

Education Matters

March 2011

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation

The Teacher Factor

Great teachers are the key to real progress

Why teacher accountability is the next front in the school reform wars



For going on two decades now, the twin movements to expand parental choice and to foster accountability have been the major drivers of reform in the K-12 education system. While choice and accountability can be seen as ends in themselves, for many reformers they have been primarily means—tactics for creating a high-performing education system, one that puts the needs of kids over the needs of adults. They are tonics meant to overcome the corrupting influence of complacency and protectionism within our public schools.

This brand of reform diagnoses the school system's disease as primarily political rather than structural, behavioral, or attitudinal. In other words, it's not that educators don't work hard enough, or care passionately enough, or know enough. It's that

organized interests have a stranglehold on the system, creating incentives for managers at all levels to avoid making the hard decisions that are necessary for any organization to thrive. Most obviously, union contracts and civil service rules make it next to impossible to fire low performers, whether they be central office bureaucrats, principals, teachers, or aides. And this creates an insidious cycle of cynicism that permeates the schools.

Choice and Accountability

The theory of change goes something like this: Offer parents and their children real options outside the (unionized) public schools. Attach public dollars to the kids so that the money leaves the bureaucracy. Develop enough options so that the out-



flow of kids and money is large enough to get the attention of the district, and to cause real pain for the union (as the number of teachers—and union members—shrinks).

At the same time, hold districts accountable from the state and federal levels, by making their (bad) results transparent and forcing them to adopt meaningful (and unpleasant) reforms in their failing schools. The combination of competitive pressures from below, and accountability pressures from above, will create a new political environment, one in which unions and civil servants have no real alternative but to accept reform instead of oppose it—out of sheer self-interest.

Finally, this approach reasons that, after this long and circuitous route, districts will adopt critical changes, such as those that make it much easier to remove ineffective teachers (or principals or staff) from their jobs. And managers, newly empowered, will take bold action to weed out the low performers and usher in a new era of excellence and accountability.

Sounds great, but how has this theory turned out in practice? Not so well. For instance, ten cities boast a charter school “market share” of greater than 20 percent. This means that in places such as Detroit, Kansas City, and Dayton, their districts have lost loads of kids, cash, and teachers. And these districts are also subject to NCLB-style accountability from on high. But to date, their unions and central office staff aren’t exactly burning a path to reform’s door.

Then again, there’s Washington, D.C. Here we have a city where a third of the students have decamped to charter schools, creating an environment in which the union is desperate to stanch the loss of teachers. And, until recently, D.C. had a tough-minded chancellor, backed by a strong mayor, willing to wield a

tough accountability stick. And sure enough, at least temporarily, Washington’s union leadership reluctantly embraced a reform-minded contract that will make it much easier to remove ineffective teachers from the classroom. (Of course, pay raises for everyone surely helped, as well.)

However, it turns out that D.C. is the exception and not the rule. It is unique in one very important way—it is a city without a state. As we learned in the National Council on Teacher Quality’s report *Invisible Ink*, many key policies that protect teachers and create complacency are enshrined in state law, not in district contracts. The NCTQ authors write, “State law dictates how often teachers must be evaluated, when teachers can earn tenure, the benefits they’ll receive, and even the rules for firing a teacher.” The Washington, D.C. contract could address these issues because they weren’t already buttoned up in state policy.

Teacher Accountability

All of this helps to explain why teacher accountability is now the reformer’s primary rallying cry—and why the battle is primarily being fought at the state, rather than district, level. After twenty years, it’s become clear that choice and accountability are necessary but not sufficient to create the conditions for high-performing systems. They were too indirect. Now it’s time to tackle teacher tenure and evaluations head on. That means fighting the unions in committee rooms in state capitals.

That’s what we’re seeing in Wisconsin and Ohio, and, that’s what we could see nationwide if states are willing to step up to the Race to the Top’s challenge for meaningful teacher accountability.

However, reformers shouldn’t expect this to be easy. In Florida, the unions have pulled out all the stops, and managed to get the Democratic caucus in the state legislature to more or less march in lockstep against the proposed changes. This same caucus split 50-50 when it came to expanding the Sunshine State’s

private school choice program, demonstrating that teacher reform is now more radioactive than vouchers.

