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# Teacher Reform Gone Astray

Chester E. Finn Jr.

## Introduction and Background

Teaching was one of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (Excellence Commission) four urgent domains of diagnosis and prescription. Its central failings, as the commissioners analyzed the K–12 world in 1983, were that “not enough of the academically able students are being attracted to teaching; that teacher preparation programs need substantial improvement; that the professional working life of teachers is on the whole unacceptable; and that a serious shortage of teachers exists in key fields.” This critique was then itemized and extended into the following six particulars:

- Too many teachers are drawn from the bottom of their high school and college classes.
- The teacher-preparation curriculum is heavy on methods and light on subject matter.

- The pay is too low *and* teachers have too little influence over “critical professional decisions,” such as textbook selection.
- Teacher shortages exist in selected fields.
- The shortage is acute in math and science (a situation especially disturbing to the two world-class scientists who served on the Excellence Commission, Harvard physicist Gerald Holton and U.C. Berkeley Nobel laureate chemist Glenn Seaborg).
- Half the newly employed teachers of core subjects are “not qualified” to teach them.

To solve these problems, the Excellence Commission made seven recommendations.

1. Would-be teachers should be required to meet high educational standards, to demonstrate an aptitude for teaching, and to show their competence in an academic discipline. Colleges and universities offering teacher preparation programs should be judged by how well their graduates meet these criteria.
2. Salaries for teaching should be increased—and should be market sensitive and performance based. Pay, promotion, tenure, and retention should be tied to an “effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated.”
3. School boards should adopt an eleven-month contract for teachers.
4. Career ladders should be established for teachers so they can gain in status and pay without leaving the classroom.
5. The country should make an urgent push to solve the math and science (and English) teacher shortages, including bringing “qualified individuals” into the classroom through unconventional paths.

6. Incentives should be created to attract outstanding students to teaching.
7. Master teachers should design teacher preparation programs and supervise novice instructors.

Note the image of teachers and their role in education that threads through the Excellence Commission's diagnosis and prescription. Though paying some heed to "professionalism," on the whole it was an instrumental view of teachers as crucial workers in an underperforming industry, namely U.S. schools. Bold steps were needed to boost that industry's efficiency and productivity, which naturally included attention to the quality and effectiveness of its workforce. But the Excellence Commission's conception of teachers was chiefly as the means to an important end, not as an end in themselves. We find in *A Nation at Risk* no clarion summons to "empower" teachers or place them in charge of key education decisions or reinvent schools around them. Their well-being and the enhancement of their profession were not the commission's foremost concerns. Rather, teachers were seen as a key ingredient in schools, an input that needed to be altered—along with time, curriculum, and standards—in order to make schools more effective. Keep this in mind when we turn to the different view of teaching that has shaped most activity in this domain over the past two decades.

### **And Then What Happened?**

In a few policy realms, the Excellence Commission's recommendations were taken fairly seriously in the years after 1983. Certainly that was the case with respect to standards and curriculum. When it came to teachers, however, twenty years later the most striking reality is the degree to which the same problems remain with us. In this sphere, perhaps more than any other, U.S. education hasn't even tried very

hard to take the Excellence Commission's advice—and those who did try found themselves facing stubborn resistance.

It's not that the Excellence Commission was wrong. Indeed, its analysis still rings true today. For example, in laying out the "highly qualified teachers challenge" in a June 2002 report to Congress, U.S. education secretary Rod Paige emphasized four problems that echoed (while updating) those of two decades earlier: the failure of most states to tie their standards for teachers to those for students; low academic standards for new teachers; "alternative routes" into teaching that, while numerous, are "still larded with a variety of requirements"; and the employment, via waivers, of too many teachers (especially in high-poverty schools and in math, science, and special education classes) who lack any certification or other qualifications.<sup>1</sup>

These problems are now widely recognized, and not just by Secretary Paige. Any governor giving a state-of-education speech today, upon reaching the part about teaching and teachers, is apt to identify these same problems, very likely in words that echo the Excellence Commission's urgent 1983 summons. Some of these problems, in fact, are worse now—or at least we understand them more vividly. We're more mindful of shortages of competent instructors in key fields and more sensitive to problems like out-of-field teaching. As the baby-boom generation retires in large numbers, we face replacement needs that loom larger than anyone could have imagined back in 1983. At the same time, class size reduction programs (combined with renewed enrollment growth) have heightened the demand for teachers and exacerbated shortages. Perhaps above all, we're more keenly aware of how important teachers are to children's education, particularly for the most sorely disadvantaged youngsters. Consider, for example, William Sanders's powerful evidence from Tennessee demonstrating how severely children's progress is retarded by a succession of weak teachers and how marvelously it is advanced by several excellent instructors in a row.<sup>2</sup>

Though the teacher-related problems that the Excellence Com-

mission identified remain very much with us, the solutions urged in *A Nation at Risk* have not been widely embraced. As a country, we've really just toyed with some of them. Prodded by then-governor Lamar Alexander, for example, Tennessee established a teacher "career ladder." Several communities and states make incentive payments to new math and science teachers. A few give bonuses and other incentives to beginning teachers. A handful of districts have haltingly experimented with performance-based compensation systems. Some states have formally abolished the undergraduate education major, in the hope that teachers will instead immerse themselves in the fields they intend to teach. Most states have developed "alternate routes" to certification, meant to ease the entry of nontraditional candidates into public school classrooms.

