

EQUITY WITHIN REACH

Insights from the Front Lines of America's Achievement Gap

Results from a Survey of Teach For America Corps Members

FOREWORD

We are fortunate to live in a great nation, one that is founded upon the principles of justice and equality, of liberty and freedom. But, our nation is also an imperfect one, where inequity and injustice are still firmly entrenched.

As a nation, we must be honest about the fact that, while our educational system is extraordinary in so many respects, it is riddled with outrageous disparities. Millions of American children from low-income and minority communities across this country face unconscionable educational inequities.

And what does the future hold for individuals in our nation who are constrained by an inadequate education? The research is clear: They are more likely to live their entire lives in poverty, more likely to lack adequate healthcare, and more likely to be incarcerated.

Do these harsh statistical realities arise because children who happen to be born into low-income communities are inherently less capable than their more affluent peers? Those of us who have worked in the classrooms on the front lines of the achievement gap know that nothing could be more false. The truth is that our students' potential to succeed is nothing less than extraordinary.

The critical question of our time, then, is how do we tap that potential and ensure high levels of achievement for all children in this nation?

What I have learned in my years as a classroom teacher, and what the two thousand teachers in this study so clearly tell the nation, is that strong teaching and effective school leadership are key, and that high expectations, like low-expectations, are a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I hope the nation will listen to the teachers in this study, that it will learn from their insights, and that it will, once and for all, eliminate the shameful inequities that still plague our education system. Every day that we allow these inequities to continue, we turn our backs on those who deserve our national attention the most. In doing so, we weaken our democracy and we jeopardize the very future of our great nation. After all, the achievement gap is not just an education issue. It is a civil rights issue. It is a human rights issue.

We have an obligation to make a simple, but powerful commitment to our children. We must promise them that the opportunity to pursue their dreams will be constrained only by the limits of their imagination, and never by their zip code.

And I believe deeply, with every fiber of my being, that, as a nation, we can fulfill this obligation. I believe this because I have found, just like the Teach For America teachers in this study, that the achievement gap is ultimately vulnerable to the greatness inherent in all children and to the power of talented, hard-working adults of vision.

By acting on the insights from this report, and by working together with a profound sense of urgency, I believe we can eliminate educational inequity and close the achievement gap within this generation of children. Let us be unwavering in our commitment and undeterred in our efforts so that all children in this nation have access to that most basic human right – the opportunity to pursue their dreams.

Jason Kamras
2005 National Teacher of the Year
John Philip Sousa Middle School
District of Columbia Public Schools
Teach For America Alumnus

AUTHOR

Abigail Smith is Teach For America's vice president for research and public policy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Numerous individuals external to Teach For America generously provided support and guidance at every stage of the process – from conceiving the vision for the original survey on through providing editorial review for the final report. We would particularly like to thank Kati Haycock, Heather Peske, Andrew Rotherham, Fredreka Schouten, Ross Wiener, and Michael Zamore.

Many Teach For America staff members contributed significantly to this project, including Steven Farr, Todd Glass, Melissa Golden, Rebecca Helmer, Todd McGovern, Graham Murphy, Cynthia Skinner, Alisa Sztatrowski, Ken Velasquez, and Monique Zurita.

Most importantly, we thank the 2,000 Teach For America corps members who took the time to share their insights. Through their deep commitment to student success, they and their colleagues in classrooms across the country inspire all of us who are engaged in this work.

This report is available online at: www.teachforamerica.org/equitywithinreach.html

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Teachers, Principals, and Expectations Are Key to Closing Achievement Gaps	3
Realizing Students' Potential	6
The Perception Gap	8
Conclusion: Equity Within Reach	10
About Teach For America	11
Methodology	12
Appendix: Data Tables	13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of this Study

There is growing consensus among educators and policy makers that the gap in academic outcomes that exists along socio-economic and racial lines is the most pressing educational challenge of our day. Given their daily work teaching in public schools in our nation's lowest-income urban and rural communities, Teach For America teachers – or “corps members” – bring a valuable perspective to the public discussion of this achievement gap.

This report is the result of a survey of nearly 2,000 of these teachers finishing their first and second years in the classroom, along with almost 200 incoming corps members who were just beginning their training. The survey addressed corps members' beliefs about causes of and solutions to the achievement gap, as well as their own experiences in the classroom.

