

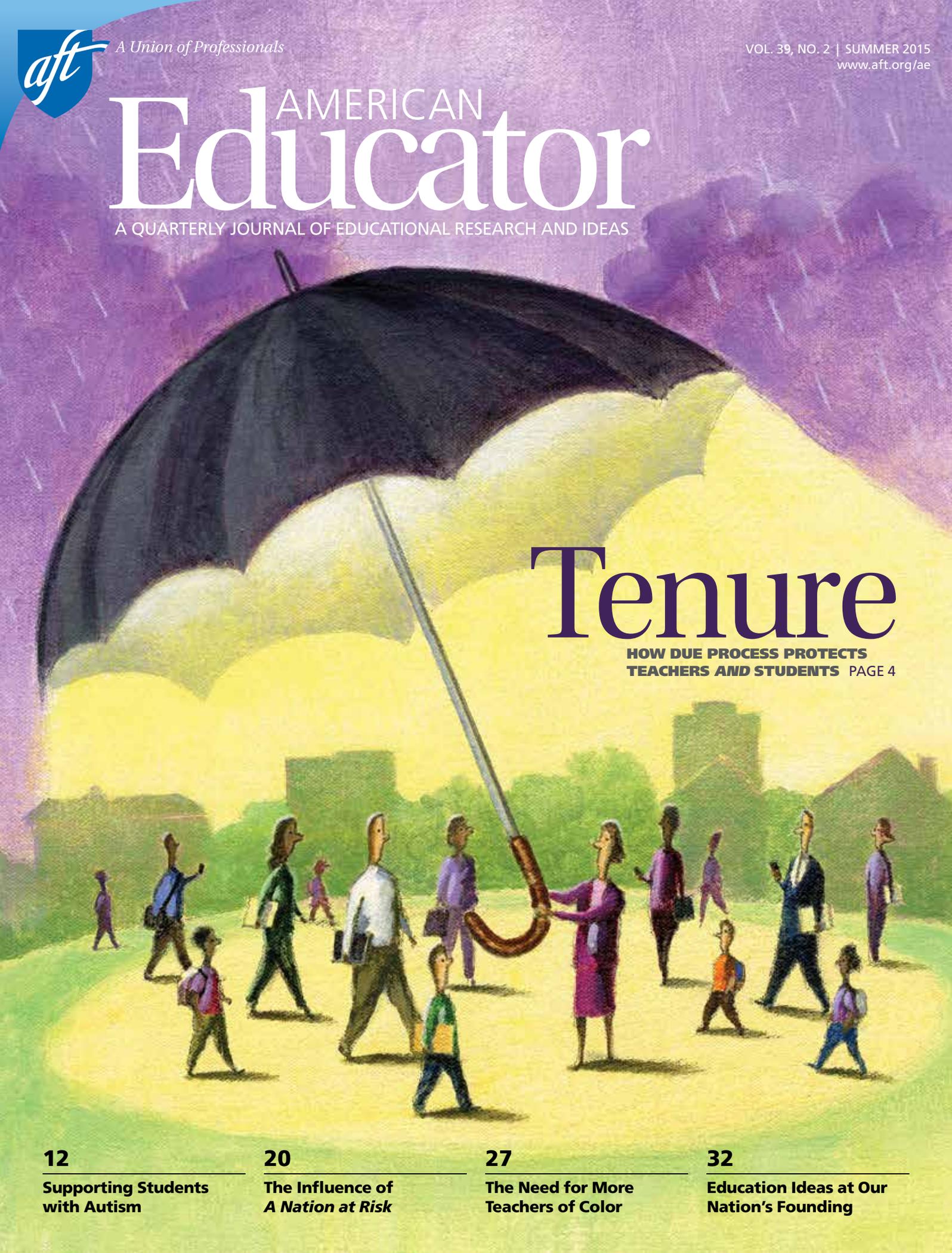


A Union of Professionals

VOL. 39, NO. 2 | SUMMER 2015  
www.aft.org/ae

# AMERICAN Educator

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IDEAS



# Tenure

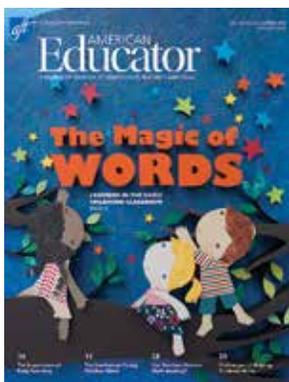
**HOW DUE PROCESS PROTECTS  
TEACHERS AND STUDENTS PAGE 4**

**12**  
**Supporting Students  
with Autism**

**20**  
**The Influence of  
*A Nation at Risk***

**27**  
**The Need for More  
Teachers of Color**

**32**  
**Education Ideas at Our  
Nation's Founding**



## Summer 2014

### Teaching Vocabulary in the Early Childhood Classroom

BY SUSAN B. NEUMAN AND TANYA S. WRIGHT

### The Importance of Early Learning

BY CHRYS DOUGHERTY

### Why Curriculum Content Is Like Oxygen

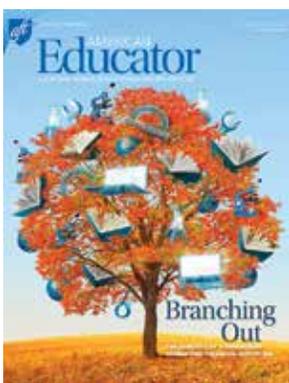
BY CAROLYN GOSSE AND LISA HANSEL

### Ask the Cognitive Scientist: Can Teachers Help Reduce Math Anxiety?

BY SIAN L. BEILock AND DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

### The Challenge of Helping Students Write

BY ANDY WADDELL



## Fall 2014

### The Case for High-Quality CTE

BY JAMES R. STONE III

### Not Your Father's Shop Class: Bridging the Academic-Vocational Divide

BY MIKE ROSE

### A Toledo Public School Prepares Students for College and Career

BY JENNIFER DUBIN

### Combining Rigorous Academics with Career Training

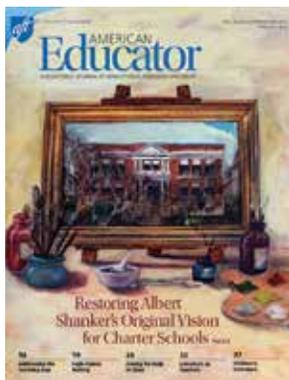
BY ROBERT B. SCHWARTZ

### Notes from New York City

BY MICHAEL MULGREW

### Reframing, Reimagining, and Reinvesting in CTE

BY JOHN H. JACKSON AND JONATHAN HASAK



## Winter 2014–2015

### Restoring Shanker's Vision for Charter Schools

BY RICHARD D. KAHLBERG AND HALLEY POTTER

### Want to Close the Achievement Gap? Close the Teaching Gap

BY LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND

### Pushing Back Against High Stakes for Students with Disabilities

BY BIANCA TANIS

### Student Problem-Solving in Elementary Classrooms

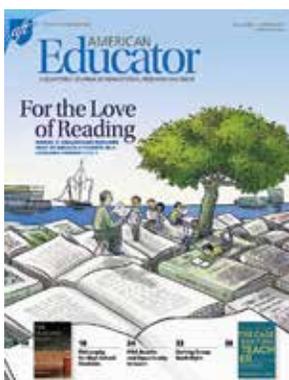
BY JESSICA CALARCO

### How Librarians Support Students and Schools

BY JOANNA FREEMAN

### The Surprising Depth and Complexity of Children's Literature

BY SETH LERER



## Spring 2015

### Engaging Students in Reading

BY DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

### Quieting the Teacher Wars

BY DANA GOLDSTEIN

### How a Philosophy Curriculum Took Shape and Took Off

BY DIANA SENECHAL

### Puzzling Out PISA

BY WILLIAM H. SCHMIDT AND NATHAN A. BURROUGHS

### Group Work for the Good

BY TOM BENNETT

### Helping Educators Create Meaningful Change

BY FREDERICK M. HESS





## Why Unions Must Keep Up the Fight

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

WHEN I WAS A TEACHER at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn, New York, my principal suggested I use my skills as a lawyer to teach a street law class. One year, I decided to take a chance and set up a mock housing court. I was so excited that the kids were really prepared, had learned how to interview witnesses, how to elicit facts, how to argue the law—in other words, how to engage in project-based instruction with a real-life approach—that I invited the assistant principal to come watch. My kids were so engaged that in some ways it was like New York City Housing Court. Next thing I knew, my assistant principal was telling me the lesson wasn't good because it was rowdy and I could have lost control of my class. I fought back, and because I had legal experience I had the benefit of the doubt. Many teachers don't. That's why due process is so important.

As Rick Kahlenberg clearly explains in this issue's cover story, due process, also known as tenure, gives teachers the ability to fight for necessary services for their kids. It's an effective tool to recruit and retain teachers. And while it should never become a cloak for incompetence—if someone can't teach after being prepared and supported, he or she shouldn't be in our profession—it's what teachers need to do their jobs well.

The fight we're in to protect teachers' due process rights—in California, New York, and, if the rumors are true, states like Minnesota and New Mexico—is about a fundamental freedom that strikes at the heart of what it means to be a teacher, to create, to innovate, to find new ways to light the spark in the minds of our kids that could become the fire that sets them on a path to a brighter future. We all remember that moment, or that teacher. Due process protects those moments and those teachers.

However, this attack on the teaching profession isn't about what's best for kids. It's part of a larger effort to dismantle

public education, teacher voice, and the labor movement—a coordinated campaign led by wealthy and anti-union interests like the Koch brothers, Americans for Prosperity, and the hedge funders. It's ultimately about our economy, our democracy, and who holds the power.

Our adversaries don't want a virtuous cycle that gives everyone a shot at the American dream, with access to a high-quality public education, jobs with fair wages, and a secure retirement—all of

Court may decide to consider related issues in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*. The plaintiffs in *Friedrichs* aim to break unions by eliminating the fee paid by those who have union benefits but don't join. Agency fee reflects the cost to the union of representing all workers in a bargaining unit. It's also known as fair share, because it's only fair if everyone who benefits from the services a union provides also chips in to cover the cost of those benefits.

## These court cases are part of a growing effort to silence working people and stifle their economic aspirations.

which help each generation climb the ladder of opportunity and help our communities thrive. They don't want to change the status quo of the greatest income inequality since the Great Depression. So they seek to defund and deprofessionalize public education.

This relentless assault continues in our nation's statehouses—with governors like Scott Walker, Bruce Rauner, and even Andrew Cuomo—stacking the deck against students, families, and educators. This relentless assault continues in the courts with cases that would “defund unions, destroy solidarity, and erase the benefits of union membership—even while bizarrely admitting that union membership does, in fact, bring workers ... strong benefits,” as Moshe Marvit wrote in *In These Times*.

Take a recent court case filed in California. In *Bain v. California Teachers Association*, the argument isn't about whether unions provide much-needed benefits. Instead, the plaintiffs are claiming that as nonmembers of a union, they should still get the full benefits of belonging to a union, for free.

On a national level, the U.S. Supreme

These court cases are part of a growing effort to silence working people and stifle their economic aspirations. With inequality in America reaching historic heights and economic polarization at its most extreme, people are increasingly turning to the labor movement for fairness, opportunity, justice, and real change.

Union members have higher wages, access to healthcare, a secure retirement, and due process. This has a multiplier effect, invigorating communities and growing the middle class. Our opponents understand this. They are stepping up the assault in our nation's legislatures and in our courts because they know that unions and a strong public sector help create shared prosperity.

Which is why we must keep up the fight. Because as these attacks have made clear, power never yields willingly.

We've weathered these storms before, and we've come out stronger for it—by standing together. This may not be a fight we sought, but it's also not a fight we intend to lose. The future of the middle class, the promise of high-quality public education, and the strength of our democracy all depend on us.



## 4 Tenure

### *How Due Process Protects Teachers and Students*

BY RICHARD D. KAHLBERG

For more than 100 years, tenure has provided due process rights to teachers who have demonstrated competence after a probationary period. But tenure is under attack, with critics wrongfully portraying it as a job for life. While tenure laws were established to protect teachers from favoritism and to ensure students were educated free from political whims, such laws remain necessary today given the fixation on high-stakes testing and the tying of students' test scores to teacher evaluations. Yet corporate reformers have seized on tenure as the root cause of educational inequality in an attempt to diminish the power of unions and to detract from the real threats to public education: poverty and segregation.

## 12 Connecting the Dots

### *Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

BY SAMUEL L. ODOM AND  
CONNIE WONG

As the rates of students with autism spectrum disorder soar, educators are increasingly teaching such students but may be unsure how to help them succeed. An extensive research review has found that 27 specific techniques can promote the development and learning of students with autism spectrum disorder.

today and are ones that teachers must confront if they are to successfully advocate for their students and push back against top-down reforms.

## 24 A Closer Look at the Commission's Work

BY TOMMY TOMLINSON

## 27 The Professional Educator

### *The Need for More Teachers of Color*

BY JOSÉ LUIS VILSON

A New York City teacher recounts his path to the profession and discusses the importance of attracting and retaining a diverse educator workforce.

## 20 Escaping the Shadow

### *A Nation at Risk and Its Far-Reaching Influence*

BY JAL MEHTA

Published in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* continues to inform education policy. The report declared public education in crisis, criticized the performance of American students compared with their international peers, and called for more educator accountability. Such claims persist

## 32 A Window to the Past

### *What an Essay Contest Reveals about Early American Education*

BY BENJAMIN JUSTICE

In the 1790s, the American Philosophical Society sponsored an essay contest to solicit opinions from the public about how the United States should educate its citizens. Contest submissions reveal what education ideas were percolating at our nation's founding.

## OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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AMERICAN EDUCATOR (ISSN 0148-432X, USPS 008-462) is published quarterly by the American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079. Phone: 202-879-4400. [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)

Letters to the editor may be sent to the address above or to [ae@aft.org](mailto:ae@aft.org).

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**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to American Educator, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices.

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Cover illustration:  
PAUL ZWOLAK

## Group Work as an Option

I cannot thank you enough for the article by Tom Bennett, “Group Work for the Good,” which appeared in the Spring 2015 issue of *American Educator*. Due to the rubric adopted by my state, the K-5 teachers in our school district are required to use group work in every lesson, and we lose points on our evaluation if it is not included. I teach music to students once or twice a week, and group work is required of me as well. Though it is appropriate at times, group work is only one of the many tools available to teachers, as opposed to something that we do just for the sake of doing it.

—KATHY LOOMIS  
Edison Elementary School  
Hammond, IN

## Librarians Can Help

As a high school librarian, I was amazed that the Spring issue’s cover article, “For the Love of Reading” by Daniel T. Willingham, did not once mention the important role of the school librarian. Most of the impediments to reading that the author mentions could be addressed by having a trained librarian in every school with a budget to curate an appropriate collection of books for the children of that school.

Willingham writes about providing students with free books to engage them and help their reading improve. We school librarians have been doing that very thing—and we see the positive



impact on our students—even though we struggle with adequate funding to support our work.

Willingham also writes about the importance of classroom teachers “really knowing each child” so they can select books based on a student’s interests and needs. But asking classroom teachers to

take this on given their myriad responsibilities is like asking them to teach art or music or a foreign language.

The author neglects to mention that school librarians are specialists in children’s literature, who know how to find the right book for any child. We actually read children’s literature widely to advise our students what to read.

Believe me, if a child wants a certain book, we will find a way to provide it.

—SARA SAYIGH  
Chicago Public Schools  
Chicago, IL

## Editors’ reply:

We agree that the school librarian is an important person in a child’s reading life. Although Daniel T. Willingham’s article did not mention it, his book, *Raising Kids Who Read: What Parents and Teachers Can Do*, from which his article is adapted, does highlight the role that librarians play in engaging students to read. “Librarians are a vastly underappreciated resource,” Willingham writes in chapter 10. “They have wide knowledge of and passion for books, and are eager to help.” For more on the work of school librarians, see Joanna Freeman’s article “Beyond the Stacks” in the Winter 2014–2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/winter2014-2015/freeman](http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2014-2015/freeman).



As the article “A Window to the Past” on page 32 of this issue makes clear, educating the mass of American citizens was a widely debated topic at the birth of our nation. To that end, an essay contest run by the American Philosophical Society in the 1790s sought to gather the education opinions of ordinary people.

To paraphrase the contest question,

*the society asked contestants to “design the best system of education for the United States, appropriate for the wealthy as well as the poor.” Submissions offered a range of ideas: focusing on the liberal arts, teaching children how to read and write, instructing them in morality, creating national textbooks, establishing a national university, making public education compulsory for boys and men, and funding schools through a property tax, among others.*

*What if a similar contest were held today? How would you as an educator answer? Email us in a few short paragraphs at [ae@aft.org](mailto:ae@aft.org) with your thoughts on the ways our country could and should make public education “the best system of education” for all. As teachers, you know firsthand what works for your students. We’d love to hear from you.*

—EDITORS

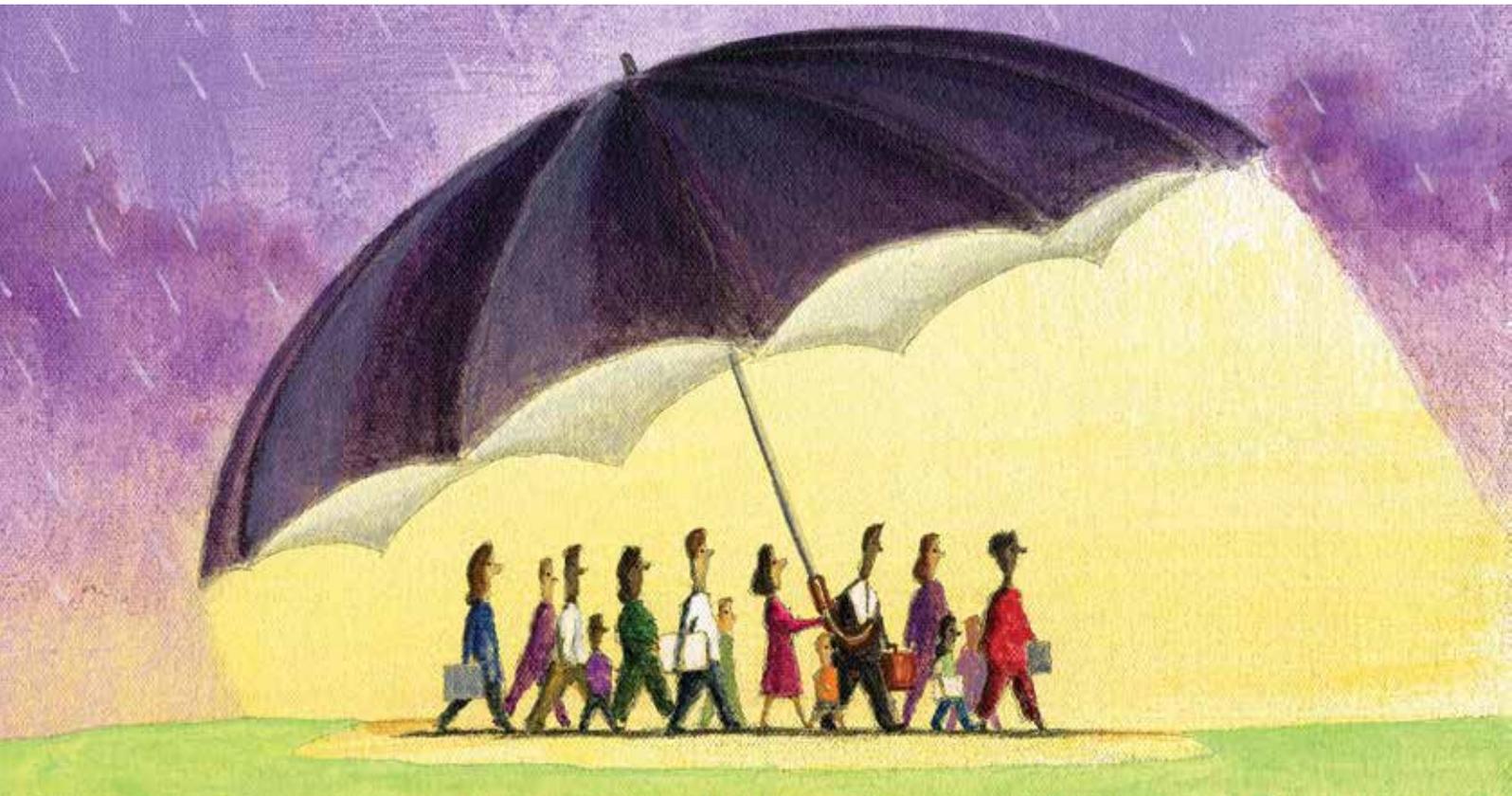
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# Tenure

## How Due Process Protects Teachers and Students



BY RICHARD D. KAHLBERG

**T**eacher tenure rights, first established more than a century ago, are under unprecedented attack. Tenure—which was enacted to protect students’ education and those who provide it—is under assault from coast to coast, in state legislatures, in state courtrooms, and in the media.

