

# Education Matters

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## CHARTER SCHOOLS & CHOICE

### WHAT IS ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?



By Debra England

AT A RECENT CONFERENCE on education held at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, a panel of MBA alumni working in the field of education was asked by their moderator what each one thought was the single most important innovation or reform necessary to improve the K-12 public education system. Answers varied widely from “better governance” to “more highly qualified teachers” to “improved reimbursements for charter schools.” The panel included the principal of a charter school, the founder of a web-based teacher professional development site, a boutique Wall Streeter who invests in for-profit educational companies, and a senior-level administrator brought in by the State of California to turn around a failed school district. Each offered a sensible and eminently reasonable tactical suggestion based on his or her personal professional experience in the field.

However, the panel did not point out that introducing competition is the single most important innovation necessary to improve

the K-12 public education system. The overarching strategic driver of substantive educational gains visible in the public school system today is free market-based competitive pressure exerted through parental choice options.

In *The Road to Serfdom*, a brilliant treatise on the dangers of collectivist ideologies, Nobel Prize-winning economist F.A. Hayek demonstrated the contradictions inherent between command economies and personal liberty. Hayek deftly illustrated how attempts to control entire economies—or even significant portions of an economy—inevitably result in the growth of totalitarianism and a commensurate loss of personal freedom. Where better to apply Hayek’s analysis today than to the \$400 billion anachronistic monopoly that is our public K-12 educational system?

Despite wave upon wave of touted educational “reforms” over the past several decades, this monopoly has succeeded in producing a bureaucracy that has flat-lined American K-12 academic achievement for

the past thirty-five years. Interestingly, this same timeframe has seen the birth and rapid growth of modern teachers unions and a nationwide explosion in average annual per-pupil spending, which has more than doubled since 1970—from \$4,700 to roughly \$10,100 today in constant dollars. Basic economics tells us that when expenditures increase by more than 100 percent while outputs remain unchanged, we are witnessing a huge productivity decline in the public education sector. Money is clearly not the problem.

### The Charter School

Charter schools are free public schools whose existence is largely dependant upon their ability to achieve good enough student academic growth—as measured by their transparent performance on all required state testing—to attract parents and students and to justify renewed chartering by their authorizing agents. In exchange for operating in this high-accountability environment with lower government

reimbursements, charter schools are freed from much of the onerous bureaucratic and union regulations burdening regular public schools. This permits them to allocate resources more flexibly and efficiently to achieve greater academic gains for their students. Most charter schools target the lowest-end socio-economic demographics where the most at-risk children are likely

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to be trapped in wretched urban public schools that augur poorly for their futures. Not surprisingly, parental demand outstrips supply, and most charter schools must use a lottery system to allocate available student positions.

Given the sturm und drang that has accompanied the arrival of charter schools on the public education scene, one might be surprised to discover that charter schools enroll only 1.5 percent of the public school students nationwide. More children are home schooled than are educated in charter schools. What, then, accounts for the vehement resistance charter schools have encountered including state caps on the numbers permitted, localized fights against granting charters, and union attacks on charter school achievements?

Here again, economics provides the answer. The educational bureaucracies and their political allies have largely managed to maintain what economist Milton Friedman rightly calls “a tyranny of the status quo” in their fight against school vouchers for impoverished inner-city children trapped in the most dysfunctional parts of the system. But they have been less successful in their

fight against charter schools. Thus, despite the near-epic battle waged against the introduction of any form of parental choice, charter schools have become the proverbial camel’s nose inside the educational bureaucracies’ tent.

Charter schools not only support parental choice by providing a variety of educational alternatives to regular public schools,

they also create competition by the nature of their existence. It is a rare monopoly that voluntarily gives up the advantages of monopolistic control for the rigors of competitive free markets. Charter schools, vouchers, tax-credits for corporate-funded scholarships, home schooling—these all introduce market-based competition into the educational arena by providing choice to parents whose socio-economic status had previously ensured their children were trapped in undesirable or failing public schools.

The threat these competitive innovations represent to “business as usual” among the various educational unions and bureaucracies is genuine, and they have responded quite rationally with fear and defensive attacks that serve to underscore the fact that their first priority is not to optimize the educational achievements of children under their control but to serve the needs of their own members’ survival. When confronting histrionic accusations or suspect “research findings” leveled at the vehicles of school choice, ask yourself: Who is the source of the claim and what stake do they have in supporting the status quo? In short, do they

have a dog in that fight?

