

School Administrators' Perceptions of Critical Teacher Skills

Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning
2021, Vol. 13(3), 246-273

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<https://doi.org/10.14305/jn.19440413.2021.13.3.05>

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Abstract

Forty school administrators in the Lower Hudson Valley of New York State were surveyed about the characteristics of preservice and novice teachers believed most critical. These administrators represented a broad and socio-demographically diverse cross-section of rural, suburban, and urban school districts. The administrators collectively rated establishing rapport with students and behavior management as the most critical skills for preservice and new teachers to possess. Examining roles separately, assistant principals valued rapport with students and creating effective lessons as most important, whereas principals rated effectively communicating with parents and guardians, and reflecting on teaching performance as being most important. In general, there was a tendency for administrators in districts with larger percentages of students with disabilities to place less emphasis on the need for novice and preservice teachers to possess the knowledge/skills of collaboration, communication, and professional development. The most frequently cited reason for not hiring or reappointing a candidate was lack of engagement with students. An ability to collaborate with colleagues as well as competence in working with students with disabilities and English Language Learners, represent skills administrators also valued in teacher candidates. Furthermore, administrators identified authentic classroom experiences prior to student teaching as invaluable preparation for the classroom and a “difference-maker” in the quality and effectiveness of preservice teacher candidates. Finally, administrators noted areas of current and future job demand; need and growth areas for

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teachers were reported to be STEM and STEAM, Special Education, Bilingual/Language Education, and Dual Certification.

Keywords:

teacher effectiveness, teacher hiring, school administrator perceptions, teacher preparation practices, teacher skills

Administrators seeking to make hiring decisions to fill vacancies within districts, look for teachers with targeted personal and professional characteristics. The specific characteristics sought after by administrators are often shaped by the employers' beliefs, background, and immediate hiring needs, although the intangible characteristics of a 'quality' teacher are often hard to quantify (Abernathy et al., 2001; Balter, & Duncombe, 2008; Broadley & Broadley, 2004; Engel, 2013; Engel & Curran, 2016; Jacob & Lefgren, 2008). In an attempt to quantify the intangible characteristics, the present study queried school administrators about perceptions of what constituted critical teaching skills among teaching candidates and novice teachers.

Quality teachers not only have classroom management skills and content knowledge, they also must fit into the existing culture of the school in order to make connections with students, parents, teachers, staff, and the community at large. State and federal policies in regard to accountability practices, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Klein, 2015), and its recent revision, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, US DoE, 2015), as well as teacher evaluation reforms have impacted the criteria used to hire teachers. Despite these policy initiatives and the often intangible characteristics of quality, good teachers are a key ingredient for school efficacy (Cannata et al., 2017; Castro et al., 2018; Holme et al., 2018; Ladd & Sorensen, 2016; Voke, 2003).

While there are most certainly metrics developed and used by states to assess the effectiveness of teachers, e.g., NYS Teaching Standards and various specialty professional association (SPA) standards, and national accreditation agencies, such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), many of the criteria these organizations employ are controversial. For example, in the case of the New York Teaching Standards, part of the very complicated evaluation formula involves the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) which includes a metric for evaluating teacher effectiveness based on their students' performance on various standardized assessments. This criterion has been broadly criticized as invalid and unreliable as a measure of teacher efficacy (NYSUT, 2021). Similarly, the educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), developed at Stanford University's Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE), which is distributed and scored by the publishing giant Pearson, has also been subject to controversy. So much so that recently, some states have voted to rescind its use (e.g., Georgia; edweek.org, 2020).

To avoid these controversial and in some cases conflicting standard sets, the authors researched various frameworks that represented a meaningful assessment of quality teaching. Ultimately, the criteria suggested by Kennedy (2008) was determined to represent the most practical theoretical framework for the study. Kennedy (2008) categorized the essential tenets of good teaching as: (a) teacher performance; teachers' everyday practices that occur in and out of the classroom, (b) teacher effectiveness; the relational teacher qualities that influence students, and (c) personal resources; the qualities that the teacher brings to the job. These categories, elaborated below, frame the qualities of teacher effectiveness.

Teacher Performance

Performance qualities are teacher practices that occur every day in learning activities and are inclusive of those strategies that foster learning and motivate students (Kennedy, 2008). Teachers employ several pedagogical styles to be optimally successful in their teaching (Harris, 1998). Effective teachers adapt their use of teaching-learning strategies to address the individual needs of each student (Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2004; van de Grift, 2007; Woolfolk, 2006). Furthermore, effective teaching is predicated on the teacher's ability to clearly communicate the learning objectives (e.g., Harris, 1998; Polk, 2006; van de Grift, 2007). Effective teachers must also be able to recognize and use "teachable moments" (Woolfolk, 2006) and to model ideas (Polk, 2006). Research further supports the contention that learning to successfully address student misbehavior is an important skill that teachers need to develop (Billingsley, 2003; Nelson et al., 2001; Singh & Billingsley, 1998).

Also important are research-based practices that improve both the academic and social performances of students. One of the best ways to do this is to ensure that instruction is meaningful and engaging (Allen et al., 2013; Gourneau, 2005; Scott et al., 2014). Another is to improve classroom climate intentionally and systematically through any one or combination of evidence-based programs (Becoming a Therapeutic Teacher for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (n.a.), 2005; Scott et al., 2007).

Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher qualities that influence students to behave and perform in pro-social ways are universally regarded as desirable or "effective" (Kennedy, 2008). One way that teacher effectiveness can be measured is by asking the teacher's students. Pratt (2008), as well as Biddulph and Adey (2004), studied the topic of teacher efficacy from the perspective of the student and found that it was not the content of the curriculum that piqued students' interest in a subject, but rather it was the quality of the teaching and meaningfulness of the learning activities that influenced students' opinions about a teacher and the subject area. Pratt (2008) noted that elementary-level students preferred teachers who made them feel like they were an important part of a community, provided choices in learning activities, allowed for cooperative projects, made learning seem fun, and used authentic and meaningful assessments.

Other researchers reported that humor was a trait of an effective teacher. Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) found that teachers who were humorous, funny, and entertaining were ranked highly as exemplary teachers. In addition to being humorous, teachers who were easy to talk to, approachable and provided outside help were also often considered exemplary (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008).

Personal Resources

Kennedy (2008) declared that traits such as beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, skill, and expertise were personal resources. Of these, four personal qualities have been repeatedly documented in the research to be considered effective: knowledgeable in the subject area, respectful to students, reflective about teaching, and active in one's professional growth.

Research suggests that effective teachers possess a strong knowledge base in their respective content areas (Helm, 2007; Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008; Polk, 2006). The use of research-based practices

help to support social skills development and academic learning including the use of Class-wide Peer Tutoring to improve the academic performance of students with learning and emotional/behavioral needs (Hughes & Fredrick, 2006), Adventure Therapy, a program that helps to build positive self-esteem and social skills (Dobud, 2016), the teaching of cognitive behavioral therapeutic interventions such as “self-monitoring” (Hager, 2012; Patton et al., 2006), and social emotional learning techniques, such as “mindfulness” to help reduce anxiety and increase focus and (Jennings, & Greenberg, 2009).

Teachers who are effective believe in the potential of all children to learn. Researchers found this belief evident in the respect teachers demonstrate for students (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008), for the students’ families (Woolfolk, 2006) and for student differences (Imber, 2006). Helm (2007) and Imber (2006) extolled the dispositions of caring, concern for children, and empathy as part of the fundamental characteristics possessed by effective teachers.

