

Importance of tracking completer data

Tracking program completers provides a framework for Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs) to assess the effectiveness of their preparation courses and experiences. Before any follow-up with completers is undertaken, the purpose for such work should be identified. There are many purposes for completer follow up. Three main purposes are accountability, continuous improvement, and process knowledge. While the goals of follow-up with completers may be different across EPPs, the common factor is the need to have data systems in place to know and understand completer perceptions of preparation and their impact on P-12 student learning. Feedback from completers provides valuable insight into the challenges they experience early in the profession as well as recommendations for program improvement.

The Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) enables accountability and continuous improvement for providers. Accountability is one of the most cited purposes for completer follow-up and a central rationale for its inclusion in CAEP standards. Much research was conducted by CAEP when the standards were drafted in 2013 (i.e., Design Team Report, Teacher Preparation Analytics Report(2016). Completer data was incorporated into CAEP standards in contrast to past accreditation standards that were more focused on inputs. Research indicated school principals and superintendents were having to spend a great deal of time and resources preparing teachers they hired and some would not hire from certain providers because of low quality. Teachers unions were also concerned candidates were paying for preparation that was not resulting in employment or sent them into classrooms unprepared.

Continuous improvement is the most important purpose for EPPs as well as a hallmark of accreditation. Although the methods for data collection and reporting are similar, the way the data is analyzed, interpreted, and used differs from accountability purposes. Completer data, particularly when triangulated with candidate data, can help EPPs create a timeline of preparation to pinpoint program strengths and weaknesses and design more efficient and responsive programs. For example, an EPP assessed candidate's dispositions during the program at multiple transitions points (at beginning of the program, prior to entering clinical practice, and at the completion of student teaching). Follow up completer data on similar dispositions can show longitudinally how candidates perform and grow. The resulting data can aid in identification of strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum and experiences provided to candidates to improve preparation. Further, this longitudinal data on the same indicators can help an EPP understand more fully how candidates performance during the program can translate to performance in their own classroom after completion.

Finally, process knowledge is the last purpose of completer follow-up. Although the findings of completer follow-up at one EPP may not be generalizable to another EPP, knowledge about the methodology and process for improvements and outcomes are important to be disseminated to the teacher preparation community at large. Sharing this process knowledge contributes to the validity of the assessment and decision-making processes, especially with completer follow-up work in EPPs. Opinions and anecdotes do not provide defensible arguments for the quality of teacher preparation. Rather, systematic data collection with completers allows EPPs to make decisions based on relevant, verifiable, representative, cumulative, and actionable data.

Methods for tracking completers

The ability of an EPP to track completers depends on a desire and focus to do so. An EPP's resources, mission, and size are not necessarily crucial to using data to improve. The ability to track is also enhanced or hindered by the support from the State Department of Education (DOE) or Local Education Agencies (LEA). EPPs that tend to do a good job with tracking completers have a robust internal system supplemented by DOE or LEA data. These systems help to identify completers (currently teaching, graduate school, left teaching or the state) and provide valuable incentives for completers to participate and stay engaged. These EPPs also tend to have a culture of program improvement that extends beyond candidates and is interested in a more longitudinal view of success. EPPs that struggle with completer tracking tend to rely on alumni rosters or external systems (i.e., alumni association, athletic groups) to manage the lists of completers. Because these systems reside outside the EPP, there is not an ability to update or add variables to the system yielding muddled data or these data are limited to self-selected completers who choose to join these groups (i.e, alumni groups, athletic support groups). A list may have many completers but a majority may be out of state or in graduate school and not currently practicing teachers. Although tracking and collecting data from out of state completers could be beneficial, the time and effort to contact usually outweighs the effort. In addition, no state data or connection to LEA provided data is available. Some EPPs take a very minimalist approach to completer follow up and basically send survey

links and report on percentage returns. This approach yields very low return rates and generally poor quality data.

