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Teacher Preparation: Reforming the Uncertain Profession—Remarks of Secretary Arne Duncan at Teachers College, Columbia University

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It's an honor and pleasure to be here at Columbia Teachers College—the oldest, largest, and most storied graduate school of education in the United States. Here in this citadel of teacher preparation, where giants like John Dewey played such a formative role, I've come to speak to you today about the need for a sea-change in our schools of education.

Like the Teachers College, many schools of education have provided high-quality preparation programs for aspiring teachers for years. In the last decade, a slew of education schools have also upgraded their programs or launched rigorous practice-based initiatives to adapt to the realities of preparing instructors to teach diverse students in the information age.

I am going to talk about some of those shining examples in just a moment. Yet, by almost any standard, many if not most of the nation's 1,450 schools, colleges, and departments of education are doing a mediocre job of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st century classroom. America's university-based teacher preparation programs need revolutionary change—not evolutionary tinkering. But I am optimistic that, despite the obstacles to reform, the seeds of real change have been planted.

America faces three great educational challenges that make the need to improve teacher preparation programs all the more urgent. First, the education that millions of Americans got in the past simply won't do anymore. In the information age, it is impossible to drop out of school and land a good job. Even workers with high school diplomas but without college degrees are going to find they have limited opportunities in a competitive global economy. As President Obama has said, "education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success—it's a prerequisite to success."

Second, education, as Horace Mann said nearly two centuries ago, has long been the great equalizer in America. No matter what your race, national origin, disability, or zip code, every child is entitled to a quality public education. Today, more than ever, we acknowledge America's need—and a public school's obligation—to teach all students to their full potential. And yet today we are still way too far from achieving that dream of equal educational opportunity.

Nearly 30 percent of our students today drop out or fail to complete high school on time—that is 1.2 million kids a year. Barely 60 percent of African-American and Latino students graduate on time—and in many cities, half or more of low-income teens drop out of school.

I believe that education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, about promoting civic knowledge and participation, the classroom is the place to start. Children today in our neediest schools are more likely to have the least qualified teachers. And that is why great teaching is about more than education—it is a daily fight for social justice.

Now the nation's rising educational demands are only half the picture. The third force propelling the nation's need for more and better teachers is the massive exodus of Baby Boomers from the teaching force in the next decade.

We currently have about 3.2 million teachers who work in some 95,000 schools. But more than half of those teachers and principals are Baby Boomers. And during the next four years we could lose a third of our veteran teachers and school leaders to retirement and attrition. By 2014, just five short years from now, the U.S. Department of Education projects that up to one million new teaching positions will be filled by new teachers.

These major demographic shifts mean that teaching is going to be a booming profession in the years ahead—with school districts nationwide making up to 200,000 new, first-time hires annually. Our ability to attract, and more importantly retain, great talent over the next five years will shape public education for the next 30 years—it is truly a once-in-a-generation opportunity.

It is important to emphasize that the challenge to our schools is not just a looming teacher shortage, but rather a shortage of great teachers in the schools and communities where they are needed most. As Lyndon Johnson foresaw in 1965, "tomorrow's teachers must not merely be plentiful enough, they must be good enough. They must possess the old virtues of energy and dedication, but they must possess new knowledge and new skill." In our new era of

accountability, it is not enough for a teacher to say, "I taught it—but the students didn't learn it." As Linda Darling-Hammond has pointed out, that is akin to saying "the operation was a success but the patient died."

More than 40 years later after Johnson spoke, high-poverty, high-needs schools still struggle to attract and retain good teachers. Teacher openings in science and math—subjects that are vitally important to the future—are often hard to fill with effective instructors. And students with disabilities and English language learners are still underserved. Rural classrooms are facing shortages and we have far too few teachers of color. Nationwide, more than 35 percent of public school students are Hispanic or black, but less than 15 percent of our teachers are black or Latino. That's a problem that is not self-correcting—we must proactively work on it. It is especially troubling that less than two percent of our nation's teachers are African American males.

To keep America competitive, and to make the American dream of equal educational opportunity a reality, we need to recruit, reward, train, learn from, and honor a new generation of talented teachers. But the bar must be raised for successful teacher preparation programs because we ask much more of teachers today than even a decade ago. Today teachers are asked to achieve significant academic growth for all students at the same time that they instruct students with ever-more diverse needs. Teaching has never been more difficult, it has never been more important, and the desperate need for more student success has never been so urgent. Are we adequately preparing future teachers to win this critical battle?

