



Testimony of
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“Improving Teacher Quality”

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On behalf of The Teaching Commission, I want to thank Chairman Regula for inviting me here today. I am honored to have the opportunity to discuss *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action*, the report released by The Teaching Commission on January 14th 2004.

The Teaching Commission, established by Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., the retired Chairman of IBM, is a non-partisan group of business executives, former governors, a teachers-union president, and leaders in philanthropy and education. Our members include: Ken Chenault, Chairman and CEO of American Express; Sandra Feldman, President of the American Federation of Teachers; Former Governors Roy Barnes; James Hunt; Frank Keating and Richard Riley; Beverly Hall, Superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools; Scott Painter, High School Physics Teacher and Teacher of the Year in Atlanta; Barbara Bush and Vartan Gregorian, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The goal of The Commission is to fundamentally upgrade the quality of teaching in the United States by changing the way that teachers are trained, assessed, supported, and compensated.

Top-quality teaching fosters high student achievement—and high achievers can harness their talents and energies to become successful, contributing citizens. Nothing is more vital to our future than ensuring that we attract and retain the best teachers in our public schools.

The United States has entered the 21st century as an undisputed world leader.

That’s the good news.

The bad news is 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.

The Commission’s report, *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action*, holds that quality teachers are the critical factor in helping young people overcome the damaging effects of poverty, lack of parental guidance, and other challenges. The effectiveness of any broader education reform—including standards, smaller schools, and choice—is ultimately dependent on the quality of teachers in the classroom.

In a study led by Eric Hanushek of Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, the most effective teachers were found to boost their pupils’ learning by a full grade more than students taught by their least successful colleagues. Replacing an average teacher with a very good one, Hanushek and his coauthors concluded, nearly erased the gap in math performance between students from low-income and high-income households.

Similarly, a study of Tennessee students by William Sanders and June Rivers reveals that the chances for fourth-graders in the bottom quartile of performance to pass the state’s high-stakes exit exam in ninth grade were less than 15 percent if the students had a series of poor teachers. But the chances for students from the same background who had a series of good teachers were four times as great, or 60 percent.

The proven value of excellent teaching, in other words, all but demolishes the notion that socioeconomic status is the most important determinant of what kids can learn.

Many teachers are working incredibly hard to help children succeed. But their effectiveness is often undermined by inadequate, one-size-fits-all compensation, flawed teacher preparation, ineffective leadership, and poor working conditions.

These systemic problems prevent teachers from achieving their goals and mire educators and their students in the quicksand of the status quo.

Our methods of teacher preparation and licensure are often marked by low standards, while teacher induction is too haphazard to ensure that new teachers have the knowledge, skills, clinical experience, and support they need to succeed. Universities often derive considerable income from teacher preparation and professional development programs without providing the ongoing help that novice and experienced teachers need.

Meanwhile, low, lockstep pay undermines the prestige of the profession and the ability to renew and replenish the field. Cumbersome and constantly delayed school hiring practices in our largest cities scare off the best applicants. Equally significant, principals and teacher leaders rarely get a chance to work together to build the instructional teams that schools need to reach challenging academic goals.

The nation has moved forward to set higher standards for what students must know and to hold schools and young people accountable for performance. But how can we hold

students accountable for results unless they have the teachers they need in order to help them meet these standards?

Our current education system has few ways to build on teacher success or to use teacher evaluation and compensation in ways that will improve student performance.

Effective teachers who dramatically raise student achievement and who make other teachers better through their knowledge, leadership, and skills are treated exactly the same as those who make no positive difference in their classrooms.

We say quality teaching matters, but we treat quality teachers as if they don't.

In an attempt to remedy these problems, The Teaching Commission offers four closely linked recommendations that would help to ensure the resources, training, leadership and support that teachers need to be successful in helping students achieve.

Specifically, the plan included in The Teaching Commission report includes:

1. Compensating Teachers More Effectively. Money does matter! All we have to do is look at the countless teacher surveys and the large numbers of teachers who flock to affluent suburbs where pay is significantly better than in urban public schools. Simply put, broadening and strengthening the pool of people who are attracted to and remain in teaching will require paying salaries that come closer to what talented college graduates can earn in other professions.

