

▲ What the Massachusetts ▲ Institute for New ▲ Teachers (MINT) ▲ Looks Like in the Field

Orin Gutlerner, Erin Gruwell, and Karen Terrell

Orin Gutlerner

For teachers and education stakeholders in Massachusetts, 1998 was a landmark year. On July 27, the governor, the state legislature senate president and speaker of the house, and the commissioner of education publicly introduced what is called the “12 to 62” framework to enhance the quality of the future teaching force in Massachusetts. This proposal became law as Chapter 260 of the Acts of 1998 in August, establishing the \$60 million Teacher Quality Endowment Fund to support efforts to attract, train, retain, and mentor teachers and the Office of Educator Quality Enhancement of the Massachusetts Department of Education to oversee these efforts.

Two of our programs have received national attention: the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program, under which selected candidates are awarded a \$20,000 signing bonus to teach in the state’s public schools, and the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers (MINT), which served as the training facility for the first signing bonus recipients. Since 1999, MINT has offered the same intensive seven-week training to aspiring teachers who have paid tuition, received scholarships, or been sponsored by public school districts. Both programs have been phenomenally successful. In 1999, the first year that the signing bonuses were awarded, there were 59 recipients, all of whom received free MINT tuition in addition to their \$20,000. In 2000 there were 117 signing bonus recipients and an additional 65 recipients of scholarships to MINT. In 2001 those numbers increased again, and in 2002 we’re hoping to have even more tuition and scholarship recipients.

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And this is not a case of preparing teachers in quantity while compromising teacher quality. We're trying to fill teaching positions in high-need content and specialty areas, and we recruit individuals with strong content backgrounds from all walks of life. We look for strong content knowledge first, but the application process for both the signing bonus program and the MINT tuition scholarships includes a comprehensive review of academic eligibility. In 2000, we had 900 applicants and only 410 finalists. The recipients of the signing bonus represent an elite group of uniquely qualified teaching candidates. Scholarship candidates go through the same training process as the signing bonus recipients; they're just as qualified. Essentially the only difference between someone receiving a signing bonus and someone receiving a scholarship or district sponsorship is that the person receiving the scholarship or sponsorship might not be in one of the highest-need content areas.

One of the things that makes MINT unique is that it is a state program. We're not a district-based program, although one of our missions is to build the capacity of each district to run similar programs. So we, essentially the state, serve four functions. We developed the standards for the selection and the process for the selection of the participants. We also developed the standards and the process for licensure. To locate potential candidates for the program, we conduct a national recruitment campaign. And to provide the seven-week summer training, we contract vendors, education collaboratives, and institutions of education.

Recruitment

Some of our recruitment strategies are very traditional: college campus visits, career fairs (nonprofit career fairs have been particularly productive), and advertisements in professional publications. We've also had a successful campaign advertising with public transportation. This year we're getting into Internet-based recruitment as well. We're using databases of resumes; we're even working with Monster.com, a popular Web site where people can post their resumes to seek employment. We've found many people who've always wanted to be a teacher, but they just didn't know how to go about the process to become one. Those are the people we want to find. School networks have also been a valuable resource. Every school has that "school mom" or that "school dad," that parent volunteer, or that favorite substitute, who probably always wanted to be a teacher and has so many of the necessary skills—we tap into a lot of those networks to find these people. We also work with companies that are downsizing employees to locate candidates. We hope to work with some of those companies to get them, as part of a severance package potentially, to sponsor the tuition of a potential teacher who might want to go through the MINT program.





Selection

We've found it's most important to have a selection team made up of math teachers; they know what they're looking for potential candidates. We also try to bring in principals and other administrators from urban schools because they are in a position to use their participation in the selection process as a recruitment opportunity. We use the same model as The New Teacher Project, requiring a written application, sample teaching, interviews, and group discussion. One of the things we're looking for is content expertise. All of our candidates must pass the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL™) in order to be eligible for the program. Because it is an intensive seven-week program, candidates must be able to learn quickly and learn while doing. We look for that quality in the written application and keep it in mind throughout the selection process. We also look for someone who is committed to working in under-resourced schools and who understands the challenges that they're going to face in those schools.