Moreover, effective teachers show a willingness to continuously develop as professionals (Harris, 1998). Students defined good teachers as ones who were never satisfied with their teaching but were always eager to improve their teaching skills and advance their subject knowledge. To remain effective, researchers assert, teachers must continually learn (de Vries et al., 2015; Polk, 2006). Harris (1998) and Larrivee (2000) stress the importance of self-reflection and inquiry. Similarly, Topping and Ferguson (2005) suggest that all teachers should have opportunities to reflect on their teaching and determine what aspects or strategies were effective and which ones were ineffective.

Rationale for Study

School administrators are ultimately responsible for the efficient, orderly, and safe operation of their schools and thus have an obligation to their stakeholders; namely, their students, parents, and professional staff to hire only the most skilled and qualified teacher candidates. Thus, this survey-based research project sought to identify which characteristics of teacher quality were important to administrators in the Lower Hudson Valley Region of New York State when making hiring decisions. By understanding what administrators are looking for as characteristics of teacher quality, teacher preparation programs can move toward developing those desired capabilities in the teachers they prepare for service. The survey was designed to collect administrator perceptions about characteristics of teacher candidates and novice teachers deemed critical for success in the profession and referred to the work of Kennedy (2008) in a very general sense as a theoretical start point, but expanded to include desirable capabilities emphasized by other researchers (e.g., Ferlazzo, 2012; Hopkins, 2017; Huguenin, 2015; Kaka & Tygret, 2019; Kono, 2010).

Method

In order to obtain the perceptions of school administrators regarding the teacher skills vital to preservice and novice teachers, the authors developed a survey consisting of three parts. The first part sought demographic data about the characteristics of a particular school or school district followed by a set of ten survey items designed to ascertain the school leaders’ perceptions of specific critical knowledge and skills needed by teachers as identified by several important studies in this vein (e.g., Allen et al., 2013; de Vries et al., 2015; Dobud, 2016; Hager, 2012; Helm, 2007; Kennedy, 2008; Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008; Pratt, 2008; Scott et al., 2014; van der Grift, 2007). Finally, seven elaborative questions were posed designed to gather the insights of administrators relative to essential teacher skills and dispositions

and how those qualities' influence hiring decisions (see Appendix A for the survey instrument). The reader will note that each of these questions was designed to solicit valuable information about the administrator's teacher hiring preferences and recommendations. Each of the questions was logically deduced and selected for inclusion in the survey by the authors' consensus. The survey was designed to be completed in less than 15 minutes.

The survey, prepared as a Microsoft Word document, was reviewed and checked for accuracy by three evaluators: one with a PhD in Education, one with a PhD in Educational Psychology, and a third with an EdD in Educational Leadership. Once revised and finalized, the survey was prepared for distribution via Survey Monkey, which collected respondent data and facilitated the analysis while ensuring respondent confidentiality. One of the authors received permission to use his institution's listserv to distribute the survey to public school administrators within the Mid and Lower Hudson Valley region of New York State (93 districts). The survey results were analyzed via *t*-tests, one-way ANOVA mean comparison with Bonferroni post hoc pairwise correction, correlational analysis, reliability analysis, and factor analysis (Parts I & II), and coded trends in narrative responses (Part III).

Results

Results Part I: Demographic Description of Administrators' Districts

The survey was distributed via listserv to public school administrators in the Mid and Lower Hudson Valley in March of 2019. The school administrators accessed by the listserv consisted of every administrator, whether at the school building or school district level, affiliated with the Putnam/Northern Westchester Board of Cooperative Educational Services (PNW BOCES), which included public schools in Westchester, Putnam, Rockland, Orange and Dutchess Counties in New York State. A total of 54 respondents completed all or part of the survey, with 40 respondents completing all of the ten Likert-type scale items measuring the level of importance that administrators placed on various knowledge and skills of preservice and novice teachers. The quantitative analysis is based on the responses of these 40 respondents. All 40 of these respondents provided answers to all district demographic questions except for race. One respondent did not provide information on the racial characteristics of his/her district but answered every other demographic question.

SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) ver. 25 software was used for the quantitative analyses presented in this study. Table B1 presents frequency counts and percentages for the demographic variables (see Appendix B). Of the 40 valid respondents, 16 (40%) indicated that they were either directors/assistant superintendents or superintendents. Building-level administrators comprised 32.5% of the sample, including eight principals and five assistant principals. The balance of the respondents were Committee for Special Education chairs (3), special education/pupil personnel directors (4), and three individuals who indicated that their role was "other."

Regarding the geographical dispersion of the districts represented by the 40 respondents, the overwhelming majority indicated working in suburban districts (70%). The remaining 30% of respondents were split evenly between rural (15%) and urban (15%) districts. Almost half (47.5%) of the respondents indicated working in districts where a quarter or fewer of the students participated in the federal free/reduced price lunch program, with another 15% working in districts where between 26% and 50% of students were receiving federally subsidized lunches. Slightly more than a third of the

respondents (37.5%) worked in districts where more than half of the students participated in the free/reduced-price lunch program.

A substantial majority of administrators (57.5%) worked in districts with at least 2,000 students, with four administrators working in districts with greater than 4,000 enrolled students. On the other end of the continuum, nine administrators (22.5%) worked in districts with fewer than 1,000 students.

As for the racial composition of the respondents' school districts, a substantial majority (60%) worked in districts that were composed of a majority of White students, with more than a third of respondents (37.5%) representing districts comprised of more than three-quarters White students. Only a small minority of respondents indicated working in majority Black districts (7.5%) or districts where more than 50% of students were Hispanic/Latino students (12.5%).

The large majority of respondents (75%) worked in districts where fewer than 21% of students were classified as English Language Learners (ELLs), with 22.5% of respondents working in districts where 21 to 40% of students were classified as ELLs. One administrator worked in a district with 41% to 60% of students classified as ELLs. This district was categorized by the respondent as a suburban district.

Finally, a majority of administrators (52.5%) worked in districts where between 11 and 15% of students were classified as having a disability (i.e., having an IEP); within which lies the national average of students classified with disabilities, estimated at 13.2% in the most recent survey conducted by the Center for Educational Statistics in 2015-2016 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Nine administrators (22.5%) indicated working in districts with between 16 and 20% of students classified as having a disability. Six administrators (15%) indicated working in districts with greater than 20% of students classified as having a disability: four in suburban and two in urban districts.

Part II: Administrator Perceptions of Critical Teacher Skills

The administrators were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale of 1-5, with 1=critical to 5=not important, the level of importance they placed on ten knowledge/skill traits which preservice and service teachers bring to the profession. For the sake of making these results interpretable, these items were transformed and reverse-coded such that higher numbers equated with greater criticality placed on the importance of the indicated knowledge/skillset (thus, 5=critical and 1=not important for the statistical analysis).

The ten competencies assessed consisted of the following: (a) *the ability to differentiate lessons*, (b) *effective classroom/behavior management skills*, (c) *the ability to effectively collaborate with other teachers and professionals*, (d) *the capability to effectively communicate with parents and guardians*, (e) *the facility to design and use assessments to improve student learning*, (f) *the capacity to establish a rapport with students*, (g) *the skill to be able to design and implement effective lessons*, (h) *the ability to reflect on teaching performance and use reflection to improve it*, (i) *the facility to demonstrate an understanding of various disabilities with the ability to employ effective interventions*, and (j) *the awareness of and will to pursue professional development opportunities and participate in school events* (i.e., Allen et al., 2013; de Vries et al., 2015; Dobud, 2016; Hager, 2012; Helm, 2007; Kennedy, 2008; Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008; Pratt, 2008; Scott et al., 2014; van der Grift, 2007).