Yet nearly all of these innovations were small or transient or turned into Potemkin-style reforms as the old arrangements were gradually reinstated behind a facade of change. Once Alexander left the statehouse in Nashville, Tennessee's teacher unions chewed away at the career ladder until it collapsed. The performance-based pay experiments in places like Denver, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, and Douglas County, Colorado, turn out to be linked primarily to supervisor or peer judgments, not to one's track record in producing student learning.<sup>3</sup> States with the capacity to engage in "value-added" analysis of teacher effectiveness refrain from doing so or—if they do it at all—don't use such data for personnel actions or compensation decisions. Many alternative-certification programs have slid back into the clutches of the education schools, such that candidates end up eventually taking and doing essentially all the same things as "traditional" candidates, the chief difference being that they do it later or part-time and can earn a salary while doing so. (That's still a worthy change that cuts the opportunity cost of becoming a teacher, but it doesn't transform our concept of what new teachers must take and what experiences they must have—or at whose hands.) Universities have also proven adept at relabeling courses so that the "abolition" of the edu-

cation major may be illusory—for example, “math education” classes are dubbed “math” classes with no real change to their content or professors.

### What Went Wrong?

Why hasn't more happened by way of serious reform in this area? Why have the Excellence Commission's recommendations not charted our actual course? I find two main explanations: intense resistance from powerful forces, plus the emergence of an alternative conception of teachers, teaching, and the reform thereof, a conception that carried the strong backing of the very forces opposed to the Excellence Commission's policy course.

Doing what the Excellence Commission urged with respect to teachers would mean altering deeply entrenched practices and challenging the sturdiest bastions of the “education establishment”: teacher unions, colleges of education, and state education bureaucracies. It would mean training people differently, licensing them differently, paying them differently (and differentially), judging them differently. For the most part, this simply hasn't happened. The forces arrayed on behalf of such changes were not half as strong as those massed to repel reform.

Indeed, once the Excellence Commission delivered its report in 1983, it went out of business. Though the federal education department published a follow-up report (*A Nation Responds*), the policy reforms that the Excellence Commission had urged were largely out of Washington's hands. And after the Excellence Commission folded its tent, there was no organized force to do battle on its behalf. Yet plenty of organized forces stood ready to oppose such changes. It didn't take long for that resistance—particularly to the Excellence Commission's salary recommendations—to surface.

A year and a half after *A Nation at Risk* was issued, Gerald Holton, who had drafted much of the report, wrote a memoir of the experience

and its immediate aftermath. In it, he noted that “criticism by certain teacher groups [presumably he meant the unions] . . . focuses chiefly on the recommendation to make ‘salaries professionally competitive, market sensitive, and performance based.’ The fear is fundamentally one of seeing too great a differentiation in pay and status simply on the basis of ‘merit,’ as defined by others.”<sup>4</sup>

Holton understood this anxiety: “Unless there is a marked up-grading of salaries across the board,” he wrote, “with the present low level in many cities and states corrected, any policy concentrating on differentiation of pay must mean, in practice, that most teachers will experience cutbacks when the inadequate pool is reapportioned, often by criteria that the teachers themselves do not trust.”

In fact, however, the pool grew. Since Holton wrote those words, teachers have enjoyed an across-the-board boost in their pay. Real (inflation-adjusted) teacher pay rose 12 percent from 1982 to 2000 (see figure 17 in chapter 3 by Caroline Hoxby). Some of that money presumably could have been “reapportioned” to the kind of differential-pay scheme the Excellence Commission had recommended without causing the “cutbacks” that Holton feared. But this didn’t happen. It was the nature of the Excellence Commission’s recommendations that posed the tough political challenge, not national stinginess toward schoolteachers. Instead of raising their pay at a faster clip, states and communities have tended to expand their numbers, both in order to reduce class size and, some analysts suggest, to compensate for their lackluster quality—and the comparatively greater cost of recruiting better ones.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, we must note that educated workers in other fields found their income rising faster than that of teachers, meaning that the financial rewards of teaching declined in relative terms, a development sure to worsen the teacher-quality problem that had exercised the Excellence Commission (see figure 18 in Hoxby’s chapter). Registered nurses, for example—another unionized, state-li-

censed, mostly female profession that requires a college degree—enjoyed a constant-dollar increase of 16 percent from 1982 to 2000.

### A Rival Is Born

On balance, of the Excellence Commission's seven recommendations for solving the teacher-related parts of the education risk facing the nation in 1983, numbers two through seven have been only dabbled in. That there has been more action with respect to the first recommendation<sup>6</sup> is due largely to the fact that it harmonized with another teaching-reform impulse, one that has turned out to have greater traction, in large part because it arose from within the education establishment itself.

Call it the "teacher professionalism" agenda. Though it had earlier incarnations, for present purposes it can be traced mainly to another prominent report of the eighties entitled *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-First Century*. This did not emerge from the government and had no "official" standing, yet it carried considerable weight. Its sponsor was the Carnegie Corporation of New York, via a program called the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy led by foundation president David A. Hamburg. At its maiden session, the Carnegie Forum spun off a "Task Force on Teaching As a Profession," chaired by Lewis Branscomb, then IBM's chief scientist (now a Harvard professor). In 1986, the fourteen-member Carnegie task force issued its report.

