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Framing Teacher Education: An Analysis of the Comprehensive Educator Equity Plans of 16 State Education Agencies

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the nature of a federal intervention into teacher education through state policy making and problem framing. The authors examined the 16 comprehensive educator equity plans that were approved by the U.S. Department of Education in 2015 and surface four inadequacies the reports communicate about teacher education: (a) an inability to recruit diverse candidates, (b) an unsuitable curriculum for high-needs schools, (c) limited exposure to diverse teaching placements, and (c) an environment that lacks accountability. Through this project, this article covers how federal educational aims are delegated to states in order to frame economics as the goal of education and teacher education as negligent in this pursuit.

Throughout the 20th century, the United States has used education policy to address the structural inequalities that shape the opportunities and conditions of certain segments of American society. Although education is in many ways afflicted by the same modalities that sustain social inequality, the federal government has recognized that education policy can be used to confront inequalities such as poverty (Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965), gender discrimination (Title IX of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994), and disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004). Each of these interventions acknowledged that public schools simultaneously serve economic, political, and social ends.

Over the last several decades, the discourse of policies for public schools has shifted significantly. According to Labaree (2011a), “the overall balance in the purposes of schooling [has] shifted from a political rationale (shoring up the new republic) to a market rationale (promoting social efficiency and social mobility)” (p. 177). The tipping point for this shift was the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which asserted that American schools were failing and that this failure would handicap America's ability to produce a competent and competitive workforce. By linking education

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and economics, *A Nation at Risk* created political momentum for policies that focus schools on serving economic equity over social equity.

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, policy makers have used numerous policies to crystalize the conception that education is primarily a tool for economic development, and that social equity is best achieved through economic success. Once these policies began to promote teacher quality as a harbinger for economic equity, federal policy-making efforts began focusing more intently on university-based teacher education. In particular, teacher education's inability to demonstrate its impact on P-12 student learning—and, thus, to articulate how it supports the nation's economic viability—has led federal efforts to frame teacher education as problematic and induce states to hold teacher education programs more accountable.

This article explores federal intervention into teacher education and the ways in which the field is positioned as a problem that fails to serve the economic ends of public education. On July 7, 2014, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) announced the *Excellent Educators for All* initiative, which required all state education agencies to submit a comprehensive educator equity plan that identifies and determines the root causes of inequitable teacher distribution. The federal government asked states to focus their efforts on high-poverty and/or high-minority students with the goal of servicing these students with higher-quality teachers. Because university-based teacher education continues to prepare the majority of teachers in the United States, these programs were featured as a central cause of inequitable teacher distribution.

We examined the 16 state-level comprehensive educator equality plans approved by the USDOE in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), and conducted a discourse analysis of these documents to surface how these plans framed teacher education as a contributing factor to the inequitable distribution of teachers in the United States. Below, we briefly discuss the contours of the economic teacher education policy paradigm, and then address how federal and state education agencies frame teacher education as negligent in supporting the economic purposes of education.

Economic teacher education policy paradigm

For the past 30 years, federal teacher preparation policy has operated from the paradigm established in the 1980s that education and teacher preparation are inextricably linked to the nation's economic security. Through various legislative reforms, the public has been conditioned to believe that education serves economics and that economic ends should drive school-based policies. The language of standardization, accountability, and choice that now governs (teacher) education discourse emanates from the logic of economics. As Mehta (2013) suggested, once crystallized, a paradigm not only delimits policy options to conform to that paradigm, it also can “restructure the political landscape around an issue and

change the agenda status of the issue, the players involved, their standing to speak, and the venue in which the issue is debated . . . ‘paradigms create politics’” (p. 293).

With the focus of reform on producing outcomes, the last decade of federal education policies has prioritized economic development over more humanistic purposes of education, such as democratic equality (Hursh, 2007; Karaba, 2016). In this sense, education reform has “subordinate[d] collective ideals to competitive individualism, and advances a political imaginary in which democratic life is rebranded as freedom to choose among an array of goods and services” (Slater & Griggs, 2015, p. 442). Yet, even as economics gains more influence on education policy, most Americans continue to recognize that schools should provide equal opportunities to all children (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2006). In fact, most of the federal government’s early education policies were part of a broader focus on attaining social equity and redressing of past injustices.

