

*"I URGE YOU TO READ IT."*  
DIANE RAVITCH

What Schools Can and Cannot Do and  
How Popular Reforms Hurt Them

# EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK

RODNEY H CLARKEN

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How Popular Reforms Hurt Them***

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*Rodney H Clarken*

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## **Education Under Attack**

*I believe that all reforms which rest simply upon the enactment of law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements, are transitory and futile.*

John Dewey

### **How I Came to Write This Book**

I began writing this book on April 27, 2011. At the time, I was only sharing some reactions with the teacher education faculty at my university to Michigan governor's special message on education reform. Though his message was just another in a series of attacks on education by politicians from around the country, this one was from my governor and these policies would hurt my students and the teachers and schools with whom I worked. I had felt for some time that what was being said about education was untrue, unfair and showed a lack of respect and disregard for educators. The political and paternalistic rhetoric assumed educators were not doing their jobs, the education system was "broken" and that certain reforms were going to "fix" it.

I did not feel the evidence to support the critics claims that education was broken and that their policies would fix it existed; therefore, these reforms did not meet the standard of truth. I did not feel their efforts were motivated by compassion and a sincere concern for our children and their proper education; therefore, they did not pass the test of love. Moreover, I did not feel their policies increased the likelihood of fairness for all people in our society; therefore, failing the criterion of justice.

One problem was that many of these reform proposals work against what their proponents claim to be supporting and that they subvert the best interests of education and society. It was my hope that educators--given their experience, expertise, dedication, loyalty, wisdom and commitment to excellence in education--would be provided with a greater voice on these matters of vital concern to the welfare of our nation and world. As

an educator, I felt a moral obligation to do what I could to contribute to raising that conversation to a more reasoned, civil and balanced discourse.

As I shared my views with others, I was encouraged share them with a larger audience to speak to the ill-founded education policies that were being vigorously promoted and pursued by officials. Many critics of education stated purpose has been to create the best schools, teaching, teachers and teacher education, but I do not believe many of these policies are in the best interests of education or our society, and I question the motivations behind them.

### The Michigan Attack

Many states are vying for the title of “Worst State in the Nation” when it comes to dismantling and destroying its public education system. Diane Ravitch, one of the most influential and respected voices in education and the author of the powerful and important book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*, has documented some of these attacks on education in her book and blog (<http://dianeravitch.net/author/dianerav/>), which gives daily updates and commentary on what is happening in education. The Michigan state government may not be the worst offender, but it is surely a contender.

The latest attack in Michigan comes in the form of the governor appointing emergency managers to governmental entities and school districts who are in financial distress. When this happens, all democratic officials and processes are replaced by the authority of the emergency manager. Because of the cuts in funding for schools, many districts will find themselves being taken over by the state and turned over to charter companies. See Diane Ravitch’s blog “Death Watch for Public Schools in Michigan” for more information (<http://dianeravitch.net/author/dianerav/> June 21, 2012).

Though the Michigan governor’s rhetoric of “the traditional methods, mindsets and goals of Michigan’s education system can take us no further” and “as we stand at the threshold of the New Michigan” (Snyder, 2011, p. 13) may have been inspiring, the policy reforms were not. A growing list of governmental educational policy reforms being proposed to “realign our educational values” (p. 13) give the appearance of improving education, while portraying educators as unwilling or unable to improve themselves. Such statements as the education system “must be reshaped,” “is not giving our taxpayers, our teachers, or our students the return on investment we deserve,” (Snyder, 2011, p. 1) and that we must “jettison the status quo that has too often accepted mediocrity and, at times, resulted in failure for our children and state,” (p. 2) illustrate this attitude.

Governor Snyder stated, “Michigan’s future is absolutely dependent on making our education system a success for our students, our teachers, our parents and our economy” (p. 1). I believe that is true. However, I think it is equally true that Michigan’s future is also dependent on making our political, economic, social and moral systems a success. All of these systems greatly influence education, and improving them would go far to helping our educational systems be successful. Fixing education alone will not solve our problems, but it can help create the foundation for improving all of the other systems if given the proper support. The decisions currently being made by the politicians will inhibit the ability of teachers and schools to perform their functions in our society, as will worsening political, economic, social and moral conditions in our state.

I also believe in this statement by the Governor: “Change does not have to create adversaries; it can create partners committed to a better future. The vast majority of Michigan educators and teachers are hard-working and committed to a prosperous future for their students” (p. 2). Those hard-working and committed educators want to collaborate with state government to help create a better future and the best education system in the world, but most feel they are being treated as adversaries, not as partners. I wrote the governor and state legislators asking to work with them to help improve education (see Appendix A), but did not receive a response. Now I am writing this book to help others understand how the popular educational reforms being proposed will hurt our students, teachers, schools and future. As a companion piece to this book, I also wrote *Truth, Love and Justice: A New Paradigm for Education and Its Reform*. It is available free of charge online at <http://rodclarken.wordpress.com/published-works/>. That book suggests that truth, love and justice should be the standards for judging any educational reform. In this book you should see how many reforms fail to meet any of these three standards.

I agree with the governor’s statement, “Great teaching starts with getting the best and brightest into teaching, and making sure their education equips them to succeed at inspiring students in the classroom” (Snyder, 2011, p. 9), but not with his ideas on how best to realize that idea. How do we get the “best and the brightest into teaching,” when our policies create low salaries and status for teachers? The best and brightest in America are encouraged to pursue careers that earn the most respect and money, and teaching does not afford much of either as reported in the [2012 MetLife Survey](#).

How do we legislate an education to equip teachers “to succeed at inspiring students in the classroom,” (Snyder, 2011, p. 9) when the laws and regulations dictate practices that destroy the spirit of both the students and the teachers? Inspiring teaching starts with wise, caring and trustworthy teachers, but also requires societal support to be

successful. It is hard to inculcate these virtues. We cannot buy or easily develop them. They require years of training and cultivation, starting from an early age. We can and must constantly refine them, but if they do not exist to an adequate degree in a teacher, it will be very hard to develop them. Now teachers are being challenged to maintain these principles in the face of attitudes and policies that actively discourage them.

We educators take our responsibilities very seriously and want the best for our students and communities. If there are educators or schools who do not and who are not fulfilling their duties in a responsible manner, we should work together either to improve them or, if needed, to replace them. Ineffective teachers and schools need to be dealt with honestly, responsibly and justly, but to castigate all teachers and schools and jettison the system without sound or justifiable cause is not a wise or judicious use of governmental powers. The educational policy reforms are not based on the best we know about education.

### [Like Soldiers Under Attack](#)

Educators are beginning to feel like soldiers under attack, and we are not prepared for the attack we are receiving, as it is coming from the very government we have pledged ourselves to serve. While we are dedicating our efforts to our mission to educate all children, our support systems are being cut off and the standards and training needed to be successful in our mission are being curtailed.

As an educator of teachers, I have been on the front lines of seeing that teachers are well prepared to fulfill their duties to the state and its citizens, but we teacher educators are also under attack. We have been doing our jobs with integrity and to the best of our ability, preparing teachers to be effective in the schools and classrooms, but now find politicians and reformers undermining our efforts, and therefore limiting the effectiveness of our candidates in the field and endangering future lives and our mission.

Teaching, like military service, is a mission-focused team effort. Though we may have heroes and moments of heroic activity, the success of our missions depends on the collaboration and competence of all members of our school or unit. We want some assurance that the teachers and administrators in our schools have been well prepared for their jobs and that they are being well provided to do what they have been trained to do in the mission of educating our young people. If they do not measure up in battle, they are made able to do so or are reassigned. If they cannot rely on the other the teachers, administrators and personnel in their school, their effectiveness is greatly limited.

If they cannot trust the government, which they are serving, to keep their best interests at heart, their morale and effectiveness will be harmed. We as teacher educators, who have prepared these teachers and administrators for the classrooms and schools, feel a special duty and responsibility to make sure that those we have prepared to serve their state and nation are given the support they need to be effective. Otherwise, we have done a disservice to them. Without the support needed, we can see that our mission of quality education for all will fail. We have not given of our talents and lives in order to fail, and we cannot sit idly by while others dismantle the years of building we have done.

There is more to military service, teaching and leading than meets the untrained and inexperienced eye. I implore critics to listen to those educators who have the training and experience before they make decisions that will have a negative impact on our state's welfare for years to come. Many proposed reforms do not honor teachers, value teaching or assure the best and brightest will get high quality training.

Our children matter. They deserve the best teachers and support we can give them. Many of the reforms proposed will erode that possibility as they realign our education standards downwards and create environments that are not conducive to good teaching or learning. We must do our best not to let that happen.

### [Demoralization of Teachers and Education](#)

Educators and educational institutions are being demoralized. Not only has their morale been eroded, but their morals are also being challenged. Medical doctors, lawyers, bankers and the institutions they work in have also been demoralized. These professionals and their professions are to be guided by the high ideals of service to the common good, but more and more they are being corrupted by self-interest, greed and bad practices.

Good doctors, lawyers or bankers would not do anything unethical or against the standards of their profession. They would put the best interests of their clients, community and profession above personal interests. Traditionally, if practitioners violated these principles, they were looked down upon by others in the profession and institutional means were often available to correct or remedy such violations.

Outstanding practitioners in any of these fields might gain fame and fortune, but that was not to be their purpose. It came as a by-product. When pursuing power and wealth replaces pursuing health, justice or well-being, then these professions lose their integrity and society suffers. We are experiencing this breakdown today. Not only have

immoral actions demoralized these professions; they are threatening to do the same to education and other institutions in our society.

What we have seen happening to these professions is in danger of happening to teaching. Teaching and educational institutions have been largely protected from this danger because the opportunity for individual or institutional gain has been limited and external pressures have not been strong enough to corrupt and move them from their mission. However, many reforms are creating conditions that attack that mission and morale.

In one of the most dramatic findings of the report, teacher satisfaction has decreased by 15 points since the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher measured job satisfaction two years ago, now reaching the lowest level of job satisfaction seen in the survey series in more than two decades. This decline in teacher satisfaction is coupled with large increases in the number of teachers who indicate that they are likely to leave teaching for another occupation and in the number who do not feel their jobs are secure. (MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2012, p. 5)

When teachers sacrifice the best interests of their students and communities for such short term and shortsighted aims as high stakes standardized test scores, merit pay or rewards from external sources, we diminish the integrity of education and the welfare of students. When teachers put self-interest, money, power or fame above providing good learning opportunities for their students, and when our institutions support or promote these destructive practices, we are in trouble. Many reform proposals aimed at improving education are instead demoralizing it and are moving our society toward increased trouble.

### [Ideological Attacks](#)

Ideology is defined as “1. The body of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of an individual, group, class, or culture, and 2. A set of doctrines or beliefs that form the basis of a political, economic, or other system” (American Heritage Dictionary). The current educational reform efforts seem to be more driven by ideology—certain philosophical, social, economic and political positions—than a sincere search for what is best for students and society. I question the assumptions and positions of the ideologies supporting many of the policy changes recommended for education. Education is being treated unfairly and dishonestly.

Those who promote political and economic agendas and who seek to silence and discredit different views are seeking power, rather than truth or justice. Indeed, the modern age initiated

the ‘age of ideology’; almost all of the great revolutions and change wrought in human society since the sixteenth century had a more or less explicit ideological (or ideational) motivation—*vide* the American and French revolutions, the rise of constitutional democracy in the West and of socialism in the East, and the rise and fall of national socialism and fascism in Europe. . . .such ideas have now become more effective in propelling change and commanding allegiance than pecuniary rewards and the threat of punishment—the carrot of wealth or the whip of power. (Laszlo, 1989, p. 44)

Ideologues use their power to influence whoever does not conform to their views. An example is the area of charter schools.

As so often happens with competing ideologies, the empirical evidence on charter schools has not yet settled the theoretical arguments about their existence. We need better research on charter schools, it is true, a non-controversial recommendation endorsed by blue ribbon commissions. But we should not be overly optimistic that better data will settle the charter school debate. Future research will be of varying quality, the data will be mixed and difficult to interpret, and the findings subject to different interpretations. Just as it is unreasonable to expect charter schools to solve all of the problems of American education, it is unreasonable to expect research to settle all of the theoretical disputes about market-based education and school choice. (Loveless & Field, in Ravitch, 2010, p. 143)

Ideology is similar to worldviews and paradigms, but is more connected to social, political and economic systems attempting to affect how we see reality and whose subtle and overt influence induces us to conform to their normative views. These persuasive and negative views of schools dominate the conversation about education reform and affect how people think, especially those who lack firsthand knowledge.

### [Ideology and the Media](#)

One such ideological narrative is the failure of U.S. schools. If we look at the perspectives of U.S. parents of children in K-12 schools, 80% of them are satisfied with the quality of education their oldest child is receiving and 19% dissatisfied. These numbers have changed very little in the last decade. On the other hand, only 43% of

adults without children in school were satisfied with the quality of education, with 54% dissatisfied (Gallup Poll, 2010).

Why would 80% of parents with children in school be satisfied with the quality of education that K-12 students receive while only 43% of adults without children in school were satisfied? It might be that the parents with children in schools have first-hand experience upon which to make their judgments, whereas the others are dependent upon the negative judgments promoted by politicians, pundits, philanthropists and the media. When an influential source speaks authoritatively on a subject, the people often accept what they say as true. Many are either unwilling or unable to question cogently the veracity of their statements and to see the ideological influences on them.

Conflicts of interests, ideological biases and questionable practices to influence the adoption and acceptance of programs, such as Reading First, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Common Core Curriculum have been exposed (Coles, 2003). For example, the US Department of Education (DOE) Office of Inspector General Final Inspection Report (September 2005) found that several grant recipients of the DOE, including the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), improperly used funds to publish several newspaper columns to praise NCLB and attack its critics. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) wrote the following concerning the DOE's contracting to have news stories published supporting NCLB:

In the course of our review of the contract and its deliverables, we learned that the Department, through Ketchum, had contracted with the North American Precise Syndicate (NAPS) to write a newspaper article entitled "Parents want Science Classes that Make the Grade." The article reports on a study that the Department conducted regarding parents' views on the declining science literacy of students. According to the documents provided to us, this article, which appeared in numerous small newspapers and circulars throughout the country, failed to disclose the Department's involvement in its writing. Our case law, including the two recent opinions enclosed, has consistently held that materials produced by or at the direction of the government that fail to identify the government as the source of the materials constitute covert propaganda. (Kepplinger, 2005, p.1)

Ideological propaganda, formulas and "studies" are being used with increasing vigor and success across the United States to attack all levels of education. They measure schools and the students on what the assessors' value and condemn those who do meet their own ideological standards as wrong and deficient. Critics of education, claiming some authority, use the media to express their views. Because the media thrives on bad

news, they give those attacking education a forum to influence the thoughts and attitudes of large numbers of people. Politically driven and ideologically funded experts, commentators and think tanks receive a disproportionate share of the media attention. In one 2007 study, advocacy-oriented think tank studies were 14 to 16 times more likely to be mentioned in *Education Week*, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* than non-advocacy academic studies (Yettick, 2011).

### *How A Nation at Risk put Education at Risk*

More and more education is largely seen as an economic concern: it is to help the individual and society compete economically and advance materially (Covaleskie, 2010). As part of this view, education is blamed when the economy is poor or the United States appears not to be competing well globally (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bracey, 2001, 2007; Covaleskie, 2010). Though education is blamed and criticized in poor economic times, it does not receive comparable praise when the economy is doing well and when the United States' role in the global marketplace is perceived as strong.

For the last decade, U.S. presidents, corporate leaders, and critics blasted public schools for a globally less competitive economy, sinking productivity, and jobs lost to other nations. . . . Why is it now with a bustling economy, rising productivity, and shrinking unemployment, American public schools are not receiving credit for the turnaround? (Cuban, 1994)

The need for education to prepare us for economic superiority and global competition are familiar refrains in both state and national reform policy statements, stating that, though we were once the wealthiest and greatest nation on earth, because of inferior education, we are losing our competitive edge and first place status. Examples of these themes can be found in most national reform proposals coming from Sputnik and *A Nation at Risk* to the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top legislation.

Let us briefly consider *A Nation at Risk*, released in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, as an example. This reform document is well known and recent enough to be relevant to current policy proposals, but old enough to be examined within some historical context. The dramatic rhetoric in this politically and ideologically driven policy statement is still echoed and influential in today's thinking and reform agenda. The title itself suggests that the failure of schools and education had put our "nation at risk."

Like today, the early eighties were a time of economic hardships and recession with similar problems caused by corruption and mismanagement in several political and financial institutions. Like today, instead of blaming bad corporate, political and financial decisions for the problems, schools and education were made the scapegoat for our “committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). Bracey accurately predicted this blaming of schools for current economic problems in his 17<sup>th</sup> Report on the Conditions of Education in 2007.

