

*Preface:*  
*What Works in Teaching*

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The essential question of education policy is neither complex nor vague. In fact, it is quite simple: What works? This collection of research brought to you by the Pacific Research Institute and the Hoover Institution will do much to help schools—and parents—answer this question. The authors in this volume, some of the brightest minds in education research, have studied the most pressing questions about teacher quality and practices. They have reviewed thousands of education studies, closely examined state test scores, and explored education theories of the past thirty years in order to assess where we are—and where we ought to be.

In many cases, the authors' findings confirm common sense. William Sanders and June Rivers, for instance, demonstrate that nothing is as important to learning as the quality of a student's teacher. The difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is so great that fifth-grade students who have poor teachers in grades three through five score roughly *50 percentile points* below similar groups of students who are fortunate enough to have effective teachers.

Oftentimes, however, the authors find conventional wisdom to be dead wrong. Eric Hanushek concludes that many of the things we normally believe produce good teachers—teacher

training, a qualified academic background, stricter certification standards, and teacher testing—do not improve student test scores to any significant degree. It is for this reason that Hanushek encourages us to worry less about *what* makes a teacher successful and actually *do* more to *encourage* them to be successful. How? Develop a system that will reward and honor good teachers. Given the job they do, these teachers deserve as much praise, thanks, and honor as any American citizen.

Overall, the papers provide the reader with a portrait of a good teacher and good teaching methods. As Herb Walberg properly concludes in his paper, “Effective teaching methods hardly seem a mystery. . . . The mystery seems to be why such principles are not already in place.” Our task thus becomes putting such principles in place—to set high standards for teachers, to develop strong accountability systems for measuring performance, and to reward those who perform and frown upon those who do not.

We know what works. And we must now turn our attention to forming policies that reflect what we know. There are many people dedicated to protecting the status quo, including some people who would seem to be natural allies of improving schools. The heads of both major teachers’ unions recently rejected the idea of merit pay for teachers. They continue to oppose the movement for standards and accountability. We should remember, however, that teachers exist for the sake of the students and that good teachers have nothing to fear from thoughtful education reform.

To paraphrase Oliver Wendell Holmes, the teacher who is great is the teacher who makes others believe in greatness. Teaching is more than “facilitating the acquisition of skills.” It is offering an invitation and encouragement to life, to a fulfilled life.

As we move forward, we must be determined and vigilant. The American people have invested enormous amounts of

money in the education system—and have entrusted it with their children. With this in mind, we must ensure that the system provides the best possible education for kids. This report from the Pacific Research Institute and the Hoover Institution will help support that critical process.