

- [home](#)
- [unabridged](#)
- [past issues](#)
- [search](#)
- [about](#)
- [single issues](#)
- [subscriptions](#)

Supplemental Services

Siobhan Gorman's "[Selling Supplemental Services](#)" (*Feature*, Fall 2004) was informative and engaging, but, like much of the discussion on the subject, it furthers a theme that school districts are the "bad guys." I would like to share a different perspective on the role and responsibilities of school districts in implementing No Child Left Behind.

NCLB is, without question, the most comprehensive and complex piece of legislation concerning education in the history of our country. But it had an implementation date of six months after it was signed (January 2002). This impossibly short timeline created tension between school districts and tutorial providers right from the start. The federal government did not have all the guidelines for implementation ready in July of 2002, nor did states even have their lists of state-approved providers ready by that date. This bumpy start led some providers to suspect that school districts were avoiding implementation so they could use the set-aside Title I dollars for other purposes.

The Supplemental Educational Services section of NCLB was a compromise agreed to by Congress when the voucher plan failed. It almost appears as though some in what Gorman calls "the popular crowd" believe if they can convince all the right people that school districts are bullies, are weighed down by conflicts of interest, and have no incentives to implement the program, school districts will be excluded as approved providers. Supplemental Educational Services is an attempt to privatize public education by using public funds for private vendors.

No Child Left Behind is the right thing to do. It may have its flaws and need some modifications, but it is seeking to put the resources in the right places. I believe in the Supplemental Educational Services program, and I welcome outside vendor partners. However, we all should be represented at the table when critical issues or concerns are discussed, not just the popular crowd.

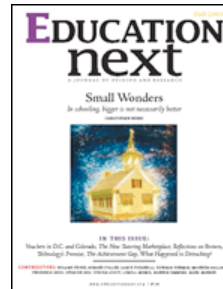
John Liechty
Associate Superintendent
Extended Day Programs
Los Angeles Unified School District

Keeping Good Teachers

If more governors had exhibited Mark Warner's excellent grasp for what it would take to improve the teaching profession, terms such as "Highly Qualified Teachers" and "High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation" might not have entered our lexicon ("[Netting an Elusive Breed](#)," *Feature*, Fall 2004). Not only does the Virginia governor understand what needs to be done, but he also shows, with program initiatives, what's possible.

One key point of Warner's template, however, needs a word of caution. Warner proposes that states need to champion more high-quality mentoring programs to reduce teacher attrition. But like many sweeping fixes to education woes, such mentoring programs can bear little resemblance to what inspired them. Our high-poverty schools, for instance, may provide the rhetorical urgency to stop these schools from bleeding new teachers every year, but the remedies tend to be spread too thin across too many schools.

The Public Education Network surveyed teachers in West Virginia who were required by their states to get a visit from a mentor every week. The survey revealed that many of them were lucky to see their mentors once or twice a semester. Not the state's fault? Absolutely not, but mentoring has always had



severe shortcomings of this nature. Caveat emptor.

Mentoring also is most likely to be mishandled and work least effectively in the most dysfunctional schools, the schools that have the hardest time holding on to new teachers. There are good reasons why teachers leave these schools in droves, and it usually has more to do with their peers and the principal than with the kids they teach. It may well be that the schools that Governor Warner wants to help most will solve their dysfunction only with significant and simultaneous infusions of *new* staff as well as the kinds of turnaround principals that Warner so aptly observes are needed.

If states didn't insist on helping all schools equally, they could afford the Cadillac versions that high-poverty dysfunctional schools need.

Kate Walsh
President
National Council on Teacher Quality

Governor Warner is to be applauded for recognizing that *retention* of teachers is the real crisis in school staffing. The conventional wisdom is that we can't find enough teachers to do the job—but the truth is that we can't keep them. A third of all new teachers leave the classroom after three years, and close to half leave after five years. More than a quarter of a million teachers stop teaching every year.

The student achievement gap won't be closed until we close the teaching quality gap, and to do that every school must attract and retain highly qualified teachers. High attrition rates undermine the teaching continuity, coherence, and community that are so essential to good schools. Typically, urban and rural schools serving poor and minority students have the highest turnover rates, and as a result they have the highest percentages of first-year teachers, the highest percentages of teachers with fewer than five years of teaching experience, the lowest paid teachers, and the lowest percentages of accomplished teachers. These conditions create a vicious cycle in high-need schools that undercuts the ability of those schools to attract and retain well-qualified teachers.

As a nation we have attempted to improve teaching quality by increasing the supply of teachers for hard-to-staff schools. However, the heavy emphasis on keeping these schools supplied with teachers is focusing the energy for improvement on recruitment rather than on the need to change the conditions that make these schools so hard to staff in the first place. This strategy has protected the status quo in dysfunctional schools.

As a former business executive, Governor Warner understands that when an organization is losing valuable human resources it is because someone else is offering them better conditions and more rewarding career opportunities. Three components of his program are particularly significant.

First, he begins in the right place: rewarding teachers for performance and modifying the current teaching incentive structure to pay teachers more for taking on the most challenging assignments.

Second, Governor Warner's mentoring initiative is noteworthy for requiring districts to show that their mentoring programs are improving retention. It is unacceptable to hold students accountable for meeting standards that their schools are not staffed to help them meet. It is time to hold school leaders accountable for reducing the turnover and attrition that undermine teaching quality in high-need schools.