*A Nation Prepared's* most notable feature was a subtle yet profound change of focus: from teachers as instruments of school improvement to teachers as *shapers* of school improvement. From teachers as means to teachers as ends. From teachers as staff in an education system run by others, to teachers as key decision makers about the purpose and operations of the system itself. One might almost say from teachers as workers to teachers as bosses.

Accompanying this shift of power and emphasis were different

ideas about the nature of schooling itself, away from the view that teachers should impart particular knowledge and skills to youngsters and toward the constructivist view that the teacher's foremost mission is to help children become learners. Here is how *Education Week* depicted this transformation:

In 1986, a landmark report issued by a task force of the Carnegie Corporation of New York called for radical changes in teaching to make it a true profession. The authors envisioned a different kind of teacher—flexible, up-to-date, able to lead children into deeper learning. The next step was for teachers to be mentors and coaches rather than dispensers of facts. Students would take more responsibility for their own education, and teachers would collaborate with them in a search for knowledge and understanding. The school structure would change so that teachers would be deeply involved in decision making: Within broad curricular frameworks, teachers would decide how best to meet their goals. They would participate in the development of new performance-based assessments. They would be empowered to make decisions that affect instruction, budget, personnel, and scheduling. At the same time, though, the teachers would be much better educated and would be eased into their jobs with help from experienced mentors.<sup>7</sup>

Carnegie's view of teaching and teachers could coexist with one or two of the Excellence Commission's teacher recommendations, but on the whole it was rooted in dramatically different core beliefs about who should make key education decisions, and it advanced a markedly different view of the organizational and policy framework within which teachers work—or should work.

This altered focus had much to do with who was focusing. The Excellence Commission included educators but could in no way be termed a creature of the teaching profession or public-school establishment. For example, it had no organization heads, union chiefs, or college of education deans. By contrast, the Carnegie Task Force included a generous representation of public education's political establishment: the presidents of both national teacher unions (the

NEA's Mary Hatwood Futrell and the AFT's Albert Shanker), a governor (New Jersey's Tom Kean), a once and future governor (North Carolina's James B. Hunt), two state education superintendents (California's Bill Honig, Minnesota's Ruth Randall), an education school dean, prominent black and Hispanic academics, a businessman, a legislator, the *New York Times*'s lead education columnist (Fred Hechinger) and the ubiquitous John W. Gardner. This deftly balanced group was staffed by Marc S. Tucker, who later went on to cofound the New Standards project and the National Center on Education and the Economy.

At least as important as—and probably because of—their differing compositions, the two panels began with divergent notions of the key education problems needing to be solved. The Excellence Commission took as its solitary challenge the weak performance of U.S. schools. The Carnegie task force acknowledged the need for stronger student performance but added a second, equivalent challenge: “creating . . . a profession of well-educated teachers prepared to assume new powers and responsibilities to redesign schools for the future.” *A Nation Prepared* thus recast the country's education problem as a dearth of duly empowered teachers and formulated its solution in terms of making the teaching occupation more “professional.” Its authors yearned to shift power from “those who would improve the schools from the outside” to educators themselves. They envisioned a “fundamental redesign” of schooling itself, not a simple boosting of the present system's efficiency and productivity.

The task force sought to change the teaching occupation in three crucial ways: raising standards for new entrants; finding ways “to retain in our schools those teachers with the needed skills”; and redesigning “the structure of the system . . . to take maximum advantage of those highly skilled teachers, so that the most efficient use is made of the additional funds required.”

Those reforms overlapped a bit with *A Nation at Risk*'s recom-

mendations, but their basic thrust was quite different. The Carnegie group was bent on empowering teachers, boosting their status, influence, and control over the primary-secondary education field in general and schools in particular—and did so with serene confidence that doing this would also boost pupil performance. The Excellence Commission mostly wanted existing schools to work better. It sought to take their essential components and make these more effective. It didn't seek to reengineer schools per se. In a sense, the Excellence Commission trusted the existing system more than the Carnegie crew did, even though the latter were mainly card-carrying participants in that system. The key difference is that the Carnegie team sought to shift more control (and resources) into the hands of educators and their interest groups, while the Excellence Commission seemed content with the “civilian control” arrangements that traditionally characterized the system's governance.

Unlike the Excellence Commission, the Carnegie task force had powerful allies, including people and organizations with great staying power, notably the teacher unions themselves. The campaign that it launched also had access to ample private and public dollars. Much of this money came from Carnegie and other wealthy foundations such as Rockefeller—as became even clearer in 1994, when those two foundations teamed up to provide funds for the new (and seemingly permanent) National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), also drawn from the heart of public education's political establishment.

