SELECTIONS FROM THE CQ RESEARCHER

ISSUES FOR DEBATE IN AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY

Teacher Education • School Vouchers
Patients' Rights • Managing Managed Care
Closing in on Tobacco • Welfare Reform and Child Poverty
Social Security • Digital Divide
Endangered Species Act • Saving Open Spaces
Gun Control • Death Penalty
Antitrust Policy • Digital Commerce
Defense Priorities • Women and Human Rights

SECOND EDITION

Issues for Debate in American Public Policy

Second Edition

Selections from *The CQ Researcher*

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Issues for Debate in American Public Policy

Annotated Table of Contents

The 16 *CQ Researcher* articles reprinted in this book have been reproduced essentially as they appeared when first published. In a few cases in which important new developments have occurred since an article came out, these developments are mentioned in the following overviews, which highlight the principal issues that are examined.

EDUCATION

Teacher Education

An influential 1996 report presented a blistering indictment of public education in America, especially the quality of teacher training. The National Commission on Teaching & America's Future said bold steps are needed to professionalize the nation's 2.7 million public school educators. Supporters of that view, including lawmakers, education experts and national teachers' unions, are pushing initiatives ranging from those that strengthen licensing standards to others that eliminate poorly performing teachers. Advocates hail the new emphasis on teaching as unique in the long history of attempted education reforms. But some skeptics say that reforming teaching without making more fundamental changes in the nation's public schools won't accomplish nearly enough. Others question where the funding would come from.

School Vouchers

In April 2000 Florida adopted the nation's first statewide tuition voucher program. The Florida plan gives students at "failing" public schools state-funded "opportunity scholarships" that can be used to attend any school of their choice, including private religious schools. At least four other states are considering similar legislation. The constitutionality of using taxpayer money to send children to parochial schools was left unclear when the Supreme Court refused to hear a case challenging the voucher program in Milwaukee. Opponents say vouchers siphon money from struggling public schools. Futhermore, they argue, there is no definitive proof that student performance has improved in districts with voucher programs. But public support for vouchers and other school-choice plans appears to be growing, especially among minorities.

HEALTH CARE

Patients' Rights

The continuing growth of managed-care health plans is provoking a powerful backlash. Many patients say managed care makes it harder simply to see a doctor, let alone get insurance coverage for needed treatment. Doctors are also chafing under restrictions that limit the way they treat patients. The managed-care industry insists, however, that it is improving the quality of health care and slowing the rise in costs. Between 1996 and 1998, more than 30 states passed laws strengthening patients' rights in dealing with insurers. Congress is considering imposing new regulations on managed-care companies. Patient and consumer groups were pushing for reforms in 2000, but insurers' and employers' groups warned that the result could be higher premiums and more uninsured workers.

Managing Managed Care

The managed-care industry succeeded in holding down health costs for most of the 1990s. But it is under unprecedented attack from critics, who charge that HMOs and similar plans have seriously compromised the quality of care by excessively focusing on their bottom lines. With public frustration building, lawmakers in Congress are proposing a variety of regulatory remedies to rein in the power of health insurers to make critical care decisions. Reform advocates say the proposals would empower consumers and allow doctors to deliver patient care without interference. But managed-care advocates contend that the proposals would succeed only in driving up the cost of health coverage. The net result, they say, would be more uninsured people and bigger bills for working Americans.

Closing In on Tobacco

The tobacco industry is facing a new round of legal and regulatory challenges in the protracted war over smoking and health. The Supreme Court ruled that the Food and Drug Administration should not regulate tobacco products, while the Justice Department is suing tobacco companies for the costs of treating smoking-related illnesses under Medicare and other federal health programs. These moves come in the wake of the tobacco industry's agreements to pay state governments $246 billion to settle similar reimbursement suits. For its part, the country's largest tobacco company, Philip Morris, is now acknowledging that smoking causes lung cancer

and heart disease. But all the tobacco companies are resisting the latest governmental moves against the industry and defending their right to sell a "legal product" in a "responsible manner."