Tackling tenure and related reforms will be a fight to the finish, but after two decades of preliminaries, it’s about time for the main event. May the good guys win. ■

After twenty years, it’s become clear that choice and accountability are necessary but not sufficient to create the conditions for high-performing systems.



Mike Petrilli is one of the nation’s foremost education experts. As Vice President for National Programs and Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, he oversees the Institute’s research projects and publications and contributes to the Flypaper blog.

BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE

New report maps out steps for states to put teachers front and center

The National Council on Teacher Quality recently released its report “Blueprints for Change” that identifies each state’s policy priorities for ensuring that all students have effective teachers.

Each state report identifies the policy areas most in need of critical attention, as well as “low-hanging fruit,” policies that can be addressed in relatively short order. Across the states, most teacher policies suffer from

- Performance management policies that are disconnected from teacher effectiveness
- Vague and/or weak guidelines for teacher preparation
- Licensure requirements that do not ensure that teachers have appropriate content knowledge
- Obstacles that prevent expansion of the teacher pipeline

NCTQ President Kate Walsh said the goal is “to give state policymakers a tool for getting started on the road to reform. We are encouraged by the significant changes we saw in a number of states during the past year, largely spurred by the Race to the Top competition, but states still have much work to do to ensure that every student is taught by a high quality teacher.”

Key Findings

Because of the federal Race to the Top competition, 2010 was not a typical year in teacher policy. Almost every state entered the race, and their efforts to be competitive and to secure some of the \$4.3 billion in federal funds led to a number of significant new laws and regulations:

ANNUAL EVALUATIONS — NCTQ’s latest policy review found an increase in the number of states requiring annual evaluations of all teachers (from fifteen states in

2009 to twenty-one states in 2010), and a more than doubling of the number of states requiring that evidence of student learning be the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations (from four states in 2009 to ten states in 2010).

TEACHER PREP ACCOUNTABILITY — There was a large spike in the number of states adopting policies for holding accountable teacher preparation programs in their states based on the academic performance of students taught by their graduates (from just Louisiana piloting an effort in 2009 to fourteen states in 2010).

CLASSROOM EFFECTIVENESS — Most states’ evaluation, tenure, and dismissal policies remain disconnected from classroom effectiveness.

EVALUATION QUALITY — Teacher evaluation is in need of critical attention in forty-two states because the vast majority of states do not ensure that evaluations, whether state or locally developed, preclude teachers from receiving satisfactory ratings if those teachers are found to be ineffective in the classroom. In addition, the majority of states still do not require annual evaluations of all veteran teachers, and most still fail to include any objective measures of student learning in the teacher evaluations they do require.

TENURE TUNE UP — In forty-six states, teachers are granted tenure with little or no attention paid to how effective they are with students in their classrooms. While a few states have vague requirements for some consideration of evidence, and a few others promise that teacher evaluations will “inform” tenure decisions, only Colorado, Delaware, Oklahoma, and Rhode Island demand that evidence of student learning be the preponderant or decisive criterion in such decisions.



DISMISSAL — The issue of teacher dismissal needs critical attention in forty-six states. At least two state leaders are taking this issue head on. In Oklahoma, recent legislation requires that tenured teachers be terminated if they are rated “ineffective” for two consecutive years, or rated as “needs improvement” for three years running, or if they do not average at least an “effective” rating over a five-year teaching period. In Rhode Island, teachers who receive two years of ineffective evaluations will be dismissed. Any teacher with five years of ineffective ratings would not be eligible to have his or her certification renewed by the state.

MATH PROFICIENCY — Forty-nine states have critical work to do to ensure that elementary school teachers statewide have a deep conceptual knowledge of the mathematics that they will teach. Massachusetts is the clear role model, requiring elementary teacher candidates to pass a rigorous test of mathematics content, covering topics specifically geared to the needs of elementary teachers. ■



Each state’s Blueprint for Change, as well as a national summary, is immediately available for free download at www.nctq.org/stpy.