In June 2014, in the case of *Vergara v. California*, a state court judge struck down teacher tenure and seniority laws as a violation of the state’s constitution.\* Former CNN and NBC journalist Campbell Brown has championed a copycat case, *Wright v. New York*, challenging the Empire State’s tenure law (which was consolidated with another New York case challenging tenure, *Daivids v. New York*). Similar cases are reportedly in the works in several other states.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, with incentives from the federal Race to the Top

program, 18 states have recently weakened tenure laws, and Florida and North Carolina sought to eliminate tenure entirely.<sup>2</sup> According to the Education Commission of the States, in order to give greater weight to so-called performance metrics, 10 states prohibited using tenure or seniority as a primary factor in layoff decisions in 2014, up from five in 2012.<sup>3</sup>

Leading media outlets have joined in the drumbeat against tenure. A 2010 *Newsweek* cover story suggested that “the key to saving American education” is: “We must fire bad teachers.”<sup>4</sup> In 2014, the cover of *Time* magazine showed a judge’s mallet crushing an apple. The headline, referencing the *Vergara* case, read, “Rotten Apples: It’s Nearly Impossible to Fire a Bad Teacher; Some Tech Millionaires May Have Found a Way to Change That.”<sup>5</sup>

Amidst this sea of negative publicity for educators, journalist Dana Goldstein wrote that “the ineffective tenured teacher has emerged as a feared character,” like “crack babies or welfare queens” from earlier eras.<sup>6</sup> Labor attorney Thomas Geoghegan quipped that the “bad teacher” meme is so strong that one can imagine a young Marlon Brando, altering his famous line from *On the Waterfront* to say: “I ... I could have been a contender—but I got that old Miss Grundy in the fourth grade!”<sup>7</sup>

Of course, conservatives have long attacked policies such as

*Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, is the author of Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy (2007) and a coauthor of A Smarter Charter: Finding What Works for Charter Schools and Public Education (2014). Portions of this article draw upon his articles “Abolish Tenure?” (Chronicle of Higher Education, March 22, 2012) and “Tenure Is Not the Problem” (Slate, June 13, 2014).*

\*California is appealing the decision.

tenure that constrain the ability of managers to fire whomever they want, but the latest assaults on tenure have invoked liberal egalitarian ideals. In the *Vergara* case, Judge Rolf Treu, a Republican appointee, claimed that the case, funded by a Silicon Valley millionaire, was about championing the rights of poor and minority students. Treu made a big show of comparing his decision weakening teacher tenure rights to the landmark cases of *Brown v. Board of Education* (which promoted school desegregation) and *Serrano v. Priest* (which required equity in education spending).<sup>8</sup> Treu used a serious and pressing problem—that low-income students often have the weakest and least experienced teachers—not as an argument for addressing segregation or inadequate financial resources but instead as the rationale for weakening tenure rights.



Curiously, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan endorsed the decision, as did leading liberal lawyers like Laurence Tribe and David Boies. Broad Foundation President Bruce Reed, a former staffer to Vice President Joe Biden, suggested that the ruling was “another big victory” for students of color, in the tradition of *Brown*.<sup>9</sup> (Other liberals had a more sober response. Erwin Chemerinsky, a constitutional law scholar and dean of the University of California, Irvine, School of Law, for example, has criticized Treu’s reasoning, arguing that attacking tenure will do little to improve school quality.<sup>10</sup>)

All the attention to tenure—especially from progressives—raises an important question: What is it exactly? The legal definition is simple: tenure provides those teachers who have demonstrated competence after a probationary period with due process rights before being fired. It is not, as critics contend, a guaranteed job for life. As I explain in this article, historically, tenure laws developed to protect teachers from favoritism and nepotism and to ensure that students received an education subject to neither political whims nor arbitrary administrative decisions. Tenure protections are still necessary today, especially given the current fixation on high-stakes testing and the linking of students’ test scores to teacher evaluations. I believe that rather than doing away with tenure, dismissal procedures could be mended to strike the right balance between providing fairness to good teachers and facilitating the removal of incompetent ones. I also believe there are innovative ways to connect low-income students with great teachers. Yet, it continues to

amaze me that with all the problems in education, we are so fixated on the issue of teacher tenure. What is really going on?

## What Is Tenure?

American public school teachers are typically awarded tenure after a probationary period of about three years.<sup>11</sup> Once a teacher has earned tenure, also known as due process, he or she has a right to know why a discharge is being sought by the employer and a right to have the issue decided by an impartial body. In the words of the University of Pennsylvania’s Richard Ingersoll, “Typically, tenure guarantees that teachers must be given reason, documentation, and a hearing prior to being fired.”<sup>12</sup> The practice recognizes that in a mass profession like public school teaching, there will be some poor performers among the ranks of tenured teach-

Tenure provides teachers who have demonstrated competence after a probationary period with due process rights before being fired.

ers. Tenure does not prevent their termination, but it does require that employers show “just cause” (a reasonable ground for action) for termination.

Critics claim that due process has, in practice, turned into “uber due process,” as Judge Treu suggested.<sup>13</sup> In *Wright v. New York*, plaintiffs’ attorney Jay Lefkowitz cited a study from 2004–2008, which claimed that legal proceedings to remove tenure from teachers for pedagogical incompetence dragged on for an average of 830 days, at an average cost of \$313,000.<sup>14</sup> The length and cost of proceedings means very few principals will pursue termination cases, the argument runs. Hoover Institution critic Terry Moe claims that having tenure means teachers who “don’t murder someone or molest a child or stop showing up for work” are “assured of being able to continue in their job for as long as they want. ... America’s private sector workers can only dream of such a thing: a guaranteed, totally secure job.”<sup>15</sup>

In places like Chicago, the idea that tenure provides a “totally secure job”<sup>†</sup> would presumably surprise tenured teachers who were fired under the federally funded “turnaround schools” program, in which at least 50 percent of teachers, including those with tenure, were replaced.<sup>16</sup> Overall, Goldstein reports that in 2007, 2.1 percent of American public school teachers, including tenured teachers, were fired for cause.<sup>17</sup> She notes there are no comparable data for the pri-

<sup>†</sup>In other cities, such as New York City, tenured teachers can be transferred to other schools or placed into a reserve pool, but they don’t lose employment.

vate sector,<sup>18</sup> but in 2012, private sector companies lost less than 2 percent of their workforce through firings and layoffs combined.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the misunderstanding about the meaning of teacher tenure in the K–12 setting may stem from the fact that the term “tenure” is also applied to university professors. But as David Cohen, a veteran teacher, noted in the *Washington Post*, tenure for K–12 educators is “not tenure, in the sense that university professors have tenure,” which is typically won after seven or eight years and comes with stronger protections.<sup>20</sup>

While it is certainly true that some K–12 termination proceedings drag on too long at too great an expense, in many places, significant reforms have been enacted in recent years. Although Lefkowitz cited an average of 830 days for proceedings in the New York tenure case,

Tenure rights came out of the progressive good-government movement as a way to improve the quality of teaching and education for children.

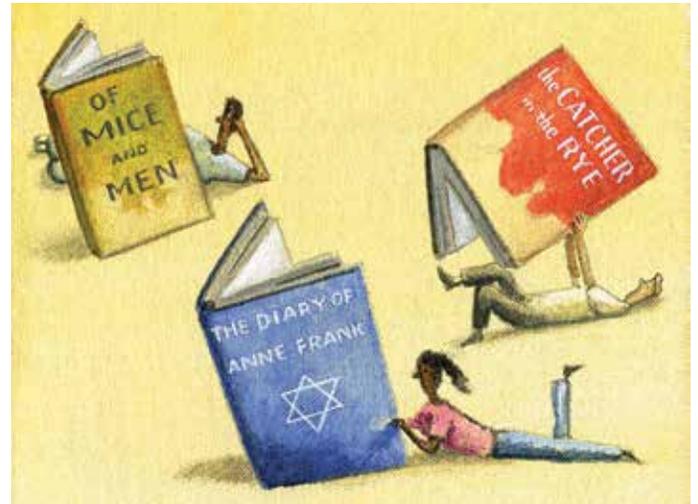
a more recent analysis using New York State Education Department data found that in 2013, disciplinary cases took, on average, 177 days statewide.<sup>21</sup> In New York City, United Federation of Teachers data show that the median length of proceedings is 105 days.<sup>22</sup> For cases of alleged misconduct and wrongdoing (as opposed to incompetence), the AFT in 2011 adopted expert Kenneth Feinberg’s recommendations for an expedited 100-day process.<sup>23</sup> In 2012, Connecticut adopted an 85-day policy for terminations, unless there is agreement from both sides to extend the process.<sup>24</sup>

### Why Was Tenure Developed?

Teacher tenure began in New Jersey in 1909.<sup>25</sup> Why was it first adopted? From the critics of tenure, one might imagine teacher tenure being dreamed up by union “hacks” figuring out a way to protect incompetent members. But in fact, tenure rights came out of the progressive good-government movement as a way to improve the quality of teaching and education for children. New Jersey’s law drew on the well-regarded Prussian education system and was backed by Harvard President Charles William Eliot in New York City, Dana Goldstein writes, “as a clean government reform after decades of politically influenced teacher appointments, in which schools were part of the patronage machine.”<sup>26</sup> Education historian Diane Ravitch notes that before tenure was adopted in New York City, ward officers could dismiss an entire staff of qualified teachers and replace them with their own choices.<sup>27</sup> With tenure, as former AFT President Albert Shanker noted, “An elected politician can’t say, ‘I’m going to fire you because you didn’t support me in the last election.’”<sup>28</sup>

But patronage hiring (and firing) was not the only abuse tenure sought to prevent. Tenure rights also were designed to shield teachers from improper political influence over their activities both outside and inside the classroom. Some politicians, for example, punished teachers for membership in a union. In 1917, after the Chicago Board of Education president, Jacob Loeb, fired teachers for union activism, good-government reformers allied with unionists to pass tenure protections for teachers.<sup>29</sup>

During World War I, a teacher who failed to buy enough Liberty Bonds in support of the war was placed under scrutiny in certain districts, Swarthmore College historian Marjorie Murphy writes. “If she failed to express enthusiasm for the war, or intimated that war was anything but glorious, she stood a good chance of dismissal.”<sup>30</sup>



Jewish socialist teachers in New York City who opposed the war were fired under the broad rubric of “conduct unbecoming a teacher.”<sup>31</sup> Quaker teachers were also fired because of their pacifist objections to the war.<sup>32</sup> Later, during the civil rights movement, half of southern states voted to revoke teacher licenses for membership in organizations like the NAACP that supported school integration.<sup>33</sup>

Tenure was also designed to protect academic freedom inside the classroom. The Scopes trial in the 1920s, for example, highlighted the need to protect the ability of teachers to educate students about evolution in the face of opposition from religious fundamentalists.

In addition, tenure provided a bulwark against sex and race discrimination. During the Great Depression, when jobs were scarce, women teachers were often fired once they were married. According to Murphy, one-third of large cities in 1930 actually had laws prohibiting marriage for female teachers.<sup>34</sup> In states with tenure, female teachers were protected.

Tenure also provided a way to shield black teachers from racist principals. Indeed, Dana Goldstein notes that in 1955, in reaction to *Brown v. Board of Education*, several southern states—Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—repealed tenure laws in order to allow white officials to easily fire black teachers in newly integrated schools.<sup>35</sup>

### Why Tenure Is Still Necessary Today

Some critics of tenure argue that while such policies were once necessary, the passage of civil service laws to protect against patron-

age hiring, civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race and sex, and labor laws to protect union organizing, adequately address the abuses against which tenure was meant to shield teachers. But tenure laws supplement civil service, civil rights, and labor laws in two important respects.

First, tenure significantly strengthens legal protections embodied in civil service, civil rights, and labor laws by shifting to the employer the burden to prove the termination is justified. Moshe Marvit, a labor and civil rights attorney as well as a Century Foundation fellow, notes, “Civil rights laws may protect teachers from being fired because of race or sex, but under a civil rights frame it is still incumbent upon the teacher to prove that the employer acted the way it did because of race or sex. Under a tenure model, the employer must prove it has cause to fire the teacher. Flipping that burden is huge, both in terms of expenditure of resources and possibilities of success.”<sup>36</sup>

Second, tenure protects a range of discriminatory firings not covered under race and gender antidiscrimination laws. As Leo Casey, executive director of the Albert Shanker Institute, notes, tenure, by requiring a just cause for termination, guards against an employer’s discrimination based on a teacher’s “political views, her friends, or the fact that she is an experienced teacher, earning a higher salary, in times of austerity and budget cuts.”<sup>37</sup>

Most Americans think this type of discrimination is already illegal. Pauline Kim, of Washington University School of Law, conducted polls of workers in California, Missouri, and New York and found that approximately 90 percent of employees thought it was unlawful to fire someone based on personal dislike, and more than 80 percent thought it was illegal to fire an employee and replace him or her with someone willing to work for less.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, with the exception of certain categories of discrimination—such as race, gender, and national origin—employers are generally free to fire nontenured employees for any reason. As Cynthia Estlund, of New York University School of Law, writes, “Absent a contractual provision for job security or a prohibited discriminatory or retaliatory motive, it remains true in every American jurisdiction, except Montana, that employees are subject to discharge without justification.”<sup>39</sup>

While most American workers are “at will” employees by custom, there is a strong case to be made that they should have due process rights of the type that Montana citizens, and most union members, have. As Casey writes in *Education Week*, due process is “the foundation of all other rights, because, without it, individuals can be penalized for exercising such rights as freedom of expression, assembly, press, and association.”<sup>40</sup> If you can be fired for exercising your free speech rights, most people will stay quiet. And it’s fundamentally unfair when experienced employees are laid off to make room for new, cheaper ones.

But the argument for tenure—and the requirement of “just cause” firing—is especially compelling in the case of educators. Teachers feel enormous pressure from parents, principals, and school board members to take actions that may not be in the best interests of students. Teacher and blogger Peter Greene notes that because teachers “answer to a hundred different bosses,” they “need their own special set of protections.”<sup>41</sup> Because all adults, from parents to school board members, have themselves attended school, they feel qualified to weigh in on how educators should teach, while they would never tell a surgeon or an auto mechanic what to

do. Richard Casagrande, a lawyer for the New York State United Teachers, made a profound point when he said during recent litigation that tenure laws are “not a gift to teachers. These laws empower teachers to teach well.”<sup>42</sup>

To begin with, teachers need tenure to stand up to outsiders who would instruct them on how to teach politically sensitive topics. A science teacher in a fundamentalist community who wants to teach evolution, not pseudoscientific creationism or intelligent design, needs tenure protection. So does a sex-ed teacher who doesn’t want to be fired for giving students practical information about how to

## Teachers need tenure to stand up to outsiders who would instruct them on how to teach politically sensitive topics.

avoid getting HIV. So does an English teacher who wants to assign a controversial and thought-provoking novel.<sup>43</sup>

These concerns are hardly theoretical. In 2005, the Kansas Board of Education adopted science standards that challenged mainstream evolutionary theory and was cheered by proponents of intelligent design.<sup>44</sup> (The standard was later repealed.<sup>45</sup>) In 2010, conservatives on the Texas Board of Education proposed renaming the slave trade the “Atlantic triangular trade,” an effort that was later dropped.<sup>46</sup> And in 2012, the Utah legislature passed (and the governor vetoed) a bill to ban instruction on homosexuality and contraception.<sup>47</sup>

The importance of academic freedom for K–12 teachers is sometimes underestimated. In 2012, the editors of the *New Republic* said they supported tenure for college faculty because universities are “our country’s idea factories.” They continued, “But this rationale doesn’t apply at the K–12 level.” Really? While university professors “explore ideas,” so do teachers. Every day, they seek to spark ideas, sometimes controversial ones, in the tender minds of young students, and they need protection from school board members who may overreach. Indeed, shouldn’t we prize elementary and secondary teachers who encourage students to think for themselves or come up with solutions not found in any textbook?

Tenure also protects teachers from well-connected parents who may push their own children’s interests to the detriment of others. Tenure protects teachers with high standards from the wrath of parents angry that their children received poor grades or were disciplined for misbehavior. Without tenure, will a teacher give a failing grade to the son of an influential parent who might shorten that teacher’s career?<sup>48</sup> Without tenure, will the teacher be able to resist the powerful parent who wants his or her mediocre daughter to get the lead part in the play?<sup>49</sup> Without tenure, what happens when uninformed but powerful parents demand that a highly trained

special education teacher exclude students with special needs from the classroom?

Tenure also allows teachers to stand up and openly disagree with a boss pushing a faddish but unproven educational practice, without the fear of being fired. In Holyoke, Massachusetts, for example, administrators asked teachers to post student test scores on the walls of classrooms. When an untenured English teacher (who was also a union official) objected publicly in 2014 that this was an unsound tactic and was humiliating to students, he was fired, despite having previously received excellent ratings.<sup>50</sup> Tenure would have ensured a fair process.

More generally, tenure empowers teachers to become more involved in school decisions. Research finds that when teachers have a say in how schools are run, they are more likely to be invested in the school and to stay longer, and are more engaged with colleagues in cooperative work.<sup>51</sup> Having this sort of strong culture, furthermore, is linked to increased academic achievement for students.<sup>52</sup> By contrast, schools that lack teacher voice have higher turnover, which is wasteful and disruptive to student learning.<sup>53</sup> As Leo Casey notes, due process allows a teacher “to speak up for her students, to advocate for a different educational approach or a different school policy, to report administrative wrongdoing, to criticize the actions of the district or school leadership, and to be involved with her union.”<sup>54</sup> An attack on tenure is really an attack on any semblance of workplace democracy.

Eliminating tenure reduces teacher voice in a very direct way. Peter Greene argues in the *Huffington Post*: “It’s not the firing. It’s the threat of firing” that shifts the power balance between teachers and administrators. “The threat of firing allows other people to control every day of that teacher’s career. ... It takes all the powerful people a teacher must deal with and arms each one with a nuclear device.” Greene concludes, “The biggest problem with the destruction of tenure is not that a handful of teachers will lose their jobs, but that entire buildings full of teachers will lose the freedom to do their jobs well.”<sup>55</sup>

Teacher tenure is an important feature of American public education for yet another reason: it is a significant carrot for attracting qualified candidates to the teaching profession. Teacher recruitment and retention is difficult, in part because of relatively low pay for college-educated professionals (\$57,000 a year was the mean salary in 2012<sup>56</sup>). In the 1940s, female teachers earned more than 70 percent of all female college-educated workers, while male teachers earned slightly more than the typical male graduate. Today, teacher pay is in the 30th percentile for male college graduates and the 40th percentile for female college graduates.<sup>57</sup> Overall, American teachers make 68 percent of what other college-educated Americans make, on average, whereas in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, the average is 88 percent.<sup>58</sup> South Korean teachers have 250 percent of the local buying power of American teachers.<sup>59</sup>

Part of what offsets low American salaries—and allows American schools to continue to attract talent—is tenure. The polling of teachers by the Hoover Institution’s Terry Moe suggests that “tenure is a highly valuable form of compensation.” In a 2003 survey, Moe found that a majority of teachers would need to be paid 50 percent more to give up tenure. Writing in 2011, Moe concluded that with average teacher salaries above \$50,000, “most teachers see the security of tenure as being worth *tens of thousands of dollars a*

*year*.”<sup>60</sup> Polling by Public Agenda and Education Sector came to similar conclusions.<sup>61</sup> This is not to suggest that the existence of tenure excuses low teacher pay; other countries provide higher pay and tenure to attract the very best talent. But the basic law of supply and demand suggests that if you take away tenure, school districts would be faced with one of two choices: accept a diminished pool of applicants, or significantly increase salaries in order to keep quality at its current levels.

Because the latter option is not in the cards, Ken Futernick, of California State University, Sacramento, notes that “administrators’ power to fire teachers without real due process will only exacerbate the teacher recruitment problem.”<sup>62</sup> University of California, Berkeley, economist Jesse Rothstein’s research found that “firing bad teachers actually makes it harder to recruit new ones” because new teachers don’t know whether, once on the job, they will turn out to be strong or weak educators.<sup>63</sup>

Abolishing tenure would make it especially hard to recruit in schools with lots of low-income students—the purported beneficiaries of the *Vergara* litigation. Under current accountability standards, teaching in a high-poverty school is risky because low-income students face extra obstacles and so, on average, perform less well academically than middle-class students. Strong tenure laws allow dedicated, high-quality teachers to know they are unlikely to be fired. But as Alyssa Hadley Dunn writes in the *Washington Post*, “Without due process rights, it is even less likely that qualified teachers will want to work in high-needs schools with difficult conditions, because it would also mean that students’ lower test scores could jeopardize their employment with no available recourse.”<sup>64</sup>

For all these reasons, it is not surprising that states with strong tenure laws (and strong unions to back up these laws) tend to perform better than those with weak laws. As former teacher Brian Jones wrote in the *New York Times*, “If teacher tenure is an important obstacle to achievement, Mississippi (with no teacher tenure) should have stellar schools and Massachusetts (with teacher tenure) should have failing ones. Instead, it’s the other way around.”<sup>65</sup> Likewise, some of the leading education systems in the world—Germany, Japan, and South Korea, for example—have long had tenure protections even stronger than those in the United States.<sup>66</sup>

## Can Tenure Laws Be Improved?

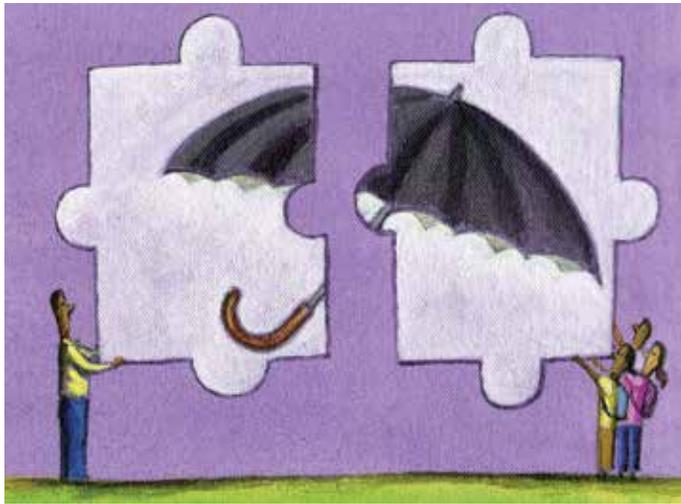
If tenure laws are fundamentally sound, that does not mean the statutes in all 50 states are perfect. Reasonable reforms are underway, but they are needed in more places in two areas: the process by which tenure is earned, and the procedure by which ineffective tenured teachers are removed.

To begin with, getting tenure should mean something, so teachers need a sufficiently long period to demonstrate skills and not everyone who tries should succeed. Most states employ a three-year probationary period, and in *Vergara*, Judge Treu was correct to note that California’s period of less than two years is an outlier\* and not optimal.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, such a short time frame is unfair to teachers, as a decision must be made before they are able to fully demonstrate their mastery of the craft.

\*As noted by Judge Treu in the *Vergara v. California* decision, California’s tenure statute requires that teachers be notified of a decision on their tenure in March of their second year on the job. The period, therefore, is in practice closer to 18 months than two years.