Teach For America corps members work alongside thousands of committed, talented teachers in our nation's lowest-income urban and rural communities. We hope that in thinking about education reform, policy makers and the general public alike will draw on the perspectives of these teachers working on a daily basis to close the achievement gap for their students.

Major Findings

The topics addressed in the survey are complex, and corps members' responses reflected that complexity. At the same time, very strong trends emerged from the survey data. Of particular note were these key findings:

- **Educators have the power to close achievement gaps.** Corps members emphasize the potential of both teachers and principals to change academic outcomes for students – in spite of all the external challenges.
- **Expectations of students – from teachers, schools, parents, the general public, and students themselves – are both a powerful tool and a powerful obstacle.** Corps members see low expectations as a significant cause of the achievement gap; they believe that increased common belief in the potential of low-income students and students of color is key to closing the gap; and their experience as teachers has strengthened their belief in their students' ability to meet high expectations.
- **Funding, in itself, is not the answer.** Teacher quality and expectations of students outranked funding as both causes of and solutions to the gap. And as corps members spend more time in the classroom, the priority they place on funding gives way to other factors, such as school leadership. While some of their proposed solutions may require further investment, corps members express skepticism about increasing funding without addressing current allocation of resources.
- **The general public has an inaccurate understanding of issues regarding the achievement gap.** Corps members express concern that the public misplaces blame for the gap on students and their families. They also believe that much of the public is simply unaware of the existence of this gap or of the realities of poverty and segregation.

INTRODUCTION

By the time they are nine years old, students in low-income areas are already three grade levels behind their peers in more affluent communities. As these students get older, the picture only gets worse. While children from families making over \$90,000 have a one in two chance of graduating from college by age twenty-four, that number plummets to one in seventeen for children from families making less than \$35,000. This report shares the insights of over 2,000 teachers working in our nation's most challenged classrooms to address these unconscionable gaps in educational outcomes.

A survey was administered online in June 2005 to teachers – referred to here as “corps members” – completing their first and second years in low-income urban and rural communities across 17 states as part of Teach For America. (See “About Teach For America” at the end of this report for background on these corps members and the program.) The survey examined corps members' views of the causes of and solutions to the academic achievement gap that exists along socio-economic and racial lines, as well as what challenges these teachers have faced in moving their students forward academically. Corps members responded to both multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

A survey was also distributed to a sample of incoming corps members as they arrived at Teach For America's pre-service training institute. This provided an opportunity to compare the views of pre-service teachers with those of teachers with one or two years experience working in our country's lowest income communities.

TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, AND EXPECTATIONS ARE KEY TO CLOSING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Teach For America corps members overwhelmingly cited three factors as both causes of and solutions to achievement gaps: teachers, principals, and academic expectations of students. They pointed to examples of teachers and principals who ensure student success, in spite of myriad challenges external to the school. And they made clear that this success is highly dependent on the expectations of these students – from educators, parents, the general public, and students themselves.

Respondents were given a list of 19 commonly named causes of the socio-economic and racial achievement gap and then asked to rank the five factors they believed most significantly contribute to the problem. They were also asked which among 15 oft-cited strategies they would prioritize if charged with devising a plan to close the gap. The results reveal strong trends. Tables 1 and 2 present the causes and solutions that corps members most often prioritized.

“I don’t think the public at large understands to what extent schools have control over their own success. I believe that a school can create a culture of achievement and have success with even the most difficult/academically challenged student populations.”

**4th Grade Teacher,
New York City**

Table 1: Top Causes of Achievement Gaps

Factor	%*
Teacher quality	55%
Student expectations of themselves	46%
Academic expectations from school	45%
Academic expectations from home	45%
Principal / Administrator quality	40%

Table 2: Top Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps

Factor	%*
Higher quality teachers	61%
Increased common belief in the potential of students in low-income communities	60%
Higher quality principals and administrators	50%
Smaller class sizes	48%
Improvement of services outside schools	47%

**Percent of in-service teachers ranking factor among top five*

Educators Have the Power to Close Gaps

As one respondent – a high school physics teacher in Oakland – put it:

I think the public would see the poverty, violence, drug abuse, and lack of funding as the primary reasons, when, despite all that, the best teachers can still make gains with their students by bringing rigor into the curriculum and setting high expectations, and having the skill and experience to back up those expectations and demand performance from the students.

“I see many veteran teachers at my school that expect a lot from their students, and these students meet their high goals.”