The competency rated as most critical (assigned a value of 5 for analysis) by respondents was *Establish a Rapport with Students* (79.5%) followed closely by *Classroom/behavior Management*

Skills (77%), *Design and Implement Effective Lessons* (64%) and *Reflect on Teaching Performance and Use Reflection to Improve it* (64%). Following in order of perceived critical importance was *Effectively Communicate with Parents and Guardians* (54%), followed by *Differentiate Lessons* (51%), *Design and Use Assessments to Improve Student Learning* (49%), *Effectively Collaborate with Other Teachers and Professionals* (41%), and lastly, *Demonstrate an Understanding of Various Disabilities and an Ability to Employ Effective Interventions* and *Pursue Professional Development Opportunities and Participate in School Events*, both rated as critical teacher competencies by only 36% of the respondents.

Table C1 displays the descriptive statistics for the Likert-scale items 1-10 in Part II of the survey (see Appendix C). The items are arranged in descending order of importance based on mean scores and sought the administrators' perceptions on the level of importance assigned to various knowledge and skills which preservice and novice teachers bring to the teaching profession.

The smallest item mean of 3.93 (Professional Development) was still large enough to be considered a very important knowledge/skill. Nevertheless, there were observable differences among the means. As can be seen, collectively the administrators indicated that *Establishing Rapport* was the most important knowledge/skill ($\bar{x} = 4.50$). This was followed closely by *Behavior Management* ($\bar{x} = 4.45$) and *Reflection* ($\bar{x} = 4.40$). The knowledge/skills deemed least important were *Collaboration* ($\bar{x} = 4.08$), *Understanding Disabilities* ($\bar{x} = 4.05$), and *Professional Development* ($\bar{x} = 3.93$); although as previously noted, the knowledge/skills deemed least important still had large enough means to be considered as very important.

Table D1 presents the means of the ten Likert-scale items broken out by administrator role (see Appendix D). As can be seen, the various administrator roles did not value the same skills/knowledge of preservice and novice teachers equally. The three superintendents rated *Differentiate Lessons* and *Behavior Management* as the most valued knowledge/skills among preservice and novice teachers ($\bar{x} = 5.00$). The eight principals rated communication and reflection most highly ($\bar{x} = 4.13$), whereas the assistant principals rated *Establishing Rapport* and *Effective Lessons* as most important ($\bar{x} = 4.20$).

In order to determine if there were any significant mean differences among or between the ten Likert-type scale items based on administrator role, a one-way ANOVA mean comparison with the conservative Bonferroni post hoc pairwise correction was conducted. The only significant difference discovered was among the means for *Differentiate Lessons* ($F = 2.42, p = .048$). In other words, there was a significant overall difference among the means of the seven administrator roles for *Differentiate Lessons*. However, there were no significant pairwise differences between any two means by administrator role, as assessed using the Bonferroni post hoc correction. The Bonferroni correction was used due to its conservative nature in minimizing the possibility of finding statistical significance when none exists (George & Mallery, 2016). Neither were there any significant pairwise differences between the means of any other skill/knowledge by administrator role.

Importantly, given the very small n count of each administrator category, it was difficult to find significant mean differences between groups. Because there is a logically dichotomous grouping among six of the seven categories into either school-level administrators (principals, assistant principals, and CSE chairs) and district-level administrators (superintendents, assistant superintendents/directors, and special education/pupil personnel director), a new dichotomous variable was created. The new variable created is *Level of Administration*, with building level administrators coded as 0, and district-level administrators coded as 1. The three individuals in the *other administrators* category were omitted from this new variable due to the inability to classify them as either school-level or district administrators.

This new dichotomous variable lends itself well to conducting t -test comparisons between level of administration and each of the ten Likert-scale items. This series of t -test comparisons revealed one significant difference between school-level administrators ($\bar{x} = 3.88$) and district-level administrators ($\bar{x} = 4.65$) on the mean for the knowledge/skill category *Differentiates Lessons* ($t(35) = -2.46, p = .022$). In other words, district-level administrators indicated that they felt that the ability to differentiate lessons was a significantly more important skill for preservice and novice teachers than did school-building administrators.

Demographic characteristics of districts and administrators' perceptions of teacher skills. One-way ANOVA mean comparisons with the conservative Bonferroni post hoc comparison correction were conducted to determine if there were any significant mean differences among or between the ten Likert-type scale items based on the additional categories of free/reduced price lunch composition, district geography, racial composition of district, ELLs composition of district, size of the district, and students with disabilities composition of the district.

There was a statistically significant difference among the means of the item *Collaborate* across categories of the variable *Percentage of ELLs in a district* ($F(2,37) = 3.77, p = .032$). Bonferroni post hoc comparisons could not be performed due to the small sample size in the district category "41% to 60% ELLs." Eliminating this category allowed for a t -test comparison between the remaining two categories. Individuals in districts with 0 to 20% of ELLs indicated that *Collaboration* was a more desired critical knowledge/skill area ($\bar{x} = 4.37$) than were indicated by individuals in districts with 21 to 40% of ELLs ($\bar{x} = 3.33$). However, the difference just missed being statistically significant ($t(37) = 2.00, p = .073$).

For the variable *Percent Disabilities in District*, the two categories containing only one individual (< 1% and 21 to 25%) were eliminated allowing for a one-way ANOVA analysis with Bonferroni post hoc comparisons of the means of the remaining four categories. Statistically significant differences among the means of the items *Communicate* ($F(3,34) = 4.97, p = .006$), *Collaborate* ($F(3,34) = 3.82, p = .018$), and *Professional Development* ($F(3,34) = 3.85, p = .018$) were revealed for this variable. Moreover, the Eta values of .552, .502 and .504 indicated moderate effect sizes for these differences. For the variable *Collaboration*, Bonferroni pairwise post hoc comparisons revealed statistically significant differences between the means for the district categories "6 to 10% disabilities" ($\bar{x} = 5.00$), and 16 to 20% ($\bar{x} = 3.22$), $p = .045$). There was also a statistically significant pairwise difference between district categories "11-15% disabilities" ($\bar{x} = 4.29$), and "16 to 20% disabilities" ($\bar{x} = 3.22, p = .044$). In sum, districts with a smaller percentage of students with disabilities were significantly more likely to indicate that *Collaboration* was an important knowledge/skill area for novice and preservice teachers than did administrators in districts with higher percentages of students with disabilities.

For the variable *Communication*, Bonferroni pairwise post hoc comparisons uncovered one statistically significant difference between districts for the mean for 11 to 15% disabilities ($\bar{x} = 4.57$) and 16 to 20% disabilities ($\bar{x} = 3.11, p = .004$). Thus, as with the variable *Collaboration*, administrators in districts with a smaller percentage of students with disabilities were significantly more likely to indicate that *Communication* was critically important than were administrators in districts with a larger percentage of such students.