With respect to the rigor of tenure, there should not be a set percentage of teachers who fail, but neither should success be automatic. In 2007, 97 percent of New York City public school teachers who applied got tenure.<sup>68</sup> That's a high figure, even when one acknowledges that large numbers of teachers leave the profession before they apply for tenure, often because they realize they are not cut out for teaching or because principals counsel them out of the profession. However, over time, a set of reforms was instituted in New York City making tenure more rigorous. By the 2013–2014 school year, 60 percent of New York City teachers who were eligible for tenure received it, 38 percent were deferred, and 2 percent were denied.<sup>69</sup> It remains unclear how many of the deferred cases will eventually receive tenure—and they should not be left in limbo for too long—but clearly, achieving on-time tenure means something

So what is to be done? Many of those who believe that eliminating tenure is out of the question, and that defending teacher incompetence is equally intolerable, have converged around a third way: tenure combined with peer assistance and review. First used in Toledo, Ohio, peer assistance and review involves master teachers evaluating new and veteran educators, providing assistance, and in some cases recommending termination of employment.<sup>†</sup> Under the plan, the brainchild of Dal Lawrence, former president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers, Toledo set up a nine-member advisory board (consisting of five teachers and four administrators) to make decisions on assisting and, if necessary, terminating the employment of new and veteran teachers. Six votes are required for action.<sup>77</sup> Evaluators teach the same subject as teachers being evaluated but come from different schools.<sup>78</sup>



Many have converged around another way: tenure combined with peer assistance and review.

more for those who win it in New York City than it did in the past.

How could the procedures for removing inadequate tenured teachers be improved? With nearly 3.4 million public school teachers in the United States, there are five times as many people in the profession as there are in medicine or law.<sup>70</sup> Given those large numbers, it is inevitable that some subpar teachers will slip through the tenure process.

Teachers realize this. In a 2008 poll, almost half of teachers said they personally knew a colleague who should not be in the classroom.<sup>71</sup> In a 2014 survey, teachers said 8 percent of colleagues deserved a letter grade of D, and 5 percent an F.<sup>72</sup>

Union heads also acknowledge the situation. These leaders serve not only the relatively small number of incompetent teachers in the system but the far greater number of strong teachers who want underperforming colleagues out of the profession. As Shanker noted years ago, “Teachers have to live with the results of other people’s bad teaching—the students who don’t know anything.”<sup>73</sup> As far back as 2004, AFT President Randi Weingarten, president of the United Federation of Teachers at the time, declared, “This is a union that is not about just keeping people. We are about keeping qualified people.”<sup>74</sup>

In a 2008 poll, 66 percent of teachers said they would favor their local union playing a role in guiding ineffective teachers out of the profession.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, teachers suggest in polls that they don’t want to go to the other extreme, and they oppose eliminating tenure by a margin of 77–23 percent.<sup>76</sup>

At first, peer review was hugely controversial. When Shanker endorsed the concept in 1984, he estimated that only 10–20 percent of teachers supported the idea. But, he said, it was time to acknowledge “that some teachers are excellent, some are very good, some are good, and some are terrible.”<sup>79</sup> The charge that labor defends incompetent teachers was the Achilles’ heel of the teacher union movement, and labor needed a credible answer.

Peer review weeds out bad teachers in a way that enhances, rather than diminishes, the status of the teaching profession. Peer review and assistance is common among professors, doctors, and lawyers, who police themselves, as Shanker argued, and it strengthens the case for teacher involvement in other areas, like textbook selection and curriculum development.

While some critics liken union involvement in terminating teachers to the fox guarding the hen house, in practice, teachers have been even tougher on colleagues than administrators have been in several jurisdictions. In Cincinnati, which was the second city in the country to adopt peer review, 10.5 percent of new teachers were found less than satisfactory by teacher reviewers, compared with 4 percent by administrators, and 5 percent were recommended for dismissal by teachers, compared with 1.6 percent of those evaluated by principals. The same has been true in other places.<sup>80</sup> In Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, the *Wash-*

<sup>†</sup>For more on peer assistance and review, see the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/fall2008](http://www.aft.org/ae/fall2008).

*ington Post* reported in March 2012 that a peer assistance and review program had “led to the dismissal of 245 teachers and the resignation of 300” since 2001. In the decade prior to that, when peer review was not in place, only “a handful were terminated for poor performance.”<sup>81</sup>

Unfortunately, peer review has not spread as widely as it should have.<sup>82</sup> In some districts, teachers have expressed concerns about being evaluated by colleagues, and in other districts, management has not wished to share power over personnel decisions with teachers. The up-front costs of hiring new teachers to cover classes while expert consulting teachers provide peer assistance and conduct reviews can also be substantial. Fortunately, districts often recoup costs by increasing teacher retention and reducing costs of dismissal.<sup>83</sup> Especially as attacks on tenure increase, local unions could incorporate this innovative answer to the spurious charge that unions are chiefly in the business of protecting incompetent members.

## Progressives need to redouble efforts to address rising school segregation by race and, especially, by economic class.

### What Can Be Done to Connect Poor Kids and Great Teachers?

Better teacher improvement policies like peer assistance and review won't by themselves solve the genuine problem identified in *Vergara*: that low-income students, on average, get weaker teachers than more-advantaged students. Progressives need to redouble efforts to address the root problem at the heart of why poor kids often have less-qualified teachers: rising school segregation by race and, especially, by economic class.

There have always been heroic, excellent teachers in high-poverty schools. But for many teachers, the working conditions in such schools are intolerable, and the burnout rate is high. University of Pennsylvania's Ingersoll finds that 45 percent of teacher turnover takes place in 25 percent of schools—disproportionately high-poverty schools.<sup>84</sup> New data from the U.S. Department of Education affirm the powerful link between concentrated poverty and lower teacher quality. In New York state, for example, students in high-poverty schools were 22 times more likely than those in wealthier schools to have an unlicensed teacher.<sup>85</sup> The Education Trust finds that poor kids are twice as likely “to serve as training fodder for inexperienced teachers.”<sup>86</sup>

Why do high-poverty schools have a hard time attracting and retaining strong teachers? Because they often provide difficult working conditions. When you pack poor kids into environments

separate from more-affluent students, the schools generally face greater challenges, such as discipline problems, a lack of parental involvement,<sup>87</sup> and inadequate healthcare and nutrition for students, which can hinder the students' performance on academic tests. In such an environment, teachers can feel overwhelmed.

Also, the use of value-added measures, under which schools with low test scores can be closed, and the obsession with testing in general, add to the pressure on teachers because low-income students tend to perform less well than their more-affluent peers on standardized tests used to calculate such measures. As a result, teachers become frustrated with unfair evaluations of their students and themselves and so tend to leave high-poverty schools at higher rates.

In recent years, for example, when Charlotte, North Carolina, schools terminated a racial integration program, researchers found that teacher quality suffered as once-integrated schools morphed into high-poverty, mostly minority schools. As Dana



Goldstein writes, Northwestern University's C. Kirabo Jackson found that “schools that became predominantly black suffered a loss of high-quality teachers as measured by growth in students' test scores, teachers' years of experience, and scores on teacher certification tests.” Goldstein notes that “many effective nonwhite teachers” left too because they “seem to prefer working in integrated or middle-class settings.”<sup>88</sup>

So how can policymakers connect poor kids and great teachers? One possibility is to pay great teachers a salary premium to teach in high-poverty schools. To be effective, the bonus would have to be quite large, experience and research suggest. Ten years ago, scholars Eric Hanushek, John Kain, and Steven Rivkin estimated that in order to get nonminority female teachers to stay in urban schools, school officials would have to offer a salary premium of 25–43 percent for teachers with zero to five years of experience.<sup>89</sup> Likewise, a 2013 study of the federal Talent Transfer Initiative, which offered a \$20,000 bonus to effective elementary school teachers who agreed to move to low-achieving schools within the same district and stay two years, found that few teachers were interested. The study of 10 school districts in seven states found that effective teachers had a positive impact when they transferred to low-performing schools, but 78 percent didn't even fill out an application, despite the fact that the financial reward offered was far more sizeable than the typical merit aid award of

a few thousand dollars or less. “It’s a hard sell, even with \$20,000 on the table,” Steven Glazerman, of Mathematica Policy Research, which conducted the study, told *Education Week*.<sup>90</sup>

The more direct way to connect low-income students and strong teachers is by creating mixed-income schools. Rather than a district automatically assigning children to schools that mirror neighborhood segregation, students should be given an opportunity to choose among a menu of school options, and districts should honor choices with an eye to promoting economic integration. More than 80 districts, educating 4 million students, employ such socioeconomic integration policies. In places like Raleigh, North Carolina, for example, policies promote socioeconomic school integration largely through magnet school programs that attract middle-class students to attend schools with urban students. As a result, high-quality National Board Certified Teachers are spread throughout the district.\*

Other effective ways to make high-poverty schools more attractive places to teach include creating community schools that provide wraparound services to students and families, implementing better mentoring programs for novice teachers, and establishing universal high-quality preschool programs.<sup>†</sup>

Rather than gutting hard-won protections for teachers, the next legal case funded by Silicon Valley millionaires should go after economic segregation itself. Instead of invoking *Brown* in a broad metaphorical sense, why not bring a state-level suit against actual segregation by class and race? If it is a violation of the California Constitution to have tenure laws that make it hard to fire bad teachers in poor and minority communities, why isn’t it a violation when the state and districts draw school boundary lines in a way that promotes deeply unequal, economically segregated schools that many strong educators won’t teach in?

In 1996, Connecticut plaintiffs prevailed in a lawsuit, *Sheff v. O’Neill*, that challenged de facto economic and racial school segregation. As a result, thousands of poor kids have been given access to integrated magnet schools in the city of Hartford and to integrated suburban schools. Careful research comparing students who applied for a lottery to attend the integrated magnet schools found that those admitted later performed better in math and reading than those who lost the lottery and attended other urban schools.<sup>91</sup> California needs a similar lawsuit. Such a case would underline a profound truth: The big problem in education is not that unions have won too many benefits and supports for teachers. It’s the disappearance of the American common school, which once educated rich and poor side by side.

## What’s Really Behind the Attacks on Tenure?

Cases like *Vergara* and *Davids* are problematic in part because they elevate a peripheral issue—tenure—which detracts from the really necessary debates over poverty and segregation. Worse, at a time when we need to recruit and retain the very best teachers, the inordinate focus on bad teachers further demoralizes the education profession. Between 2008 and 2012, a MetLife survey

found that teacher job satisfaction “plummeted from 62 to 39 percent, the lowest level in a quarter century,” Dana Goldstein notes.<sup>92</sup> Some pundits think eliminating tenure will elevate the profession, but by a 3-1 ratio, teachers disagree that they would have greater prestige if collective bargaining and lifetime tenure were eliminated.<sup>93</sup>

So what is really going on? Who benefits from the grossly disproportionate focus on a small number of bad teachers? Going after teacher tenure serves an important function for ideological conservatives. It provides a highly effective way to bludgeon one of the few remaining elements within the largely decimated progressive trade union movement in the United States: teachers unions. With private sector unionism greatly diminished, union critic Richard Berman targeted AFT President Weingarten, going directly to the tenure issue, falsely claiming that she is on a crusade to “protect the jobs of incompetent teachers.”<sup>94</sup>

That the attack on tenure has gained traction in courts, state legislatures, and major media outlets is enormously problematic. Teachers unions are not perfect, but they are one of the few voices speaking on behalf of disadvantaged kids. As journalist Jonathan Chait has noted, politicians have a short-term horizon so tend to underinvest in education. Teachers unions “provide a natural bulwark” against such tendencies, he writes.<sup>95</sup> In places like La Crosse, Wisconsin; Louisville, Kentucky; and Raleigh, North Carolina, teachers unions have fought for school integration—because it makes teaching more manageable and because it is better for students. And, of course, teachers unions are part of the larger trade union movement fighting for collective bargaining for workers and a higher minimum wage, which together probably constitute the nation’s most important educational improvement programs, given the well-documented link between the stresses induced by poverty and lower academic achievement.<sup>96</sup>

Taking on poverty and segregation—long recognized as the largest drivers of educational inequality<sup>97</sup>—is hard work and can be expensive, so conservatives have focused attention elsewhere. For years, the right wing has been using the sad reality that poor and minority kids are stuck in lousy, segregated schools as an argument for private school vouchers to dismantle public education. Now, in *Vergara* and *Davids*, inequality in access to good teachers is leveraged to promote an anti-union agenda. That this is done in the name of poor kids and civil rights turns the world upside down. □

## Endnotes

1. On Connecticut, New Jersey, and Oregon, see David Finley, “Teacher Tenure: An Innocent Victim of *Vergara v. California*,” *Education Week*, March 4, 2015. On Minnesota, New Mexico, and Washington, see Caitlin Emma, “*Vergara*, New Mexico Edition?,” *Morning Education*, *Politico*, April 29, 2015; and Alex Cotoia and Maria Casillas, “Perhaps Lawsuits Can Help Improve Education in NM,” *Albuquerque Journal*, April 27, 2015.
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4. Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*, 1.
5. Randi Weingarten, “*Time Magazine Attacks America’s Teachers*,” Diane Ravitch’s blog, October 23, 2014, [www.dianeravitch.net/2014/10/23/time-magazine-attacks-americas-teachers-write-a-letter-to-time](http://www.dianeravitch.net/2014/10/23/time-magazine-attacks-americas-teachers-write-a-letter-to-time). Cover is from November 3, 2014.
6. Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*, 5.

(Continued on page 43)

\*For more on the importance of school integration by socioeconomic status, see “From All Walks of Life” in the Winter 2012–2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/winter2012-2013/kahlenberg](http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2012-2013/kahlenberg).

†For more on community schools, see the Summer 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/summer2009](http://www.aft.org/ae/summer2009). For more on universal preschool, see the Spring 2010 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/spring2010](http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2010).

# Connecting the Dots

## Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder



BY SAMUEL L. ODOM AND CONNIE WONG

**V**ictor is a junior at Singleton High School in a Midwestern city, and he has autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In his chemistry class, which he attends with students who do not have special needs, the lesson for the day is on endothermic reactions. The teacher has organized the class into small groups of four to review the lab experiment that they will do later in the period. Victor, a tall, rangy young man with

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sandy blond hair, reads the lab sheet and listens to his classmates, while rocking slightly in his chair. The teacher has modified Victor's worksheet to help him follow the lesson. After this review, the teacher directs the students to move to their lab space and work with their groups to conduct the experiment.

At the lab space, Sarah, a member of Victor's group, has been assigned to work with Victor today. Victor starts the lesson by reviewing and following the instructions, with Sarah's occasional reminders. His rocking increases as they begin the experiment. Eventually, he leaves the experiment to pace the room, periodically returning to check on the progress and complete some of the steps of the lesson with Sarah. The teacher and his classmates know that Victor feels anxious in social situations and has a hard time concentrating on tasks for a long period of time. His pacing does not draw a single glance from his peers.

When the lab experiment ends, Victor helps put the equipment away in the appropriate locations, which are clearly labeled. He and his classmates return to their small groups and complete the worksheets for their experiment. Then the bell rings, and they head to their next class. When asked later about Victor's work, the chemistry teacher says he's a solid B student.

Victor's mother says that her goal is for her son to attend community college and graduate from a university. Victor says he wants to be a scientist like his mom.

Rosa is a fourth-grader, also with ASD, who attends Monte Verde Elementary School in a Southern California city. Her parents emigrated from Mexico before she was born. Rosa has a hard time using words to communicate with others and is learning to use a communication program on an iPad. The program enables her to touch a small picture on the screen to generate a voice that expresses her thoughts, such as "hello," "all through," "how are you today?" or "I need a break."

Much of Rosa's day is spent in a special education class with five other children, four of whom have ASD. The class is very structured; there are well-labeled areas designated for specific activities (e.g., group academics, independent work, literacy, computer work). The schedule is posted on the whiteboard, but Rosa also has her individual schedule with small symbols that represent the sequence of activities for the day (e.g., a symbol of a small book indicates literacy time).

During part of the day, Rosa and her teacher work together focusing on her individual goals; at other times, she participates in small learning groups or works on independent learning tasks the teacher has designed. At two points during the day, as well as during lunch and physical education, Rosa joins a fourth-grade class down the hall.

While her teacher acknowledges the challenges Rosa faces, such as living in a bilingual community and being nonverbal, she takes pride in her successes: Rosa is mostly independent in class, is starting to have an interest in communicating with others, and has made gains in her early literacy lessons. Rosa's parents hope their daughter eventually will be able to attend middle school with the children from their neighborhood.

Victor and Rosa, whose names we have changed (as well as the names of their schools) to protect their privacy, illustrate the complexities and challenges confronting children and youth with ASD. In the last 10 years, the prevalence of ASD has increased 200 percent.<sup>1</sup> Principals, special education directors, and superintendents across the country report that their schools are teaching increasing numbers of students with ASD. We have found that educators want to provide a good and effective educational experience, but they may not be sure where to start or what to do. ASD is not usually a part of their preservice training, and while laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act dictate that they must use research-based practices, most resources are difficult to find and confusing to implement.

In this article, we discuss the evidence-based practices (EBPs) that are solidly supported by the research. We also provide sources for learning more about how to use EBPs in school, community, and home settings. And we discuss the types of training that can lead to their effective use by teachers. But first, we begin with a short description of ASD.

## What Is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Although several psychiatrists in the early 20th century used the term "autism" to describe their clients, it was the work of two psychiatrists in the 1940s that has had the most important contemporary impact on diagnosis. In 1943, Leo Kanner, a child psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, reported a

unique pattern of social withdrawal, rigidity in behaviors (e.g., becoming extremely upset over a tiny change in schedule or environment), and echolalia (repeating words or phrases that others have just said). Because of its extreme social isolation, he used the term "autism" (a Greek derivative that means extremely self-aware) to describe the condition. Around the same time (1944), Hans Asperger, a psychiatrist in Austria, saw a similar pattern of social difficulties among young men who were his patients and described the condition as "autism." "Asperger's syndrome" became a term often used to describe, and even diagnose, children with autism who did not also have intellectual disabilities. As diagnostic classification systems evolved, both "autistic disorder" and Asperger's syndrome, in the United States, were combined into a single classification: autism spectrum disorder.

Educators want to provide a good and effective experience for students with ASD, but they may not be sure where to start or what to do.

ASD is known as a "spectrum" because of a common set of characteristics—such as onset before age 3, difficulties in social communication, and restricted and repetitive behaviors—and the wide range in the way these characteristics are expressed. For instance, Victor would talk with his teachers and classmates but often not look them in the eye, and his speech didn't have the same cadence as the speech of his teenage classmates. Although he would talk with his peers, he often preferred to be alone. Rosa, on the other hand, did not use words to communicate with her teachers or peers and was learning to use the iPad communication system. Her teacher tried to stick to a standard schedule because Rosa found schedule changes very upsetting and confusing.

Both Victor and Rosa have different forms of what scientists call repetitive or stereotypic behavior: unusual physical movements such as rocking (Victor) or flicking fingers in front of one's eyes (Rosa). ASD is also characterized by co-occurring conditions. Rosa has an intellectual disability, which occurs in 40–60 percent of individuals with ASD.<sup>2</sup> Victor experiences social anxiety that sometimes leads to "meltdowns" (i.e., nondirected tantrums).

Although ASD occurs most often in boys (more than 75 percent of the time),<sup>3</sup> it also occurs in girls, as in Rosa's case. Over the last 40 years, the rate of autism diagnoses has increased dramatically: In the 1970s, it was estimated at 4 in 10,000 people.<sup>4</sup> Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that ASD occurs in 1 in 68 children.<sup>5</sup> Scientists think that this increase has been due to greater public and professional awareness of ASD, as well as changes in diagnostic criteria and assessment practices.<sup>6</sup>

ASD crosses ethnic and racial lines equally, although children from African American and Latino families tend to be diagnosed at older ages.<sup>7</sup>

## Shrouded in Myth

Probably more than any other disability, autism has been shrouded in myth and plagued by misinformation. During the early history of ASD, scientists attributed the cause to mothers having an emotionally cold relationship with their children. They were called “refrigerator mothers,” and the treatment entailed removing the child from the home. Current genetics and neuroscience have debunked that myth. A second myth, based on fallacious medical research, was that measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccina-

Probably more than any other disability, autism has been shrouded in myth and plagued by misinformation.

tions caused autism in some children. That myth has also been scientifically disproven, but its persistence has led some parents to refuse vaccinations for their children, which in turn has contributed to the re-emergence of measles in this country.

Likewise, many proponents of ASD treatments make claims from cure or recovery to amelioration, but they can point to little scientific evidence of effectiveness. These interventions appear in books and on websites that proclaim them as “cutting-edge therapies” for autism. Sometimes they even mix in programs and practices that *do* have research evidence to support their use, thus lending them an air of legitimacy and further confusing consumers. Educators and family members need to have a reliable source for finding out about practices that have been shown, through research, to be effective with children and youth with ASD.

## Our Search for Evidence-Based Practices

In 2006, the U.S. Department of Education funded the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder (NPDC), with the explicit goal of promoting educators’ use of evidence-based practices for children and youth with ASD (from birth to 22 years—that is, from early intervention to the transition-to-community years of schooling).<sup>\*</sup> An immediate dilemma presented itself. Although researchers had talked and written about evidence-based practices, there had never been a pub-

<sup>\*</sup>The center was a collaboration of scientists and professional development experts at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Waisman Center at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and the MIND Institute at the University of California, Davis, School of Medicine.

lished comprehensive, critically reviewed summary of them.

To begin the work of the NPDC, we first conducted a review of the literature.<sup>8</sup> During the first year, NPDC investigators did an extensive search of research published between 1997 and 2007. They used professional standards for evaluating methods of published studies,<sup>9</sup> identified focused intervention practices that researchers used, and then grouped those interventions into categories of evidence-based practices. A total of 24 practices were identified, and we published a report of this review.<sup>10</sup> We then collaborated with the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence to develop online training modules for each of these practices.<sup>†</sup>

The research on focused intervention practices for children and youth with ASD does not stand still; in fact, it moves quickly.