Training

Last year we worked with two vendors: The New Teacher Project and the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. We've also worked with the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and this year we're hoping to add Stonehill College as well. And we would like to continue to expand our vendor network. This is a preparation program, so we want to include institutions of higher education and their expertise. Vendors are responsible for partnering and planning with the host district. Last year we had eight districts located across the state to give people a choice of where they could participate. The vendors host and participate in the seven-week summer training, provide follow-up support in the fall, and make a licensure recommendation to the state, which retains final licensure authority. The training focuses mainly on pedagogical skills; we assume the content expertise based on the candidates passing the licensure examination as a prerequisite to acceptance to the program. We, then, need to work with the candidates on how they can take that content knowledge and turn it into effective and engaging classroom instruction. Toward this end, the program emphasizes planning lessons based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, creating a good classroom environment, and setting achievable, realistic goals for students. If we can accomplish those three things in the summer and have teachers feeling prepared for their first day in the fall, we've accomplished a lot of work.

To facilitate pedagogical skills, a practicum model is used in the training. All the teachers teach summer school, and the model that we've found to be most effective is to have two MINT participants share the lead teaching responsibilities in a classroom. A qualified, trained mentor is assigned to the





two teachers—actually, the one mentor oversees four teachers in all. The mentor moves between the two classrooms and meets everyday to debrief the teachers and offer advice about the day’s instruction. But there are a lot of challenges to having that model, particularly in the summer. Finding mentors, specifically finding mentors with appropriate content backgrounds, can be very difficult. We still don’t have all the funding that we’d like to adequately compensate the mentors and attract them in the summer. But that is something that we’re continuing to work on. Then, of course, student enrollment in the summer does not necessarily reflect what it is in the fall. Sometimes classes may be unrealistically small compared with those the teachers will face in the fall.

The MINT program also offers special education and bilingual education training. Teachers in those disciplines receive an additional 30 hours of summer seminars, and in the fall they also attend seminars in reading and literacy pedagogy. In the coming year, we hope to expand the special education portion of the program by inviting teachers who already hold a content certificate to add a special education certificate. We feel that the additional certificate in special education will help support the inclusion model of special education by enabling regular classroom teachers to address the needs of special education students in the mainstream classroom. Furthermore, the skills that a teacher learns in special education training are beneficial to all classroom environments.

As I’ve mentioned previously, all MINT participants must meet professional standards for teachers. To qualify for the program, all participants must first pass the appropriate certification examinations. Then, to complete the program, participants must turn in a portfolio of their work over the course of the summer and the fall and winter of their first year. No one can learn in seven weeks everything they need to know about teaching. The portfolio, then, supplements their training by allowing them to step back and reflect objectively on their work and the work of their students. A caring and reflective person will be better prepared to take on a full teaching responsibility in the fall. Their final portfolio is due in March of their first year, and that is the portfolio that will be reviewed for a licensure decision. However, we want them to do most of the work in the summer in part because we know how busy they will be in the fall, but also because their final portfolio will benefit from the feedback they received on their initial portfolio.





Changing Career Paths

Last year about 70 percent of the participants in the MINT program were mid-career professionals. Over the past couple of years, through interacting with the participants, through interviews, and through surveys, we've come up with a list of factors that really influenced them to go into teaching. And, surprising to some, the signing bonus isn't very high on the list. The mid-career professionals who come to us are content experts; they're passionate about their subject matter and want to share their expertise. Moreover, they are people who always wanted to be teachers, to impact the lives of children, to be role models. We also have a lot of parents, and parents bring a wonderful and unique perspective to teaching. They really know what they want in the classroom, and they love being on the same schedule as their children. Salary and professional status were not necessarily what interested them either. They are just really committed to serving children.

Of course, there are some obstacles that some of the mid-career changers must overcome. Although MINT offers an accelerated track toward certification, a lot of them face very frustrating hiring practices. There's a strong need for security. Unlike the professional world, in which you can go in with a resume and actually meet with the person who can make the hiring decision, there tends to be some bureaucracy involved in the hiring process. Moreover, most of these people have put roots down somewhere, and although we really try to emphasize and target urban school districts, sometimes it doesn't always work out exactly as we'd like because the teachers have roots in other communities.