In 2007, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Center for American Progress, the National Center on Education and the Economy, the Broad Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have set up the public schools once again. If the subprime mortgage debacle sends us spiraling into recession, educators can expect to take the hit. (p. 124)

*A Nation at Risk* was convened and its members chosen by Terrell Bell, then President Reagan’s secretary of education. It had a decidedly conservative and political agenda. The document used the provocative language of war in such statements as

Our Nation is at risk . . . . The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people . . . . If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war . . . . We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.

This kind of threatening rhetoric has been common in statements and policies that call for educational reform since then. It is powerful and gets attention. It is also the inspiration for the title of this book—*Education Under Attack*.

Though the document’s get-tough, back-to-basics message suggested that education had lost its way and standards were collapsing under liberal approaches, no evidence was given to support these claims. It was but one more of the many ideologically driven reports created by conservative policy makers to tell and sell their story. The story line is familiar—they (the schools) have failed our nation, and we (our enlightened policies) are going to save us from them. In fact, the evidence told a different story altogether. Instead of the failed system dramatically portrayed in the document, actual data told a positive story about educational progress.

The Sandia report of 1990, *Perspectives on Education in America*, commissioned by the US secretary of energy, reported steady to slightly improving trends on nearly every performance measure of educational achievement during the times referred to in *A Nation at Risk* and after. The findings did not support the government's reform agenda and the government never publically released report, but researchers did eventually publish the findings (Carson, Huelskamp & Woodall, 1993). The statements in earlier drafts that suggested the government reforms were misguided and did not focus on the real problems were dropped. "The analysts were supposedly told that the report 'would never see the light of day' and that 'they had better be quiet' about it" (Stedman, 1994, p. 133).

As we look back now, we find those unprepared children in those failed schools in *A Nation at Risk* went on to make a mockery of that report as the United States' economy became the most productive in the world in the next sixteen years, long before any of the government's proposed reforms could be imposed. Notably, while America was in this time of unprecedented prosperity and growth, no statement was made in praise of the schools and their contribution to building up the nation and its economy as this did not support the agenda of those in power.

Though the statements in *A Nation at Risk* were not supported by evidence and later evidence contradicted its claims, its rhetoric did not lose its power over the people or politicians. It lives on in today's mythology of failed schools failing our nation (Covaleskie, 2011). I am employing a similar metaphor and language when I talk about education being under attack; however, unlike the authors of *A Nation at Risk*, I will provide the evidence to support my views. Like the evidence in the 1990 Sandia report, it can be interpreted and analyzed in several ways (Stedman, 1994).

This pattern of reformers blaming the educators is being played out again. It has become a political mainstay, and when the veracity of the critics claims are challenged, the defender of truth is attacked.

Why is it that, whenever someone points out that the sky is not actually falling, they are accused of alleging that everything is "just fine," accused of being advocates of complacency, spokespeople for the status quo? This blatant non sequitur is often trotted out to dismiss those who would stem the rising tide of fear mongering (Bracey, 2007, p. 127).

Critics do not offer clearly better or more viable alternatives, and when their reforms are implemented, but fail to bring the promised results, the results are hidden,

excuses made and educators blamed. We need to build the capacity of all to be able to see through these dishonest and destructive practices.

## **What Teachers and Schools Can and Cannot Do**

*When a quality education is denied to children at birth because of their parents' skin color or income, it is not only bad social policy, it is immoral.*

Arthur Levine

*The richest nation on Earth has never allocated enough resources to build sufficient schools, to compensate adequately its teachers, and to surround them with the prestige our work justifies.*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

### **Schools and Teachers as Parts of a Larger System**

Schools, teachers and teacher education can and should improve, but they should not bear the blame for the economic, social, moral and political problems we are currently facing. The wrong-headed fixes being put upon education by external reformers will do little to help and much to harm the educational process. Our educational system is part of and influenced by the society's economic, social, moral and political systems. These systems are not working as they should, individually or collectively.

These systems are like the various systems or organs of the body. The health and welfare of one affect the others. Even if education is made perfect, the problems of the society and its institutions will not be solved, partly because these evils are endemic in the body of "the competitive life of a capitalistic state" (Covaleskie, 2010, 84). As these systems are reformed, transformed and healed to work harmoniously together, rather than to compete against one another, education will also get better and play an increasing role in positively influencing the other aspects of the interconnected body of society and life.

Reformers imagine that it is easy to create a successful school, but it is not. They imagine that the lessons of a successful school are obvious and can be easily transferred to other schools, just as one might take an industrial process or a new piece of machinery and install it in a new plant without error. But a school is successful for many reasons, including the personalities of its leader and teachers; the social interactions among them; the culture of the school; the students and their families; the way the school implements policies and programs dictated by

the district, the state and the federal government; the quality of the school's curriculum and instruction; the resources of the school and the community; and many other factors. When a school is successful, it is hard to know which factor was most important or if it was a combination of factors. (Ravitch, 2011, p. 137)

Reformers are focusing on education, schools and teachers, avoiding the more pressing and frightening reality that our overall system needs to be transformed--that we as a society are sick and need to change our ways of living if we are to get better. Our social-economic-political-moral orders are diseased, and a healthy dose of truth, love and justice would go far toward remedying it. We are not doing the job we need to have a prosperous, secure and healthy nation and world and to live up to the ideals framed in our founding documents or set forth by the founders of our religions. As Rothstein cogently observes: "the achievement gap can be substantially narrowed only when school improvement is combined with social and economic reform" (2004, October, p. 2).

Class backgrounds influence relative achievement everywhere. The inability of schools to overcome the disadvantage of less-literate homes is not a peculiar American failure but a universal reality. The number of books in students' homes, for example, consistently predicts their test scores in almost every country. (Rothstein, 2004, p. 3)

The kinds of changes called for to address our current problems are significant. It is interesting that the people most closely related to the economic and social problems we are facing continue to prosper financially while others, notably teachers and schools, are blamed and punished. The current order of things with its injustices and prejudices is defective. It will need to be replaced with one based on the sounder principles of truth, justice and love.

An example of the lack of care and injustice in our society infecting schooling and education has been the unfair screening, sorting and selecting of individuals for life opportunities and advancement. The system is rigged in favor of the powerful and successful to maintain their advantages in society, the economy and marketplace.

Schools and educators are just part of that system, and, as much as I have believed and wanted to believe that education could save the world, I now realize the world is a much bigger and more complex place than I previously thought. I continue to do my part in seeing that my work and efforts as an educator contribute in whatever measure possible to the betterment of humankind, yet realize that there are much stronger currents, which I am powerless to alter and which sweep me along with the rest of humanity. My

writing this book is but one of my many attempts to do what I think I can to make things better.

### Teachers as Heroes

Some movies and books tell the stories of teachers who overcame huge obstacles to help their students succeed despite the tremendous odds against them. These stories of teachers and their students are inspiring. I have been privileged to meet and know such teachers; however, most of their stories remain unknown outside those directly affected by these outstanding educators. Even many of those who have benefitted from the love, kindness and greatness of a teacher do not adequately appreciate the sacrifice and influence of these individuals. I celebrate these teachers and their selfless service to their communities, schools and students. I hope that others can do the same.

Countless stories tell of teachers transforming students' lives through tremendous dedication, effort and talent. These are exceptional individuals, who like great athletes or artists inspire us with their accomplishments. However, for every star in these fields, thousands of others aspire to these high levels of performance, but do not attain it to the point that they are recognized by others. Yet all will have moments of accomplishment and excellence in their lives that will serve the betterment of others.

Most teachers experience such moments when a student or a class becomes excited about learning. These moments bring hope, joy and satisfaction to teachers as their students realize more of their potential. It is one of the big rewards of teaching—serving in the awakening and unfolding of another's possibilities. These accomplishments often come after days and weeks of struggling and striving. The more significant and enduring the endeavor, the more time and effort generally required in realizing the full results. Often the fruits of a good teacher's labor do not become apparent until many years later.

Being considered great depends on many qualities and circumstances, as well as our perceptions. Many teachers and their students are living heroic lives all around us, struggling against all sorts of injustices and wrongs, yet we do not see or appreciate it. They are not given the credit or support they deserve. Teachers working in the worst schools and with the neediest students deserve support and assistance, but instead, often receive criticism and cutbacks. Working in such challenging circumstances trying to overcome poverty, hopelessness and despair takes tremendous fortitude and dedication, and is not something most people can successfully sustain over a lifetime.

## Factors That Affect Achievement in School

A good teacher can be instrumental in helping young people succeed in school, but other things can override that influence. The landmark report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman, et al., 1966), attributed much of the difference in school achievement to non-school factors, such as the family's socio-economic status. They measured variance in student achievement that could be attributed to such factors as school facilities, curriculum, teacher qualities, teacher attitudes and student body characteristics and found all only accounted for about 8% of the variance among ninth graders' verbal achievement score, with only 1% of that being teacher qualities (Coleman, et al., 1966). This study found that the "differences among schools in average were not nearly as great as expected, and the impact of school resources on student achievement was modest compared to the impact of students' family backgrounds" (Gamoran & Long, 2006, p. 3).

The production function methodology and findings of the Coleman report have been contested and further research conducted to try to understand better the effects of teachers and schools. Because of the complexity and interrelationship of contributing factors, several different approaches have been used to try to identify these factors and the degree to which they lead to achievement. One method compared learning during school to learning during summer vacations and found students from disadvantaged backgrounds lost ground over the summer, suggesting schools performed some equalizing function (Heyns, 1978; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1997; Downey, von Hippel, & Broh, 2004).

Another approach, the school fixed effects model, finds differences among schools but it is less clear on which attributes account for the variation. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin, who use this approach, found "lower bound estimates suggest that differences in teacher quality explain at least 7.5 percent of the total variation in measured student achievement, and probably much more" (1998, p. 32).

Other researchers estimate that 60-80 percent of achievement can be attributed to student and family background. Schooling factors are considered to make up about half the remaining variance, with about half that being attributable to the teacher. The remaining half is unknown or unexplained. Nye, Konstantopoulos and Hedges found a range from 7 to 21% in student achievement gains attributed to teachers in the 17 studies they analyzed (2004, p. 240). In short, most of the achievement differences are attributable to factors outside of schools and classrooms. Further, "it seems clear that assertions about the magnitude of teacher effects on student achievement depend to a

considerable extent on the methods used to estimate these effects and on how the findings are interpreted” (Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002, p. 9).

Current U.S. policy initiatives to improve the U.S. education system, including No Child Left Behind, test-based evaluation of teachers and the promotion of competition, are misguided because they either deny or set to the side a basic body of evidence documenting that students from disadvantaged households on average perform less well in school than those from more advantaged families. Because these policy initiatives do not directly address the educational challenges experienced by disadvantaged students, they have contributed little -- and are not likely to contribute much in the future -- to raising overall student achievement or to reducing achievement and educational attainment gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Moreover, such policies have the potential to do serious harm. Addressing the educational challenges faced by children from disadvantaged families will require a broader and bolder approach to education policy than the recent efforts to reform schools. (Ladd, 2011)

All of these studies have limitations, which are beyond the scope of our exploration here (see [Peterson, 2012](#) for an excellent critique of Ladd’s findings), but clearly the limited variance among schools and teachers, difficulty in obtaining clear data and connections and the varying analytic approaches make it hard to find significant differences or draw strong conclusions.

But most reviewers of this literature agree that it is difficult to interpret the relation of school or teacher characteristics and achievement, even after controlling for student background, because they may be confounded with the influences of unobserved individual, family, school, and neighborhood factors. (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, p. 238)

Most importantly, research reveals that gains in student achievement are influenced by much more than any individual teacher. Others factors include:

- School factors such as class sizes, curriculum materials, instructional time, availability of specialists and tutors, and resources for learning (books, computers, science labs, and more);
- Home and community supports or challenges;
- Individual student needs and abilities, health, and attendance;
- Peer culture and achievement;
- Prior teachers and schooling, as well as other current teachers;

- Differential summer learning loss, which especially affects low-income children; and
- The specific tests used, which emphasize some kinds of learning and not others and which rarely measure achievement that is well above or below grade level (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012, p. 8).

We will explore most of these factors further later in the book.

### What About the Students

If you want to improve the learning in schools, the best and surest way to do so is to get better students, not to get better teachers. Good teachers can encourage the development of the students' faculties and capacities, but the students must be able and willing to learn in response. Talented, intelligent, committed and motivated students are the most important variable in learning. Though good teachers are extremely valuable, they can only do so much. If you have both a good teacher and good students, the learning will be greatly increased.

We cannot overcome the effects of poverty, deprivation and other deficiencies among students that are highly related to achievement through improved teachers and schools alone, yet we are currently being called do just that by the federal government in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002). All subgroups of students are to be rated as proficient on standardized tests by 2014. The reality of all schools failing in this charge becomes more apparent with each passing year. This failure could have been predicted from the start, and many believe it was set up to portray schools failing so they can be privatized. In addition, the resources and support that might improve the chances of success are being withdrawn from teachers and schools.

Gifted and dedicated individuals have and will continue to arise out of deplorable conditions to overcome the odds. We need to support and should celebrate such accomplishments, recognizing the courage, will, determination and talent it takes to triumph over difficult circumstances; however, it is not reasonable to expect such heroic endeavors all the time from all students, schools and teachers. We should not punish those who, for whatever reasons, are not able to surmount the impediments and obstacles that keep them from such laudable accomplishments.

Schools and teachers have to accept the physical, intellectual, social, moral, emotional and psychological conditions of each student who shows up at their door. Unlike private schools, public schools cannot choose the students they have to educate. Our schools can and should help each individual to realize his or her fullest potential.

Nevertheless, in developing their students' physical capacities, schools and teachers are largely limited to providing proper nutrition, physical training and environments for that development. The National Research Council's Institute of Medicine reported,

The inextricable transaction between biology and experience also contributes to a better understanding of developmental disorders and the effect of early intervention. Hereditary vulnerabilities establish probabilistic, not deterministic, developmental pathways that evolve in concert with the experiential stressors, or buffers, in the family, the neighborhood, and the school. That is why early experiences of abuse, neglect, poverty, and family violence are of such concern. They are likely to enlist the genetic vulnerabilities of some children into a downward spiral of progressive dysfunction. By contrast, when children grow up in more supportive contexts, the hereditary vulnerabilities that some children experience may never be manifested in problematic behavior. Understanding the co-action of nature and nurture contributes to early prevention. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)

### **The Unique Capabilities of Students**

Although human beings are more alike than different, each person is unique with diverse capabilities and personalities. For example, students all have varying physical capacities and characteristics. We do not expect or require everyone to attain a certain height or reach certain physical performance standards to progress in school or graduate. We do not judge the teachers, even the physical education teachers, on how tall their students are or how well they can run, jump or climb. Likewise, students all differ mentally, emotionally, socially and psychologically. Just as we cannot expect students to achieve uniformly in physical matters, we cannot and should not expect them to do so intellectually and in educational matters. We do what we can to optimize the opportunity for individuals to achieve their full potential in all these areas.

If students do not reach a standardized height or athletic performance requirement, we do not punish them, their parents or their teachers. We understand that people vary in their capacity to become tall and to perform physical tasks. However, we seem to have problems accepting that students also vary in intellectual capacity. No matter how much we train, feed and care for children in school, they will not vary significantly from their genetically endowed potential height. We can improve their physical performance, but that is also largely influenced by inherited potential. No matter how much we teach and care for students, their highest accomplishments will be limited

or affected by their inherited capacities and the extent to which these were nourished and developed before birth and school by their parents and society.

Though we all have similar needs and wants, we express them differently. Our motivations vary from context to context and from person to person. If we are all given the same objective and the same reward for achieving it, our motivations and approaches will differ. Some objectives will be easy for some, hard for others and impossible for yet others. These objectives also may be attractive to some and repulsive to others. These differential effects can be seen in any classroom. “Because of the relational complexity of learning and of the differing positions and dispositions of learners, there is no approach that can ever guarantee universal learning success” (James & Biesta, 2007, p. 37).

Education tends to be rewarding for those who can succeed in and value it. It is punishing for those who fail at it and see little or no value in it. Those who do not benefit from education tend to leave it as soon as they can. When we set standards that are perceived as too hard to accomplish and we do not offer the remediation and support needed to achieve these standards, we create a climate of hopelessness. Further, when we set goals that students have no interest in and see no value in, we create an environment not conducive to learning.

The students’ innate, inherited and acquired capacities are the most important variable in the classroom. Their hearts, minds and wills are each unique and their capacities in each area differ. These faculties and capacities are developed through a number of influences and factors, most significantly in interactions with others. The collective attitudes, thoughts, policies and values of their parents, teachers, administrators, school board, community and government affect the shaping and actualizing of their potentialities, but do not determine them.

### [Teachers, Students, Diversity and Beauty](#)

Because of all of this uniqueness and diversity of teachers, students and contexts, it is hard to predict learning outcomes. We need to create learning environments that can serve the needs of all these diverse teachers and students, but we will nevertheless vary in our success, often based on factors unknown to us or beyond our control. We have not yet found a way to account for all of these differences to determine fairly the value or quality of a teacher or student’s efforts or performance.

