Taking Action to Improve Teaching Quality:
Addressing Shortcomings in The Teaching Commission Report

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A new report from The Teaching Commission, *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action,* reminds the American people of how much more needs to be done to improve teacher quality in our public schools. In its urgent call for more comprehensive reforms, The Teaching Commission puts forth a number of important ideas that could help make teaching a "true profession" — a goal that must be reached if we expect all students to have the educational opportunities they deserve and our democratic society requires.

The report raises a familiar spectre, one that haunts reformers who are committed to closing the achievement gap in America. Poor children and those of color are far more likely not to have a qualified and effective teacher. Yet growing research evidence shows that a teacher's knowledge, skills, and experience are the best predictors of whether a child will learn in school. The Commission, led by former IBM chairman Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., notes that:

> [The nation] will not continue to lead if we persist in viewing teaching – the profession that makes all other professions possible – as a second-rate occupation.[1]

The report makes clear the importance of quality teachers and teaching in ensuring that schools can meet the higher academic and testing standards of No Child Left Behind. The Commission makes the accurate claim (one borne out by our Center's NCLB "highly qualified" teacher research) that many states are sidestepping NCLB's teacher quality objectives.[2] Instead of revamping their teacher standards to assure the development of a high quality teacher workforce, states are actually lowering the teacher-

quality bar, meeting the letter of the federal regulations but ignoring the spirit of the law itself – which is to establish conditions that will increase the achievement of all students.

The Teaching Commission report, in some respects, harkens back to just eight years ago when the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NCTAF) released its path-breaking report that laid out how to create a comprehensive teacher development agenda at the federal, state, and local levels that would ensure a caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child. The NCTAF report of 1996, entitled *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, created quite a stir, and began to galvanize a great deal of policy action that recognized in a highly visible way the importance of teachers in closing the achievement gap.[3] *What Matters Most* was based on the assumption that in order to close the student achievement gap, teaching needed to be professionalized; in order to accomplish that lofty goal, there needed to be a "common national system of teacher preparation and development based on professional consensus and high standards for teacher preparation, initial teacher licensing, and board certification of experienced teachers."[4]

However, while there is considerable consensus among policy makers, researchers, and practitioners over the fact that teachers matter for student achievement, there is little consensus as how to ensure that every child has a "highly qualified" teacher. Indeed, since the release of the 1996 NCTAF report, there has been a growing backlash toward the movement to professionalize teaching, most notably by the Fordham Foundation an organization well known for its vociferous stances on market-based educational reform, and one that argues that the teaching quality problems can best be

served by deregulating teaching and posing policies designed to loosen, if not eliminate, extant requirements for those entering the field of education.[5]

Much has been written of late of the ideological divide between those who view teaching and teachers in different ways. On the one hand, NCTAF views teaching as knowledge, highly complex work and teachers as professionals who require formal, specialized preparation and considerable autonomy. On the other hand, the Fordham Foundation views teaching as more routine work that reasonably smart people can perform and would do so more readily if misguided government or professional regulation would not limit entry into the field.[6] To be sure, the competing definitions over teacher and teaching quality as an ideological issue cannot be easily resolved. And, unfortunately, the NCLB teacher quality mandates devised by the United States Department of Education are built upon a simplistic and empirically ungrounded view that "highly qualified" teachers only need verbal ability and subject matter knowledge. The misguided mandates only widen the divide and take our nation's policy makers and practitioners further away from what matters most in closing the teaching quality gap.[7]

Consequently, Gerstner's bi-partisan panel — which included a wide range of business leaders, politicians from both sides of the aisle, a foundation president well known for supporting teacher education reform, representatives from both conservative and progressive think tanks, and the president of a teacher union (the American Federation of Teachers) — could play a major role in breaking some of the gridlock associated with closing the teaching quality gap in the United States. At first blush, one would think that The Teaching Commission would do just that.

The *Teaching at Risk* report offers four closely linked strategies to recruit and retain more qualified teachers: (1) compensating teachers more effectively; (2) bolstering accountability in teacher education; (3) strengthening state teacher licensing and certification requirements; and (4) empowering school leaders as CEOs. Gerstner's advisory panel also proposed a number of specific recommendations — including higher pay for teachers who work in hard-to-staff schools or in shortage areas, greater investments in supporting new teachers, and more effective professional development. Granted, all of these steps have been called for time and time again in a variety of research studies and reports from other distinguished commissions (including NCTAF's).