**Middle School Math Teacher,
New York City**

“My [co-]principals have extraordinarily high expectations for the students, teachers and for themselves... They have fostered a culture of learning and achievement and they have opened the eyes of the community, the state, and the country to the capabilities of students who, given the proper guidance, instruction and motivation, can achieve amazing results.”

**Middle School
Spanish Teacher,
Gaston, North Carolina**

“People don’t realize that the kids will give you exactly as much as you expect from them, no more, no less. If schools and families have given up on academic success for their kids, of course the students won’t be as successful.”

**3rd Grade Teacher,
New York City**

“People believe that the biggest issue is resources and money, but the real issue is quality teachers and administrators.”

**High School Math Teacher,
New Orleans**

A high school English teacher made a similar comment, but focused on the power of school leaders to impact results.

I have had the pleasure of working for the best principal in the city of Philadelphia. By establishing high expectations for academics and behavior (expectations of students and staff) she has completely transformed a school formerly known for violence and low test scores into a place of learning and growing. It works.

Corps members placed much less emphasis on a number of areas traditionally viewed as critical to the achievement gap. Just one-third of corps members cited differences in funding and resources as a top cause, and even fewer cited such social, community, or family factors as nutrition and healthcare (12 percent), violence and substance abuse (12 percent), or languages spoken at home (5 percent). The corps members point instead to factors within schools – those things over which educators have control – as mattering most in closing the achievement gap.

Belief in the Potential of These Students Must Be Stronger and More Widespread

Of the five factors that corps members most commonly identified as the key causes of the achievement gap, three of them focused on expectations. Furthermore, corps members believe that critical to closing the achievement gap is a strong, shared belief in the potential of young people in low-income communities to achieve at high levels. These teachers, who every day interact with students at the low-end of the achievement gap, see the power this belief has to influence student achievement, and suggest that if this belief were more widely shared the impact on the achievement gap would be significant.

The sentiment of this second grade teacher in Atlanta was echoed by many respondents: “I believe that the general public grossly underestimates the potential and the desire to achieve among students growing up in low income areas.” A colleague teaching second grade in New York City took it further, arguing that these low expectations on the part of the broader society are “the greatest hindrance to change.”

With Classroom Experience, Teachers Place Less Emphasis on Funding, More on School Leadership

While corps members across the three different stages (pre-service, end of first-year, end of second-year) agreed on many key factors, there were some notable differences in how they ranked the various causes of and responses to the gap. Of particular interest were the differences among the three groups in their prioritization of two factors: school funding and quality of principals.

Before beginning teaching, 60 percent of pre-service corps members saw increased funding as among the top five strategies for closing the achievement gap, whereas only 33 percent of teachers at the end of their second year of teaching included it among their top five. See Figure 1.

Conversely, there seemed to be an increasing belief in the importance of leadership at the school level, with only one quarter of pre-service teachers citing principal/administrator quality as a key solution, while 46 percent of first-year teachers and 54 percent of second-years identify it among their top five. See Figure 2.

“Rather than increased funding, [we need] more appropriate allocation of funding.”

High School Special Education
Math Teacher,
St. Louis

A number of respondents made an explicit link between these two factors, noting the importance of having school leadership that can effectively allocate resources. One middle school Spanish teacher finishing her second year in the Mississippi Delta put it bluntly: “The lack of funding is not necessarily the problem, [the problem is] the lack of leadership to spend money appropriately.”

Figure 1
% Choosing “Increased Funding” as Top Strategy for Closing Gaps

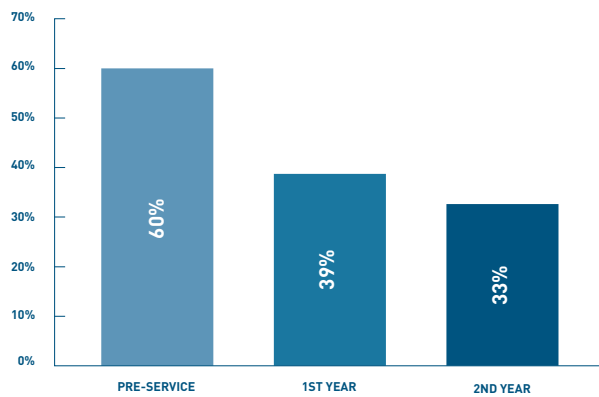
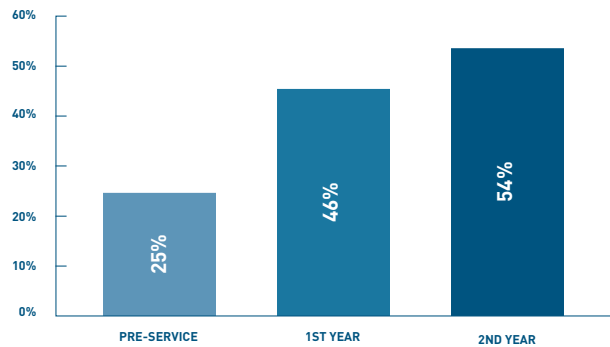