I wouldn't call MINT an alternative preparation program for teachers; rather it's an accelerated pathway into the teaching profession. There are numerous individuals who want to become teachers, and we need them to become teachers. MINT tries to make it easier for that to happen. As an incentive, we offer the \$20,000 signing bonus and award scholarships and tuition. However, these incentives don't serve as the primary impetus for applicants—a passion for teaching and for impacting the lives of young people does that.



Erin Gruwell

The Invitation

Orin Gutlerner pointed out the recruitment initiative in Massachusetts, to which I am something of a testament. Last year, after my presentation at this conference, Alan Safran, one of the commissioners at the Massachusetts Department of Education, immediately came to me and said he wanted to hire me. And I said, I have a great job, I currently work at California State University, Long Beach. But after some negotiation, I decided that I would work for the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers (MINT) summer program. I am very passionate about pedagogy and about taking perceived at-risk students (exactly those that the MINT program hopes to reach), dispelling the stereotypes about them, and making sure that every student achieves. So the fulcrum of my coming to Massachusetts for the summer was that I was going to bring two of my former students, who were themselves “at-risk” students, and it was going to be trench warfare: we were going to roll up our sleeves and work with the MINT participants on how to build a bridge from possessing incredible content knowledge to being a good teacher. But how do you take professionals—people with Ph.D.s, and people up to 50 years old who’ve had life experiences and two or three different professions—and make them good teachers? How do you make them relate to the kids in the classroom, so there’s not this surreal Charlie Brown-like division with the teacher standing at the blackboard saying, “Wah wah wah wah wah wah wah,” and losing all of that great information in the transmission. We spent the entire summer working with the 220 MINT participants—most of whom had just come from other professions—teaching them to take the information that they possessed and to connect with students—predominantly students that are segregated, marginalized, and disenfranchised.

Record of Success

As a teacher in California, I took 150 at-risk students who at age 13 scored below the 30th percentile on standardized tests, who admitted they’d never read a book from cover to cover, and who had no interest in public education (most of these students were either in gangs and/or under probationary supervision). In four years, in part by making them feel accountable, these 150 students not only graduated, but they are now in college and are the authors of a book. The first book they read was Anne Frank’s diary, *The Diary of a Young Girl*. When they came to me, most of these students had never heard of Anne Frank or of Amsterdam and they didn’t know of or believe in





the freedom offered by the writing process. And I taught those students, regardless of their ethnicity or of their socioeconomic background, because I believed that high student standards were achievable.

Two of my former students, Maria Reyes and Henry Jones, came with me to Massachusetts to provide a face and a name to the types of students the future teachers in the MINT program were going to be dealing with. I also hoped that Maria and Henry could help to provide, in a sense, an antidote to pedagogy. We didn't go in there with a desire to talk about data, statistics, charts, and graphs; we went in there with a job to do: we had 220 teachers and at the end of that seven-week program we wanted every single one of those 220 teachers to be able to do what I did—only better, more efficiently, and with more vigor.

The Strategy

Anyone who goes into the teaching profession does so because they have a passion. It's not the income that attracts them, it's the kids. The feeling of gratification a teacher can get from his or her job is a form of psychic income. The problem, though, that we've seen in the retention of teachers—specifically in at-risk or urban schools—is very dismal. So my idea was to bring a student like Maria, who could put a face to urban plight, to being in a gang, to being a second-language learner, to being written off, to being one of those statistics. She would be able to stand in front of those 220 participants and say, I've beaten the odds, I've stood in front of Congress, I've been on *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, I was an author at age 18 despite all of the circumstances that would have kept me down. She was able to use education as the greatest equalizer.

Our job last summer was to identify who those 220 people were and to teach them, more importantly, whom they would be dealing with. Maria and Henry became the archetypes of students in urban schools across this country. Maria and Henry were able to work with the MINT participants on issues of urban plight (such as why students are going to be hostile), while I was able to work with them on the pedagogy.

