

Addressing America's Current and Future Educational Challenges: The Renaissance Group President's Perspective

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Experience informs us that, after parents and guardians, educators have the greatest level of influence on children of all ages. These are the educators we prepare on our university campuses every semester, year after year, for whom the act of teaching is much more than a monthly paycheck. For them, teaching is rather a very special calling. Higher education institutions began the noble and much respected work of preparing professional educators in the well-known Normal Schools, which have expanded their offerings and programs over the years to form the many excellent public colleges and universities of today.

The United States of America has been preparing these dedicated professionals for generations, and for a significant number of years other nations have looked to America for mentoring, guidance, and leadership. Countries have closely examined and imitated our programs, and we have served as a role model for the rest of the world. Today, if student test scores are any indication, the nations we helped build, particularly during the decades after WW II, have surpassed their role model.

Parents, whose children are taught by the teachers and administrators our universities prepare, typically praise their local schools, teachers, administrators and support personnel. However, when we move beyond these familial educational settings, the general level of criticism directed toward our public schools and schools of education has never been higher. When compared to other world educational leaders, we usually rank toward the bottom relative to our students' academic preparation. The message is very clear: our public is generally not satisfied with our educators and our educator preparation institutions. The challenges we face are well defined and cannot be ignored.

Although I am pleased with the advancement of education systems in other countries, I am also convinced our future position in the world depends more than ever on the degree of knowledge and skills our citizens possess. At this critical juncture in our nation's history, as a matter of highest priority, we must strengthen and enhance our system of education, particularly programs that produce professional educators. In this regard, our colleges and universities have the critical responsibility to support and advance the preparation of educators at all levels. In so doing, the professionals we prepare can effectively guide and restore our nation's schools.

In my opinion, the best place for this “rebirth” to take place is with The Renaissance Group (TRG) member institutions. These are the colleges, universities, and the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, which for the past 23 years, have dedicated their talents and resources to address the preparation of educators as an all-campus responsibility by working in close collaboration with their K-12 partners from local school districts.

The Renaissance Group is the only national, higher education consortium where university presidents, provosts, deans of education, and deans of arts and sciences have joined forces to effectively carry out this important mission.

Education clearly holds the formula for rebuilding our nation. We cannot be distracted by criticism. We must stay the course and seriously support the recruitment and preparation of the very best educators at local, state, and national levels. We have always had the knowledge, the skills, and the experience to address this most important field. Our educator preparation programs were once praised and imitated throughout the world. We simply need to realize that potential again and to stand beside our teachers, counselors, and administrators whose teachings and leadership greatly influence and shape the lives of students in all of America’s schools.