

nation's elite private schools are full of such people, and parents eagerly proffer tens of thousands of dollars to give their children the benefit of such skill and wisdom.

Amazingly, even the Regents, among the nation's most addled education bodies, sporadically acknowledge what works in the classroom. A Task Force on Teaching paper cites some of the factors that allow other countries to wallop us routinely in international tests: a high amount of lesson content (in other words, teacher-centered, not student-centered, learning), individual tracking of students, and a coherent curriculum. The state should cling steadfastly to its momentary insight, at odds with its usual policies, and discard its foolhardy plan to enshrine *Anything But Knowledge* as its sole education dogma. Instead of permanently establishing the teacher education status quo, it should search tirelessly for alternatives and for potential teachers with a firm grasp of subject matter and basic skills. Otherwise ed school claptrap will continue to stunt the intellectual growth of the Empire State's children.

The Truth About Teacher Salaries and Student Achievement

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The season of teacher contract negotiations tends to bring forth a series of comparisons of teacher salaries with average salaries in other professions. These comparisons, which invariably show teachers trailing others, are frequently linked to arguments about the necessity of having quality teachers. Increasing teacher shortages simply amplify the need to improve teacher wages. What should we make of these arguments?

Research confirms what all parents know: **The teacher is the key ingredient to quality schooling.** A quality teacher is much more important than, say, a small class size.

Similarly, nobody doubts that increasing teacher salaries—for an individual district or for the nation as a whole—will increase the number of people interested in teaching. Thus, improving quality and dealing with shortages would seem directly related to improvements in salaries.

Unfortunately, the argument on salaries, like many others on educational policy, does not hold up because the validity rests on a number of unstated and unproven assumptions.

Let's consider the left-out components: First, when school people discuss salaries, they regularly have in mind raising everybody's salary. This includes the salary of all current teachers, regardless of quality, specialization, or anything else. There exists no overall shortage of people willing to teach or even of people certified to teach. Shortage arguments rest on ideas of specific skills, such as math or science training, but few people arguing for increased salaries would contemplate paying math and science teachers more than elementary English teachers. Second, poor teachers almost certainly value improved salaries at least as much as good teachers. An increase in salaries induces all current teachers to stay in teaching, regardless of how good they are. Third, **quality is not a determinant of salaries.** Teachers' salaries are determined by experience, degree level, and coaching abilities but not by their impact on student learning. Fourth, nobody doubts that increasing teacher salaries will expand the pool of potential teachers from which a district can choose. But the influence on students depends directly on the ability of districts to choose the best teachers from the expanded pool. Research shows that the typical school district does poorly in these choices.

The combination of these factors implies that **there is virtually no relationship between teacher salaries and student achievement.**

Imagine a world where good teachers were paid large salaries and poor teachers were helped to find alternative jobs. Imagine a world where schools could compete for skilled specialists without having to pay the same to everybody, regardless of scarcity. This world would be very different from our current world, and the discussions of pay comparisons with other professions would be more meaningful.