In time, the teacher-empowerment campaign also won federal funding—far more, ironically, than anything done about teaching in the name of the federally chartered Excellence Commission—and gained much sway in Washington, D.C., as well as state capitals. While it would oversimplify to ascribe this to partisanship, it cannot have hurt those advancing the Carnegie agenda that for eight crucial years during this period the federal executive branch was home to an administration that was politically in sync with teachers and their

unions and philosophically comfortable with the professionalism agenda. (GOP policy makers are more apt to think of teaching as a problem area that needs to be set right, even when this entails changes that the unions don't like.) In the end, though, the main explanation for teacher professionalism's leverage at federal and state levels was the old-fashioned, many-splendored political clout of its architects and builders.

### The Rival Prospers

Between 1986, when *A Nation Prepared* was issued, and 1994, when the NCTAF was formed, several related entities were born or strengthened in pursuit of the professionalism goal. Foremost among these was the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), founded in 1987 and the recipient of much foundation and federal largesse, chiefly orchestrated by North Carolina's Jim Hunt, who had helped to draft *A Nation Prepared*. The NBPTS offers a special, advanced credential to superior teachers, whom it identifies largely through a peer-review process. In other words, it recognizes teachers whose ideas and practices find favor with other educators. (There is, as yet, no proof that their students learn more than those of other teachers.)<sup>8</sup>

Also launched in 1987 was the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), composed of state education departments, universities, and national education groups, which seeks to reform teacher preparation, licensure, and professional development.

Another key player is the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), long a sleepy, voluntary accrediting body whose transformation began in 1991, when Arthur E. Wise took its helm. A tireless, smart, and politically sophisticated veteran of both academe and Washington, Wise dedicated himself to advancing the professionalism agenda, particularly by persuading many states that

they should view NCATE as a partner in deciding which teacher-preparation programs deserve state approval. (This effort got a further boost in 1992 when the National Education Association committed itself to requiring all teacher preparation programs to obtain NCATE certification.)

While the Excellence Commission had no organizational progeny to carry on its bloodline, the Carnegie task force sired a whole family of descendants, including the NBPTS, the INTASC, the NCTAF, and a reenergized NCATE. Three of those entities have come to wield much leverage over the means by which one gets trained for teaching, is licensed to teach, and advances through the profession. The fourth, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, has functioned as cheerleader, coach, and intellectual arsenal for the others, as well as campaign manager for the broader agenda advanced in *A Nation Prepared* and a host of subsequent reports. All these efforts gained further clout (and access to human, fiscal, political, and public relations resources) from their close affiliation with the teacher unions, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), and other mainstream groups comprising what former education secretary William J. Bennett once termed "the blob." And they benefited hugely from the emergence of a loose interlocking directorate among them, such that many of the same organizations and people are engaged in the policy direction, political advancement, and funding of them all.

Others joined the crusade for teacher professionalism. For example, in 1986, a cadre of prominent education-school deans formed a body called the Holmes Group to rethink teacher education. Its debut report, *Tomorrow's Teachers*, emphasized new and ostensibly more professional ways to prepare teachers, which it embellished four years later in *Tomorrow's Schools*, a report full of talk of radically restructuring schools, ensuring that learning would become lifelong for both teachers and students, creating "learning communities," "professional development schools," and so forth. The Holmes Group took

teacher preparation as seriously as student learning—not too surprising, considering its constituency. Like Carnegie and its offspring, the Holmes Group placed teachers at the center of the education solar system, not as a satellite orbiting within that system.

Besides Carnegie and Holmes, in 1987 the Milken Family Foundation began its annual educator awards (of \$25,000 per teacher) as a way of recognizing outstanding teachers and principals and fostering their professionalism. A decade later, Milken launched the Teacher Advancement Program, a promising way to restructure the entire teaching profession.

### The Rival Prevails

Teacher professionalism has a mom-and-apple-pie aura. Americans are fond of their teachers and tend to respect people described as professionals. As a result, the quest for teacher professionalism has largely trumped the push for improved teacher performance. It has become a policy goal in its own right, one that now obscures the view of teachers as instruments for producing more learning in children and better performance by their schools. And it's become a goal on which much policy activity has centered. Indeed, the teacher-professionalism agenda has had enormous influence over the policies and practices of American public education during the past fifteen years, dwarfing any impacts attributable to the Excellence Commission in terms of both scale and durability.

It did not take long. Within months of *A Nation Prepared's* 1986 release, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Governors Association (NGA) endorsed it, and the NGA incorporated some of its principles into that organization's own influential *Time for Results* manifesto, prepared under the leadership of future U.S. education secretary Lamar Alexander. At least seven states launched school-restructuring programs attuned to those same principles, as did a number of large school systems.<sup>9</sup> And as the professionalism agenda

gained traction at the national level, it affected more and more state policies. Three examples illustrate the point.

First, heeding the professionalism rhetoric and responding to the teacher unions' (and education schools') political clout, by 2001, sixteen states had created teacher professional standards boards that were entirely autonomous of the state education agency and thus largely beyond the influence of elected policy makers, voters, and taxpayers. Such boards wield immense power through their control of teacher and principal preparation standards and certification decisions, so it matters greatly who is on them and what their members value. Three other states had semiautonomous boards of this kind—and a number of legislatures are considering moves in this direction. Seductive and reasonable as it sounds to wrest teacher standards and licensure from the bureaucratic grip of the state—after all, lawyers do much the same thing through the state bar associations—in reality, these structures nearly always turn out to be dominated by teacher unionists and education school faculty. This tends to lock in the professionalism agenda while rendering states markedly less hospitable to alternative certification, subject-centered preparation programs, and kindred reforms of teaching.