One of the most frequent charges brought against charter schools is that support for any competitive educational option undermines the regular public education system by snatching desperately needed dollars away from the system. Public K-12 schools receive government reimbursements based largely on average daily attendance. If parents have the freedom to remove their children from undesirable or failing schools, those attendance dollars are lost to the school. The educational bureaucrats and unions would have you believe that parents freed to seek the best educational opportunities for their children will thus bankrupt or severely wound the public school system.

In fact, the introduction of parental choice through the availability of competitive options also introduces an incentive for public schools to respond to parental demands and to be accountable for producing educational achievement. When regular public schools must compete with charter schools, vouchers, or other forms of competition, these formerly unresponsive bureaucratic monopolies are forced to find ways to improve the educational outcomes of the children they serve in order to compete successfully for students. The greater the competitive pressures, the greater their incentives to find ways to improve educational outcomes for students. This is how free markets work in theory, and this is how extensive research and empirical evidence show us that free markets are working in the K-12 educational arena. Competition is the closest thing we are likely to find to a “silver bullet” for K-12 public education. ■

*Debra England is the Program Officer for Education at the Koret Foundation, San Francisco, CA. Through the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, the Foundation funds research, evaluation, and analysis of public policy in an analytical context to identify policies that can effectively enhance the quality of K-12 education.*

*Debra welcomes reader comments at [debraengland@gmail.com](mailto:debraengland@gmail.com).*

# Survival of the Weakest

## Addressing Ed Schools' Challenges

By Kate Walsh

At a recent conference of teacher educators, I mentioned that roughly one out of every four institutions currently housing ed schools routinely accepts students who would have a tough time meeting NCAA's eligibility requirements needed to play college ball. The football team aside, these same students, I pointed out, are eligible for a career in teaching.

As one might expect, there was a little pushback from the audience.

One objection to my observation was, on its face, quite reasonable—that just because host institutions lack standards does not mean that the schools of education don't have any. In practice, though, it is hard to imagine that those schools aren't the

rare exception. There is little evidence that these bottom quartile institutions are "creaming" the stronger talent. Some of these schools might require an aspiring teacher to earn a 2.5 GPA in the freshmen year of studies but just as often they only need a 2.5 GPA in their pre-professional ed school classes, where A's are handed out with notorious generosity. None of these schools impose a higher *objective* measure of academic ability than what it had taken to get admitted as a college freshman.

The most troubling objection was, "Why can't you focus on those schools that have standards? Why do you have to dwell on schools at the bottom?"

This view is indicative of a common mindset in the field of teacher education, a frequent unwillingness by the profession to police itself under the same criterion that other academic fields use as a measure

of high standards: the academic quality of its students. The profession has proved itself more than capable of policing itself on the basis of unproven, ambiguous standards but resists sufficient consideration of students' academic caliber—both when they come in as college sophomores and when they come out as teachers ready for hire. Most telling, the accrediting body for schools of education, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Educators (NCATE) is as likely to confer accreditation on a school with low academic standards as they are a high one.



Arthur Levine, President of Teachers College

"The nation has too many weak education schools, with teachers, students, and curriculums that are not up to the task at hand," boldly wrote Professor Arthur "Take No Prisoners" Levine, in a *New York Times* opinion piece five years ago. Levine is the outspoken president of Teachers College—what many consider to be the top teacher training institution in the nation. "It's time for government to strengthen or close these schools," he challenged. While neither the profession itself nor any government entity has elected to follow up on Dr. Levine's advice, more recently he unleashed his fury at the job schools of education are doing in training our nation's principals and other school leaders.

Levine paints a picture where states, local school districts, and universities are in cahoots, creating what he characterized as a "race to the bottom." All fifty states and 96 percent of local districts award raises to



teachers who earn advanced degrees and credits beyond the master's. As a result, teachers are looking for a quick way to earn credits and degrees in order to make more money. Universities now must compete for students who are mainly interested in a piece of paper and credits, rather than true intellectual pursuit. The results are lower admission standards, a retreat on rigor, and "quickie degrees."

Levine's solution still lies with higher education, just a different department. He recommends leaving it to business schools to educate future leaders. He also holds up a *nondegree-producing* British model, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), located in Nottingham, England.