Figure 2
% Choosing “Higher Quality Principals/Administrators” as Top Strategy for Closing Gaps



REALIZING STUDENTS' POTENTIAL

“I think that one of the public’s biggest misunderstandings is that students in the communities and schools that we teach do not have the desire or the abilities to learn and perform at the same level as students from more affluent...communities.”

**Middle School English Teacher,
Philadelphia**

“Every time I have raised the expectations in my classroom, students have also raised their performance.”

**1st Grade Teacher,
Phoenix**

Teach For America corps members believe strongly in the academic potential of students in low-income communities and in the power of their own expectations of students. Furthermore, these beliefs strengthen with time.

Corps Members Expectations Are High

Corps members express high expectations for students, regardless of students’ background or prior achievement:

- 91 percent believed that schools should hold inner-city students to the same academic standards as students from wealthy backgrounds; only 7 percent said schools should make some allowances.
- 72 percent said their school expects too little academically from students; only 3 percent said their school expects too much.
- 68 percent disagreed – including 41 percent strongly disagreeing – that “students who don’t have basic skills by junior high or middle school will never be able to catch up.”

Corps members’ message is two-fold: They see schools writing off students in low-income communities, and they see no good reason these students can’t achieve at high levels. And they back up the latter assertion with their first-hand experience seeing the impact of teacher expectations. Specifically:

- 93 percent believed their expectations of their students have a significant impact on student achievement.
- 62 percent of the total respondents strongly agreed with that statement.

Second-Year Teachers Believe Even More Strongly in Their Students’ Potential

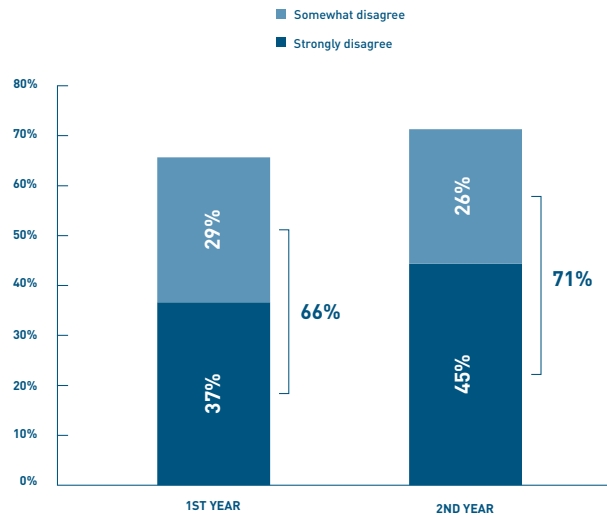
While these beliefs about expectations were strong among corps members as a whole, the trends were even stronger among teachers finishing their second year.

While two-thirds of first-year corps members believed that even by junior high school, students who are behind can still catch up, second-year teachers were even more optimistic (71 percent). See Figure 3.

Similarly, corps members’ strong belief in the impact of their own expectations is even more pronounced among second-year teachers. Seven out of ten second-year teachers strongly agreed that their expectations have a significant impact on academic achievement, as compared to 55 percent of first-years. (Less than 10 percent of each group disagreed with this statement). See Figure 4.

Figure 3

% Disagreeing with the statement: "Students who don't have basic skills by junior high or middle school will never be able to catch up."

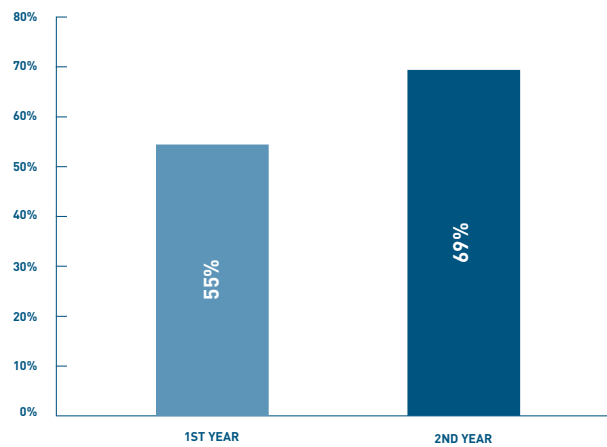


"I cannot think of a single student in my classroom that has not had a complete turn-around in behavior, academics, or both because they have been told that they can do it."