In 2010, we realized that we would have to continually update the literature review. New research had been published since 2007 that could provide further evidence for practices previously identified. Also, we knew that new research had been completed that would potentially qualify new practices as evidence-based. In addition, we thought we could improve on the review methods we had previously used.

In this second literature review, we included research published from 1990 to 2011. Our initial broad search yielded more than 29,000 articles. We screened and eliminated many of them, and reduced the number of articles that met our inclusion criteria (i.e., they were based on research that included participants with ASD who were school-aged and that used experimental methodology) to around 1,100. Those were further reviewed by a national group of professionals who had training in research methods and experience with ASD to identify the ones whose methodology met the standards for high-quality research. From that review, we further narrowed the literature to 546 articles. Members of our central research team conducted a systematic content analysis of practices in these research articles, finding 27 distinct evidence-based practices that met our criteria. We have listed those practices in Table 1 on page 15. (For a full description of our methodology, see the technical report published online at <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/node/21>.)<sup>11</sup>

These 27 evidence-based practices are techniques that educators can use to promote the development and learning of children

<sup>†</sup>These modules can be accessed at <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu>.

and youth with ASD; we describe these below and then walk through a process for appropriate practice selection.

### Fundamental Applied Behavior Analysis Techniques

A common mistake in the field is to think of applied behavior analysis techniques as one practice. In fact, many practices are based conceptually on applied behavior analysis theory, and they are considered among the most effective approaches for children and youth with ASD. We identified five practices that we call “fundamental” because they reflect the basic principles of applied behavior analysis. Fundamental applied behavior analysis practices (italicized below as we unpack them) can be used by teachers, speech pathologists, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, and family members as individual interventions or as part of multicomponent EPB strategies. In other words, they are the building blocks for some of the other intervention approaches.

*Reinforcement* is a technique in which educators apply a consequence, such as descriptive praise, a grade, or an item (e.g., a sticker), after a child engages in a desired behavior, in order to increase the reoccurrence of the behavior in the future. The educator may assist the child in engaging in the behavior by providing a *prompt* (e.g., an instruction, a gesture, a helping hand).

A particular problem for some children with ASD is that they become dependent on prompts from adults to engage in a learned skill. A strategy for “weaning” students from this support is called *time delay*. For example, the educator might set up the occasion for Rosa to ask for materials using her iPad by putting out all the materials for an art activity except the scissors. The educator would wait for a brief time with an expectant look on her face (e.g., 5–10 seconds) to allow Rosa to ask for the scissors on her own. The educator would prompt Rosa if she does not ask for the scissors during the time delay.

Educators may show a student how to engage in a behavior or action by *modeling* that behavior (e.g., a teacher shows a student how to put away materials used in an activity in their labeled locations). Another basic behavior strategy called *task analysis* involves breaking down complicated behaviors or tasks into smaller parts. For example, a teacher might identify the six steps needed for Victor to make the transition from his last class of the day to the bus he will be taking home. The teacher would then specifically teach Victor each step so he can reach his goal of independent transitioning from school to home. As noted, these fundamental behavioral techniques are often used in combination with other techniques in the evidence-based practices we describe next.

### Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

The practices we discuss in this article are designed to teach students a skill in which they need to be proficient (e.g., interacting socially with peers). However, students with ASD may engage in behaviors that are undesirable and distract from learning, which we will call problem behaviors. These behaviors may be repetitive in nature, such as rocking or unusual hand or motor movements, tantrums or “meltdowns,” or repetitive vocalizations. A general strategy for addressing these behaviors is called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and many schools have adopted it schoolwide to address problem behaviors for all students. In our review of the ASD intervention literature, we identified many of the

## Table 1. Current Evidence-Based Practices, Grouped Conceptually

### Fundamental Applied Behavior Analysis Techniques

- Reinforcement
- Prompting
- Time Delay
- Modeling
- Task Analysis

### Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

- Functional Behavior Assessment
- Antecedent-Based Intervention
- Extinction
- Response Interruption/Redirection
- Differential Reinforcement of Alternative, Incompatible, or Other Behavior
- Functional Communication Training

### Social-Communication Interventions

- Social Skills Training
- Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention
- Social Narratives
- Structured Play Group
- Picture Exchange Communication System

### Teaching Strategies

- Visual Supports
- Discrete Trial Teaching
- Naturalistic Intervention
- Parent-Implemented Intervention
- Pivotal Response Training
- Scripting
- Exercise

### Cognitive Behavioral Interventions

- Self-Management
- Cognitive Behavioral Intervention

### Technologically Oriented Interventions

- Technology-Aided Instruction and Intervention
- Video Modeling

individual interventions that make up the system of PBIS.

When a problem behavior occurs, an initial approach is to try to determine the cause of the behavior through a *functional behavior assessment*. By observing and recording what happens immediately before and after a problem behavior occurs, educators may be able to determine the cause. In some cases, a situation may trigger a behavior, like too much noise in a certain part of the classroom. The teacher may use an *antecedent-based intervention* in which he or she removes the trigger, in this case moving the student to a quieter part of the classroom. In other cases, the teacher may determine that when he or she attends to the student (e.g., by saying “stop that”) after each problem behavior, the attention actually appears to motivate the student to continue the behavior. In such cases, the teacher might use a practice called *extinction*, in which he or she ceases to give the student the desired attention by ignoring the behavior.

Sometimes a problem behavior will escalate from small, less intense occurrences (e.g., mild rocking) to a full-blown tantrum. An educator may see these early signs and use *response interruption/redirection*. For example, participating in a small-group activity increased Victor's social anxiety, which first would manifest as rocking behavior but then would escalate to a meltdown if unaddressed. When the early stages of this "behavioral chain" began, the teacher would ask Victor to engage in a solitary activity (e.g., completing a worksheet) so he could settle down and return to the small-group activity.

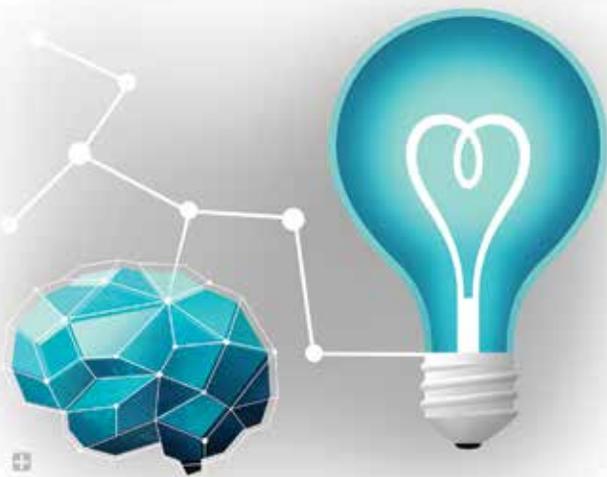
Another strategy is to promote an appropriate behavior that would take the place of or be incompatible with the problem behavior. Using this *differential reinforcement*, the teacher provides positive reinforcements to a student for using a pencil to complete a class assignment instead of engaging in the tic of "finger flipping" with the pencil. When the problem behavior appears to result from frustration in not being able to communicate, an educator may use *functional communication training*.

the situation and perhaps how the student should act in the situation. For Victor, his teacher writes a narrative describing the appropriate way of joining a group of peers having lunch in the cafeteria. Victor would read the story before going to lunch, and the teacher would review the story with him; later that day, the teacher would discuss with Victor what happened at lunchtime. For children with ASD, *structured play groups* can be arranged by the teacher in ways that support the social and play interactions of the student with ASD and the student's peers.

One of the most frequently used interventions to promote communication skills for nonverbal students with ASD is the *Picture Exchange Communication System*. This system begins with having students exchange pictures for desired objects and then prompting them, once they are ready, to engage in verbal communication.

### Teaching Strategies

Seven types of interventions focus on teaching a wide range of skills. Because many children and youth with ASD understand



Educators and family members need a reliable source for practices that have been shown, through research, to be effective with children and youth with ASD.

With this approach, the educator teaches communication skills to take the place of a problem behavior (e.g., a student is taught to use words to ask for a food item at snack time rather than crying and pointing at the food).

### Social-Communication Interventions

A core feature of ASD is difficulty with social communication skills, the focus of several evidence-based practices. In one strategy, social skills are taught directly through *social skills training*, usually delivered in small-group settings based on a specific curriculum or therapy. A strategy that educators use in many schools is *peer-mediated instruction and intervention*, which may include teaching a peer to provide tutoring or support for a student with ASD (e.g., Sarah helping Victor in chemistry class). Such a strategy may also consist of establishing a peer social network that helps students with ASD engage in social interactions and relationships.

Another approach is *social narratives*,\* in which a teacher or student writes a brief story about a social situation that explains

visual presentations of information, teachers frequently employ *visual supports*. These can include a schedule that highlights the order of the day's activities in graphic symbols (like Rosa used), symbols posted in the class that provide cues for which activities should occur in which areas, and/or highlighted parts of a class activity that cue a response (e.g., a visual indicator that prompts students to write their names on class assignments).

Another teaching strategy is *discrete trial teaching*, which usually involves a teacher working one-to-one with a student with ASD. In this approach, the teacher provides prompts when necessary, reinforces correct responses, and corrects errors if they occur. Discrete trial teaching requires that the teacher provide many opportunities for the child to respond in the learning activities, which is sometimes called "massed trials."

In contrast are *naturalistic interventions*, where the educator identifies activities and routines during a school day that give a child the opportunity to practice a skill. The teacher sets up the student's schedule and activities to provide the learning opportunity, and then offers support through prompting or reinforcement. For example, for Rosa, the teacher identifies a minimum of five times during the day that Rosa would use her iPad to com-

\*Carol Gray first popularized the Social Stories technique in 1991. Students receive explanations about how to act in everyday situations that children with autism may find confusing. For more about her work, see [www.carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories](http://www.carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories).

municate with peers or adults in the class. The teacher ensures each opportunity is provided, offers a prompt (or time-delay prompt) if Rosa does not use the iPad independently, and then ensures an appropriate response.

Some interventions are *parent implemented*. Educators teach parents to use intervention techniques with their children in the home or community. This intervention may include some of the other evidence-based practices described in this article. For example, parents may use naturalistic interventions to teach a social or play skill or a form of discrete trial teaching to teach a language concept.

*Pivotal response training* is a teaching strategy that uses both behavioral and naturalistic strategies. In this approach, the educator builds on student initiative and interests by providing choices, reinforcing attempts, practicing previously learned skills, and providing directly related consequences for correct responses. For example, if an educator is teaching the student to use words when making a request, the natural consequence would be for the student to receive what she is requesting rather than the teacher’s praise or an unrelated reward such as a sticker. For instance, if the student asks for crayons, she would get crayons and not simply hear her teacher say, “Nice job using your words.”

To help a child learn to participate in specific situations, educators have used a technique called *scripting*, in which they prepare a written description of the situation and behavioral expectations, and use the script to help the child practice repeatedly before engaging in the actual situation. This practice is different from social narratives in that the child is taught specifically what to say in a special situation, and then he or she practices the response. In social narratives, the story the child reads (or sees through symbols) describes the social situation and may serve as a reminder of the way he or she should act in the situation.

Another evidence-based practice that emerged in our latest review was *exercise*. Facilitating a student’s engagement in physical activities can promote appropriate behavior or reduce problem behaviors. For example, a student with ASD may grow more inattentive and engage in more problem behavior (e.g., finger flicking and rocking) as the school day progresses, to the point that it interferes with his or her participating in the literacy activities in his or her special education class. By planning an exercise period with aerobic physical activity before the literacy activity, the educator may help improve the student’s attention and decrease the problem behavior—outcomes reported in the research studies.

### Cognitive Behavioral Interventions

Two focused interventions employ a combination of cognitive and

behavioral approaches. Although conceptually similar to one another, the procedures are different, and educators and therapists have used them to address different goals. *Self-management* strategies teach students to recognize when they are engaging in the correct or desired behavior (e.g., a goal specified in the student’s individual education plan), and also enable them to monitor or record the behavior and/or reward themselves when performing a specific criterion correctly.

*Cognitive behavioral interventions* focus on the student learning to be aware of his own thoughts and emotions, to recognize negative thoughts or emotions, and to use strategies for changing his thinking and behavior.

### Technologically Oriented Interventions

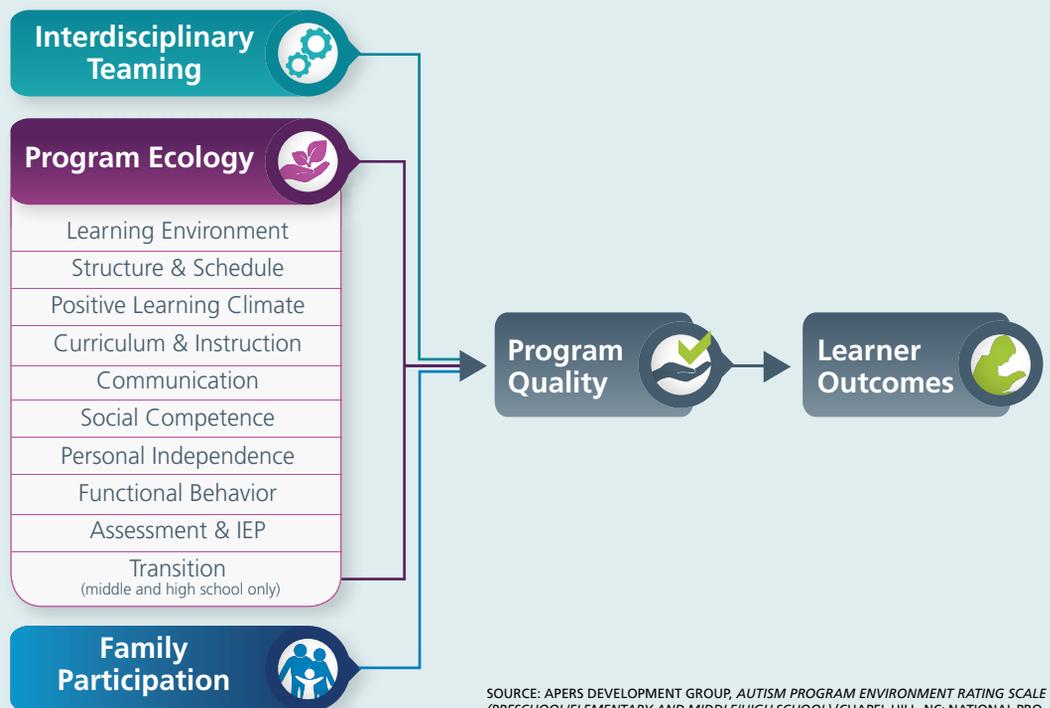
As the world has become a more technological place, a large variety of interventions for students with ASD now rely on technology.<sup>12</sup> A general evidence-based practice called *technology-aided instruction and intervention* employs technology as its central supporting feature. The range of these interventions is broad and includes computer-assisted instruction, speech-generating devices, smartphones, and tablets, to name a few.

With *video modeling*, students watch a video demonstration (perhaps on an iPad or smartphone) of the correct way to perform a skill or behavior immediately before they will be in a situation where they should use that skill. The person modeling the behavior in the video may be the student or another person.

### Selecting and Using Evidence-Based Practices in Schools

Identification of evidence-based practices is only a part of the process of designing effective programs for students with ASD. In

**Figure 1. Program Quality for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder**



SOURCE: APERS DEVELOPMENT GROUP, AUTISM PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE (PRESCHOOLELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL) (CHAPEL HILL, NC: NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER ON ASD, 2011).



our work, we have suggested a plan for building such a program that incorporates assessing program quality, goal development, selection of specific practices, support for implementation, and ongoing evaluation of outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

### **Building on Quality**

When our research team works with schools to implement evidence-based practices for students with ASD, we begin by discussing program quality. By program quality, we mean the features of a school that appear in Figure 1 (on page 17). A high-quality program has coordination among school interdisciplinary team members, family involvement, and a range of other features, such as clear organization of schedules and class environments, a positive social climate, and instructional guidelines. Trying to implement EBPs that focus on a student's goals in a school that is unable to fully support students with special needs is, in the worst cases, like the proverbial "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic." Even when implemented well, the practices are not going to achieve the desired effects for the student because the foundation is not there.

We have developed an instrument to assess the quality of school programs called the Autism Program Environment Rating Scale (APERS), which includes assessment of all the features of quality appearing in Figure 1. When working with schools, we complete an APERS review, share it with school staff, and note the areas of strength and the areas for improvement. The school staff members then develop a work plan for addressing the areas for improvement.

For example, in Victor's school, there were many areas of strength, but the staff members were not working closely as a professional team, had poorly written transition plans, and could have done a better job at involving families. The team members in the school (several special education teachers and general education teachers, the speech therapist, and the transition coordinator) identified these as areas for school improvement and worked on each during the year.

### **Setting Goals**

Observable and measurable goals for students with ASD are a critical "end" on which teachers must focus. Being clear about the skill or behavior we want the student to learn is essential. In our work with schools, we spend a lot of time with teachers to develop students' goals.\*

### **Selecting Evidence-Based Practices**

A teacher may look at the list of EBPs in Table 1 (on page 15) and say, "There are 27 practices here. Do I have to use every one of them? If not, how do I pick the right one to use for a particular student?" One of the originators of evidence-based medicine, Dr. David Sackett, noted that evidence-based practice is not a cookbook.<sup>14</sup> Selection of practices depends on the identification of the scientifically validated practices *and* the professional judgment of the practitioner.

In our work with educators, we use a matrix (Table 2 on page 18) that identifies the common outcomes generated by each prac-

tice, sorted by age. We ask the teacher to first determine the general outcome area of a goal and then find the practices that have generated positive outcomes in those areas.

For Victor, one goal (broadly stated) was talking with classmates at lunchtime. Given this goal, his teacher would look at the matrix, which has outcomes on the top row and EBPs in the left column. Toward the top of the matrix is a row that indicates at which age range(s) the practice has been determined to be effective. Victor's goal is social, and he is in high school (the 15-22 age group). The matrix reveals nine EBPs that have produced positive outcomes for participants who were Victor's age. The teacher would then review the practices and use her professional judgment about which one(s) might work best for Victor. For example, she might decide on a peer-mediated intervention and a social narrative intervention, which we described earlier. The high

**Evidence-based practice is not a cookbook. Selection depends on identification *and* professional judgment.**

school already has a peer-buddy program, so she arranges for the peers in the program to spend time with Victor during lunch. Also, as noted previously, the teacher creates a social narrative that Victor reads immediately beforehand.

### **Finding the Procedural Details about EBPs**

Many educators do not have time to sift through research journals to learn the details of EBPs they can use with their students. To that end, our group, in collaboration with the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence, has developed online modules for all of the 24 practices found in the first literature review mentioned previously. Also, we have created briefs that contain the content from the online modules in PDF format. The modules and briefs are available for free on our website (<http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu>). Each module and brief contains a description of an EBP, data collection forms, the specific articles that contain the scientific evidence of the practice, video examples (for some but not all), and a fidelity checklist (important in evaluating accurate use of the practice). We are currently revising the modules to include the information from the most recent review<sup>15</sup> and are revising the current practices based on the latest research.

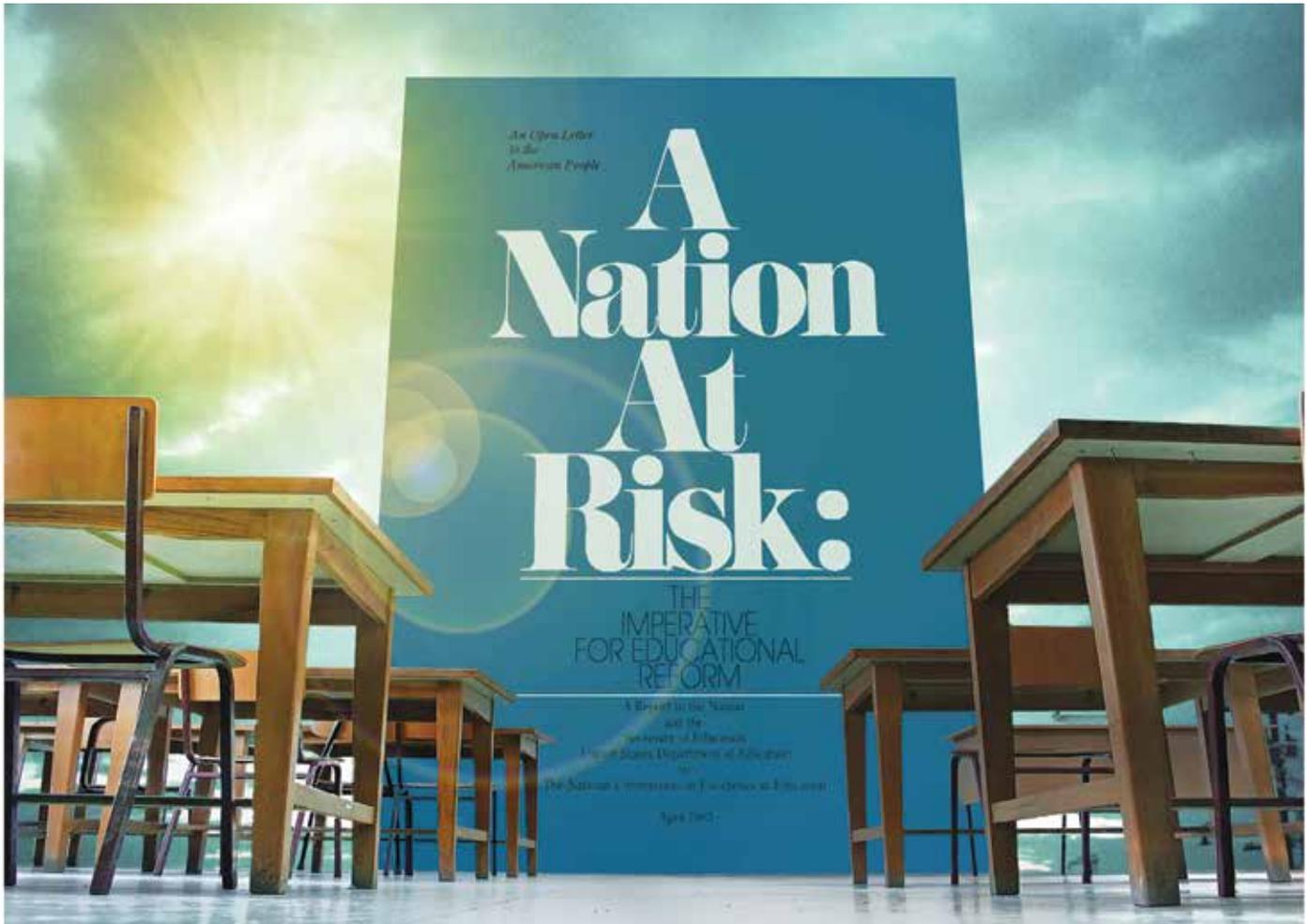
Selected EBP interventions may not work for every student. The autism spectrum is broad, and the individual characteristics and needs of students with ASD are diverse. EBPs are an important starting place for educators. However, after selecting an EBP to use with an individual student, it is critical that the educator

*(Continued on page 44)*

\*We also use a system called Goal Attainment Scaling to rate students' progress on their goals. For more information, see <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/node/26>.