WINNING BIG

Producing great students doesn't have to be a "roll of the dice"

By Dr. Kevin Daniel

The harsh reality in many schools is that teachers in the same grade level in the same school in the same district get very different results on important student achievement measures even though they have nearly the same type of class sizes, and student demographics and backgrounds.

In other classrooms, it doesn't seem to matter what the learning abilities or disabilities are; the best teachers seem to find a way to get students to rise above the obstacles that their colleagues teaching in classrooms just 15 feet away have dubbed too insurmountable for high levels of learning.

Rick DuFour, author of multiple books on Professional Learning Communities (PLC), has described this phenomenon as the educational/teacher lottery. Simply put, a student's school year is in large part dependent upon the teachers assigned, and their mindset and behaviors rather than a guaranteed system that ensures learning at high levels and academic improvement for all.

In the Raymore-Peculiar (Ray-Pec) School District in Peculiar, Missouri, where I am the assistant superintendent, I share with our schools' leadership teams the student performance data that verifies the educational/teacher lottery continues to be a harsh reality in our schools.

The educational/teacher lottery also relates to the many different—and sometimes random—approaches taken from classroom to classroom when intervening with students who are struggling in school. This individual teacher approach has a large continuum. One end of the spectrum, I call the sink-or-swim mentality, could be expressed as "it's my job to teach and the student's job to learn." On the other end of the spectrum sits the failure-is-not-

an-option mindset that could be expressed as "it is my responsibility to ensure that each student learns and when they don't, I must come up with differentiated approaches to do so."

Which teacher would you prefer for your children, particularly if they are struggling learners?

To help avoid the educational/teacher lottery, let's look at four solutions to implement and three mistakes to avoid.

■ Solution #1

Create a Schoolwide System of Support

Working in isolation must be viewed as no longer acceptable in supporting our students. Teachers who use a collaborative approach will create a better support system for the students and boost morale for themselves and their colleagues. Too many teachers feel overwhelmed and alone in the battle to meet the significant social, emotional, and academic needs of today's students. What most schools have discovered, and what PLC experts like Rick DuFour and Mike Mattos strongly suggest, is that the best way to overcome the educational/teacher lottery is to create a systematic approach to student interventions rather than leaving it up to each teacher's discretion.

■ Solution #2

Mandate Students Get Support

The students in most need of support rarely take advantage of opportunities provided. Students who are already struggling in school, who don't like doing homework, and who avoid thinking at high levels, will be creative in declining invitations from teachers who offer to help them.

The most successful teachers and schools respond to this

common challenge by moving away from offering support to mandating it. The best way to accomplish this is to create extra time and support during the school day whenever possible. By focusing on the variable that can be controlled—time during the school day—students (and schools) will no longer have any excuses for not being successful.

■ Solution #3

Implement Quality Interventions and Monitoring

Student achievement and improved results can be linked to the quality of support and intervention in most every situation. Because this is the reality, it is important to monitor and measure which interventions are actually working with the students. Frequent formative assessments are the key to monitoring student success and measuring whether the intervention is having the desired impact.

It is also important to use more than one intervention while also avoiding too many. It is hard to measure impact when there too many interventions are being provided.

■ Solution #4

Aim for Having Great Teachers

The number one solution for improved student results is what we already know. It is having a great teacher every day and year. Robert Marzano's research is clear on the impact of an effective teacher—even in an ineffective school. Teachers are still working miracles and doing amazing work despite tremendous odds.

Clear and doable solutions are impacting student learning; yet, even today, with all we know, BIG mistakes are made in providing extra time and support for student learning. The one common denominator seems to be an unwillingness to break away from traditional practices and past mindsets.

■ Mistake #1

Making Intervention Another “New Thing”

We have worked very hard at Ray-Pec to make Response to Intervention (RTI) an extension of our regular work. School leaders make a mistake when they promote RTI as a whole new initiative. When leaders don't make connections to past work, staff members get that cynical “here we go again with the latest and greatest program of the year” attitude. Teachers are right to feel this way when leaders do not connect systems and fully implement programs.