Data collected for tracking completers

We have discussed how EPPs are tracking completers but what data is actually collected from them? For CAEP, there are three main areas completer data is compiled: employer satisfaction of completers, completer satisfaction with their preparation, and completer impact on P-12 student learning and development. Satisfaction with preparation, both of completers and employers who hire them, is generally in survey form. The most informative surveys ask questions aligned to preparation areas (i.e., content, dispositions, technology) that can be linked back to candidate data in the same areas. This triangulation provides a rich integrated set of measures to allow the EPP to see trends and gaps. Smaller EPPs tend to use interviews and focus groups to collect this data but triangulate in much the same way as the survey groups. The P-12 impact data is generally harder to collect and EPPs have provided several methods for collecting. There are basically three ways Impact data is presented. State provided metrics (i.e., value-add measure data), case studies, or performance portfolio follow ups. Several states (i.e., North Carolina, Tennessee) provide data on completers by certain licensure areas and aggregate the data for EPPs. If state data is not available or incomplete, EPPs employ a case study methodology to gather specific data on completers. The performance portfolio data can be collected within a case study methodology or stand alone. Many EPPs that utilize edTPA or PPAT during student teaching craft a similar process for completers to record, reflect and address in narrative their impact on P-12 learners.

Challenges to tracking/barriers to tracking

Completer follow-up is time consuming and can be costly. Many colleges and universities have developed data management systems to handle the large amounts of data collected from current candidates in response to CAEP standards. However, integrating completer data into the already established system can take time. Other barriers exist when EPPs look to follow-up with their completers. Gathering and verifying accurate lists of completers can take time. Accurate tagging of candidates that are out of state, in graduate school, working outside the teaching profession can be challenging. One problem with tracking candidates are name changes. A large majority of teacher candidates are women and one large EPP reported over 70% of their completers changed their names within 6 months of graduating, leading to verification of accurate lists extremely difficult. In addition to upkeep of the tracking system, the amount of staff and faculty time dedicated to case study work, focus groups, interview, and observations can be prohibitive.

Benefits of tracking within an EPP/nationally

Although there are many barriers to tracking completers, the benefits certainly outweigh the challenges. The collection of completer evidence informs programmatic decisions including whether curricular priorities affect professional practice. EPPs can triangulate data from candidates with completer data to support programmatic changes and inform strengths

and weaknesses in preparation. The following is an example of how an EPP can connect their data for continuous improvement.

Current EPP Candidates who were surveyed feel prepared to use a variety of assessment methods and student data to make decisions about teaching. These data were corroborated through pre-ATC and ATC gateway rubric scores on assignments. In the Professional Year Gateway, we recognized 20% of candidates were not meeting the standard. Reviewing individual rubrics, the EPP identified the student performance on the edTPA assessment (rubric 13), edTPA academic language (rubric 14), and edTPA using instruction to plan next steps (rubric 15) yielded the lowest scores. The ED 300 & 301 core course sequence was redesigned to clarify these 3 tasks. Specifically, ED 300 & 301 have added modules to the curriculum on feedback and redesigned some of the major course assignments to mirror the edTPA. Post-graduation surveys indicate that completers feel confident and are able to use a variety of measures to assess student learning. This data is triangulated with employer evaluation of teacher performance around assessment through the State Teacher Evaluation System.

In this example, the EPP is connecting candidate data (course assignment rubric data, perception surveys, clinical experience data, student teaching data, and edTPA) with post graduation surveys and evaluation data on completer performance. The EPP is tying this data thread to programmatic improvement decisions (curriculum changes).

EPPs can also examine the number of completers who are actually entering the field. There is much variability in the number of completers who actually seek a career in teaching. Evidence of hiring practices in school systems can provide teacher candidates with a realistic picture of the “culture” of hiring in schools. Also, hiring practices are an important consideration for EPPs and are the reasons why candidates choose not to enter the profession. Teacher preparation programs are often charged with producing more graduates to compensate for the “revolving door” in education. However, if teachers are not feeling prepared to enter teaching and choose another profession, programs can work to fill the gaps

they cite in completer follow-up studies. To further meet this surging demand, EPPs have developed multiple pathways to teaching. Completer follow-up studies can provide information regarding the fidelity and impact on teacher perceptions, teacher performance, and retention of alternative routes while comparing them to traditionally prepared graduates. The state of North Carolina has provided disaggregated data by preparation path and the UNC system has published several articles comparing preparation paths and outcomes.