In the end, we must each assess our own abilities and efforts and be responsible to do better. Reform policies attempt to change teacher and student actions, but ultimately, it

is for the teacher and the student to take whatever action they deem best. The politicians can affect the principals who can affect the teachers who can affect the students, but if the students fail to respond, who is responsible?

Let me offer an analogy. We all have a conception of beauty and we all generally aspire to be beautiful accordingly. First, our conception of beauty will vary, but there will be generally agreed upon standards in a given society. If you naturally approximate those standards, you will be considered beautiful whatever you do. If you do not, you will have to work to make yourself more attractive according to society's standards. You might do that by changing aspects of yourself. Through whatever means are available to you, such as with makeup or plastic surgery, you will attempt to make whatever is uniquely you conform more closely to what is considered the standard of beauty.

In some ways, this is a distortion of who you really are or what you really look like. However, if the stakes are high, you will do what you can to succeed in this endeavor. The higher the stakes, the more likely you are to do whatever it takes, even if the costs exceed the supposed benefits. Some people, no matter what they do, will still not be able to meet the standard. These people will likely become despondent, drop out or rebel. We have a similar situation in education. We set standards of education and judge people on them regardless of their potential, native abilities, interests and talents.

If we could see the beauty in all and assist them to realize and unfold more of their innate gifts, we would have a more beautiful and richer world. When we take outer beauty and test scores at face value as indicators of inner beauty and wisdom, we make a big mistake. When a society places value on and rewards superficial measures, yet fails to value and reward the more substantial and vital inner qualities they are meant to represent, this society is in decline. We have deemphasized real beauty and learning for shabby imitations.

None of this suggests teachers do not make a difference. They do, and this is supported by both attackers and defenders of education.

In 2009, a Scholastic and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation survey of nearly 40,000 public school teachers confirmed what we know in our hearts – teachers are the single most important in-school factor in ensuring students' academic success. They know what works in their classrooms, what resonates with their students, and what makes them the best teachers they can be. (*Primary Sources: 2012, 2012, p. 1*)

However, to imagine that we know how or how much teachers make a difference is beyond our current ability to accurately measure, let alone to make decisions affecting teacher's lives.

It is important to recognize that failure to find that some sets of measured teacher characteristics are related to student achievement does not mean that all teachers have the same effectiveness in promoting achievement. It is possible that the wrong characteristics were measured (characteristics that were convenient, but unrelated to achievement) but other (as yet unmeasured) characteristics *would* be related to achievement. Even if researchers attempted to measure the right teacher characteristics, it is possible that the measurement is so poor that the relation was attenuated to the point of being negligible. (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, p. 238)

### Schools as the Solution to Society's Problems

Schools should not be expected to solve problems they did not create, and which they are not given the power, tools or resources to correct. For example, concerning teen pregnancy and promiscuity, schools have been blamed for creating or not solving these problems through mandated sex education. Schools are blamed when crime increases, when minorities and the poor do not perform as well as non-minorities and the wealthy and when civic responsibility is waning.

Many reforms are currently pursued and many wrongs and injustices in our society blamed on education without any clear evidence to support them. When reformers hold schools and teachers responsible for these social problems, they are setting them up for failure. When schools are not supported and given the resources to accomplish their duty, it is those who failed to provide the needed help who should be held accountable. Addressing the achievement gap requires no less than a significant transformation of social and labor policy along with extensive school reform (Rothstein, 2004).

Such an analysis provides little room for easy answers and leaves few institutions off the hook. A few inspiring, dedicated teachers will not do the trick. Nor will higher expectations, in isolation, yield big payoffs for those left behind. In fact, school reform itself must be supplemented by a comprehensive compensatory program in the early years of school, along with after-school, summer, and pre-kindergarten programs. Holding schools accountable may be part of the answer, but what schools can do, even when they are at their best, will solve just part of the problem. (Mishel, in Rothstein, 2004, preface)

However, schools and teachers do have a moral duty and responsibility to help all students learn and do their best. If schools or teachers are found in dereliction of that duty, they need to be held accountable. If satisfactory progress is not evident, the schools need to be reconfigured for success and teachers fired. However, reliable and valid measures and standards upon which to base such decisions should be agreed upon.

Unlike some other endeavors, the education of human beings involves complexities beyond the reach of current science to accurately determine and measure. It involves at a minimum the hearts, minds and wills of an uncountable number of individuals set in multifaceted communities and institutions that all are connected and affect one another. You cannot expect to reform one without the other. Solutions that may work in one area may not translate well into diverse educational settings.

### Pre-School Variables

If a society wants to optimize development and improve educational outcomes, the greatest benefit with the least cost is to ensure healthy growth in the womb and the years before school. No amount of intervention or education in school can compensate for failure to develop properly in the womb and before school (Kolb & Whishaw, 1990; Illig, 1998). Our best efforts with the latest science and technologies are unable to fix some of these problems.

Together, these diverse fields [neuroscience, molecular biology, genomics, and the social sciences] provide a remarkably convergent perspective on the inextricable interactions among the personal experiences (e.g., family and social relationships), environmental influences (e.g., exposures to toxic chemicals and inappropriate electronic media), and genetic predispositions that affect learning, behavior, and health across the life span. Applying this EBD [ecobiodevelopmental] framework to the challenges posed by significant childhood adversity reveals the powerful role that toxic stress can play in disrupting the architecture of the developing brain, thereby influencing behavioral, educational, economic, and health outcomes decades and generations later. (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, and Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 2012, p. e225)

To expect schools and teachers to overcome these biological, environmental and genetic influences alone and to hold them to impossible expectations in the eye of the

public is disingenuous. Further, to underfund and denigrate them in the process is immoral.

Students' minds, hearts and wills, like their bodies, are largely formed in their early years before school. To overcome limitations in any of these areas is not entirely possible, even with the best of intentions and interventions. When schools and teachers, with their limited time and resources, are expected to remedy their students' individual needs and problems, we can expect failure. It is unrealistic. When it comes to developing the bodies, minds, hearts and wills of their students, schools are limited by many factors in what they can do and most reforms make matters worse rather than better.

### The Role of the Family

The family is the basic social and economic unit of society. It is within the family that children receive their first training and education. The health and well-being of the family is reflected in its children, including how well those children function in school. The family is also the key subunit in any community and nation. However, the family is in transition and these changes are having an impact on education and society. The dysfunctions of the family are introduced into the schools and the community. As the physical, social, intellectual, emotional and moral supports of the family break down, children carry these scars and deficiencies with them to school. Not only do teachers need to deal with these problems, so do other service providers.

The growing scientific knowledge base that links childhood toxic stress with disruptions of the developing nervous, cardiovascular, immune, and metabolic systems, and the evidence that these disruptions can lead to lifelong impairments in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health, should be incorporated into the training of all current and future physicians. (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, et al. 2012, p. e228)

Family engagement is regarded as one of the best strategies for improving student outcomes, and getting parental support is one of the biggest challenges reported by teachers (Johnson, Yarrow, Rochkind, & Ott, 2009).

Because parents and communities play a crucial role in student success, educators continuously seek ways to engage parents in their children's education. The good news is that most teachers, parents and students believe that their schools help engage parents in supporting student success...Parents report that schools with high parent engagement perform better on a range of measures, including

collaboration, resources, responsiveness, sharing information, contacting parents about learning issues, providing guidance on helping students succeed, and being flexible to meet with parents at different times of the day ([MetLife Teacher Survey, 2012](#), p. 6).

The United States is going through some major changes that are affecting education. The family is a crucible for this change process. As with other aspects in change, there is a dynamic interaction among the individuals, communities and institutions. It is in the family that an individual identity is formed. It is the foundational community and institution of society and civilization. The family influences every individual, community and institution with which it interacts, and is influenced by them as well.

Protecting young children from adversity is a promising, science-based strategy to address many of the most persistent and costly problems facing contemporary society, including limited educational achievement, diminished economic productivity, criminality, and disparities in health. (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, et al., 2012, p. e228)

The educational institutions and the individuals and communities that participate in them are also major influences in society. Schools, teachers and families need to work together to help students be successful. More specifically, good parent-teacher relations are positively related to high student achievement, healthy social development and college enrollment (Jeynes, 2005; Caspe, Lopez Chu, Weiss, 2011). Teachers and schools must learn how to collaborate more closely with families if they are to be effective in providing the support needed to improve student success (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). It is the obligation of every family to educate its children; however, many families do not take this obligation seriously enough.

The need for creative, new strategies to confront these morbidities [developmental, behavioral, educational, and family difficulties] in a more effective way is essential to improve the physical and mental health of children, as well as the social and economic well-being of the nation. (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, et al., 2012, p. e225)

So why do policy makers either ignore or deny the overwhelming evidence that school achievement is highly related to family background? Ladd and Fiske (2011) offer the following reasons: policy makers

- honestly believe schools can offset the negative effects of a bad background,

- want to avoid giving the impression of low expectations for discriminated classes,
- believe some schools have beat the odds and been successful and
- are setting the schools up for failure to discredit them so they can change and privatize them.

### Changes in Women's and Individual Rights

One of the major changes affecting all of society, but perhaps felt most within the family, is the emerging equalization of rights and opportunities between men and women. Human history has largely been his-story, generally ignoring the role of women. This great injustice is being addressed today. As we work through this transition stage of women assuming their rightful place as equals in the affairs of society, we will necessarily experience many painful but needed adjustments. As we find our way, mistakes will be made in adapting to new attitudes and patterns of behavior. As we lessen the domination of men over women and experiment with new forms of equality that are more suited to the conditions and requirements of this age, we will evolve new knowledge, skills and attitudes.

As women seek their equality with men, one of the strategies is to imitate the ways of males—to be more man-like. Like men, they may use aggression and domination to seek power. However, this is a dysfunctional pattern in men and its being taken up by women only leads to more conflict and dysfunction. We find men and women more in power struggles, as men are reluctant to give up their position of privilege and women are no longer willing to be content with inequity. This changing dynamic has been played out in families and affects children and schools as well.

In addition, we are living in a time when the rights of the individual are considered supreme, which creates a host of other problems for families and schools. One is the breakdown of marriage and family life. Divorce is common and its effects on the children still little understood; however, the evidence is clear that it has an adverse affect. Respect for parents and teachers has significantly eroded. The moral and character training that is foundational for being a successful student and person is not happening within the family to the extent it did in the past. The negative influence of the culture and media on the young is also felt in the schools. We live in an age of narcissists (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). All of this turmoil related to rights and roles can affect care giving and child development negatively.

Those who experience the benefits of secure relationships have a more controlled stress hormone reaction when they are upset or frightened. This means that they

are able to explore the world, meet challenges, and be frightened at times without sustaining the adverse neurological impacts of chronically elevated levels of hormones such as cortisol that increase reactivity of selected brain systems to stress and threat. (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2009, p. 3)

### Economics and Education Reform

Most education reforms are centered on the economic implications or repercussions of education, either directly or indirectly. As discussed elsewhere, when the economy is bad, education is attacked. Reformers are interested in getting more for their money from education and holding educators accountable for the funds spent on education. This latest round of reforms also seems to be fueled by economic concerns. Some feel these claims are disingenuous. “All too often, those who promote education as a solution to entrenched economic (or racial) inequalities do so, whether consciously or not, as a way to absolve themselves of the policies that create those inequalities in the first place” (Marsh, 2011, p. 116).

It is true that education is intimately connected to the economy and the economy to education. It is understood and generally accepted that more education means more earning capacity. Data comparing different levels of education achievement with lifetime earnings and several quality of life factors strongly support this connection (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Furthermore, research generally supports the notion that communities and nations that are more educated do better than less educated ones. We rightly expect that improved education will have beneficial effects for individuals, communities and institutions. Reform of an individual, community and institution will influence their respective environments, just as changing environments will affect them. However, how these interactions will affect future events is hard to predict, and whether a reform will have its desired effect takes serious resources, time and investigation to determine.

Goldin and Katz credit education with helping the United States become the world’s richest nation (2008). Though the U.S. education system “created an egalitarian system that put the elite systems of Europe to shame” (p. 129) during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has lost that distinction in the last forty years. The key features or “virtues” they identified in their research that were instrumental in U.S. education development were public funding and provision of education alone with the separation of church and state. Goldin and Katz also credit the decentralized system and an open structure that allowed girls to receive an education and the willingness to forgive mistakes and past failures. These basic egalitarian and democratic principles grew out of

the ethic of the nation, which resulted in the United States having a school enrollment rate and educational attainments better than any other nation by the 1850's. This progressive educational system of expanding educational opportunity continued to lead the world until the 1980's.

The U.S. egalitarian model provided free public schools for everyone starting with elementary education and later expanding to secondary. By the mid-twentieth century, public support for post-secondary education had become widespread. The United States investment in public supported education seems to have provided many benefits. Other societies that have invested in learning for their citizens have had also had encouraging results, finding more education being positively related to improved economic and physical wellbeing.

At a time when schools and teachers need greater community and state support, they are being made the villains in our current economic problems and punished by having resources, respect and rights withheld. Alleged bloated school budgets and excessive teachers pay, job security and benefits are being blamed for bad state budgets. These accusations do not accord with the facts. Teachers do not enter into the profession for the pay or benefits. They have been portrayed as only interested in themselves, which is hard to defend in light of the sacrifices they make for their students and communities.

Though schools must be run according to sound financial and business practices, they are not banks or businesses and their purpose is not to make a profit. They are social institutions, like families and social service agencies, designed for the welfare of children and the public good. Like parents, social workers and ministers, teachers are to serve their clients to the best of their ability. Teachers' measures of success are how they have helped develop young minds and characters, not in profits made or widgets produced. A foundational principle of economics is benefit-cost analysis. When considering whether the benefits warrant the costs in education, both the long term and secondary benefits of education must be considered. This is an enormously complex process in education.

### [Financing Education](#)

Many ways of financing education have been tried. The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) article 26 states that everyone has a right to elementary education that should be free and compulsory. In the United States, financing has been largely from public funds collected through taxation and other governmental revenue. It was largely because elementary and then secondary education were publicly funded that the U.S. was able to get so many of its citizens educated and lead all nations educationally.

Some mixture of public and private financing is also possible, where education is paid in whole or part by the person, families or some other non-governmental entity. Those paying for their or their children's education tend to take a greater interest in their financial investment and expect the benefits of learning and advancement to be forthcoming. For those with the means and the disposition to educate their children or themselves, well and good, but many do not. It is important for the welfare of the entire community that all its citizens be educated and equipped to be contributing members of society. For this reason, public financing of education is necessary and has led to the advancement of those who have it.

Public universities mostly run on a mixed model of public and private financing that seems to have worked fairly well. Part of their funding comes from money raised by government and the balance from tuition paid by the student. To make access more equitable, financial aid, often funded by the government as well, has been given to those qualified students less able to pay the tuition rates. As funding from governmental sources is reduced for education, universities have raised the tuition the students must pay, thereby shifting the costs from the state to the students. Though this makes it more difficult for students without financial means to pay for post-secondary education, universities can still provide their educational services and some tuition money can be distributed to help the more needy students. Because of this change, the debt that college students accrue has increased substantially over the last few years.

A variation of this model might be feasible for K-12 public education. Allow elementary and secondary schools to charge some tuition and fees, but assure that all students regardless of ability to pay are given an opportunity to receive a good education. This approach, sometimes referred to as "pay to play," is being used for some school athletic programs. We already have a system of private schools and universities that are privately funded. They do have scholarship systems to allow talented but financially unable students to attend.

However, if we move from our present system of free education for all citizens, then we must balance the principles of truth, justice and love in developing a new financing model. One of the things that has made the United States great has been its dedication to democracy and egalitarianism. It has provided care and opportunity for the disenfranchised, poor and needy. One of the reasons the cost of schools has almost doubled over the last four decades (Rothstein, 2011), is the expanding efforts to provide an education to all children, many of whom require significant resources to educate.

The costs of educating the children with greater needs, children largely neglected or excluded from public schools in the past, requires more funding. By encouraging our humanitarian and philanthropic natures, we can further help our fellow man. A graduated income tax performs a similar function and may be more efficient and equitable for providing a quality education and other services for all. In the end, we must ask ourselves what are our priorities and what are the consequences of the choices we make. As Dr. M. L. King said in 1967, a “ nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

What is the current financing situation and its implications for education in the United States? The Center on Education Policy reported in 2011 that about 70% of all school districts had funding cuts last year and about 84% expect cuts this year. About 85% of schools with funding reductions last year cut teachers and staff, and 66% of them postponed or stopped reform initiatives. Because of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, better known as “stimulus funding,” many layoffs and cuts were prevented in 2010, but only about 30% had any ARRA funds left for 2011-2012. The jobs and programs these funds saved were lost in the face of state budget shortfalls that have led to decisions throughout the country to cut back on education funding. Education in the U.S. is facing a financial crisis. Other recent surveys indicate similar data.