From Interaction to Effective Instruction

On day one, we came in with a group of lesson plans to make the participants roll up their sleeves and get involved. We played Fruit Loop bingo, we played games with peanuts, we did things such as the line game—all of these very surreal games that had everyone scratching their heads and saying, "What am I doing here? I'm supposed to be teaching physics." The





idea was to teach them how to create a sense of environment and community, and how to engage the students they are going to work with before they move into content instruction. We created a structure we called “Into, Through, and Beyond.” The “Into” was to engage, involve, and empower the students. The “Through” was a way of sustaining students’ knowledge. For example, before a student can really understand physics or geometry, they need a base of sustained knowledge from which to work. And then the most important was the “Beyond”: the belief that if a group of 150 students who were on free and reduced lunch and who scored below the 30th percentile on standardized tests could eventually find themselves in Amsterdam or as published authors, then any student in Massachusetts, or any community for that matter, can therefore become an architect, a physicist, or a doctor. The idea was for each and every one of these teachers in the program to look at their subject area and create a vision for their students. That is, we would ask them, “Where do you see your students in June when you’re finished with them?” If you are an architect, you have nine months to put so much passion behind your subject matter that come June, your students are ready to become I. M. Pei—they’re ready to build the next great museum. If you are a physicist, your students are going to become the next Albert Einstein, and so forth.

We went in there with people who were very skeptical, and I truly believe that when we left, we had 220 visionaries who were ready to hit the ground running come September.



Karen Terrell

Introduction

The purpose of the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers (MINT) is to get qualified individuals into public school classrooms as quickly as possible. But in my case (and I expect this is true for most MINT participants) not only did MINT set me on an accelerated track to become a public school teacher, it helped me to actualize a lifelong dream.

Background—Starting with the Public Schools

I am a tenth grade teacher of geometry at the Burke High School in Dorchester, Massachusetts. One of the first questions people would ask when I told them I was going into teaching was, *Where are you going to teach?* I don't know, some public school, I would say. Then they would ask, *Why do you want to do that?* I would reply, *Well, most of our kids go to public school;* so if we're going to address the educational issues in our country, then we've got to start with the public schools.

Originally I am from Atlanta. I attended a predominantly Black public school in Decatur, Georgia, right outside of Atlanta. I am a walking statistic: I am a Black female from a crumbled family—my parents divorced when I was ten. I have the whole thing. But I tell my students that such setbacks or disadvantages are no reason for them not to succeed. It's no reason for anyone not to go wherever they want or need to go. My mother pushed me, and I had incredible teachers who helped me, specifically in mathematics. Mathematics was my strength. Out of my 12 years of schooling, I only remember two teachers as not being good, but I had ten teachers who were phenomenal. Those were the people who shaped me, and those were the people who pushed me to go to wherever I wanted to go.

Foundations of the Future

My foray into teaching actually began when I was about seven or eight years old. When my family discovered that I had an aptitude for math, my grandfather started buying me little math booklets to work with. I loved those books; I would just go through page after page after page. When my grandmother wanted to have all of the children in one room, to keep everybody together, she would make me teach them. That's where I started; I taught my cousins and my little brother their first multiplication tables. The rest is history.





My inclination to teach always existed because I grew up around teachers. My mother was a Sunday School teacher, and my father taught automotives in a technical school in Atlanta. I used to help him grade his papers. My mother, who was a nurse, would also conduct workshops for nurses.

In about 1990, when I was coming to the end of my high school career, engineering was the hot new field. We were told that if you were good in math and you were good in science, then you've got to go into engineering. Consequently, I decided that I would go into engineering. But in my senior year, my school started a Future Teachers of America club, and I remember looking at the sign one day and thinking that teaching would be a good idea. Most of my teachers, however, tried to dissuade me from teaching, saying that there's not enough money in it and that I need to do something else. So at that point, teaching occupied only a vague position in the back of my mind.