■ Mistake #2

Thinking Interventions Must Occur outside the Classroom

A common mistake I see and hear is some version of “Where do I send this student so he can get the help he needs?” The reality is that in most schools less than 15 percent of students will qualify for an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Those students who do not qualify for an IEP are going to be in regular classrooms with the need for intervention, extra time, and support. When teachers are using a differentiated instructional approach, students on grade level, intervention, or advanced levels should all learn from classroom instruction. Mike Mattos goes

into great detail about the mistakes made when special education is treated as the early solution. We know far too much about schooling now to continue to see special education as the remedy for students not learning.

■ Mistake #3

Not Fully Implementing Interventions and Thinking You Have

Another coming mistake I see is the assumption that interventions are being provided correctly and fully. I have observed many situations in which a teacher thinks he is fully implementing an intervention. However, when another set of eyes observes him, a significant gap exists between what was intended and what is actually happening. Because the implementation gap is real, it is critical that teachers receive needed professional development and follow-up coaching. Students are not the only ones needing extra time and support. The adults must be learning as fast, if not faster, than the students if achievement gaps are going to be closed.

Final Thoughts

Without any hesitation, most experts in the school world believe we know more than enough to effectively intervene for students struggling in school. The question is, will we respond appropriately to the words of the following educators?

“The question is not, is it possible to educate all children well? But rather, do we want to do it badly enough?”

—Deborah Meier

“We can successfully teach any set of kids when schooling is important to us. We already know more than we need to in order to do that. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.”

—Ron Edmonds

Remember, insanity is doing what has always been done and expecting a different result. ■



Dr. Kevin Daniel is the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services in the Raymore-Peculiar (Ray-Pec) School District. He has worked with multiple schools on PLCs, student expectations, motivating students, and effective classroom management strategies. This article first appeared in Schools & Community, a publication of the Missouri State Teachers Association (msta.org).

Used with permission granted. Dr. Daniel can be reached at kdworkshops@comcast.net.





News from Washington, D.C.

Reports from AAE's Office in the Nation's Capital

Obama Talks Education in State of the Union



President Obama devoted an unprecedented amount of time to education in the State of the Union address.

Using his yearly platform, the President put education front and center on the national stage and challenged the newly divided Congress to come together on this traditionally bipartisan issue.

"This is our generation's Sputnik moment," Obama said, using the classic cliché regarding the 1960's launch of the Soviet satellite. According to Obama, the time is now to increase spending and make necessary changes in America education.

Although the President called for a freeze on federal spending, he advocated for increased "investments" in education. "Cutting the deficit by gutting our investments in innovation and

"Cutting the deficit by gutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine."

President Obama

education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine," Obama said. "It may feel like you're flying high at first, but it won't take long before you'll feel the impact."

Obama reiterated his plans for changing the nine-year-old No Child Left Behind Act, focusing on his March 2010 Blueprint for Reauthorization. He framed the law's renewal as an attempt to build on the \$4 billion Race to the Top grant competition, highlighting the program's success as justification for a federal government presence in education.

"Race to the Top," Obama said, "is the most meaningful reform of our public schools in a generation."

Obama also announced an initiative to recruit and train 100,000 new teachers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

Dept. of Ed Releases Education Dashboard Website



The Department of Education has launched a website that provides convenient access to key national and state education data and reports. The new site, "Education Dashboard," highlights the progress being made at every level of the education system and encourages individuals and interested parties to engage in informed conversations about their local schools.

This first version of the Education Dashboard contains a set of sixteen variables, ranging from student completion of post-secondary education, to indicators on teachers and leaders and equity. This version also includes a section that supplies data on whether subgroups are performing sufficiently.

The new site allows users to easily find information they need and view it in several different ways. For example, on a single webpage, those interested are able to view indicators of student performance and measure it against another state or grade level. The interface also allows users to download customized reports for further analysis.

The Dashboard website is in its first stages; however, the Department is committed to regularly updating the Dashboard's data and to enhancing the tools on the website. The indicators will be updated as new information becomes available, and users are encouraged to send comments to dashboard@ed.gov so that usability and functionality can be improved.

To browse the new site, visit <http://dashboard.ed.gov/dashboard.aspx>.

