



Philanthropy Roundtable

Achieving Teacher and Principal Excellence

A GUIDEBOOK FOR DONORS

by Andrew J. Rotherham



Ten Big Ideas in Need of Support

Many donors are getting involved in improving human capital in the education sector and are supporting a number of promising new initiatives. But there remain many unfunded projects which hold enormous promise for further gains. Here is a list of some of the big ideas that are still in need of support.

Idea 1:

Focus on a Single, Proof-point Location

It's true that some philanthropists here and there are collaborating on human capital issues. In Delaware, The Broad Foundation and the **Rodel Foundation** worked closely together to develop a statewide initiative known as **Vision 2015**. Moreover, perhaps the largest and most impressive collaboration to date, in fact, is occurring in post-Katrina New Orleans. In the Crescent City, Fisher, Gates, and Broad have jointly committed \$17.5 million over three years to support special programs run by organizations like Teach For America, New Leaders for New Schools, and The New Teacher Project.

But nowhere to date have philanthropists collaborated in a concerted effort to simultaneously address every point in a teacher's career trajectory. It's an idea whose time has come. A group of donors could easily combine their resources and choose a single city as an experiment in partnering together to achieve comprehensive and dramatic reform. The combined effort would work simulta-

neously to attract new talent into education, create new training routes for top-notch prospects, distribute resources where the challenge is greatest, and alter the compensation structures to reward excellence.

Effective organizations are already undertaking pieces of this work; coordinating them in a few high-need cities with the right leadership and political climate (like Newark, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., or Chicago) could serve as a powerful "proof-point" for the possibilities of dramatic human capital reform. There is a compounding effect to suc-

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successful reform initiatives, so that (for example) advances in compensation often improve recruitment. For that reason, a coordinated effort has the potential for much more impact than a singular commitment to any one priority. (While the combined philanthropic outreach in New Orleans seems to resemble such an effort, its utterly unique circumstances have made the goal not reforming, but rather re-establishing, a shattered school district.) What is more, such coordination provides an occasion to help steer sizeable resources more effectively. In many communities, cumulative giving from local sources represents a substantial investment, one which could leverage broader change were it more focused.

Idea 2:

Create a New Model for Colleges of Education

The traditional college of education faces increasing competition from the many new experiments in the field: AUSL in Chicago, the Boston

Residency Program, and High Tech High's Graduate School of Education in San Diego, as well as the partnership of Hunter College with Achievement First, KIPP, and Uncommon Schools in New York City. To all of these, add the new Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas, sup-

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ported by a \$10 million grant from the **Windgate Charitable Foundation, Inc.**, which was in turn matched by funds from a larger Walton Family Foundation grant.

But the boldest idea has yet to be acted on: to create a new college of education that trains practitioners, researchers, and policy analysts, side-by-side. Such a "green field" initiative would attract considerable opposition. Yet there are a number of cities with the resources to see down any controversy: a strong philanthropic sector, a large number of novice teachers, and a cadre of veteran instructors.

If history is any guide, it is unlikely that today's colleges of education will substantially reform themselves without real competition from other providers. In other words, new entrants in teacher training hold the most promising prospects for redirecting the massive resources that are now sunk into ineffective teacher preparation programs.

Idea 3:

Devise Good Alternative Teaching License Procedures in Every State

Current licensing procedures are altogether too burdensome and drive too many prospective teachers away from the field of education. Alternative and non-traditional routes to teacher certification are crucial for overcoming this obstacle.

But not all alternative routes are created equal, and many are not really alternative at all. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality, “While nearly every state now has something on its books that is classified as an ‘alternate route to certification,’ only six states offer a fully genuine alternative, one that provides talented individuals with an accelerated and responsible pathway into the profession. With some modification of one or two components, an additional 15 states could also meet a genuine standard.” NCTQ defines genuine alternative routes to certification as including a manageable amount of coursework, a maximum program length of two years, a course-load relevant to the immediate needs of new teachers, a strong mentoring program for new teachers, and a diversity of providers located both inside and outside of traditional university-based programs.

In many states, there is an opportunity for donors to partner with organizations and create alternative routes into the teaching profession. Grantmakers can sponsor teaching fellowship programs, for instance, or provide support to prospective teachers and principals in strong alternative-licensing programs.

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Idea 4:

Redirect Teacher Incentives

While there are some promising reforms for changing teacher incentives underway, there remains plenty of room for philanthropists to support and champion still bolder ideas. One such idea involves reconfiguring compensation packages to attract talented new prospects into the field. In particular, donors could help young teachers cope with two of their biggest financial challenges: buying a first home and saving for retirement.

