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## OPINION

### FORUM

# Better teaching best route to good education

**W**HILE the state sues over testing costs, the No Child Left Behind law requires that teachers of core subjects be highly qualified. One report gives Connecticut an A-minus for its efforts. Remaining hurdles concern achievement gaps, teacher retention and particular deficits in math and science. But another report, by the U.S. Department of Education, questions qualifications of some 13,000 Connecticut teachers.

Grades 3-8 recently completed the Connecticut Mastery Test, tenth graders the Connecticut Academic Performance Test. Standardized tests are one snapshot of student achievement. They are a very crude proxy for teacher quality. By examining individual students over time, researchers estimate teachers' contributions to learning.

Whatever tests reveal, teacher quality — which can vary more within schools than among them — affects student achievement.

From literacy to technology, there are frequent reminders of teachers' significance. President Bush seeks 70,000 Advanced Placement teachers of math and science. Denver voters approved a compensation system that establishes bonuses for teachers in difficult-to-staff assignments, who develop knowledge and skills, or whose students reach goals. The Connecticut Center for School Change is studying teacher morale and turnover, with the security of their pensions a current topic.

Standards, testing and demographic trends — not to mention student needs — exert pressure. Forty percent of teachers nationally plan to leave the classroom within five years. Forty-two percent, versus 24 percent in 1996, are age 50 or older.

The increasing retirements and requirements present challenges. Districts lose experienced educators. Openings bring opportunity. Who enters and stays in teaching will shape schooling for decades.

No formula for teacher quality captures what The Teaching Commission terms "passion and art along with academic prowess." A degree in the subject as well as certification is typically necessary, but insufficient.

Teacher education, selection, and retention are factors. For math and science instructors and those in high-need schools, extra cash and scholarships have been suggested. NCLB calls for "exemplary" mentor teachers; New York City is using such teachers in certain schools. Boston and Chicago have tried residencies resembling medical training. The "teachers for a new era" design integrates clinical practice with teacher preparation and the arts and sciences at universities including the University of Connecticut.



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Education Week describes the better programs as "a flexible but purposeful menu of teacher networks, study groups, partnerships with universities, peer reviews, online-learning activities and curriculum-development projects." One teacher aptly pursues "professional development that treats me like a professional, that gives me latitude in determining what my students need."

We should invest in endeavors involving teachers as leaders over a sustained period, fostering collaboration among school and university faculty and serious exploration of subject content as well as pedagogy. An effective approach promotes subject knowledge; skills in writing, math, and speaking; enthusiasm; high expectations for students; and the ability to motivate them.

Universities can be school districts' long-term partners, not only to prepare but continually to develop educators. Yale and Southern Connecticut State University are among those working with New Haven.

In teachers institutes, public school and university faculty members are colleagues. Seminars address the sciences and humanities. Each teacher fellow writes a curriculum unit for the K-12 classroom and publication online.

This year's local institute features six seminars Yale faculty members are leading in response to needs teachers identified. Teachers plan and coordinate the seminars. Sixty-five fellows from 23 city schools are participating. The district, Yale's partner in the program since 1978, helps fund fellows' stipends and recognizes their continuing education.

This approach supports efforts to attract and retain qualified teachers to do their demanding and critical job. The Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute is just one reason prospective educators might join this district, which has a visitation day April 27.

Connecticut's entire congressional delegation backs bipartisan legislation — introduced by U.S. Sens. Joseph I. Lieberman and Christopher J. Dodd and U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro — to establish teacher professional development institutes nationwide.

No single intervention can transform teaching. Revolutionizing students' academic engagement or environment, from school to family and peers, is even harder. Still, students with effective teachers surpass their counterparts in learning. Teacher-driven professional development is one tool in the quest for more qualified educators and higher-achieving students.

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