



## EDUCATION WEEK

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### COMMENTARY

#### No More Silver Bullets

Let's Fix Teacher Education

By Vartan Gregorian

<http://www.carnegie.org/sub/about/vgregorian.html>

**The granting of so-called emergency teaching licenses on a routine basis is a short-term solution to what is shaping up to be a long-term disaster.**

As autumn comes into focus each year, American education experiences an unseemly spectacle. I'm referring to the annual scramble of school districts across America to recruit teachers who will educate our nation's children. Paradoxically, teacher shortages and the emergency recruitment of teachers—which in recent years has included “headhunters” roaming foreign lands with hiring bonuses clutched in their hands—highlight both the importance of teachers and their role in our society and, at the same time, lead to the conclusion that it is relatively easy to fill these jobs. The granting of so-called emergency teaching licenses on a routine basis to uninitiated and untrained recruits is a short-term solution to what is shaping up to be a long-term disaster. For in the next decade, our nation's schools will need to hire millions of teachers ready to move a generation of young Americans into the knowledge-based economy. American colleges and universities are not prepared to meet the challenge—and they must be.

How is it possible that the United States, which claims to have three-fourths of the world's finest universities—and boasts 1,300 schools of education—has, in recent years, not only lacked qualified teachers but also had to venture beyond its own borders to find them? For answers, we may look to our own economic rules of supply and demand. After all, the nation never seems to lack for lawyers, doctors, and architects but always seems to have a “Teacher Vacancy” sign blinking outside the schoolhouse door. Why hasn't teaching flourished, following the path of other professions? A century ago, law, medicine, and school teaching were all considered to be vocations. All of them became professions, but the status of teaching never rose very high.

The other professions gained high status by developing prestigious training schools and rigorous certification for entrance and advancement. They are vigilant against substandard institutions and training programs. Also, accountants, engineers, and other valued professionals are respected for their *special* knowledge. Their careers give them authority, autonomy, and independence to make important decisions. It goes unquestioned that professionals must receive adequate support, the latest technology, and work environments conducive to efficiency and creativity. As to compensation, as we know, society usually rewards them generously. Teaching clearly falls short on all of these professional markers. In this connection, we should heed the warning of Louis V. Gerstner Jr., the former chairman of IBM and currently the chairman of the Teaching Commission (of which I am a member), who reminds us: “We [as a nation] will not continue to

lead if we persist in viewing teaching—the profession that makes all other professions possible—as a second-rate occupation.”

We can no longer close our eyes to the problem of America’s schools of education and the pitiful job most of them do in preparing our teachers. We are all fooling ourselves if we think that the past 20 years of standards-based education reform will ever result in our nation’s children being provided with the quality education they need without a dramatic parallel reform effort in the training of teachers. My bookshelves are sagging under studies that say the quality of teaching is the most important variable affecting student achievement, and survey after survey proves that Americans overwhelmingly believe that improving teaching is one of the most important strategies for improving schools. In an age of global competition, which spans every sphere of human endeavor, a society that settles for anything less than providing high-quality education for all its citizens is going down a dangerous path. It is nonsense to talk about raising standards for students when their own teachers often do not meet the same high standards. It’s not surprising that mediocre teachers produce mediocre students.

Presidents of America’s colleges and universities—where virtually all of our nation’s teachers have earned degrees—must step up to the challenge and, forcefully, both individually and collectively, discredit the prevailing view that teaching is just another job that anyone with a couple of weeks of intensive training can perform. Each must make it clear that teaching institutions must *prepare teachers who are proficient in the fields they will be teaching, well-versed in the latest theories and practices of pedagogy, skilled in technology, and professionally mentored with solid classroom experience*. This is the gold standard of teacher education that must be put in place, and no institution nor university worth its reputation can settle for less. Once and for all, we must retire George Bernard Shaw’s tired old maxim, “He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.” On the contrary, we must remind our fellow citizens that teachers are arguably the most critical “doers” in our society, for they bear the awesome moral, social, and historical responsibility of creating our nation’s future through the education of our children.

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What, then, should be the starting point in any teacher education reform effort? It seems to me that our nation’s schools of education, given the huge responsibility they bear, must not only be equal in caliber to their sister institutions comprising the American campus but must also occupy a central role in the university—conditions that, alas, they do not meet. And while they are looked upon as “separate but unequal,” they are nevertheless also regarded as a fiscal resource for universities, providing a steady source of unrestricted income and held up as a shining example of public service, since they provide teachers to educate the nation’s young. (This is a particularly important role for state universities’ schools of education, since they can point to a direct benefit to the state in producing home-grown teachers.) All of this comes at the expense of schools of education: Since so few of them have endowments of their own, they frequently find themselves doing what’s expedient rather than what’s right for themselves and their students, meaning they resort to increasing enrollments and lowering standards in order to raise income. Is it any wonder, then, that these schools so often end up being the choice of those most unprepared to succeed in higher education, most undecided about what to do with their lives and careers?

Isolated and marginalized, with separate faculties and separate activities, schools of education dwell in the shadow of their favored university siblings, the schools of arts and sciences. This situation cannot continue without causing lasting damage, not only to schools of education and their students, but also to the universities themselves, and to their reputations.