**1st Grade Teacher,
Jefferson Parish, Louisiana**

Figure 4

% Strongly Agreeing with the Statement: "My expectations for students have a significant impact on their academic achievement."



THE PERCEPTION GAP

“I am constantly struck by the fact that most people I know have no idea this part of America exists... Would they care if they did know? I am not sure what the answer to that question is, but I think we have to find out.”

**High School Special Education
Math and English Teacher
Rio Grande Valley, Texas**

The survey asked corps members whether they believed the public accurately understands the achievement gap and its causes and potential solutions. They answered a resounding ‘no’ (98 percent) and explained their answers by offering what they saw as the biggest misperceptions on the part of the public. The misperceptions identified by corps members overwhelmingly fell into two categories. These teachers pointed to what they saw as:

- The public’s inaccurate belief that low-income students and/or their parents are primarily to blame for the achievement gap, and
- The public’s lack of awareness about the existence or extent of the achievement gap and/or the realities of poverty and segregation.

In addition, a notable group pointed to what they viewed as the public’s inaccurate belief that funding will fix the achievement gap.

Interestingly, the misperceptions identified by corps members reflect the findings of the most recent annual Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, released in September 2005. That survey of the general public included a number of questions about the achievement gap.

Differences of opinion: Contrasting the views of the general public with those of Teach For America corps members

Who or What Is Responsible for Creating the Gap?

Respondents to the PDK/Gallup poll of the general public point to lack of parental involvement, home life and upbringing, and lack of interest on the part of students themselves as the three most important factors in creating the gap. While the public strongly supports eliminating the achievement gap, the public largely believes (74 percent) that the achievement gap is related to factors outside of the quality of schooling.

Teach For America corps members had a very different perspective. Teacher quality, academic expectations for students, and principal quality all outranked parental concern regarding children’s education as key factors. When asked in an open-ended question to identify the three main obstacles they personally faced in reaching their academic goals for students, only 10 percent of the responses named student motivation – well down the list of factors mentioned. Parental involvement was cited even less frequently, at 5 percent. As one 7th grade English and social studies teacher finishing her second year in San Mateo put it:

I constantly hear blame being placed on parents who ‘just don’t care,’ and have found that this is simply not the case. I had parents lined up outside my classroom until 9pm on a conference day that had no earlier notification. Parents are constantly calling me at home or stopping by

“I constantly hear blame being placed on parents who ‘just don’t care,’ and have found that this is simply not the case.”

**7th Grade English & Social Studies
Teacher, San Mateo, CA**

to check up on their child. The ones who appear to be 'not as involved' have all had very extenuating circumstances (disability, difficult work schedule, etc.). Only a very small percentage 'just don't care.'"

These teachers are deeply concerned that the public is blaming supposedly uncaring parents or unmotivated students. And these teachers view this blame as unfounded.

What Achievement Gap?

When told about the achievement gap, 88 percent of the general public said it is important to close the gap, according to the PDK/Gallup poll. At the same time, 78 percent believed that white students and students of color had the same educational opportunities within their communities. Corps members expressed a real concern about what they saw as this lack of awareness and engagement among the public – about the existence and extent of the achievement gap and about the realities of poverty and segregation.

One high school physics teacher from the Mississippi Delta put it in terms of his own developing awareness:

If one person grew up in the white suburbs, then they tend to think that most of America is like that. I know that I was totally unaware of the situation before actually being immersed in it. Why? I was educated to think that the civil rights movement ended all of the problems in our country. Pretty stupid, huh? I'm not the only one who has/had this misconception.

Again and again, corps members pointed to this lack of awareness on the part of the general public as a major hindrance to closing the achievement gap.

It's All About the Money. Or Is It?