However, while The Teaching Commission acknowledges a need for change in all of these areas, I believe that some solutions proposed in the report do not adequately address the problems at hand, or they ignore critical facts that may undermine the Commission's laudable goals. I welcome the Commission's call for America to take much more seriously the need to invest in teachers and teaching. At the same time, I am convinced that many of the issues raised in *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action* deserve a much more honest appraisal, and all issues should be framed with a more forthright discussion concerning the struggle over professionalizing or deregulating teaching.

Rewarding teachers for student achievement gains is not so simple

The Teaching Commission calls for raising teacher salaries 10-30 percent at an estimated price tag of $30 billion. It's a place to start, given that the nation's average teacher salary today is $44,000, an inflation-adjusted increase of only $3,000 over what teachers earned in 1972.[8] The Commission did not speak to the stark reality that states are

buried under more than $60 billion in deficits, and are having enormous difficulties paying for the basics of their education program, not to mention the added costs of NCLB.[9]

The Teaching Commission also calls for teacher compensation to be linked to student achievement gains. They propose to rate teacher performance by using "value-added" methods that measure how individual teachers influence learning for each child. This may be a case where a bright idea has so dazzled its proponents that they have failed to ask themselves whether we really have the mechanisms to make it work. Although the value-added statistical process has many important applications, the models now in place can be fraught with technical problems.

First of all, standardized tests are not perfect measures of student achievement. Standardized tests can capture, although not with perfect precision, whether or not students have mastered the "basics," memorized facts, and applied formulas in routine ways. These tests do not do a good job of determining whether or not students are developing higher-order thinking skills, or advanced reasoning, and these tests all have what is called *random error*. Today's standardized tests, upon which The Teaching Commission proposes to judge the effectiveness of teachers, have huge statistical sampling problems — to the point that they should not be employed for many of the high stakes decisions for which they are now being used.[10] Dale Ballou, an economist noted for his support of market principles in improving teacher quality, has been critical of relying solely on even valued-added standardized achievement scores for teacher accountability purposes.[11] When Ballou examined the often-heralded system of value-added assessment in Tennessee, he found that student-gain scores in reading were far

more unreliable than those in math. He also noted that value-added assessments may not adequately control for factors like poverty and limited English proficiency which may affect a student's rate of progress, as well as his or her absolute performance. Another review found similar problems and also pointed to other factors beyond the control of a teacher (like student attendance and high student mobility) that can greatly affect whether a value-added accountability system will accurately gauge an individual teacher's direct impact on the learning gains of a large group of students. [12]

I believe these issues and other technical problems in calculating estimates of teacher effectiveness argue against a heavy dependence on value-added tools *in a high-stakes teacher accountability program*. Rewarding teachers solely on the basis of standardized test scores will be like rewarding doctors solely on the basis of their mortality rates, no matter whether they are a pediatrician or an oncologist. This does not mean that mortality rates should not be used in assessing doctors or test scores in assessing teachers; however, they cannot be the sole measures. Other measures, including a progression of student work samples and a teacher's demonstration of new knowledge and skills known to increase achievement, may not be as cheap and easy to implement. But these kinds of strategies, which can hone in on the individual conditions under which a teacher is asked to perform, are likely to be fairer and more legally and ethically justifiable. The Carnegie Corporation of New York is funding a number of studies that should yield sound insight into how value-added assessments can be validly used to measure teacher performance. The Commission did point to the ground-breaking work of Carnegie and its Teachers for a New Era initiative (TNE), which is promoting new and

innovative ways to prepare teachers and measure the effects of their preparation on later student achievement.[13]

The Commission also failed to acknowledge the hard fact that states need much more sophisticated teacher quality and student achievement "data infrastructure" systems to assemble and accurately report on the linkages between what teachers know and do, and what their students achieve. Our work at the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality has pointed to many specific improvements that must be made in these state data systems before we can make the linkages between teacher actions and student results. Many of these improvements are dependent upon state K-12 and higher education agencies, universities, and school districts overcoming bureaucratic turf battles around who owns the data, resolving "privacy" issues in order to establish a unique identifier for tracking individuals from the time they enter a preparation program and/or teaching, and building the collective "know-how" to link data bases in ways that the right teacher and student variables can be assembled.[14] Most thoughtful analysts know that the kind of teacher assessments called for by the Commission demand new funding for dramatically improved state and district data systems and new institutional partnerships that can overcome the existing bureaucracies' current resistance to change. The Teaching Commission just does not speak boldly enough to this important implementation issue.