However, because paradigms create politics, as the economic rationale for education became more persuasive for federal policy makers, social equity was rebranded as equitable opportunity for economic self-sufficiency. When equity is viewed as economic, policy makers are given an alibi to dismiss the unjust and unequal organization of society (Meens & Howe, 2015). When (teacher) education is viewed from an economic stance, achieving equity is no longer encumbered by social injustices but by merit and opportunity. As such, economics makes equity a colorblind proposition (Leonardo, 2007). In this sense, contemporary conversations around equity in teacher education have focused reform policies exclusively on aspects of economic production, such as recruitment and retention, while at the same time remaining mute on redressing the structural and societal inequities that created and continue to create barriers to equity. The *Excellent Educators for All* initiative furthers the colorblind stance created by the economics serves education policy paradigm.

Context: The *Excellent Educators for All* initiative

The USDOE’s *Excellent Educators for All* initiative—which was rolled out by the department in July of 2014 and is the focus of this study—consists of three parts: (a) a requirement that state education agencies submit a comprehensive educator equity plan that “put[s] in place locally-developed solutions to ensure every student has effective educators” (para. 5); (b) a \$4.2 million investment to create an educator equity support network; and (c) the publication of state equity profiles that identify gaps in access to quality teaching for low-income and minority students. The initiative was grounded in the recognition that students in high-poverty, high-minority schools have limited access to excellent educators. In the press release announcing *Excellent Educators for All*, Secretary of Education Duncan noted:

Despite the excellent work and deep commitment of our nation's teachers and principals, systemic inequities exist that shortchange students in high-poverty, high-minority schools across our country. We have to do better. Local leaders and educators will develop their own innovative solutions, but we must work together to enhance and invigorate our focus on how to better recruit, support and retain effective teachers and principals for all students, especially the kids who need them most (USDOE, 2014, July 7).

Although Secretary Duncan's rationale for this policy acknowledged systematic inequities, his proposed solution focused the initiative exclusively on the development of teachers as human capital.

To support the work of developing the state equity plans, the USDOE conducted a webinar on November 17, 2014, that outlined the three core principles of this initiative: (a) All students deserve an equal educational opportunity and equal access to excellent educators; (b) teachers who work in our hardest-to-staff schools deserve the support they need to succeed; and (c) excellent educators are those who can fully support and push students to graduate from high school ready for college and careers. During this webinar, the USDOE defined equity gap as "the difference between the rate at which students from low-income families or students of color are taught by a certain group of educators and the rate at which their peers are taught by that group of educators" (slide 8). Following statutory stipulation found in Title I of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, the USDOE required states to define and calculate equity gaps for poor and minority students within three groups—inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers. To explain the likely causes of equity gaps, states were asked to engage in a root cause analysis.

The USDOE provided states a series of possible root causes of equity gaps that included ineffective or unstable school leadership, poor working conditions, an insufficient supply of well-prepared educators, inadequate development and support for educators, lack of a comprehensive human capital strategy focused on ensuring equitable access in hardest-to-staff schools, and/or insufficient or inequitable policies on teacher or principal salaries and compensation. States were to support their root cause analysis with quantitative data, input from stakeholders, and/or research from other states or local education agencies. The reports were also required to include timelines to address inequities that each state identified, and the methods of communicating to the public the progress in mitigating inequities. Seventeen states submitted their comprehensive educator equity plans to the USDOE in June 2015, and 16 plans were approved later that year. We use the 16 plans that were initially approved by the USDOE as the basis of our study.