More than three-quarters of teachers have faced budget cuts in their schools in the last year. These budget reductions have been enacted across the full range of school types: urban, suburban and rural schools, as well as in schools with either low or high concentrations of low-income students, minority students and English language learner (ELL) students. Two-thirds of teachers report that their schools have had layoffs of teachers, parent/community liaisons or other staff in the last year. (MetLife Teacher Survey, 2012 p. 5)

Defunding public education, both K-12 and higher, means those who most need it and are least able to access or afford it are left out. This is unjust. Teachers are responsible to provide the highest service to their students and society, and their students and society should support them in this process. The rights of each must be preserved and upheld. Justice should be the ruling principle in both schools and society, not profit. The serious economic problems in society are being blamed on bad teachers and schools, when the truth seems less clear.

Not only do teachers get blamed for not doing enough, but they also face funding cuts as they struggle to meet the growing demands of the government and needs of their students. The budgetary cuts to education, from states trying to deal with their own

growing budget deficits, severely threaten the well-being of schools. Some evidence suggests that efforts to limit schools' political and financial power are partly intended to curtail the collective bargaining rights of teachers and punish teacher unions.

## **Role of Teachers and Teacher Education in American School Reform**

*Those who can't teach, pass laws about how to evaluate teachers.*

Diane Ravitch

### **Myths About Low Academic Standards of Teachers**

In the perception on many in our society, teaching is for mediocre students and teacher education programs admit and retain students with low academic ability. Though critics often note that the SAT scores of high school students who say they want to become teachers are lower than the average of other college-bound students, they do not say how many of those students actually get into teaching or graduate as teachers.

In reality, many candidates who wish to be teachers do not meet the entry requirement to enroll in a teacher education program. Of those qualified to enroll, some do not successfully complete the program. Of those who complete and meet certification standards of the teacher education program and the state, many are not selected from among the pool of available candidates to be hired as teachers. Of those who are hired, some are not retained as teachers after their first years as teachers. Of those retained some find the work too demanding or the rewards too small, so many leave the profession for reasons, such as low pay and poor working conditions that have nothing to do with their abilities or preparation.

At my university, about half of those who applied to become teachers were allowed to enter and complete the program. We have file drawers filled with students who wanted to become teachers, but did not meet our academic or other standards. Of all newly certified teachers in Michigan, less than half will be hired as teachers in this state, and of those, only about half of them will still be teachers after five years according to national averages.

At my institution and others documented through the Teacher Education Accreditation Council, teacher education students actually graduate with grade point

averages that are higher than of students not preparing to become teachers. If we compare teacher candidates' grade point averages in the subjects for which they are being certified to teach with those students who are majoring in the subject, but are not in teacher education, the teacher education students get higher average grades in those content areas. For example, teacher education students in mathematics and science get higher grades than straight majors do in the same content courses. In addition, education students majoring in these subjects are required to take and pass externally prepared and scored standardized test to demonstrate mastery of their content, whereas the non-education majors are not.

Almost all states require that students pass standardized tests in basic skills before they can enter into a teacher education program as well as pass a test in their special subject matter to be certified to teach that subject. Teachers, like medical and law students are required to achieve a certain score to be admitted into their professional programs. The states and institutions set the standards needed in the basic skills to enter into teacher education and in the content knowledge to be certified as a teacher. If evidence suggests these standards should be higher, then the states can raise them.

However, far more is needed than basic skills and subject matter knowledge to be a successful and inspiring teacher. Policies and reforms generally do not acknowledge or assess these essential qualities. If officials were serious about getting the best and brightest into teaching, they would not rely on limited and superficial standardized tests of knowledge to determine eligibility.

My concern here is in politicians trying to legislate excellence and professional standards and assuming standardized tests are the best, or even valid, reliable, good or reasonable assessments of teacher quality. I would suggest these tests are minimal measures that only get at a very limited and superficial slice of what is expected of a good teacher. General and content knowledge are necessary, but not sufficient, and the government places too much emphasis on them. More attention should be given to professional dispositions, knowledge, skills and practices. Most teacher education programs have extensive field experiences, practica and clinical practice involving performance-centered assessments to ascertain that their candidates have the skills and attitudes needed to be good teachers.

### [Effectively Evaluating Teachers](#)

Teachers and teacher education can be and should be evaluated. The evaluation of those hoping to become teachers is the primary responsibility of teacher education programs and certifying agencies. These programs are to identify capable candidates and

help them develop the qualities needed to be successful teachers. Throughout the process of becoming a teacher, the programs assess these students' skills, knowledge and attitudes. Those who do not meet the standards are not allowed to continue in the program.

Educational and field experiences to develop and demonstrate competency help determine the candidate's ability to carry out the responsibilities of a teacher. These experiences offer multiple sources of data for evaluation to determine if the necessary competencies are present to an adequate degree. If not, then remediation or removal is prescribed. The minimal competencies expected at each stage in the teacher education program are met before a candidate can advance to the next level.

The first criterion for entry into teaching is to have a genuine calling to serve humanity by educating others. Teacher candidates must demonstrate that commitment and meet the high standards called for in such a noble endeavor. Those standards include being the best and brightest, which means they need to possess the best qualities and character and be the brightest in mental abilities and teaching skills. In my career as a teacher educator, I have striven to see that only those students with proven character, intelligence and the ability to inspire students in the classroom are certified to teach. I am increasingly concerned that the new teachers I have helped prepare will not be given the support needed to enable them to be successful in their classrooms. I feel they and we, as their teachers, are being set up for failure.

A performance evaluation system to determine eligibility for teaching needs to be credible to the parties affected by the decisions. As education is not simply a process of sorting and selecting, promoting or firing of teacher candidates and teachers should not be either. Like students, teacher candidates and teachers should be given a chance to improve, to remediate and demonstrate competence. However, if they do not meet the minimal expectations within a reasonable timeline, they should not be allowed to continue until they can. Teacher education programs have the first line of responsibility to see that only those candidates with the potential to be good teachers are allowed to enroll and remain in programs to become certified as teachers. Then administrators, fellow educators, community members and students should be given a voice in the selection and retention of those licensed teachers.

For whatever the reason, many skilled and capable people fail to live up to their potential or to perform their duties adequately. In these cases, they should be helped to do the right thing, but cannot be made to do so. If they choose not to, then they should not be teaching. We should be doing all we can to assist teachers to be the best they can. Teachers who are given credible evidence that they are not performing up to standard will generally remediate or leave on their own. Some people have difficulty seeing their own

shortcomings and weaknesses and may not be willing or able to make the changes needed. If they do not, they can be counseled out or dismissed. In a consultative framework, in which the parties are fully, honestly, fairly and compassionately informed, involved and consulted, a good plan of action and an effective plan for professional, community and institutional development and improvement can be found.

A high quality evaluation system will weigh all relevant and important factors. Research sponsored by the American Educational Research Association and National Academy of Education found the following “both to predict teacher effectiveness and to help improve teachers' practice.”

- performance assessments for licensure and advanced certification that are based on professional teaching standards, such as National Board Certification and beginning teacher performance assessments in states like California and Connecticut; and
- on-the-job evaluation tools that include structured observations, classroom artifacts, analysis of student learning, and frequent feedback based on professional standards. (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011)

They also found benefits in teacher collaboration, training evaluators, frequent evaluation and feedback and peer assistance and review.

Teaching can be conceived of as a set of interactions among teacher, student and material (Cohen, Ruadenbush, & Ball, 2003; Grubb 2008). A good evaluation system will identify what the problems are, where they reside, who is responsible for fixing them, what their causes and solutions are and how they might be best addressed. For example, the problem might lie in the teacher, the student, the family, the school, the principal, the community, the curriculum, the materials, some other factor or some varying combination of these factors. Properly identifying and defining the problem is an important first step. If students are failing, it is not necessarily the teacher's fault, and therefore, blaming the teachers or improving them will not fix the problem.

Finally, using students' test scores as the primary evaluation tool for teachers fails the three-way test of truth, love and justice.

For this discussion, it is perhaps most important to underscore that most tests are not designed to support inferences about related questions, such as how well students were taught, what effects their teachers had on their learning, why students in some schools or classrooms succeed while those in similar schools and classrooms do not, whether conditions in the schools have improved as a result of a policy change, or what policy makers should do to solidify gains or reverse

declines. Answering those sorts of questions requires more and different kinds of evidence than test scores. (National Research Council, 2011a, pp. 5.2)

We will discuss the problems with using students' scores on standardized test to evaluate teachers further in later sections.

### What Should Teachers Know and be Able to Do

Though we all should have an opportunity to become what we want, that does not mean we could or would do a good job at all things. Not everyone who wants to become a teacher is well suited for teaching. Many people aspire to be teachers, but only those who meet the standards set by the society, profession and state should be allowed to teach.

How do we honestly, fairly and helpfully evaluate teachers? First, we might start with determining that they can perform the necessary duties of teaching to an acceptable degree. Evaluation of teachers is a normative and relative activity. The quality of a teacher depends on the circle of comparison—how does this teacher compare with other teachers in this grade, school, district and region and are there others who could do a better job?

Before we accept the complaints about teacher education programs having low quality or low standards, or being too theoretical or too removed from the day-to-day realities of the classroom, let us examine what a current teacher education program requires of its candidates to be recommended for certification. What are the requirements to become a teacher and how can teacher education programs develop and assess those expectations to determine that their teacher candidates know how and are able to be effective in a classroom?

Scriven identified five categories of the duties of the teacher: 1) knowledge base, 2) instructional competence, 3) assessment competence, 4) professionalism and 5) other services to the school and community (1994). He considered these duties "the only legitimate basis for teacher evaluation" (1993, p. 4). They can serve as a reasonable rubric for evaluating teacher candidates and teachers (Clarken, 1993a, 1993b). All of these duties can be measured, and standards can be set to determine if they are adequately met.

Other models of teacher evaluation, which have been discussed elsewhere in this book, place too much emphasis on factors beyond the control of teachers and use faulty

premises and methodology. Scriven, Wheeler, and Haertel found many problems with accepted approaches to teacher evaluation that were "multiple and serious" (1993, p. 7). These included that they are based upon a limited view of the teacher's tasks, limited and atypical observations, too much weight on the way of teaching, too little on the content and effect of teaching and the faulty use of indicators based upon statistical conclusions.

All teachers have a duty to possess and demonstrate a satisfactory level of general and content specific knowledge. To be a teacher requires general intelligence and an appreciation of its value for students and society. In addition, teachers should understand the subject matter they are to teach and be able to demonstrate an ability to teach it effectively to a broad range of students. Standards of knowledge attainment should be required before students are allowed to enter into teacher education programs, and they should achieve higher levels as they progress through the different stages of preparation for teaching.

Teachers must be able to manage student behavior and learning effectively. To help deal with classroom behavior, they need effective communication and pedagogical skills. They must handle varying ability levels, activities, assignments, contingencies, emergencies and time competently. Educators should demonstrate the ability to use appropriate instructional techniques, technology and materials to develop students' attitudes, skills and understanding according to their individual capacity.

Teachers should know and use appropriate, reliable and valid ways of determining the merit of a student's learning and be able to report their assessments fairly, honestly and helpfully. They also need to be able to evaluate their own work and instructional methods and materials so they can make needed improvements.

One of the most important responsibilities of a teacher is to serve as a role model. The list of professional attitudes, virtues and attributes that a teacher should model are numerous, including open-mindedness, tolerance, courtesy, honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, intelligence, uprightness and fairness. Developing these qualities is a life-long endeavor and should be included as part of ongoing teacher evaluation and professional development.

Teachers are also responsible for many other tasks that are part of running a school and being part of a community and institution. They need to know and follow necessary regulations, policies and procedures, and to work with and get along with others. If they cannot adequately perform any of the duties listed above, they should not be certified or allowed to teach in a school.

These duties are similar to the following aspects of effective teaching which are supported by research and incorporated into professional standards for teaching (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012, p. 13).

- Understand subject matter deeply and flexibly;
  - Connect what is to be learned to students' prior knowledge and experience;
  - Create effective scaffolds and supports for learning;
  - Use instructional strategies that help students draw connections, apply what they're learning, practice new skills, and monitor their own learning;
  - Assess student learning continuously and adapt teaching to student needs;
  - Provide clear standards, constant feedback, and opportunities for revising work;
- and
- Develop and effectively manage a collaborative classroom in which all students have membership (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, cited in Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012, p. 13).

To evaluate the above, teacher candidates at my university are assessed on 78 professional standards for which they must demonstrate proficiency while teaching students in the grade level and subject area for which they are seeking certification. Throughout their teacher preparation program, they are guided and nurtured to master these skills and demonstrate proficiency in these standards. They do a self-assessment and are assessed by a master teacher and by a university supervisor independently (see [https://aditweb.nmu.edu/education/evaluations/stuteach\\_final\\_eval.php](https://aditweb.nmu.edu/education/evaluations/stuteach_final_eval.php) for the online form they use and 78 standards for which they are assessed).

These assessments meet several professional standards for evaluation and for teaching. First, they align with the evaluation standards and principles set by the professional associations for personnel evaluation. Second, they are based on the real duties required and expected of a classroom teacher as identified by experts in evaluation. Thirdly, they include the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) vision of what is expected of accomplished teachers that was subsequently translated into standards for beginning teachers by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and adopted by over 40 states for initial teacher licensing (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012, p. 13).

For example, the Michigan Department of Education requires all teacher preparation institutions to use the state approved criteria for assessment of entry-level pedagogical skills for each student teacher, which are based on INTASC standards. My university incorporated the State Board of Education Entry Level Standards for Michigan Teachers, later replaced by the Professional Standards for Michigan Teachers (PSMT), into their evaluation of field experiences and student teachers.

### Criticisms of Teacher Education Programs

Teacher education has become the object of criticism from several sectors. The U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (2009), has made public statements on what he says is the mediocrity of teacher education. Like many of the attacks on education in general, these criticisms seem ill informed and even disingenuous. They are also subjective and, I believe, ideologically driven. They are given as statements of fact, but are not supported by reliable or valid evidence. Those who disagree with them are accused of bias, self-interest or are discredited.

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), cited above for misusing DOE funds to promote programs, has captured the media's attention with its ideologically driven "studies" to show the deficiencies of teacher education (AACTE, 2011). A recent example is its "study" of teacher education in Illinois, which it has now expanded to all of the teacher education programs in the United States. This "study" is being conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality and the *US News and World Report* to rank teacher education programs in the United States. It is very long on biased surveying and very short on scientific methodology and validity, resulting in programs that conform to NCTQ's ideological formulas being rated well and those that do not being considered as weak or failing.

Eduventures, a research and consulting agency, found "The majority of NCTQ's standards are not evidence-based, and appear to reflect the specific viewpoint of NCTQ" (2010, p. 3). Its report concludes:

While it is important that SOEs [Schools of Education] be held accountable for preparing high quality teachers, the study that NCTQ has conducted in Illinois of teacher preparation programs is significantly flawed. The quality of outputs and employer ratings are not taken into consideration—an integral piece to consider when judging the quality of preparation program. The federal government and state and local policymakers increasingly emphasize outcomes and results in producing highly effective teachers that increase student achievement, turning away from inputs alone as indicators of teacher quality. The lack of clarity and transparency with regards to the common standards that NCTQ

is using and the processes and procedures used to analyze the collected data make the methodology of the NCTQ study in Illinois problematic. While the study provides a high-level look across teacher education program models, its methodology flaws ultimately limit the validity of the study's conclusions and make the findings somewhat unreliable. Eduventures analysts recommend that policymakers, the public, and the press should keep these limitations in mind when reviewing the results of the NCTQ study. (p. 4)

Further, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) finds NCTQ's efforts and methodologies do not meet scientific evidence or research-based standards (2011). Unfortunately, these NCTQ results are presented as valid and convincing evidence of the problems with teacher education.

Popular programs with policy makers are alternative routes to teaching that require very limited education coursework or clinical experience in education programs. They put their teacher candidates with only subject content knowledge in classrooms after intensive two to six week orientations. The trend is to allow any alternative path to teacher certification that claims to be better or cheaper. Teach For America (TFA) is the most well known, prestigious and popular of these programs.

On the other hand, increased clinical experiences in teacher education programs are being called for in reform proposals. Like any profession, whether medicine, law or some other trade, teachers may not feel truly prepared for the first year on-the-job, but they have been given enough experience and a foundation upon which to build. Paradoxically, traditionally prepared students generally have extensive field experiences, whereas the alternative program those policy makers are promoting have minimal or none. Teacher candidates need practical experience based on sound knowledge and meaningful feedback. What are these reformers basing their contrary recommendations on? What are their motives? The rhetoric behind these proposals seems to be aimed at criticizing teacher education as irrelevant or unnecessary.

Though teacher education is being attacked, surveys consistently show that the large majority of teachers feel the teacher education program they graduated from did a good to excellent job preparing them to be a teacher. The general public believes from their personal experience that their educational institutions and teachers, elementary, secondary and post-secondary, are doing and have done a good job.

Though most teacher education programs are pursuing their missions with integrity and providing their teacher candidates with needed skills and in-classroom experience to be successful, those that are not should be put on notice and finally closed if they do not meet the vital and challenging standards of the profession. Teacher

education programs need to raise professional standards continually so that excellent teachers are available, even though the policies being advocated by government are discouraging the best and brightest from becoming educators, and the position, livelihood and calling of teaching are being diminished.

