

# *Introduction*

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In May 2000, the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy (PRI) and the Hoover Institution cosponsored a conference at Stanford on teacher quality that brought together some of the nation's top experts on the subject. Why teacher quality? With education reform at the forefront of recent political debate, a wide array of programs aimed at increasing student performance have been proposed and adopted. From reducing class size to changing curricula to increasing funding, lawmakers and education officials have been trying to find, often in vain, the silver bullet that will raise test scores and student learning. These quick-fix solutions, however, not only fail to address the public education system's core problems but also usually have little or no basis in empirical research. For example, evidence shows little improvement in student performance as a result of states' spending billions of dollars on class-size reduction. What the research does show is that the quality of classroom teachers has the greatest impact on the performance levels of students. High-quality teachers using proven teaching methodologies produce high-achieving students.

Despite this well-documented fact, the subject of improving teacher quality is often, and sadly, absent from education policy discussions. Where teacher improvement programs have

been implemented, they are often little more than watered-down public-relations schemes aimed at assuring the public that something is being done. In reality, largely, the status quo is being maintained. For instance, teacher peer-review programs, although popular with politicians and teacher unions, have proven ineffective in improving teacher quality and weeding out poor-performing teachers. In contrast, a true teacher improvement program would focus on key indicators, including teacher assessment, effective teaching methodologies, and performance incentive systems.

The PRI-Hoover conference sought to define and outline these factors. Each of the presenters used his or her special expertise to identify the various problems in the area of teacher quality and what must be done in order to craft a comprehensive teacher-improvement strategy and agenda.

Professor Herb Walberg, one of the nation's leading authorities on international education data, provides a fleshed-out context for the discussion of teacher quality by using a variety of indicators to compare American public education with its counterparts in the industrialized world. He finds that, among other things, American students spend less time studying, work less at home on schoolwork, and spend less time reading. Such factors correlate directly with the level of student performance. Walberg recommends tough academic content standards and a change in teaching practices to adopt proven methodologies, such as direct instruction.

Hoover Institution fellow Dr. Eric Hanushek, perhaps the country's top education economist, discusses what does and does not affect student performance. For example, he finds that more education spending does not correlate with increased student achievement. How money is spent, rather than how much is spent, is more important. And what most affects student performance is the quality of the teacher in the classroom.

Dr. June Rivers and Dr. William L. Sanders, formerly of the University of Tennessee, reveal just how much student performance is affected by teacher quality. Employing an in-

novative value-added methodology, Rivers and Sanders use student assessment devices to determine the quality of teachers. Controlling for a range of factors, Rivers and Sanders find that the quality of teachers is highly variable and that having consecutive years of good or bad teachers can have a dramatic effect, positive or negative, on student achievement.

Dr. Eugene Hickok, former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, now U.S. Undersecretary of Education, describes what a model teacher-quality program should look like. Along with his boss in Pennsylvania, Governor Tom Ridge, Hickok designed a program that emphasizes holding schools of education accountable, requiring preassessment and postassessment of teachers who take professional development courses, and focusing on the real knowledge and quality of teacher applicants as opposed to paper credentials. Recently passed by the Pennsylvania legislature, the Ridge-Hickok program offers a roadmap for other states seeking to improve teacher quality.

Dr. J. E. Stone, a leading critic of current teacher education programs, focuses on the disconnect between the demands of education consumers (parents and taxpayers) for increased student achievement and the downplaying of such achievement by education providers, such as schools of education and teachers. He recommends a wholesale revamping of teacher education that stresses basic academics, teacher assessments, and teaching methodologies based on empirical research rather than vogueish psychology or pedagogy.

Although teacher quality is the most important factor in improving student performance, it is also the most difficult to affect. Schools of education, teacher unions, the existing teacher workforce, state governments, and local school boards are just some of the players who have an impact on teacher quality. Changing teacher preparation, teaching methodologies, teacher incentives, and other key teacher quality factors is a monumental undertaking. However, if policy makers are truly serious about improving the achievement and learning of students, then this is a challenge they

must confront head on. The papers presented here should give policy makers clear guidance for meeting this challenge.

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