Methods

Framing theory

This study examines how 16 state education agencies frame teacher education as a cause of the inequitable distribution of high-quality teachers in high-poverty and/or high-minority schools. Framing, according to Chong and Druckman (2007), refers to “the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (p. 104). Because complex public issues such as the preparation of teachers involve multiple interpretations, definitions, aims, and interests, frames help organize the inherent conflict of the policy-making process. Language is leveraged in policy documents and among actors to create boundaries about how one should look at a particular issue. Within education reform, policy makers often use capitalist discourse—talk about free markets and the “invisible hand”—to argue for policies that promote charter schools, high-stakes testing, and value-added models to measure teacher quality (Jabbar, 2016; Laitsch, 2013). These boundaries define the issue while simultaneously blocking out aspects that might be involved but are outside the frame (Stone, 2002). For example, the notion that qualified teachers are needed in classrooms is generally uncontested. In fact, it would be difficult to argue that unqualified teachers are better suited for the classroom. However, the notion of *qualified* is highly ambiguous. Measuring quality in the classroom, articulating the kind of education needed for quality preparation, or even enumerating the knowledge and abilities necessary to demonstrate quality are all highly contentious issues. As a result, in order to define the attributes of a quality teacher, different policy organizations have worked to frame quality along economic, political, or social dimensions (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2011).

Because the terrain of teacher education is a “crowded space with multiple communities, organizations, individuals, interest groups, and institutions” (Wilson & Tamir, 2008, p. 916), where there is considerable disagreement between and among these actors, policy recommendations in teacher education often abound. However, framing theory warrants that the influence of frames flows from the more powerful to the less powerful. In the case exemplified in this article, the federal government—through mandate—influences how state agencies frame teacher education. The *Excellent Educators for All* initiative illustrates how the federal government directly intervenes in state affairs by requiring equity plans, but applies its policy influence under the guise of federalism, whereby the federal government pushes its agenda to the states for operational development. In order for the federal government to frame teacher education as problematic, it must influence state agencies to enact state-level policies that draw on these frames.

Data analysis

This study analyzed the 16 state comprehensive educator equity plans that were approved by the USDOE during the first round of submissions. We relied on discourse analysis methods (Gee, 2014) to determine the various frames states used to cast teacher education as a root cause of school-based inequities. Because the construction of frames relies on language, discourse analysis techniques provided a way to deconstruct how the words, phrases, and ideas deployed in the comprehensive educator equity plans were mediating, constructing, and communicating an understanding of the reality of teacher education.

We began our analysis by searching for references or mentions of teacher education in the 16 approved plans. These references were coded words or short phrases to symbolically assign a “summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). Once we isolated these references and mentions, we attempted to holistically cluster how teacher education was framed as a cause of the inequitable distribution of excellent educators. This initial analysis yielded three major categories in the ways in which teacher education was a problem: It was lacking (e.g., diverse candidates, collaboration, human capital pipeline), insufficient (e.g., support, curriculum, clinical experiences), and unaccountable (e.g., low standards, evaluation, feedback). In order for our analysis to communicate what kinds of problems state education agencies were identifying as actual root causes, we resorted the instances within our original categorization scheme to better understand the particular problems being conveyed to the public. Our analysis revealed four unique kinds of inadequacies, which we share below.

Inadequacy of teacher education as a root cause of inequity

As noted, the USDOE (2014, November 17) defined equity gap as the “difference between the rate at which low-income students or students of color are taught by excellent educators and the rate at which their peers are taught by excellent educators” (slide 8). Inherent in the USDOE definition of equity, educators are responsible for addressing the problems of inequitable student and school performance. In other words, according to the federal government, access to more experienced, qualified, and infield teachers will lessen the achievement gaps among low-income students and students of color. With this implicit understanding, it is not surprising that all 16 state equity plans identified teacher education as a root cause for students’ inequitable access to excellent educators. In fact, when we analyzed the possible root causes the USDOE suggested to states, we found that teacher education was the only root cause identified in all 16 reports (see Table 1).

Table 1. Root causes of inequity suggested by the USDOE.

	AR	CT	DE	IN	KY	ME	MA	MN	MO	NV	NY	OK	PA	RI	SC	WI
Lack of effective leadership																
Poor working conditions (environment)																
Insufficient supply of well-prepared educators																
Insufficient development and support for educators																
Lack of a comprehensive human capital strategy																
Insufficient or inequitable policies on salaries and compensation																

Although the equity reports were not exclusively directed toward reforming teacher education, the unanimous identification by states of teacher education as a cause of inequity is a concern for the field of teacher education.