SOCIAL POLICY

Welfare Reform and Child Poverty

The child-poverty rate has declined slowly since 1993, and the rate of black child poverty is the lowest in history. But 13.5 million American children still live in poverty—the highest rate of any industrialized country. Conservatives attribute the decline to welfare reform, which forced millions of single welfare mothers to go to work. But child advocates like the Children's Defense Fund say that progress in reducing child poverty has slowed markedly and that cuts in social service programs made the poorest families poorer. Meanwhile, child advocates question why states are amassing huge surpluses in federal welfare funds and why food banks and homeless shelters are seeing more and more children of the working poor, even as Congress dawdles in raising the minimum wage.

Social Security

America's 76 million baby boomers pose a threat to the nation's social safety net. Simply put, the Social Security system won't take in enough money to pay all of the boomers' guaranteed benefits as they retire over the next 30 years. To meet these obligations, the government will have to either raise workers' payroll taxes, cut benefits or take more drastic steps, such as raising the retirement age. A growing number of policymakers are embracing calls to "privatize" the system and shift some payroll taxes to private retirement accounts. But a consensus is proving elusive.

Digital Divide

The Internet is revolutionizing the world economy, but some parts of the global village are being left behind. The growing gap between the information-rich and the information-poor means many rural and low-income areas—and much of the Third World—could lose out on jobs and economic development. Many public-private partnerships are trying to bridge the digital gap. In 2000 the Clinton administration sought up to $50 million in grants to help poor families get on-line, and pressure was growing to make high-speed Internet access universally available. But critics argue that lingering government regulations are preventing the free market from solving telecommunications access problems. And some in Congress want to scale back the popular "e-rate" program, which subsidizes Internet connections at schools and libraries.

ENVIRONMENT

Endangered Species Act

Passage of the 1973 Endangered Species Act stands as one of the fundamental legislative victories of the environmental protection movement. It is also widely considered to be the most controversial. The act was intended to halt —and even reverse—the startling decline in animal and plant species caused by pesticides, water pollution, habitat destruction and other consequences of human activities. It requires landowners to refrain from developing land that is defined as critical to the survival of species listed as endangered. Critics say the law violates property rights by authorizing the government to "take" privately owned land, inhibits economic development and wastes taxpayer dollars. Both critics and supporters of the law say the environmental record of the past quarter-century proves their point.

Saving Open Spaces

In November 1998 voters across the country expressed their frustration over suburban sprawl and the traffic congestion and visual blight that accompany it by approving more than 120 ballot initiatives to conserve undeveloped land. The Clinton administration and a number of lawmakers supported a broader federal role in land conservation, mainly through an increase in federal acquisition of private property for parks and other public land. Property-rights activists say such efforts waste taxpayers' money and put landowners under unfair and overwhelming pressure to sell their land. Meanwhile, state and local governments are acting on their own to conserve green space with "smart-growth" initiatives to limit new development, and citizen-run, nonprofit land trusts are sprouting up all over the country to buy up open land.

CIVIL LIBERTIES, CIVIL RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

Gun Control

Gun control continues to inflame public opinion three decades after passage of the first broad federal firearms law, the Gun Control Act of 1968. Gun control supporters blame the high rate of violent crime and the large number of gun accidents and suicides on the easy availability of firearms and lax licensing and safety rules. Opponents argue that access to firearms deters crime and note that gun homicides are decreasing and fatal gun accidents are at a record low rate. Recently, gun control supporters have been pushing safety initiatives. They scored a partial victory in October 1997 when gun manufacturers in the United States agreed to include trigger locks on handguns. But they suffered a defeat the following month

Preface

Much of what goes on in the halls of government, be it in legislatures, courts, or executive mansions, is transparent. We can identify and describe in great detail certain processes used to formulate and implement public policy. Yet reducing something complicated, like policy making, to its elements is bound to leave an incomplete picture of how the process really works. Indeed, even the most sound theoretical structure should be accompanied by clear, real-world examples that add color and depth to our understanding of how things work in the public arena. Such examples give students a flavor of the substantive detail of a variety of policy areas, whether it be health care, education, or business and the economy.