# Escaping the Shadow

*A Nation at Risk* and Its Far-Reaching Influence



BY JAL MEHTA

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released its now famous report, *A Nation at Risk*, which warned of “a rising tide of mediocrity” in American schooling. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education but largely written by a group of prominent academics, *A Nation at Risk* invoked a crisis so far-reaching in its impact that it still governs the way we think about public education 30 years later. Many of our current policies, and the assumptions that underlie those policies, are attributable in significant part to the way in which the report framed the debate. If the next generation of educators are to forge their own path, they will need to get out from under the long shadow of *A Nation at Risk*.

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The report, published years before many young teachers today were even born, was groundbreaking in emphasizing the importance of education to economic competitiveness and the failings of American schooling in comparison with international competitors. It presented a utilitarian and instrumental vision of education, and argued that schools, not society, should be held accountable for higher performance, and that performance should be measured by external testing—assumptions that underlay the state standards movement in the 1980s and 1990s and persist today in federal policy through No Child Left Behind.

*A Nation at Risk* has not been ignored in previous accounts of American educational history: it is often cited as a critical document.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I examine, in more detail than previous work, the creation, rhetoric, and reception of the report, as well as its profound effect.

Of all the reports and commissions on education, why did *A Nation at Risk* have such a seismic impact? Why did the authors define the educational problem as they did? Why did their definition resonate so widely? Why were critics unable to dislodge the

dominant narrative? Why has the report had such staying power in framing the debate? And how might those who disagree with its framing escape its long reach?

## Establishing a New Story Line

There was no indication in 1982 that the next two decades would witness an explosion of reform strategies aimed at increasing performance in schooling. A serious economic recession, severe state budget deficits, and President Ronald Reagan's stated intention to downgrade the federal role in education policy all pointed to education remaining a low priority.

In their 1982 textbook on the politics of education, longtime education policy analysts Frederick Wirt and Michael Kirst pointed to tax revolts, slow national economic growth, the shrinking share of the population with students in the schools, and a decreasing federal role, as factors that likely precluded significant education reform, concluding that "the 1980s will be a decade of consolidating and digesting the large number of innovations from the 1970s."<sup>2</sup>

It was into these seemingly calm waters that *A Nation at Risk* dropped in April 1983. In a short report that employed bold and ominous language, the National Commission on Excellence in Education assailed the nation's poor performance, famously declaring that the United States was caught in "a rising tide of mediocrity" that imperiled the nation's economic future. In support of its case, it cited a variety of academic indicators, most notably high levels of illiteracy, poor performance on international comparisons, and a steady decline in SAT scores from 1963 to 1980.

Quoting analyst Paul Copperman, the report claimed that this would be the first time in the history of the country that the educational skills of one generation would not be equal to those of their parents. Contrasting this declining educational picture with the centrality of skills and human capital in the knowledge-based, postindustrial economy, the report linked the future of the nation's international economic competitiveness with the reform of its educational system.

The report's recommendations called for a new focus on "excellence" for all, which would be achieved through a revamped high school curriculum with fewer electives and more required courses in math, English, science, and social studies, a combination that the authors called "the New Basics." They also called for a longer school day and school year, more homework, tighter university admission standards, more testing for students as indicators of proficiency, higher standards for becoming a teacher, an 11-month professional year, and market-sensitive and performance-based teacher pay.

The reaction to the report was instantaneous and overwhelming.\* The report was released in a White House ceremony that Reagan, disregarding the report's findings, used as an occasion to highlight his familiar agenda of school prayer, tuition tax credits, and the end of the "federal intrusion" into education. But the media coverage of the ceremony focused on the claims about the "rising tide of mediocrity," pushing Reagan's agenda to the background.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. Government Printing Office received more than 400 requests for copies in a single hour the following day and distrib-

uted more than 6 million copies over the course of the next year. The press interest was insatiable; the *Washington Post* published almost two articles per week on *A Nation at Risk* in the year following the report's release.<sup>4</sup> An assessment in 1984 found that more than 250 state task forces—in only 50 states!—had been put together to study education and recommend changes.<sup>5</sup>

Some critics have charged that the commission "manufactured a crisis" as part of a broader neoconservative agenda for school reform.<sup>6</sup> But a careful look at the composition of the commission and the internal records of its deliberations shows that this view does not hold up. At the time the commission was formed, the agenda of the Reagan administration was the abolition of the Department of Education, not an expanded federal bully pulpit demanding educational excellence. The commission was initially formed by Department of Education Secretary Terrel Bell, whose primary assignment from Reagan was to find a way to eliminate

*A Nation at Risk* invoked a crisis so far-reaching in its impact that it still governs the way we think about public education 30 years later.

his own department. He devised the idea of a national commission to report on the quality of American education and make suggestions for improvement as a way of increasing national attention to the important functions of public education. Finding little support from Reagan's office for the appointment of a presidential commission amid criticisms that it might generate a greater federal role for education, in July 1981 Bell appointed a commission himself.<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding the political motives behind the formation of the commission, its composition does not support the idea that the analysis was motivated by larger ideological, partisan, or corporate concerns. It was chaired by University of Utah President David P. Gardner and was composed of university faculty and administrators (seven members) and state and local school personnel, including principals, teachers, school board members, and superintendents (seven members), with only one business leader, one politician, and two others.<sup>8</sup>

It included some very distinguished educators who presumably would not be easily swayed by political concerns, including Gardner, Nobel Chemistry Prize-winner Glenn Seaborg, Harvard physics professor Gerald Holton, and Yale President A. Bartlett Giamatti. Reagan did initially try to set a direction for the commission; one member reported that in an early meeting Reagan suggested that it focus on five fundamental points: "Bring God

\*Albert Shanker, president of the AFT at the time of the report's release, embraced it. For more on his position, see *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy* by Richard D. Kahlenberg.

back into the classroom. Encourage tuition tax credits for families using private schools. Support vouchers. Leave the primary responsibility for education to parents. And please abolish that abomination, the Department of Education. Or, at least, don't ask to waste more federal money on education—'we have put in more only to wind up with less.'"<sup>9</sup>

But the commission members did not share the president's interests and, ironically, elevated the priority of educational reform so that the abolition of the Department of Education (created in 1979) subsequently became impossible. The commission engaged in 18 months of fact-finding, commissioning dozens of papers and holding six public meetings, as well as a number of regional meetings with a variety of stakeholders, before producing its analysis. (For an inside look at the commission's work, see the sidebar on page 24.) There is no reason to think that its report did not represent the commission's honest appraisal of the state of the school system and what needed to be improved. The fact that

## Educators resented the report's implication that economic problems should be laid at their feet.

Reagan's office largely disregarded the findings of the report in drafting his remarks for the White House ceremony indicates that the administration had not gotten the report it wanted.<sup>10</sup>

Internal drafts do show that the report's inflammatory rhetoric about a system in crisis was a conscious choice made by some on the commission in order to increase its impact. An outline of the final report that was approved in September 1982 reveals a version that would have been much longer and more complimentary, including four chapters of text, beginning with a "relatively brief, positive description of the size and scope of American education" and leaving an outline of major problems to the final section.<sup>11</sup> Staff offered drafts of sections of the report in December 1982, which some members of the commission regarded, as one put it, as "not emphatic enough to measure the gravity of the need."

In January 1983, Seaborg wrote an outline that more closely resembled the final document. He wrote: "1. Clarion call, call to arms, concise, include 4, 5 or 6 top recommendations. Total of 10 pages (no more than 15 pages). 2. Strident opening sentence or two. (1) If foreign country did this to us we would declare war. (2) 'We have identified the enemy and it is us.'"

This theme was picked up by Holton, who voiced his displeasure with the "involved and complex" versions written by the commission's staff and wrote a February 14 draft that contained much of the heated rhetoric that would serve as the groundwork for the final

version.<sup>12</sup> In the end, the good the report offered about American education—high college-going rates compared with international competitors and high scores for top American students on international comparisons of achievement—was buried near the end, a minor qualification to a dominant rhetoric of crisis.

### The New Story Line Triumphs

Not everyone agreed with the claims of *A Nation at Risk*, and its over-the-top rhetoric was a source of much criticism among professional researchers and academics, who argued that the panel's desire to capture attention for its report had led it to suspend the usual standards of scientific scrutiny in order to make its provocative claims. As Harold Howe II, a former U.S. commissioner of education, said in the week following the report: "I think American education has a cold. Most people think it has the flu. It certainly doesn't have the pneumonia the committee suggested."<sup>13</sup>

Specifically, these critics noted that the international comparisons were unfair because other countries were more selective about which students took the tests; that measuring a decline in SATs neglected to consider the increase of students, particularly poor and minority students, taking the test; that SAT scores had actually increased since 1980; and that basic skills, particularly among poor and minority students, had been on the rise throughout the 1970s.<sup>14</sup>

Educators resented the implication that economic problems should be laid at their feet; critics have subsequently questioned the connection between national educational and economic performance, especially as the American economy rose in the 1990s and the Japanese economy faltered. A *New York Times* article in September 1983 reported some of the early discontent in a story headlined "'Tide of Mediocrity' May Not Be Rising as Fast as It Seems," which quoted Ernest Boyer, at the time president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, acerbically noting that "what we have is a rising tide of school reports."<sup>15</sup>

These academic qualifications, even when they were reported in the media, had little impact on the dominant story line in the mind of the public or policy elites. Public confidence in schooling, which had already been falling as part of the post-Watergate decline of confidence in public institutions, hit a new low after the release of the report in 1983.<sup>16</sup> States rushed to issue their own reports to evaluate whether they were falling short of the new measures of excellence specified by *A Nation at Risk*. Despite the claims of the critics, *A Nation at Risk* had been the rare report that galvanized not only debate but also action.

Why did *A Nation at Risk* succeed where so many previous high-level reports, including one by the College Board in 1977 that reported the same decline in SAT scores, were unable to rouse more than a moment's notice?<sup>17</sup> Part of it was undoubtedly attributable to the prominence of the report's authors. The fact that it was commissioned by the Department of Education gave it needed weight and authority and assured initial media attention. The conflict between the substance of the report and Reagan's school agenda, particularly over the issue of federal responsibility for schooling, was of early interest to the media.

The timing of the report was also important, as it was released in the midst of a recession and offered a seemingly compelling explanation of the relative success of leading international competitors like Japan and South Korea. The analysis was bolstered by a series of other reports, released shortly thereafter, that also raised

concerns about the quality of schooling and emphasized the growing importance of education to state and national economic competitiveness.<sup>18</sup> The findings themselves, particularly on the decline of SAT scores, the levels of illiteracy, and poor international performance, were also striking and widely publicized, even if they could partially be explained by the report's detractors.

In addition to the substance of its findings, the report also gained influence by telling a powerful story of decline that resonated with policymakers and the public. More than simply a jumble of numbers, the report contained an identifiable narrative arc that made it both memorable and resonant. This arc was what Robert Putnam, referring to his own work on the decline of social capital in America, calls a “declensionist narrative,” or, more simply, a story of decline and fall.<sup>19</sup>

For an audience of adults who no longer had firsthand knowledge of the schools, this narrative, supported by the glaring indicator of dropping SAT scores, proved irresistible. Critics of the report never were able to offer an equally convincing counternarrative that would tie together their assorted criticisms into a compelling story.<sup>20</sup>

## The Economic View of Schooling

Perhaps the most fundamental shift in thinking that *A Nation at Risk* encapsulates is the elevation of the economic purposes of schooling over its many other purposes. Schooling has traditionally been accorded a wide variety of functions—to create citizens and social cohesion; to promote patriotic values; to incorporate immigrants; to stimulate student growth, creativity, and critical thinking; to provide an avenue for upward mobility—only some of which are consistent with the human capital approach.

What propelled this elevation? Three separate consequences of the changing economy were likely relevant. Most often noted has been the greater role of education in *international economic competition*. This is an issue that *A Nation at Risk* placed squarely on the map, and it has not receded since. In hindsight, *A Nation at Risk* overstated the case—other factors affect productivity, and, before the most recent recession, the American economy had since overtaken many of its rivals, despite little improvement on international school comparisons.<sup>21</sup>

But the link between educational success and national competitiveness caught the popular imagination and continues to be a widely used prism in op-ed columns and political speeches.<sup>22</sup> Less noticed but more important in spurring state policy adoption was the idea that improving education was key to *state economic growth*. While international productivity comparisons are influenced by a variety of factors that differ across countries (e.g., infrastructure, regulatory climate, proximity to supply chains), the differences across states in these factors are less significant, making the quality of the labor force more critical. A group of southern governors had already begun reform efforts to improve education under this banner, and *A Nation at Risk* nationalized these state concerns.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, *A Nation at Risk* highlighted the increasing *individual returns to education*, which were of widespread concern to parents and students everywhere. In the years since, politicians have largely blurred these various economic advantages to greater educational performance, linking individual, state, and national prosperity to the bandwagon of school reform.

To be sure, individuals have always seen schooling as a key route to economic mobility, and political leaders have always stressed the relationship of education to our broader economic prosperity. In this sense, *A Nation at Risk* did not provide a new analysis. But the political debate around education does shift from one educational purpose to another—sometimes emphasizing the equity purposes of schooling, sometimes its role as a shaper of social citizenship—and *A Nation at Risk* (like Sputnik before it) did play an important role in concentrating attention on the economic functions of schooling. By linking an old set of concerns about education's economic role to a new analysis of international economic competition and the shift to a postindustrial economy, *A Nation at Risk* succeeded in elevating the economic purpose of schooling over its other purposes.



This elevation has restructured the terms of rhetorical debate and the political landscape of schooling. By raising the agenda status of education, the economic emphasis brought in a much wider array of actors, most notably state (and eventually federal) legislators and business groups. An analysis that I conducted of governors' State of the State addresses in three states—Maryland, Michigan, and Utah—found that the topic of education was four times more prevalent in addresses given in the decades since *A Nation at Risk* in comparison with the previous decade. Reading these addresses suggests that the reason for this increase is that as education became more directly linked to economic issues, it became a more central part of political rhetoric.

The idea of investing in human capital was attractive to Democrats, since it provided a way to pitch their traditional concerns about greater resources for schools in the hard language of economic investment.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the economic view of schooling proved appealing to Republican legislators eager to please business constituencies, and the market and business-derived reform strategies that followed enabled Republicans to erode the traditional Democratic advantage on education.<sup>25</sup>

For both parties, what the economic imperatives meant in educational terms—greater literacy, improved skills in math and reading, more advanced critical-thinking skills—was so fundamental as to be uncontroversial, drawing wide and deep support from the general public. In the past, the parties had largely split over the issues of busing, school finance, and greater federal inter-

# A Closer Look at the Commission's Work

BY TOMMY TOMLINSON

Having concluded that public education was getting short shrift, President Reagan's first secretary of education, Terrel Bell, determined that the country needed a close examination of education quality and a better definition of its status. To that end, he created the National Commission on Excellence in Education. He appointed David Gardner, president of the University of Utah, to be chairman and chose Milton Goldberg, acting director of the National Institute of Education (NIE), to be the executive director.

To avoid later charges of partisanship, Bell gave both men free reign to identify and select members. They chose 17 commissioners representing diverse interests and backgrounds, including university presidents, leading academics, a Nobel laureate, public school administrators, the current high school teacher of the year (coincidentally, a member of the American Federation of Teachers), and state and community leaders.

Goldberg picked his staff from among the NIE workforce. Thirteen staff members were appointed to serve the commission—seven administrative/clerical support and six professional staff. Another 21 NIE staff members supplemented the core group to add their expertise on specific issues. In my case, I was a senior associate at NIE. As soon as I heard that Secretary Bell had created the commission, I called Goldberg and declared my interest in being a member of the staff. He asked me to be the director of research. In that role, I commissioned research reviews on a range of education issues, including curriculum, learning, motivation, and American educational history, among others.

The commission's scope was initially confined to the variables that were plausibly within control of schools, colleges, and universities. These initially included time on task, structure and content of the curriculum, and expectations or standards of learning. The commissioners quickly determined that teacher quality and administrative leadership, including political and fiscal support, were also critical determinants of excellence, and they were added. Issues such as income, race, and parental background were purposely excluded.

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As a first step, Goldberg drew up a series of symposia, panel discussions, and hearings to be held around the country on a variety of topics bearing on the quality and structure of American education; transcripts of the proceedings were provided to all commission members so they could increase their knowledge about the issues in primary and secondary education. Such presentations, coordinated by commission staffer Susan Traiman, also provided publicity for the commission's work and helped establish an audience in advance of *A Nation at Risk's* April 1983 release.

Leading scholars and other authorities in the field were chosen by commission staff to participate in these presentations and to prepare reports on selected topics. Thirty-one papers were commissioned, and together with the evidence from the symposia, hearings, and panel discussions, they composed the substantive background of the final report. The results of this effort were then circulated among the commissioners.

The next step was pulling all these pieces together and writing the report. The first draft was prepared by the principal staff writer, Jim Harvey, based on a combination of the commissioners' conclusions and recommendations, some final thoughts by the chair, David Gardner, and other salient findings. Shortly after the draft was sent to the commissioners, Commissioner Gerald Holton responded with the now famous preamble titled "A Nation at Risk." The staff received Holton's text by mail one morning, handwritten on the yellow pages of a lined tablet, just as he had written it on a plane to the West Coast. It was a page-turner unlike any we could have imagined. It was completely unanticipated, despite prior suggestions from Commissioner Glenn Seaborg that the report had to be a call to arms and feature the federal eagle on its cover. Seaborg contended that a report written in the standard academic style

aimed at the usual audience of academics and educators would not do. He was right in his concern, but the commission staff members were completely caught off guard by Holton's rhetoric and, like proper social scientists, were frankly not sure it was an acceptable approach.

As it turned out, Holton's preamble was precisely what Seaborg had in mind. We had conceived a report along more or less conventional lines, one that summarized the import of the issue, the charge from the secretary of education, the sense of the research, and the substance of the symposia.

**We had conceived a report along more or less conventional lines. But the addition of Holton's preamble set a much different tone.**

It would be organized around the variables of content, expectations, time, teaching quality, and leadership. It would end with the commission's recommendations for change. But the addition of Holton's preamble set a much different tone.

Our charge was clear: we had to integrate the preamble with the substantive body of the text. While staff members did not write the famous introductory declaration, they did conceive and write the main text that described the principal conclusions, established the prime variables, and, with the advice and consent of the commissioners, set out the recommendations. One could say that the two approaches were complementary: the florid rhetoric of the introduction generated enormous public interest in an otherwise straightforward plan for reform.

A torrent of public interest and academic criticism followed the report's release. The commissioners and staff fanned out across the country to explain and expand on its findings, and promote interest in improving education at the primary and secondary level. One thing was certain: the nation had gotten the message, and people wanted a change for the better. Education was no longer the low man on the totem pole; indeed, not since Sputnik had its visibility been so high. The rest, as they say, is history. □

vention into schools. In the new environment, both parties had reasons, constitutive and strategic, to pursue reforms that promised to enhance overall school quality.

Finally, the economic vision of schooling also sets priorities in the allocation of resources and attention for school reform. In higher education, as numerous critics have pointed out, more dollars are allocated to economically important areas like technology and science, while traditionally important but less practical subjects like humanities and the arts have been neglected.<sup>26</sup>

At the elementary and secondary level, much of the attention has been paid to reading and math, the two areas for which annual testing is required under No Child Left Behind, to the neglect of untested areas. Many states have cut funding for music and the arts in order to maximize time and resources for tested subjects.<sup>27</sup> In short, the rise of the economic view of schooling has powerfully reshaped the divisions in educational politics and has focused the aims of schooling tightly around learning that has economic value.

### Shifting Responsibility for Education

Hidden in plain sight in *A Nation at Risk*'s analysis was the responsibility that it placed on schools as the source of the problem and as the solution. By pointing the finger at declining standards and a diffusing mission, the authors placed responsibility squarely on schools to the exclusion of a range of other societal factors. As they wrote, "We conclude that declines in educational performance are in large part the result of disturbing inadequacies in the way the educational process itself is often conducted."<sup>28</sup>

While the report repeatedly mentioned the importance of a wide variety of stakeholders, including parents, students, unions, business groups, and legislatures, its call for excellence focused primarily on schools themselves as the prime enforcers of a new set of expectations: "Excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them." Not surprisingly, the commission's recommendations were also focused on school variables, such as increasing academic course-taking requirements for graduation.

In adopting this school-centered analysis, *A Nation at Risk* implicitly rejected the broader view that school performance is a result of both school and societal factors. A 1977 College Board report, for example, sought to explain the same decline in SAT scores; its analysis allocated responsibility much more widely. Drawing on a variety of different kinds of evidence and offering a much more careful (if necessarily less definitive) analysis, the report concluded that a range of factors, both in school and out, were partially responsible for the decline in SAT scores.