Second, the “professionalizers” have put great pressure on states to mandate NCATE accreditation for their teacher-preparation programs. Though this is a major departure from the theory of voluntary accreditation that launched the NCATE, it's consistent with the post-Carnegie view that government instrumentalities at every level should be bent to the service of teacher professionalism. Nearly every state now has some sort of partnership with this accrediting organization and, in half of them, the NCATE wields joint power in determining which preparation programs get state approval for purposes of teacher certification. (In eighteen others, the NCATE advises the state education agency on which programs to approve.) Four states require full NCATE accreditation before a teacher-training program can operate within their borders. Three more have imposed this requirement on

their public colleges and universities. The upshot is that the NCATE's ideas of what comprises a sound program—its content, its methods, its faculty, its philosophy—have immense influence on state decisions about who will teach in the public schools and how they will be prepared for the classroom.<sup>10</sup>

Third, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has succeeded in persuading many states and districts to reward, recognize, or assist those teachers who secure its stamp of approval. Twenty-five states now offer ongoing (or multiyear) salary increases to NBPTS-certified teachers. Four provide one-time bonuses and twenty more offer other recognitions or subsidies (such as paying the NBPTS's hefty application fee for candidates from their states). Moreover, several hundred school districts have their own versions of salary boosts, bonuses, subsidies, and recognitions for NBPTS-certified teachers.

The professionalism agenda also proved influential in some localities, of which the best-known example is Rochester, New York, where Marc Tucker's National Center on Education and the Economy was long based. As Tucker and former U.S. labor secretary Ray Marshall recount the beginning of a long saga,

In the fall of 1986, the Rochester City School District . . . and the Rochester Teachers Association announced a new contract that caught the country by surprise. The contract incorporated the salary recommendations of the Carnegie report, raising average teachers' salaries by more than 40 percent . . . ; incorporating . . . a career ladder for teachers . . . ; an agreement to develop a site-based management system that would empower teachers to make many more of the key decisions about instruction . . . ; a provision involving the teachers' union in working to improve the performance of weak teachers . . . ; and an agreement to develop a system for increased teacher accountability. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Considering all this activity and the immense political, legislative, and budgetary resources that it has consumed, one might say that the

teacher professionalism agenda has functioned like a black hole in space, sucking in much of the available energy, attention, and funds and leaving little for other reforms—not just other teacher-related reforms (such as those urged by the Excellence Commission) but also a very different list of changes (for example, in technology, competition, preschool, new curricula) that might prove more effective and economical as strategies for boosting pupil achievement. Along with salary increases and class-size reductions, we can conclude that the reforms associated with teacher professionalism have been the principal policy preoccupation of educators themselves during the period since *A Nation at Risk*.

### The Rival Is Doubted

So ardent a push for teacher professionalism might be warranted if we were confident that its full flowering would yield the desired results for students and schools as well as for teachers and their advocates and organizations. Perhaps the Excellence Commission's proposals were faulty and the Carnegie strategy is superior. Then we would have no reason to object to its consuming the available education-reform oxygen.

But there are significant reasons to doubt that the professionalism agenda is succeeding from the standpoint of children, parents, taxpayers, and public officials, however much it may point to changes that teachers favor.

First, it rests on a shaky evidentiary and research base concerning its ability to solve the problems identified by the Excellence Commission. There is little evidence that it will boost student learning or address either the quality or quantity challenges that the current teaching force poses. In other words, it is a weak—and costly—solution to the problems at hand.<sup>12</sup> In Rochester, for example, within five years, the Carnegie-inspired reform plan had succeeded in boosting teacher

pay but had induced little change in school operations or student results.<sup>13</sup>

Second, the professionalism agenda rests on a philosophy of education that flies in the face of what most Americans believe to be essential in the schooling of their daughters and sons. This leads to friction, dissension, and confusion. In hindsight, it was inevitable that professionalism would eschew basic skills and knowledge and instead hook up with constructivism. They share kindred intellectual and institutional origins.<sup>14</sup> Yet most parents want their children's teachers to impart specific skills and knowledge, and that's also how many policy makers view the mission of the schools that they are asked to fund. However much one may wish it were not so, the skills-and-knowledge view of student learning is best advanced by treating teachers as expert technicians who are skillful at implementing others' designs. They also must be held accountable to others outside the profession for educational outcomes that are also largely shaped outside the priesthood of experts. Stating it simply: The public's push for basic skills and knowledge clashes with educators' press for greater professionalism.

Third, in institutional and organizational terms, the professionalism agenda is deeply conservative. It seeks to strengthen monopolies, to maintain established practices and orthodoxies, to retain power and prestige within a tight fraternity of experts, to fend off structural changes, and, of course, to deter radical education innovations that do not hinge on a vast cadre of "professional" teachers (for example, distance learning, virtual schooling).