■ *Achieving Teacher and Principal Excellence*

As for home purchases, donors would do well to consider the example of San Jose’s mayor, Ron Gonzales, who recently began offering teachers forgivable loans for home down payments, in order to help teachers afford Silicon Valley’s expensive real estate market. Indeed, where real estate is most expensive, it has the unfortunate effect of driving out new teachers from the communities they serve. With a little imagination, philanthropists can devise a number of strategies to help teachers and principals afford homes in the communities where they work, to the mutual benefit of both school and neighborhood.

As for retirement saving, career teachers are still generally covered by defined-benefit pension plans. But not all prospective educators plan on staying in the field long enough to earn those benefits—a reality that keeps some potential candidates out of the classroom altogether. There are a number of different ways for donors to help devise new, portable retirement savings vehicles as a way to recruit and retain promising teachers and principals. Young teachers are smart enough to know what money saved now will be worth by the time they reach retirement.

Idea 5:

Build Knowledge-management Tools

Teachers need more and better tools to help them do their work. Nonprofit organizations like **Teachscape**, as well as for-profit companies like **Wireless Generation**, have already shown a few of the ways

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that technology can be used to increase teacher effectiveness and productivity. Promising ideas include providing teachers with real-time feedback and coaching, constructing wiki-like platforms to build and organize knowledge, and instructing teachers on how best to gather, analyze, and apply data.

At the moment, such knowledge-management tools are sorely underdeveloped; indeed, Ted

Mitchell of NewSchools Venture Fund notes that “the market for professional development tools is badly formed.” But the current deficiencies mean there are many openings for quality providers. Charter schools, in particular, have been willing to experiment with new technologies. One California charter school network, for example, uses earpieces to provide real-time

coaching for new teachers from a veteran teacher unobtrusively observing in the back of the classroom.

Organizations need better management tools every bit as much as individual practitioners. Some cutting-edge initiatives—like New Leaders for New Schools and Teach For America—already rigorously evaluate their work and create feedback loops for constant self-improvement. TFA, for instance, received support from several key backers to partner with Mathematica Policy Research and undertake a randomized evaluation of their teacher effectiveness. Yet within the field of education as a whole, very little systematic work has been done to identify and publicize effective practices.

A step in the right direction can be found in the **Effective Practice Incentive Fund**, an initiative spearheaded by New Leaders for New Schools. The fund not only identifies and rewards effective educators—it also works hard to spread its findings widely within the education sector. Backed with funds from the federal Teacher Incentive Fund, local school districts, and philanthropic grantmakers, the Effective Practice Incentive Fund represents one way that donors can try to improve the understanding of, and disseminate information regarding, the very best practices in the field. (Please see Chapter VIII for more information.)

Idea 6: **Address the Rural Challenge**

Like the inner cities, rural communities have to confront a chronic shortage of outstanding teachers and principals. There are a few ongoing human capital initiatives with rural components; TFA, for example, places educators in remote areas of North Carolina, Texas, and the Mississippi Delta. Yet despite the acute need, there are few large-scale efforts aimed at attracting educators to rural communities. “When a school is in a thriving metropolitan area, people—particularly young people—are more likely to move there. People with families and young folks are less likely to move to a rural area,” says Tom Torkelson, the founder of **IDEA Public Schools**, a public charter school network along the Rio Grande Valley.

There is reason to hope that technology will alleviate some of the problems confronting rural communities—Advanced Placement courses, for example, can be offered online. But technology alone cannot solve the core challenge of getting effective

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teachers and principals into rural communities. Grantmakers can address that core challenge directly by helping develop teacher preparation and licensing programs through rural community colleges, a strategy which has proven effective in bringing much-needed nurses to some rural communities. Similarly, interested donors should avoid treating the rural lifestyle as a drawback, and instead underscore the benefits of living and working in the country. For some prospective educators, the opportunity to live in a small town, own some property, and work in a quiet, beautiful location may well be a rather attractive proposition.

Idea 7:

Swap Tomorrow's Benefits for Today's Compensation

Teacher compensation is heavily backloaded: teachers earn a large percentage of their overall career compensation in their last few years on the job. Yet research shows that effectiveness plateaus much earlier in a teacher's career, and many young teachers leave the field before earning the more substantial benefits. At the same time, many states have significant unfunded liabilities in their teacher pension systems; according to the National Association of State Retirement Administrators, California, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas each have more than \$10 billion in unfunded pension liability.