Another voice calling for higher standards is the ever-prolific Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute who suggests a more open approach. Like Levine, Hess concludes that no education school provides a truly innovative program or is likely to produce administrators capable of doing anything more than maintaining the status quo. Hess looks to the KIPP Schools (the Knowledge Is Power Program) and New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) as models because "they are highly selective, seek out ways to combine educational preparation with broader training in management practice, and actively recruit promising leaders who might not otherwise pursue positions in education administration."

One conclusion can be made—states ought to stop requiring master's and doctoral degrees for leadership positions. Let responsible experimentation through such vehicles as NLNS, KIPP, and the British model take hold—and see who comes out ahead. ■

Kate Walsh is president of the National Council on Teacher Quality ([www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org))



# Preventing Your Classroom Rules from Falling Apart

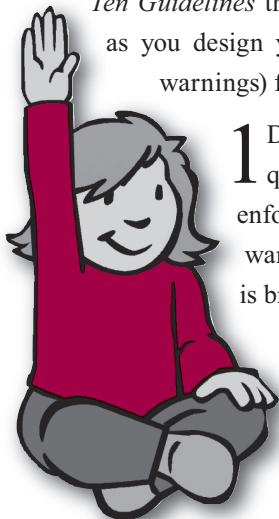
By Howard Seeman, Ph.D.

**W**hy does Mrs. Smith's rules work and last throughout the whole year, and Mrs. Johnson's rules fall apart in a few weeks, leaving her screaming louder, and sending more and more students to the office?

No one can tell you what rules to make in your classroom. That is because if they are not congruent with your personality and teaching style, these rules and their warnings will come off as phony, the students will sense that these are not your rules, and these rules will eventually become ineffective.

However, I can offer guidelines that will make your rules effective and still fit who you are, what you believe in, and your specific teaching style. I will suggest here

*Ten Guidelines* that you should follow as you design your rules (and their warnings) for your classroom:



**1** Decide on the consequence that you will enforce (in the form of a warning at first) if a rule is broken.

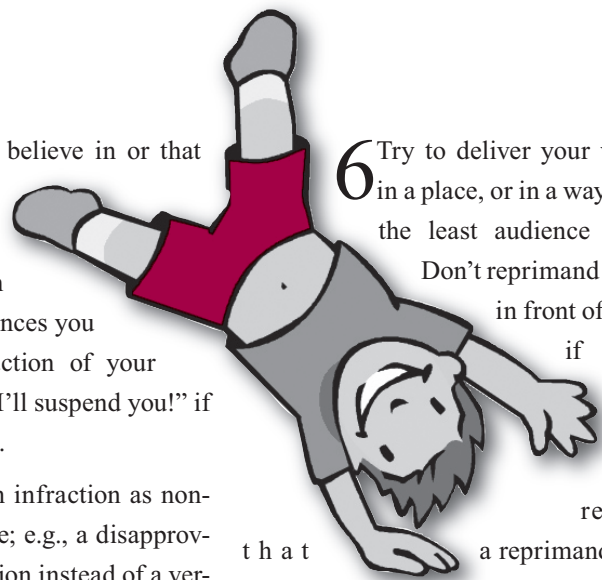
**2** Be congruent with your rules. Don't blurt out some-

thing you don't really believe in or that you later realize is too harsh.

**3** Follow through with the consequences you design for each infraction of your rules. Don't blurt out "I'll suspend you!" if you can't really do that.

**4** Respond first to an infraction as non-verbally as possible; e.g., a disapproving look or no recognition instead of a verbal reprimand. Why? Because the latter gives more attention to the misbehavior. You don't want to accidentally award "negative attention" to behaviors you're trying to extinguish. If you have to reprimand, reprimand while giving the misbehavior as little attention as possible. Thus, for example, putting a disruptive student's name on the chalkboard or asking him or her to come to the front of the room, etc., places the student in the limelight. It's a negative limelight, but some students would rather get negative attention than none at all.

**5** Along with denying students the negative attention they seek, reward them immediately as they "turn over a new leaf" and now try to get attention for being good.



