

To Create 21st Century Schools, We Need a 21st Century Education Workforce

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Approximately 1.45 million of today's teachers are Baby Boomers ("Boomers") between 45 and 63 years old.¹ Approximately 800,000 of these seasoned veterans, or 25 percent of the nation's teachers, are less than five years from retirement. Over 300,000 Boomers have already left the workforce since 2004. As the nation takes on the challenge of educating the largest generation of students in history, it is on the verge of losing hundreds of thousands of its most accomplished educators.

The children of the Boomers, the Millennial Generation, are attracted to the education profession in sufficient numbers to replace the Boomers. But in today's schools, they find themselves with one foot in the future and the other in the past. Given a choice between a workplace and staffing design leftover from the last century or one that reflects the 21st century, they are increasingly voting with their feet. Beginning teacher attrition has been steadily increasing for more than a decade.

As a result, the industrial-age teaching career is collapsing at both ends. It is an illusion to think that the nation can recruit its way out of this problem,

¹ Carroll, T. G. and Foster, E. *Learning Teams: Creating What's Next*, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, Washington DC, April 2009 [www.nctaf.org]

using yesterday's strategies to meet today's challenges. To create a 21st century education system, a 21st century education workforce is needed.

Today's teachers (young and old) value their profession and are eager to make a difference in the lives of their students. But the reality is that teaching, while a life-changing career, may not be a career for life anymore. Millennials will have a minimum of six to eight jobs throughout their work life. For teaching to remain relevant and engaging, the work that teachers do must continue to evolve, offering new roles and opportunities for growth. Preparing this generation of educators means empowering them to engage in the exciting challenge of creating and shaping 21st century schools that look and function like the places where today's youth will live and work.

To meet this challenge, educational leaders need to move beyond tinkering with outdated teacher preparation policies and practices. Traditional teacher preparation was not designed to develop 21st century educators. Stand-and-deliver text-based instruction by solo teachers in self-contained classrooms was never educationally sound, is no longer demographically viable, and is not economically sustainable. It will not take teachers and students where they need to go in the 21st century.

One way to develop a 21st century education workforce is to create a new generation of Web-based teaching residences, in which potential educators build their professional knowledge and skills in a collaborative learning culture that looks like the knowledge-based organizations in which their students will ultimately work. If educators are to participate effectively in a broadband open learning economy, these Web-based teaching residencies must become hubs and nodes in a networked learning community.

Using technology to support continuous learning is natural for today's young teachers. They grew up in a digital world and are the most connected generation yet. Computers, the Internet, cell phones, and a wide array of interactive social networking tools are ubiquitous in their daily lives, and they are in constant communication with their peers, engaging in continuous learning and sustained collaboration to solve problems.

Web-based teaching residencies will use a blend of online and face-to-face collaboration to improve educator preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development. They will enable teams of teacher candidates and practicing teachers to reflect on effective teaching practices and strategies in varied educational settings, receive timely feedback from faculty and colleagues to enhance their performance at each stage of their careers, collaborate on improving practice, and draw upon appropriate, just-in-time professional support. They will bring together the wisdom of veteran teachers with the new ideas and enthusiasm of novice teachers.

Web-based teaching residencies will foster a professional learning community that gives teacher candidates and novice educators the real-time support of an interactive network, composed of their preparation faculty, their peers and colleagues, and accomplished teachers who are only a click away when help is needed with classroom management or a curriculum design problem. This professional learning community, which can be customized to each novice teacher's needs, is similar to other smart social networks, such as Facebook and MySpace, that young teachers see as a natural way to stay connected to the important people in their lives.

Organizationally, in contrast to the typical induction program that seeks to bridge two separate entities—campus-based teacher preparation and stand-

alone teaching in isolated classrooms – web-based teaching residencies forge a continuous, two-way link between preparation and the beginning teaching experience, within the context of the specific schools and districts in which novice teachers will serve.

Learning never ends. Web-based teaching residencies will make it possible to create and support a 21st century education workforce in schools that meet the promise of learning for all.

Key Questions

1. Who are today's teaching candidates? What are their teaching expectations?
2. What skills do we most need in school teaching teams and how can we utilize the human resources available throughout the workforce to support education?
3. Are teaching preparation programs making adjustments to account for the life experience of second-career entrants and retirees from a range of fields who want to contribute to education? What preparation programs should be developed to support new roles and school staffing designs that make it possible for Boomers and others to take on roles in teacher-learning teams?
4. How can educator retirement and pension programs be adjusted to support the continuing involvement of star educators in school learning teams, perhaps in flexible, part-time roles?
5. How can technology help create communities that bring educators together and address their learning and support needs and enable them to collaborate at every stage of learning, including preservice, student teaching, residencies, early teaching, and ongoing teacher development?
6. How can technology enable educators to not only do things better, but do great things never dreamed of before?