I am urging every teacher education program today to make better outcomes for students the overarching mission that propels all their efforts. America's great educational challenges require that this new generation of well-prepared teachers significantly boost student learning and increase college-readiness. President Obama has set an ambitious goal of having America regain its position as the nation with the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. But to reach that goal, both our K-12 system and our teacher preparation programs have to get dramatically better. The stakes are huge—and the time to cling to the status quo has passed.

Now there is a reason why so many of us remember a favorite teacher forever. A great teacher can literally change the course of a student's life. They light a lifelong curiosity, a desire to participate in democracy, and instill a thirst for knowledge. It's no surprise that studies repeatedly document that the single biggest influence on student academic growth is the quality of the teacher standing in front of the classroom—not socioeconomic status, not family background, but the quality of the teacher at the head of the class.

Earlier this month at Thomas Jefferson's fabled Rotunda at the University of Virginia, I issued a call to teaching as an essential national mission of our time. But the fact is that recruiting and preparing this army of great, new teachers depends heavily on our nation's colleges of education.

More than half of tomorrow's teachers will be trained at colleges of education. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that schools and departments of education produce about 220,000 certified teachers a year. Now I am all in favor of expanding high-quality alternative certificate routes, like High Tech High, the New Teacher Project, Teach for America, and teacher residency programs. But these promising alternative programs produce fewer than 10,000 teachers per year.

The predominance of education schools in preparing teachers is not the only reason this is a national priority and a critical concern for higher education. My good friend, Congressman George Miller, the chair of the House Committee on Education and a great reform advocate, points out that America's taxpayers already generously support teacher preparation programs. And it is only right that this investment should be well spent.

In the 2007-08 school year, nearly 30 percent of undergraduate education majors received Pell Grants totaling close to a billion dollars. That same year, about 40 percent of undergraduate education majors received \$3 billion in Federal Loans. All told, the federal government now provides about \$4 billion a year in Pell Grants and Federal Loans to support students and our university-based teacher preparation programs.

At the same time, graduate schools of education have a huge impact on post-baccalaureate enrollment—they award nearly 30 percent of all master's degrees, more than any other branch of graduate studies. And unlike independent alternative certification programs, university-based teacher preparation programs have unique advantages—they are financially self-sustaining, have math and science departments on campus to assist in specialized training, they can provide rich content knowledge in the liberal arts, and they are in a position to research and test what works to improve student learning.

Now it is not possible to talk honestly about radical improvements to teacher preparation programs without acknowledging the troubled history of education schools and stubborn barriers to reform. To echo a sentiment voiced by deans of education schools, almost since colleges of education came into being they have frequently been treated like the Rodney Dangerfield of higher education. Historically, education schools were the institution that got no respect—from the Oval Office to the Provost's Office, from university presidents to Secretaries of Education.

From the onset of education schools a century ago they have been beset by skeptics who believed that teachers are born, not made. In William James' popular lectures, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, published in 1899, James warned that educators made "a very great mistake" in assuming that child psychology could help provide "methods of

instruction for immediate school-room use."

James thought that teaching was an instinctual art—and many of his colleagues in academia agreed that teaching was more a craft than a profession. In his book *The Uncertain Profession*, former ed school administrator Arthur Powell argued that "none of the social sciences spawned by the American university at the end of the nineteenth century has had a more volatile and troublesome history than the field of education."

The dismissal of teacher preparation programs by the liberal arts faculty on many campuses was so complete that in the 1930s the president of Harvard described Harvard's Graduate School of Education as a "kitten that ought to be drowned." Columbia itself was not exempt from soul-searching about the effectiveness of colleges of education. In 1944, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Teachers College, Harvard president James Bryant Conant gave a speech here calling for a "Truce Among Educators"—a plea, he acknowledged, that fell on deaf ears. Nearly 20 years later, Conant authored a two-year study of education schools that acknowledged many students believed their required courses at ed school were "Mickey Mouse" courses.

Jacques Barzun, who wrote the classic bestseller *Teacher in America*—and later went on to be Columbia's provost—was equally unsparing in his critique of education schools. In his essay "The Art of Making Teachers," Barzun wrote that "teacher training is based on a strong anti-intellectual bias, enhanced by a total lack of imagination."

Jump forward to 1963 and you find that President Kennedy was voicing many of the same concerns about the quality of educational research that continue to resound today. "Research in education," President Kennedy declared, "has been astonishingly meager and frequently ignored . . . It is appalling that so little is known about the level of performance, comparative value of alternative investments and specialized problems of our educational system."