For the last fifteen years of the PDK/Gallup poll, the general public has cited funding as one of the top problems, and as the very biggest problem for the last six years. In the most recent poll it was mentioned twice as often as any other problem. Interestingly, before beginning to teach, more than half of incoming corps members saw school funding as among the top five causes of the achievement gap; 18 percent ranked it as the most significant factor. By the end of their second year, however, only one-third of teachers ranked it among their top five, with only 6 percent placing it at number one.

Of course, ensuring high quality teaching and school leadership - which corps members prioritized over funding - could well require more financial resources. In explaining their rankings, however, many corps members pointed to poor allocation of funds and inadequate attention to strategies that do not require additional resources - scenarios they have witnessed repeatedly as teachers.

“My school receives a lot of money...however, the way the money is allocated just seems plain wasteful at times. Additionally, although my school receives plenty of money, the prevailing attitude and expectations of our students remain dismal. I think the attitudes have to change - the whole school and community culture - before any significant gains will be [made].”

7th and 8th Grade Math and Language Arts, San Jose, CA

CONCLUSION: EQUITY WITHIN REACH

“I find that my students seemed to just be waiting for someone to believe in them and provide them with the tools they need to reach great goals.”

**2nd Grade Teacher,
East Baton Rouge**

There is no shortage of hope in the results from this survey. While Teach For America corps members point to the enormity of the challenge, they also express their strong belief that the achievement gap is not insurmountable. On the contrary, their first-hand experience teaching in low-income communities has led them to believe with conviction in the capacity of their students and in the power of educators to catalyze positive change.

At the same time, these teachers believe that to close the achievement gap, we must first close another gap: the gap in awareness and understanding of the challenges and possibilities that face students and schools in our low-income communities.

ABOUT TEACH FOR AMERICA

Teach For America is the national corps of outstanding recent college graduates of all academic majors who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools and become lifelong leaders in the effort to expand educational opportunity.

Our mission is to build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by enlisting some of our nation's most promising future leaders in the effort. In the short run, our corps members go above and beyond conventional expectations of teachers to ensure that more students growing up today in our nation's lowest income communities have the educational opportunities they deserve. In the long run, we build a force of leaders with the insight and conviction that comes from having taught in a low-income community, who work from inside education and from every other sector to effect the fundamental changes needed to ensure that all children have an equal chance in life.

More than 17,000 individuals applied to join Teach For America in 2005, including 12 percent of the senior classes of Yale and Spelman, 11 percent of the graduating classes at Dartmouth and Amherst College, and 8 percent of Princeton and Harvard graduates. Applicants undergo a rigorous selection process; in 2005 Teach For America had a 17 percent acceptance rate. Upon joining the program, new corps members take part in intensive pre-service training, followed by a program of ongoing support throughout their first two years in the classroom.

Currently, 3,500 first and second-year corps members are teaching in over 1,000 schools in 22 regions across the country. Our alumni, now numbering over 10,000, are starting schools, becoming principals and district administrators, winning accolades as teachers, and working to expand educational opportunity while pursuing careers in law, public policy, medicine, and business. Sixty-three percent of our alumni are currently working full-time in education; three-fourths report they are engaged with low-income communities either through their work or on a volunteer basis.

Since its beginning in 1990, more than 14,000 exceptional individuals have joined Teach For America. They have directly impacted the lives of 2,000,000 students and form a growing force of civic leaders committed to ensuring that our nation lives up to its ideals of equity and opportunity for all.

Teach For America is a public-private partnership with a 2005 operating budget of \$38.5 million. Seventy percent of our funding is private, from corporations, foundations, and individuals. Public sources of support include AmeriCorps and the school districts in which we work.

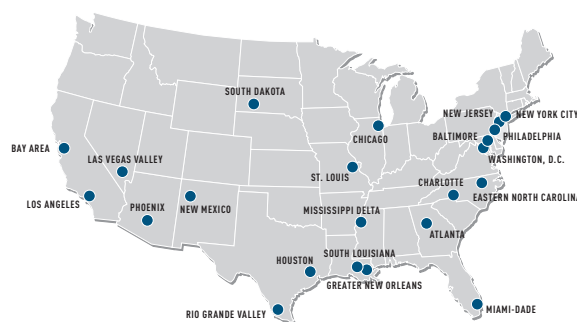
For more on Teach For America, including how it recruits, selects, trains, and supports teachers, please visit www.teachforamerica.org.

