



VIEWPOINT

ON PUBLIC ISSUES

October 6, 2006 • No. 2006 - 46

Finding Good Teachers—Paying for Stubbornness

By: Matthew Carr

Summary

Rather than spending \$13.2 million to train teachers for high-need, hard-to-staff subject areas, the state of Ohio could find a large and untapped pool of highly qualified candidates by simply eliminating the draconian alternative certification program and replacing it with one that works.

Main text word count: 517

In June, the state of Ohio decided to spend \$13.2 million training existing teachers to serve in hard-to-fill positions, particularly in upper level math and science. But there is a far easier way to get high-quality teachers into these jobs, and it would cost far less.

By fixing its overly restrictive program for alternative certification, Ohio could begin attracting highly educated and experienced people to teaching.

The biggest obstacle to getting good teachers into hard-to-staff classrooms is an antiquated teacher certification system that was built for a world that no longer exists.

Ohio has two certification systems. The older system is still used to grant most teaching licenses. It requires prospective teachers to have a degree in education, a good GPA, and to pass the certification exam.

Recently, Ohio recognized the need to offer an alternative path to certification. But this reform effort has not attracted enough teachers. Witness the \$13.2 million initiative.

There are two reasons for this failure. First, the alternative certification is available only for the higher grade levels, where teachers work in distinct subject areas. There is no way for a prospective teacher to get an alternative certification to work in the lower grades.

The second reason this initial reform failed was that it relied on the old saw that only college schools of education can prepare someone to handle a classroom.

Thanks to this misguided thinking, prospective teachers must go back to college for at least one semester.

And what classes must the returning college student take? Here is a sample, as outlined by the Ohio Revised Code: “characteristics of student learning, diversity of learners, planning for instruction, instruction strategies, learning environments, communication, assessment, or student support.”

Requiring working adults to forgo income for a superfluous one-semester return to college is bad enough. Asking them to endure classes at best only marginally related to the task of educating students for successive



Why are Ohio taxpayers paying for stubborn teachers in the classroom?

Source: Corbis

semesters adds to the burden.

If these requirements don't seem particularly cumbersome, consider the opinion of Teach for America. This non-profit group trains recent college graduates to teach in disadvantaged schools across the country. It does this by helping people go through alternative certification programs.

But Ohio doesn't offer a viable alternative certification program. So Teach for America sends idealistic and highly educated Ohioans who want to teach in disadvantaged schools to other states.

Critics of alternative programs continue to argue that the traditional certification system is the only way to ensure that only good teachers get into our classrooms. As plausible as this idea is, it simply isn't true.

In his book "Education Myths," the University of Arkansas' Jay Greene writes: "If, as the evidence indicates, there is no substantial relationship between teacher credentials and performance in the classroom, current education policy is misguided in a way that can only be inflicting serious harm on teacher quality."

Rather than spending \$13.2 million to train teachers for high-need, hard-to-staff subject areas, the state of Ohio could find a large and untapped pool of highly qualified candidates by simply eliminating the draconian alternative certification program and replacing it with one that works.

The biggest obstacle to getting good teachers into hard to staff classrooms is the antiquated teacher certification system that was built for an education system that no longer exists.

**Attention
Editors and Producers**

Viewpoint commentaries are provided for reprint in newspapers and other publications. Authors are available for print or broadcast interviews. Electronic text is available at www.buckeyeinstitute.org. Please contact:

Dorothea Prouty
88 East Broad Street, Suite 1120
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Phone: (614) 224-4422
Fax: (614) 224-4644

www.buckeyeinstitute.org
prouty@buckeyeinstitute.org

#####

(Matthew Carr is the Education Policy Director at the Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions and editor of the Buckeye Institute Weekly Digest. More information is available at www.buckeyeinstitute.org. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided the author and his affiliation are cited.

