



**Response to *Educating School Teachers*
by Dr. Arthur Levine
from Dr. Sharon P. Robinson, President and CEO
American Association of Colleges for
Teacher Education**

September 18, 2006



Serving Learners

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) commends Dr. Arthur Levine, a colleague whom we greatly respect, for this important study of teacher preparation in the United States. AACTE welcomes the report. The findings are sobering and we take them seriously. We know Dr. Levine's motive in conducting this study is to improve an enterprise that is critical to the success of our nation—one in which he has invested over half of his career. There is no one from whom we would rather receive this study's "tough love" findings. We agree with some, but not all, of his recommendations. In particular, we challenge the need to start from scratch to create quality control and accountability. Further, we take exception to the elitism implicit in the proposal to expand programs at highly selective institutions, rather than to bolster those that prepare a majority of the nation's teachers.

So let us get on with it! There's a point at which further analysis gets in the way of progress—where discourse about already known problems overshadows the efforts of those who are inventing and implementing solutions. We at AACTE are working on *solutions*; we're in the *fixin'* business. Let us all commit to the goal that when we meet at the next press conference it will be to report on solid evidence of reform in developing the nation's education workforce.

Teacher education, in fact, is currently undergoing a dynamic transformation. By responding to the demands of modern multicultural learning environments, national workforce needs for the global economy, and required accountability systems, schools of education are increasingly partnering with PreK-12 schools, colleges of arts and sciences and engineering, and businesses, to reinvent themselves. AACTE's recent publication, *Teacher Education Reform: The Impact of Federal Investments* (http://www.aacte.org/Governmental_Relations/titleIprofiles.rprt.pdf) documents remarkable innovations across the country.

Innumerable strong education schools exist from New York to California, such as those lauded in the report: Alverno College (WI), Emporia State University (KS), the University of Virginia, and Stanford University (CA). All of these exemplary programs are members of AACTE and have received national accreditation. Furthermore, professional development schools (PDSs), which the report endorses, are emerging as particularly effective, evidence-based school-university partnership models in many sites across the nation, providing academic content and pedagogical instruction that is well integrated with extensive, closely supervised, hands-on, in-school clinical experience. These model teacher education sites present and consult with other institutions at our annual meetings and at professional development conferences held throughout the year. AACTE seeks support for additional mechanisms to broker the services of outstanding models to assist all programs in meeting high standards.

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Creating Solutions

Building the Profession—Education schools which prepare the educators of each new generation of learners—which educate the workforce that our nation requires to compete in the global economy—are members of a *profession* and not a craft. The teachers they prepare provide the initial education for the nation’s future scientists, mathematicians, doctors, lawyers, and engineers, as well as its computer programmers, plumbers, airline pilots, and retail clerks. Teaching and teacher education are without question *professions*.

We appreciate the occasion of this report to clarify terms and develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be a profession. We support Dr. Levine’s proposal for a nationwide effort to create the profession’s building blocks, including a uniform vision of the roles and responsibilities of teachers and the knowledge and skills they must possess. Since our Leadership Summit in the summer of 2005, the Association has focused its work on four strategic goals, the first of which is to *Build Consensus on Professional Issues*. We know that it is essential for the teacher education community to assert its authority as a profession by accomplishing this internal consensus exercise. Our primary task, then, is to build consensus on professional goals and standards that contribute to improved learning at all levels.

Improving Accountability—Dr. Levine calls for a workable accountability system. Institutional accreditation is a major part of such a system. AACTE invests heavily in this form of accountability, as evidenced by our Board of Directors’ current work to develop a set of principles for national accreditation in educator preparation. These principles reflect that accreditation should serve public interests in education, focus on student learning outcomes, and be grounded in an evidence base. The principles will be proposed to the entire organization at our annual meeting in order to establish a consensus view of how this profession will use accreditation.

We agree with Dr. Levine that accountability for teacher preparation should be aligned with P-12 student learning goals and standards. In fact, AACTE has been an advocate for revisions to federal policy that would drop proxy quality measures such as pass rates on teacher licensure tests in favor of Dr. Levine’s recommendation to use the results of student longitudinal data collection systems under development in several states. This would be a stronger approach to ascertaining the impact of recent teacher education graduates on student achievement and a more effective way to judge the impact of particular types of teacher preparation. AACTE is currently working with the National Center for Educational Accountability to strengthen the connection between P-12 achievement data and teacher education programs.

We do not, however, agree with Dr. Levine’s recommendation to start over from scratch with accreditation. We would not support wiping out 50 years of forward progress in improving the quality of preparation programs. The history of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) shows a pattern of continuous improvement and increasing rigor in the standards and requirements of its accreditation process. We need to build upon that solid base, not tear it down.

Obtaining Adequate Resources—We agree that “the quality of tomorrow will be no better than the quality of our teacher force,” and we find it incredible – in fact unconscionable – that the level of financial support for teacher preparation reform in some institutions is so low. As Dr. Levine points out, funds brought into education schools are often siphoned off to other university programs. This practice must cease. We look forward to Dr. Levine’s advocacy as we bring this case to university provosts, presidents, and trustees.

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We are perplexed at the report's recommendations for financial incentives to *disproportionately* expand the high-cost, highly selective, elite institutions that attract few teacher candidates. We need to be more inclusive than that. Like other professions, education must rely more heavily on the *less* selective institutions to build the bulk of its workforce, incorporating the growing first-generation college-going populations. If we intend to overcome the teacher shortage and produce the education workforce that the nation needs, preparation must be accessible and affordable. AACTE maintains that the disproportion should go in the *opposite* direction: to bolster the quality of the more numerous, less selective institutions that attract the vast majority of the nation's teacher candidates.

A steady support stream is needed to continue and expand the transformation now occurring in many education schools across the country. Unfortunately, the investment of the federal government in reforming teacher education has steadily and significantly declined. The major federal program of support for teacher preparation, Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants provided by Title II of the Higher Education Act, was authorized at \$300 million but has never been funded at higher than \$90 million and is now dwindling to less than \$60 million. President Bush has sought to eliminate the funding altogether for the last two years. The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee recently cut the modest federal investment in teacher education reform by \$2.9 million.

Funds are needed to support a coordinated set of teacher education improvement measures. Some of the most critical needs are support for building professional consensus around standards, curriculum, assessment, accountability, and who belongs in the profession; revamping institutional preparation programs; expanding state longitudinal education data systems; developing finance models that increase, rather than reduce, institutions' support for their revenue-generating teacher preparation programs; building stronger university-school partnerships; and developing extended clinical practice programs such as PDSs.

We call on Dr. Levine to help craft solutions to the many problems he has identified. He could help muster resources to address the compelling need to improve professional deployment, build a strong professional consensus around standards and accountability, and strengthen existing quality control and accountability. We hope to collaborate with Dr. Levine from his new leadership position at the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation in implementing such solutions. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

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AACTE: Serving Learners

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) is a national voluntary association of higher education institutions and other organizations and is dedicated to ensuring the highest quality preparation and continuing professional development for teachers and school leaders in order to enhance PK-12 student learning. The almost 800 institutions holding AACTE membership include private, state, and municipal colleges and universities large and small located in every state, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam. In addition, AACTE has a growing number of affiliate members, including state departments of education, community colleges, educational laboratories and centers, and foreign institutions and organizations. Collectively, the AACTE membership prepares more than two-thirds of the new teachers entering schools each year in the United States.

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