For the variable *Professional Development*, Bonferroni pairwise post hoc comparisons also uncovered one statistically significant difference between districts with the mean for "11 to 15% disabilities" ($\bar{x} = 4.24$) and "16 to 20% disabilities" ($\bar{x} = 2.89, p = .023$). Thus, as with the variables

Collaboration and Communication, administrators in districts with a smaller percentage of students with disabilities were significantly more likely to indicate that *Professional Development* was a critically important knowledge/skill among novice and preservice teachers than were administrators in districts with a larger percentage of these students.

To summarize, in general there is a tendency for administrators in districts with larger percentages of students with disabilities to place less emphasis on the need for novice and preservice teachers to possess the knowledge/skills of collaboration, communication and professional development than administrators in districts with a smaller percentage of students with disabilities.

Correlational analysis. Table E1 presents the correlation matrix of the key study variables (see Appendix E). The dichotomous variable *Level of Administration* is included, as is *Percent White* as a proxy for district racial composition. *Percent Free Lunch* is used as a proxy for socioeconomic status of the district. *Size of School District* was omitted from the matrix due to its small and insignificant correlations with any other variable. District geography, which was also omitted, was only significantly correlated with racial composition ($r(39) = -.575, p < .01$): Non-White students were significantly and substantially more concentrated in urban districts.

All of the ten knowledge/skill items are moderately to highly correlated, and significant at the $p < .01$ level of significance. *Percent Free Lunch* in district is highly and negatively correlated with *Percent White* ($r(39) = -.804, p < .01$), moderately correlated with *Percent ELLs* ($r(40) = .420, p < .01$), and highly correlated with *Percent Disability* ($r(40) = .571, p < .01$). In other words, as the percentage of students living in poverty in the district increases, the percentage of White students dramatically decreases, the percentage of ELLs tends to increase, and the percentage of students with disabilities tends to sharply increase.

The only non-Likert-type scale item which is significantly correlated with any of the knowledge/skill items is the dichotomous administration-level item. This variable is positively and moderately correlated with both *Differentiates Lessons* ($r(37) = .401, p < .05$) and *Behavior Management* ($r(37) = .349, p < .05$). Thus, district-level administrators were significantly more likely to indicate that the skills of differentiating classroom lessons and managing student behavior are more critical among novice and pre-service teachers than were building level administrators.

Importantly, the racial composition of a district, specifically the percentage of white students within a district and the socioeconomic status of districts were not significantly correlated with any of the qualities of novice and pre-service teachers deemed important by administrators. Additionally, analyses confirmed that there were no significant correlations between the ten knowledge and skills of novice and pre-service teachers, and the racial composition variables investigated as percent of district Hispanic, percent of district Black, or percent of district multiracial.

Reliability analysis and factor analysis. The possibility that the ten knowledge and skills areas of novice and pre-service teachers might represent more than one factor was also explored; in short, there was no evidence to support this. The Cronbach's alpha for the ten Likert-type scale items was a very high $\alpha = .960$, which could not be improved by deleting any items. This suggests very strong internal reliability of a single factor. After employing multiple factor analytic techniques, only one very strong factor was confirmed. Typical of our factor analytical findings were those generated by the maximum likelihood extraction method which generated only one factor that had an Eigen value greater than 1.0 (7.39). This factor explained almost 74% of the total variance of the underlying 10-item factor to be

explained. The ten factor loadings ranged from .725 (*Differentiates Lessons*) to a high of .956 (*Establish Rapport*). Thus, all of the factor loadings were well above the threshold of .40 that some researchers suggest is a floor for retaining a variable in a factor.

Part III: Narrative Responses to Explicit Inquiries

The following are summaries of the narrative responses to seven questions that solicited narrative elaboration. Where appropriate, excerpts from the administrators' responses are provided to enhance the synopses.

Other skills and dispositions in a teacher candidate that might influence your decision to hire them. The authors coded the various responses to this question and identified three that were most frequently represented. These highly valued teacher skills included, in order of frequency, (a) experience in the classroom, (b) emotional intelligence, and (c) confidence in teaching skills (see Appendix F, Figure F1). *Experience in the Classroom* would appear to correlate with the administrators' perceptions of the value of the teacher's ability to differentiate lessons, manage student behaviors in the classroom, and collaborate with professional colleagues (Part II, Items 1, 2, & 3). Similarly, *Emotional Intelligence*, or the innate ability to accurately interpret behavioral cues that reflect the emotional state of an individual would seem to resonate with Item 3: *Effectively collaborate with teachers and professionals*, and Item 6: *Establish a rapport with students* (Part II). Lastly, *Confidence in Teaching Skills* would appear to correlate with administrators' perceptions of the importance of teachers' ability to *Design and Implement Effective Lessons* (Item 7), *Classroom Behavior Management Skills* (Item 2), *Design and Use Assessments to Improve Student Learning* (Item 5), and *Effectively Communicate with Parents and Guardians* (Item 4) (Part II).

Recommendations of knowledge and skills for an effective teacher preparation program. Three recurring themes were identified in response to this question, listed below in descending rank order (see Appendix F, Figure F2). The first of these recommendations was to ensure that preservice teachers possess expertise in the skills essential to their success in the classroom that can only be acquired through authentic experience. One administrator replied to this question with, "Novice teachers should have internships in schools yearly, rather than at the end of their program." Another recommended that preservice teachers should have, "lots of hands-on experience" in the classroom. The notion of "expertise" in teaching was reflective of item 5 in the quantitative section of the survey; specifically, *Design and Use Assessments to Improve Student Learning* and item 8, *Reflect on Teaching Performance and Use Reflection to Improve it* (Part II). A skill equally regarded as important by school administrators was the ability to plan and implement effective lessons. This recommendation directly correlates with item 7, *Design and Implement Effective Lessons* in Part II of the survey and appears to be tangentially related to item 1, *Differentiate Lessons* and item 5, *Design and Use Assessments to Improve Student Learning*. The third skill most recommended by administrators as important in teacher preparation was *Personalized Instruction*. Once more, this recommendation was clearly in line with item 1, *Differentiate Lessons*.

Concerns regarding teacher candidates and novice teachers applying for teaching positions. In descending order of frequency, the respondents' major reservations and concerns were lack of

experience, lack of content knowledge, and lack of flexibility (See Appendix G, Figure G1). As noted by one administrator, “Novice teachers don’t have enough classroom experience.” Others elaborated on this concern with specific areas of inexperience, including, “lesson planning,” “[working with] diverse communities,” “workshop model or explicit direct instruction,” “...no real experience with kids,” and “Lack of experience in varied settings.”

The next two most widely cited concerns relative to teacher candidates were an inability to develop a rapport with students, “[They] don’t connect with students,” and a lack of flexibility, interpreted as an unwillingness to work with students with special needs (e.g., “lack of an ability to engage diverse learners,” “[in]ability to work with our high needs populations”). These perceived deficiencies appear to provide elaboration for item 3 *effectively collaborate with other teachers and professionals*, item 1 *differentiate lessons*, item 7 *design and implement effective lessons*, and item 8 *reflect on teaching performance and use reflection to improve it* from Part II of the survey.