Our analysis identified four major areas where the states focused on constructing teacher education as inadequate and a root cause of the inequitable access to excellent educators among marginalized student populations: (a) recruitment, (b) curriculum, (c) exposure, and (d) accountability. The framing of teacher education in the equity reports illustrates how teacher education’s complexity is implicitly reduced to simplistic notions. Policy makers use these simplistic notions to mandate the efforts of teacher education toward economic ends.

Recruitment

Failing to recruit diverse candidates and/or providing human capital for high-needs schools was one of the major inadequacies identified in the state equity reports. Although the demographics of educators is not a component of the federal definition of excellence, a consistent problem raised by states was a lack of minority candidates in the teacher pipeline—which began with teacher education. Rhode Island identified the lack of diverse candidates as a pertinent issue that concerned education stake holders across the state. The Rhode Island stake holders posited that “increasing educator diversity in schools would increase the cultural competency of the workforce overall” (p. 39). The Rhode Island Department of Education planned to share research and information with preparation programs from local and national experts on high-leverage practices for recruiting a diverse cohort of teachers.

Missouri noted that one of the primary reasons that “more high-quality and diverse individuals are not recruited into teacher education programs is that there is no comprehensive effort underway at this time” (p. 35). As a result, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

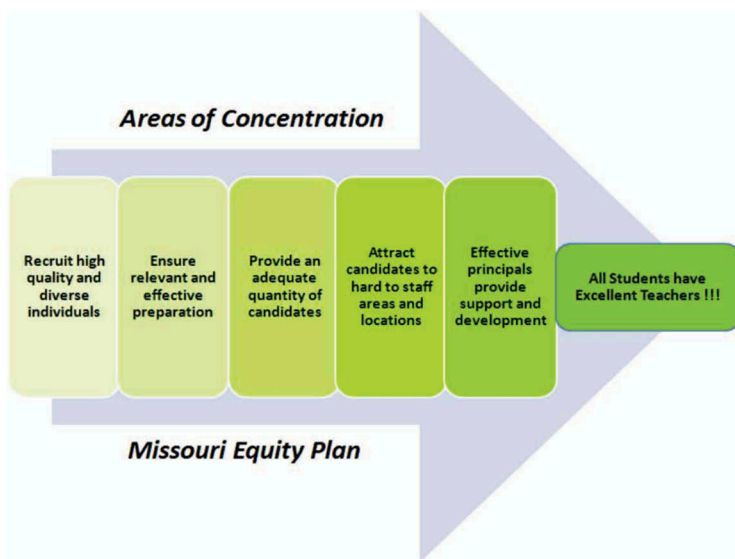


Figure 1. Missouri's theory of action (p. 34 of equity plan).

suggested developing a statewide strategy to recruit diverse candidates. Other states did not mention specific traits, but similarly claimed that teacher education is not doing enough to serve as a pipeline for high-needs/high-minority schools. Arkansas reported that “educator preparation and pathway availability does not align to the needs of high poverty and high minority schools.” (p. 30). Pennsylvania claimed that the supply of new teachers produced by teacher education “doesn’t always meet the demand created by vacancies, including inadequate supply of teachers for special education and English language learners” (p. 61). Although demographics and supply are not necessarily determinants of quality, the equity reports framed teacher education programs as inadequate recruiters of diverse candidates, failing to meet the needs of the state. The equity reports, however, frame demography as commonsense logic. Missouri’s theory of action (see [Figure 1](#)) communicates the simplicity of this message.

From this perspective, recruiting a high-quality, diverse set of individuals and ensuring an adequate number of candidates for high-needs areas will guarantee all students access to excellent teachers.

