

THE HAMILTON PROJECT

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TO: Education Reporters
FROM: Katie Busch and Anjetta McQueen, Office of Communications
RE: **The Hamilton Project at Brookings: New Data Reveal That Teacher Credentials Are Not Effective Tools for Assessing Teacher Quality**

A newly released Hamilton Project paper finds that changing the criteria for teacher hiring and retention could have a significant effect on student performance and ameliorate a looming teacher shortage. In light of these findings, the authors propose a five-point plan that would increase the pool of potential teachers, make it tougher to retain those who perform least well, and reward effective teachers who are willing to work in schools serving large numbers of low income, disadvantaged children.

The paper, “*Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job*,” by Robert Gordon, of the Center for American Progress; Thomas J. Kane, of Harvard University, and Douglas O. Staiger, of Dartmouth University, makes three key findings:

- Some teachers are consistently more effective than others at helping their students learn.
- School districts can learn a lot about which teachers are likely to generate large student learning gains, and which are not, with data from only two years of job performance.
- Teacher effectiveness is largely unrelated to whether a teacher is certified.

The authors also note a looming teacher shortage: some 40 percent of public school teachers plan to leave the profession within five years, while the school-age population is projected to grow. In response to their new evidence, Gordon, Kane, and Staiger propose a five-point plan to improve teacher effectiveness and increase the supply of teachers:

- **Reduce Entry Barriers** – Novice teachers would have two routes into teaching: one would be open to those who have an undergraduate degree and subject knowledge; the other would follow the traditional path based on certification. School districts would remain free to screen for additional qualities they believe are most important in the classroom.
- **Make it Harder to Tenure the Least Effective Teachers** – Research shows that teachers’ performance in their first few years is a good predictor of future

effectiveness. This proposal recommends that states receiving Title II funding establish a presumption, although not a requirement, that teachers performing poorly after two years should not qualify for tenure and should not continue teaching. Making it harder to tenure the least effective teachers would produce significant gains in student achievement that translate into enormous economic benefits.

- **Give Bonuses to Highly Effective Teachers Willing to Teach in Disadvantaged Schools** - Current pay practices encourage too few of the strongest teachers to work in schools where they are needed the most. The proposal recommends bonus pay for teachers who rank in the top quarter of effectiveness and who work in schools where at least 75 percent of the students are from low-income families.
- **Evaluate Teachers' Job Performance** – States receiving federal Title II teacher quality funding would be required to measure teachers' effectiveness, and Title II funding would be expanded to fund development of systems that would enable them to do so. Assessment systems should place substantial weight on objective measures – especially teachers' impact on gains in student achievement.
- **Track Student Performance and Teacher Effectiveness Over Time** – The proposal recommends that the federal government provide sufficient funding for all states to develop and implement longitudinal data systems that would better measure the effect of specific teachers on student performance.

The authors recommend that their plan be piloted in ten states with the simultaneous development of a national data system at a cost of up to \$800 million per year for the first five years. Once the program is implemented nationally, the main components would cost the federal government slightly more than \$3 billion per year, mostly for teacher bonuses and operation of the data systems. The authors note that this cost would be relatively small compared with the nearly \$38 billion per year the federal government spends on K-12 education or with the large potential economic value of the resulting increases in student achievement.

The white paper and policy brief “*Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job*” are available at www.hamiltonproject.org

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