**6** Try to deliver your warnings in a place, or in a way, that has the least audience reaction.

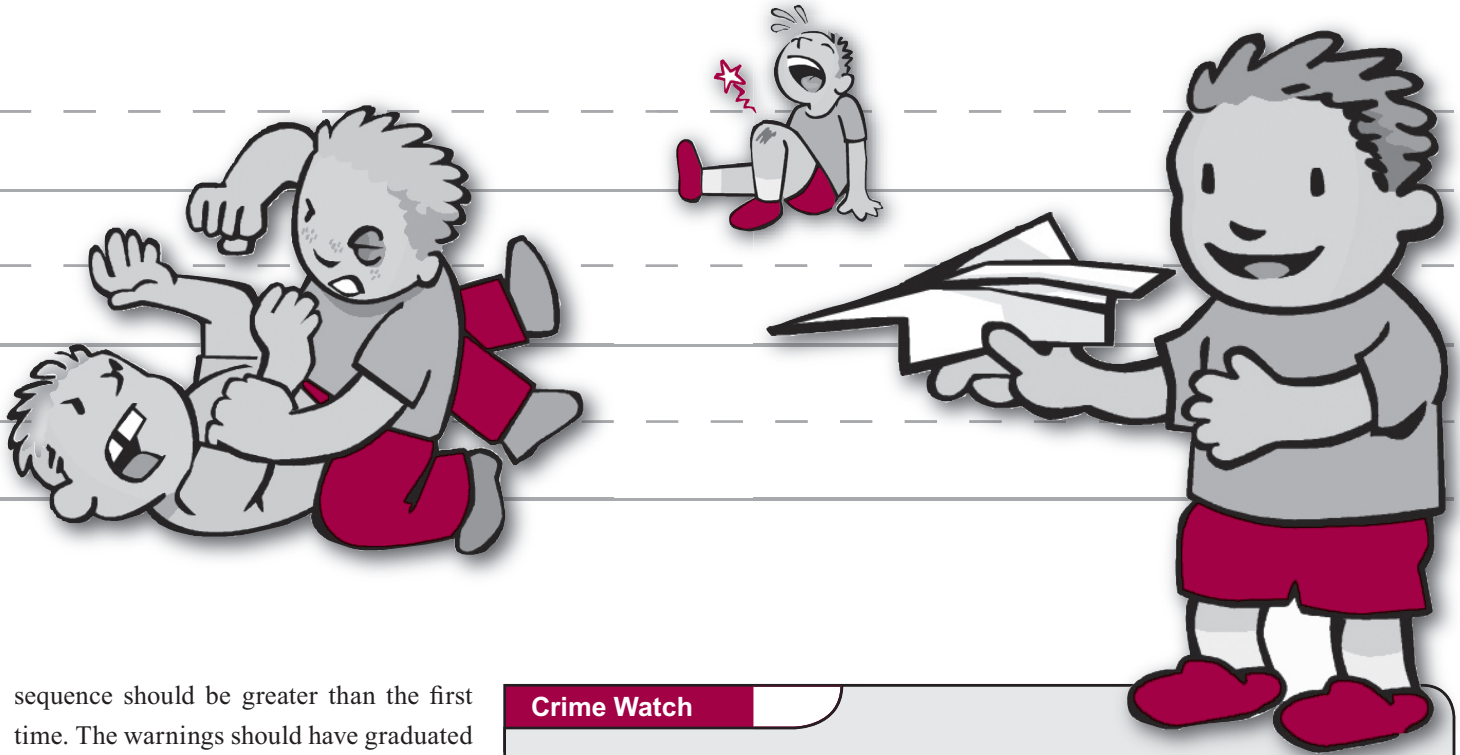
Don't reprimand a student in front of the class if you can at all help it. Try to remember

that a reprimand in front of the class, especially for adolescents, is always much more severe than the same one given in private. Students reprimanded in front of an audience need to revolt against your warning to save face. Always, if you can, deliver your warning after class at the "See me after class!" meeting.

**7** Don't make your warnings too long-winded. If you do, the time it takes to reprimand will slow down the train of your lesson. Students will then turn off, and more disruptions will be incited. Say it short and sweet, and then immediately go on with the lesson.

**8** Design a hierarchy of consequences in the form of warnings if your rule is broken. If a student violates a reprimand the second time, the severity of the con-





sequence should be greater than the first time. The warnings should have graduated consequences—that you have the authorization and the will to back up.

**9** Design the warnings for breaking your rules so that they have as many small step-by-step consequences as possible and do not skip warning steps. For instance, an ineffective hierarchy of consequences would be: “If you call out twice, your mother will have to come to school.” This consequence is too big and has too few steps. The student has little time to change his behavior.