Curriculum

Another inadequacy the comprehensive educator equity plans pointed out about teacher education was the lack of curricular preparation for high-needs schools. Some states, like Kentucky, made broad claims about the preparation of teacher candidates. In their root cause analysis, they stated, “teachers are not exiting their education preparation programs to meet the challenges of



Figure 2. Oklahoma’s strategy to improve educator preparation (p. 27 of equity plan).

the profession” (p. 23). New York argued, “teacher preparation coursework and experiences have been described as mediocre and inadequate in comparison to the level of classroom management and content knowledge necessary to effectively meet diverse student needs” (p. 54). Missouri made both broad and specific claims when rationalizing why teacher education was a root cause of the equity gap: “Beginning teachers who lack the necessary content knowledge and pedagogical skills to be successful are an indication that educator preparation can be improved” (p. 38). More specifically, however, Missouri noted, “too many teacher education graduates are unfamiliar with the particular challenges of urban education and are unsuccessful when placed in those settings” (p. 38).

As these examples highlight, several states deemed the curriculum of teacher education inadequate for high-needs schools and positioned it as a root cause of the inequitable distribution of excellent educators. Once again, this framing not only defines teacher education as problematic but also delimits curriculum as a human capital tool. The clearest connection between teacher education and human capital is illustrated in Oklahoma’s equity report (see [Figure 2](#)), which posits an if/then relationship between preparedness, retention, and effective educators.

This figure demonstrates the logical leaps between preparedness and effectiveness—which ignore mitigating factors such as school context or culture—while at the same time warranting the curriculum problem as commonsense. The logic here is that if programs better prepare teachers to work in high-poverty and high-needs settings, then high-poverty and high-needs schools will have more effective teachers.

Exposure

Many of the comprehensive educator equity reports claimed that teacher education programs were inadequate at providing opportunities for candidates to learn how to teach in high-needs school settings. Maine pointed out that teacher education fails to provide student teaching experiences in high-needs settings as a reason why new teachers struggle when employed in high-needs schools, noting, “teacher preparation programs do not

regularly provide student teaching experiences in these [high-poverty, isolated small-schools, and high-risk] settings” (p. 22). Connecticut suggested that more field experiences in high-needs schools is an important component in its strategy to strengthen teacher education—particularly for “educators who do not come from or have never worked in the community in which they will be serving” (p. xx). Similarly, South Carolina determined that preservice teachers lack meaningful exposure to high-minority, high-poverty, mostly rural learning environments. Social Carolina indicated that this lack of exposure would hinder success working in high-needs situations and “handicaps [new teachers] because they lack the exposure in dealing with the unique needs associated with an at risk learning environment” (p. 34). Nevada claimed, “district personnel reported that teachers lack clinical experience and preparation to teach in high-need school settings, including lack of cultural and relational competency, and preparation for teaching special populations” (p. 33). By claiming that the failure of teacher education to provide candidates with adequate exposure to high-needs settings is a root cause of the inequitable distribution of excellent educators, the equity plans reify the inadequacy narrative.

Wisconsin’s root cause analysis (see [Figure 3](#)) indicated how teacher preparation is framed and, in particular, how exposure to high-needs classrooms leads to high rates of inexperienced teachers.

Inherent in the critique leveraged at teacher education is that time served matters most—that exposure alone generates quality. The reports do not