The Teaching Commission also understands, however, that simply raising salaries for all teachers will not, by itself, raise student achievement. Therefore, while calling for an increase in base compensation, The Teaching Commission urges a far-reaching break with tradition: a salary scheme that is commensurate with excellence. That is, paying teachers more for high performance, as measured by fair evaluations and clear evidence of improved student learning.

While the specific details of any compensation system are best determined by individual states, districts, and schools, The Teaching Commission believes that all performance incentives should be large enough to influence behavior. The pay-for-performance system also must provide frequent and comprehensive individual teacher evaluations, including assessments of student achievement and other teacher skills, such as lesson planning and classroom instruction and management.

The Commission recommends that some version of the "value-added" method be used to measure gains in student performance and that additional compensation for individual teachers be ultimately based on performance, including student achievement. However, districts or states may want to use a team approach that rewards all teachers in a specific subject matter, grade, or school for overall gains in student achievement.

Further, districts, schools, and unions should agree to establish career-advancement paths that offer teachers increasing levels of responsibility and compensation as their skills and effectiveness grow. Teachers who serve as mentor or master teachers would be required to demonstrate highly accomplished teaching, including continued improvement in student performance, in order to maintain their positions.

2. Bolstering Accountability in Teacher Education. Colleges and university presidents must revamp their teacher education programs and make teacher quality a top priority. The Teaching Commission calls on the presidents of all American colleges and universities to make a personal and institutional commitment, including resources, to tackle the problem of unskilled teachers.

Ensuring that the best and brightest college graduates are encouraged to teach in public schools—and that they receive high-quality academic training—must be among the top priorities of college and university presidents. That means raising standards for entry into teacher preparation programs, beefing up the academic content of those programs while ensuring a connection to real practice, and promoting teaching as an exemplary career path for new graduates who wish to become engaged citizens. And it means measuring results in order to ensure that teacher education programs are doing their job.

The Commission also recommends that the federal government should be prepared to withhold funds from colleges and universities that fail to show the effectiveness of their teacher-recruitment and preparation programs.

3. Strengthening State Teacher Licensing and Certification Requirements. States must improve—or overhaul—their licensing and certification requirements. The Teaching Commission calls on governors and state education departments to ensure that every individual who wants to become a teacher passes a rigorous test for both content and essential skills. At a minimum, this will require raising the passing score on existing certification exams. It should also entail replacing low-level basic competency tests with challenging exams that measure verbal ability and content knowledge at an appropriately high level. In addition, states need to streamline the cumbersome bureaucracy that often surrounds teacher licensure in order to make the profession more attractive to a wide range of qualified candidates.

4. Empowering School Leaders as CEOs. School districts need to give principals ultimate say over personnel decisions, while principals must provide teachers with mentoring and ongoing professional development known to improve classroom instruction. We call on superintendents to ensure that school principals are given the authority they need to provide leadership through a coherent academic program and the fostering of teaching excellence. Using fair and agreed-upon measures of performance, every principal should be given the responsibility and authority to hire, fire, and promote teachers. Principals should also be held responsible for ensuring that new teachers receive structured mentoring, and that all teachers benefit from scientifically based professional development opportunities that focus squarely on assessing and improving instructional practices and thereby raising student achievement. To ensure the effectiveness of this

support, principals should create school environments that encourage teachers to get directly involved in decision making in these areas.

In a study conducted for The Teaching Commission, economist Eric Hanushek points out that investing in teaching to address student achievement problems will go a long way toward paying for itself. Hanushek estimates that significant improvements in education over a 20-year period could lead to as much as a 4 percent addition to the Gross Domestic Product. In today's terms, that would be over \$400 billion, an amount that rivals total current expenditure on K-12 public education.

In closing, The Teaching Commission will not measure its success by what it recommends. Its effectiveness will be determined by its ability to bring these ideas to life at the federal, state, and local levels.

The Commission is in the process of building partnerships with states, education organizations, policy groups, and college leaders to implement its agenda. The Commission is also working on a communications and outreach campaign at the national, state, and local levels to build political will and encourage support for our recommendations.

Finally, I'd like to leave you with a quote from Lou Gerstner, Chairman of The Teaching Commission: "If we don't step up to this challenge of finding and supporting the best teachers, we'll undermine everything else we're trying to do to improve our schools. That's a conscious decision that would threaten our economic strength, political fabric and stability as a nation. It's exactly that clear cut."

Thank you very much for taking the time to hear about the work of The Teaching Commission.