Reasons that a teacher candidate is not hired, and a novice teacher is not reappointed or awarded tenure. The administrator responses to this question were very similar to those provided in response to Question 12 (see Appendix G, Figure G2). The most frequently cited reason to not hire or reappoint was the candidate or teacher’s “lack of engagement with students,” also expressed as “a perceived inability to connect with students,” and an “inability to engage students” or to “work with all students.” This response-type is commensurate with item 6, *establish a rapport with students*, the most important teacher characteristic identified in Part II of the survey. The second most repeated reason was “poor communication skills,” expressed as a perceived “inability to work with colleagues” or an “inability to develop professional relationships and collaborate effectively.” This concern aligns closely with item 3, *effectively collaborate with other teachers and professionals* and item 4, *effectively communicate with parents and guardians* in Part II. The third most frequently reported cause was a “a lack of experience,” likely manifest in *emerging skills in lesson design and implementation* (item 7, Part II) and *the effective use of assessments to improve student learning* (item 5, Part II).

Characteristics that distinguish your most successful educators from those less effective. Once again, in hierarchical order, the most frequently reported distinguishing characteristic was “great [effective] communication with students and their families,” the most commonly occurring theme in this research. The second most cited characteristic was similarly “strong student-teacher relationships.” An equally important characteristic was “dedication and hard work,” followed by a “willingness to learn from others and accept feedback,” “a desire for continuous improvement,” and a teacher that is “open to new ideas.” The fifth most cited characteristics was: possessing “a growth mindset” (see Appendix H, Figure H1).

Current hiring challenges: teaching areas in the highest demand and the most difficult to staff. The most frequently cited hiring challenges by the administrators surveyed were recruiting sufficient teacher candidates with certification in areas related to bilingual education or languages, sciences, mathematics, and special education (see Appendix H, Figure H2).

Teaching areas “in demand” in the next five years and why? Similar to the responses provided to the previous question, the administrator respondents identified five teaching areas anticipated as being in high demand based on current trends, listed in priority order: (a) STEM & STEAM, (b) Special

Education and (c) Dual Certifications. Also cited were the anticipated needs for teachers with state certification in ENL, ELL, TESOL, BCBA, and Reading Specialist.

Some of the rationales offered for these projections were: “[We will need teachers qualified to teach] Computer Science, due to new regulations and a lack of certified teachers; General Education teachers with Special Education Certification and a Bilingual Extension due to a changing bilingual population with more specialized needs,” “Science and Math....students are finding options in these areas in other fields and not going into teaching...,” “TESOL and bilingual educators- growing ELL/MLL population; STEAM certified teachers- technology advancements; Special education teachers with a special area and/or content area certification as well- increasing need for specialized instruction,” “...technology, bio-sciences, coding, and health sciences. The population is getting older, the world will be increasingly more digital-based and there will be medical breakthroughs that will influence young people to explore this field,” and, lastly, “[We will need teachers certified in] SPED, TESOL, Science and Math. Teacher prep. programs are not attracting candidates in general” (see Appendix I, Figure I1).

Discussion

An examination of the administrator responses to the demographic section of the survey revealed that a majority of the respondents who participated in the survey were either school superintendents or building administrators. Additionally, most respondents worked in school districts with majority White student populations and fewer than 21% ELLs, about a third reported that the majority of their students participated in the free/reduced lunch program, a finding that comports with the new research on the changing composition of the suburbs in this region (Wepner, Ferrara, Rainville, Gomez, Lang, & Bigaouette, 2012). Thus, economic disparity and the challenges presented by students with disabilities and language differences present obstacles that must be overcome by the administrators surveyed from the Mid and Lower Hudson Valley. It is important to note that the number of students with disabilities served in this sample of schools and school districts is compatible with the national average of approximately 13% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), highlighting that this is part of a national challenge facing administrators.

Overall, the administrators viewed *Establishing Rapport* as the most frequently cited knowledge/skill, followed closely by *Behavior Management* and *Reflection*. Similar to the researchers' findings, in a study involving school administrators and their perceptions of important skills evident in cooperating teachers, Magaya and Crawley (2011) found that two of the most frequently cited skills were classroom management and effective communication. In a study with a slightly different focus, Kocasarac, Taspinar, and Karatas (2019) found that school principals indicated that teachers who engage in various innovative approaches tend to be more receptive to innovation, information technology, professional development, and collaboration with other educational professionals. Johnson (2004) investigated “what school leaders want” in a “quality teacher” and found that three desired attributes, “teachers' ability to maintain order in the classroom, motivate students to do their best, [and] establish strong working relationships with parents” (p.26-27), were perceived as illusive traits.

A similar investigation conducted by Kono (2010) identified what school administrators (exclusively school principals) perceived as “most valued” traits and skills in new teachers in four domains. Relative to “personal traits and skills” the respondents cited “sense of responsibility,” honesty,” “punctuality,” “trustworthiness,” and “emotional stability.” The administrators identified “communication skills,” and “commitment to education” as the most valued “professional traits and

skills.” Kono (2010) further explored what school administrators considered valuable school-wide traits and skills for which “enthusiasm,” “professionalism,” “positive attitude,” “good judgement,” and “strong problem-solving skills” were preeminent. Lastly, Kono’s (2010) study found “purposeful lessons,” “classroom management skills,” “planning and preparation,” and “respect for students” to be the most esteemed classroom traits and skills. These findings were congruent with several in this study; preeminent of which was establishing rapport with students and behavior management of students.

It is interesting to note, however, that depending on their role, the administrator respondents in this study rated the value of skills differently. For example, the superintendents considered the skills *Differentiate lessons* and *Classroom (behavior) management* as most valued whereas principals perceived that *Communication* and *Reflection* were critical skills, and assistant principals viewed *Establish Rapport* and *Effective Lessons* as most important. The skill perceived most differently by all three groups was, *Differentiate Lessons*. These differences might be the result of the stakeholders’ engagement (or lack thereof) with teachers and students. Ostensibly, the assistant principals work more closely with teachers and students and the skills they consider most important follow suit.

Further examination of the results of the administrators’ perceptions of the importance of the ten skills and attributes based on the demographics of their districts revealed a few counterintuitive findings. The first of these is that administrators in districts with 0-20% ELLs considered *Collaboration* to be more important for teachers than those in districts with 21-40% ELLs. Also, surprisingly, administrators in districts with a lower percentage of students with disabilities were significantly more likely to view *Collaboration*, *Communication*, and *Professional Development* as important skills for novice and preservice teachers as compared with administrators in districts with a significantly higher percentage of students with disabilities. One interpretation is that perhaps teachers hired in districts with lower enrollments are expected to fill multiple roles whereas districts with higher enrollments might be sufficiently resourced to be able to hire teachers in specified roles.

Also noteworthy is the finding that as the percentage of students receiving free lunch in a district increases, the percentage of White students significantly decreases, while the percentage of ELLs and students with disabilities sharply increases. This finding is consistent with research that shows that ELLs and students of color are overrepresented in the classification of students with disabilities and, conversely, White students are typically from higher socio-economic strata and are less likely to be classified as having disabilities.

Data from the current investigation clearly demonstrates that the ability to establish rapport with students, effective use of behavior/classroom management skills, and engaging in reflective practice are the preeminent teacher skills sought after by school administrators. Similarly, to improve the teacher preparation process and to better ensure that these skills are learned and acquired, administrators recommended that preservice teachers be provided with abundant authentic classroom experience prior to student teaching. When examining valued knowledge/skills relative to administrator role it was found that superintendents regarded differentiated instruction and classroom management most highly, principals found communication and reflective abilities very important, and assistant principals stated that establishing rapport and implementing effective lessons were most critical. Although these knowledge/skills were specific to role, all examined knowledge/skills were highly valued by administrators including effective communication skills, collaboration and co-teaching, and the ability to work successfully with students with disabilities. Furthermore, adequate preparation in social emotional learning techniques and cultural sensitivity were noted as important teacher skills.

