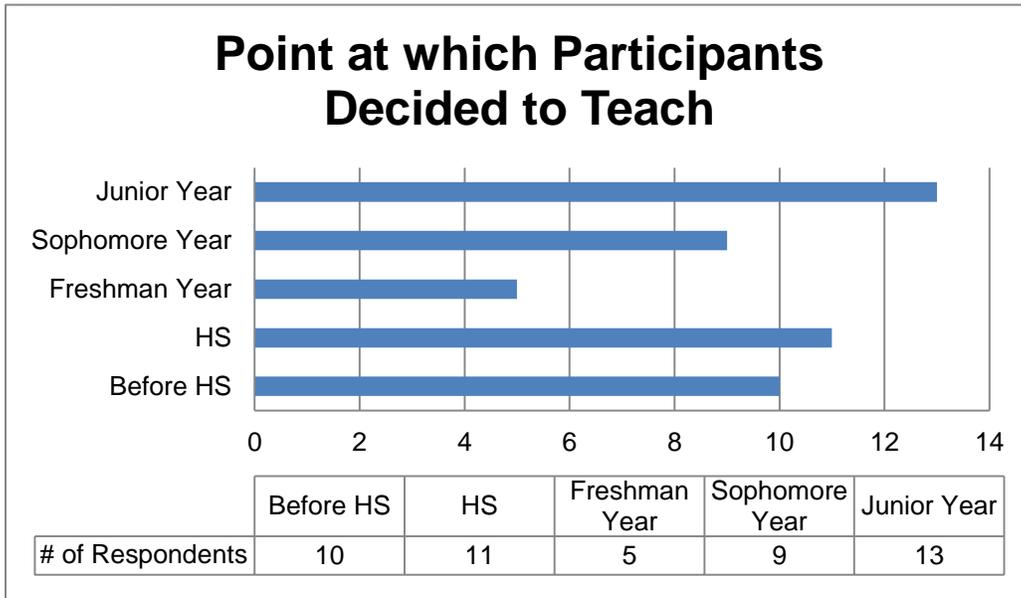


<sup>4</sup> NCES statistics, 2009-10

GRAPH 2



GRAPH 3



## APPENDIX I: EXISTING PUBLICATIONS

The two main teacher education programs currently on the Harvard campus are the Undergraduate Teacher Education Program (UTEP) and Teach for America (TFA).

UTEP is a program run exclusively at Harvard and was created at the Graduate School of Education so that undergraduates would have the opportunity to take graduate level classes and do observations and practicums, while still pursuing a traditional undergraduate degree. Many students who participate in UTEP do so to prepare for a career in education. Based on surveys with UTEP students, they on average plan to spend a greater percentage of their careers in the classroom as compared to students who pursue other undergraduate teaching programs. Information about UTEP is available at its website, [www.utep.fas.harvard.edu](http://www.utep.fas.harvard.edu).

TFA has a presence on many college campuses across the United States, and has greater name recognition. Unlike UTEP, which solely provides teachers with licensure, TFA involves placement in a classroom for a commitment period of two years. Most of the individuals surveyed indicated that they were not planning on a long-term teaching career, but that they would enter a different career field after their TFA commitment. More information about TFA can be found at its website, [www.teachforamerica.org](http://www.teachforamerica.org).

A minority of students may choose to enter teaching through a recruitment program run by individual school districts. As a whole, these residency programs are generally run by larger urban districts. This report mentioned New York ([www.nycteachingresidency.ttrack.org](http://www.nycteachingresidency.ttrack.org)), Washington, DC ([www.dcteachingfellows.ttrack.org](http://www.dcteachingfellows.ttrack.org)), and Chicago ([www.chicagoteachingfellows.ttrack.org](http://www.chicagoteachingfellows.ttrack.org)). Boston, the largest school district in proximity to Harvard also has a similar program ([www.bostonteacherresidency.org](http://www.bostonteacherresidency.org)).