The Nation's Science Report Card Released



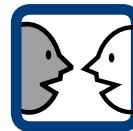
"The Nation's Report Card: Science 2009" was recently released and presents the achievement of fourth, eighth, and twelfth-grade students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in science.

National results for each of the three grades are based on representative samples of public and private school students from all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense schools. Only 34 percent of fourth-graders, 30 percent of eighth-graders, and 21 percent of twelfth-graders nationwide performed at or above the proficient level in science.

The report provides a current snapshot of what American students know and can do in science, and will serve as the basis for comparison with future assessments.

The full report: http://nationsreportcard.gov/science_2009/.

Arne Duncan Advocates for More Minority Males in the Classroom



Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, filmmaker Spike Lee and Congressman John Lewis joined forces last week to speak

to a group of black undergraduate males at Morehouse College about the teaching profession as part of the Department of Education's TEACH campaign.

Duncan stated recently that the nation's teacher workforce does not reflect the diversity of its students when only one in fifty teachers is a black male. "This is a national problem," he said, "and one in which most schools of education have not shown leadership or foresight."

Duncan has been making similar visits to traditionally black universities in an effort to promote the teaching profession to minority students. He recently visited Howard University, with musician John Legend, to promote teaching, calling for undergraduates to "give back to their communities."

This initiative to recruit minority males for a career in teaching is just one of the many facets of the TEACH campaign to attract successful undergraduates to teaching.

For more information and celebrity testimonials, visit www.teach.gov.

2011 Rachel's Challenge Educators Summit Announced

The second annual Rachel's Challenge Educators Summit, Conference & Exhibit will be held June 22-24 at the Plano Centre in Plano, TX. The conference theme is "Transforming a Climate of Bullying into Positive Behaviors."

With a continuing occurrence of serious incidences of bullying on school campuses across the country, Rachel's Challenge founder Darrell Scott, father of Columbine victim Rachel Scott, stated, "We know what works when it comes to changing the culture in schools, and this conference will provide practical strategies for educators to implement in their classrooms."

The conference will include keynote addresses and hands-on breakouts designed to empower and equip educators to replace bullying with respect and compassion in the classroom. Internationally known speakers will include:

- **Guy Doud**, former National Teacher of the Year
- **Larry Powell**, Fresno County Office of Education
- **Dr. Neila Connors**, noted author and educator
- **Annette Breaux**, whose inspirational presentations give teachers solutions to managing their complex classroom dynamics

Breakout topics will include Character Lessons for Life, Rachel's Challenge—Blueprint for Building a Compassionate Com-



munity, The Anne Frank Connection, Cyber-bullying, and more. All of the Summit presentations focus on the overall theme of Rachel's Challenge, reaching the hearts of today's students.

Rachel's Challenge was started by Darrell Scott after his address to Congress shortly after the Columbine tragedy touched so many leaders and educators. The text of that address is still widely circulating on the internet. The core of Rachel's Challenge comes from writings and drawings Rachel left in her journals and school assignments. Scott and a team of speakers now present Rachel's Challenge in elementary, middle, and high schools across the country. The presentation has been viewed by over fifteen million people in five countries.

Plans for the June Summit grew out of repeated requests from teachers and administrators who saw the positive results of Rachel's Challenge in their schools. They asked for an opportunity to learn more about how to make these dramatic cultural changes permanent. The conference will also feature exhibits from educational resource providers and other supporting organizations. ■

Registration for the Summit is open online at www.rachelschallenge-summit.org. Group discounts are available. For more information contact Sarah Branion at Rachel's Challenge 303-470-3000 x13 or email sarah@rachelschallenge.org.



Have Gun Will Teach

Nebraska legislator proposes arming teachers

A Nebraska lawmaker wants teachers to be able to carry concealed guns in school, reports Stacy Teicher Khadaroo of the *Christian Science Monitor* (CSM).

In January, an Omaha high school assistant principal died and a school principal was wounded by a high school senior who brought a gun to the school.

The proposed legislation would allow each school district to set its own policy, with a two-thirds majority vote of the school board required to allow the weapons. Teachers or administrators would have to get a concealed handgun permit.

"If you have a kid come in to shoot a teacher...or other kids, it's best to have somebody that can take care of the situation," Nebraska State Sen. Mark Christensen told CSM.

