



MATT MILLER’S PLAN TO... MAKE TEACHING THE MOST ATTRACTIVE PROFESSION IN AMERICA

“In the highest-performing school systems in the world – which are now in countries like Finland, Singapore and South Korea -- the caliber of person recruited to the teaching profession is considered a critical national priority. That’s not how we view teaching in America -- and it’s time we made a national commitment to change that. My plan to help local districts raise starting teacher salaries to \$65,000 and top salaries toward \$150,000 is the way to start.”

-Matt Miller

The problem

Everyone knows education is the key to a strong democracy, economic competitiveness and a world-class standard of living. What everyone doesn’t know is that in recent decades America has forfeited its tradition of global leadership in educational attainment in ways that will assure our children’s living standards decline, if we don’t get serious about altering our current course, and fast. Despite years of hand-wringing, our rapidly declining standing in postsecondary attainment and our mediocre-or-worse standing in secondary achievement hasn’t sunk into our national consciousness and created the sense of urgency the situation demands.

Today, far too many U.S. students are no longer competitive with students across the developed world. In the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings for 2012, the United States was 35th in math—indistinguishable from the Slovak Republic and Lithuania. In terms of “advanced” performance on math, 16 countries produced twice as many high-achievers per capita than the United States did. While some young Americans—most of them white and affluent—are getting a truly world-class education, the vast bulk of middle-class students are performing at levels comparable to students in Estonia, Latvia and Bulgaria in math. Indeed, in mathematics, only one in four of America’s 52 million K-12 students is performing on par today with the average student in the highest-performing school systems in the world—which are now in Singapore, Hong Kong, Finland, Taiwan and South Korea. If we accept this level of performance, we will find our economy on a low-growth path, because over the past

half-century, the economies of countries with higher math and science skills have grown faster than those with lower-skilled populations. We will also erode our country's ability to deliver on its promise of equal opportunity.

Meanwhile, 10 million students in America's poorest neighborhoods are having their lives unjustly and irredeemably blighted by a system that's rigged to consign them to the weakest teachers, the most run-down facilities and academic expectations considerably lower than what we expect of other students.

It's not as if we weren't warned. In 1983, "A Nation At Risk" famously spoke of the "rising tide of mediocrity" that threatened our schools. Nearly thirty years later, the tide has come in and we're drowning. Since that landmark report, we've had five "education presidents" and dozens of "education governors" who have championed higher standards, innovative schools, better teaching, rigorous curriculums, tougher testing, and more. And, to be sure, there have been important pockets of progress. Reading and math performance levels in our elementary schools, for example, have improved in recent years, as has mathematics performance in our middle schools. But any honest assessment must acknowledge that our incremental steps haven't nearly kept pace with the dramatic improvement other nations have made in their school systems. In California, results have been even more disappointing.

What's more, for all the passion and energy devoted to school improvement by countless reformers in recent years, a central dimension of our challenge has been largely ignored. It's the matter of who teaches. As one South Korean education official wisely puts it, "the quality of a school system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers."

Which raises the question: Why don't more of our smartest, most accomplished college graduates want to become teachers?

Teachers matter most

People trying to improve education in the US talk a lot about boosting "teacher effectiveness." That's vital. But nearly all such efforts focus on the teachers who are already in the classroom, instead of seeking to change the caliber of the people who enter teaching in the first place.

Three of the top-performing school systems in the world -- those in Finland, Singapore and South Korea -- take a different approach, recruiting 100 percent of their teachers from the top third of their high school and college students. Simply put, they don't take middling students and make them teachers. They tap their best people for the job.

Of course, academic achievement isn't the whole story in these countries. They screen would-be teachers for other important qualities, and they invest heavily in training teachers and in retaining them for their entire careers. But scholastic prowess comes first: You don't get through the classroom door in Finland, Singapore or South Korea without

having distinguished yourself academically. In the United States, by contrast, only 23 percent of new teachers scored among the top third of SAT and ACT test-takers back in high school. In high-poverty schools, that figure is just 14 percent. (Some more recent data suggest that 30 percent of entering US teachers may now come from the top third – a modest improvement, but a far cry from the 100 percent seen in Finland, Singapore and South Korea).

This shouldn't come as news. The late Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers from 1997 to 2004, was open about the problem as far back as 2003. "You have in the schools right now, among the teachers who are going to be retiring, very smart people," she told me in an interview for my book *The 2% Solution*. "We're not getting in now the same kinds of people. It's disastrous. We've been saying for years now that we're attracting from the bottom third."

Feldman was right to point out that we are entering a period of enormous turnover in our classrooms: With about half of America's 3.5 million teachers eligible to retire in the next decade, the question of who should teach looms especially large.