Fourth, owing in part to its conservatism and in part to its constructivism, the professionalism agenda keeps running afoul of the two dominant education-reform strategies in America today. One of these, usually termed "standards-based reform," owes much to the Excellence Commission but is not popular with educators, who insist that many state standards are mindless, that "teaching to the test" cramps their style and makes a mockery of true learning, and that they

ought not be held to account—especially to laymen—for pupil results that are substantially beyond their control. Thus, for example, most of the major K–12 education groups voiced serious misgivings about the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, never mind its attempt to mandate “highly qualified” teachers in every U.S. classroom.<sup>15</sup> (Though that measure made it through Congress, the public education “blob” succeeded in greatly weakening Bush’s original proposal.)

The other prominent reform strategy, based on marketplaces, school competition, and parental choice (for example, charter schools, vouchers, privately managed public schools), owes little to the Excellence Commission, but is even more repugnant to established education groups. They see it as letting anybody into the classroom—not just members of their certified priesthood—while shifting power from experts to laymen and from producers to consumers.

As both of these strategies moved forward, the professionalizers found themselves on the defensive more often and discovered that some of their long-sought policy conquests were blocked or slowed by these newer notions of education reform.

Fifth, key elements of the professionalism agenda turn out to be less than fully welcome within the ranks of its strongest political allies, notably the teacher unions. Though they have carried its banner and in some cases (for example, the NBPTS) have been key agents of its advancement, their basic orientation to the work of teachers has more in common with fifties-style smokestack industries than with any normal notion of professionalism. The unions’ top-priority issues are uniform salary levels, benefits, class size, and job security, none of which is compatible with traditional concepts of professionalism. Moreover, their focus on these issues tends to consume the available resources of money and political energy, resources that otherwise could go to the quest for greater professionalism and to the school reform campaigns that are most apt to advance the professionalism agenda. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence that education resources, when

consumed in these ways, do little to boost school effectiveness and productivity.

For the most part, the unions have also ignored good advice about how to professionalize their own operations; they remain stuck in the steelworkers' mode of job actions, districtwide collective bargaining, the defense of mediocrity, and insistence on uniform treatment for all their members.<sup>16</sup> While there have been a handful of exceptions, mostly within the American Federation of Teachers and notably including that organization's respected longtime leader, the late Albert Shanker, the unions' general aversion to actually behaving—and encouraging their members to behave—as professionals is squarely at odds with the professionalism agenda itself. Indeed, as recently as July 2002, outgoing NEA president Bob Chase pleaded with his members not to “go backward” on the “new unionism” agenda that he had sought (with very limited success) to advance during his tenure.

Sixth, and finally, some of the changes sought by the professionalizers end up worsening other education problems. Notably, the push to raise standards for entry into the public school classroom aggravates teacher shortages, boosts opportunity costs for career-switchers and others who would be willing to try teaching, and strengthens the public education cartel that resists other reforms. NCATE accreditation standards militate against innovations in teacher preparation. Financial rewards for teachers who get certified by the NBPTS not only absorb scarce state and local education dollars, but they also impede the move to judge educators' effectiveness by how much their students learn.

### **The Rival Is Opposed**

These are heavy burdens for the professionalizers, major impediments to reshaping the education world around their model, and they haven't gotten any easier to skirt. Indeed, resistance to the professionalism

agenda has stiffened in recent years. Four developments warrant mention.

First, standards-based reform turned out to have staying power, which has placed greater pressure on teachers and other educators to demonstrate their effectiveness. It has also incorporated efforts to set external standards for educators themselves. More states are testing their teachers—new teachers, rarely veterans—and in 1998, California congressman George Miller spearheaded a successful move in Congress to require states to report the pass rates of their various teacher-preparation programs. (This was, in fact, a recommendation of the Excellence Commission.) Although the present version of this rule proved easy for universities to foil and states to manipulate, Congress will likely revisit it in 2004. Most important, the advent of more student testing, especially the spread of value-added measures of pupil and school performance, and the arrival of high-stakes test-based accountability, has underscored the idea that teachers should be evaluated based on the results they produce, a far cry from everything the professionalizers cherish. Worse (from their standpoint), Uncle Sam has gotten deeper into the act, first with a pair of 1994 statutes and more recently with the No Child Left Behind act, which further prods schools, districts, and states to moor their education policies to results-based accountability. (The legislation also mandates that, by 2006, every child in American schools be taught by a highly qualified teacher, which one might think would please the professionalism crowd but which seems to be having the opposite effect!)<sup>17</sup>

Second, the education marketplace has been strengthened; new providers have entered and consumers have been empowered. With some 2,700 charter schools in operation, choice-based education reform has gained traction despite the unions' opposition—and may gain more in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's June 2002 decision in the Cleveland voucher case. Though nothing says that a school of choice ought not be staffed by top-notch education professionals (and many are), the bottom-up, deregulatory, consumer-driven nature of

the choice movement inevitably weakens the government-centered, regulation-based, educators-in-charge strategy of the professionalism agenda. Many schools of choice—charters, private schools, outsourced schools, and certainly home schools—are even exempt from state teacher-licensure requirements, meaning that, in effect, the school may select whomever it likes to instruct its pupils. That's a grave blow to Carnegie-style professionalism—and becomes more potent as evidence emerges that such schools perform just as well as, and possibly better than, traditional public schools with all their certified teachers and principals. Because most such schools of choice are also free from mandatory collective bargaining, their proliferation weakens the unions, education schools, and other cartel institutions from which the professionalizers draw most of their political oomph.