Third, the governor's initiative also calls for changing state and district incentive structures that drain quality teachers and resources from the schools that need them the most. It is time to establish formulas to ensure adequate funding that are based on per-pupil *needs* in lieu of per-pupil *averages*. School financing policies should be driven by an analysis of what it costs to raise the bar and close the gap in student achievement, bringing teaching and learning opportunities in all schools up to a high standard.

Tom Carroll
President

Multiple Intelligences

It is a shame that Daniel T. Willingham is unable to link empathy and imagination with his commitment to the science of psychometrics in his stinging critique of multiple intelligences theory ("[Reframing the Mind](#)," *Check The Facts*, Summer 2004).

If he could, then he might be able to see a completely different scenario when the child comes home from school enthusiastically explaining how he finally learned all of the vowel letters by forming their shapes with twigs he gathered on one of his many rambles in his backyard woods. I suspect that a parent's mind would not be as closed as Mr. Willingham's as he senses his child's newfound joy in learning because he is respected for his unique intellectual gifts and not "left behind" like he was by all the other teachers whose primary focus was the test scores and not the child.

I share Mr. Willingham's concern that multiple intelligences (MI) theory be tested for its scientific validity. I have spent the past 17 years investigating the validity and reliability of an MI assessment that provides both quantitative and qualitative data. My recent work includes a 12-nation cross-cultural study and factor analyses studies of 20,000 North American adults and teenagers. These extensive and rigorous analyses support the essential structure of MI theory.

It is telling that Willingham does not argue against the existence of human abilities outside the academic domains, such as kinesthetic skill, musical talent, and social insight. The question is whether we dare to call them "intelligences." If we do, then it means that they should be included in the hallowed realm of the school curriculum and not slighted as "mere" talents or aptitudes to be exercised only during extracurricular activities.

Howard Gardner's definition goes beyond the convergent problem-solving abilities associated with IQ to include "the fashioning of products" and providing of services that are valued within a community. This stretching of the cognitive envelope means that we must value creative thinking and practical problem solving and interpersonal skill as on par with math and reading.

Branton Shearer
*Chair, Multiple Intelligence Special
Interest Group, American Educational Research Association*

Daniel Willingham replies:

Shearer confuses several issues. First, Gardner proposed Multiple Intelligences (MI) as a theory of mind, not as a method to instill joy of learning. I therefore evaluated it as a theory of mind. Second, as a theory of mind, its *essential* structure has never been in question because, as noted in my article, Gardner's theory included factors of human ability similar to those of many theories that preceded his. What was new in Gardner's theory was (1) his proposal of how those abilities are related; (2) his criteria for identifying intelligences; and (3) his labeling as *intelligences* what others have called *abilities*. I argued that his characterization of the relationships among abilities is known to be incorrect and that the criteria are flawed. Third, I tried to shed light on why "daring" to relabel abilities as intelligences has led to applications Gardner did not intend, one of which Shearer advocates. Shearer asserts that status as an intelligence "means [it] should be included in the hallowed realm of the school curriculum." Gardner disagrees, arguing that matters of curriculum are independent of the structure of intelligence.

Small Schools

The findings in Christopher Berry's "[School Inflation](#)" (*Research*, Fall 2004) add to an impressive mound of evidence documenting the advantages of

small schools.

Early-20th-century advocates of large and consolidated schools, such as James Conant and Ellwood Cubberley, never dreamed that someday three out of five high-school students would attend schools comprising more than 1,000 students, with some schools having over 4,000 students. Conant's idea of a large school was 400 students, and the schools Cubberley wanted to consolidate were mostly rural one-room schoolhouses with an average size of well under 100 students.

Recent studies have found that students in schools with about 100 students per grade generally score higher on tests, pass more courses, and are more likely to stay in school, graduate, and go on to college. Hundreds of these high-quality small schools already exist around the country, with 250 more scheduled to open in the fall of 2004. Many of these schools are graduating at least 80 percent of their students and sending them off to college, even while facing significant challenges, such as serving high levels of low-income, minority, and special-needs students.

It is important to remember that small size is not a solution in and of itself. But it does create an environment that fosters success. Our own evaluation studies have shown that in small schools students say their teachers know them better, care about them more, and have higher expectations of them. As a result, students are challenged and focus on achieving. Additionally, teachers are better able to collaborate and develop a common vision.

While the achievement gap between white students and their low-income, minority counterparts on tests has received a great deal of attention, the gap in high-school graduation rates is even more critical. Nearly half of our nation's African-American and Hispanic students drop out of high school, and fewer than a fifth graduate ready for college. This graduation gap is the most important economic, civic, and social problem of our time. As research points out, small schools improve life outcomes by helping more students graduate, thus providing them with the opportunities to attend college, find meaningful employment, and become productive citizens.

Small schools can also help boost graduation rates among these underserved students by providing them with a new version of the three Rs—rigorous academic coursework, meaningful relationships with instructors who can help them meet high standards, and relevant learning opportunities through internships, community partnerships, and real-world tasks.

To help more students attend these more effective schools, our foundation is investing in community-based efforts to create new high-quality small schools and smaller learning communities within larger schools. But our goal is not to create more small schools; it is to help more low-income and minority students graduate ready for college, work, and citizenship.

Tom Vander Ark
Executive Director
Education
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation