

# New teacher-prep system earns nod

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Some new teachers are performing as well or even better than their much more experienced peers after going through “redesigned” teacher-preparation programs in college, according to a new state study.

The two main points of the new assessment show it is possible for newly graduated teachers to be good right away and also that teacher achievement can be linked to the quality of their college programs — a first nationwide, said George Noell, the LSU psychology professor who led the study.

“This is inconsistent with data for ages and ages that new teachers take a while to catch up to their peers,” Noell said Tuesday about his Value Added Teacher Preparation Assessment.

“Overall, new teachers are still less effective,” he said. “We’re just saying it’s possible and that some places have done it.”

However, not everyone is pleased with the suggestion that brand new teachers can be just as good as those with 20 years of experience.

Louisiana Federation of Teachers President Steve Monaghan said he is concerned the results reflect the theory that schools only need a “transitional work force” of cheaper, young teachers who are recycled every five or 10 years.

“We’re not making widgets,” Monaghan said. “This (study) raises my suspicion.

“This puts out ... that the young teacher is better than the seasoned teacher or at least as good as,” Monaghan said. “I think that’s damaging to the real dialogue to fix our schools rather than the quick fixes.”

The LFT is one of the state’s two largest teacher unions.

The study, which was led by Noell and Jeanne Burns, Louisiana Board of Regents associate commissioner for teacher education initiatives, focused on the redesigned alternative certification teaching programs at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, the private Louisiana College in Pineville and The New Teacher Project, a nonprofit group that helps some of the larger school districts recruit teachers.

The state’s Blue Ribbon Commission first recommended teacher preparation redesign in 2000 to create more program consistency and accountability for teacher success. Alternative certification programs, which are fast-tracked teaching degrees for students with a bachelor’s degree in another

field, were some of the first redesigned.

Some of the redesigned teaching curriculums at Louisiana College, Northwestern and The New Teacher Project produced results that exceeded the effectiveness of experienced teachers, according to the study.

Noell contended the study is not an “ulterior motive” to force out older teachers. Louisiana would need an excess of young teachers to do so anyway, he said.

“That ain’t true in this state. We pay bounties to get people,” Noell said, noting that teachers have age discrimination protections too.

Burns said the focus should be on the apparent success of the redesign and that Louisiana is able to link teacher success to the quality of its college programs.

“This study is finished to the point that we can say, ‘Yes, we can do that,’ ” Burns said. “We’re the first state in the nation that has the capability to do this statewide.”

But Burns did say that the evidence showing more success for new teachers “can definitely have impacts on hiring patterns in school districts.

“The bottom line is this can improve student achievement,” she said.

Noell said full statewide results are about three years away.

Before the redesign, only LSU’s social studies teacher preparation matched the results of experienced teachers, according to the data. LSU also ranked highest in overall teacher preparation statewide before redesign.

Jayne Fleener, dean of the LSU College of Education, said she is pleased with LSU’s current progress. But much more data is needed, she said.

The new data has caused more of a stir nationally than locally, Fleener said. A lot of states and think tanks around the country now have their eyes on Louisiana, she said.