Third, bona fide supply and demand considerations, other demographic and school-policy changes (for example, class size reduction), and secular macroeconomic trends have made it impossible for states, districts, and schools to meet their teaching needs exclusively through mechanisms favored by the professionalizers. So they have made pragmatic exceptions to and alterations in those mechanisms when recruiting, compensating, and licensing teachers. In the process, they have often found that the exceptions work at least as well as the rule. Moreover, programs such as Teach for America and Troops to Teachers have come into being, grown, and been vindicated by evaluations, even though these, too, fly in the face of the professionalizers' assumptions and advice. The upshot is that policy makers and citizens alike have observed good results being obtained without jumping through all of the hoops of professionalization.

Fourth, besides those practical problems, an alternative theory has begun to win adherents, one that says the strategy favored by the professionalizers and advanced by their organizations is wrong—or, at least, that it hasn't proved right and therefore should not be mandated throughout the land.

The alternative theory favors deregulation of many aspects of

teaching, freer entry into public school classrooms, greater flexibility in personnel management, and more alternatives. Among the groups espousing this heterodox view are the National Council on Teacher Quality, the Education Leaders Council, the Progressive Policy Institute, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and the Abell Foundation. In June 2002, these organizations were joined by none other than U.S. education secretary Rod Paige, whose report on teacher quality alarmed the NCTAF, the NCATE, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, and others habituated to federal backing for the professionalism agenda.<sup>18</sup> Instead, Paige has on several occasions urged states to raise the bar on teacher academic standards while lowering barriers to classroom entry by people without conventional pedagogical preparation. “Raising teacher standards,” he said, “is only half of the equation. . . . [S]tates must also tear down the wall that is keeping many talented individuals out of the profession.” Paige particularly deplores “mandated education courses, unpaid student teaching, and the hoops and hurdles of the state certification bureaucracy.” Instead, he said, “states will need to . . . focus on the few things that really matter: verbal ability, content knowledge, and, as a safety precaution, a background check of new teachers. States need to tap into the vast pool of potential teachers who today are discouraged by the bureaucratic hoops and hurdles but tomorrow might be willing to fill their classrooms.”<sup>19</sup> The education secretary has little patience for talk of teacher shortages, contending that this is a policy-induced problem that can be solved by policy changes.

### For the Future

How do we go forward? When it comes to teachers, in the years since *A Nation at Risk* a large dichotomy has surfaced between two views of their place in education reform: as instruments—along with many others—for boosting student achievement and school effectiveness or as ends in themselves? Though the real world seldom poses the choice

so starkly, we do well to acknowledge that different policy conclusions flow from these rival conceptions of the teacher's role.

Though nothing is gained by papering over these differences, let us also acknowledge that neither approach has the might to vanquish the other. Nor has either yet proven itself so effective that it should be imposed across a large and varied nation. In other words, political prudence and intellectual honesty argue for experimenting with both approaches and with some of their amalgams and combinations. Let's try other plausible ideas and approaches, too. And let's carefully appraise the costs and benefits of them all.

What might this mean in practice?

First, we must agree on a common metric by which to gauge the effectiveness of these several approaches, and it seems clear that this must center on student achievement and, even more, on the value that is added to student achievement by various policy regimens and intervention strategies. Though the value-added methodology for gauging teacher effectiveness is far from fully developed, it is sure to improve and is surely the fairest way to measure the impact of teachers and schools (and education reforms) upon students. Teacher contentment is a welcome secondary outcome—and possible prerequisite—for greater student learning, but it's not the central point or the right barometer of progress. Student learning must be our primary focus and chief tracking system.

Second, because many different strategies have the potential to boost student learning, including some that have not yet been fully tried or examined, we should be open-minded and experimental rather than doctrinaire about teacher-related education reforms. Nobody should have the power to veto a promising approach that might benefit students on grounds that it doesn't appeal to adults who work in schools (or to other interest groups).

Third, among the strategies worth trying are some that flow from the teacher-professionalism agenda: place teachers in charge of schools, employ and compensate them on terms that they like, and

let them decide who is qualified to teach in those schools. Encourage the teacher-professionalism organizations and the unions to run schools of their own—an opportunity made readily available by the spread of the charter-school movement. Encourage some school systems and states to embrace the professionalism agenda—so long as it is accompanied by high-quality, long-term, objective evaluations focusing primarily on pupil achievement.

Fourth, among other strategies worth trying are some that do not obey the dictates of the professionalism agenda, including some that remain to be tested from the days of the Excellence Commission. Let charter schools violate the dictates and experiment with alternative approaches to personnel and everything else. Let districts and states experiment, too—field-testing, for example, performance-based pay keyed to the academic value that teachers add to their pupils. Let distance-learning ventures get properly tested despite their profound implications for the role of teachers. Evaluate them, too.

Fifth, when it comes to teacher preparation, we should try both approaches. Let some teachers be trained by NCATE-accredited programs, certified through INTASC-approved means and reviewed by the NBPTS. Let others enter the classroom through alternate routes and programs such as Teach for America. Evaluate both.