Among the nonschool factors cited by the College Board: the increase in the time students spent watching television, a growth in single-parent families, changes in the composition of students taking the test, and the impact of the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s on the psyche and motivation of individual students. The authors concluded, "So there is no *one* cause of the SAT score decline, at least as far as we can discern, and we suspect no single pattern of causes. Learning is too much a part of Life to have expected anything else."<sup>29</sup> In a warning to those who sought a simpler analysis, one that would focus attention narrowly on schools, the authors wrote: "[A]ny attempt to isolate developments in the schools from those in the society at large turns out to reflect principally the

inclination to institutionalize blame for whatever is going wrong; the formal part of the learning process cannot be separated from its societal context."<sup>30</sup>

Critics have charged that by ignoring the role of these external factors, *A Nation at Risk* unfairly scapegoated educators.<sup>31</sup> There is truth to this, but it is also the case that developments in educational research were giving increasing support to the idea that schools did, or at least could, play a powerful role in affecting student outcomes.

Research subsequent to James S. Coleman's 1966 report on educational opportunity, known as the Coleman Report, concluded that the idea that family background was so powerful that school factors did not appreciably shape student outcomes was overblown.



The researchers argued that by focusing on measurable school resources (books in the library, for example), the Coleman Report ignored the school process variables that differentiated low- and high-quality schools. These researchers—pioneers of what was dubbed the "effective schools movement"—found that high-quality schools generally shared five characteristics: "strong administrative leadership, high expectations for achievement, an orderly learning environment, an emphasis on basic skills and frequent monitoring of student progress."<sup>32</sup>

Coleman and his colleagues reached similar conclusions in their prominent studies of Catholic schools, which found that the sense of shared mission and high expectations that characterized these private schools produced higher levels of learning than similar public schools. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's book *The Good High School* put less emphasis on order and discipline but also found that a school's atmosphere, principal leadership, respect for teachers, and high expectations were key ingredients in school success.<sup>33</sup> In sum, while the specific characteristics of success were debated, and continue to be, there was a growing sense by the mid- to late 1970s that schools could make a considerable difference in student learning, even for students who came from highly challenging family situations.

At the same time, the country experienced a broader decline in collective responsibility for schooling. By the early 1980s, the desegregation movement, America's most concerted effort to assume broader responsibility for schooling, had long since

fallen by the wayside. In light of the failures of busing and the anti-welfare state political climate that it helped to produce,<sup>34</sup> political leaders of both parties became averse to discussing the antipoverty or school integration measures that many critics argued were necessary for real reform.

Margaret Weir and Ira Katznelson point to the way that postwar shifts toward suburbanization, aided by government construction of highways and Federal Housing Administration mortgage guarantees, exacerbated racial and socioeconomic segregation and eroded collective responsibility for schooling.<sup>35</sup> The consequences of these shifts for schools (and neighborhoods) that remain in concentrated poverty have been disastrous, a point that has been amply documented in a series of social scientific studies beginning with William Julius Wilson's\* *The Truly Disadvantaged*.<sup>36</sup> Journalistic critics like Jonathan Kozol and Alex Kotlowitz have

## History has shown that top-down technocratic approaches have limited power in generating school improvement.

dramatized the traumatic consequences for children of the growth of high-poverty schools and neighborhoods and the unfairness of this arrangement in a land that promises equal opportunity.<sup>37</sup>

But this time, the social scientific consensus and moral claims for fairness were running against the political tide, and political leaders steered clear of anything that could be linked to busing.<sup>38</sup> In this regard, the school-centered analysis offered by *A Nation at Risk* provided a comfortable template for risk-averse political leaders—it put responsibility squarely on the schools and, consistent with the broader political temper of the times, did not ask for redistribution of resources or otherwise challenge the structural inequalities of schooling.

The analysis of *A Nation at Risk* placed a set of boundaries around the responsibility for improving schooling that has continued to mark the debate in the years since. The calls for educator accountability that have become prominent in recent years take as their premise the idea that schools are, at minimum, substantially responsible for student outcomes.

This emphasis on school responsibility has created a fundamental divide that has persisted through the subsequent battles over school reform, with many teachers arguing that it is unfair for them

to be judged on outcomes that are at least partly out of their control, and with political reformers preaching the mantra of accountability and “no excuses.” Again, the lines are teachers versus politicians and parents, as opposed to left versus right, as many school reformers on the left and center-left have welcomed greater educator accountability as a means to use schools to break cycles of poverty.

The result has been a downward spiral of distrust between policymakers and practitioners. As policymakers have sought to increase control through standards and accountability, teachers and their representatives have increasingly resisted what they see as misplaced blame and narrowing of curriculum. This resistance only hardens the resolve of policymakers to increase their levels of regulation and control, beginning the cycle anew.

Finally, embracing an essentially managerial effort to improve schools' performance precludes a broader discussion of structural reform (combating poverty, improving housing and employment) or societal responsibility for improving schools (desegregation). In this regard, the debate over schools reflects a rightward shift away from comprehensive efforts to improve high-poverty schools and neighborhoods.

### Getting Out from Under the Shadow of *A Nation at Risk*

While international comparisons and video studies of classrooms continue to suggest American students do need a more rigorous and challenging education—confirming one part of *A Nation at Risk*'s basic message—history has also shown that top-down technocratic approaches have limited power in generating school improvement.

Today, we would do well to embrace a different set of aims, remembering that schooling is as much about expanding the mind as it is about preparing people for jobs, that policymakers must empower educators to learn and grow rather than seek to control them, and that issues outside of schools, such as poverty and healthcare, must be tackled alongside those within schools if the goal is real progress for all of our students. These are not popular positions in the public debate, because such positions require that we see schooling as more than a utilitarian enterprise, that we trust a profession constantly under fire,<sup>†</sup> and that we fight poverty in ways that the American public has traditionally not supported.

The most promising people to argue for these positions are teachers themselves. Teachers are among the few professionals in American society who recognize the intrinsic benefits of reading Shakespeare or exploring Newton's laws. Teachers are the ones who understand that you enhance the profession by making it the kind that people want to join. And teachers are the ones who experience firsthand the effects that our stingy welfare state policies have on our most vulnerable citizens. Unless, or until, educators make this case, powerfully and clearly, they will continue to operate within the paradigm created by *A Nation at Risk*. □

#### Endnotes

1. William L. Boyd and Charles T. Kerchner, eds., *The Politics of Excellence and Choice in Education: 1987 Yearbook of the Politics of Education Association* (New York: Palmer Press, 1988); Joseph T. Murphy, ed., *The Educational Reform Movement of the 1980s: Perspectives*

(Continued on page 44)

\*For more on the problem of concentrated urban poverty, see Wilson's article “Being Poor, Black, and American” in the Spring 2011 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/spring2011/wilson](http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2011/wilson).

†For more about the intense scrutiny of the teaching profession, see “Quieting the Teacher Wars” in the Spring 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/spring2015/goldstein](http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2015/goldstein).

## THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR

# The Need for More Teachers of Color



Professional educators—in the classroom, library, counseling center, or anywhere in between—share one overarching goal: ensuring all students receive the rich, well-rounded education they need to be productive, engaged citizens. In this regular feature, we explore the work of professional educators—their accomplishments and their challenges—so that the lessons they have learned can benefit students across the country. After all, listening to the professionals who do this work every day is a blueprint for success.

BY JOSÉ LUIS VILSON

If I've done the math correctly, out of the 50 or so teachers I've had in my lifetime, only two or three of them were men who were black and/or Latino. For someone who is 33 years old and was born and raised in New York City, a place often celebrated for its diversity, that's staggering.

You're allowed to wonder why that's so important. After all, teachers of all races, backgrounds, sexes, and ages have proven to be effective educators of urban youth. In fact, I love that many white people care enough about the plight of black and Latino students that they seek to work in the neighborhoods in which these students live. Throughout my own education, many of my white teachers were excellent. I understand that there needs to be

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a diversity of experiences; our students have to survive in the same world as everyone else. A small part of me also thinks: Who better to teach students of color the tools needed to survive in a predominantly white country than white people?

But as a teacher of color, I'd be lying if I told you I wasn't disturbed by the lack of representation of black and Latino people, especially males, as teachers. Some work as principals and district administrators. Others are third-party vendors, education lawyers, and professors in institutions of higher education. Effective (and ineffective) teachers often leave the classroom in favor of these occupations; while plenty of men do great work in administration, many use it as a steppingstone to stay in education without grounding themselves in the educational practice of the classroom.

Because about 75 percent of our nation's teachers are women, many in society also view teaching as "women's work," a category that often leads to demeaning and obtuse ways of dismissing teachers' contributions. This dynamic compounds the already existing problem of society talking down to educators in our schools. Too many people don't see the need to pay teachers well

or to ensure they have proper working conditions because educators are regarded as caretakers, not professionals. While male-dominated professions like computer science or medicine garner respect, the teaching profession still has to combat patriarchy.

The fact that so many people view teaching as a second-class profession speaks volumes about our society's values. Plenty of men talk favorably about teachers, but when asked if they'd ever be teachers themselves, they respond, "I don't have the patience," and "You guys don't get paid enough." In our society, money means stature, whether we value the occupation or not. It's not just coming from the younger generation, either. My mom, whom I love dearly, on occasion wonders aloud why, with all the stress I endure as a teacher, I would put up with my job when I could make far more as a computer programmer.

There are those who have left the profession because it's really easy to become jaded about the school system *and* the human experience. I don't know any fellow black or Latino teachers who think that every student in their school is getting properly served by this system. Some conclude that the system is hopeless. Others say, "We'll continue to fight." The latter are crucial: when our students see more black or Latino sports figures populating a multimillion-dollar basketball court or football field, yet see only one black or Latino teacher in their whole grade, or two or three in their whole school, then they're probably less inspired to take their own education, inside and outside the classroom, seriously.

To be clear, I'm not speaking for every person of color here, but I'm calling things like I see them. I'm black and Latino. I'm a guy who grew up in public housing on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. You may or may not share any of these characteristics, and whether you share all of them, some of them, or none of them, you may or may not agree with me. No one group of people—people of color included—is monolithic in their thinking or experience. And just because someone is a person of color does not mean he or she grew up poor. But based on my experiences as someone who came of age in a pretty tough neighborhood, and then shocked everyone, including myself, by becoming a middle school teacher, I have some insights into schools and teaching as both a student and an educator of color.

### Making a Contribution

For a decade, I have been a New York City public school teacher, teaching students math at Inwood Intermediate School (IS 52) in the neighborhood of Washington Heights. I hadn't always intended to become an educator. I attended Syracuse University seeking to

graduate with a bachelor's degree in computer science, but then my college roommate showed me the movie *Office Space* and I realized I didn't want to spend my life longing for my stapler or beating up dysfunctional printers. Instead, I wanted to teach students whose backgrounds were similar to mine. A few years after earning my undergraduate degree in computer science from Syracuse, I enrolled in the New York City Teaching Fellows program, which places candidates in schools in three high-poverty regions of New York City. I chose to work in the Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights/Inwood, which is predominately inhabited by people who speak Spanish.

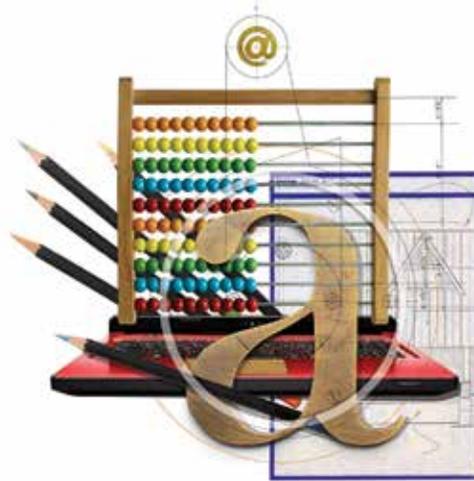
When I started teaching there, the neighborhood had already become a mostly Dominican (as in Dominican Republic) stronghold, a little DR in the United States, so to speak. But it was still home to a hodgepodge of cultures, a conglomeration of Puerto Rican, black, and Chinese blue-collar workers. As someone who grew up in similar circumstances, I came to the Heights because it's where I thought I could make a contribution.

With only seven weeks of pre-service training under my belt, I, like so many bright-eyed, bushy-tailed teachers, was filled to the brim with hope and enthusiasm. Such feelings usually fade fast, partly due to the strain of the school year, but also due to the pressure to perform miracles under deplorable learning conditions and the lack of agency to make things better. Challenges such as lack of autonomy, teacher isolation, and inadequate administrative support are easier to solve than teacher pay, yet they also fall under the top reasons why many teachers, especially

teachers of color, leave, and why those of us who *do* stay learn to temper our zeal.

My first adviser in the NYC Teaching Fellows program predicted that I wouldn't survive my first year of teaching because of the passion I exuded during my pre-service teaching. Ten years later, I tell others what I told him. I thrived then, and continue to do so now, not because of my idealism but because of my idealistic realism.

The difference between idealism and idealistic realism is that the former suggests a wishful dream far removed from reality. The latter, which I've often found with teachers of color (and those who have worked in high-poverty schools with a student body that's predominantly of color), is that we hold fast to the vision of a better country, a better town, a better neighborhood, where students find success in positive and enlightening ways. Yet, we do this in the context of their lives, and not based on our projections of what success looks like for them. We're not trying to mold them into what we believe they should be. We're trying to open doors to show them alternatives for what they could be.



As a teacher of color, I'd be lying if I told you I wasn't disturbed by the lack of representation of black and Latino people, especially males, as teachers.

In *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession*,\* journalist Dana Goldstein suggests that we recruit more teachers of color, saying "A half century of research and 150 years of practical experience show teachers of color are more likely to hold high expectations for students of color."

Yet the number of teachers of color still lags far behind the number of white educators. Of the nearly 3.4 million public school teachers in the United States in 2011–2012, the year for which most recent data are available, nearly 82 percent were white, and approximately 18 percent were of color.† Only about 4 percent were men of color.‡ For that same year, nearly 52 percent of public school students were white and approximately 48 percent were of color.²

With a predominantly white profession and a student body that's now majority nonwhite, we must consider the importance of recruiting teachers of color, especially male teachers of color. Just as integration by socioeconomic status can promote racial diversity while narrowing the achievement gap between low-income and more-affluent students,§ increasing the percentage of teachers of color would narrow what I call the vision gap—the gap that can arise in how low-income and more-affluent students view themselves as future professionals.

After all, children can't be what they can't see. By hiring more teachers of color (in particular, those who grew up economically challenged, like I did), students of color can form relationships with professionals who may share their cultural background *and* possess powerful narratives for success.

### A Genuine Connection

When I first walked into the classroom as a teaching fellow, my students were mostly from low-income families and were Dominican and black. Just like me. They raised their eyebrows the first time I stood in front of them; they looked as if they had never before seen a teacher of color. At the time, most of the male adults of color at the school were deans and administrators, who had been quickly shuffled out of the classroom into their positions. My students may have had a few women of color as teachers as well, almost all of

whom were veterans with strong content and pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills.

With only a month and a half's worth of training, I relied heavily on my ability to connect with students through their culture to survive that first year. I didn't yet have the experience that my older colleagues possessed, and I was not as sure of my teaching ability, so I was probably harder on myself than I needed to be. But according to others, I fared just fine. Some teachers in my first year approached me to ask for advice on how to handle certain situa-

tions, and I couldn't tell them because I didn't have the words for it. I usually referred them to veteran teachers in the building, who they seemed to be afraid of. I didn't understand it then, but all those times that I called my students' parents and spoke to them in Spanish, used my students' home language to help them understand math, and followed them from class to class, my genuine connection to their backgrounds was enabling me to develop a positive relationship with them. I had an instant leg up because I could see things through their eyes, and because I'd been where they'd been and still found success.

My colleagues acknowledged that my efforts were paying off. When I came into the school building one morning, a dean spotted me in the hallway as I was escorting my students to lunch and said in his burly growl, "Vilson, you're doing a yeoman's job!"

I said, "Huh?"

"A yeoman's job!"

"What?"

"You're doing a HELLUVA job, Vilson!"

"Thanks."

Despite the fact that many white teachers (like that dean) acknowledge the important contributions made by teachers of color, some still doubt the need for a diverse educator workforce. Here, I want to state clearly that we need more research, including quantitative research, on the effects of black male educators on student outcomes. For instance, a recent study suggests that teachers of color specifically could help to improve the academic achievement of students of color.³ Based on my own experiences, I believe it's important for children of color, especially male children of color, to see teachers of color, especially male teachers of color, as role models.

Whenever someone like me suggests that public schools do in fact need more teachers of color, the first question inevitably asked is, "Do you think we need to get rid of white teachers?" and, as a corollary, "Are you saying white teachers can't teach children of color?" That's not what I'm saying at all. If anything, balance matters for our students.



With a predominantly white profession and a student body that's now majority nonwhite, we must consider the importance of recruiting teachers of color.

\*For an excerpt, see "Quieting the Teacher Wars" in the Spring 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/spring2015/goldstein](http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2015/goldstein).

†The National Center for Education Statistics identifies teachers of color as black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and two or more races.

‡For more on socioeconomic school integration, see "From All Walks of Life" in the Winter 2012–2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/winter2012-2013/kahlenberg](http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2012-2013/kahlenberg).

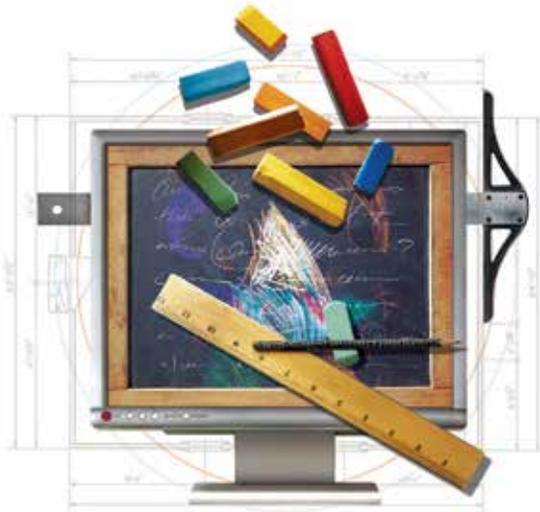
I would suggest that children of color need access to the ways and means of the dominant culture, and who better to teach that than white teachers and teachers of color who have mastered it? As Lisa Delpit writes in her book *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, "Teachers need to support the language that students bring to school, provide them input from an additional code, and give them the opportunity to use the new code in a nonthreatening, real communicative context." Survival in this country often depends on understanding the code to success (the phrase "college and career ready" comes to mind here), and if white teachers and teachers of color can show children of color the values and norms of our dominant culture, then we can close the vision gap for those students.

Educators of color can also make a positive impact on white students. Often, the onus of developing cultural competence falls solely on teachers of color. A more diverse teaching population can help white students interact with and understand people of different races and cultures. It would also enable them to see people of color in positions of authority. Exposure to peers and adults with different experiences and worldviews helps all children develop empathy for others and assess their own humanity.

Yet, the hiring of white teachers, which historically resulted in the removal of teachers of color, has often been, for all intents and purposes, a matter of public policy. For instance, when the Supreme Court began to mandate that southern states comply with *Brown v. Board of Education*, more than 30,000 black teachers and administrators were fired to ensure that white teachers kept their jobs. Even the 1966 merger of the National Education Association and the American Teachers Association, a historically black teachers union, didn't sway many teachers of either race to see the common struggle of teaching in America.<sup>4</sup> However well intentioned, the merger didn't ultimately improve the racial and gender dynamics that continued to play out in schools and union meetings.\*

Fast-forward to this century, and a closer look at teacher demographics in New York City speaks volumes as to why we need to hire teachers of color. According to a report published by the New York City Independent Budget Office, the share of teachers staffing high-poverty schools in 2011–2012, the year for which most recent data are available, was approximately 44 percent white, 25 percent black, 24 percent Hispanic, and 5 percent Asian, with other subgroups not

reported.<sup>5</sup> In low-poverty schools, the percentage of white teachers is substantially higher, at approximately 73 percent, while the percentages of black and Hispanic teachers are only 12 percent and 8 percent, respectively. Asian teachers' share is about the same, at 6 percent. The report also noted that "teachers in high-poverty schools transfer to other New York City public schools in larger numbers, suggesting that student characteristics might be an important factor in turnover decisions."



**I relied heavily on my ability to connect with students through their culture to survive that first year.**

When I ask some of my colleagues of color why they stay in high-poverty schools, they often say it's because they feel as if they're paying their successes forward, opening doors for their students, and teaching them to succeed. Few, if any, ever point to job protections and benefits, though both help to ensure that teachers make a career of the profession.

To further complicate matters, teachers of color leave the profession at a faster rate than their white peers,<sup>6</sup> not due to salaries or benefits but because of learning and working conditions. Too often, the high-poverty schools where teachers of color typically work are either over-managed by outside consultants or in the process of being shut down by their mayor or governor. While it's certainly true that poor management and lack of funding can negatively affect teachers at any school, such problems hit our high-poverty schools the hardest and often make professional concerns personal for teachers of color.

### **Professional and Cultural Competence**

To truly transform our education system and recruit and retain teachers of color, we must push multiple levers. One lever is ensuring the cultural competence of *all* educators. In October 2014, 11 civil rights groups ranging from the NAACP and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund to the National Urban League and the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center came together to lay out a handful of reforms and principles that would help narrow achievement gaps and push education in America into the 21st century. One of these principles focused on professional competence:

Systems of preparation and ongoing development should ensure that educators have the time, investments, and supports necessary to acquire the knowledge about curriculum, teaching, assessment, linguistic and cultural competence, implicit bias, and student support needed to teach students effectively. This should include additional supports for education professionals who serve children and families in historically under-resourced and disadvantaged classrooms and schools. School

\*In 1957, the American Federation of Teachers expelled locals that refused to desegregate.

systems should recognize educators' abilities, particularly in working with diverse learners and students of color. They should not only create incentives for education professionals to develop or acquire additional skills, but also require professional learning to ensure their effectiveness in the classroom.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, professional competence and cultural competence go hand in hand. We don't just teach subject matter; we teach the students in front of us. And if we share the same skin color and cultural and socioeconomic background as they do, we can serve as immediate models for success. From an administrative standpoint, having more teachers of color in a school means there may be more teachers whom students can turn to and feel comfortable having conversations with about certain situations. I've often joked that some teachers of color could earn loads of professional development credit for all the racial situations they must address in schools, and perhaps that's a benefit administrators should consider in hiring a diverse faculty. With more teachers of color in buildings with students of color, administrators and teachers alike can turn to one another to foster a more inclusive school community and advocate for all children.