More than three decades later, not much—or at least not enough—had changed. In 1995, the Holmes Group, a coalition of ed school deans, issued a pointed report warning that "The education school should cease to act as a silent agent in the preservation of the status quo." In 1999, Richard Riley, one of my predecessors as Secretary of Education, told the National Press Club that "we can no longer fiddle around the edges of how we recruit, prepare, retain, and reward America's teachers.... Our colleges of education can no longer be the sleepy backwaters."

Now, as you know, the most recent comprehensive study of education schools was carried out by Arthur Levine, the former president of Teachers College. Levine's 2006 study found numerous examples of exemplary programs. But he also documented the persistence of problems that had afflicted ed schools for decades. "At the moment," he wrote, "teacher education is the Dodge City of the education world... unruly and disordered." "The bottom line," he concluded, "is that we lack empirical evidence of what works in preparing teachers for an outcome-based education system. We don't know what, where, how, or when teacher education is most effective."

Ed school deans and faculty interviewed for Levine's study painted an unflattering picture of teacher education, which they complained was "subjective, obscure, faddish . . . out-of-touch, politically correct . . . and failed to address the burning problems in the nation's schools." English professor E.D. Hirsch, the father of the acclaimed, content-rich Core Knowledge Program, got his own taste of the ideological blinders at colleges of education when he chose to teach an ed school course on the causes and cure of the achievement gap. Having authored the 1987 bestseller, *Cultural Literacy*, Hirsch anticipated that his course would be oversubscribed. But three years in a row, only 10 or so students enrolled. Finally, one of Hirsch's students informed him that other professors in the ed school were encouraging students to shun the course because it ran counter to their pedagogical beliefs.

More than three out of five ed school alum surveyed for the Levine report said their training did not prepare them adequately for their work in the classroom. In my seven years as CEO of the Chicago Public Schools and in my current job as I've travelled the country, I've had hundreds of conversations with great young teachers. And they echo many of the same concerns about ed schools voiced in the Levine report and in earlier decades. In particular they say two things about their training in ed school. First, most of them say they did not get the hands-on practical teacher training about managing the classroom that they needed, especially for high-needs students. And second, they say there were not taught how to use data to differentiate and improve instruction and boost student learning. On Tuesday night, at a national town hall meeting with teachers, I asked the studio audience of about 100 teachers how they felt about their schools of ed. An uneasy laughter filled the room—not the kind of response that engenders confidence.

Now the obvious question arises, why have teacher preparation programs historically been difficult to reform? And how is it that, in the face of this history, I am actually optimistic that important changes are already underway in teacher preparation programs?

Let me start by answering that first question, about the obstacles to reform. It is far too simple to blame colleges of education for the slow pace of reform. In fact, universities, states, and the federal government have all impeded reform in a variety of ways.

For decades, schools of education have been renowned for being cash cows for universities. The large enrollment in education schools and their relatively low overhead have made them profit-centers. But many universities have diverted those profits to more prestigious but under-enrolled graduate departments like physics—while doing little to invest in rigorous educational research and well-run clinical training.

This robbing Peter to pay Paul is shortsighted. If teaching is—and should be—one of our most revered professions, teacher preparation programs should be among a university's most important responsibilities. Unfortunately, this is the exception, not the rule.

It takes a university to prepare a teacher. The arts and sciences faculty play an absolutely essential role in strengthening the content knowledge of aspiring teachers. I do not understand when college presidents and deans of the arts and science faculty ignore their teacher preparation programs—and yet complain about the cost of providing remedial classes to freshmen. Simply put, incoming freshmen don't know the content because too often they have been taught by teachers who don't know the content well. In my view, Donald Kennedy, the former president of Stanford University, got it right when he said that "Only if the best institutions care about [public] schools and their own schools of education will the public think they are worth caring about; and nothing could be more clearly the business of America's academic leaders."

Now the fact is that states, districts, and the federal government are also culpable for the persistence of weak teacher preparation programs. Most states routinely approve teacher education programs, and licensing exams typically measure basic skills and subject matter knowledge with paper-and-pencil tests without any real-world assessment of classroom readiness. Local mentoring programs for new teachers are poorly funded and often poorly organized at the district level.

Less than a handful of states and districts carefully track the performance of teachers to their teacher preparation programs to identify which programs are producing well-prepared teachers—and which programs are not turning out effective teachers. We should be studying and copying the practices of effective teacher preparation programs—and encouraging the lowest-performers to shape up or shut down.

Even the failure of some education schools to develop a rigorous, research-based curriculum cannot solely be laid at their door step. We all know that the reading and math wars have gone on for decades—but that doesn't mean they are destined to last forever. Thanks to the national reading panel and other national expert assessments, educators know much more about the science of teaching reading and math today than a decade ago. Yet, as your president, Susan Fuhrman recently pointed out, countries like Singapore, South Korea, and the Czech Republic that outperform us in science and math provide teachers with much clearer guidance on key ideas and content to be mastered in each grade.

