

Chapter 6

The Impact of K–20 Policies on Teachers: From Effectiveness to Attrition

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ABSTRACT

The publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983 as well as the progression to a global society has created a national concern for the quality of education in the United States. There has been a shift in education, from hands off from the national government to a move for a national curriculum that will assist in the improvement of our schools. Policies around education are ever changing, and this has an impact on the teachers who are currently in the profession as well as those who educate pre-service teachers. The chapter provides an overview of the unfolding of educational policy within the United States, discusses the current policies being implemented and their impact on the field of teaching. The chapter concludes with consideration of the impact of these policies and recommendations for future implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Each semester I start out asking my students why they want to become teachers. The majority of the students indicate that they want to make a difference, impact student's lives in a way that theirs was lacking, or simply that they love kids and want to work with them. I admire their honesty and am fearful at how naive they are to the world of K-20 education. As we move full speed into the 21st Century, many things are changing, how we communicate, work and even how we learn are all major factors in how the United States

will help shape and adjust to the ever changing economy. Sadly, there seems to be one reoccurring issue that has not ceased in the last decade, the ever-growing focus on the condition of education in the United States. With the global economy constantly being thrust into focus, our schools, teachers, and students are being compared to their counterparts across the world. On a consistent basis the United States scores at the bottom for both student achievement and teacher status.

In order to address this shortfall several federal programs have been put in place. With these programs there is a strong sense of immediacy to improve student learning from federal, state, and local agencies, regardless of the fact that systemic

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changes are things that take place over time, and the results on student test scores take even longer. This desire to see immediate change thrusts teachers into the spotlight, how effective they are in the classroom and where they received their training.

Teachers are continuously being put under additional stress from all levels of administration, federal, state, district, and school. Some teachers have noted that even after teaching for 15 years, the school administration still feels the need to stop by their classroom and micromanage their work, to ensure that the students they are teach score well on the latest test (Fazekas & Burns, 2011).

A recent report by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED, 2011) states that the quality of teachers is key to raising education standards; this means that not only those who are working with the K-12 realm, but also those in the beyond K-12 into the arena of teacher preparation. One of the main focus areas in education are the policies that are put forth around the issue of accountability. The accountability movement, frequently measured as students passing a state test, spans to all areas of education. The policies around this accountability movement drive a system where student scores are attached the measure of quality and success, for both the schools and the teachers, in addition to being tied to some type of financial reward.

According to Faber (2012):

We have an anti-teacher climate that has only worsened since 2010...The situation has only gotten worse, with layoffs, pay cuts, anti-union sentiment, program cuts and strict mandates that are part of federal education laws. If we are to make any reform or new initiative work in education, we have to create schools that are supportive, humane, dynamic, and creative.

While the federal mandates, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Teacher Incentive Funds (TIF), or the more recent Race to the Top, are set out to help “cure” the ailments identified in

education, they fail to take into consideration the impact these policies are having. Doing this would require policymakers to delve further into a teacher’s world and look at the broader institutional and community factors that must come into play while implementing these policies. Serious efforts to improve student achievement and compensation systems must be guided by the evidence that is available, rather than making uninformed decisions.

While there have been evaluation studies on the effectiveness of these programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dee & Jacob, 2010) on student outcomes, further exploration needs to be conducted to fully determine the policy impact on teachers themselves and how they are withstanding the increased pressure on their chosen profession. The policies around K-20 education are creating a high-stress environment on teachers and stand the chance of having a negative effect on the retention of good teachers at all levels of education. With this evolution of policy at the federal level, there is a need to examine the potential impact on teaching both at the K-12 level and beyond K-12.

The objectives of this article are to: First, lay the foundation as to what K-20 policy looks like in 2012; second, to identify discrepancies in these policies; third, to discuss the implications that these policies have on a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession; and fourth, to provide recommendations and potential trends in this area.

BACKGROUND

Educational policies have been part of the federal legislation since the creation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. ESEA was created so that there would be a line item in the budget that would ensure that elementary and secondary education in the nation would be funded. This Act has been reauthorized every five years and has made modifications occasionally in regards to where the funding should go. The

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