2004 - 2005 CORPS PROFILE

- Colleges and Universities: 350
- Average GPA: 3.5
- Held leadership roles on college campuses: 95%
- People of color: 32%

MAJORS FOR 2004-05 CORPS MEMBERS

Art and Architecture	3%
Business	4%
Education	1%
Government and Public Policy	15%
Humanities	8%
Language and Literature	17%
Math, Science, and Engineering	11%
Social Sciences	27%
Other	14%



METHODOLOGY

The survey was administered online to all first and second year corps members in June 2005 as an optional addendum to a required end-of-year program survey. Sixty-eight percent of all corps members responded to the survey, for a sample of 1,970 teachers.

	N
First year corps members	1378
Second year corps members	1526
Total # received survey	2904
Total completed survey	1970
Response rate	68%

Respondents reflected a representative sample of corps members, with respect to gender, race, grade level, and region where the corps members were teaching.

Because we were interested in whether the attitudes of incoming teachers differed from those who had already been working in classrooms, we administered a shorter version of the survey to a set of corps members who had not yet begun teaching. The survey (with a subset of the same questions) was administered to a sample of approximately 10% of incoming corps members upon arriving at our summer pre-service training institutes. Thus, the data for 'pre-service' teachers reflects a sample of 177 incoming corps members.

The data for corps members across stages (i.e., pre-service, end of first-year, end of second-year) is cross-sectional, so we cannot draw conclusions of causality with respect to the differences among groups. Still, the differences were significant enough on a number of responses that they seemed worthy of note. We plan to track these teachers longitudinally to allow for better analysis of causality.

The survey included 4 questions from previously administered surveys by Public Agenda and MetLife, as a means of providing benchmark data. The remainder of the questions were developed by Teach For America, with the helpful input of several outside sources.

APPENDIX: DATA TABLES

[Note: A subset of the survey questions was taken verbatim from existing large scale surveys of the general public and or/ educators. The relevant questions are noted below, along with their source.]

Q1: Should public schools expect inner-city kids to achieve academic standards that are as high as standards for kids from wealthy backgrounds, or should they make some allowances because inner-city kids come from disadvantaged backgrounds? [Source: *Reality Check 2000, Public Agenda*]

Answer	Total	2nd Year	1st Year	Pre-Service
Achieve academic standards that are as high	90.9%	91.2%	90.8%	87%
Make some allowances	6.7%	6.9%	6.5%	5%
Don't know	2.4%	1.9%	2.7%	8%
N (Size of Sample)	1970	887	1083	177

Q2: Thinking about your school, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? [Source: *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2001*]

Students who don't have basic skills by junior high or middle school will never be able to catch up.

Answer	Total	2nd Year	1st Year
Strongly agree	3.6%	3.4%	3.7%
Somewhat Agree	24%	22.3%	25.5
Somewhat Disagree	27.5%	25.9%	28.9%
Strongly Disagree	40.8%	45.1%	37.3%
Not Sure	4.1%	3.4%	4.6%

Q3: In terms of academic achievement, do you think that your school generally expects kids to learn: [Source: *Reality Check 2000, Public Agenda*]

Answer	Total	2nd Year	1st Year
Too much	2.7%	2.3%	3.1%
Too little	72.1%	75.4%	69.4%
About right	25.2%	22.3%	27.5%

Q4: My expectations of my students have a significant impact on their academic achievement.

Answer	Total	2nd Year	1st Year
Strongly agree	61.7%	69.4%	55.4%
Somewhat Agree	31.7	26.5%	36.0%
Neutral	4.2%	2.5%	5.6%
Somewhat Disagree	1.9%	1.2%	2.5%
Strongly Disagree	.02%	.01%	.03%
Not Sure	.3%	.2%	.3%

Q5: When a lesson doesn't go well, it is usually the result of poor planning.

Answer	2nd Year	1st Year
Strongly agree	21%	17%
Agree	57%	54%
Disagree	20%	25%
Strongly Disagree	2%	2%

Q6: What are the three biggest obstacles you face in reaching the academic goals you have set for your students? (Open-ended question. Responses below reflect those cited most frequently by respondents)

Answer (responses were coded by category)	% of Total Mentions
Teacher centered factors	25%
The range of student skill levels and needs	12%
Administration (both school and district level)	12%
Family influence (including parent involvement, home/community environment, lack of knowledge on part of parents)	11%
Student motivation/value placed on education	10%
Expectations (from school, home, teachers, society and students' expectations of themselves)	7%

Q7: Do you believe the public has an accurate understanding regarding the achievement gap and its causes and potential solutions?