Build more heavily on the teaching assessment efforts of the NBPTS and NCATE

In a much needed call for changing how teachers are assessed, the Commission recognizes the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) and its current efforts to create a more standard test to measure teacher knowledge. However, the

Commission fails to speak forcefully enough about the need to transform teacher assessment systems by building on the cutting edge work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

The National Board has developed a rigorous system for assessing accomplished teachers and has produced evidence that NBCTs significantly outperform their peers who are not Board Certified on 11 of 13 key dimensions of teaching expertise.[15] I would agree with the Commission that NBCTs are still relatively few in number (now 32,000 nationwide) and have not been utilized effectively. But the Commission is in the business of "visioning," and the potential of the National Board system to transform teaching quality over time deserves to be a part of that vision. To be sure, we need more research on the relationship between National Board certification and accomplished teaching (and several current studies are attempting to use value-added methodologies to measure NBCTs' effectiveness in comparison to teachers who have not earned certification).

What the Commission did not mention was that the technological advancements in teacher assessments made by the National Board over the last decade are available to help point the way to the development of credible, high-stakes teacher evaluation systems. One example is found in Connecticut – which has actually used the NBPTS's sophisticated teacher performance measures to create a compatible system (it measures the performance and skills of new teachers). Several states, like North Carolina, have made attempts to follow suit but have not mustered the technical know-how or the political will to complete the process. For example, inadequate funding, lackadaisical training of administrators, and little time to assess teachers all beset efforts to improve

teacher performance assessment measures.[16] The Commission report did not address these critical implementation issues of what states and districts must do to develop teacher assessment systems that can better gauge knowledge and performance.

Granted, the Commission recognized the ABCTE for its efforts in developing "high-quality teacher credentials that are portable and can be earned in a time-efficient, cost-effective manner."[17] ABCTE certification will be available for individuals first entering the teaching profession who can pass tests in both pedagogy and subject-area knowledge. ABCTE also expects to offer a "master teacher" level certificate to test-takers who earn a higher cut-score on the same tests.

The Commission is understandably attracted to an approach like ABCTE, which holds out the promise of creating a more unified approach to teacher testing across states. However, it is still unclear whether the ABCTE assessment will be valid or reliable for the purposes being ascribed to it. Will the test items assess the full range of content and teaching skills required to serve all children well? A review of the ABCTE website suggests that the assessments (which are still being developed by the Education Leaders Council) will focus primarily on a teacher's subject matter knowledge and that "pedagogical" items will require test-takers to demonstrate very little (if any) teaching knowledge. For example, sample ABCTE "professional knowledge" items posted on the site include the identification of the "median" for a group of seven two-digit numbers and the identification of the best definition of *cooperative learning*. [19] By contrast, the National Board's assessments not only measure teachers' content knowledge, but also stipulate that candidates compile several samples of student work from different points in the school year and then require them to explain how they assessed this work, how they

developed specific interventions, and how they documented student improvements in subsequent assignments.

At this time, there is no reason to consider ABCTE as an appropriate tool to assess whether or not a teacher candidate has the right kind of content and pedagogical knowledge necessary for successful teaching that leads to student learning. Although officials from ABCTE claim that veteran teachers who seek their certificate will have to prove their classroom effectiveness through student results on achievement tests, there is no word on how this value-added data will be collected, analyzed, and assessed — and there is no discussion of how the thorny issues I have previously raised will be addressed.

In addition, the Teaching Commission was virtually silent on the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and its expanding role in teacher accountability. While the previous NCATE system looked primarily at college curricula and other inputs, the new system requires that colleges and universities produce hard evidence that their prospective teachers meet professional, state, and institutional standards. To graduate from a NCATE-accredited institution, teacher candidates are expected to show mastery of content knowledge in their fields and demonstrate that they can teach it effectively. Nearly 700 of the 1200 universities now preparing teachers are approved by NCATE professional standards, and 47 states use the NCATE teacher education standards in their own program approval process. Clearly, NCATE is a major player in the teacher assessment arena and must be included in any realistic blueprint for reform.

Improving teacher preparation involves more than "putting the heat" on the education school

The Commission calls upon college and university presidents to revamp teacher education programs by raising entry standards, "beefing up" academic content, and ensuring that training programs have "a connection to real practice." The Commission recommended that the federal government "tie continued funding of teacher education programs to measures of success for graduates of these programs" and recommended that "institutions that do not meet acceptable standards of performance should no longer continue to receive federal funding."[20] These actions might finally convince higher education leaders to focus on their responsibilities to improve teacher and teaching quality.