## **Evaluating Popular Reform Proposals**

*The influence of social class characteristics is probably so powerful that schools cannot overcome it, no matter how well trained are their teachers and no matter how well designed are their instructional programs and climates.*

Richard Rothstein

### **Standards for Evaluating Reforms: Three-Way Test**

I have lived my life and tried to be of service to humanity in my various roles in education following the three guiding principles of truth, love and justice and believe they are vitally needed to help us transform our education in a way that will benefit all humankind. These three guiding principles are based in the ethical, philosophical and religious ideals of the true, the beautiful and the good, which relate to the cognitive, affective and conative domains in psychology and education. These values are often at odds with modern-day conceptions of leadership, such as competition, power and aggressiveness. I have explored these principles at length in another book entitled *Truth, Love and Justice: A New Paradigm for Education and Its Reform*. I would refer you to that book if you are interested to learn more about them.

I am proposing we evaluate educational reforms using these three principle in what I call the “Three-Way Test”: 1) Is it true? 2) Is it loving? 3) Is it just? (See Figure 1.)

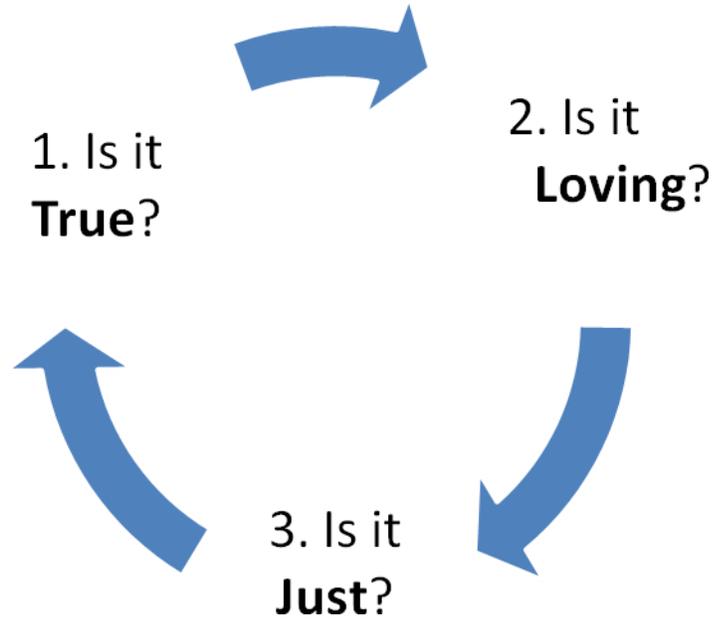


Figure 1. The Three-Way Test.

In this book, we will be focusing on truth, as I believe it is generally the best starting place for discussing our problems and their solutions, but in no way diminish the central role that love and justice must play in education and our society if we are to overcome the many problems facing us. In considering truth, we will also give precedence to science as one of the most valuable tools for determining truth from falsehoods.

The method used by science to investigate reality relies on the scientific method, which generally includes some experimentation that is subject to external validation and verification. The value of any thought or discovery must be examined by qualified experts to make some determination of its worth and validity. Theories, thoughts, methods and results are shared with others for their review. This happens among educators and those who study education. However, the experts in education who are qualified to make such assessments are generally not given the resources to do the quality of scientific inquiry needed to make clearer determinations about what works. In addition, simplistic and measurable solutions are more likely to find positive results, while their influence may be limited or even negative in the long term.

## Motivation and Reform

Many of the reform efforts are attempts to use incentives and external motivations, to get students and teachers to do what the reformers want, namely to perform better on tests. It is a counterproductive approach. Firstly, teachers “differ from those who select corporate careers. Education attracts people with both a strong service ethic and a desire for job security, not entrepreneurs with a thirst for risk and competition” (Evans, 2000).

Secondly, their “occupation permits them maximal freedom and minimal supervision” and they “cherish their freedom and tend to see themselves -- and to behave -- as artisans in their separate studios, practicing their craft as they see fit” (Evans, 2000). External incentives tend to dampen internal motivation (Deci, 1971; Deci, Koestner, and Ryan, 1999; Fehr and Falk, 2002; Kohn, 1999). Critics of teachers are operating under Theory X, that most workers are lazy and irresponsible, rather than Theory Y that assumes teachers are self-motivated and responsible. This is a false assumption.

As a part of the Theory X approach

The test-and-punish approach to school reform has already made it more difficult for schools labeled as failing to attract and retain well-qualified educators — thus, ironically, reducing the quality of education for students still further. Rather than increasing the incentives and supports for teaching in high-need schools, recent federal policy has encouraged states to lower standards for prospective teachers, despite evidence that doing so increases teacher attrition and reduces student achievement. Blaming teachers for the ills of high-need schools lets policy-makers off the hook and keeps the more fundamental problems of severe poverty, a tattered safety net and inequitable funding under the rug. (Darling-Hammond, 2012)

In recent times, researchers in psychology have shown, through a number of experiments and meta analyses, that people externally rewarded for doing something that they are internally motivated to do already, will be less likely to perform it in the future. It seems that we have a need or desire for self-determination and autonomy, which can be negatively affected by others’ manipulation, including rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

In other words, we have free will with which we chose to do what we want, regardless of external pressures. We do not like to do things that go against our will, but

also like the feeling of exercising our wills. We like our freedom and do not like to be controlled. However, if we do not want to do something, some external reward may motivate us to do so or change our mind to make us want to do it.

If we are already motivated to do something and someone then rewards that behavior, we tend to respond according to how we perceive the intent of that action. If we see it as controlling us, limiting our autonomy or demeaning our inherent worth or dignity, it is actually demotivating.

When external rewards are given, they can also be perceived as a sign of immaturity, irresponsibility or incompetence on the part of the recipient: that you would not do what you are supposed to do unless someone rewards you for doing it. Even children and adolescents respond negatively when they perceive they are being manipulated in this way. For example, if someone said they will pay us to do something we of our own volition have chosen to do, let us say go to the bathroom by ourselves, we would either wonder at or resent the implication that we would not do it without being bribed.

Another negative effect of external rewards and punishments on teachers and students results when comparisons are made. When high performers are rewarded more than lower performers, disunity and discouragement enter the ranks. Those who are well rewarded are made to feel superior to the others and those who do less well are made to feel discouraged and inferior. These feelings can be complicated and exacerbated, even when the rewards are perceived as controlling, unfair or beyond the abilities of the recipients to do anything about. Such feelings destroy student and staff morale and unity, both necessary for good learning to occur.

People do tend to be internally motivated by challenge and accomplishment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman, 2011). However, if the challenge is too easy or difficult, the task is not motivating. Teachers and students need to be encouraged to set challenging and clear goals to promote optimal growth and happiness. Interestingly, people tend to choose relatively easy tasks when external rewards are given, but choose tasks that are more challenging in the absence of external rewards (Shapira, 1976).

Seligman has identified five factors that cause people to flourish: positive emotion, relationship, accomplishment, engagement and meaning (2011). These five qualities can be fully experienced in teaching and learning but are all negatively impacted by external motivations. For instance, the sense of accomplishment in completing our own goals and following our own values is lost when we are made to feel we are being driven by someone else's goals and values.

The key to fostering motivation is to encourage internal and autonomous motivation and use external motivation with wisdom. Tests can be motivating when they are used to provide relevant information or feedback, but are demotivating when they are controlling or too difficult. In brief, the more controlling the external motivation, the less internal motivation and long-term learning occurs. As a result, both teachers and students do less well when external pressure or motivation is applied (National Research Council, 2011).

### Accountability and Incentives

Test-based accountability has been the most enduring education policy in the last fifty years (Elmore, 2004) and continues to dominate the political policy agenda (Feuer, 2008). It is attractive in that it promises an objective, accurate, easy and economical way to measure and assigns a quantitative value to the learning of students and effectiveness of teachers and schools. It is also part of a larger movement for accountability in society, especially by government and public agencies.

English education policies rely on more choice, tougher competition, intensified standardised testing and stronger school accountability. These are the key elements of the policies that were dominant in the United States, New Zealand, Japan and parts of Canada and Australia a decade or so ago. ... Significantly, Finland has not employed any of the market-based educational reform ideas in the ways that they have been incorporated into the education policies of many other nations, including the United States and England. (Salhberg, 2011)

Ideally, each individual, profession and institution should be self-accountable to high standards and continually strive to improve. In practice, we generally do need some external force or agency to establish, encourage and maintain acceptable standards, much as we need a police force and justice system to make individuals accountable for obeying the laws and a government to regulate the affairs of a state.

In principle, both accountability and incentives are effective and constructive tools in efforts for reform. Life itself is a series of tests for which we are held accountable and rewarded or punished based on our responses. We learn simple lessons, such as that fire burns and how to get along in society, through trial and error. We make adjustments or reforms based on the informal or formal feedback we receive. However, when approaches used to determine accountability and to apply incentives are faulty, decisions

based on them can be destructive. For examples, if laws are unfair or are not applied fairly, the progress and order of society will deteriorate. In addition, if we are held accountable for things that are beyond our control, which is unfair, morale will breakdown.

When what gets measured is not an accurate indication of the quality or outcome sought, pressure is exerted to focus on the indicator rather than the substance. In education, the important qualitative aspects of teaching are not easily quantified; neither are the other important aspects of learning. When the quality of learning and teaching gets reduced to a number, and when we further imagine that that number is an objective and accurate measure of education, we are deluded and have missed the most essential and important aspects of learning. However, there is a strong pressure to measure learning and to quantify objectively what each student and teacher is producing. We therefore seek to quantify using objective measurable standards, such as standardized tests. In the same way, when determining the value of a person, one might use some objective measures, such as race, gender, income, class, religion, nationality, weight or height, as an indicator of their value.

The recent book, *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education* (2011), from a committee of the prestigious National Research Council of the National Academies, provides a synthesis of relevant research on the results of test-based accountability systems tied to incentives to improve student, teacher and administrator performance. This is the first time research on this topic from economics, psychology, other social sciences and education has been reviewed by a panel of leading scholars in several fields to prepare an informed statement to help guide policy makers. It represents the culmination of a project originated by the National Academies Board on Testing and Assessment in 2002.

Their study of basic research on incentives had some noteworthy findings. For instance, incentive systems may increase measured performance, but not the desired outcome. They also affect people in ways that are not predicted, create unexpected costs and have negative overall consequences. In complex organizations like schools, incentives will affect people differently depending on their position, performance and personality. Incentives can have an opposite effect, especially if receiving them is perceived as impossible, unlikely, not based on merit, not moral or not related to reality. They can also erode commitment to institutional goals and create disunity.

This is the situation we seem to find ourselves in at present and which reforms seem to be promoting and exacerbating. Teachers and schools are rewarded for accomplishing goals that are not reasonable while they have the support and resources

they need taken from them, further undermining their possibilities of success. These and other problems have been discussed in other sections, especially in high stake testing, merit pay and demoralization.

Test-based incentives have additional problems in that tests generally do not provide either a rich or a reliable measure of a school or teacher's mission. Not only do these tests not measure the most important things about education, they fail to fairly and fully assess the content they purport to measure in many significant and damaging ways. Those receiving the incentives will narrow their efforts to focus only on those parts of the subject or content covered on the tests. Therefore, we end up with the contradictory results of students' test scores increasing while their real learning decreases.

Not only do they result in unequal treatment of the content, incentives can result in unequal treatment of students as well. For example, when schools or teachers are incentivized to increase the number or percentage of students who meet a performance standard such as "proficient," there is a push to put most of the attention on those students near the cut score. Those students who will clearly pass or fail are not taught, as they will not affect the percentage pass rate. Only those students near the cut scores are given attention to assure that they can be added to or kept in the pass column. Also, competition among the teachers for those students who will boost their pass rates can occur.

In addition, though focus on incentives and tests may bring short term results, long-term benefits may be sacrificed. For instance, the morale of students and educators may be damaged. Later learning may also be hindered as the joy, meaning and sense of achievement and growth is lost. As learning is reduced to trivial, superficial or narrow activities, the desire to learn now and in the future is sacrificed.

Numerous examples of incentive systems producing unintended or contradictory results abound. Some examples are given in the chapter on the demoralization of the teachers and education. For instance, rewarding sales or business people for earnings encourages unethical practices and self-interest over the welfare of the customer or the company. In health care, when cure rates and the number of procedures performed are rewarded, health professionals are discouraged from taking higher risk patients and encouraged to perform more procedures, regardless of the best interests of their client.

These distortions and corruptions are already found in education related to high stakes tests, even though incentives are still relatively small. Examples of teaching to the test, gaming the system, cheating and manipulating results are prevalent, though at present very few salaries, benefits or jobs are affected. Cases in Atlanta and New York

have been reported recently. One way to limit these problems is to look at other indicators of performance that are not tied directly to the incentive measure. For example, some increase in the identified performance indicators, such as high stakes tests, may occur, but will a similar increase in other comparable measures result?

The committee of the National Research Council found from a review of studies of test-based incentive programs that they have not had the desired effect of raising the United States achievement levels internationally and that high school exit exams have decreased both graduation rates and achievement. This analysis included the test that is part of NCLB. Their recommendations for policy and research states, “The modest and variable benefits shown by test-based incentive programs to date suggest that such programs should be used with caution and that substantial further research is required to understand how they can be used successfully” (2011, p. S-4).

### Merit Pay

Pay-for-performance can work for people whose primary motivations are monetary. It may also work for those who do not need to work together in cooperation and collaboration to achieve a long-term goal whose sole aim is to benefit others, as teaching does.

Educators do not respond to the same incentives as businesspeople and school heads have much less clout than their corporate counterparts to foster improvement. Most teachers want higher salaries but react badly to offers of money for performance. Merit pay, so routine in the corporate world, has a miserable track record in education. It almost never improves outcomes and almost always damages morale, sowing dissension and distrust, for three excellent reasons, among others: (1) teachers are driven to help their own students, not to outperform other teachers, which violates the ethic of service and the norms of collegiality; (2) as artisans engaged in idiosyncratic work with students whose performance can vary due to factors beyond school control, teachers often feel that there is no rational, fair basis for comparison; and (3) in schools where all faculty feel underpaid, offering a special sum to a few sparks intense resentment. (Evans, 2000)

For teachers who need to be motivated by higher ideals of truth, service and justice to be truly effective, such materialistic, base and selfish motives are counter-productive. It is understandable why and how these material incentives appeal to those making them, and why they assume that everyone else is similarly motivated; however,

introducing such inducements into teaching will undermine the moral integrity and efficacy of teachers, attracting self-seekers and promoters and encouraging corruption, the quickest and easiest way to profit in this arrangement.

Pay teachers a respectable wage and accord them the respect, honor and status they deserve. This will attract the best and brightest in our society to become teachers and keep them in classrooms. If they are the best, they will do their best and will not need to be manipulated or cajoled by extra pay to do their jobs. Be fair. If their jobs are more demanding, then they should be paid according to the standards of justice. If they do not do their jobs adequately, they should also be treated with justice. Find ways to fairly evaluate and compensate their work, but realize teaching is an extraordinary complex and challenging job. To imagine that superficial measures of quality—such as isolated standardized tests that are subject to many conflated and conflicting variables and influences—can fairly or accurately measure teacher success is not supported by common sense or science. If it is determined that teachers are not doing a satisfactory job, they should be fired, because our students and society should expect and deserve the very best in their teachers.

In our public schools, it is in the public's interest and society's duty and responsibility to pay teachers an honest, respectable and living wage. It is right, wise and just to do so. Those countries such as Finland and Singapore, in which students score the highest on international tests, pay and respect teachers highly. When we do not operate with the principles of compassion, wisdom and justice, we have problems. When individuals, communities and institutions do not support education, we can expect problems. These problems will reverberate throughout the nation for years to come as individuals lose faith, communities fall apart, institutions fail, societies break down and civilizations collapse.

If teachers will do a better job because they are going to be paid better, they are not living up to the high standards and calling of teaching. Good teachers should do their best regardless of what they are paid. Not only is this true, but most teachers also spend a fair amount of their limited salaries and free time on improving their teaching, curriculum materials and classroom supplies to help their students. Teachers do not get rich, and those who wish to become wealthy leave teaching. If they do want riches, they should get out of teaching and go into business for themselves or work in systems whose main goal is to make money and reward those that contribute to that process. Any trade, craft or profession should do its work with excellence and in the spirit of service regardless of pay.

Schools and teachers are expected to do the right, wise and just thing for their students. If we do not in turn do the right, wise and just thing for our schools and teachers, we limit their ability to accomplish their mission with their students. By creating conditions where schools and teachers are encouraged or forced to focus on survival, pay or their own self-interest, we work against the purposes for which they exist. According to a comprehensive review of the research, “There is also little or no evidence for the claim that teachers will be more motivated to improve student learning if teachers are evaluated or monetarily rewarded for student test score gains” (Baker, *et al.*, 2010, p. 1).