Issues for Debate in American Public Policy

This reader is a compilation of sixteen recent articles from *The CQ Researcher,* a weekly policy brief that brings into focus the often complicated and controversial issues on the public agenda. *The CQ Researcher* brings often complex issues down to earth. Difficult concepts are not oversimplified, but they are explained in plain English. Offering in-depth, objective and forward-looking reporting on a specific topic, each article chronicles and analyzes past legislative and judicial action as well as current and possible future political maneuvering, whether at the local, state, or federal level. *Issues for Debate* is designed to encourage discussion, to help readers think critically and actively about these vital issues and to facilitate further research.

The collection is organized into seven subject areas that span a range of important public policy concerns. Indeed, the pieces were chosen purposely to expose students to a wide range of subjects, from civil rights to foreign policy. We are gratified to know that *Issues for Debate* is appealing to several audiences. It is being used as a supplement in both introductory public policy and American government courses, and interested citizens, journalists and business and government leaders are turning to it to familiarize themselves with key issues, actors and policy positions.

The CQ Researcher

The CQ Researcher was founded in 1923 under a different moniker: *Editorial Research Reports*. ERR was sold primarily to newspapers, which used it as a research tool. The magazine was given its current name and a design overhaul in 1991. Today, *The CQ Researcher* is still sold to many newspapers, some of which reprint all or part of each issue. But the audience for the magazine has shifted significantly over the years, and today many more libraries subscribe. Students, not journalists, are now the primary audience for *The CQ Researcher.*

People who write *Researchers* often compare the experience to that of drafting a college term paper. Indeed, there are many similarities. Each article is as long as many term papers—running about 11,000 words—and is written by one person, without any significant outside help.

Like students, staff writers begin the creative process by choosing a topic. Working with the publication's editors, the writer tries to come up with a subject that has public policy implications and for which there is at least some existing controversy. After a topic is set, the writer embarks on a week or two of intense research. Articles are clipped, books ordered, and information gathered from a variety of sources, including interest groups, universities and the government. Once a writer feels well informed about the subject, he or she begins a series of interviews with experts—academics, officials, lobbyists, and people actually working in the field. Each piece usually requires a minimum of ten to fifteen interviews. Some especially complicated subjects call for more. After much reading and interviewing, the writer begins to put the article together.

Chapter Format

Each issue of the *Researcher,* and therefore, each selection in this book, is structured in the same way, beginning with an introductory overview of the topic. This first section briefly touches on the areas that will be explored in greater detail in the rest of the chapter.

Following the introduction is a section that chronicles the important debates currently going on in the field. The section is structured around a number of questions, known as "Issue Questions," such as "Should taxpayers help parents pay for private schools?" or "Did welfare reform help poor children?" This section is the core of each chapter: the questions raised are often highly controversial and usually the object of much argument among those who work in and think about the field. Hence, the answers provided by the writer are never conclusive. Instead, each answer details the range of opinion within the field.

Following these questions and answers is the "Background" section, which provides a history of the issue being

examined. This look back includes important legislative and executive actions and court decisions from the past. Readers will be able to see how the current policy evolved.

An examination of existing policy (under the heading "Current Situation") follows the background section. Each "Current Situation" provides an overview of important developments that were occurring when the article was originally published. In most cases, for instance the examination of gun-safety laws in the "Gun Control" chapter, the issues are still current as this anthology goes to press.

Each selection ends with an "Outlook" section, which gives a sense of what might happen in the near future. This part looks at whether there might be new regulation afoot, anticipates court rulings and considers possible initiatives from the White House or Capitol Hill.

All selections contain other regular features to augment the main text. Each selection has two or three sidebars that examine issues related to the topic. An "At Issue" page provides opposing answers to a relevant question, from two outside experts. Also included are a chronology that cites important dates and events and an annotated bibliography, which details some of the sources used by the writer of the article.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank many people for helping to make this collection a reality. First is Tom Colin, editor of *The CQ Researcher,* who gave us his enthusiastic support and cooperation as we developed this second edition. He and his talented staff of editors and writers have amassed a first-class library of *Researcher* articles, and we are privileged to have access to that rich cache. We also thankfully acknowledge the advice and feedback from current users of the book. We are gratified by their success with the book. There are several scholars who commented on our plans for this revision and helped us keep the volume up to date while retaining those articles that seemed specially suited to the classroom. In particular, we thank Sherman Lewis at California State University, Hayward; Virginia Gray at the University of Minnesota; Paul Baker at the Georgia Institute of Technology; and Michael J. Zarkin at the University of Florida.