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The public should send a loud and clear message to university presidents, faculties, and governing boards that they have no choice but to make teacher education a central preoccupation of their respective institutions. Indeed, as education leaders, they must make this issue their *personal* central preoccupation. They must either integrate their schools of education with the schools of arts and sciences, along with the rest of the university—bring them into the intellectual mainstream—or shut them down. What they cannot do is continue to subject the schools of education to “benign neglect.” This should make eminent sense to educators, who certainly know that without quality teaching, the education of our children is not a realizable goal. Without teachers drawn to their profession by a real love of teaching and learning and a true commitment to the challenge of transmitting knowledge and wisdom to the next generation, the great ideas that infuse us with energy, the ideals that make us strive to live better lives, the dreams that built our democracy—indeed, the very DNA of our nation—may be lost.

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We are all paying a high price for the poor state of our schools of education—and that includes American higher education itself. Unprepared teachers produce unprepared students, who then show up at the doors of colleges and universities needing remedial work in order to participate at higher education levels. This set of circumstances means failure and disappointment for young people who depend on our educational system to equip them to succeed, but can also be counted in literal dollars and cents. That’s a costly equation that should be recalculated at its source: Excellent teachers preparing students who are ready to take on the challenges of postsecondary education is good business, not only for teachers and students but for the universities themselves. It’s in their own self-interest to have students who can keep up with their schoolwork from the moment they set foot in their first college class.

Despite the many fine education reform efforts of the past 20 years and the national commitment to learning that the federal No Child Left Behind Act appears to embody, teachers have not been provided with the necessary training and support to carry out these mandates. As the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future observed, in the absence of quality teaching, “all the directives and proclamations are simply so much fairy dust.” In that connection, I am personally committed to removing once and for all the excuse that teachers are not well compensated and do not enjoy the status of other professionals because they are not well prepared. I believe that if we really want to improve learning, then we must improve teaching. I refuse to blame our teachers for their professional shortcomings while overlooking the failures of the higher education institutions that are responsible for educating and training them. We have a sacred responsibility to the young men and women who step forward to declare: “I want to be a

teacher.” Our part is to help them become *good* teachers—*excellent* teachers—and when they do, to reward them accordingly.

And as for that sacred responsibility, let me suggest that most universities should thank God that their alumni who are now teachers have not brought a class-action suit against them for letting their schools of education send teachers out into the world who are not prepared or trained to keep up with the constant need to increase their subject-matter expertise and pedagogical skills, or to achieve higher levels of professional development in order to cope with the explosion of knowledge and information that characterizes 21st-century life and learning. Not to mention the fact that they also have to be able to interpret, manage, and successfully interact with the myriad regulations, administrative structures, and legalities that govern K-12 education.

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The time is right for intervention, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York has embraced this extraordinary opportunity with a multimillion-dollar, five-year reform effort designed to strengthen K-12 teaching through the creation of a new model of teacher education. The initiative, Teachers for a New Era, represents the corporation’s commitment to translating two decades of research and public discussion into substantive teacher education reform. The leaders of each of the 11 institutions of higher education selected to participate in the initiative have agreed to organize their teacher education reform efforts around three fundamental principles:

- Research evidence must ultimately demonstrate whether children have experienced learning gains as a result of the work of teachers who are graduates of the teacher-preparation program.
- Full engagement of arts and sciences faculty is required in the education of prospective teachers, as well as ongoing collaboration between the faculties of a university’s schools of arts and sciences and its school of education.
- Viewing education as an academically taught clinical practice is required, one which includes close cooperation between colleges of education and participating schools; master teachers as clinical faculty in colleges of education; and two-year residencies for beginning teachers.

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The 11 institutions participating in Teachers for a New Era were invited to work with the Carnegie Corporation on this initiative not just for their excellence but for their potential as catalysts for improvement, as incubators of change. Because they are such a diverse and eclectic group—large and small, East and West Coast, public and private, Ivy League and state institutions—they can demonstrate to the hundreds of institutions like them that there are no excuses, and that well-supported, well-endowed schools fully integrated into the vibrant learning community that is a university can succeed in making a long-term educational impact. We hope they can provide viable models for others to emulate as well as prove that American schools of education can—and *will*—bury forever the excuse that “we just can’t fix the problem.”

And the timing of this initiative is critical. The participants in Teachers for a New Era have, in effect, agreed to make the case for university-based teacher education at a pivotal moment when school districts, in desperate search of that silver bullet, are increasingly looking outside the university to develop teacher- preparation alternatives. So the gauntlet has been flung down: Are America's universities up to the task of providing American students with well-trained, enthusiastic, skilled, and knowledgeable teachers, or are they not?

Although it is my hope that Teachers for a New Era will contribute significantly to the redesign of schools of teacher education, I am acutely aware that no single reform initiative will get the job done. Every hope inevitably has a corollary. Mine is that Teachers for a New Era will serve as a catalyst for many other worthy teacher education reform efforts. What we cannot accomplish alone we can accomplish through cooperation, collaboration, and creating models that can be replicated.

Together, the leaders of America's institutions of higher education can ensure that the millions of teachers that this nation will need in the next decade or so will be superbly prepared, highly motivated, highly valued, and eager to begin their journey in this noblest of noble professions. Quite simply, what is riding on the success of our combined efforts is the future of every child in America—and for that, I say, failure is not an option.

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