What are some reasons studies might not find a difference in student or teacher performance for merit pay or that we might not trust the studies’ findings? It might be that teachers are already doing their best; therefore, giving them additional financial incentives to do better produced no increase in achievement. It may be that the teachers felt forced, controlled or required to use methods different from what they chose or felt best. It may be that the incentives are not appropriate: neither large nor attractive enough to change behavior. It may have been that the targets to receive the reward were too high or unreasonable, therefore limiting motivation to try to reach them. It may have been that the teachers either did not understand or buy into the program. It may have been because of some bias in who is selected to get bonuses or differences between the experimental group and comparison groups. As has happened in other settings, the gains may have been illusory, rather than measures of real achievement.

All but the first of the above reasons—teachers are already doing their best—were controlled for in a three-year randomized experiment by the National Center on Performance Incentives (NCPI) that found that incentive pay did not lead to improved performance (Moran, 2010; Springer, Ballou, Hamilton, Lockwood, McCaffrey, Pepper, & Stecher, 2010). It was left to teachers to decide what, if anything, they did to improve their students’ scores. The incentives—\$5,000, 10,000 or 15,000 depending upon the gains in scores—were considered significant and attractive enough by the teachers involved. The incentive thresholds were considered attainable and reasonable, requiring students to answer only 2 to 3 more questions correctly on the 55-item exam to qualify for the minimum bonus of \$5,000. The teachers understood and bought into the program. Bias was limited by randomizing selection of the teachers in the study and other factors controlled for between treatment and control groups in the experiment. Gaming the tests and cheating were controlled to avoid false results. Teachers in the group with the potential to receive the bonus pay did little to change what they were doing and varied little from the control group in teaching practices and beliefs.

Though this study did not find performance incentives made a significant difference on middle school mathematics test scores overall, it did find a positive effect in grade 5 achievement. A possible reason is that these teachers were more likely to teach their students in multiple subjects; therefore, they could spend more time on mathematics, the subject tested, or it could mean that teachers knew their students better.

A later study by RAND (Marsh, Springer, McCaffrey, Yuan, Epstein, Koppich, Kalra, DiMartino & Peng, 2011) tested the effects of performance bonuses in a random sample of New City high-needs public schools. This 2007-2010 study was to improve student performance using school based financial incentives rather than the teacher incentives used in the NCPI study. The study did not find that the bonuses, about \$3,000 per teacher/staff member and about \$56 million for the total program, improved test scores. Schools were allowed to determine how they would distribute their bonuses. Most schools chose to distribute them equally, but some schools used performance measures to differentiate the amount of award each person received. There was no difference in achievement between these schools.

This study further challenges the assumptions of policy makers that teachers will teach better and students learn more if they are rewarded more. Unlike the National Center on Performance Incentives, the RAND investigators suggested that the conditions needed to motivate the teachers might not have been sufficient to make a difference in performance. These conditions are considered important pay-for-performance programs based on expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964; Marsh, *et al.* 2011). For example, in this study more than a third of the staff members were lacking in an understanding and awareness of how the incentive program worked and how it might affect them. Though most of the teachers wanted to win bonuses, almost half felt they were not large enough to motivate extra effort. Buy-in was limited; only 57% of the staff members had to agree to participate for a school to be included in the experiment, and most felt the criteria relied too heavily on test scores. Some also felt the targets for bonuses were too high and the timeline not effective.

As discussed elsewhere, the reason pay-for-performance for teachers has not been shown to be effective may be that teacher motivation is not the problem, and therefore to incentivize it is not the solution. Teachers are already motivated to do their best, and greater financial rewards will not result in greater output. It may be that more money is the wrong incentive, even counterproductive, as it works against other motivations or adds more stress. It also may be that improved teacher motivation alone is not enough to make a difference in student achievement. Maybe other factors are more important and override the influence of merit pay.

Marsh and fellow researchers concluded

The results of this evaluation add to a growing body of research from the United States that finds no effects on student achievement of narrow pay-for-performance policies that focus only on financial incentives without other features, such as targeted professional development or revised teacher evaluations. (Marsh, *et al.* 2011, p. 264)

They recommended that for pay-for-performance policies to work, they should create conditions that foster strong motivation, identify the factors that affect motivation, address the politics of school-level implementation and pilot test and evaluate before full implementation.

When we tie incentives such as merit pay to accountability measures, such as high stakes tests, we have further problems. When we try to manipulate teachers with external rewards or punishments such as merit pay or testing, we undermine their internal motivation and their sense of public service and professional integrity. We also neglect the fact that the “teachers’ work is so idiosyncratic and unpredictable and requires so much improvisation (Evans, 2000).

### Value-Added Modeling

Value-added modeling (VAM) is touted as a way to evaluate schools and teachers scientifically and fairly. Value-added models appear to address some concerns with comparing differences among students’ growth. However, there are serious methodological problems with the reliability and validity of these measures (Amrein-Beardsley, 2008). John Ewing, president of Math for America, recently wrote of his concern about the mathematics of value-added modeling being used as a rhetorical weapon to convince others of the objectivity and value of its findings (2011).

Using VAMs for individual teacher evaluation is based on the belief that measured achievement gains for a specific teacher’s students reflect that teacher’s “effectiveness.” This attribution, however, assumes that student learning is measured well by a given test, is influenced by the teacher alone, and is independent from the growth of classmates and other aspects of the classroom context. None of these assumptions is well supported by current evidence. (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012, p. 8)

VAM sounds deceptively scientific, simple and straightforward: compare the results of different treatments to see which is most effective or adds the most value to the

variable in question. Even when the variable of study is a drug treatment, something that is clearly controllable and measurable, many factors can affect the results, such as the commonly recognized and experienced placebo effect in which those who were part of the experiment got better even when they did not receive any treatment.

When it comes to student learning, the variables and treatments are so numerous, nuanced, interconnected and uncontrollable that it should be obvious that basing conclusions on them is unreasonable. Some problems include the contamination and limitations of the data. For example, some classrooms will have a 100% turnover of students in one academic year. Even within more stable classrooms, the various issues that arise with the coming and going of students are significant.

The other variables such as class size, learning resources, school conditions, personal safety, home conditions and social environments can make a big difference in student learning. For example, students in a small class, with adequate resources in a high achieving school, whose needs are met and who are cared for by families, communities and peers with high expectations, will likely do better than those who do not have these things, even if they had the same teacher. Is the teacher to be blamed or credited?

A school's "product" is never clear cut. America's current frenzy over accountability and "high-stakes" testing rests, at heart, on a simplistic, misapplied factory model of education: raw resources enter; workers make inputs; outputs emerge; faulty outputs must indicate faulty inputs. But a school's "value added" is extremely hard to measure. For one thing, our best-performing schools, public and private, usually serve wealthier students; our worst-performing schools, poorer students. For another, a complex array of external factors, from divorce and poverty to the Internet and TV, affects the motivation and performance of all students (Evans, 2000).

What about those teachers whose test scores say they are not doing a good job, when our experience and common sense tells us they are? The harm done to unfairly judged teachers is evident, but what about schools, programs and teaching methodologies that get bad ratings based on poorly designed studies. We are currently making policy decisions based on these limited and misapplied approaches, such as VAM, that will influence education for years to come.

Leading educational researchers in the United States collaborated on a paper for the Economic Policy Institute Research entitled *Problems with the Use of Student Test Scores to Evaluate Teachers* (Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Ladd, Linn, Ravitch, Rothstein, Shavelson, & Shepard, 2010). In that paper, they reported on research

studies using VAM. In several studies, VAM found teachers' effectiveness ratings of one year varied dramatically the following year. For example, in one study teachers were ranked in the top 20% of effectiveness the first year, but less than a third remained in that group the second year and a third moved to the bottom 40%. Another study found only a 4-16% prediction rate for teacher effectiveness ratings from one year to the next. We would not expect the effectiveness of a teacher to vary so much from year to year, which strongly suggests the tests are not measuring teacher effectiveness (Baker, *et al.*, 2010).

When it comes to using these tests and value-added models for teacher accountability, it is safe to say, "The research base is currently insufficient to support the use of VAM for high stakes decisions" (McCaffrey, Koretz, Lockwood & Hamilton, 2003, xx). Not only are there serious problems with the methodology of VAM, there are significant concerns about the high stakes test used to determine effectiveness. Though scholars acknowledged that newer VAM approaches are fairer and stronger than previous ones, they stated,

Nonetheless, there is broad agreement among statisticians, psychometricians, and economists that student test scores alone are not sufficiently reliable and valid indicators of teacher effectiveness to be used in high-stakes personnel decisions, even when the most sophisticated statistical applications such as value-added modeling are employed. (Baker, *et al.*, 2010, p. 2)

The National Academy of Sciences National Research Council Board on Testing and Assessment concluded "VAM estimates of teacher effectiveness should not be used to make operational decisions because such estimates are far too unstable to be considered fair or reliable" (cited in Baker, *et al.*, 2010, p. 2). This finding has also been supported by the American Educational Research Association and National Academy of Education policy report "that found that teacher effectiveness ratings differ substantially from class to class and from year to year, as well as from one statistical model to the next" (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, Rothstein, 2012, p. 9).

Hill, Kapitula and Umland (2011) did an intensive study to determine the reliability of VAM. Their case studies of middle school mathematics teachers found that some of the teachers rated poorest in their study according to expert observations, ended up in the category of highest value added based on state student math evaluations. They did find that "value-added scores could potentially play a role in improving this system if used wisely" (p. 32); however, they did "conclude that value-added scores, at least in this district and using these not-uncommon models, are not sufficient to identify problematic and excellent teachers accurately" (p. 32).

Their evidence “suggests that value-added scores alone are not sufficient to identify teachers for reward, remediation, or removal” (p.33). The “high value-added teachers did not necessarily have strong instructions” (p. 33) and teachers needing remediation would not be accurately identified. They found that teachers with accelerated students had high value-added scores and those with more pupils with special needs had lower, regardless of observed teacher skill.

A background paper for policy makers (2011) sponsored by the respected American Educational Research Association and National Academy of Education, summarizes well the problems with VAM that have been supported by research.

1. Value-Added Models of Teacher Effectiveness Are Highly Unstable. Teachers’ ratings differ substantially from class to class and from year to year, as well as from one test to the next.
2. Teachers’ Value-Added Ratings Are Significantly Affected by Differences in the Students Who Are Assigned to Them. Even when models try to control for prior achievement and student demographic variables, teachers are advantaged or disadvantaged based on the students they teach. In particular, teachers with large numbers of new English learners and others with special needs have been found to show lower gains than the same teachers when they are teaching other students.
3. Value-Added Ratings Cannot Disentangle the Many Influences on Student Progress. Many other home, school, and student factors influence student learning gains, and these matter more than the individual teacher in explaining changes in scores (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2011).

In conclusion, I would suggest VAM fails all three tests of being true, loving or just: it does not give a true measure of teacher effectiveness and it is not loving or just to any party.

### High Stakes Standardized Tests

Of all the reforms put upon education, high-stakes testing has perhaps been the most destructive. It violates all three principles of truth, love and justice in multiple ways. It purports to give an honest appraisal of what students have learned and how well teachers have taught, but that is not true. It discourages the love of learning and camaraderie needed to make education effective and it is not a fair measure of learning or teaching. It destroys the morale of students and teachers who are unfairly judged by these misleading indicators of success.

Standardized tests fail to adequately account for individual and cultural differences, and they give money to private corporate test makers and scorers rather than to the schools. They can hurt children and families not able to cope or perform well and advantage those who can afford special preparation. In addition, they provide minimal feedback, encourage extrinsic motivation, penalize creativity, do not help students or teachers do better and cause them to hate learning and school (Brady, 2011). Critics claim teachers are opposed to testing because they do not want to be accountable; however, teachers are held responsible every class and every day by their students, community, administrators, peers and selves.

Teachers can and should help students do well on tests, but the nurturing of their students' characters is the foundation of all other accomplishments. A standardized test may get at some measure of intelligence, but it does not measure the more important and foundational qualities of character that are so needed in students and society today. As determined by a consortium of scholars who have studied this topic: "Any sound evaluation will necessarily involve a balancing of many factors that provide a more accurate view of what teachers in fact do in the classroom and how that contributes to student learning" (Baker, *et al.*, 2010, p. 2).

Most people value the teachers who most positively changed or influenced their lives: teachers who cared, who encouraged them to become the most they could, and who opened their minds, illumined their hearts and quickened their wills. Teachers who treat students as noble and dignified beings and awaken them to new possibilities, who helped them create a new mind, heart and will are what we need. The fruits of teaching are playing a part in realizing and uncovering these hidden potentialities and giving the students the tools, vision and volition to carry on with that process. The results of this kind of good teaching are not measured to any significant degree by standardized tests.

Evaluating education and teachers fairly, clearly and honestly is a complex, difficult, expensive and time-consuming endeavor. Until now, we have mostly sought relatively inexpensive, easy and politically expedient solutions such as standardized testing. As a result, "we test students in the United States more than any other nation, in the mistaken belief that testing produces greater learning," whereas top performing nations such as Finland and Korea only formally test students once, and that is to inform college admissions (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Critics want to use these tests and all the accumulating data that are falsely touted as objective and scientific to evaluate all aspects of education, teaching and teacher education. It sounds good, but it is not true, caring or just. A comprehensive report by the National Research Council (1999) cited a "strong

need for better evidence on the intended benefits and unintended negative consequences of using high-stakes tests to make decisions about individuals” (p. 8).

Some suggest that such proposals for increased standardized high stakes tests are part of policy makers agendas for degrading and eventual dismantling of public education. One way of creating the impression that schools are failing is by raising the bar on these tests until most students do not pass, and then use this as evidence to show how our schools are not doing their job. Critics further connect the school’s failure to get students to perform at the prescribed reading or mathematics level as the basis of our problems in society. It can become a Catch-22. They blame schools and teachers for failing to meet artificial and arbitrary standards, and, if students do well on the tests, then the tests are too easy. The cut scores and pass rates are use to promote political ideas, they are not educational tools.

Some reformers are suggesting using standardized test scores of the students for as much 50% of the teacher’s performance evaluation. Leading education researchers consider this practice unwise based on the evidence (Baker, *et al.*, 2010, p. 2). Student standardized test scores are unstable, unreliable, error-prone and illogical for use in evaluating teachers or teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2011, Ewing, 2011). Also, when high stakes tests are used to reward or punish, the process becomes vulnerable to misuses and abuses such as teaching to the tests, teaching test-taking strategies, neglecting what is not tested and cheating. The result will be that test scores will improve while real learning is harmed.

These problems of corrupting and cheating around high stakes testing are more likely to grow because of Campbell’s Law: “The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to measure” (Campbell, 49). In this case, test scores—the quantitative social indicator—are being used for social decision-making concerning students, teachers, schools and teacher education programs, which results in corrupting pressure to raise the indicator scores, which in turn distorts and corrupts the educational processes and practices it was intended to measure. Nichols and Berliner’s book, *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America’s Schools* (2008), documents the many ways standardized testing has distorted the integrity of education.

One corruption is that students and teachers are encouraged to “game” the system, by doing whatever they can to show academic gains regardless of any actual learning related to the content. The most common form of gaming is to teach test-taking skills, such as how to select the best answers, how to make educated guesses and how to answer

according to the scoring rubric. In such high stakes situations, it seems in the best interests of the schools and teachers to encourage their students to engage in permissible activities that do not necessarily increase real learning, but help boost scores. As a result, test scores tend to rise every year for the first three to four years and then level off (Linn, 2000) as teachers learn what questions are asked, and then adjust their instruction to meet the expectations of the test. However, when a new test is introduced, scores drop, as the students have not been prepped for the new questions. Further research suggests that this is the result of teaching to the test, as there are not comparable gains on other similar achievement tests, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for which the students were not being prepared (Center on Education Policy, 2008).

Other problems that have resulted from standardized testing include the narrowing of the curriculum as teachers are first encouraged, and then mandated, to teach to the test to meet imposed quotas or benchmarks. As these tests are normally made up of machine scored multiple-choice questions in reading and mathematics, only the lower level factual knowledge and limited skills in these two subjects are tested. The other subjects and aspects of school, such as career, technical, life skills and arts education are neglected, along with critical thinking and the higher-level knowledge that is not easily tested.

Furthermore, these tests do not begin to measure the far more important and significant learning that goes on in schools related to dispositions, attitudes, social skills, moral development and higher order thinking. These qualities are more likely than high test scores to lead to success. Beyond limited language and math skills, such tests also do not address the significant issues of life. As John Dewey, a leading American philosopher said in 1897, “Examinations are of use only so far as they test the child's fitness for social life and reveal the place in which he can be of most service and where he can receive the most help.” Why are we not developing measures and standards for these important issues? Why are we not measuring and addressing a host of factors outside the control of schools and teachers that affect academic achievement?

High-stakes standardized tests push schools and teachers to engage in questionable practices. Several examples of states inflating their test scores have been exposed over the last two decades. In addition, other states have set very low cut scores to give the impression that the students in their state are doing well, when in fact they are not. Tests can be manipulated to tell whatever story the creators wish to tell. For example, we can make them harder so more fail to show how teachers and schools have failed. What lessons are we teaching our young when our politicians, policy makers, superintendents, principals and teachers are pushed to engage in such practices?

