to the debate and the dialogue, and could contribute to the substance," said Chuck Williams, the NEA's director of teacher quality initiatives. "But it could not and should not be the silver bullet."

And some union leaders concede that measurement is inevitable. "When we get to the point, and we will, where we can disaggregate to isolate the impact of a teacher on students learning vis-à-vis other factors, then we can raise this question of rewards and consequences, but until then, it's irresponsible," said Adam Urbanski, a vice president of the American Federation of Teachers and an advocate of peer review.

The real pressure to find a compromise is likely to come from such parents as Kaplan, who will be better armed with information as states start issuing report cards and ending social promotion, the practice of passing children from one grade to the next even when they're not academically prepared. As states move to end social promotion, parental pressure to differentiate between good and bad teachers will grow, Dornan said. And these evaluations will be easier to do. "You're going to open up a whole other layer of scrutiny," Dornan said. "But this time, it will be focused on classrooms, not buildings, and classrooms will be a proxy for teachers."

And, as Kaplan and Sanders pointed out, public schools have plenty of dynamic teachers, but the problem is that teacher quality is so uneven. "All professions have bad eggs," Kaplan said. "This one just happens to affect our society more than most."

Put Teachers to the Test

Diane Ravitch

This selection first appeared in *The Washington Post* on 25 February 1998. Diane Ravitch, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, is the author of *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Last summer, a suburban school district in New York advertised for 35 new teachers and received nearly 800 applications. District officials decided to narrow the pool by requiring applicants to take the

11th-grade state examination in English. Only about one-quarter of the would-be teachers answered 40 of the 50 multiple-choice questions correctly.

As Congress considers reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, teacher education has emerged as a major issue. Many states—and now President Clinton—are clamoring to reduce class size, but few are grappling with the most important questions: If we are raising standards for students, don't we also need to raise standards for teachers? Shouldn't state and local officials make sure that teachers know whatever they are supposed to teach students?

Almost every state claims that it is strengthening standards for students, but the states have been strangely silent when it comes to ensuring that teachers know what they are supposed to teach. Most instead certify anyone with the right combination of education courses, regardless of their command of the subject they expect to teach, and many states require future teachers to pass only a basic skills test.

Today, in some states it may be harder to graduate from high school than to become a certified teacher. Something is wrong with this picture.

Last summer the U.S. Department of Education reported that approximately one-third of the nation's public school teachers of academic subjects in middle school and high school were teaching "out of field," which means that they had earned neither an undergraduate major nor a minor in their main teaching field.

Fully 39.5 percent of science teachers had not studied science as a major or minor; 34 percent of mathematics teachers and 25 percent of English teachers were similarly teaching "out of field." The problem of unqualified teachers was particularly acute in schools where 40 percent or more of the students were from low-income homes; in these schools, nearly half the teaching staff was teaching "out of field."

Many states now routinely certify people who do not know what they are supposed to teach. No one should get a license to teach science, reading, mathematics, or anything else unless he or she has demonstrated a knowledge of what students are expected to learn.

A majority of the nation's teachers majored in education rather than an academic subject. This is troubling, even though most of those who majored in education are elementary teachers. There is a widely accepted notion that people who teach little children don't need to know much other than pedagogical methods and child psychology; that is wrong. Teachers of little children need to be well educated and should

love learning as much as they love children. Yes, even elementary school teachers should have an academic major.

The field of history has the largest percentage of unqualified teachers. The Department of Education found that 55 percent of history teachers are "out of field," and that 43 percent of high school students are studying history with a teacher who did not earn either a major or minor in history. This may explain why nearly 60 percent of our 17-year-olds scored "below basic" (the lowest possible rating) on the most recent test of U.S. history administered by the federally funded National Assessment of Educational Progress. Only one out of every five teachers of social studies has either a major or minor in history. Is it any wonder that today's children have no idea when the Civil War occurred, what Reconstruction was, what happened during the progressive era, who F.D.R. was, what the Brown decision decided, or what Stalin did? Many of their teachers don't know those things either.

There are many conditions over which school officials have no control, but they have complete control over who is allowed to teach. Why should anyone be certified to teach science or history who doesn't know what he or she is expected to teach the children?

Many state officials say that they have an abundance of people who want to teach and that this is actually an excellent time to raise standards. For career-changers with a wealth of experience in business or the military, however, obsolete certification requirements get in the way. Instead of requiring irrelevant education courses, states should examine prospective teachers for their knowledge of their academic field and then give them a chance to work in the schools as apprentice teachers.

As Congress ponders ways to improve the teaching profession, it should consider incentives for colleges of liberal arts to collaborate with schools of education in preparing future teachers. Representatives from both parts of the same campus should sit down together, study state academic standards, and figure out how to prepare teachers who know both their subject and how to teach it well. Teachers need a strong academic preparation as well as practical classroom experience to qualify for one of the toughest jobs in America.

Every classroom should have a well-educated, knowledgeable teacher. We are far from that goal today. Congress can address this problem by focusing on the quality, not quantity, of the nation's teaching corps.