Some readers of this collection may be learning about *The CQ Researcher* for the first time. We expect that many readers will want regular access to this excellent weekly research tool. Anyone interested in subscription information or a no-obligation free trial of the *Researcher* can contact Congressional Quarterly at *www.cq.com,* at (800) 432-2250, ext. 279, or (202) 887-6279.

We hope that you will be pleased by the second edition of *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy.* We welcome your feedback and suggestions for future editions. Please direct comments to Charisse Kiino, in care of CQ Press, 1414 22nd Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037, or by e-mail at ckiino@cq.com.

—The Editors of CQ Press

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ENVIRONMENT

CIVIL LIBERTIES, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND JUSTICE

1 Teacher Education

THOMAS J. BILLITTERI

Kay Shrewsbery, a 26-year veteran of the Toledo public schools, always considered herself a good teacher. Now she has the credentials to prove it.

Last year, Shrewsbery became the first board-certified elementary school teacher in Ohio, a distinction once reserved for physicians and other highly skilled professionals. After months of evaluations by her peers — including a critique of her teaching — Shrewsbery was designated as an "accomplished" teacher by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

"Teachers get a bad rap," Shrewsbery says. "It was a chance for me to demonstrate that there are people in the teaching profession who are intellectually competent and excellent at what they do."

Certification, which in Ohio entitles Shrewsbery to an annual $2,500 salary bonus for 10 years, is part of a constellation of reforms aimed at reinvigorating and professionalizing the nation's 2.7 million public school teachers. Besides board certification, innovations include rigorous proficiency tests for new teachers, peer review of classroom veterans and new approaches to teacher training.

"A quiet revolution has been occurring within the ranks of the teaching profession," says Arthur Wise, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). "There has never been a reform effort of this nature before."

In the past, Wise says, reformers focused "on schools, curriculum, technology, decentralization, vouchers, and so forth. But these were all efforts to improve education despite the teacher. This movement says we will only improve education if we improve the teaching force." [1]

Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College in New York, agrees. "What distinguishes the era we're in now is that there are really dramatic, radical reforms of the teaching profession going on."

That includes an unprecedented vow of cooperation from teachers' unions.

For the first time, the 2.3-million-member National Education Association (NEA) this year endorsed peer review — what many see as a challenge to the hoary tradition of tenure. To the chagrin of unbending unionists, NEA President Bob Chase also advocated a "new unionism" in which teachers would play a collaborative role with school administrators in improving public education.

At the rival American Federation of Teachers (AFT), President Sandra Feldman says she recently called on her union "to get out front in closing down failing schools." "When you've got failing schools," Feldman says, "teachers and very often parents still rebel" when you propose to close them. "I have stood in front of faculties [at failing schools] and taken a lot of lumps."

Feldman says the AFT also vows to increase its support of peer review. "Teachers do not want incompetent people working with them," she says.

The tide of reformist sentiment has induced a measure of skepticism. Some observers fear that rigorous competency standards will create teacher shortages. Others wonder where the money for reforms will come from. [2] Still others question the motives of the unions, saying they are more concerned with survival than improvement. And many observers point to the long history of attempted education reforms and caution against moving too fast.

"One thing we all have to guard against is not to go for simple answers," says Thomas F. Warren, chairman of the Department of Education at Beloit College in Wisconsin and president-elect of the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education. "Obviously, education has a history of leaping on the bandwagon," sometimes in "blatantly farcical" ways. "We're talking about complicated issues. . . . How can we both be sensitive to what the past has taught us and to what's new?"