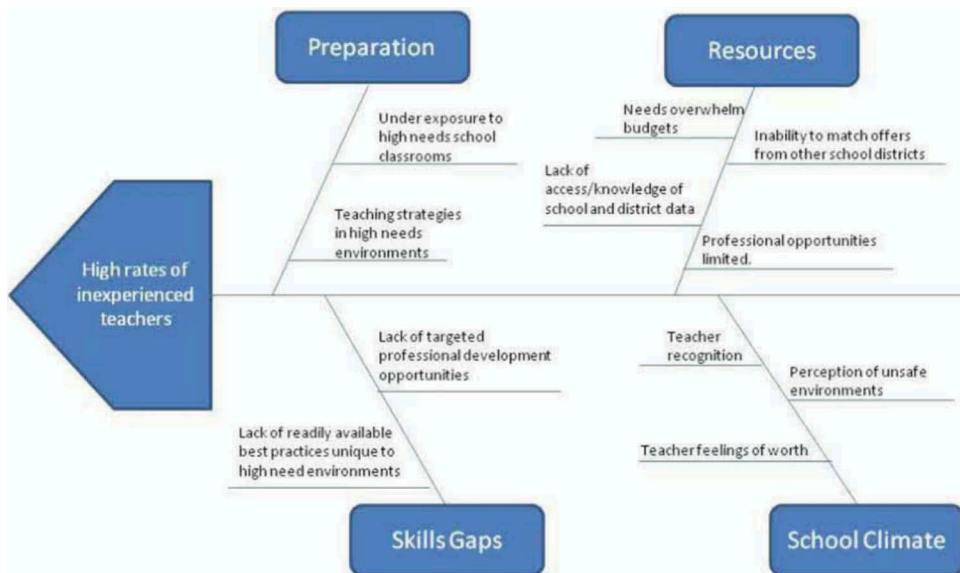


Figure 3. Wisconsin’s root cause analysis (p. 17 of equity plan).

address teacher learning during the field experiences or the challenges of placing student teachers in difficult-to-staff schools (Ronfeldt, 2012). Like the curriculum critique, the message is that exposure equates to preparedness. The argument is that exposure to high-needs schools in teacher education will lead to a more equitable distribution of excellent teachers. As such, the exposure critique also positions teacher education as an instrumental agent in the human capital pipeline.

Accountability

A common critique of teacher education is that the field is disorderly, lacks quality control, and ultimately fails to regulate itself. This critique is best captured by the *Education Schools Project (2006)* report, which compared teacher education to Dodge City: “[L]ike the fabled Wild West town, it is unruly and chaotic” (p. 109). A version of this critique appears in the state equity plans as a rationale for teacher education as a root cause of the inequitable distribution of excellent educators. Many states highlighted that, despite standards, teacher education programs are still unaccountable for performance.

Wisconsin noted there is “no common state process to ascertain the quality of preservice teacher candidates’ preparation in pedagogical skills and their ability to implement teaching strategies in high-needs environments” (p. 31). Without a common state process, Wisconsin argued, “districts often struggle to effectively hire quality educators for high-needs environments” (p. 31). Indiana—which identified teacher education as inadequate throughout the equity report—implied that teacher education is disorderly. The report called for establishing “standards for the continuous improvement of program processes and the performance of individuals who complete educator preparation programs” (p. 38). Leveraging the vague curriculum critique by citing the *Education Schools Project (2006)* report, Massachusetts argued that new teacher attrition in high-needs schools is “due in part to a lack of preparedness for the realities of the classroom” (p. 22). The Massachusetts state education agency promised to shift the “expectations for program review and accountability” into a new process called the Educator Preparation Profiles—an annual reporting process that will “hold educator preparation programs accountable for teacher performance and emphasize the importance of preparing educators to work with students with diverse needs” (p. 31).

New York asserted it had taken numerous steps to increase the quality of teachers, such as creating “more rigorous” certification exams and “publicizing preparation program statistics to hold programs accountable for the candidates’ success on certification exams” (p. 8). The Kentucky report pointed out, “the quality of educator preparation programs,

Monitoring Key Component 1 (Educator Preparation)

Ongoing monitoring is critical to ensure that there is improved quality of those entering the profession and preparedness of the educator workforce. Monitoring activities from the Department include:

- | Monitoring Key Component 1 (Educator Preparation) | |
|--|--|
| 1. | Evidence-based accreditation |
| 2. | Public reporting of New York State higher education certification data |
| 3. | Further development of preparation program profiles |
| 4. | Continued construction of “Where are they now?” reports |

Figure 4. New York’s rationalizing of teacher education (p. 85 of equity plan).

practices, and field/clinical experiences must increase so that teachers are ‘student-ready’ from day one in the classroom” (p. 25). To make sure teachers are day-one ready, the state education agency noted it is “re-designing how Kentucky carries out preparation program authorization and review, as well as the accreditation process” (p. 25). Missouri promised to engage in developing a program approval process that ensures teacher candidates possess the content knowledge and pedagogical skills for successful teaching.