However, while the Commission was quick to turn up the heat on colleges of education, its report fails to recognize that some of the problems in teacher preparation fall squarely on the shoulders of the arts and sciences faculty. There is a "disconnect" between the content taught by liberal arts professors, the content assessed on teacher content exams, and the content teachers are expected to teach in today's standards-based public school classrooms. Repairing these faulty connections will require new funding for the development of a university-wide curriculum that recognizes the needs of pre-service and public school teachers (who are major consumers of university education). It will also require a sea-change in the organizational culture of universities, which continues to place education schools at the bottom of the pecking order. The Commission was mum on the current work of the Council for Basic Education and the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education and its Standards-Based Teacher Education Project —

one of the nation's most promising efforts to connect the liberal arts to teacher preparation. The Commission also did not recognize the lessons learned from the considerable efforts and occasional difficulties encountered during recent (i.e., the past 20 years) efforts of the Goodlad's National Network for Educational Renewal, the Holmes Group, and the Renaissance Group. In defining what needs to be done tomorrow without regard for what was learned yesterday, The Teaching Commission seems to be suffering from some form of organizational amnesia. Drawing on lessons from each of these past efforts could have paved the way for more well-grounded recommendations.

One prominent problem not mentioned in the Commission report is the long-standing practice in many universities of treating teacher education as a "cash cow" whose programs are short-changed at the expense of other professional programs on campus. Research has clearly shown that education programs are funded well below the average, generally near the bottom ranks of departments and well below the level of most other professional preparation programs.[21] If teacher education is going to be the clinically-based training program called for by the promising Teachers for a New Era initiative (sponsored by Carnegie Corporation of New York and promoted by the Teaching Commission), then pressure needs to be put on universities and on federal and state governments to fund teacher education differently.

Not all alternative routes are of high quality

In a call to make teaching more enticing to a wide range of qualified candidates, the Commission recommends that states "ensure that the focus of teacher certification is on substance, not process" and that states streamline the cumbersome bureaucracy that surrounds teacher licensure.[22] The Commission pushes the idea that "high quality"

alternative certification programs can serve as a model for overhauling the Byzantine process of teacher certification that still exists in some states. I could not agree more.

However, the Commission report is silent on the specifics of a high quality alternative certification program. The report highlights several existing programs as examples but provides no explanation of the quality standards these programs meet. In fact, some of the programs mentioned by the Commission have limited or questionable evidence of their quality. For example, the Commission cites Teach for America as an exemplary alternative route program based on one research study suggesting that TFA recruits in Houston were about as effective as other inexperienced teachers in schools and classrooms serving high percentages of minority and low-income students.[23] However, in a careful critique of the TFA study (which the Commission relies on in formulating its recommendations), Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes pointed out significant flaws in the research:

> In 1999-2000, the last year covered by the study sample, about 50% of Houston's new teachers were uncertified, and the researchers reported that 35% of new hires lacked even a bachelor's degree, so TFA teachers were compared to an extraordinarily ill-prepared group. [The researchers] did ***not*** report how TFA teachers' outcomes compare to those of trained and certified teachers [in the district]….[24]

The Commission overlooked several other TFA studies, including one from Arizona that found students of TFA-produced teachers did significantly worse than the students of certified beginning teachers on math, reading and language arts tests.[25] The Commission report also failed to acknowledge or explore retention problems among alternatively certified teachers. A recent study in Texas revealed that alternatively

certified teachers were more likely to leave the profession than their certified counterparts.[26]

The fact is that TFA and most other alternative route strategies are like the "donut" spare tires in today's automobiles. They may get you off the side of the road, but they're not going to take you where you want to go. These four-to-eight week training programs send under-prepared "teachers" into the rough terrain of high-need schools, equipped with few teaching skills. They enter these schools with no sound assessment of their ability to work effectively with children. Their high dropout rate speaks volumes about the inadequacy of this solution to the teacher quality problem.