Sixth, let us also try some promising hybrids, such as the Teacher Advancement Program developed by the Milken Family Foundation, which enhances teacher professionalism in ways that also recall a number of the recommendations of *A Nation at Risk* and the latter-day alternative view of teacher quality reform.<sup>20</sup>

This list could easily be extended, but the point is clear. Too many of today's education reform debates are conducted as if they were winner-take-all contests that must leave a single reform strategy standing. That would make sense only if we were certain that a single strategy will succeed everywhere—and if there were any realistic political prospect of that single strategy prevailing everywhere. As yet, however, that case simply cannot be persuasively made. So let's try

multiple approaches. Let's try them seriously, with adequate funding and over a long enough period of time. Let's try them with proper control or comparison groups, and let's make sure they are evaluated according to the best available methods—and chiefly in relation to their impact on student achievement. To make that possible, let us declare a truce in the “teacher wars” for a decade or so, while we try to figure out what works best. Perhaps it will turn out that many different approaches are effective. Perhaps none will work well enough. But we'll be better off if we take seriously the job of trying to learn this from the children's standpoint instead of fussing endlessly over the allocation of adult interests.

### Notes

1. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Office of Policy Planning and Innovation, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Annual Report on Teacher Quality*, Washington, D.C., 2002.
2. William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers, “Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement,” University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, 1996. For a more recent analysis, based on Texas data and conducted by prominent economists, see Steven G. Rivkin, Eric A. Hanushek, and John F. Kain, “Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement,” National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 6691, revised July 2002, which can be found on the Internet at <http://edpro.stanford.edu/eah/papers/basic.july2002.PDF>.
3. At this writing, the Cincinnati teacher union has backed away from even that and the superintendent who spearheaded the program has resigned.
4. Gerald Holton, *The Advancement of Science, and Its Burdens* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 265.
5. Darius Lakdawalla argues that the rising price of skilled labor in the U.S. economy has contributed both to a decline in teacher quality and to the class-size reduction strategy by which the public education system has tended to substitute more (but lower-paid) teachers for fewer, abler but pricier teachers. Of course, teachers' and parents' preferences for smaller

classes must also be considered, as must the teacher unions' preference for larger membership rolls and more dues. See Lakdawalla, "Quantity over Quality," *Education Next* 2, no. 3 (Fall 2002):67.

6. "People preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards, to demonstrate an aptitude for teaching, and to demonstrate competence in an academic discipline. Colleges and universities offering teacher preparation programs should be judged by how well their graduates meet these criteria." U.S. Department of Education, *The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, Washington, D.C., April 1983.
7. *Education Week*, "Teaching As a Profession," 2000. [http://www.nationalissues.com/education/teacher\\_issues/overview\\_article.html](http://www.nationalissues.com/education/teacher_issues/overview_article.html).
8. It must be noted that the NBPTS's emphasis on "peer review" partially adheres to the Excellence Commission's second recommendation concerning teachers. The Commission never really explained what else besides peer review should be part of the teacher evaluation system. Note, too, however, that the review system contemplated in *A Nation at Risk* included "improving or terminating" "poor" teachers, not just rewarding good ones.
9. Ray Marshall and Marc Tucker, *Thinking for a Living* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), especially chapter 8, "Restructuring the Schools for High Performance: Tough Road to Excellence."
10. In the past several years, the NCATE has been challenged, albeit not strongly, by the advent of the Teacher Education Accreditation Council, about which more can be learned at <http://www.teac.org/about/index.asp>.
11. Marshall and Tucker, *op. cit.*, 113–14.
12. See, for example, the review of this body of research by Kate Walsh, *Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality* (Baltimore: The Abell Foundation, 2001). <http://www.abell.org/TeacherCertReconsidered.pdf>.
13. See Marshall and Tucker, *op. cit.*, especially 114–124. Eric Hanushek notes that the effects of the Rochester school reform effort have never been seriously evaluated. See Eric A. Hanushek, "Outcomes, Costs, and Incentives in Schools" in *Improving America's Schools: The Role of Incentives*, ed. Eric A. Hanushek and Dale W. Jorgenson (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1996), 44.
14. For expert renderings of this convoluted story, see E. D. Hirsch Jr., *The*

*Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, (New York: Doubleday, 1996); and Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

15. Prominent exceptions included the American Federation of Teachers and the Council of Great City Schools.
16. See for example, Charles Kershner, Julia Koppich, and Joseph G. Weeres, *United Mind Workers: Unions and Teaching in the Knowledge Society* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).
17. After much debate, Congress ended up with a blurry and evasive definition of "highly qualified" that still defers substantially to the traditional "inputs" approach.
18. For one account of their reaction, see Julie Blair, "Critics Claim Missteps on Execution of Title II," *Education Week*, 7 August 2002, 30,35.
19. U.S. Department of Education, *op. cit.*, 40. See also Secretary Paige's interview with Lawrence McQuillan, "Nonteachers Suggested for U.S. Shortage," *USA Today*, 17 September 2002.
20. More about the Teacher Advancement Program can be learned at <http://www.mff.org/tap/>. Also see Lowell Milken, *Growth of the Teacher Advancement Program: Teaching As the Opportunity 2002* (Santa Monica: Milken Family Foundation, July 2002). <http://www.mff.org/publications/publications.taf?page?03>.