All 16 comprehensive educator equity reports called for new systems of external accountability. These calls reinforce the belief that teacher education is unable to self-regulate or assure the production of quality educators. However, what these reports fail to mention is the substance of what excellent preparation for marginalized populations looks like. The claims that teacher education needs more accountability are problematic because state education agencies are essentially asking for more of the same—high-stakes testing, narrowed curriculum, and micromanagement of the academy. Unfortunately for teacher education, in the process of calling for the reconstruction of the same accountability systems, state education agencies generate currency to publicly question teacher education’s ability to deliver quality educators. As evidenced in the New York report (see [Figure 4](#)), by questioning the quality of teacher education, the warrant for monitoring the profession becomes more self-evident.

This process creates a distributive circular logic that enables further regulation of what is deemed an unruly institution.

Solving the inadequacies of teacher education

Through the comprehensive educator equity reporting process, 16 state agencies and the USDOE identified teacher education as a root cause of the inequitable distribution of excellent teachers. These reports framed teacher education as inadequately recruiting diverse candidates, delivering

relevant curriculum, exposing candidates to diverse settings, and holding themselves accountable for outcomes. Through problem framing, the USDOE and state education agencies created a problem/solution paradigm that advances their policy agenda—which is strategic to promote the federal government’s preferred course of action (Stone, 2002). Given that education reform discourse focuses on serving economics, the equity reports indexed teacher education’s problems on its inability to serve human capital production, especially for marginalized populations. By framing teacher education as disconnected from marginalized communities, the equity reports are policy tools the USDOE uses to leverage public opinion. This leveraging enacts a federal policy agenda that promotes economic solutions for the problem of teacher education.

Our analysis of the comprehensive educator equity reports uncovered two dominant solutions to the problems of recruitment, curriculum, exposure, and accountability—competition and control. These two solutions flow naturally in the problem/solution paradigm created by the reports. This paradigm warrants that if traditional teacher education is unable to meet the demands of the school market, policy makers should create competitive forces and open up the profession. Yet, while opening up the market and creating competition, policy makers have argued that if the issues of curriculum, exposure, and accountability continue to afflict teacher education, they will continue pursuing curriculum control policies.

Delaware exemplifies how these two solutions—deregulating the marketplace while regulating control of traditional programming—flow from the inadequacy framing established in the reports. Delaware argued that “teacher preparation for high-needs schools was a root cause for teacher turnover and effectiveness gaps. . . . Delaware believes that improved teacher preparation will result in stronger teachers” (p. 40). As such, Delaware has proposed increasing accountability and expanding credentialing options by creating a competitive marketplace for high-quality training programs. To support these arguments, Delaware cited its funding for alternative certification—Teach for America and the Relay Graduate School—as a way to “curb the root causes of inadequate preparation for high need schools.” (p. 42). Although the debate about the effectiveness of competition is contentious, evidence suggests that the high rate of attrition of alternatively certified teachers fails to provide a sustainable solution to the structural and economic inequalities that plague high-needs schools (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005).

Nevertheless, the solutions policy makers pursue to solve inequity focus on the production of human capital. In this sense, what is a concept of democratic equality is transformed into an issue of social efficiency and social mobility. Delaware’s report illustrates this shift by pointing out that teacher education was not efficiently enacting human capital production for the

state's most marginalized students. Unsurprisingly, Delaware called for curricular control of programs while creating alternative pathways to support the communities that traditional teacher education has left behind. The logic here is that if competition can solve the recruitment problem (e.g., Teach for America), a natural solution to the curriculum, exposure, and accountability problems is increasing state control in ways that help the state articulate how they are ensuring quality (e.g., writing new standards and attaching them to more high-stakes testing). While lauding the quality of teachers in alternative pathways (which are often fast-track programs that focus only on the curricular goals of the state's testing regime), Delaware also called for a continued focus on setting and raising the standards for teacher education for high-needs schools—standards that were and are solely tied to the testing regime.