Many of the alternative certification programs do not stand up to even the most modest standards of new-teacher preparation and support. *Education Week* recently reviewed alternative certification programs and found that only 13 states required any classroom training for alternative candidates prior to service.[27] It is sometimes argued by proponents of rapid-entry certification programs that individuals with strong content backgrounds can learn all they need to know about teaching "on the job." Those who make this argument seem to assume that adequate systems are in place to guide and support these novices through their first years of teaching. Our own research suggests that such systems are the exception, not the rule.[28] The *Education Week* study revealed that only 19 states require a mentoring component of any kind. Among these 19 states, only nine required a match between the alternative recruit's teaching assignment and the mentor's teaching background – and only five provided release time for the mentors. The frequency of required mentoring sessions spanned from one meeting a month in New York to twenty-three meetings a year in Kentucky.[29] Few states establish quality

standards for these mentoring programs and fewer still have the manpower to enforce such standards.

Wilson and Floden's recent research review concluded that high quality alternative route programs are characterized by high standards for entry, substantial pedagogical training, high quality mentoring, and strong evaluation components.[30] High-quality alternate certification programs *are* beginning to emerge across the nation. Wilson and Floden conclude that these programs, which emphasize careful selection, focused preparation, and extensive mentoring and practice teaching, successfully prepare mid-career recruits from other fields. However, these high quality programs (like Project Promise in Colorado[31]) are not mentioned in the Commission report. Instead, in its discussion of teacher education and alternative certification, the Commission focuses almost solely on the content knowledge needs of teachers, leaving readers with the impression that learning *how to teach* is not that important.

Teachers need to be prepared before they start teaching

To be fair, many traditional teacher education programs also do not address the kinds of content knowledge and teaching skills demanded by teaching today. The Commission is understandably hard on these programs, asserting that in the preparation of future teachers there needs to be "clear connections between what future teachers are taught about pedagogy and what research shows to be effective."[32]

I agree. In fact, I would go even further. Too much of what passes for teacher education can be attributed to educational "faddism" or a refusal to abandon strategies that have consistently failed to produce results for today's students. A great deal of what is known about teaching reading, working effectively with second language learners, or

developing the "cultural competence" necessary to teach in diverse school communities has yet to find its way into the curricula of many of our teacher education programs. But the same can be said for the "quick-fix" alternative route programs that are being recommended as replacements for traditional teacher education.

The preponderance of evidence indicates that the more teachers are prepared, the less likely they are to leave.[33] We also know that lesser prepared teachers are more likely to work in schools serving some our most disadvantaged students. How will we ever close the achievement gap when these students are taught by a passing parade of novices who are inadequately prepared to move these students toward higher academic standards? Despite the chronic inadequacies of some teacher education programs, our public education system cannot afford to abandon the idea that teachers need to be thoroughly prepared before they "solo" in the classroom. Many of our nation's teacher education programs have made marked progress in improving how they prepare teachers, while others are still mired in the status quo. We cannot ignore or bypass these programs simply because they are difficult to change. They must change, and the Commission's influence is needed to accelerate the transition to a new brand of teacher education, and not just to call for short-cut alternative routes.

The demands of today's public schools clearly require all teachers to know a great deal about how humans learn and how to manage the complexity of the learning process.[34] Today's quality teacher understands the intricacies of teaching diverse students to read and comprehend text, the complexity of managing classrooms filled with students with varied learning needs, how to develop and teach standards-based lessons, how to assess student work (and grade papers and tests fairly and appropriately), how to use

technology to bring curriculum to life for the many under-motivated students they teach, and how to work with special needs and second-language learners.

With this in mind, the Commission could have identified effective teacher education programs like UCLA's Center X, which is designed to attract academically able students and deeply prepare them in a two-year program that readies them to radically improve urban schooling for California's racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse children. In this post-baccalaureate program, students with majors in their content area take a full load of courses and student teaching in the first year. The second year is the Residency, where each program participant is paid to work as a teaching assistant in a school while completing coursework and a teaching portfolio. An ongoing assessment of the program reveals that only 10 percent of graduates leave teaching after three years, compared to over 50 percent in most other urban schools.

Designing schools for teacher success requires a laser-like focus on working conditions

The Commission is on target with a number of its recommendations regarding the need to transform the way principals are prepared and the kinds of authority they must have to ensure that teachers are successful. The report is clear on the fact that "lack of professional support" is one of the primary reasons why teachers leave the profession. It acknowledges that better mentoring, and improved professional development, as well as more teacher involvement in important decisions, are all key to building a culture more conducive to teaching quality in our schools.

