

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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PROSPERITY AND GROWTH

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PORTION – ROBERT GORDON

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Peter.

The most important part of good schools is good teachers. Today, we do a lot of screening of teachers before we hire them, but after we hire them, we do very little screening at all. So, for example, we ask teachers to be fully certified, often to have education degrees before they go into the classroom, but once they are in the classroom, we grant tenure as a matter of course.

The basic idea behind this paper is pretty simple, that that system is backward. We should do less screening on the front end, and then once teachers are in the classroom, we should do more based on their performance on the job.

Why do we say that? Consider this research from Los Angeles where we looked at three grades of students over four years. We first asked whether those students' performance varied depending on whether their teachers were certified. What we found was that it didn't really; certification didn't matter much.

Then we asked: Could the students' performance be predicted based on the way their teachers have performed in the past? So we divided into quartiles, teachers, based on the achievement of their students in their first two years of teaching. We had a top quartile of teachers who had the students who achieved the most in those teachers' first two years down to a bottom quartile.

Then we asked: Well, how did those quartiles perform in their third year in the classroom? What we found was a huge gap. The top quartile of teachers' students actually went up by about five percentile points. The bottom quartile teachers' students went down by about five percentile points. That gap, those 10 points, that is a really big gap. It is about twice the gain that you would see from class size reduction. It is about a third of the current black/white test score gap.

This is consistent with research from other cities and states. It boils down to a pretty simple finding: It is very hard to predict which teachers will be good based on certification, but it is much easier to predict which teachers will be good once we have actually seen them work for a couple years. That simple idea is the basis for a very profound change in the way that we hire teachers, the way that we tenure them, and the way that we pay them.

Let me briefly go through those recommendations. First, about hiring, we suggest creating a path into teaching that is based on performance, not on certification. Certification requirements don't make sense, not just because of the research I have outlined but also because we face an enormous teacher shortage. The age of the median teacher has risen over the last quarter century by about 13 years. Over the next 20 years, we will need to see an increase in the rate of teacher hiring by about 35 percent just to

keep class size where it is today. So we need more teachers, and we think there are a lot of people out there who would teach if the barriers to teaching weren't so high.

We saw in the Los Angeles research that, when they had to triple their teacher hiring because they were cutting class size reduction, the quality of teacher achievement didn't decline. You see in programs like the Teaching Fellow Program in New York, Teach for America, six and seven applicants for every slot.

What we say is there should be a new route into teaching. Traditional certification is still fine, but you should also be allowed in without certification, provided that after two years, you demonstrate that you are an above average teacher in the results that you achieve for your kids. We say that, if you are a good teacher, you should stay in the classroom whether you are certified or not.

Second, we propose a change in our practices around tenure, not the laws but the practices. Right now, fewer than two percent of teachers report that they were laid off in their first three years of teaching. The reality is that the vast majority of teachers get tenure. It doesn't make sense to give teachers this kind of lifetime job protection before they have demonstrated much of anything about their ability to perform in the classroom. What we found is that if schools didn't tenure just the bottom quarter of teachers, tenured three quarters but not the bottom quarter, and hired novices instead, you would see a significant increase in student achievement, about 14 points over the life of a student.

So teachers absolutely should have notice of how they are doing in those first two years. They should be able to get help with their teaching if they need it and if they want it, additional professional development. But schools should have a rule that at the end of those two years, I should say a default, that you could have exceptions in some cases if

you needed them, but they should have a general rule that after two years, if you are in that bottom quartile, you shouldn't get tenure and you shouldn't continue to teach. That would help us to improve the achievement of our students a great deal.

Our last proposal is about pay. Right now, students in the poorest school districts, they are the ones who need good teachers the most. Well, they are least likely to get them. One of the things we could do to draw high quality teachers into those schools is to raise pay for those teachers. What we propose doing is saying that we will raise pay by \$15,000, a substantial amount because small amounts won't really make enough of a difference, for high quality teachers, teachers in that top quarter who are willing to teach in these poor schools.

We think that would do two things. One, it would change the distribution of teachers; and two, it would have the potential over time to draw more people into the profession if they saw that, if they were high quality teachers, they could get better pay and more responsibility.

Now, you may be thinking: How on earth is this going to work? It sounds good. What are you going to do about all these evaluations? There are a lot of different things in the country going on around this. We took a look at those and looked at the research.

Three principles for evaluation: The first is that test scores should count for a lot, but they should not count for everything. You don't want to be making evaluations based on only one measure. Second, there is lots of other stuff we could use. We could use principal evaluations, peer teacher evaluations, parent evaluations. There are good processes like the National Board that we could be using. And the third thing is that, as you are developing these systems, and we will need to develop these systems, teachers

are going to need to be involved in the whole process. The system is going to need to be transparent; it can't be a secret.

Right now, we are a long way from being able to implement these kinds of systems. We don't have a lot of the data we need, many states don't. So the first thing that we would do is to invest a good deal in putting into place the systems needed for these kinds of evaluations. These are big changes that we are talking about. They will be hard. They will take time. We recommend doing some national infrastructure building and at the same time piloting in 10 states over three years before taking it national.

We do think it is really important that these ideas be on the table now. No Child Left Behind reauthorization is approaching. This is a very different approach than we have taken in the past, and we think it is promising. We have tried many different strategies for education reform over the years. One of the things that we find is that you get to a point of diminishing returns. This is a new strategy that we are talking about here, the idea of using teacher performance in the classrooms to make judgments, and we think it could have a really big impact on the performance of children.

Thanks.

(Applause)