Summary/Recommendations of Best Tracking Practices

There are three recommendations for successful completer tracking. First, an EPP should create an easily implemented and sustainable tracking system. While every EPP does not have the resources to invest in purchasing a complete "out of the box " tracking system, it is important the work of tracking completers is a living process. The system should be aligned with the capacity and mission of the EPP and purpose of the data collection. An effective and inexpensive tracking system can be created using a series of spreadsheets. The most important consideration is that the work and responsibility for compiling, maintaining, and reporting in this system is specifically delegated to a member(s) of the EPP. A simple system can be understood easily, requires minimal training, and widely utilized by the EPP will be sustainable. It is recommended the tracking begins while students are still candidates in their programs. As part of exit metrics, have candidates update contact information and provide a personal non-university email and if possible job information. Many candidates have employment prior to completing student teaching or graduating. Further, the tracking system the EPP creates should not be connected to alumni associations, never solicit funds, or sell email contacts as part of mailer programs. Setting clear guidelines for the tracking system ensures trust and willingness

of completers to read and respond to data requests. One EPP had relied on their University alumni database for completer contacts but received very low response rates (less than 20%) and many invalid email address returns. After setting up their own tracking database and beginning the system with candidates, the EPP saw a dramatic increase in participation (50%). When completers were asked about their participation, they responded they provided viable contact information because the EPP was not asking for money and they felt they were supporting the teaching community.

Second, in order to populate employment data in the system, an EPP can form connections with the State Department of Education (DOE) or Local Education Agencies (LEA). A state DOE can aid an EPP in tracking their graduates. One state provides contact information of the EPPs graduates currently working in a public school in the state. This data can be cross referenced with graduation rosters and data candidates provided at completion to create accurate lists of completers working in their prepared field. Many completers leave the state, enroll in graduate programs, or pursue other careers. The ability to tag completers and know which ones to contact can save an abundant amount of follow up time. Some states do not have the capacity or are not legislatively allowed to provide completer location data. In general, the motivation of State departments to provide this data is low because the effort outweighs the perceived benefit. In these cases, EPPs develop relationships with LEAs employing a high percent of their completers. Partnering with LEAs to support beginning teachers in those districts and create alumni/beginning teacher events in tandem is a good practice. Not only does this strengthen partnerships with P-12 schools, it allows EPPs to solicit feedback from both employers and completers while also providing mutually beneficial activities. This strategy is an

example of how an EPP can collect evidence for both CAEP Standard 2 as well as stakeholder involvement in CAEP Standard 5.

Third, once an EPP knows who to contact, it is important to connect completer participation with incentives meaningful to new teachers. Teachers in their first few years need support and resources so tying completer participation to tangible professional development will result in higher participation. The most successful professional development topics are instructional technology training (i.e., learning management systems and emerging technology tools), building motivation and relationships, classroom management, and practical tips and tricks given employment context (i.e., creating unit and lesson plans for first weeks of school, developing parent communication structure, etc.). EPPs can also develop completer learner communities to continue the collaboration that candidates participated in within their program. This network would allow completers to request support in specific areas. For example, the EPP can host periodic Twitter chats with completers to ask questions. The EPP can provide support in an online modality as other completers may have similar needs. Another option would be allowing completers to submit questions in a social media tool and then the EPP could then provide quick “how to” videos based on the needs of completers. The EPP could explore closed or protected social media options so only their completers have access in order to provide a safe space to request help. Not only does this provide real-time support for completers in the field but the EPP is also able to use the qualitative data for program improvement.

The creation of a EPP specific tracking system, nurturing relationships with the State and LEAs, as well as providing meaningful incentives for completers to participate are all critical components to success. Investment in systems and structures have to be put in place by all

stakeholders at the EPP for the long-term sustainability of complete tracking and feedback loops for program improvement. Ultimately, the goal is to fill every classroom with a high quality teacher and using follow-up studies of teacher preparation programs can find and close gaps between preparation and good practice.