After high school, I went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to become a chemical engineer. After two years, I discovered it was not for me. My last experience in chemical engineering was a summer I spent at Eastman Kodak. For the entire summer I tested packing materials in a lab with no windows. Quickly, I decided that I couldn't continue doing that and switched to another love of mine: architecture. I had wanted to major in math, but I just couldn't grasp the theory side of it. Therefore, I knew I couldn't major in math at MIT and chose architecture instead. For all intents and purposes, I thought I was going to be an architect; but when I was looking for summer internships, I knew I needed to make some real money. Initially, architects don't make a lot of money. Fortuitously, I met a woman who ran the MIT-Wellesley Upward Bound Program, and she was looking for teaching assistants for their summer program, specifically for math. My desire to teach was rekindled. I did that for two summers, teaching algebra for the first summer and calculus for the second. I was a teaching assistant for some other math classes as well. In my third year I became a full teacher there. By the end of my third year, I really felt the need to teach. But coming out of college I was broke, and I needed to find full-time employment. For the next three years I worked in marketing and graphic design and by the end I felt it was pointless. I could not understand why there would be so much drama over one sign being a day late; it wasn't as if anyone would lose their job or go hungry because of it.





The Revelation

In December 1999 I left my marketing job. Three weeks later, in January, I was on a bus in Central Square in Cambridge. I had been at MIT collecting information to put a portfolio together. When I got on the bus, I put my money in, sat down in the first seat, and literally the first thing I saw when I looked up was a sign advertising MINT. When I left my marketing job, I had decided to apply to graduate school and become a teacher through the traditional route. But when I saw that sign on the bus, I felt it was a revelation. Staring at it I realized that if I didn't pursue that program, I would come to regret it. And I have no regrets. I'm very appreciative for the MINT program. For my entire life, I've always either been inclined or had a desire to teach, and MINT gave me the opportunity to do it and to do it immediately.

Laying the Groundwork

Was MINT perfect? No. Yet, I do believe that the program taught me what was necessary to get started. The program provided me with a solid foundation. There were some things I thought my school would provide, like more mentoring and someone to walk me through my first couple of days, which would happen in a corporate job. On top of that, I started teaching when the Boston public schools were implementing a new math curriculum. To sum it all up, I had a new job teaching math, a new math curriculum, and a new set of kids. To be quite honest, my first term was pure hell. The funny thing was that most people didn't know that it was hell for me because I kept smiling. They would say, You're still smiling; you must be doing okay. The second term, however, was a whole different ballgame. Almost overnight, I felt that I had caught my breath and things suddenly were easier.

The Boston public school system is a very interesting place to be. I have met some phenomenal people at my job. Relationships among the teachers and the administration can be political at times (I'm not a political person myself). I've found some really, really good friends. The one thing that pulls us all together is that we all have the desire to see every child learn and be successful. In spite of the frustrations, the outcome can be a beautiful thing.

At this point, I have students I call my babies. They were students of mine last year who still come to visit me, and say things like, Miss Terrell, I wish we were still with you. I also answer questions they may have and help them develop relationships with their new teachers. As a matter of fact, a Harvard researcher has been observing my class because she's looking at teachers





who really care about their students, even though their students might not be performing as well as we would want them to. Last year, I laid some important groundwork for students who did not perform as well as they should have, because I refused to give up on the fundamental skills I was trying to teach them.

Conclusion

While working with Upward Bound, we had students from the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. It was baffling to me that some of those tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders did not know how to manipulate basic fractions, decimals, and percents. I'm not talking about word problems; I am talking about taking a fraction and turning it into a decimal or a percent. That was something I covered in the fifth grade, and I could not leave the fifth grade until I was proficient at it. Now, all of my students initially get frustrated with me because when they come to my class, whether they're in my ninth, tenth, or eleventh grade class, I start off with basic skills. We start by addressing them, and we continue to address them through the year.

I am truly appreciative of the MINT program; it provided me with a fantastic opportunity and helped me to achieve a lifelong dream. More importantly, it has enabled me to positively influence the lives of young people. Come the fall, however, I will pursue the formal route of graduate education, as I had previously intended. Only now, because of my experience with MINT and because of my practical experience in teaching, I'll be better prepared to tackle the educational theories of academics.