In 2011, I had the privilege of attending an event in Tarrytown, New York, held by the organization Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers. The program was founded by Bettye Perkins to encourage more teachers of color to enter the profession through an eight-year program that provides mentorship for high school students and scholarships for college tuition; all candidates have to do is earn their certifications and become teachers. I wish such a group had existed when I first came into my own, but I'm excited that people like me have this opportunity now. I was invited to share a few remarks, which I titled "It's Not about a Salary, It's All about Reality," a quote from rapper and producer KRS-One's classic "My Philosophy":

Who gets weaker? The king or the teacher?  
It's not about a salary; it's all about reality  
Teachers teach and do the world good  
Kings just rule and most are never understood

I shared these lines to encourage the attendees to consider the ways educators inspire students to think for themselves. I also gave a few words of advice—for example, "Sample the best teachers from your past, but make your own story."

In my first month of teaching, I told them, I had this crazy idea that I would transform my students' lives and that they would change for me the way that students of famed educator Jaime Escalante did in the movie *Stand and Deliver*. They didn't. But that first class was probably my favorite, and the one from which I learned the most.

One time, we did a lesson on percentages. I wrote my lesson using the technical aspects of finding percentages. As I began to teach it and saw the bored looks on my students' faces, I had an idea. I wrote the word "percent" out and asked my students, "Does anyone recognize a word in here?"

"Cent!"

I said, "Oh, good! Now, has anyone ever heard of the word somewhere else, even in Spanish?"

Students jumped out of their seats, they were so excited to answer.

A few shouted, "Ooh! Ooh! *Centavo!*"

"So what does *centavo* mean?"

"A penny!"

"And how many pennies do you need to get a dollar?"

"A hundred!"

"So when we say *percent*, we mean we're comparing one thing out of a possible hundred."

"OOHHHHH!!!"

That piece of my lesson took a few more minutes than I had planned for, I explained. But it also made a huge difference. Teachers who can relate to their students on a cultural level can reach their students in important ways.

I'm not saying people from other cultures can't help us, but every student of color could use a role model. If that role model just happens to be the teacher in front of them, that's a good thing. □



With more teachers of color, administrators and teachers alike can turn to one another to foster a more inclusive school community.

#### Endnotes

1. "Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers in Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Selected Teacher Characteristics: Selected Years, 1987–88 through 2011–12," in National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2013, table 209.10.
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4. David Cecelski's *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) provides a detailed account of the devastation visited upon African American educators in North Carolina in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Cecelski estimates that more than 30,000 southern African American educators lost their jobs in the process of school desegregation. See also chapter 10 of Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).
5. New York City Independent Budget Office, *Demographics and Work Experience: A Statistical Portrait of New York City's Public School Teachers* (New York: Independent Budget Office, 2014), 4.
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7. "Civil Rights Groups Demand Accountability for Equity in Public Education," National Opportunity to Learn Campaign, October 28, 2014, [www.otlcampaign.org/blog/2014/10/28/civil-rights-groups-demand-accountability-equity-public-education](http://www.otlcampaign.org/blog/2014/10/28/civil-rights-groups-demand-accountability-equity-public-education).

# A Window to the Past

## What an Essay Contest Reveals about Early American Education



BY BENJAMIN JUSTICE

Pencils ready?

[Write] an essay on a system of liberal education, and literary instruction, adapted to the genius of the government, and best calculated to promote the general welfare of the United States; comprehending, also, a plan for instituting and conducting public schools in this country on principles of the most extensive utility.

This was the question posed by America's premier scholarly association, the American Philosophical Society (APS), in 1795.

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In a list of seven contest questions on various subjects, this education question came first, and had the largest prize, including \$100 (in 1795 dollars, which is about \$1,400 today) and publication by the APS.<sup>1</sup> The winners were chosen two years later, in 1797.

In today's English, the question would mean:

Design the best system of education for the United States, appropriate for the wealthy as well as the poor, including secondary and higher education as well as elementary schools, reaching people in remote areas as well as cities, promoting the common good and strengthening our republican form of government.

No easy task in any era.

But these were no ordinary times. The nation's leaders had just completed their political revolution, with the states ratifying the Constitution (in 1788) and Bill of Rights (in 1791). Despite their monumental failures to end chattel slavery, honor the land rights of indigenous people, or abolish the subordination of women, the men referred to as the Founding Fathers had nevertheless achieved a rare moment in history: applying ancient and modern theories of government to the creation of a new country.

The APS education prize contest captured the excitement and apprehension that the Founding Fathers felt about that creation. With no king and no state church, the founders believed that only through the virtue and intelligence of its citizens could the American republic survive; and in federal and state law, governments took measures to encourage the spread of useful knowledge and virtue. They ensured the delivery of mail, protected free speech, encouraged learned societies like the APS and voluntary ones like the Freemasons, formed or reformed colleges and academies, and created funds to subsidize local schooling efforts. In New England, state governments reaffirmed colonial laws that required towns to maintain free elementary schools or pay fines for noncompliance.

How to spread learning across the populace was indeed a challenge, if one viewed education as being formal, functional knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The very aspects of society that intellectuals celebrated as uniquely American made it difficult to educate the masses. America was diverse—culturally, regionally, and religiously. Settlement patterns varied by region, placing many families at significant distance from each other, and from seats of government. Deeply held cultural traditions varied as well, leaving people in some parts of the United States more inclined to value formal education or pay taxes to support it, and people in other parts less inclined.

There were other problems as well, more serious and intractable, that the American Revolution did not resolve. Should women have an equal right to education? What about the nearly one-fifth of Americans who lived as chattel slaves? Or the free people of color who were nevertheless marked by the shade of their skin?

Educating the mass of citizens, whether in the positive sense of enhancing the interest of liberty or in the negative sense of social control, or some of both, became a central preoccupation of intellectuals in the 1780s and 1790s. Interest ran across the political spectrum. Even before the war with Great Britain ended, Thomas Jefferson joined John Adams and other leaders in the effort to write grand educational provisions into state law.<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the 1780s, as America slouched toward a replacement for the Articles of Confederation, the question of education in the republic gained popularity in magazines and newspapers.<sup>3</sup>

Among these were fully formed, almost utopian plans for systems of mass education through public schooling. Benjamin Rush, a civic leader and one of this country's Founding Fathers, published essays recommending a statewide system of public education for Pennsylvania, from universal elementary school through college, for girls as well as boys; Noah Webster traveled across the country delivering lectures and selling his new American textbooks, before using his federalist newspaper, the *American Minerva*, as a mouthpiece for educational reform; George Washington urged Congress to found a national university. Alongside a similar university proposal at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, James Madison proposed that the federal government be empowered to "encourage, by proper premiums and provisions, the advancement of useful knowledge and discoveries."<sup>4</sup>

Madison's educational proposals failed, but the APS picked up the slack, serving as the nation's leading intellectual institu-

tion and even, for a time, the informal library of Congress. Centered in the heart of what was then America's largest city and capital, Philadelphia, the American Philosophical Society was uniquely situated to take a crack at the challenge of education. Founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1743, the APS sought to encourage and disseminate useful scientific and philosophical information. It was the age of associations, when Enlightenment intellectuals across Europe and, to a lesser extent, America formed clubs and academies to share ideas and discoveries.

By the 1790s, the APS had become a significant institution in the transatlantic intellectual world, maintaining correspondence with similar institutions all over Europe. For a time, APS facilities

## Educating the mass of citizens became a central preoccupation of intellectuals in the 1780s and 1790s.

were home to portions of the University of Pennsylvania. The membership list boasted the names of leading men of the day, Founding Fathers and European Enlightenment thinkers from Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Rush to Linnaeus, Lafayette, Talleyrand, Priestley, Condorcet, and Crèvecoeur. In their regular meetings, the society read and discussed contemporary issues in science, government, economics, and philosophy. A core of seven appointed members from various fields met at least once a month, usually joined by others who dropped in.<sup>5</sup>

The APS began awarding its first prize, the Magellanic Premium, for discoveries "relating to navigation, astronomy, or natural philosophy," in 1786. But the idea of sponsoring prize contests was much older, of medieval origins, and had become a staple of various European learned societies, which routinely sponsored essay and scientific contests on a variety of subjects. The most famous precursor to the APS education prize came from an Academy of Lyon essay contest, sponsored by the Abbé Raynal, in 1780. History teachers will appreciate the topic's enduring appeal: "Was the Discovery of America a blessing or a curse to mankind?"<sup>6</sup>

### The Contest Question

As with all utopian projects, the dreams implicit in the APS education prize exceeded the reality. The education question did not frame an open competition of new ideas, but instead reflected the pet educational reform agendas of APS members. It had two very distinct parts. The first half of the question dealt with what

should be taught: curriculum and possibly pedagogy (as implied by the word “system”). “[Write] an essay on a system of liberal education, and literary instruction, adapted to the genius of the government, and best calculated to promote the general welfare of the United States.”

Rather than make its question general, the APS asked for specific types of education, from two very different traditions. The first, “liberal education,” referred to elite education and required a discussion of college curriculum that, at the time, aroused passionate debate over the role of ancient languages. On the other hand, the phrase “literary instruction” could refer to mass education in basic literacy (reading and writing), or to academy- or college-level curriculum in vernacular literature. Both of these, the question challenged, should reflect and promote the “genius” of the newly minted government and the interest of the nation as a whole.

## The men of the APS asked for a single plan that would cover the entire United States, encompassing primary and secondary education.

In post-Revolutionary America, a liberal education centered on the “dead” languages of Greek and Latin and was, to a large degree, synonymous with an academy diploma or college degree, but it was both more and less. It was an education afforded by free time for contemplation—quite literally, it was “liberal” in the sense that education in ancient Athens was for free men of means and not slaves (although some women had one too).<sup>7</sup> Invoking a “liberal education” entitled a man to be heard on matters of politics and government. For many, a liberal education also implied a certain moral stature, even in the case of a woman.<sup>8</sup> A few periodicals even aimed to provide a “liberal education” to those who lacked one, by giving readers a monthly dose of high intellectual culture.<sup>9</sup>

The dominant ideologies of the day argued that the American republic could survive only if its people were virtuous and well informed, and their rulers even more so.<sup>10</sup> But while there was widespread consensus among writers (especially among those who *had* a liberal education) that a liberal education was necessary for creating future leaders, writers generally split into two camps with regard to the future of liberal education. Traditionalists championed the continued study of the oratorical and moral traditions of classics and classical languages, developing increasingly sophisticated rationales for existing practice. Reformers of a more philosophical mindset—outspoken APS men such as Franklin and Rush—argued that a liberal education should be more useful, inquiry-based, and scientific.<sup>11</sup>

The second part of the APS essay question was really a separate one: to develop a practical plan to build and operate public schools across the nation. It read, “comprehending, also, a plan for instituting and conducting public schools in this country on principles of the most extensive utility.”

This “public schools” portion of the question reflected a preoccupation of prominent leaders with a well-informed and virtuous citizenry on the one hand, and a homogeneous citizenry on the other. While the word “public” was not meant in the modern sense of the word, neither did it reflect any one specific definition or consistent usage. It could merely refer to education taking place in public, as opposed to in the home. But it was more than that too. The public schools described by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, for example, were to be funded in part with rent from public land and overseen democratically by local voters. New Englanders funded their public schools partially through local tax and defined them legally as having democratic, lay control by citizens, while also encouraging local clergy to oversee them (although some towns preferred to pay a fine rather than keep a school).<sup>12</sup> Southern states almost universally rejected the notion of public support for common education. And at the collegiate level, public education had yet other meanings. Graduates of Dartmouth referred to themselves in 1786 as having a “publick liberal education.”<sup>13</sup>

What the APS probably meant by public schools in its contest question was that the schools should exist in the public sphere, for the use and benefit of the general public, at some form of common expense. Presumably, though it was not stated explicitly, these schools needed to embrace the curricular concerns of the first part of the question, that is, liberal education and literary instruction. Finally, these schools needed to be described in a single plan that would cover the whole nation, from the rural South, which had no tradition of public support of education, to New England, which boasted one of the most literate, best-educated populations in the world.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the APS education contest did not ask for the best or most original essay on education, but rather for an essay on specific reforms. Beginning with “liberal education,” it moved outward to increasingly general issues, with the unifying themes of utility and national character. Despite its eagerness to emphasize the unique aspects of American society and government, however, the APS addressed the very same issues that concerned the French learned societies. The men of the APS asked for a single plan that would cover the entire United States, encompassing primary and secondary education, taking a stand on the issue of liberal education, and doing so in a way that was practical and uniquely American.

### Vying for the Prize

The society placed advertisements in Philadelphia periodicals (which had a national reach) in May of 1795, setting a deadline for the education contest of January 1, 1797. A year passed with no mention of an entry. By October 1796, there was still no mention of an entry, so the society tried more advertising. Finally, on December 30, it reported having three essays. By a new April 1, 1797, deadline, the APS would have a total of seven.<sup>15</sup>

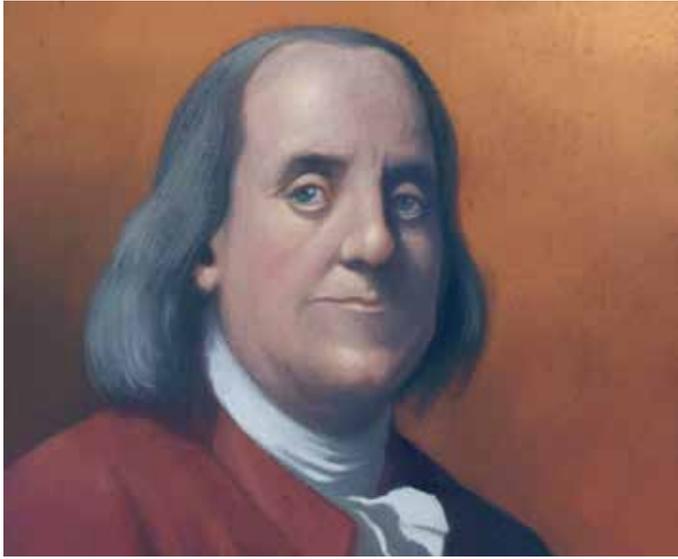
The peer reviewers followed a strict review methodology. Each entry had to be anonymous, accompanied by a separate

envelope with the name and address of the author, which would be opened only in the case of a winning essay. The APS secretary numbered and/or titled each essay, and someone read it aloud to the members of the society. The APS then assigned each to a review committee, which was to write an impartial summary for the benefit of the whole body.

Not all entries were created equal, however, and not all reviews were quite as impartial as they may have claimed. Each of the three strongest essays was long and carefully crafted, and arrived by the original deadline. Once the essays were assigned to review committees, they were numbered: No. 1 (written by

omy between elite liberal education and mass education—sound educational principles were universal. Smith’s radical plan eliminated dead languages for all but university students. He made no argument for religious instruction.<sup>17</sup>

**Contender No. 2:** Samuel Knox wrote the most thorough and detailed plan. Knox was a clergyman and a veteran teacher of more than 15 years, and his 200-page plan reflected an intimate knowledge of the classroom. Knox imagined a state-run, secular, four-tiered system of mass education for males, including primary or “parish” schools, “county schools” or academies, state colleges, and a national university. Like Smith, Knox argued that



The seven entries reveal a decided lack of consensus about American education.

Samuel Harrison Smith), No. 2 (written by Samuel Knox), and No. 3 (anonymous, but very likely written by Rev. William Smith). The author of No. 3 hoped to collect the essay in the event it lost the competition, asking the committee to return it care of a nearby tavern keeper. When No. 3 did lose, the essay was duly delivered—and thus does not survive in the archives of the APS. What does survive, however, is the review committee’s report.<sup>16</sup>

**Contender No. 1:** Samuel Harrison Smith, a newspaper editor in Philadelphia, wrote a highly theoretical, 79-page argument built upon the prevailing discussion in Scottish philosophy about the nature of virtue: were men born inherently good or evil, or were they blank slates, or somewhere in between? From a lengthy discussion of what he saw as the connection between “virtue and wisdom,” he proceeded to outline a three-tiered system of free, compulsory public education for the boys and men of the United States funded through property tax.

Smith argued that the first-tier schools should be of two types: primary schools for boys ages 5 to 10, and secondary schools for boys ages 10 to 18. These should focus primarily on reading, writing, and arithmetic (the three Rs, the saying goes), but at the secondary level should also include history, geography, mechanics, memorizing portions of the Constitution, and other “useful” studies. The second tier, state colleges, and the third, a national university, would be available at public expense to a select group of students promoted from lower schools, as well as to those who could afford tuition. Smith rejected the dichot-

each level should select a small percentage of students to move to the next, but unlike Smith, Knox saw clearer distinctions between education for the masses and education for the elite. Primary schools would teach the three Rs, but academies should emphasize Ancient Greek and Latin first, followed by French and arithmetic.

Knox’s plans for colleges and a national university did not imagine anything unusual, except that he punctuated his plans with obsessive detail, from the size and relative position of professors’ residences to the design of the iron gates. Although Knox was a clergyman, he placed relatively little importance on religious education, urging schools at all levels to protect freedom of conscience by avoiding sectarian instruction and limiting religious content to brief, universalist prayers at the start and finish of the day. He also urged a uniform collection of national textbooks, and state boards of education to oversee local schools. He conceded the possibility that local families may want to send their girls to primary school, in which case he argued that all schoolmasters should be married, so that their wives could teach separate classes for girls. As with all the essayists, he did not discuss race.<sup>18</sup>

**Contender No. 3:** This essay has gone unnoticed by historians, though significant artifacts of it survive either as quotations or in summary. Forty-seven pages in length, the language is provocative, as the committee noted, and the proposal differs from its peers on key points. The author was probably Rev. William Smith, former provost of the University of Pennsylvania and

founder of Washington College. First, Rev. Smith put nonsectarian religious instruction front and center in his proposal, writing, “Morality was ever constructed as inseparable from the principles of Religion.” At higher levels of education, Rev. Smith saw no conflict between science and giving “due homage to the Supreme Creator who established its Laws.”

As did most of the others, Rev. Smith proposed a three-tiered system of schools, comprising free primary schools for poor children—presumably both girls and boys, since they were to be taught by “masters and mistresses”—and offering instruction in “national language, Arithmetic, morality, and a general descrip-



tion of the terrestrial globe.” These schools would be run by justices of the peace or “corporations.” At the next level, central schools or academics would provide two separate courses—a short course for future teachers and a longer academic course that would be the equivalent of college. At the highest level, a national university would set the standards for all levels of education, provide the highest levels of education available, and provide inspectors for lower schools. Existing colleges and universities could become “central schools” in this plan. At the end of the essay, Rev. Smith listed an unusual provision: schoolmistresses would be ranked equally with professors at the central schools, potentially creating a professional teaching career for educated women.<sup>19</sup>

**Other entrants:** There were four weaker and shorter submissions as well. One written by Francis Hoskins, a Philadelphia accountant, focused on classroom concerns—the school schedule, rewards and punishments, schoolhouse architecture, and teachers. Another essay was likely submitted by John Hobson, a Unitarian minister from Birmingham, England, who fled to America after a mob burned down his church and home. He wrestled with curriculum theory; discussed teaching literacy to children, including the use of phonetics; and laid out a system of building, funding, and maintaining public schools through a statewide property tax.

Two others remain anonymous, despite extensive archival research to determine the authors’ identities, but both appear to have been connected to the study of medicine, as students or

possibly faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. One author, with the pseudonym “Hand,” wrote that a national university should oversee all education by setting national standards. In addition, he believed that higher education should take a more direct role in managing common schools, training and overseeing teachers, and providing professional development in the form of lectures on special topics. The final contestant, “Freedom,” argued that the acquisition of literacy was a mechanical art, virtually devoid of thought or personal expression. He then devoted his essay to weighing every aspect of the academic curriculum against the idea of “utility” and emphasized basic medi-

State-sponsored public education has become a universal public good, found in nearly every nook of the globe.

cal training, no doubt a response to the deadly epidemics that had begun to sweep through Philadelphia in the 1790s.

### And the Winner Is...

At a June 1797 meeting, society president Thomas Jefferson ordered a special meeting to judge the seven entries for the education prize. For one month, the seven essays lay together on a table, inside Philosophical Hall, which the society kept open every day (except on Sundays) so that members had “ample opportunity of estimating the comparative merits of the Essays on this important Subject.” The general public was not invited.<sup>20</sup>

The seven entries reveal a decided lack of consensus about American education—even in a context as selective as the APS contest. Written as questions, these uncertainties sound hauntingly familiar to educationists of any generation: How can (or should) religion be taught in public schools? Is higher education an entitlement or a privilege? Should schools prepare students to be better workers, better thinkers, or better human beings? What role should the federal government have in dictating local school policy?

Given their high aspirations, it should be no surprise that the members of the APS were frustrated with the results: only three strong contenders. Finally, in December of 1797, the APS decided that Samuel Harrison Smith and Samuel Knox should share the prize. But the body resolved that neither essay was exactly what it was looking for, and immediately explored the possibility of a second contest. It never happened. Over the ensuing century, the

winning essays made their way into the canon of early republican writing on education, while the contest became an iconic moment for historians of American education.

Taken together, the essays provide us with a window into the ideas and beliefs of educational reformers at the birth of the United States. While the educational writings of more prominent leaders are well known—Jefferson’s plans for Virginia, Benjamin Rush’s for Pennsylvania, and Noah Webster’s textbooks for the whole nation, for example—the APS contest introduces us to a second tier of educational reformers: a newspaper publisher, an accountant, the principal of an academy, a political refugee, a

health and well-being of any society. If the APS contest is, for the historian of the early republic, a rich source for understanding the 1790s, it is also, for the scholar of modernity, a useful starting point for understanding the relationship between public schools and state building that has laid the foundation of global liberalism.