We might learn some lessons from the corporate, political and financial institutions and structures that place high premiums on short-term goals and reported profits to meet stockholder or constituent expectations. Enron is one example that might be illustrative of the damage of focusing on arbitrary standards and appearances without regard to moral principles. Through “creative” accounting and reporting, they were able to give the impression of being one of the world’s most profitable, effective and successful companies for several years, while they were just the opposite. They were able to report high earnings that were not real—they were not based on facts, but on appearances and manipulation of data. They spent their energy and money on creating the illusion of success rather than actually producing real accomplishments. Similarly, we must remember that test scores do not necessarily equate to student learning or achievement (Ewing, 2011).

Tests, we must remember, are developed, pushed and sold by testing companies with no vested interest in student achievement. They are marketed to bureaucrats and politicians looking for an easy fix to a complex problem, and serve little or no purpose beyond teaching our students to become experts in bubble-in testing methodology. They perpetuate the myth of the effectiveness of top-down bureaucratic leadership that doesn’t work for business and has never worked for education either. We continue to forget the reform in education must be led by teachers and educators from the local level up and not the other way around. (Arnold, 2012)

More recently, the financial institutions nearly caused the collapse of the world economic order through similar dishonest, corrupt and self-serving practices. Many corporate and political leaders have been corrupted by power, profits and self-interest. Leaders from some of these institutions have called for reform of education, primarily by using approaches, worldviews and motivations that have failed them and the society they are to serve. U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone spoke eloquently for education and against high-stakes tests.

Education is, among other things, a process of shaping the moral imagination, character, skills, and intellect of our children, of inviting them into the great conversation of our moral, cultural, and intellectual life, and of giving them the resources to prepare to fully participate in the life of the nation and of the world. But today in education there is a threat afoot: the threat of high-stakes testing being grossly abused in the name of greater accountability, and almost always to the serious detriment of our children....It is a harsh agenda that hold children responsible for our own failure to invest in their future and in their achievement....high-stakes

testing marks a major retreat from fairness, from accuracy, from quality and from equity. (cited in Nichols and Berliner, 2008, p. 171-172)

In short, high-stakes standardized tests fail the truth, love and justice test. See the resolution against high-stake testing in Appendix B for a cogent statement supported by many.

### Class Size

Another reform suggestion to save money and make education more efficient is to increase class size. A May 11, 2011 report, *Class Size: What Research Says and What It Means for State Policy* (Whitehurt & Chingos) gives us an example of how think tanks frame information and interpret data and findings in ways that serve their purposes rather than the public good or truth. As discussed earlier, these think tank reports get a lot of attention from the media and policy makers. This Brookings Institute report posits that schools can save money without compromising student learning by increasing the number of students in a class.

Advocates for legislation on any of these topics are likely to appeal to research evidence as support for their position. That is appropriate and desirable as long as: a) the evidence is of high quality, b) it is relevant to the legislative action under consideration, c) conflicting evidence isn't ignored, and d) alternative courses of legislative action are similarly evaluated and compared. (Whitehurt & Chingos, 2011, A Context for Linking Research to Policy section)

These are good points that can be used to evaluate any evidence used to support any reform proposal for education. The above points a) and b) relate to the standard of truth and c) and d) to fairness. It is instructive to use these four standards from their report on class size, which help inform policy decisions based on research evidence, to see how well they applied these principles to their own work. This same approach is used in many statements intended to influence policy on educational reform: give standards and ideals by which they say they are guided, but violate them in practice. Such a claim or pretense to high principles that are not followed is either disingenuous or hypocritical.

High quality evidence, their first evaluative standard, is generally considered to mean empirical studies with sound methodologies that lead to conclusions that would be considered highly reliable and valid. The facts need to establish some confirmation of a causal relationship between or among variables. According to their report, randomized

and natural experiments or studies using sophisticated mathematical modeling are the highest quality evidence.

For the evidence that exists on class size, almost all studies are of the effects of class size reduction, not increases in class size. They did include the studies that met their “high-quality evidence” criteria. The study they identify as the most credible, the Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR), found increases in math and reading scores of 0.2 standard deviations in class size reductions averaging from 22 to 15. Another high quality review of the class size literature was published in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* with the subtitle, “How Research Design is Taking the Con out of Econometrics” (Angrist & Pischke, 2010). It found a 0.2 to 0.3 standard deviation increase when class size was reduced by 10 students. Other research that met the high quality standard also found similar results or was not conclusive.

However, Whitehurt and Chingos also included other evidence that did not meet their own standards of high quality and gave more credence to those studies that generally showed mixed or no results, in order to support their conclusion that class size is not an important variable. In this case, they violated both principles a) quality evidence and c) conflicting evidence. They included much of the high quality evidence that conflicts with their views, but then they proceeded to discredit or downplay it, focusing instead on unreliable and weak evidence “that improperly represents what we do know” (Schanzenbach, 2011, p. 5).

Standards b) and d) were not honored in that their policy recommendations were not relevant and alternative courses of action were not similarly evaluated and compared. They misrepresented the information given. An example that seems to violate all four principles is Whitehurt and Chingos’ suggestion that a 1-student increase in class size would result in more than \$12 billion in savings.

Whitehurt and Chingos were making some unreasonable assumptions when they used the reverse case of changing the current ratio of teachers from 15.3 to 14.3. According to their example, using the current data of 3.2 million teachers and 49.3 million students would require 226,000 additional teachers at an average salary of \$55,000, which would cost an extra \$12.4 billion a year; therefore, increasing the ratio by one should save this much a year. They further suggest that by doing this the schools could fire the least effective teachers to lessen the possible negative impacts of increased class size.

This logic is flawed in several ways. One involves the practical implications of reducing real teachers in real schools. This has been experienced when class maximums

are imposed, such as happened in several cases of class size reduction. When you cap a class size and it goes over by one, you have to hire another teacher, which changes the ratio dramatically, as it cuts the class with the maximum plus one in half. On the other hand, increasing class sizes by one does not mean you will be able to fire a teacher. To go to a 16.3 students to one teacher ratio from a 15.3 students to one teacher ratio includes more than simple math. Classroom numbers are not uniformly equal and easily divisible. More than classroom teachers are involved in the ratio, and increasing by one student does not equate to getting rid of one teacher. For example, if you increase class size from 25 to 26, how do you get rid of a teacher? You cannot fire or hire a fraction of a teacher in these cases.

In addition, Whitehurst and Chingos suggest that by eliminating the least effective teachers, they could limit the negative effect of the class size increase; however, how the least effective teachers would be identified and fired was not discussed. These problems further limit their findings. Schanzenbach's (2011) review of this report found several problems with their interpretation of the research and conclusions. She concludes that it "is of limited use in policy debates" and "provides a misleading characterization of the prior research," so that "the authors fail to make their case" (p. 6).

### International Comparisons

The United States has led the world in educational attainment since the mid-nineteenth century, first with universal compulsory elementary education, then with secondary education, and finally with the finest university system in the world. Somewhere in the latter part of the twentieth century, it began to lose its distinction as a world leader in education. It can no longer claim to be an undisputed leader in all of these levels of education, largely because other nations have continued to advance in the indicators of educational attainment while the U.S. has not.

High school graduation rates continued to rise until the 1970s when they plateaued at about 75%, while rates in other nations on average continued to increase and many to pass the United States. It can be argued that U.S. students do not need more education than they currently receive. Most students receive an adequate education to get a job, earn a livelihood and live productively in society. More of the same education will not necessarily make them better equipped for life. However, as education attainment has slowed, economic inequality has soared (Goldin & Katz, 2008).

As the world shrinks and becomes much more interconnected, it is only natural that nations would compare their educational programs and successes with one another. Learning from others is an excellent way to discover new ways of improving. If others

have created an effective approach, others can find out how to be better from them. The most talked about comparisons of educational attainment come in the form of international assessments. One thing that is not talked about is how much these tests predict future success for both the individual and the society. The predictability, reliability and validity of these international assessments, like standardized test used to measure student and teacher growth, are much more limited than the public supposes, yet we take them as accurate and trustworthy indicators of learning, and by extension, progress and success.

Putting those major concerns aside for the present, let us look at how the United States compares to other nations, to see what we might learn. Scores on international tests for the U.S. are in the average range for all nations that participate. The scores for the United State were up slightly in the latest results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); however, what made the news was how poorly U.S. students performed compared to other nations. The common perception conveyed in the media is that the United States was once the world's leader in these international comparisons and has now fallen behind. This assertion is not true. The first international assessment in 1964 ranked the U.S. as second to last out of 12 nations. There has been a slight but general trend of improvement in U.S. scores on these tests since 1964 (Loveless, 2011, p. 9).

The result of the latest PISA ranked Shanghai-China, Hong Kong-China, Finland, Singapore and South Korea as the top scorers. Among the nations in the original 12 tested in 1964, Finland was ranked fourth, but in 2009, it was ranked first among them. It has become regarded as a model the United States should look to for improving our education system. Many of Finland's policies and approaches are contrary to what is being proposed as reforms in the U.S. For example, Finland distributes educational resources much more equitably, pays higher teachers' salaries, gives teachers greater authority and autonomy and has no high-stakes standardized tests (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

A typical feature of teaching and learning in Finland is high confidence in teachers and principals as respected professionals. Another involves encouraging teachers and students to try new ideas and approaches rather than teaching them to master fixed attainment targets. This makes school a creative and inspiring place for students and teachers. These policies are a result of three decades of systematic, mostly intentional development that has created a culture of diversity, trust and respect within Finnish society in general, and within its education system in particular. The result is a cocktail of good ideas from other countries and smart practices from the tradition of teaching and learning in Finland.

The secret of education in Finland is that it brings together government policy, professional involvement and public engagement around an inspiring social and educational vision of equity, prosperity and creativity in a world of greater inclusiveness, security and humanity. (Sahlberg, 2011, blog)

America should thoughtfully consider some of these alternative approaches, especially when they are making policies that are contrary to them.

Some of these uniquely American solutions -- charter schools, private school vouchers, entrepreneurial innovations, grade-by-grade testing, diminished teachers' unions, and basing teachers' pay on how their students do on standardized tests -- may be appealing on their surface. To many in the financial community, these market-inspired reform ideas are very appealing.

Yet, these proposed solutions are nowhere to be found in the arsenal of strategies used by the top-performing nations. And almost everything these countries are doing to redesign their education systems, we're not doing. (Tucker, 2011)

Let us take a closer look at what we are doing and what they are doing that is different. These are broad generalizations and need to be explored more closely. The first relates to accountability and respect. It seems the more autonomy, professional responsibility and respect teachers are given, the better the results. The trend in the U.S. is in the opposite direction. As trust breaks down the push for external controls, incentives and accountability increases. High stakes testing, standardization and market management becomes more important. We are de-professionalizing education and turning schools into market-driven enterprises. The U.S. does not fund its schools equitably, like other nations do, nor does it provide the same access to child care and education inside and outside of schools.

Linda Darling-Hammond has an excellent chapter on what Finland, Korea and Singapore have done to improve their education. She identifies the following: 1) schools are funded adequately and equitably; 2) no examination systems; 3) national standards that focus on higher-order thinking, inquiry and innovation; 4) strong teachers; 5) ongoing teacher support; and 6) consistent ongoing reforms (2010, pp. 192-193).

The inequities between the wealthy and the poor are not as extreme in other nations and the availability of health care and other human services are more equitably distributed. Finally, education is more prized and teachers more respected in many other nations that are progressing. We seem to be moving away from what works in other countries. The one exception seems to be class size. Many of the high performing nations

have larger classes, but the strong cultures of learning and respect for teachers make this feasible.

Another way we could look at international comparisons is by seeing how different U.S. schools populations compare. What if we compare American students according to rates of poverty, which has been shown to be highly related to differences in student achievement? Using the 2009 Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) tests in reading, U.S. schools with fewer than 10 percent of students in poverty ranked first among all nations, while those serving more than 75 percent of students in poverty ranked about fiftieth (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

If we break out the U.S. scores by percentage of the schools' students in poverty, how would they be ranked in international comparisons using the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMMS)?

In the PIRLS, U.S. students in schools with less than 10% poverty rate, which constituted 13% of all U.S. students scored the highest, those in the 10%-25% range were ranked second and those with 25%-50% poverty ranked only behind Sweden, Netherlands and England. In the TIMMS fourth-grade science rankings these same groups were ranked first, second and fourth respectively. (Bracey, 2007, p. 133)

Breaking the data down by poverty rate results in wealthier students in the United States outperforming all other nations. The strong relationship between poverty and test scores seen in the PIRLS data are replicated in the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT), in the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) and in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Bracey, 2009, p. 4). So maybe we should be looking to our own high scoring schools in the U.S. to see what we can learn from them.

It is the high poverty schools in the U.S. that need to improve, not the wealthy ones, but the reforms being put upon these poor schools are the opposite of what is working in the high scoring nations and what is used in the most elite and high-scoring schools in the United States (Evans, 2000). No respectable independent or private school in the United States, which charges tens of thousands of dollars in tuition, uses the U.S. reform policies being legislated on the schools serving low-income families. If they did, they would go out of business. What might we learn from them?

Though U.S. average scores are middling internationally, the rankings of many of our schools are the best in the world. How do we explain that? Another way of looking at the international assessment data is the real numbers of students who score well.

A publication from OECD itself observes that if one examines the number of highest-scoring students in science, the United States has 25% of all high-scoring students in the world (at least in “the world” as defined by the 58 nations taking part in the assessment—the 30 OECD nations and 28 “partner” countries). Among nations with high average scores, Japan accounted for 13% of the highest scorers, Korea 5%, Taipei 3%, Finland 1%, and Hong Kong 1%. (Bracey, 2009, pp. 2-3)

With a larger population, the United States would be expected to have a larger percentage, but looking at the highest scorers gives a different impression than looking at the national average scores, which include all students. What we have not discussed, but is an important question, is who and what are being assessed. How should we interpret the results of these assessments? Many questions and concerns can be raised. One final question—though the United States had consistently scored low to middling since 1964, why is it that these scores only become a concern in times of economic turmoil and how do we account for the times of prosperity with the same scores?

### [Alternative Routes to Teacher and Administrator Certification](#)

Paradoxically, the political leaders and reformers continue to proclaim that we need better prepared teachers, while they take away some of the most proven and established methods of professional development by not requiring that teachers complete a planned program of teacher education through university programs. Interestingly, not only do our leaders call for more education for teachers, many institutions and states actually require a master’s degree to be eligible to teach. In Finland, which is regarded as one of the best education program in the world, all teachers must have a master’s degree to be eligible to teach. Why would we go backwards in our expectation of teachers by lowering both the requirements to become a teacher and to obtain a continuing professional certificate? Based on the lesson from countries like Finland, instead of reducing the number of credits and expectations required for entry into teaching, continuing service and professional development, we should be requiring more.

One of the attacks on teaching and teacher education has come in the form of states approving alternative routes to teacher certification that neither require the completion of accredited teacher education programs nor meet the high standards and strong clinical experiences that accrediting bodies and state education departments

require from traditional university programs. As mentioned, these processes were greatly accelerated and strengthened in the Race to the Top (RTTT) competition, which gave points to states with alternate routes to teacher and school administrator certification, along with a host of other destructive policies.

Kate Walsh, the president of the National Council of Teacher Quality (NCTQ), praised the U.S. Secretary of Education's inclusion of alternative certification plans in RTTT, but felt that it should not explicitly require a clinical or student teaching experience. Interestingly, one year later, her organization launched a review of student teaching programs across the United States. This NCTQ's study, like all of its others, was flawed on several fronts, one being it used "self-derived standards and methodologies to make simplistic assumptions about a complex, dynamic and evolving component of education preparation" (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 2011, July 21, p. 1).

Its conclusions are also suspect. The NCTQ report on student teaching listed Vanderbilt University's student teaching program as "weak," whereas *U.S. News and World Report*, its partner in a current study to rank all teacher education programs in the nation, ranks it as its number one "Best Education School." Among the only 10 programs identified by NCTQ as models, one of them is identified as "at-risk" by its state department of education.

The National Center for Alternative Certification (Feistritzer, 2010) reports that the number of new alternative-route-prepared public school teachers hired has risen to about one out of three nationally. In 1997-1998, 6,028 teachers were certified through alternative routes. By 2007-2008, that number had increased tenfold to 62,000. All but two of the states have some type of alternative route to become a certified teacher (Feistritzer, 2010).

Alternative routes to teacher certification vary in quality. Many are offered through universities and some have higher standards and expectations than traditional programs. I became a teacher through an alternative non-traditional route—the Wisconsin Indian Teacher Corps, an intensive two-year program that included university coursework in summers and during two full school years of internship in schools serving Indian children. I felt it was excellent preparation to be a teacher and exceeded expectations and requirements of most traditional education programs. However, most alternative routes to certification require less of and give less to their teacher candidates.