**10** Call in a third party to your system as late as possible; if you think you are nearing the use of a third party, prepare that person ahead of time. For instance, an ineffective system would be: “If you call out, you’ll have to report to the dean.” This tells the student that very quickly you can’t handle things by yourself and leaves the administration with the same impression. ■

*Howard Seeman, Ph.D. is the author of Preventing Classroom Discipline Problems: A Classroom Management Handbook. He is also Professor Emeritus of Education at City University of New York, Lehman College, where he has taught classroom management since 1970.*

## Crime Watch

### Students Face Felony Charges in Misuse of Computers

They’re being called the Kutztown 13—a group of high schoolers charged with felonies for bypassing security with school-issued laptops, downloading forbidden Internet goodies, and using monitoring software to spy on district administrators.

The Kutztown Area School District officials reported the students to police only after detentions, suspensions, and other punishments failed to deter them from breaking school rules governing computer usage.

The students “fully knew it was wrong, and they kept doing it,” Jeffrey Tucker, a lawyer for the district, stated. “Parents thought we should reward them for being creative. We don’t accept that.”

The trouble began last fall after the district issued some 600 Apple iBook laptops to every student at the high school about fifty miles northwest of Philadelphia.

The computers had a filtering program that limited Internet access. They also had software that let administrators see what students were viewing on their screens.

However, those barriers proved easily surmountable. The administrative password that allowed students to reconfigure computers and obtain unrestricted Internet access was easy to obtain. It was a shortened version of the school’s street address and was taped to the backs of the computers.

The password got passed around, and students began downloading such forbidden programs as the popular iChat instant-messaging tool. At least one student viewed pornography. Some students also turned off the remote monitoring function and turned the tables on their elders—using it to view administrators’ own computer screens.

*Source: Michael Rubinkam, an Associated Press writer*

## Appellate Court Upholds Teacher's Suit Challenging Union Dues Spent on Politics

The Court of Appeals of Tennessee has given a green-light to a Tennessee educator's lawsuit challenging union officials' practice of compelling teachers to support political activities as a condition of union membership.

The appellate court agreed with arguments made by National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation attorneys that the trial court improperly dismissed a lawsuit filed on behalf of Polk County teacher Dewey Esquinance. Mr. Esquinance is making a

constitutional challenge to a statewide teacher union rule that forces teachers to resign from union membership and thereby sacrifice their voice in workplace matters in order to exercise their political and religious freedoms.

The appellate court ruled that the trial court must allow the suit to proceed. If Mr. Esquinance ultimately prevails, teachers will have a constitutional right to remain union members and withhold dues spent by the union on ideological activities. Currently,

teachers must resign from union membership in order to withhold dues.

Esquinance objects to several aspects of the NEA's agenda for religious and political reasons. Every year, the NEA spends millions of dollars in compulsory dues it collects in support of political views and candidates that many of its members find objectionable.

Esquinance is challenging the membership dues based on the rights established in *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*. Under *Abood* and subsequent

rulings, employees have a constitutional right to refuse to pay for union noncollective bargaining activities and ideological activities—such as politics. ■

*The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation is a nonprofit, charitable organization providing free legal aid to employees whose human or civil rights have been violated by compulsory unionism. The Foundation, which can be contacted toll-free at (800) 336-3600, is assisting over 150,000 employees in over 250 cases nationwide. Its web address is www.nrtw.org.*

## Median Per-Pupil Spending on the Rise

By Eric Kelderman

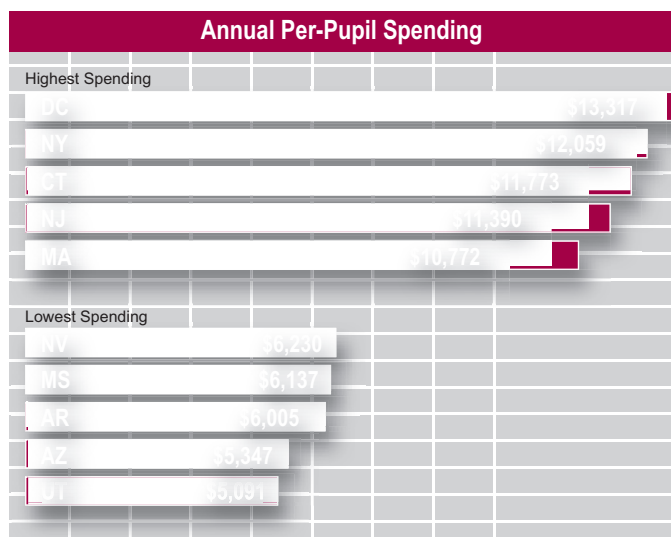
The District of Columbia spent an average of \$13,317 educating each student in its public school system last year, a sum that makes it first in the nation in per-pupil public school spending.

