

## Fix the broken supply chain

After a decade of education reform – and despite the remarkable work of many – we still have a long way to go. We have effectively dealt with rigorous standards, supports, and accountability for students. We have made progress to insure an adequate foundation budget for each school district. These two legs of the education reform stool were absolutely necessary. But we have not yet done the work of instituting rigorous standards, supports, and accountability for teachers and administrators – the missing leg of the stool.

Skillful teaching – and the leadership that supports it – is the pre-eminent variable for realizing gains in student achievement. In only three years, children who start equal in ability and achievement wind up fifty percentile points apart depending on whether they have an excellent or poor teacher. It dwarfs all other variables. But skillful teaching and leadership require proficiency with the knowledge base of professional practice – a knowledge base far more complex than we have allowed. To gain proficiency takes years of practice for those who have access to the knowledge base, and never happens for those who don't.

To make skillful teaching and leadership a pervasive reality in all our public schools, we need to comprehensively address a central problem in education: The supply chain for the teacher and leader workforce is severely dysfunctional. It has ten subsystems that are extremely disconnected from one another. Large chunks of the knowledge base for professional practice are missing from each of the ten subsystems. To make matters worse, no one is accountable - not school districts, not colleges, not state regulatory agencies - for seeing it shows up in these subsystems, much less in an integrated way.

Our next step in education reform must be to get the subsystems to operate as a seamless, coherent SYSTEM - an integrated whole grounded in the knowledge base for professional practice. The only way to strengthen our teacher and leader workforce across the board is to align these ten subsystems: preparation, licensure, recruitment and hiring, comprehensive induction, supervision and evaluation, professional development, re-licensure, teacher advancement, school structure, and professional learning and culture.

Schools cannot be fixed by working exclusively on testing, school structure, school governance, school accountability, school privatization, or school size. It's not even primarily a matter of school funding. We have already seen all these paths pursued for decades with scant results. It's time to put aside piecemeal solutions and get focused on the real systemic work at hand – otherwise, this personnel problem will continue to put a limit on all other improvement efforts.

Legions of individual educators manage to function personally at a high professional level anyway despite the primitive personnel system in which they exist. But there are also legions of educators who don't, and it's not their fault. To be sure, the personnel system is not the only focus worth addressing, but it needs to be the central one. If we want to finish the work of education reform, we must put this at the top of our list: **FIX THE SYSTEM!**