For example, Michigan Governor Snyder urged "the State Superintendent and Department of Education to quickly allow teachers to enter the profession through

alternative certification. They then would be held to the same rigorous performance standards and student proficiency requirements as any other teacher” (2011, p. 11). In other words, as the subsequent proposed changes in the state’s certification codes suggest, those who become teachers through alternative certification will not be held to the same rigorous performance standards of teacher candidates before they enter the classroom or school administrator’s office, but will be expected to meet them when placed there. How do states expect these candidates will do that without prior preparation? Who will be responsible to monitor and determine that? What makes these government officials think that if these candidates are not held to the same rigorous standards before being allowed to be a teacher or administrator, that they will do so when given those responsibilities?

Alternative/Experimental teacher preparation approaches already exist in many places, whereby approved teacher preparation institutions may request waivers of some requirements for trying out research-based new approaches to prepare teachers. Several teacher preparation institutions have state-approved alternative approaches for candidates seeking teacher certification. These programs, along with the other routes to teacher certification, supply the needed quality and quantity of teachers in most states.

In fact, in Michigan these routes combined provide for more than twice the number of teachers than can be employed. As a result, these well-prepared and respected new teachers from Michigan colleges and universities are heavily recruited by other states. Why would Michigan or out-of-state schools hire teachers from alternative programs that are not required to meet the same standards other programs are held to by the state when a surplus of those well-prepared teachers exist? Some schools and officials want a large pool of teachers so they can hire at lower salaries and benefits.

Alternate routes to certification that do not meet the high standards traditional university programs are held to allow a double standard in who is certified. These alternative programs are not held to the same requirements as teacher preparation institutions. Though Michigan Governor Snyder called for “more in-classroom clinical experience for all teacher candidates” (p. 10) in his April 27, 2011 reform message, the rules for alternative routes to certification he endorses greatly reduces this training. He says we need “rigorous performance-centered assessment of teaching” (p. 10), though the proposed code his administration is pushing does not include such standards for alternative routes to teaching. He also says that no one should be allowed “to practice on our young people without demonstrating sufficient proficiency with the highly skilled work needed for teaching,” (p. 10) while the proposed change allows just that deficiency.

Michigan is also changing the rules on who can be a school administrator, requiring only three years of leadership experience in a setting other than a school without any formal training in education. This does not provide the knowledge or background needed to be a successful school administrator. These administrators might have managed a fast food restaurant or a construction site, but it is not the same as leading a school. The outcome of successful school leadership is an effective learning environment that results in “effective people,” not hot, timely burgers, or success in the business world. Why have such low standards and regulations for alternative routes while we are striving for higher standards in education? We are preparing the future of Michigan. There is too much at stake to lower the educational requirements of school leaders.

I appreciate that some politicians want to allow quick entry into teaching and administration for those who do not want to or necessarily need to go through standard programs. However, most alternative routes allowed do not provide for the same rigorous standards that other candidates who wish to become teachers or administrators must meet. Alternatives should exist and do exist. If more needs to be done, we can work within the established working standards and structures to do it.

This raises several questions. Do we need more teachers for our local schools? Should we open the doors so that anyone can be eligible to be a teacher? How do we then decide who can best educate and serve the needs of our children? Do we need alternate routes to allow more candidates to become teachers when we are already producing more than enough? What qualities will the reforms bring that will improve our schools and students? How do we know that? What is broken in our current system that requires the reforms suggested? In short, is it true, is it loving and is it just?

## Conclusion

*Human history is a race between education and catastrophe.*

H.G. Wells

## Reform Agendas

In closing, I believe education is a tremendous force and has the potential of enabling individuals and societies to flourish. However, formal education and those that work in the field of education can only do so much. Other environmental factors also greatly affect the educational process. For instance, schools and teachers cannot reform the political, cultural and economic institutions and structures in the society that control and criticize them and their students. As we are experiencing, those very institutions are in positions of power to pressure reform in education. In addition, education does not happen just in the schools and at the hands of schoolteachers. It happens primarily in the home at the hands of parents and the influences of their environment, with economics, politics, media and culture playing a large role.

Then to demonize the schools and teachers when they are set up to fail is wrong. Schools reflect the values of the society of which they are a part, and they deal with the students and problems of that society. We live in a society that is doing little to encourage the proper physical, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual development of its young. If we really wish to turn things around, that is where we need to focus our attention. We also live in a society that fails to engender or encourage many of its individual citizens to aspire to wholesome and healthy lives. Teachers are very limited in being able to turn these things around on their own.

We want and need teachers that are more effective; however, if we are serious about solving society's problems, we will need parents, families, communities and governments that are more effective as well. Teachers alone cannot solve the neglect, abuse, poverty, deprivation, hunger, inequities, injustices and sickness from which their students suffer. Our current understanding of human needs suggests that until these more basic needs are met to an adequate degree, learning will be hampered.

Many of the troubling reform proposals are influenced by politicians and critics, most who pose as champions of high quality education. Educators have been disenfranchised from these discussions concerning the very things in which they have invested their hearts, minds and souls. These committed experts in education are painted as the problem, and their contributions framed as self-serving and biased. They are not included in policy discussions or allowed to present their views.

Instead of using everyone's energy to investigate the truth constructively without bias, many critics use their power to destroy ideas they do not like while clinging ever more tenaciously to their own faulty thinking. They reject other points of view and refuse to discuss dispassionately their reform proposals with scholars and educators. The antidote to this age of self-serving is truth, love and justice. Whereas ideology seeks influence to dominate and control others, truth, love and justice are themselves powers that lead to greater understanding, unity and prosperity.

We are in the midst of some of the most dramatic and damaging changes in educational policy that has occurred in memory in what seems to be a growing trend. This recent policy reform process is a continuation of a conservative attack on education that started gaining prominence in the 1970's, partly as a backlash to liberal changes introduced into schools in the 1960's (Evans, 2011). I do not feel the many of the proposed reform efforts met the three-way test of truth, love and justice.

More recently, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has been promoting this agenda. The most recent and dramatic example was the DOE Race to the Top fund of 4.35 billion dollars in competitive grants to states that best meet their reform agenda and requirements. Many states passed laws and changed their policies in attempts to be more competitive to receive funding, and most of these laws remain on the books, even in states that did not receive any of this money.

The DOE moved ahead their education reform agenda aggressively and effectively by giving points to obtain millions of federal dollars to states that had their prescribed laws and policies. I do not think these laws and the suggested changes serve the best interests of the people or the stated intentions of our leaders. These reforms are being implemented with little or no input or discussion from educators or research.

### Education Reform Perspective

Education has, can and will continue to reform. Educational institutions and culture have to adapt to changing conditions. However, these reforms should be systematic and based on sound facts and principles. Assertions that something is broken and must be fixed should be supported by sound evidence and reasoned arguments. We need to have extensive investigation and consultation on these matters. We need to employ the best our science and society has to offer to identify and solve these problems. We must continually strive for excellence in all we do, seeking to advance the best interests of all humankind.

Demagogic pronouncements that appeal to our lower natures and prejudices are harmful to the public welfare. Manipulating people for political, ideological or selfish interests is destructive. In the past, hucksters were allowed to sell various “remedies” that not only did not help, but also were actually harmful. As a result, we created systems to protect the public from unscrupulous practices and to assure that the products we use are safe and do what they are supposed to do.

We need similar protection from the modern “snake oil” that is being sold to fix what ails schools. These new and innovative ideas should be successfully field and pilot tested to see if they work before we force them into policy and practice. The initial findings related to many of the reform proposals do not suggest they are working. We currently have any number of people parading as educational experts, promising quick, easy and inexpensive solutions, but they have not diagnosed the problems accurately, nor have their prescriptions worked. In fact, they are making the patient sicker and with each new injection of yet another “cure” the health of education worsens. In the end, the ailing patient is blamed for not getting better.

Education and teachers matter, especially with high needs students. The future well-being of the individual, community and state depend on the quality of education. They each deserve our best efforts and intentions. Given proper support, they can make a big difference. Each teacher is different and may be successful in one setting but not another. Some are more effective with younger children, in rural settings or with challenging students. They are not interchangeable. Each community and school will create a different context that may facilitate or hinder a teacher’s success.

Schools with capable, committed and caring students and communities are more likely to be successful. They will also attract good teachers and help them become better. Good teachers can help transform students and communities, but, depending on the circumstances, this can be a very daunting task, especially when teachers are expected to do it on their own. Yet this seems to be what many proponents of educational reform are expecting of teachers and schools. To help students achieve their potential is an enormous challenge, especially when they have not been

given a foundation upon which to learn effectively and live in communities that do not support the mission of the school. Policy makers are holding teachers and schools accountable for something they did not create and have little ability to change. Further, to create this expectation and withdraw both moral and financial support to the schools and teachers to achieve this goal is irresponsible.

If we are to create thoughtful, caring and just schools and classrooms and help develop the full range of our students' capacities, we ourselves must possess the knowledge, desire, skills, fortitude and moral competence to do so. Education should foster love, nobility, high ideals, morality, service, responsibility, kindness and respect for others. Teachers are to be models of education, exemplifying the virtues they seek to inspire in their students. These include the cognitive skills related to honesty, open mindedness, understanding and truth; the affective dispositions of love, caring, humility and kindness; and the inner capacities for tolerance, justice, courage and trustworthiness. This education will contribute to the transformation of our quickly shrinking and flattening world to one where peace, happiness and prosperity are available to the generality of humankind.

Such a holistic framework is an antidote to the narrow materialistic worldview that is in ascendancy today. If educational systems are to contribute to the solutions, rather than contribute to the problems our society faces, then curricula of truth, love and justice should constitute the foundation and framework. The materialistic frameworks have failed to counter the growth of hatred, prejudice, greed and oppression that lead to a breakdown of institutions and social systems. A more holistic paradigm and framework will help shape the culture and beliefs of people so they can develop their potentialities to contribute to the well-being of society. It can create and nurture learning, as well as just and harmonious communities within its institutions. It is my hope that this book can contribute in some measure to that noble and needed goal.

## **Appendix A: Letter to the Governor and Legislators of Michigan**

November 2011

Letter to the Governor and Legislators of Michigan

I am writing this letter as a representative of the Michigan Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (MACTE) board of trustees. MACTE represents almost all of the 34 teacher education programs in Michigan. I wish to offer my services, and the services of other educators in Michigan, to assist you in solving the problems facing education in Michigan. Among our ranks are some of the most experienced and respected scholars in education and the most highly regarded teacher education programs in the country. Although my colleagues and I represent different institutions and diverse perspectives, we believe that many of the current educational reform proposals will harm education in this state. We would like the opportunity to share our understandings, concerns and research with you.

Michigan has a rich history in education of which it can be proud. It can be better, and together we can make reforms that will help us realize a brighter future for our citizens, schools and state. However, if we do not work together upholding the standards of truth, care and justice, we will see a continued erosion of our state's well-being. No individual, community or institution on its own can bring about the change needed. It is only as we work together for the welfare of all that we will see the positive growth for which we all long.

I am speaking on behalf of Michigan's teacher educators who believe teaching is a noble profession and have dedicated their lives to this high calling. Like most other teachers I know, I chose to become a teacher because I wanted to give back to my community and to help young people become the best they could. I was motivated by a love of learning and a desire to serve humanity to the best of my ability. I have been privileged to teach at almost every level in several settings around the world and the United States over the last 40 years. In Michigan, I have held leadership positions in teacher education at public and private universities in urban and rural settings over 27 years.

As teacher educators, my colleagues and I have hundreds of years of teaching and teacher education experience. We are proud of our graduates and believe they are among the best prepared in the world. We are troubled that many of the reform policies for education and teacher education undermine the excellence and standards we have achieved.

We believe many of the perceptions and assumptions upon which these educational reform policies are made are faulty. We believe these reform proposals work against what their proponents claim to be supporting and that they subvert the best interests of our children. For instance, you call for increased knowledge, professional development, technology and clinical experiences for teachers while approving alternative certification routes and eliminating continuing education requirements for teachers, which work against these purposes.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. We look forward to collaborating with you in our combined efforts to serve the best interests of the children of Michigan. We helped build a world-class education system in Michigan. Let us work together in solving these problems.

Sincerely,

Rodney H Clarcken

### **Appendix B. Resolution on High-Stakes Testing**

This resolution is modeled on the resolution passed by more than 360 Texas school boards as of April 23, 2012. It was written by Advancement Project; Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund; FairTest; Forum for Education and Democracy; MecklenburgACTS; Deborah Meier; NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.; National Education Association; New York Performance Standards Consortium; Tracy Novick; Parents Across America; Parents United for Responsible Education-Chicago; Diane Ravitch; Race to Nowhere; Time Out From Testing; and United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries. We encourage organizations and individuals to publicly endorse it (see below). Organizations should modify it as needed for their local circumstances while also endorsing this national version.

WHEREAS, our nation's future well-being relies on a high-quality public education system that prepares all students for college, careers, citizenship and lifelong learning, and strengthens the nation's social and economic well-being (1); and

WHEREAS, our nation's school systems have been spending growing amounts of time, money and energy on high-stakes standardized testing, in which student performance on standardized tests is used to make major decisions affecting individual students, educators and schools (2); and

WHEREAS, the overreliance on high-stakes standardized testing in state and federal accountability systems is undermining educational quality and equity in U.S. public schools by hampering educators' efforts to focus on the broad range of learning experiences that promote the innovation, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, communication, critical thinking and deep subject-matter knowledge that will allow students to thrive in a democracy and an increasingly global society and economy (3); and

WHEREAS, it is widely recognized that standardized testing is an inadequate and often unreliable measure of both student learning and educator effectiveness (4); and

WHEREAS, the over-emphasis on standardized testing has caused considerable collateral damage in too many schools, including narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test, reducing love of learning, pushing students out of school, driving excellent teachers out of the profession, and undermining school climate (5); and

WHEREAS, high-stakes standardized testing has negative effects for students from all backgrounds, and especially for low-income students, English language learners, children of color, and those with disabilities (6); and

WHEREAS, the culture and structure of the systems in which students learn must change in order to foster engaging school experiences that promote joy in learning, depth of thought and breadth of knowledge for students (7); therefore be it

RESOLVED that [your organization name] calls on the governor, state legislature and state education boards and administrators to reexamine public school accountability systems in this state, and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which does not require extensive standardized testing, more accurately reflects the broad range of student learning, and is used to support students and improve schools; and

RESOLVED, that [your organization name] calls on the U.S. Congress and Administration to overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently known as the "No Child Left Behind Act"), reduce the testing mandates, promote multiple forms of evidence of student learning and school quality in accountability, and not mandate any fixed role for the use of student test scores in evaluating educators.

(To endorse this resolution, go to <http://timeoutfromtesting.org/nationalresolution.>)

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*I have been hoping that professors would step up and join the struggle to save our nation's public schools from the stealth attacks on them. I don't know if I can use the word stealth any more. It's out in the open, as the privatizers grow bolder and more confident. What other political movement can claim bipartisan support, even as it seeks to destroy a basic public institution?*

*Rodney Clarcken, a teacher educator in Michigan, stepped up to the plate. He was outraged by the constant attacks on his students, his graduates, and the schools they work in. He wrote the following comment, which includes a link to his book refuting the attacks. I urge you to read it.*

### *Diane Ravitch*

I began sharing some reactions to Michigan governor's special message on education reform with the teacher education faculty at my university. Since then it has morphed into a book that I have published online called *Education Under Attack-What Schools Can and Cannot Do and How Popular Reforms Hurt Them* (<http://rodclarcken.wordpress.com/published-works/>). Though his message was just another in a series of attacks on education by politicians from around the country, this one was from my governor and these policies would hurt my students and the teachers and schools with whom I worked. I had felt for some time that what was being said about education was untrue, unfair and showed a lack of respect and disregard for educators. The political and paternalistic rhetoric assumed educators were not doing their jobs, the education system was "broken" and that certain reforms were going to "fix" it.

I did not feel the evidence to support the critics claims that education was broken and that their policies would fix it existed; therefore, these reforms did not meet the standard of truth. I did not feel their efforts were motivated by compassion and a sincere concern for our children and their proper education; therefore, they did not pass the test of love. Moreover, I did not feel their policies increased the likelihood of fairness for all people in our society; therefore, failing the criterion of justice.

One problem was that many of these reform proposals work against what their proponents claim to be supporting and that they subvert the best interests of education and society. It was my hope that educators—given their experience, expertise, dedication, loyalty, wisdom and commitment to excellence in education—would be provided with a greater voice on these matters of vital concern to the welfare of our nation and world. As an educator, I felt a moral obligation to do what I could to contribute to raising that conversation to a more reasoned, civil and balanced discourse.

Many critics of education stated purpose has been to create the best schools, teaching, teachers and teacher education, but I do not believe many of these policies are best for education or our society, and I question the motivations behind them.

Rodney H Clarcken is a professor at Northern Michigan University. You may learn more about him and read his other works at [rodclarcken.wordpress.com](http://rodclarcken.wordpress.com).