However, the Commission could have gone further in speaking to the dismal working conditions under which many teachers must teach — especially in our poor urban and rural areas. In many schools today, working conditions are as "bleak," "substandard", and "intolerable" as they have ever been.[35] Our own recent research found that the potential of new accountability and professional development reforms can be severely limited by poor teacher morale. Teachers who work in dilapidated buildings, have limited access to needed instructional materials, and suffer under the regime of authoritarian principals with a "pencil-whipping" management style are not likely to create vibrant professional learning communities.[36]

Principals, as the Commission rightfully notes, need to be recruited and prepared differently, but the report leans heavily on a strategy of seeking non-traditional (i.e., non-education) candidates. I would argue that more emphasis is needed on recruiting highly effective teachers, who know good instruction, as the next generation of school leaders and then giving them the tools to redesign schools for student and teacher success. Today effective principals must have a comprehensive understanding of school and classroom practices that contribute to student achievement. Such understanding takes years to develop. Tapping teachers for the principalship who are already exhibiting leadership as curriculum coaches, team leaders and department chairs should be a top priority.[37]

Also, the Commission report could have focused more on what I believe is an organizational imperative: *teacher time*. The report talks about this long-standing issue but proposes no concrete actions to address it. Teachers need a great deal more time to work with colleagues — time that many current school leaders do not know how to create, or that other "powers that be" lack the political will to guarantee.

Most U.S. elementary teachers have less than three hours per week to prepare for their classes, while secondary teachers typically have five weekly "prep" periods — or only 13 minutes per hour of classroom instruction.[38] Despite the growing movement to create small, redesigned schools (a trend fueled by the philanthropy of the Gates Foundation), most teachers in the U.S. still have very little time to meet "with other teachers, to develop curriculum or assessments, to observe or discuss each other's classes, or to meet with parents."[39] In other nations, teachers have 10-20 hours a week in non-classroom teaching responsibilities — time to work together on demonstration lessons, intensively analyze those lessons as they play out in real classroom situations, and hold school-based conferences to fine-tune curriculum and instruction.[40]

Weak leadership and the lack of *teacher time* form a double-walled, reform-resistant barrier that blocks efforts to create the right kind of new teacher support and high quality professional development the Commission envisions. Tearing down this barrier is no easy task. The truth is that many people want schools to be better and to have teachers who are more "highly qualified," but they do not want those schools to look much different, and they do not want teachers to have working conditions that might empower them to abandon their acquiescence and become real leaders of reform.

One encouraging action to breach the barrier of poor working conditions is taking place in North Carolina, under the leadership of Governor Mike Easley and the state's Professional Standards Commission. Efforts are underway to systematically document and assess teachers' working conditions and to make public the linkages between working conditions, teacher longevity, and student achievement. North Carolina's leaders

seem to understand that before we can solve the problems of our schools, we have to be honest about what the real problems are.

Conclusions

In closing, Louis Gerstner and The Teaching Commission deserve credit for once again raising important issues facing the teaching profession, and forcing the nation's policy leaders to recognize that it will require major new investments to recruit and retain truly "highly qualified" teachers. The Commission could mobilize both the political will and technical know-how needed to improve teacher and teaching quality in United States — especially in light of the current discord between those who seek to professionalize teaching and those who seek to deregulate it. Federal, state, and local teacher and teaching policies are constantly buffeted by ideological debates that rage among political leaders. Depending upon who holds the upper hand, policies vacillate between those built on teaching as a straightforward task most reasonably smart individuals can do, and policies that recognize teaching as a complex enterprise, requiring greater degrees of preparation, support, and professionalization.

The Teaching Commission is comprised of a reasonable mix of political, business, and education leaders who represent multiple perspectives on the future of teaching in America, and has the potential to untie the Gordian knot over the often bifurcated debate over which path to take to quality teaching. . But, instead, the report relied on some faulty data as well as ignored promising developments while overstating the claims of others. The report avoided the more forthright discussion of the struggle to professionalize teaching — and the need for teachers' compensation, preparation and licensing to reflect that

teaching is not simple work that almost any reasonable, smart person can do, and that is not okay to recruit a revolving supply of inexperienced and under-prepared teachers for our nation's hardest-to-staff-schools. The report could have made much clearer what it will take to overcome the political and technical roadblocks that are in the way of closing the teaching quality gap. Without a sharper diagnosis of the problem and more open skepticism about some of the proposed solutions, I doubt that the Commission's work will meet the goal we all share — ensuring a caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child, in every class, every day.

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