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## GOLSAN: Re-thinking Texas teaching, encouraging and rewarding excellence

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JAMES GOLSAN

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Posted: Thursday, July 11, 2013 2:30 pm

By James Golsan  
Texas Public Policy Foundation

Recently, the National Council on Teacher Quality released a troubling report on teacher preparatory programs. The conclusion of the study—that many programs are not adequately preparing new educators to teach effectively—begs the question of whether the lengthy process prospective teachers go through in these colleges is always the best means to ensure that a teacher will be effective in the classroom.

The raw numbers of the NCTQ study are alarming. Only 4 of the 1,200 elementary and secondary education prep programs surveyed were given four out of four stars. In contrast, 163 of the programs were given no stars and a warning label for candidates to those schools, saying they were unlikely to get much return on their investment.

There are two sets of victims here. The first are would be educators who are investing in these inadequate programs and coming out ill-prepared to teach. The second are students who are not receiving the level of quality instruction needed to prepare them for college or the workforce.

What, then, are the options? To a certain extent, this problem must be addressed at the higher education level. Reforming the education colleges, and holding them accountable based on their outcomes, will be a strong step toward ensuring more of our teachers are well prepared when they enter the classroom for the first time.

A second option would be to go around the education colleges altogether. Thomas Fordham, in a report entitled "The Teachers We Need and How to Get More

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of Them: A Manifesto," called for widening the entry paths into the teaching profession. He suggested that lengthy certification processes with an emphasis on pedagogy would only serve to block otherwise highly qualified individuals from getting in front of our classrooms.

According to Fordham, "[A] better solution to the teacher quality problem is to simplify the entry and hiring process. Get rid of most hoops and hurdles. Instead of requiring a long list of courses and degrees, test future teachers for their knowledge and skills. Allow principals to hire the teachers they need."

In Texas, that means streamlining the certification process as much as possible and shortening the time it would take a qualified professional, say a former engineer interested in teaching calculus, in front of the classroom.

That said, getting high quality talent in front of the classroom is only the first step Texas should take toward strengthening our teaching pool. Encouraging excellence in the classroom is also important, as is rewarding it. Unfortunately, the manner in which we currently compensate our teachers—through a state mandated minimum salary schedule that rewards experience over excellence on an incremental, yearly basis—does neither of those things.

How can we expect school districts to reward their best teachers—potentially at the six figure level—if the existing system constrains them into paying all their employees more or less the same wage? Furthermore, what incentive do educators who have not yet honed their craft have to improve? Whether they perform well or poorly, the salary schedule system grants them a raise the following year.

We have many excellent teachers in Texas' public schools. Unfortunately, the report by NCTQ highlights the fact that nationwide, not just in Texas, we have a serious problem with educator preparation.

Problems in educator preparation lead to problems in the classroom, which is unfair to both the teachers who were short-changed in their learning experience and, in turn, unfair to students who are being short-changed in the classroom. The education colleges need improving, there is no doubt. But there are ways Texas could improve entry paths into the teaching profession, as well as improve the incentives toward becoming a great teacher. There are a lot of great teachers in this state. There's no reason we can't have more.

James Golsan is policy analyst for the Center for Center for Education Policy with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a non-profit, free-market research institute based in Austin. He may be reached at [fgolsan@texaspolicy.com](mailto:fgolsan@texaspolicy.com).



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