Whether we view the great contest narrowly or generally, as a source for political theory or historical understanding (or both), the challenge of finding the ideal system of education for the United States remains as relevant and fruitful today as it did when the APS deemed it as being worthy of a contest. The knowledge it produced is still useful. □



former university head, and two writers who remain anonymous. The winning essays by Smith and Knox provide us with substantial, well-crafted arguments drawing together the best educational literature of their time. Yet the losing essays, too, give us an indication of the problems and solutions of American education through the eyes of more ordinary men.

Why should their vision matter? It’s fair to say that all the essays favored the same general late-18th-century Enlightenment orientation as the APS, and were thus not indicative of the full range of views on education at the time. But we must also recognize that the men of the APS (and others like them) led the revolution, wrote the Declaration of Independence and federal and state constitutions, and served in the highest political offices in the land. The essays of the APS contest offer us a link between the political vision of the United States and its educational significance. What did the Founding Fathers think about public education in America? It’s not an easy question to answer, but the APS contest is a great place to start.

The award of the prize in 1797 to Smith and Knox did not signal the end of the conversation about education in the republic, but instead marked its beginning. In the intervening centuries, state-sponsored public education has become a universal public good, found in nearly every nook of the globe, sponsored to some degree by every stable national government. And whether one is in the United States, United Kingdom, or United Arab Emirates, the provision of free, universal, and state-regulated education has become one of the standard measures of the

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# The Summer Slide—for Teachers?



education leaders during June and July. There will be sessions for everyone, including new teachers. And the best part? You receive one professional development credit for each session you attend.

Here is the lineup: On June 11, learn about how to keep students engaged during summer break. On June 25, tune in for a day of professional development just for those who teach the humanities. On July 9, professional development will be specifically targeted to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) educators. And on July 22, the series wraps up with presentations on the foundations of teaching, perfect for those new to the profession.

Want to connect with your peers in person this summer? Then attend some events Share My Lesson will be offering at the International Society for Technology in Education conference in Philadelphia, as well as at EdSurge and the AFT TEACH conference, both in Washington, D.C.

No matter what adventures you have planned, avoid the summer slide. Sign up for Share My Lesson and stay up to date with Summer of Learning!

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

EDUCATORS WANT TO PREVENT the “summer slide” in academic skills that can happen when students take a break from school and shift their focus to hanging out with friends, taking trips to the pool, and enjoying other fun activities. But what happens to educators when they take some time off from the classroom? Do they encounter a similar slide?

Many teachers may laugh at the notion that summer sets them back. While it’s true that teachers aren’t in the classroom each day, summer is typically a time when they still work: earning professional development credits, learning the new curriculum being implemented in September, taking on tutoring jobs, and planning for a successful school year. The two months educators have off does not feel like much of a break. Instead, summer seems like a short amount of time to accomplish everything they are too busy to tackle during the school year.

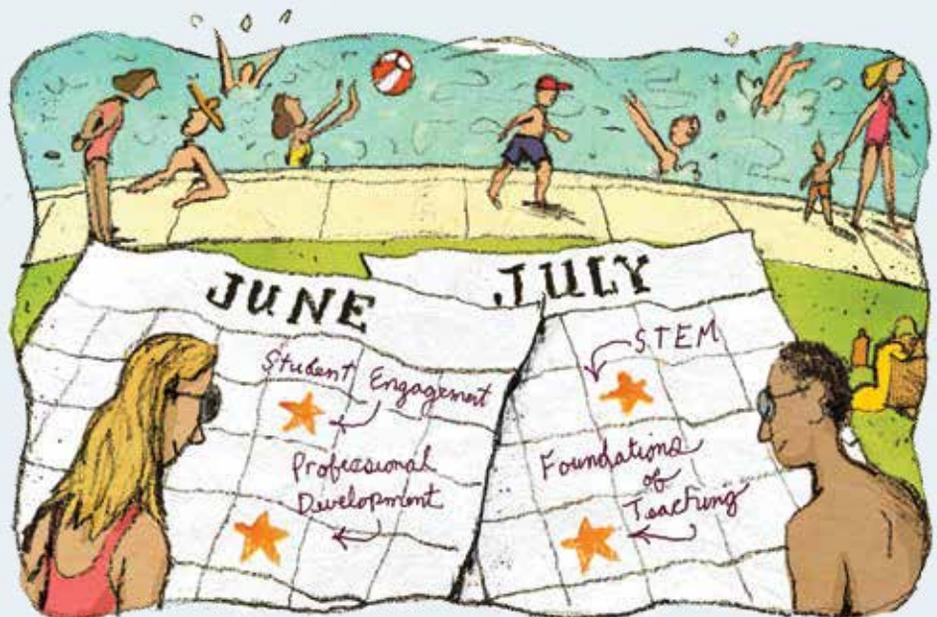
Share My Lesson, well known for being a resource for finding free preK–12 lesson plans and activities in all subject areas, will help educators get the most out of their time away from the classroom by launching “Summer of Learning.”

This summer, Share My Lesson will offer a variety of ways that educators can stay connected—even on those trips to the beach. Summer of Learning will provide educators several new areas of content to explore and help them build a new library of lessons and ideas, including collections focused on professional development and parental involvement. Advice from Share

My Lesson partners, bloggers, and teachers will offer perspectives on topics like homework and teaching students with disabilities.

We’ll also provide resources on digital trends in education and how to network with educators online, among other ideas for both inside and outside the classroom. And, of course, the summer would not be complete without a contest and giveaways—found weekly on [ShareMyLesson.com](http://ShareMyLesson.com), Twitter, and Facebook.

Because professional development lies at the heart of summer learning for educators, Share My Lesson will offer four days of free online professional development from top



# Unaccompanied Children in Schools

SINCE 2014, more than 62,000 unaccompanied children—those entering the United States on their own, without parents or guardians—have been detained crossing the border with Mexico. The vast majority come from El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras, where violence, poverty, and unemployment have risen to alarming levels in recent years. Although U.S. schools have a long history of educating immigrant students, the arrival of unaccompanied minors from Central America in such large and unprecedented numbers presents unique challenges to educators.

Students who have crossed the border unaccompanied by an adult have undergone long, dangerous, and traumatic journeys before arriving here. They may be held in detention centers far away from family, or they may be living with relatives they haven't seen in years, if ever. When they're not in school, they may be working, caring for a younger sibling, or, if they've been detained, attending deportation hearings as mandated by federal law. Such stressful circumstances can make it even more difficult for them to concentrate on their studies.

Schools are required to meet the educational needs of all students, immigrants or otherwise, so if you feel the needs of your students are not being met, please contact your school's resource teacher for English language learners (ELLs), your school administrators, or your state officials. In addition, community, faith-based, and legal-aid organizations may be willing and able to provide assistance.

For more information, visit <http://go.aft.org/AE215ftt1>, where you'll find materials jointly developed by the AFT and Colorín Colorado, an online resource for educators and parents of ELLs. Also, see [www.bit.ly/UnaccompaniedTips](http://www.bit.ly/UnaccompaniedTips) for advice on how to:

1. Understand the context of your students' immigration experiences.
2. Lay the foundation for a strong personal relationship with your immigrant students.
3. Establish contact with your students' families or guardians.
4. Help build a strong support network.
5. Reach out to ELL specialists in your school or district.
6. Look for ways for students to share



- information about their experiences, language, and culture.
7. Understand your students' challenges and strengths.
8. Offer your students opportunities to use their first language.
9. Educate yourself about the experience of unaccompanied minors.
10. Find out what else is happening in your community to support your students.

—AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

## RESOURCES

### SHANKER INSTITUTE'S EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLECTION

The Albert Shanker Institute recently launched a website with newly available, free resources for early childhood educators. The collection includes the “Let’s Talk” series of Common Core State Standards-aligned modules. Spanning oral language development, early literacy, early science, and early mathematics, “Let’s Talk” is designed to strengthen the ability of early childhood educators to impart rich, academic content that young children are fully capable of learning and especially eager to explore. Also featured are materials on the Preschool Educational Environment Rating System (PEERS). Designed for use by practitioners as well as administrators, PEERS is a method for examining the quality of instruction in preschool settings (and presents a much fuller picture than other rating scales). The Shanker Institute’s early childhood education collection, which continues to grow, is located at <http://go.aft.org/AE215res1>.

### NAVIGATING COMMON CORE MATH

A new online tool called the Textbook Navigator/Journal helps teachers tie textbook lessons to the Common Core State Standards in mathematics. Created by Michigan State University’s Center for the Study of Curriculum under the direction of William H. Schmidt, the Navigator encompasses 34 math textbook series to help teachers determine which standards are covered in which textbook lessons. The Navigator also allows teachers to select a given grade-level Common Core standard in

math and then view all of the textbook lessons focusing on that standard. In effect, the Navigator creates a table of contents for a textbook that is defined in terms of the standards and not the topics. In this way, teachers can decide for themselves in what order they wish to cover the textbook lessons (and which lessons they can and probably should skip). If there are no textbook lessons covering a particular standard, the Navigator will direct teachers to several free, online sources of curricular materials. For more information or to register for the tool (only Chrome and Safari browsers are supported), visit [www.bit.ly/1JbJUtY](http://www.bit.ly/1JbJUtY).

### THE IMPACT OF “SNOW DAYS” AND “DAYS ABSENT”

In the Summer 2015 issue of *Education Next*, Joshua Goodman, assistant professor of public policy at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, explains why “days absent” are a much different animal than “snow days” when it comes to student academic performance. According to Goodman, studies show that “student absences sharply reduce student achievement, particularly in math, but school closings appear to have little impact.” That’s not to suggest that instructional time doesn’t matter, he stresses, just that schools and teachers are better prepared “to deal with the coordinated disruptions caused by snow days—much more so than they are [able] to handle the less dramatic but more frequent disruptions caused by poor student attendance.” The full article is available at [www.educationnext.org/defense-snow-days](http://www.educationnext.org/defense-snow-days).



A Union of Professionals

# ELECTION 2016: YOU DECIDE.



As we approach the 2016 presidential election, working families want to know about the issues at stake and where the candidates stand.

We've put together information\* on leading declared and potential candidates and their positions on issues critical to AFT members and the communities they serve.† Read and consider carefully. Then let us know who you think deserves the AFT's endorsement and support.

Visit [aft.org/election2016](http://aft.org/election2016).

**It's your union. It's your voice. You decide.**

## K-12 Education

## Higher Education

## Affordable Care Act

## Labor/ Jobs/ Economy

## Retirement Security

## Immigration



**BIDEN**

Longtime supporter of increased federal funding for critical preK-12 education programs.

A firm opponent of private school vouchers.

Led the Obama administration's \$500 million initiative to create and expand innovative partnerships between community colleges and businesses to train workers with the skills employers need.

Strongly supported and advocated for the ACA: The ACA gives "the American people more freedom and control over their healthcare choices, improving the quality of the care that they receive and reducing cost, all by building on the best of our private insurance system."

Supports raising the minimum wage and is sharply critical of rising income inequality.

Opposes privatizing Social Security, cutting benefits and raising the retirement age.

Supports comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship.

Supports the DREAM Act.



**CLINTON**

Leader of "Too Small to Fail," an effort to improve the health and well-being of children from birth to age 5. Supports increased Title I funding for schools in need. Opposes private school vouchers.

Has fought to expand financial aid for low-income college students.

Is committed to preserving and improving the ACA.

Favors raising the minimum wage and is an avowed union supporter. "When I'm president, we're going to stand up for unions. We're going to make sure they can organize for fair wages and good working conditions."

Opposes cutting Social Security benefits, privatizing the program and raising the retirement age.

Supports comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship.

Supports the DREAM Act.



**O'MALLEY**

As governor, invested record amounts in Maryland's public schools. Under O'Malley, funding increased by 37 percent.

Opposes private school vouchers.

Increased state funding to allow Maryland colleges and universities to freeze tuition from 2007-2011.

Supports the ACA. Maryland was one of the first states to set up a health insurance exchange.

Supports increasing the minimum wage.

Supports strengthening collective bargaining rights. In 2007, signed an executive order to grant collective bargaining rights to healthcare aides and child care workers.

Opposes privatizing Social Security and instead supports expanding the benefit.

Supports comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship.

Championed a version of the DREAM Act for Maryland's public colleges and universities.



**SANDERS**

Signed the Fix America's Schools Today (FAST) Act of 2011.

Co-sponsored an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for increased funding.

Co-sponsored the Student Loan Affordability Act, which extended the reduced interest rate for Stafford student loans.

Introduced the American Health Security Act, which would guarantee healthcare as a human right and provide every U.S. citizen and permanent resident with healthcare coverage and services through a state-administered, single-payer program.

Supports raising the minimum wage. Is also a strong supporter of expanded collective bargaining rights for public employees.

Promotes strengthening the social safety net by expanding Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and nutrition programs.

Supports comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship.

Supports the DREAM Act.

\* Sources and citations are available in the online version at [aft.org/election2016](http://aft.org/election2016).

† This chart reflects a brief snapshot of the candidates' positions.

**K-12 Education****Higher Education****Affordable Care Act****Labor/ Jobs/ Economy****Retirement Security****Immigration****BUSH**

As governor of Florida, signed legislation to evaluate students and teachers based on high-stakes tests, create for-profit charter and virtual schools, and provide vouchers for private and religious schools.

Launched the nation's first statewide voucher program.

Ended affirmative action in Florida's colleges and universities, leading to a sharp drop in minority higher education enrollment.

Does not support the ACA and calls it "flawed to the core."

Has voiced opposition to minimum wage increases. Wants to weaken collective bargaining rights for teachers and other public employees, and supports laws that undermine the strength of public and private sector unions.

Advocates for privatization of Social Security and raising the retirement age for Social Security.

Opposes the Obama administration's executive order protecting undocumented children (DACA and DAPA).

Supports the DREAM Act.

**CHRISTIE**

As governor of New Jersey, cut funding in 2011 budget, which the state Supreme Court ruled violated the state constitution.

Cut state funding to New Jersey colleges and universities.

Opposed the ACA, calling it a "failed federal program."

Opposed raising the minimum wage. Was a vocal supporter of Scott Walker's attacks in Wisconsin on public employee rights.

Signed legislation that slashed pensions by \$1.5 billion, which the courts ruled was in violation of state law.

Opposes the Obama administration's executive order protecting undocumented children (DACA and DAPA).

**CRUZ**

Supports turning federal education dollars into vouchers that can be used to fund private schools.

Voted to cut Pell Grants that help low-income students attend college.

Opposed the ACA.

Opposed attempts to raise the minimum wage.

Supports raising the retirement age for Social Security, reducing the growth rate of Social Security benefits and privatizing Social Security.

Opposes the Obama administration's executive order protecting undocumented children (DACA and DAPA).

**JINDAL**

As governor of Louisiana, proposed budget for 2015 that keeps state funding with no increase in six years.

Implemented a private school tuition voucher program, which was ruled unconstitutional by a Louisiana judge.

Proposed hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to higher education, even though public colleges and universities in Louisiana already receive less money on a per-pupil basis than in any other state.

Opposed the ACA.

Opposes recent attempts to raise the minimum wage. Supports legislation that would wipe out payroll deductions for union members and silence the voice of teachers and other public employees.

Tried to eliminate defined benefit pensions for public employees.

Opposes the Obama administration's executive order protecting undocumented children (DACA and DAPA).

**KASICH**

As governor of Ohio, proposed a massive expansion of the state's voucher program that would have drained funds from public schools and used tax dollars to fund private schools.

Cut state support to higher education by 6 percent.

Opposed the ACA.

Through state Senate Bill 5, attempted to wipe out workplace rights for teachers, firefighters and other public employees. His efforts were defeated by popular referendum.

Supported legislation that cut state funding for employee pensions.

Opposes the Obama administration's executive order protecting undocumented children (DACA and DAPA).

**PAUL**

Supports private school vouchers. Would abolish the U.S. Department of Education.

Sponsored federal voucher legislation.

Voted to cut Pell Grants that help low-income students attend college.

Opposes the ACA and has voted to repeal it.

Says we should abolish the minimum wage. Opposes collective bargaining rights, and supports legislation intended to hinder the effectiveness of unions.

Would raise the retirement age for Social Security, and supports what would be the largest cuts to Social Security in U.S. history.

Opposes the Obama administration's executive order protecting undocumented children (DACA and DAPA).

**RUBIO**

Presided over a \$2.3 billion cut to Florida education as speaker of the Florida House.

Supports federal voucher legislation.

Voted to cut Pell Grants that help low-income students attend college.

Opposed the ACA.

Opposes increasing the minimum wage and doesn't think that the minimum wage law works.

Supports raising the retirement age for Social Security.

Opposes the Obama administration's executive order protecting undocumented children (DACA and DAPA).

**WALKER**

Supports the expansion of voucher programs that drain funds from public schools and use taxpayer dollars to fund private schools.

In 2015, slashed \$300 million from Wisconsin's higher education budgets.

Opposed the ACA.

In 2011, pushed legislation that stripped public employees of collective bargaining rights; in 2015, supported and signed a so-called right-to-work bill in Wisconsin designed to hinder and harass private sector unions.

As governor, slashed state contributions to employee pensions.

Opposes the Obama administration's executive order protecting undocumented children (DACA and DAPA).

## BIPARTISAN ESEA BILL SHOWS PROMISE

“A big deal” is how AFT President Randi Weingarten characterized the rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. The panel finished its work on April 16 with a bill Weingarten called “the most positive development we’ve seen in public education policy in years—because of both its content and the committee’s very intentional move to leave partisanship at the door.” The bill, which has moved to the full Senate, includes major gains for English language learners and early childhood education. Weingarten also noted that the bill “restores the law’s original intent” of addressing poverty and educational inequality through targeted funding. “While not perfect—no compromise is—the bill moves away from the counterproductive focus on sanctions and high-stakes tests, and ends federalized teacher evaluations and school closings,” she said. Weingarten contrasted this promising federal action with growing acrimony in states like New York, in a recent column available at <http://go.aft.org/AE215news1>.

## CORINTHIAN SHUTDOWN

Corinthian Colleges announced on April 25 that it will immediately close its remaining campuses, fueling calls from student advocates, lawmakers, the AFT, and other organizations for U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to relieve Corinthian students of crippling student debt. The debacle also is bringing attention to the PRO Students Act, a federal bill to protect students from predatory, deceptive, and fraudulent practices, particularly in the for-profit college sector. Corinthian was accused of charging students exorbitant tuition and fined \$30 million by the Department of Education for padding job placement rates. “More than a marketing tool to lure new students, solid job placement rates allow the company to satisfy the accrediting bodies that oversee its nearly 100 U.S. campuses, while enabling Corinthian to tap federal student aid coffers—a source of funding that has reached nearly \$10 billion over the last decade,” a *Huffington Post* investigation reveals. Read the story at [www.huff.to/1cwBHWH](http://www.huff.to/1cwBHWH).

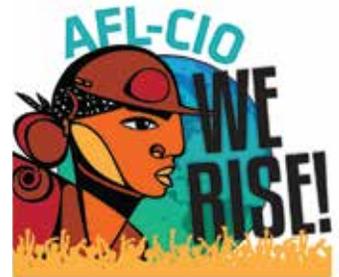
**Michael Adorno-Miranda, speaking at a press event in April, is one of the Corinthian 100, students who are refusing to pay back their student loans because their “education” at Corinthian Colleges gave them no useful credentials—just lots of debt.**



AFT STAFF

## HELPING IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

On April 2, the AFL-CIO officially launched “We Rise!” a national initiative to help immigrant workers. The effort will equip unions around the country to empower such workers and their families by helping them apply for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) programs. “We Rise!” will also encourage qualified legal permanent residents to become U.S. citizens. More than 200 labor activists from 23 different unions and 27 states gathered in Washington, D.C., this spring for three days of training. This effort builds on the AFT’s initiative “Reclaiming the Promise of the American DREAM: Educators, Parents, and Students Working Together on the Implementation of DACA and DAPA,” which encompasses 25 locals in 16 states. Meanwhile, on April 7, the AFT joined with dozens of states and organizations to file an amicus brief in *Texas v. United States of America*, urging the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit to lift the stay on President Obama’s executive action on immigration. The brief is available at <http://go.aft.org/AE215news4>.



## HOLDING A TESTING GIANT ACCOUNTABLE

AFT President Randi Weingarten traveled to Pearson’s annual shareholder meeting in London on April 24 to join union leaders, parents, and education advocates who are demanding that the company measure the social, emotional, and academic impact of its education practices. “While I recognize Pearson has a duty to its shareholders to be profitable, my question centers on another obligation: to conduct business in a way that befits the world’s largest education company—that is, in the words of its president, John Fallon, where every product must be measured by its ‘social impact.’” The AFT, the United Kingdom’s National Union of Teachers, and other organizations also sent a letter to Pearson outlining their concerns. Read the letter at <http://go.aft.org/AE215news3>.

## TAKING STOCK OF TEACHER PREPARATION

Some of the nation’s leading voices on education policy offered guidance on effective teacher preparation at the 2015 Teaching & Learning Conference in Washington, D.C. Among the speakers at the March event were Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University; Kentucky Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday; and Sharon Robinson, president and CEO of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Their plenary session was moderated by AFT President Randi Weingarten, who emphasized that teaching, like any other profession, must treat induction and preparation as a core mission. The panel highlighted some of the components teachers need to succeed: high-quality preparation rooted in rich clinical experience, continuous supports for new teachers, and opportunities for growth. Details are available at <http://go.aft.org/AE215news2>.

# Importance of Tenure

(Continued from page 11)

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## Supporting Students with ASD

(Continued from page 19)

collect data on an ongoing basis about student progress. If an educator is implementing the practice appropriately (as measured by the fidelity checklists) and the student does not make progress over a reasonable period of time (as shown by the student's data), the educator should consider other EBPs that have generated positive outcomes in the student's goal area (e.g., interacting socially with peers).

The increased prevalence of ASD and the interest in evidence-based practices are substantially intertwined. Increasingly, educators will teach students like Victor and Rosa. Fortunately, the EBP movement in education has provided the necessary tools for building effective programs for students with ASD. These practices alone, though, will not give them the supports they need. They must be combined with attention to program quality, targeted professional development, and educator judgment and expertise, the foundation for helping all students, not only those with ASD, succeed. □

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