The Delaware example highlights how framing the problems of teacher education through an economic paradigm bifurcates issues of quantity and quality for the public. This bifurcation creates a contradiction. When an economic function like production is the governing narrative framing education policy, state education agencies subject teacher education to economic solutions like alternative pathways. Simply put, if we do not produce enough teachers, we must open up the market to more routes to entering the profession. Although these solutions are warranted under of a call for “the right kinds of teachers,” the call remains a guise, because the same isomorphic relationship for creating quality educators under an economic paradigm is not possible—which creates a paradox of school consumption. As Labaree (2011b) claimed, “we want schools to express our highest ideas as a society and our greatest aspirations as individuals, but only as long as they remain ineffective in actually enabling us to achieve these goals, since we really do not want to acknowledge that these two aims are at odds with each other” (p. 394).

The result for teacher education is that quality exists for the sole purpose of consumption; therefore, the most direct path to ensure quality is not a call for stronger curriculum or more exposure to high-needs schools but, instead, appeals for control and quality assurance.

By focusing on these technical policy prescriptions, policy makers can ignore the difficult, normative discussion of what constitutes quality teacher education—none of the 16 state plans we analyzed did this work. When economics frames the policy narrative, it enacts a governing framework that pushes policy makers to enact control over standards, creates a proliferation of assessments, and reifies external accountability. Economic technicality becomes the natural mechanism for reform, positioning the seemingly contradictory techniques of deregulation (opening up the market to alternative pathways) and regulation (control and accountability of curriculum through high-stakes testing) as complementary solutions to the problems of teacher education.

Problem framing and the erosion of expertise

One consequence of the human capital framing of teacher education outlined in the comprehensive educator equity plans is the erosion of professional expertise, especially from the academy. By anchoring the field of teacher education to an economic paradigm, the USDOE and state governments delimit the potentiality of teacher education and neutralize the reality that teacher education is a field that produces specialized knowledge about itself. The problems identified in the equity reports are not new to teacher education researchers. For decades, teacher educators have worked to develop empirically grounded solutions to the problems of diverse recruitment, culturally competent curriculum, exposure to high-needs settings, and self-accountability. For example, Project TEACH was a successful partnership between a university-based teacher education program and a local community in Connecticut to increase the recruitment and retention of African American and Latino teachers (Irizarry, 2007). Yet, the equity reports fail to include these kinds of programs or recognize the knowledge generated by teacher education research about these programs.

Consequently, the comprehensive educator equity plans decouple teacher education from higher education by effectively bifurcating the knowledge production function of teacher education from its responsibilities to prepare teachers. This division is important because higher education continues to be socially revered for its specialized knowledge, technical expertise, and self-regulation (Mehta, 2014). The public continues (mostly) to defer to the expertise found in colleges and universities. Therefore, if states are looking to control teacher education, higher education's autonomy must be dissociated with teacher education. The very ideals of higher education that are revered by the public—knowledge, expertise, and self-regulation—must be framed as problems in teacher education. When teacher education loses social trust, sources of knowledge outside of the field become more trustworthy. This trend is why the Rhode Island state education agency explicitly articulated its efforts to request technical assistance from the National Governor's Association to help it increase the diversity and cultural competence of the state's educator workforce.

In order for teacher education to remain a viable profession, teacher educators must work to reassert their expertise, before teacher education becomes a playground for technocrats. Part of our work as teacher educators in this policy milieu must include working to resist these problematic frames of our profession and to exert our expertise in the field as a social good. We must develop political frames about our work that can strike the public as more compelling than the frames currently constructed and promoted by federal and state policy makers. Teacher educators must engage in the politics of teacher education by stepping into the policy-framing arena,

asserting the knowledge generated by teacher education research to shape policy prescriptions, and work more intentionally in schools to help equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to mitigate inequitable social and educational outcomes.

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Appendix

The respective states of the 16 comprehensive educator equity plans reviewed in this study are listed in the table below. Each plan was retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education’s *Equitable Access to Excellent Educators* webpage at <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/resources.html>.

State
Arkansas
Connecticut
Delaware
Indiana
Kentucky
Maine
Massachusetts
Minnesota
Missouri
Nevada
New York
Oklahoma
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
South Carolina
Wisconsin