

Foreword

Although education reform remains one of the top issues of our day, it is, in many ways, still one of the least understood. Too often, education discussions fail to address the tough problems that affect student performance, centering instead on tangential issues. For example, it is much easier for legislators to increase education spending on an array of programs—many of which have no empirical correlation to student achievement—than on reforming university schools of education, revamping teacher training, and improving teacher quality. Yet it is the latter that research shows will have the greatest impact on improving the performance of our students.

For this reason, the Hoover Institution and the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy (PRI) convened a conference on teacher quality that addressed the critical issues of the effect of poorly prepared teachers on their students, the reform of the teacher education system, and the formulation of methods for making teachers accountable for their performance. The nation's leading experts gathered at the conference to present formal papers on various aspects of teacher quality. Education policy makers, legislative staff members, heads of education and philanthropic foundations, business leaders, academics and researchers, education

media, and grassroots education activists attended. The conference was held at the Hoover Institution in May 2000.

The papers presented at the conference, which are contained in this publication, were catalysts for discussion and debate among conference participants. We believe that readers of these papers will react in similar fashion, and we hope that they will be spurred not only to think about these issues in new ways but also to then take steps to influence policy makers so that true reforms can be enacted.

Both the Hoover Institution and the PRI are greatly indebted to the Koret Foundation for its generous support of the project. Indeed, it was Koret's Tad Taube who first urged Hoover and the PRI to jointly put on the conference. That the conference turned out to be such a success and will have lasting impact on education policy is due in significant part to Mr. Taube and Koret's foresight and commitment.

The conference and this publication are among the many examples of cooperation between the Hoover Institution and the PRI. Hoover and the PRI are near each other geographically in Northern California, and together the two public policy research organizations can field an unmatched array of experts on a wide range of issues and subjects. Current joint projects include production of a coedited primer on K-12 education reform and collaboration between Hoover and PRI researchers on an analysis of state education-accountability systems. We believe that these and other joint projects will result in both organizations' increasing their ability to shape the public policy debate and to influence decisions and outcomes.

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