These recommendations should be seriously considered by teacher preparation programs to better address the instructional needs of today's classrooms. Likewise, preservice and novice teachers would be wise to ensure that they possess the teacher skills most valued by the gatekeepers who will ultimately decide whether they are hired or not.

Limitations

As is the case with all research, there are limitations to the generalizability of the findings described in this study, which the investigators acknowledge. First, the sample size is both a convenient one and relatively small, with only 40 comprehensive survey completers. It is important to note, however, that these 40 respondents each represent a school or a school district in the Mid and Lower Hudson Valley Region of New York State and thus denote a fair cross-section of the administrators in this region.

Second, the researchers developed a three-part survey instrument that asked a few, key questions of the participants. However, respondents were not asked to rank order their responses to the qualitative questions, which would have provided readers with a comparative table. Furthermore, the reliability of a survey is generally increased with a greater number of survey items or questions. Nonetheless, in the strategic design of this survey, the investigators included only the items and questions that would provide the most meaningful feedback to address the overarching research question; namely, what do school building and school district administrators, in the region sampled, consider to be the most important skills and dispositions for pre-service and novice teachers, ostensibly those that influence their hiring decisions.

Lastly, the study only involved a survey and did not include a follow-up interview with a representative sample of the respondents. Such a mixed-methods approach might have provided a richer and more elaborative understanding of the perceptions of these administrator-participants.

Conclusions

In the final tally, whereas some of the school administrators' perceptions and recommendations were not revelatory, at minimum, responses served to reinforce current literature regarding the perceived characteristics of highly qualified teachers (see Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre, & Pianta, 2013; Kennedy, 2008; Scott, Hirn, & Alter, 2014).

Finally, there is a clear message for teacher preparation programs. To ensure the viability of programs, teacher preparation faculty must take seriously the recommendations of the leaders of the schools that hire their graduates and prepare their candidates accordingly. Only in doing so will teacher preparation programs continue to effectively prepare teachers for the classrooms of tomorrow.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for this research.

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Appendix A**Essential Skills for New Teachers
A Survey of School Administrators
PART I****Demographic Information**

1. Please indicate your role in the school or school district (check boxes or bubbles):

- i. Superintendent
- ii. Director or Assistant Superintendent
- iii. Special Education/Pupil Personnel Director or Assistant Superintendent
- iv. Principal
- v. Assistant Principal
- vi. CSE Chairperson

2. Please select the percentage of your students who receive free or reduced meals:

- i. 0% - 25%
- ii. 26% - 50%
- iii. 51% - 75%
- iv. 76% - 100%

3. How would you best describe your school/district's demography? Please select one of the options listed below:

- i. Rural
- ii. Suburban
- iii. Urban

4. Please indicate the ethnic composition of your school or district (est. %) (please check all that apply):

<1% 1-5% 6-10% 11%-25% 26%-50% 50%-75% >75%

- i. American Indian or Alaska Native
- ii. Black or African American
- iii. Hispanic or Latino
- iv. Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- v. White
- vi. Multiracial

5. Please indicate the percentage of your school or district's students who are English Language Learners (ELLs)

- i. 0% - 20%
- ii. 21% - 40%
- iii. 41% - 60%
- iv. 61% - 80%
- v. 81% - 100%

6. Please indicate the number of students in your district:

- i. Less than 1,000
- ii. 1,000 - 1,999
- iii. 2,000 - 2,999
- iv. 3,000 - 3,999
- v. More than 4,000

7. Please indicate the percentage of your students classified as a student with a disability, i.e., they have an IEP:

- i. Less than 1%
- ii. Between 1% and 5%
- iii. Between 6% and 10%
- iv. Between 11% and 15%
- v. Between 16% and 20%
- vi. Between 21% and 25%
- vi. >25%

PART II

Please rate the following knowledge and skills you see as critical for preservice and novice teachers on a scale of 1-5 (1=critical, 2=very important, 3=somewhat important, 4=of little importance, 5=not important):

Item #	Likert scale (1-5)
	1 2 3 4 5
1. Differentiate lessons	
2. Classroom/behavior management skills	---
3. Effectively collaborate with other teachers and professionals	---
4. Effectively communicate with parents and guardians	---
5. Design and use assessments to improve student learning	---
6. Establish a rapport with students	---
7. Design and implement effective lessons	---
8. Reflect on teaching performance and use reflection to improve it	---
9. Demonstrate an understanding of various disabilities and ability to employ effective interventions	---
10. Pursue professional development opportunities and participate in school events	---

PART III

Please provide any other skills and dispositions that you would like to see in a teacher candidate that might influence your decision to hire them and list the top 3-5 below.

Please share with us five recommendations relative to the kinds of knowledge and skills that you would like to see in an effective teacher preparation program.

What are your five major concerns and reservations regarding teacher candidates and novice teachers applying for teaching positions in your school or district?

In your experience, what are the three-five most frequent reasons that: (a) a teacher candidate is not hired, and (b) a novice teacher is not reappointed or awarded tenure?

What are the top 3-5 characteristics that distinguish your most successful educators from those less effective?

Currently, what are your top five hiring challenges (i.e., what teaching areas are in the highest demand and the most difficult to staff)?

In your opinion, 5 years from now, which teaching areas will be the most “in demand” and why?

Appendix B

Table B1
Descriptive Statistics for Select Demographic Variables
(N=40)

Variable	n	%
Administrator Role		
-Superintendent	3	7.5
-Director or Assistant Supt.	13	32.5
-Special Ed/Pupil Personnel	4	10.0
Director		
-Principal	8	20.0
-Asst. Principal	5	12.5
- CSE Chairperson	4	10.0
Percent District Students Receiving Free/reduced-price Lunch		
0 - 25%	19	47.5
26 - 50%	6	15
51 - 75%	11	27.5
76 - 100%	4	10
District Geography		
Rural	6	15.1
Suburban	28	70.0
Urban	6	15.0
Percentage White Students in District		
0 - 25%	5	17.5
26 - 50%	8	20.0
51 - 75%	9	22.5
➤ 75%	15	37.5

Percentage ELL students in District		
0 - 20%	30	75.0
21 - 40%	9	22.5
41 - 60%	1	2.5
61 - 80%	0	0
➤ 80%	0	0
Number Students in District		
< 1,000	9	22.5
1,000 - 1,999	8	20.0
2,000 - 2,999	10	25.0
3,000 - 3,999	9	22.5
➤ 4,000	4	10
Percent of Students with Disabilities		
< 1%	1	2.5
1 - 5%	0	0
6 - 10%	3	7.5
11 - 15%	21	52.5
16 - 20%	9	22.5
21 - 25%	1	2.5
➤ 25%	5	12.5

Appendix C

Table C1

Descriptive Statistics for Administrator Perceptions of Essential Skills for New Teachers

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Establish Rapport	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.50	1.18
Behavior Management	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.45	1.18
Reflection	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.40	1.08
Design Lessons	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.38	1.15
Differentiate Lessons	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.25	1.01
Communication	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.17	1.11
Assessment	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.10	1.13
Collaboration	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.08	1.02
Understand Disabilities	40.00	1.00	5.00	4.05	1.01
Professional Development	40.00	1.00	5.00	3.93	1.21