## APPENDIX II: LIST OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

### Background Information

- ❖ Where did you spend most of your time growing up?
  - West, Southwest, Midwest, Southeast, Northeast, International
- ❖ How many siblings did you grow up with?
  - One, Two, Three, Four or more, None
- ❖ How would you describe your ethnicity?
  - Non-Latino white or Caucasian, Latino, African-American or black, Asian, Other
- ❖ What is your first parent or guardian's highest level of education?
  - Less than a high school degree, a high school degree, Associate's degree, Bachelor's Degree, Beyond a Bachelor's degree, Other
- ❖ What is your second parent or guardian's highest level of education?
  - Less than a high school degree, a high school degree, Associate's degree, Bachelor's Degree, Beyond a Bachelor's degree, Other
- ❖ What is your first parent or guardian's profession?
- ❖ What is your second parent or guardian's profession?
- ❖ Are any close family members involved in education?
  - Yes, No
- ❖ Roughly how much financial aid do you receive at Harvard?
  - Tuition and board fully covered, Board and much of tuition covered, Board covered, Very little, None

### School Background

- ❖ What sort of elementary school did you primarily attend?
  - Public, Private, Charter
- ❖ What sort of high school did you graduate from?
  - Public, Private, Charter
- ❖ How would you describe the high school you graduated from?
  - Urban, Rural, Suburban
- ❖ How highly would you rate the overall quality of the high school you graduated from? (1=low, 5=high)
  - 1-5
- ❖ How significant a role do you see your high school teachers as having had in your success? (1=low, 5=high)
  - 1-5
- ❖ What 3 words do you associate with your favorite high school teacher?

### Harvard

- ❖ What is your Harvard concentration?
- ❖ Which is closest to your Harvard GPA?
  - 2.0-3.0, 3.0-3.25, 3.25-3.5, 3.5-3.75, 3.75-4.0
- ❖ If you weren't becoming a teacher, what job would you plan on entering?
- ❖ At this second choice job, how many hours would you expect to work a week?

### Teaching Plans

## IOP Education Policy Group

- ❖ At this second choice job, how much would you expect to be paid in your first year?
- ❖ How will you be entering teaching?
  - TFA, Traditional teacher preparation (such as UTEP), A teacher residency program, Other
- ❖ When did you first decide you wanted to be a teacher?
  - Before high school, high school, freshman year, sophomore year, junior year, senior year
- ❖ What grade levels would you prefer to teach?
  - Pre-K, K-3, 3-6, 7-8, 9-12
- ❖ How long do you plan on teaching?
  - 1-5 years, 5-15 years, 15-30 years, whole career
- ❖ If you do not plan on teaching for your entire career, what do you plan on doing after?
- ❖ What subject areas would you prefer to teach?
  - Math, Science, History, English, Foreign language, Special Ed, General (elementary school), Other
- ❖ Where do you plan on teaching?
  - West, Southwest, Midwest, Southeast, Northeast, International
- ❖ What sort of school do you plan on teaching in?
  - Urban, Rural, Suburban
- ❖ What sort of school would you prefer to teach in?
  - Public districted, private, charter

### Teaching Goals

- ❖ Please list five words that relate to what you hope to accomplish as a teacher
- ❖ Please List two words about what most concerns you about becoming a teacher
- ❖ Would you prefer to teach in an underperforming school where you can have a particularly high impact or a high performing school where you will be supported and in an environment of success?
  - Underperforming school, high-performing school
- ❖ Do you wish to join a teacher's union?
  - Yes, No
- ❖ How much money do you expect to make in your first year of teaching?
- ❖ How many hours per week do you anticipate working in your first year of teaching?
- ❖ Which area of teaching most concerns you?
  - Classroom management, Content knowledge, Instruction ability, Career advancement
- ❖ If you have made a decision about where to teach or what program to teach in, how did you make this decision?
- ❖ In choosing which schools to apply to for teaching jobs, which factors matter most?
  - Professional development, Location, School type, Colleagues, Student type
- ❖ Would you prefer to teach students you believe to be well prepared to learn or those who you believe to be underserved by most schools?
  - Well-prepared, Underserved