New York (\$12,059), Connecticut (\$11,773), New Jersey (\$11,390), and Massachusetts (\$10,772) filled out the top five in average per-pupil spending. Median per-pupil spending

rose to \$8,208 last year—a 3.6 percent increase from the year before.

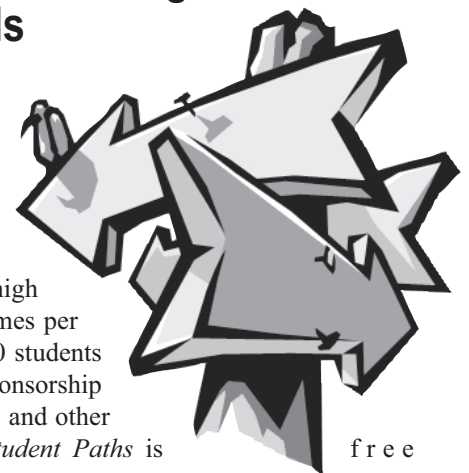
Nevada (\$6,230), Mississippi (\$6,137), Arkansas (\$6,005), Arizona (\$5,347) and Utah (\$5,091) remained at the bottom of the rankings on per-pupil spending for a second year, despite spending increases in all of those states. ■

Source: Arizona Capitol Times



## Free Career Options Program for High Schools

*Student Paths* is a free, nationally recognized showcase program designed to help students with the transition from high school to their future. The program is used in high school classrooms three times per year by more than 700,000 students nationwide. Based on sponsorship from colleges, universities, and other post-secondary options, *Student Paths* is free to high schools.



The *Student Paths* program includes a classroom publication along with a corresponding *Lesson Plan Guide* that teachers use to plan activities, projects, and assignments covering a variety of topics related to a student's transition. Many of these lesson plans complement subjects teachers are currently covering in their classes. In addition to the guide, numerous resources and worksheets are available at the *Student Paths* website.

*Student Paths* was founded by a college student and takes a "been-there-recently" approach, making it fun, interesting, and relevant for high school students. The program has been guiding students toward their future since 1997, and has printed materials currently available in sixteen different states. However, with the launch of the new online version of the program, *Student Paths* is now available for free to any high school in the country.

To learn more about *Student Paths* or to sign up to receive free materials, visit [www.studentpaths.com](http://www.studentpaths.com), or call *Student Paths* toll-free at (888) 840-1239. Ask for Gayle Saunders or Amy Ogren, the high school outreach coordinators for the program. ■

## New Study

# How Good Policies Can Yield Better Teachers

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) recently released the report "Increasing the Odds." The NCTQ examined the research in various areas to determine the effect of teacher quality on student performance. Highest consideration was given to scientifically designed studies with verifiable results.

In summary, the study found the following:

1. Advanced degrees do not make teachers more effective.
2. Four to five years of experience makes a teacher more effective; after that, there is no clear effect.
3. Pre-service education courses may help some aspiring teachers to be more effective, but there is no evidence to support hiring policies that bar individuals from the profession because they lack such coursework.
4. The traditional certification process may add some marginal value, but states should ensure that certification systems are flexible to accommodate capable nontraditional candidates.
5. There is insufficient evidence to support policies that give a teacher's race primary consideration.
6. Requiring more subject matter training for secondary teachers is justified. For elementary teachers, broad training across many subjects appears to be a judicious requirement.
7. A teacher's level of literacy has a measurable impact on effectiveness and should be a primary consideration in hiring.
8. Teachers with strong academic credentials are more likely to produce greater student learning gains. However, districts need to address those factors that cause those teachers to leave the classroom.
9. The personal attributes common to teachers who produced the greatest student learning gains are: being high-achieving, responsible, a critical thinker, organized, motivating, respectful, and sharing the goals of the school.

To acquire a free copy of the report, go to [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org).

## Teachers on the Rise

Too many effective teachers leave low-income teaching primarily due to frustration with work environment, pay, and isolation. Now there is an emerging organization working to reverse this trend. Resources for Indispensable Schools and Educators (RISE) is a nationally recognized network of teachers and public schools that have the greatest impact on students in low-income communities.