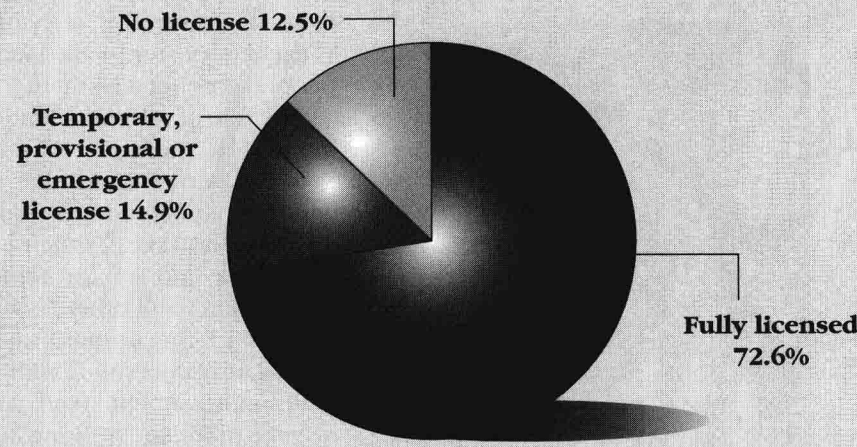
Yet many activists say it's time to take some bold steps into the future. The first move, they argue, is to bring strict professional standards to teaching. "Educators in this country are working in a system that is dysfunctional," Darling-Hammond argues. "We've got to look at how to transform that system."

Darling-Hammond was the primary author of a landmark report last September — "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future" — that presented a blistering indictment of American public education — especially teacher training. [3]

From *The CQ Researcher*, October 17, 1997.

Many New Teachers Are Unlicensed

More than a quarter of the new public school teachers hired in 1990 were not fully licensed.



Sources: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future, *September 1996; U.S. Department of Education,* Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990-91; *National Data Resource Center, 1993.*

"Although no state will allow a person to write wills, practice medicine, fix plumbing or style hair without completing training and passing an examination, more than 40 states allow school districts to hire teachers who have not met these basic requirements," declares the report from the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future. [4]

Among the commission's findings:

- More than 25 percent of new public school teachers in 1991 were either untrained or had not fully met state standards.
- Almost one-fourth of secondary teachers — and more than 30 percent of math teachers — lack even a minor in their main teaching field.
- More than half of the high school students taking the physical sciences are taught by teachers without a minor or major in the subject, as are 27 percent of math students.
- Students in schools with high minority enrollments have less than a 50-50 chance of getting science or math teachers with a degree or a license in the field they teach.

In fact, the report notes that only 500 of the nation's 1,300 schools of education are accredited. * "Although some schools of education provide high-quality preparation, others are treated as 'cash cows' by their universities, bringing in revenues that are spent on the education of doctors, lawyers and accountants rather than on their own students." [5]

Advocates of teacher reform say the commission's findings are all the more compelling when read against the backdrop of the "baby-boom echo" — the surge of new pupils whose parents were born after World War II. Over the next decade, the commission noted, more than 2 million new teachers will be needed, and they will account for more than half of the nation's teaching force in 2006.

What is required to shore up American teaching, the commission said, is nothing short of a radical reformation of the education establishment, including:

- tougher standards for colleges of education;
- strict licensing standards for new teachers;
- rigorous procedures to certify "accomplished" teachers;
- innovative clinical experience for beginning and experienced teachers; and
- peer review to weed out poor performers.

"We pay teachers substantially less than any other college-educated worker, and we educate them unevenly," says Darling-Hammond, who serves as the commission's executive director. "Then we hope to control them with textbooks and training developed outside the classroom, and we rely on a huge administrative infrastructure to regulate teachers because we don't trust them to make good decisions."

Many of the commission's proposals already are being implemented. A dozen states have independent boards to set standards for teacher licensing and education. At least 20 states have — or are planning — mentoring programs for new teachers.

And there are signs that toughen-

* Most states do not require schools of education to be accredited, and several major education schools have not sought accreditation, including Columbia University Teachers' College in New York City.

ing standards for teachers can get results, as the Connetquot school district in Long Island's Suffolk County recently discovered. When it gave applicants for teaching jobs a reading-comprehension test designed for high school juniors, only one-fourth of the applicants answered at least 40 of the 50 questions correctly. [6]

Yet the reforms occurring nationwide are piecemeal and vulnerable to budget pressures and bureaucratic shakeups. And in many locales, school officials are struggling simply to find enough teachers — classroom veterans or not. In Texas, schools must accommodate 80,000 new students in each of the next three years.