So why do top U.S. college students have so little interest in teaching careers compared with their counterparts in the world's best-performing nations?

Partly, it's because we're stuck in a time warp. Up through the mid-1970s, the academic quality of the teacher corps in the United States was effectively subsidized by discrimination: Talented women and members of minorities became teachers at high rates in large part because they didn't have many opportunities outside the classroom.

When that changed, teaching lost its longtime labor supply and suddenly had to compete with more lucrative professions, even as educators' salaries were falling behind. In New York City in 1970, for example, a starting lawyer at a prestigious firm earned about \$2,000 per year more than a starting public school teacher. Today, that starting New York lawyer makes \$160,000, including salary and bonus, while a new teacher across town earns \$45,000. (In Los Angeles, top starting lawyers today also make around \$160,000, while a new teacher earns \$45,000 as well. The maximum salary in LA for most teachers is \$80,000 or so – which you can earn only after decades on the job, and after picking up your doctorate.) Nationally, teachers' starting salaries average \$36,000 today, rising to an average career maximum of around \$65,000.

But it's not just pay that's a problem. A teaching career doesn't offer our nation's top college graduates opportunities for continued learning or the prestige of other professions. Moreover, our most needy schools mostly fail to offer the working conditions or the leadership needed to retain top talent once it has been recruited.

Our approach to teacher recruitment and development doesn't hold a candle to the methods used in Singapore, Finland and South Korea, where attracting high-quality people to the profession is considered a national priority. The good news, based on

research I helped lead for McKinsey & Company in 2010, is that the United States could dramatically increase the number of top students who choose teaching by adopting some of these countries' practices.

How do they do it? For starters, these countries make teacher training programs highly selective, accepting no more than one out of every seven or eight applicants. Their governments also limit the number of training positions to match the expected demand for educators, so that those admitted are assured jobs. American teachers, by contrast, mostly enter the profession through programs that are not selective at all. As a result, more than half of newly certified teachers in the United States -- about 100,000 each year -- do not take jobs in the classroom.

Next, Singapore and Finland fully fund teacher education and pay students salaries or stipends. In the United States, meanwhile, students must often go into debt to attend education schools. In addition, the quality of teacher training in top-performing nations is first-rate. Companies such as Nokia, for example, covet teachers who leave the classroom in Finland, because graduates of teacher training there are known to be exceptional talents.

These countries also foster a professional working environment. Finland, for example, grants teachers the kind of autonomy typically enjoyed by doctors in this country: They have wide latitude over how they teach, they share responsibility for their schools' operating budgets, and they belong to a culture that emphasizes the need to continually update one's skills.

In the United States, by contrast, teaching is often seen as an "unprofessional" career track, even by teachers. For example, only 3 percent of current U.S. teachers from the top third of their college class think that people who do well in teaching can advance professionally.

Crucially, these other countries provide competitive compensation. Of the three, South Korea puts the greatest emphasis on salary, with starting pay equivalent to about \$55,000 and top salaries reaching \$155,000. According to Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University, these earnings place South Korea's teachers somewhere between its engineers and its doctors. Singapore, in addition to competitive pay, offers retention bonuses of \$10,000 to \$36,000 every three to five years.

To top it all off, these nations accord enormous cultural respect to teaching and teachers. Leaders in the United States routinely offer rhetorical tributes to teaching, but the profession here enjoys nothing like the exalted status it holds in these three countries.

The bottom line? We're simply not serious as a nation when it comes to recruiting, training and retaining top talent to teaching. In fact, you can make a strong case that we have it totally backward. We allow many mediocre students to enter the profession, fail to train them well, and then spend enormous amounts of time and energy

in local districts trying to “weed out” low performers – a dynamic that’s bound to arouse the protective reflexes of teachers unions. By contrast, when you talk to the Ministries of Education in places like Finland and Singapore about how they deal with low performing teachers, they scratch their heads. Those nations take such care up front to identify great people and train them to succeed in the classroom that “low performance” isn’t really an issue.

Put another way, the world’s best school systems have an actual human capital *strategy*. The U.S. doesn’t. Which approach seems the better way to treat a profession critical to a nation’s economic and civic success?

The Miller Plan

I’m passionate about improving public schools. I serve on the board of directors of the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, a group of 17 urban public schools that lead California in academic improvement. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan appointed me to his Equity and Excellence Commission; our report last year aimed to set a more ambitious agenda for the nation in the years ahead.