RISE is revolutionizing the way effective teachers are recognized and rewarded.

Committed to retaining teachers that consistently improve student achievement in K-12 public schools, RISE reduces attrition rates among those that would otherwise leave the profession.

### Support for Teachers

The RISE network recognizes and retains prescreened, effective teachers by connecting them with one another (a network of like-minded peers), with donors (dollars and corporate discounts from individuals and entities that lack the infrastructure and expertise to identify effective teachers on their own), and with "emerging" public schools (job opportunities for those who are so dissatisfied with their current work environment that they plan to leave the profession). Its services are affordable for schools and free for teachers, making its programs scalable and achievable on a national level.

Working with over 700 effective teachers from across the nation and fifty-five public schools in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Chicago, RISE is a nonprofit organization building an alternative network of education professionals committed to closing the achievement gap for America's most disadvantaged students. It hopes to expand its services into other areas of the country.

One of RISE's innovations is its "value-added" assessment—a scalable and sustainable approach to determining teacher effectiveness. Teachers apply to join the RISE Professional Network by demonstrating that their students are achieving over one year of academic growth per year of their instruction. Therefore, every year in a RISE teacher's classroom, low-income students make significant strides in closing the achievement gap. Once teachers have been identified that have proven their ability through student success, RISE then works to deliver the resources needed to recognize and retain them: a professional network of their peers, financial resources, and career opportunities.

"I envision an effective teacher in every K-12 classroom in the United States," explains Temp Keller, founder and president of RISE. He envisions a future where teachers in low-income communities are recognized and retained on the basis of student learning gains rather than tenure. ■

To find out more, visit [www.risenetwork.org](http://www.risenetwork.org)



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# Six Myths

## ABOUT NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

If you listen to media reports on the implementation and costs associated with NCLB Act of 2001, you have been bombarded with a lot of misinformation. Below are six common myths about NCLB and facts to refute them.

**Myth 1:** *NCLB is an unfunded mandate that imposes on states a one-size-fits-all education system.*

**Fact:** Congress has not only provided funds for NCLB, but states also have been given a great deal of flexibility as they implement the program's goals.

NCLB has not only increased standards for public elementary and secondary education but also provided an additional \$6.4 billion in federal education funding, a 28.5 percent increase! Instead of binding funding to specific programs not proven effective to increase academic achievement, federal funding is now correlated to several broad areas, such as academic achievement, high-quality teachers, parental choice, and accountability for states to find methods that best suit them.

**Myth 2:** *NCLB is nothing more than new federal mandates states have to follow.*

**Fact:** Many of the "new" mandates aren't new at all. Accountability measures were in place prior to NCLB. Under the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which preceded NCLB's enactment by eight years,

each state was required to develop comprehensive academic standards and correlate those standards with a curriculum-based exam. At least math and reading exams were to be administered at three grade levels. Unfortunately, states were never held accountable to be in compliance with the 1994 law.

**Myth 3:** *NCLB requires a national standardized test.*

**Fact:** NCLB, in fact, forbids a national test. States are free to choose the testing vehicles that best fit their students' needs.

**Myth 4:** *The federal government has imposed unrealistic requirements on teachers seeking "highly qualified" status.*

**Fact:** To be certified as a highly qualified teacher, an instructor must be fully certified, have a bachelor's degree, and have demonstrated knowledge in the teacher's subject area. Every state already mandates the first two requirements. With respect to the third requirement, NCLB allows each state education agency to choose how it will determine if a teacher has demonstrated subject specific mastery. NCLB gives states the flexibility to establish their own highly qualified standards, and states may determine who is highly qualified by administering a test or using some other objective evaluation system developed or approved by the state.

**Myth 5:** *Teachers who choose to seek advanced certification will bear an unfair financial burden under NCLB.*

**Fact:** NCLB includes new flexibility and increased funding for teachers. States have been allocated \$2.9 billion for teacher quality programs to help districts train, recruit, and retain quality teachers.

**Myth 6:** *School administrators do not have the flexibility to recruit and retain teachers.*

**Fact:** Well aware of the need for exemplary teachers in fields such as math, science, and special education, NCLB's authors gave states several options for attracting uniquely qualified professionals to the teaching field. Under NCLB, states are authorized to implement high-quality recruitment and retention programs that can include professional development opportunities, differential pay, signing bonuses, and performance bonuses, to name just a few of the incentives.

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