While much of the ongoing debate over teacher training focuses on practical questions — training regimens, certification standards and so on — the climate of reform also raises difficult ideological questions. For example, is teaching indeed "what matters most" in public school reform, as the title of the commission report suggests? Or should policy-makers pursue more fundamental changes in public education?

Many conservative policy analysts argue that mandating training and testing standards for teachers will take education reforms only so far. More important, they argue, is changing the very nature of schooling through such options as government-funded vouchers, charter schools and other mechanisms of parental "choice." [7]

"Standards play a role," says John Berthoud, president of the National Taxpayers Union in Alexandria, Va. "But the danger I see is that these kinds of reforms can be a distraction from much more profound changes that should be happening in our schools."

Chester E. Finn Jr., a senior fellow at the conservative Hudson Institute, is skeptical of reports like "What Matters Most."

"It's like the dairy industry telling us we should drink more milk," he says of the report's heavy input from educators. "I don't give a damn about teacher performance unless it leads to student performance."

Wilmer S. Cody, Kentucky's commissioner of education, says focusing on teacher preparation and training is important, but that "those looking for a silver bullet are going to be disappointed if that's the only thing they work on." Equally important, he says, are such issues as the culture of school systems and administrative policies. Good teachers can be worn down "very quickly by a bad school environment," he warns.

Still, the appetite for teacher reform is growing keener across the nation. President Clinton recently announced a new effort to attract teachers to tough urban settings. And he backs federal funding support for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Meanwhile, legislation to enhance teacher professionalization is percolating on Capitol Hill.

As education-reform efforts increasingly focus on teachers, here are some of the key questions being asked:

Will rigorous standards lead to a teacher shortage?

Every year as summer comes to an end, school administrators across the country scramble to find enough teachers.

The Department of Education predicted a record public and private school enrollment of 52 million students in fall 1996 — and 54.3 million by 2007. In the West, public school enrollment will climb 17 percent, more than double the national average.

Under such circumstances, it might seem that raising teacher-performance standards will only exacerbate the teacher shortage. But many experts argue that elevating standards will ultimately attract more teachers, and improve student performance in the process. Some advocates see the need for new teachers as a golden opportunity to infuse the profession with a new crop of well-trained, highly motivated educators.

"We have a shortage of qualified teachers now, so I don't think raising standards will exacerbate the problem of finding good teachers," says Marilyn Scannell, executive director of the Indiana Professional Standards Board. "I know people usually associate raising teacher standards with shortages, but part of our problem is credibility for the profession anyway."

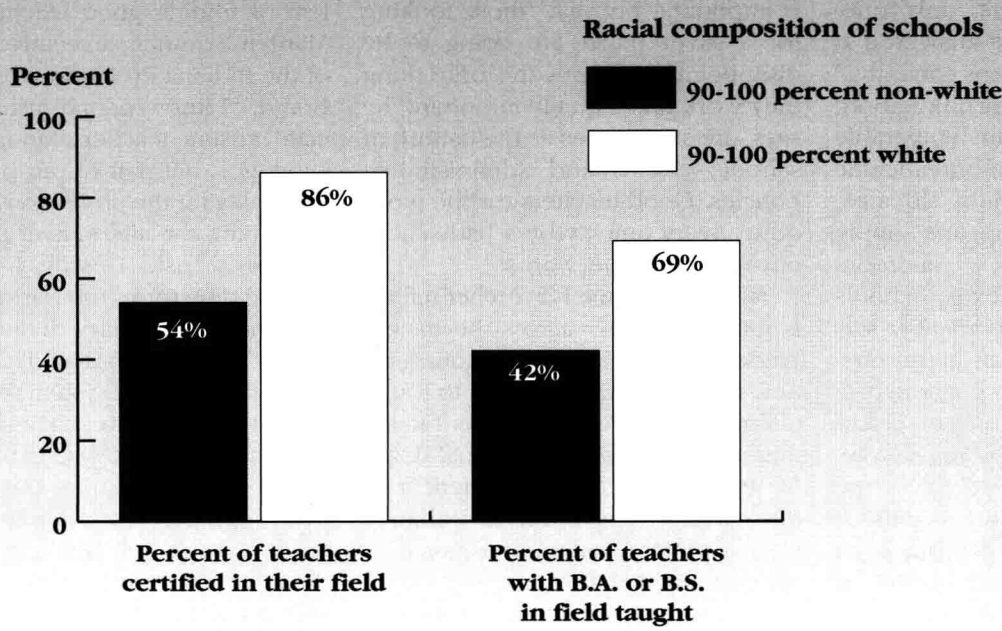
"What's the alternative? Lower the standards?" asks Timothy J. Dyer, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. "We can't do that. The bait has to shift to a reward system. What does industry do when it can't find people?"