Answer	Total	End of 2nd Year	End of 1st Year
Yes	2.0%	2.4%	1.7%
No	98.0%	97.6%	98.3%

Q7A: If you answered no, please explain what you think are the biggest misunderstandings? (Open-ended question. Responses below reflect those cited most frequently by respondents)

Answer (responses were coded by category)	% of Total Mentions
The public inaccurately believes that low-income students are to blame for the achievement gap	31%
The public is unaware of or does not care about the existence of the achievement gap.	28%
The public inaccurately believes that low-income parents are to blame for the achievement gap	15%
The public is unaware of the realities of poverty and segregation.	10%
The public inaccurately believes that funding will fix the achievement gap.	9%
The public inaccurately believes current education policies/initiatives will effectively close the achievement gap.	6%
The public inaccurately believes that schools have enough funding.	4%

Q8: The following is a list of commonly cited causes of the achievement gap in this country. This list of factors derives from a number of external sources and does not reflect any particular opinions of Teach For America. Based on your experience as a corps member, we would like your opinion on this issue.

Please select five (5) factors you think are the most significant causes of the achievement gap, and rank the five factors in order of importance, with (1) being the MOST important.

In-service and Pre-service Teachers: Factors ranked in order of percentage of respondents ranking in top five

Factor	In-service (end of 1st or 2nd year)	Pre-service
Teacher quality	54.6%	71%
Student expectations of themselves	46.3%	58%
Academic expectations from school	45%	64%
Academic expectations from home	44.8%	37%
Principal/administrator quality	40.4%	16%
Funding/resources	33.4%	58%
Student behavior in school	32.3%	11%
Parental concern regarding child's education	30.2%	17%
Student-teacher ratio/class size	28.6%	11%
Rigor/level of instruction	27.3%	44%
Stability of family structure	24.4%	15%
Resources at home	17.7%	20%
Degree of violence and/or substance abuse in community	12.1%	15%
Health care/nutrition	11.6%	28%
Parent/guardian level of education	10.6%	11%
Student mobility (i.e., students changing schools frequently)	12.1%	8%
Languages spoken at home	5.2%	5%
Professional development for teachers	4.3%	5%
Summer effect- amount retained/ lost over the summer	2.2%	2%

Q9: If you were charged with devising a plan to close the achievement gap, what five strategies would you prioritize? We've listed below some of the strategies most commonly referenced for closing the achievement gap. Please select the five (5) strategies you would prioritize and rank them in order of importance, with (1) being the HIGHEST priority.

In-service and Pre-service Teachers: Percentage of respondents ranking factor in top five

Factor	In-service (end of 1st or 2nd year)	Pre-service
Higher quality teachers	60.6%	76%
Lack of common belief in the potential of students in low-income communities	60%	81%
Higher quality principals and administrators	49.9%	25%
Smaller class sizes	47.7%	26%
Improvement of services outside schools (including healthcare, preschools, social services)	47%	42%
Mobilization of parents/guardians to demand a better education for their children	38.2%	28%
Increased funding	36%	60%
Initiatives outside schools to improve parenting	33.1%	11%
Improved curriculum	28.7%	45%
More rigorous academic standards	27.6%	62%
Career ladders and differentiated pay for teachers based on performance/responsibility	19.4%	10%
Desegregation of schools	13.7%	17%
Increased autonomy on the part of principals regarding how they allocate resources, hire, etc.	11.3%	5%
Changes in teacher unions	5.8%	3%
School choice/vouchers	4.3%	6%

END NOTES

¹ Because respondents were forced to rank factors, we cannot necessarily conclude that respondents did not see these other factors as important; it's reasonable to conclude, however that as a group they saw them as less important.

² A consistent pattern of difference emerged between the responses of corps members finishing their second year vs. those finishing their first year. Because this survey was not longitudinal, we can't conclude from these data alone that corps members' attitudes change with time or experience. Still, the differences are significant enough that they're worth examination. The most statistically significant difference based on corps year was found on question regarding the impact of their own expectations of students on student achievement. We intend to follow a set of these teachers longitudinally.

³ 46% of mentions

⁴ 38% of mentions

⁵ Nine percent of mentions fell into this category. Less than half of that said the opposite: that the public inaccurately believes that schools have enough funding.

⁶ Rose, L. & Gallup, A. 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Towards the Public Schools. 2005: (Executive Summary)

⁷ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