Appendix D

Table 1

Means Comparisons of All Administrator Roles on Ten Essential Skills/Knowledge of Preservice and Novice Teachers

Role	<i>n</i>	<i>Skills/Knowledge</i>	Differentiate Lessons	Behavior Management	Collaborate	Communicate	Assessment	Establish Rapport	Effective Lessons	Reflection	Understand Disabilities	PD
Superintendents	3	Mean	<i>5.00</i>	<i>5.00</i>	4.00	4.33	4.33	5.00	4.33	4.00	4.33	4.33
Dir/Asst Superintendents	13	Mean	4.46	<i>4.77</i>	4.31	4.62	4.38	<i>4.77</i>	4.69	4.69	4.23	4.08
Sped Directors	4	Mean	<i>5.00</i>	<i>5.00</i>	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.75	<i>5.00</i>	4.75	4.75	4.75
Principals	8	Mean	3.50	3.75	3.88	<i>4.13</i>	3.75	4.13	4.00	<i>4.13</i>	3.75	3.63
Asst. Principals	5	Mean	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.60	4.00	<i>4.20</i>	<i>4.20</i>	4.00	3.80	3.60
CSE chairs	4	Mean	4.75	<i>5.00</i>	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.75	4.50	<i>5.00</i>	4.00	4.00
Other administrators	3	Mean	3.67	<i>4.00</i>	3.33	3.00	3.00	3.67	3.33	3.67	3.33	3.00
Total		Mean	4.25	4.45	4.08	4.17	4.10	<i>4.50</i>	4.38	4.40	4.05	3.92

Note: the largest mean for each role is bolded and italicized for ease of interpretation.

Appendix E

Table 1

Pearson Correlations among Study Variables

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	14	15
1.Admin level 0= School-level 1=District-level	.027	-.049	.389	.117	.401*	.349*	.198	.302	.227	.239	.254	.293	.238
2. % Free Lunch		-.804**	.420**	.571**	.000	-.161	-.115	-.171	-.105	-.140	-.082	-.047	-.215
3. % White			-.464**	-.457**	.077	.152	.198	.165	.130	.229	.124	.132	.241
4. ELLs				.266	.113	-.041	-.239	-.134	-.049	-.065	-.050	-.028	-.133
5. %Disable					-.185	-.264	-.192	-.215	-.202	-.211	-.189	-.123	-.300
6. Differ Lesson						.791**	.405**	.466**	.565**	.671**	.716**	.793**	.502**
7. Behave Mgt							.590**	.766**	.603**	.834**	.746**	.671**	.657**
8. Collaborate								.781**	.727**	.735**	.565**	.591**	.691**
9.Communicate									.602**	.758**	.613**	.587**	.740**
10 Assessment										.812**	.842**	.805**	.703**
11. Est. Rapport											.864**	.776**	.768**
12. Design Lessons												.801**	.724**
12. Reflection												.755**	.751**
14. Understand Disabilities													.696**
15. PD													

Note: N=40 for all correlations except those with %White, for which N=39, Admin level, for which N=35, and the correlation of % White with Admin level, for which N=34)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Appendix F

Figure F1

Question 10: Skills and dispositions preferred by school administrators

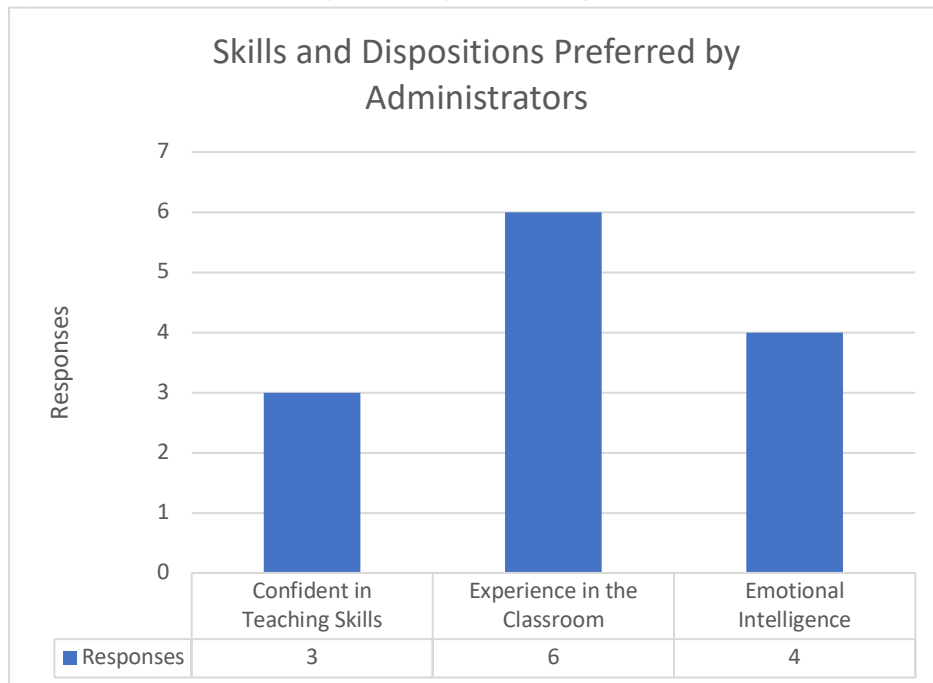
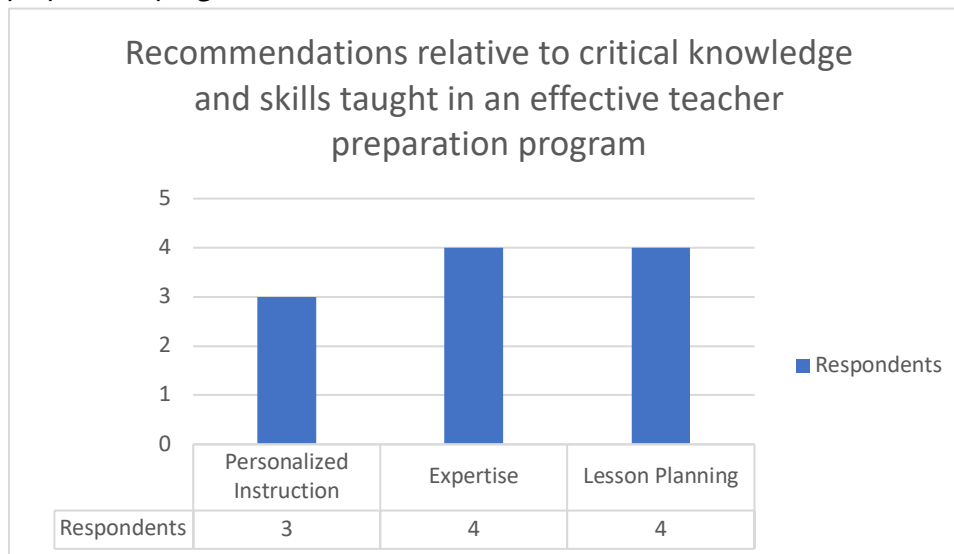


Figure F2

Question 11: Recommendations relative to preferred knowledge and skills taught in teacher preparation programs



Appendix G

Figure G1

Question 12: Administrators' major concerns relative to the hire of teacher candidates and novice teachers