Now, each of these barriers to reform that I've just cited is beginning to slowly recede—and that is one reason why I remain optimistic that real improvements and change in teacher preparation programs are underway.

For the first time, 48 states have banded together to develop common college and career-ready standards for high school students—and the federal government is providing generous incentives through the Race to the Top Fund to encourage rigorous standards, including setting aside \$350 million to fund the competitive development of better assessments for the standards. Just a year ago, many education experts doubted states would ever agree on common college-ready standards.

The draft Race to the Top criteria would also reward states that publicly report and link student achievement data to the programs where teachers and principals were credentialed. And the federal government is funding a large expansion of teacher residency programs in high-need districts and schools, including one to be run out of Teachers College.

As you know, teacher residency programs follow a medical model of training, with residents placed in schools with extensive induction and support during a year-long apprenticeship. In Chicago, I was lucky to work with the Academy for Urban School Leadership program, one of the nation's top residency programs. The U.S. Department of Education recently announced \$43 million in grants for 28 Teacher Quality Partnership programs that went to colleges of education and high-need school districts, with more than half of the five-year grants supporting residency programs. An additional \$100 million in grants included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will be awarded early next year.

At the state and district level, states like Louisiana are leading the way in building the longitudinal data systems that enable states to track and compare the impact of new teachers from teacher preparation programs on student achievement over a period of years. Louisiana's system is already up and running, linking teacher education programs in the state back to student performance and growth in math, English, reading, science, and social studies.

All students in Louisiana in grades four through nine who took one of the state assessments are eligible for inclusion in Louisiana's evaluation of teacher impact—and the state uses three years of data involving hundreds of thousands of students and tens of thousands of teachers. Louisiana is using that information to identify effective and ineffective programs for the first time—and university-based teacher education programs are using the outcomes data to revamp and strengthen their programs. Officials at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette opted to increase admission requirements, added a career counseling program to better prepare teachers for the transition to the classroom, and boosted coursework requirements in English language arts. Real change, based upon the real outcomes of children—revolutionary, isn't it?

Right now, Louisiana is the only state in the nation that tracks the effectiveness of its teacher preparation programs. Every state in the nation should be doing the same—and, as I said, we are going to provide incentives for states to do

so in the \$4.3 billion Race to the Top competition. It's a simple but obvious idea—college of educations and district officials ought to know which teacher preparation programs are effective and which need fixing. Transparency, longitudinal data, and competition can be powerful tonics for programs stuck in the past.

Several districts are moving to track the impact of teacher preparation programs on outcomes. Here in New York, the Teacher Policy Research Project, sponsored by the University of Albany and Stanford University, recently assessed the impact that 31 elementary teacher preparation programs have had on math and English achievement in New York City. They found that the difference between the average impact of the 31 teacher preparation programs and the top value-added institution for first-year teachers was about the same as the difference in average learning for a classroom of low-income students and those who are not poor. The New York study is yet another example of how we are finally beginning to get the comparative data on education investments that President Kennedy sought so long ago.

Now, just as states and districts are beginning to link teacher education programs to student outcomes, universities are also taking their responsibility to improve teacher preparation more seriously. I have been involved in a Listening and Learning tour during the last nine months that has taken me to more than 30 states. Everywhere I go I see universities partnering with school districts, opening up lab schools, magnet schools, and charter schools, and creating professional development schools for ed school students to gain clinical experience. In droves, universities have opened their doors to alternative certification programs—and are paying greater attention to the quality and supervision of student teachers during their clinical training.

As you know, the accreditation of schools of education is a voluntary process, and historically coursework had been given greater priority than clinical training for students in accreditation. But there also are encouraging signs that colleges of education want to make self-policing more meaningful, with clinical experience driving coursework. Both NCATE, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, and AACTE, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, are firmly behind the new drive to link teacher preparation programs to better student outcomes.

In June, NCATE and its president, Jim Cibulka, announced the first major revision of teacher education requirements in 10 years. It includes new accreditation requirements that will oblige institutions to strengthen the clinical focus of their programs and foster demonstrable increases in student learning. NCATE's new accreditation system will be modeled in part on Tennessee's evolving experiment, where the Board of Regents has decided that all undergraduate teacher candidates will spend their senior year in year-long residencies in P-12 schools. I hope other states and schools of education shift more to the residency-model of training.

