

National Commission on Teaching & America's Future

What Matters Most:

Teaching For America's Future Full version in [pdf format](#)

Executive Summary

This report offers what we believe is the single most important strategy for achieving America's educational goals: A blueprint for recruiting, preparing, and supporting excellent teachers in all of America's schools. The plan is aimed at ensuring that all communities have teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to teach so that all children can learn, and all school systems are organized to support teachers in this work. A caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child is the most important ingredient in education reform.

The Commission's proposals are systemic in scope—not a recipe for more short-lived pilots and demonstration projects. They require a dramatic departure from the status quo— one that creates a new infrastructure for professional learning and an accountability system that ensures attention to standards for educators as well as students at every level— national, state, local school district, school, and classroom.

This Commission starts from three simple premises:

1. **What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn.**
2. **Recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools.**
3. **School reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions in which teachers can teach, and teach well.**

We propose an audacious goal for America's future. Within a decade—by the year 2006—we will provide every student in America with what should be his or her educational birthright: access to competent, caring, qualified teaching in schools organized for success. This is a challenging goal to put before the nation and its educational leaders. But if the goal is challenging and

requires unprecedented effort, it does not require unprecedented new theory. Common sense suffices: American students are entitled to teachers who know their subjects, understand their students and what they need, and have developed the skills required to make learning come alive. However, based on its two-year study, the Commission identified a number of barriers to achieving this goal. They include:

- Low expectations for student performance;
- Unenforced standards for teachers;
- Major flaws in teacher preparation;
- Painfully slipshod teacher recruitment;
- Inadequate induction for beginning teachers;
- Lack of professional development and rewards for knowledge and skill; and
- Schools that are structured for failure rather than success.

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We offer five major recommendations to address these concerns and accomplish our goal.

I. Get serious about standards, for both students and teachers.

- Establish professional standards boards in every state.
- Insist on accreditation for all schools of education.
- Close inadequate schools of education.
- License teachers based on demonstrated performance, including tests of subject matter knowledge, teaching knowledge, and teaching skill.
- Use National Board standards as the benchmark for accomplished teaching.

II. Reinvent teacher preparation and professional development.

- Organize teacher education and professional development programs around standards for students

and teachers.

- Develop extended, graduate-level teacher preparation programs that provide a yearlong internship in a professional development school.
- Create and fund mentoring programs for beginning teachers, along with evaluation of teaching skills.
- Create stable, high-quality sources of professional development.

III. Fix teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in every classroom.

- Increase the ability of low-wealth districts to pay for qualified teachers, and insist that districts hire only qualified teachers.
- Redesign and streamline district hiring.
- Eliminate barriers to teacher mobility.
- Aggressively recruit high-need teachers and provide incentives for teaching in shortage areas.
- Develop high-quality pathways to teaching for a wide range of recruits.

IV. Encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill.

- Develop a career continuum for teaching linked to assessments and compensation systems that reward knowledge and skill.
- Remove incompetent teachers.
- Set goals and enact incentives for National Board Certification in every state and district. Aim to certify 105,000 teachers in this decade, one for every school in the United States.

V. Create schools that are organized for student and teacher success.

- Flatten hierarchies and reallocate resources to send more dollars to the front lines of schools: Invest more in teachers and technology and less in nonteaching personnel.
- Provide venture capital in the form of challenge grants to schools for teacher learning linked to school

improvement and rewards for team efforts that lead to improved practice and greater learning.

- Select, prepare, and retain principals who understand teaching and learning and who can lead high-performing schools.

Developing recommendations is easy. Implementing them is hard work. The first step is to recognize that these ideas must be pursued together—as an entire tapestry that is tightly interwoven. Pulling on a single thread will create a tangle rather than tangible progress. The second step is to build upon the substantial work that has been undertaken over the past decade. All across the country, successful programs for recruiting, educating, and mentoring new teachers have sprung up. Professional networks and teacher academies have been launched; many education school programs have been redesigned; higher standards for licensing teachers and accrediting education schools have been developed; and, of course, the National Board for Teaching Standards is now fully established and beginning to define and reward accomplished teaching. All these endeavors, and those of many others, form the foundation of this crusade.

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