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## **First Person**

### **Great Teachers on the Fast Track**

By Susan Colby & Tia Martinez

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## Great Teachers on the Fast Track

To save the nation, the United States needs alternative teacher training **BY SUSAN COLBY & TIA MARTINEZ**

A NATION'S ECONOMIC GROWTH is directly linked to its people's educational attainment, relate Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz in their recent book, *The Race Between Education and Technology*. Yet since 1970, the United States has put fewer and fewer teenagers through secondary school. As a result, the country is quickly losing its competitive edge.

To reform education, we know that we must get great teaching and great learning in every classroom. But to do this, Americans must first reject an endemic and persistent myth: Traditionally certified teachers are the most effective educators. This is especially critical because over the next five to seven years, fully half of current teachers are predicted to retire. The nation faces the challenge of recruiting millions of talented new people to fill these empty slots, with many openings in low-income areas where kids have been under-taught for years. Traditional certification—by which the vast majority of teachers undertake lengthy and costly studies at university-based teacher programs, followed by state licensing exams—is simply not the best way to get there.

Thomas Kane, Jonah Rockoff, and Douglas Staiger are among a number of researchers to make this point. Their recent work, published in *Education Next*, followed the performance of elementary school teachers in New York City between 1998 and 2005. They found that students taught by traditionally certified teachers fared no better in math than did students taught by alternatively certified or even uncertified teachers. And in reading, traditionally certified teachers' students performed only slightly better than alternatively certified teachers' students.

How can we raise quality and lower barriers to entry for promising teachers? The answer is to develop alternative pathways into the profession. One way to fast-track talent is to allow novice teachers to earn full-time salaries while completing their certifications, as does the Boston Teacher Residency (BTR). BTR gives teaching candidates 13 months of on-the-job training in Boston's public schools, as well as mentoring. Since 2004, more than 200 BTR graduates have earned their teaching licenses, as well as their master's degrees in education from the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Another option is to break universities' monopoly on teacher preparation, as High Tech High (HTH) is doing. Started in San Diego in 2000, HTH is a network of charter schools that train students for the technological age. To combat a shortage of

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math, science, and engineering teachers, HTH applied to the state of California and eventually won licensing as a graduate school of education. Now the program can offer its own master's degrees. HTH teacher interns must have a relevant bachelor's degree and competence in their subject matter. During their first two years on the job, interns complete additional coursework at the high school to earn their California teaching credential. HTH expects to credential about 30 teachers by 2010.

Attracting and developing superior teachers also requires rigorous evaluation once they enter the classroom. The best evaluation systems focus on student learning and teachers' professional development, rather than on censuring or tenuring teachers. School districts in Houston, Tennessee, and Toledo, Ohio, are leading the way, evaluating teachers according to their students' test scores and classroom observations of their teaching.

The fate of our nation is in the hands of our teachers. As baby boomers age and half the current teaching force retires, Americans will feel the pinch of too few teachers even more. But there is a solution: programs that efficiently and effectively identify and train teachers. These programs give future teachers the experience they need without sacrificing quality in the classroom. ■