In the late 1980s, Connecticut raised teacher salaries but also imposed rigorous new competency standards on beginning teachers. Even so, there have been no shortages in Connecticut, says Raymond Pecheone, the state's curriculum and teacher standards chief. Connecticut's higher-than-average teacher salaries no doubt have helped, as has its mentoring program for young teachers. But Pecheone credits the state's strict expectations with attracting teaching talent. "If you raise the standards and are very clear," he says, "it's more of a magnet."

On the other hand, lowering the bar can have serious policy and cultural consequences, notes Michigan State University education professor David F. Labaree. The need for teachers is so acute that, "Approximately one in every five college graduates every year must enter teaching in order to fill all the available vacancies," he notes. "If education schools do not prepare enough teacher candidates, state legislators are happy to authorize alternative routes into the profession . . . and school boards are quite willing to hire such prospects in order to place

Poor Children Get Least-Prepared Teachers

In secondary schools with a high percentage of minority students, less than half of the science and math teachers have a degree and certification in the field they teach.



Sources: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future, *September 1996; Jeannie Oakes,* Multiplying Inequalities: The Effects of Race, Social Class, and Tracking on Opportunities to Learn Mathematics and Science, *RAND Corp., 1990.*

warm bodies in empty classrooms." [8]

According to "What Matters Most," more than 12 percent of all newly hired teachers are untrained, and another 14 percent enter the profession without having fully met state standards. "Our schools' most closely held secret amounts to a great national shame," the report said. "Without telling parents they are doing so, many districts hire unqualified people as 'teachers' and assign them full responsibility for children." [9]

Of course, a dearth of qualified teachers can occur for a variety of reasons, especially in rural and small-town school districts. Dyer tells of a principal in the Midwest who had no one to teach Spanish last summer and wound up hiring a Spanish-speaking resident with no formal teaching experience. "You've got to get someone in that room when the door opens the day after Labor Day," Dyer says. "To say a principal isn't picking good people — well, you can't pick apples off a maple tree."

Hiring unqualified teachers can be "a function of genuine shortages in fields of short supply," "What Matters Most" acknowledges. But, the report adds, such decisions often result from "shortsighted hiring procedures, administrative convenience, efforts to save on teacher costs in favor of more 'important' areas and plain old-fashioned patronage." [10]

In California last year, serious classroom overcrowding prompted lawmakers to give financial incentives to schools that cut class sizes in lower grades. [11] The $1.5 billion program brought swift results. By this fall, nearly every public elementary school in California had reduced classes to 20 or fewer pupils in at least one or two early grades. But as schools have trimmed class size, they've had to hire more teachers — leading to a shortage of qualified candidates. A fifth of the candidates for new teaching slots do not have appropriate teaching credentials, and many are beginners with little or no classroom experience. [12]

The state has taken steps to ameliorate its shortage of competent teachers, including allowing retired teachers to return to the classroom for up to three years without sacrificing their retirement benefits. But that's done little to assuage critics, who see in California a rich example of the danger of pursuing reform before laying the proper groundwork.

"As a parent and as a taxpayer, I applaud California's effort to reduce classroom size, but frankly I am deeply troubled by the extent to which the state has compromised standards for teacher quality to meet this goal," says Rep. George Miller, D-Calif. He has sponsored a bill that