I believe we have an opportunity to fundamentally elevate the status of the teaching profession in the next decade – an opportunity presented by the looming retirement of so many teachers. ***Our goal should be to make teaching the most exciting profession in America for talented young people.*** Teaching should be a career in which people eager to exercise their full capacity and make a difference in countless lives can also make a good living in a professional environment that fosters growth. Google and Facebook know how to make engineering positions attractive; if other countries can do the same with teaching, so can we. Here’s where I would start:

1. Create big new federal incentives for local communities to attract and retain top talent to teaching. Research I led several years ago showed that higher salaries are the most powerful lever for attracting and retaining the top graduates who don’t even consider teaching as a career today. For example, we found that in one scenario involving high-poverty schools serving about 8 million children nationally, increasing starting teacher salaries from roughly \$40,000 to \$65,000 and maximum salaries from \$80,000 today toward \$150,000 would *increase the percentage of new teachers drawn from the top third of their class from 14 percent to 68 percent.* This approach would cost something like \$30 billion a year at current student/teacher ratios, or about 5 percent of national K-12 spending. We could fund this investment by reallocating a portion of non-classroom expenditures (where U.S. spending is far above international norms), adjusting class size at the margin, or both.

A new federal fund on this scale should be earmarked to support integrated district strategies to attract and retain top third talent to the classroom. Competitive applications (part of a “Race to the Top Third,” so to speak) might include several features. Priority might be given to high needs districts, both because of the urgency of closing the achievement gap, and because such districts typically have such high turnover

that a top talent strategy could fundamentally improve the composition of their teacher corps over five to seven years. A voluntary “opt-in” component to new higher pay scales might be encouraged, with all new teachers entering on the new regime, along with existing teachers who choose to shift to this new system, which might pair higher pay with more rigorous evaluation, and perhaps modification to traditional tenure protections. Special incentives for math and science graduates might be encouraged. Efforts to boost working conditions would be undertaken. A grassroots marketing campaign might enhance the cachet of becoming part of a major community initiative.

The bottom line? If a young couple starting out knows that if they become teachers and do well they can together earn \$200,000 or even \$250,000 in a reasonable time frame, that’s not just two more teachers – it’s two less lawyers (so there’s an environmental benefit to boot...).

2. Develop a national teaching talent plan. Require the Secretary of Education, under the aegis of the National Economic Council, to develop a National Teaching Talent Plan outlining changes in how we recruit, prepare, retain, and reward teachers, based on global best practice. The task force developing the plan would include state and federal officials, as well as teachers’ representatives, human resource management experts, business leaders, educators, and other relevant stakeholders. The public hearings this task force would hold around the country to solicit public input would broaden stakeholder involvement and elevate the issue’s prominence in the press. Its report would help shape a new era of policy and practice on teacher recruitment and retention equal to the challenges facing 21st century schools.

3. Create four regional, highly selective “West Point”-style teacher and principal training academies which students would attend free of charge. The federal government should fund new models of prestigious training institutes on a par with the world’s finest. We should follow the practice of top performing nations by assuring that those selected for the profession would incur no expense in their training.

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There’s obviously a broader agenda when it comes to school improvement in Los Angeles and the country, but the critical thing missing from the debate today is a strategy to elevate the teaching profession. Today the gap in our educational achievement versus higher-performing countries imposes the equivalent of a permanent national recession on the US much larger than the one we went through after the financial crisis. If we’re serious about the moral and economic cost of leaving millions of Americans unable to fulfill their human potential, then elevating the teaching profession has to become one of our highest national priorities.

Matt’s challenge to conventional Republican thinking	Matt’s challenge to conventional Democratic thinking
The quality of America’s teacher corps isn’t just a state or local issue – in a global economy, our failure to supply top talent for schools imposes huge national costs, and demands national attention. It also takes money to solve.	We need to aim much higher in terms of starting salary and salary trajectory to attract and retain the talent our schools need. Democrats should also be willing to challenge traditional union practices on tenure and dismissal to win support for major new national investments that give the profession the stature it deserves – a goal that teacher unions believe in and can embrace.

What they’re saying about Matt Miller’s ideas

“Matt Miller has put his finger on an issue that is critical to America’s future – elevating and improving our teacher force. In an age of global competition, Matt’s call for a national strategy to help accomplish this is exactly the kind of leadership we need.”

Joel Klein, former chancellor, New York City schools

“Matt Miller understands that the strongest possible public schools are crucial to our nation's economic health. Those of us who’ve followed Matt's work for years know he’ll be a uniquely effective voice in Washington on these issues from day one.”

Governor Jack Markell of Delaware – former head of the National Governor’s Association, winner of first federal grants under the “Race to the Top” education reform

“Matt Miller is the new voice that the Democratic Party urgently needs to make the case for real progress in the twenty-first century.”

Bruce Ackerman, Sterling Professor of Law and Political Science, Yale University

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PAID FOR BY MATT MILLER FOR CONGRESS 2014