Under the leadership of Sharon Robinson, the AACTE and its 800 colleges and universities have made it a core mission to have pre-service education lead to substantial increases in student achievement. AACTE has also recently launched a series of new programs and initiatives designed to improve teacher effectiveness. One of their most promising initiatives to date is the development of the first nationally accessible assessment of teacher candidate readiness. Under this performance-based assessment, supervising teachers and faculty would evaluate student teachers in the classroom. And student teachers and interns would be required to plan and teach a week-long stint of instruction mapped to state standards and provide commentaries on videotapes of their instruction and classroom management.

AACTE's project is based on PACT, California's Performance Assessment for Teachers, which Linda Darling-Hammond and a wide-ranging consortium of teacher preparation programs in California have done so much to pioneer. Already 14 states have signed up to pilot the performance assessment.

In the end, I don't think the ingredients of a good teacher preparation are much of a mystery anymore. Our best programs are coherent, up-to-date, research-based, and provide students with subject mastery. They have a strong and substantial field-based program in local public schools that drives much of the course work in classroom management and student learning and prepares students to teach diverse pupils in high-needs settings. And these programs have a shared vision of what constitutes good teaching and best practices—including a single-minded focus on improving student learning and using data to inform instruction.

The program here at Teachers College, which turns out about 700 teachers a year, explicitly trains students to use data to continuously improve their own instruction and target student learning gaps. Every student teacher in the elementary education program at TC completes at least two semesters of student teaching, and unlike some education schools, every student teacher works under the careful supervision of a well-qualified mentor teacher. About half of TC's graduating teachers in 2007-08 ended up in high-needs schools in New York City. Your commitment to research what really works to advance student learning is impressive.

Earlier this month, I spoke to students at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia and found a similarly top-notch program where fifth-year students teach full-time during their first semester. I see David Steiner, your great new commissioner in New York in the audience, and David created an extraordinary teacher preparation program at Hunter College. Like Virginia's program, it has a carefully-run clinical program that videotapes student teachers and helps them learn from their experience.

In contrast to some colleges of education, David also encouraged the incorporation of best practices from a new generation of high-performing charter schools. He even established an alternative certification program for teachers of

record—Teacher You—for KIPP, Achievement First, and the Uncommon Schools.

There are many other first-rate teacher preparation programs—Stanford, the University of Washington, and Michigan, just to name a few. But I want to be clear that it doesn't take an elite university and a big endowment to create a good teacher education program.

At Emporia State University in Emporia, Kansas, home of the National Teachers Hall of Fame, the Teachers College is the crown jewel of the school. Roughly 80 percent of students are supervised by full-time education faculty instead of adjuncts—and all elementary education professors are in the public schools every day. Senior year is a 100 percent field-based program in Emporia's public schools, where student teachers do everything from assisting with grading to sitting in on parent-teacher conferences.

Alverno College, a Catholic women's college in Milwaukee, also requires a rigorous field experience in the public schools and has faculty and local principals assess videotapes of student teachers. Eighty-five percent of Alverno graduates are still in the classroom five years after graduation, an extremely high retention rate. At Black Hills State University in Spearfish, South Dakota, Project Prime, a partnership with the Rapid City Schools uses school-based math coaches and graduate level courses for teachers to successfully boost math achievement among Native American students.

I cite all these examples to point out that, with courage and commitment, our teacher preparation programs absolutely can provide dynamic and effective teacher preparation for the 21st century—leaving the sleepy backwaters that Secretary Riley spoke of behind. In place of the uncertain profession, I want to see teacher preparation programs one day rival those of other professions.

When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is reauthorized, we will be reinvesting in teacher education programs. We will encourage partnerships with states and districts that address teacher shortages in high-needs areas. And we will encourage programs committed to results: Programs that use data, including student achievement data, to foster an ethic of continuous improvement for students and teachers.


Our best teacher preparation programs see the smart use of data as a boon that can help them improve, not as a burden. They see competition from alternative providers not as a threat but as a force from which they can learn, benefit, and share ideas.

It's often said that great teachers are unsung heroes, but for me that truism has real meaning. Teaching is one of the few professions that is not just a job or even an adventure—it's a calling. Great teachers strive to help every student unlock their potential and develop the habits of mind that will serve them for a lifetime. They believe that every student has a gift—even when students doubt themselves.

Henry Adams said that "a teacher affects eternity—he can never tell where his influence stops." That is a weighty responsibility and a unique privilege. I thank you for all that you have done and will do to train the next generation of great teachers. The challenges facing our nation's schools of education are great. But so is the opportunity to better serve our children and the common good.

Thank you.

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