As policymakers consider ways to address the problem of sustainability, they can also consider ways to modernize how teachers are compensated. For instance, proposals have been floated to frontload compensation to the earlier years of a teacher's career, and to finance this shift by redistributing the entire compensation structure. The idea isn't to pay teachers less, but rather to distribute aggregate pay differently in order to make education more lucrative earlier in a teacher's career. Any reform of this nature will carry substantial transition costs, since existing arrangements must be honored while new initiatives are instituted. Philanthropists are ideally positioned to help underwrite such transition costs and accelerate the movement towards a more frontloaded compensation scheme in school districts nationwide.

Idea 8:

Leverage Charter Schools as the Leading Edge of Teacher and Leader Effectiveness

Charter schools may represent the largest missed opportunity in learning from the use and study of model human resource practices. For example, although charters have much greater flexibility, only a small segment use value-added data in teacher evaluation, differentiated pay tied to per-

formance, or strategic staffing related to class size. In fact, with a few exceptions, most of the innovations in charter schooling have been on the management and organizational side of schools, not in the classroom. Donors should use the inherent flexibilities that charter schools have to leverage the best of what we know about maximizing teacher and leader impact, investing in innovative ideas along all links of the human capital chain, and underwriting applied research and development.

Idea 9:

Create Incentive Prizes to Encourage Reform

In recent years, philanthropists have increasingly come to appreciate the virtues of large-purse incentive prizes. Revitalized by the **X PRIZE Foundation**'s awards in aerospace technology and health care, incentive prizes have come to be well-established means for catalyzing major breakthroughs on specific problems. In other words, when structured properly, incentive prizes encourage research development and real-world solutions. It's not by accident that those competing for the prize often end up investing more in research and development than the prize itself is actually worth: that's the whole idea. Of course, the challenge of designing a prize is greater for a field like education, where outside of discrete issues like curriculum and technology the definition of "solution" is often less concrete. Nevertheless, a philanthropist could experiment with, say, offering to fund the best-designed teacher pay reform plan, or proposing to support the winning peer-review evaluation system.

Idea 10:

Maximize Strategic Use of Technology in the Classroom

Computers have been in K-12 classrooms for almost three decades now, but they have never quite lived up to their hype. That may be about to change, however. Until recently, computers were "crammed" into the classroom, as Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen likes to say. What Christensen means is that educators tried to fit computers into pre-existing curricula; computers have been treated as glorified typewriters in many English classes, as advanced calculators in many math classes, and as compact card catalogues in many social studies classes.

What educators have not yet done, in a sustained and transformative way, is employ computers to deliver educational content directly to students. As educational software continues to improve, computers will become

■ *Achieving Teacher and Principal Excellence*

increasingly able to provide independent educational instruction. They will be an invaluable tool for addressing the teacher distribution challenge: any computer with an internet connection will be able to provide quality (and increasingly personalized) instruction—in any school, anywhere in the country.

One practitioner already working in this space is **Reasoning Mind, Inc.** Reasoning Mind is the brainchild of Alexander Khachatryan, a Russian mathematician who moved to the United States in 1990 with his wife, his son, \$700 in cash, three suitcases, and 50 crates of books. When Khachatryan found that his son was having difficulty with learning math in school, he decided to create an integrated, web-based mathematics teaching module. The fruit of that decision was the establishment in 2000 of the Houston-based nonprofit Reasoning Mind. Using Reasoning Mind's software, teachers control and coordinate the learning process, interacting with students, tutors, and the system, while students get help from online tutors who mentor students and set up virtual classrooms to aid the learning process. Between 2003 and 2005, Reasoning Mind refined its fifth-grade math sequence, positing 187 learning objectives, integrating over 600 animations, and offering over 8,000 original problems. Reasoning Mind has now fully developed its fourth-, sixth-, and part of its seventh-grade basic math curricula. There are plans to add curricula for advanced mathematics and basic science in the future.

Ernest (“Ernie”) Cockrell, the chairman of Reasoning Mind's board, is quick to note that the program is self-paced and individualized, and that it offers instruction that is immediate, inexpensive, scalable, and uniform. Initial testing has shown impressive student learning gains, at a cost of only \$50 per student per year (based on sites in Houston and Dallas in 2007). Cockrell says he hopes to expand the instructional software to 80,000 students by 2011, at which point the product will become profitable and self-sustaining. But, he hastens to note, donors played an invaluable role in “jump-starting” the Reasoning Mind project. During its development and implementation phases, Reasoning Mind has received over \$12 million in grants from private foundations and individuals, including Forrest Hogle (vice chairman of Reasoning Mind's board) and the **Hogle Foundation**, the ExxonMobil Foundation, the Houston Endowment, Inc., the **Cullen Foundation**, the **Fondren Foundation**, and Ernie Cockrell and the **Cockrell Foundation**, as well as considerable support from a number of other donors. Indeed, without such multi-year philanthropic commitments, Reasoning Mind might never have sparked to life.