CSM reports that a number of states have considered laws allowing teachers to carry guns.

Forty-three states (plus the District of Columbia) explicitly prohibit people from bringing guns to K-12 schools, according to The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

In Texas, the Harrold Independent School District set up a concealed weapons policy in 2007, and it appears to be the only such district in the United States to allow guns in K-12 schools. With law enforcement in the rural county at least thirty minutes away, "We are our first responders," superintendent David Thweatt told CSM. ■

Source: Christian Science Monitor



Education Matters is a publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation (AAEF)
27405 Puerta Real, Suite 230
Mission Viejo, CA 92691-6388

Presorted Standard
US Postage Paid
#400
Laguna Niguel, CA

www.aeteachers.org; (800) 704-7799
E-mail: info@aeteachers.org
Gary Beckner, Managing Editor
Debbie Brown, Editorial Assistant
Diane Meyer, Editorial Assistant
Bobette Craycraft, Editorial Assistant

Opinion and News Analysis

George Washington would not be happy

By Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Kathleen Porter-Magee

We have mounting evidence that American education is creating a generation of students who don't understand or value our own nation's history.

On the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for example, not even half of twelfth graders made it to NAEP's basic level in U.S. history—and barely 13 percent were proficient. What does that really mean? Here's an example: When asked to “identify a significant factor that led to United States involvement in the Korean War” and “explain why this factor was significant,” only one high school senior in seven was able to supply a satisfactory answer, such as America's efforts to curb the spread of communism after World War II.

Though scores in 2006 were up a bit from earlier rounds, the overall results were still appalling. (NAEP tested U.S. history again in 2010; these scores will be made public in a few months.)

Cause and Effect

What causes this alarming vacuum of basic historical knowledge? There are multiple explanations, of course, but the most significant is that few states and school systems take U.S. history seriously, so why should their teachers and students?

Fordham has a long history of reviewing state-level academic standards in core subjects. Eight years ago, we examined those standards for U.S. history, and



Few states and school systems take U.S. history seriously.

found that the average grade—this is for the states' expectations, mind you, not the kids' achievement—was a D. This year, helped by a pair of top-notch historians, we did it again, in an analysis recently released.

However, the news is no better. While forty-five states have revised their history standards since 2003, few have improved them. In fact, a majority of states' standards are still mediocre-to-awful, and the average grade across all states remains a D. Today, a majority of states—twenty-eight in all—earn Ds or Fs. Eighteen flunk.

Only South Carolina has standards in this subject that deserve a straight A. Our analysts—Drs. Sheldon Stern and Jeremy Stern—commended the Palmetto State for having brought focus, rigor, and ample solid content to this essential element of a comprehensive education.

Six other states—Alabama, California, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, and the District of Columbia—earn A-minuses, and three more receive grades in the B range. Bravo for them. But this also means that just ten jurisdictions out of fifty-one get honors marks for grounding their standards in real history, and avoiding the temptations, pitfalls, and neglect that prevail across most of the land.

What's To Be Done?

In this field, nobody is coming to rescue individual states from folly, slackness, or neglect.

However, that doesn't mean that those with weak standards must start from scratch. Instead, they could look to the states with A-range grades—or to the NAEP framework—and revise their own standards using those as a model. That's what the District of Columbia did. In 2003, its U.S. history standards were abysmal. A few years ago, however, D.C. officials looked to the best state standards as models, adapted them, and then adopted them. Now the District's teachers are guided by some of the strongest U.S. history standards to be found anywhere. The twenty-eight states whose standards earned Ds or Fs would do well to do something similar.

Let us emphasize that great standards alone don't produce superior results. Several states with exemplary history standards still aren't serious about course requirements, assessments, and accountability. They may have slipshod curricula (if any), mediocre textbooks, and ill-prepared teachers. Top-notch expectations don't get the education job done, but they're a mighty important place to start. ■



Chester E. Finn, Jr. is President of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, and Senior Editor of Education Next, his primary focus is the reform of primary and secondary schooling.



Kathleen Porter-Magee is the Senior Director of the High Quality Standards Program at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.