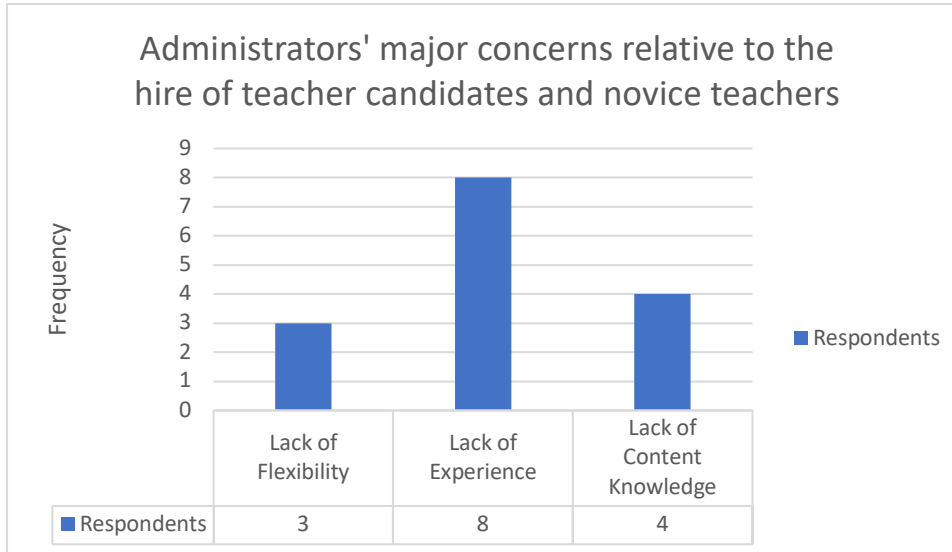
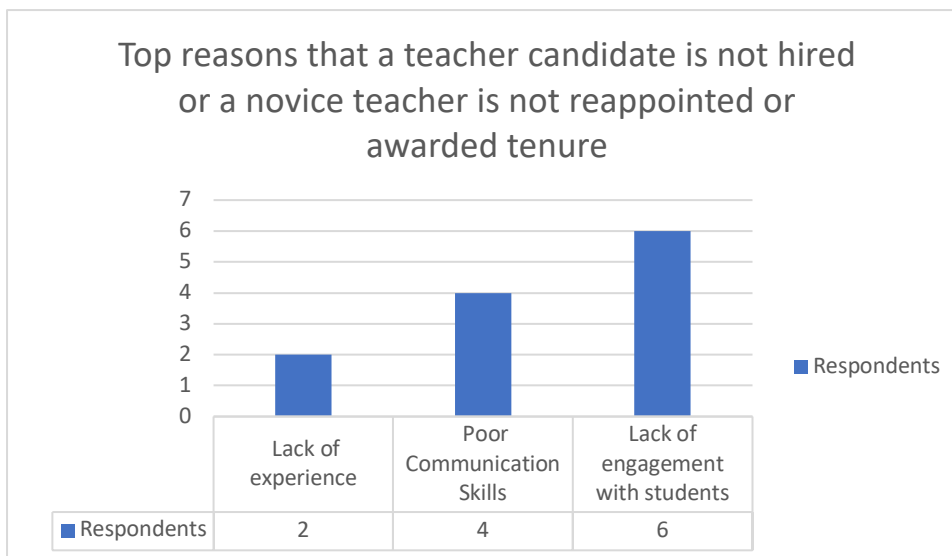


Figure G2

Question 13: Top reasons that a teacher candidate is not hired or a novice teacher is not reappointed or awarded tenure



Appendix H

Figure H1

Question 14: Top reasons that distinguish successful educators from those less effective

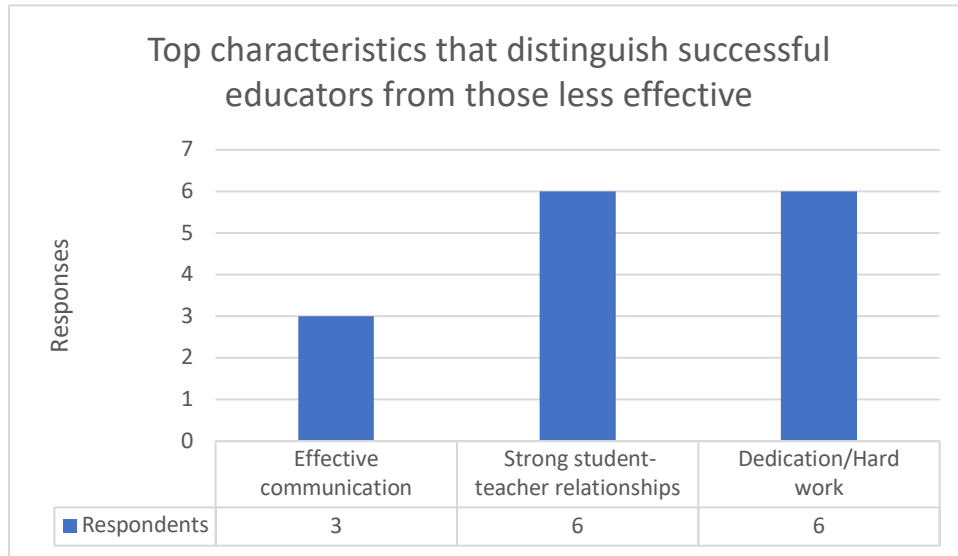
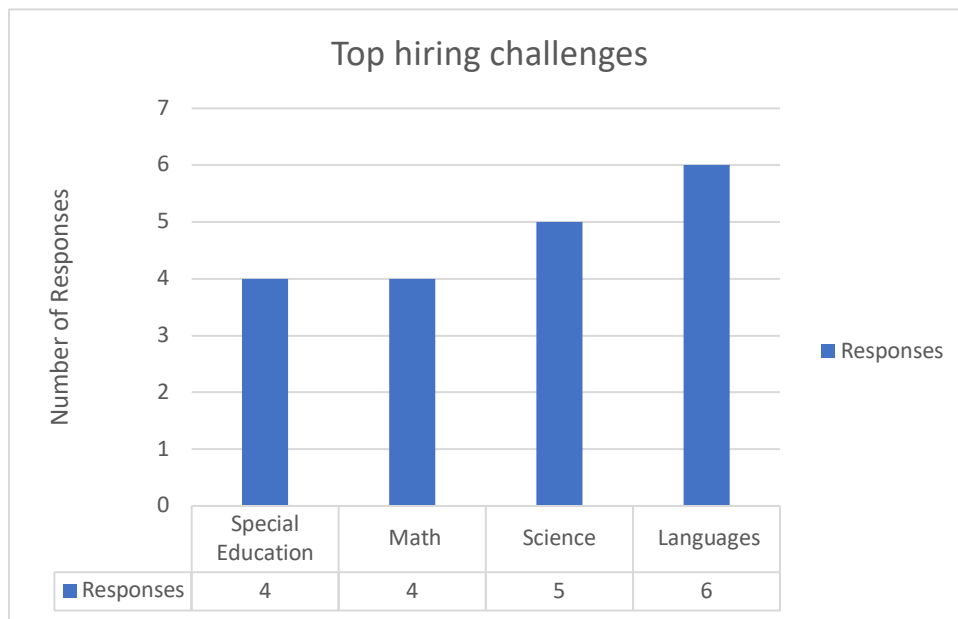


Figure H2

Question 15: Top hiring challenges



Appendix I

Figure I1
Teaching areas most in demand in five years

