

## **The Renaissance Group – “The Next Generation”**

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*The Renaissance Group*

The “next generation” refers to the generation after the present one. The term is also used in manufacturing, especially for hardware and software, and even Star Trek has a “next generation” of cast members. I am especially attracted to the expression, given it offers a sense of hope and encouragement; although the past and present generations of The Renaissance Group (TRG) have contributed in important ways to supporting and improving educator preparation programs throughout America, the next generation must be more creative in assembling the latest education puzzle and vehemently embrace the expressed and anticipated challenges and opportunities facing P-20 education today, employing the best possible strategies designed to support and strengthened this basic American institution. Education is power, and this fundamental, inalienable right of all Americans to have access to the powerful tool of a quality education cannot be minimized or allowed to slowly slip away. However, before characteristically defining the next generation of TRG members and offering some personal thoughts about what TRG’s next generation needs to look like and be able to do, let us quickly review the past 24 years of the life of The Renaissance Group.

The Renaissance Group, a national consortium of colleges and universities, was conceived in the year 1989, a tumultuous time of increased expectations for schools and for teacher preparation programs. The criticism directed at our higher education institutions and educator preparation programs gave energy, purpose and serious motivation to counter that criticism to the university presidents, provosts, and deans who first gathered at the University of Northern Iowa in the Spring of 1989 and to those who joined them in a series of meetings that followed. The educational leaders of the late 1980’s, representing the top leadership of the finest higher education institutions in the country, were visionary in their belief and firm in their conviction that the education of teachers must become an all-campus responsibility. The movement, as it was appropriately labeled, was established for the purpose of redirecting that criticism; with this mission came a rebirth of ideas, strategies, and initiatives genuinely developed to improve, articulate, and demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of America’s leading educator preparation institutions.

The first 24 years of The Renaissance Group witnessed a number of reactions from a dissatisfied America relative to student achievement, leading to ‘A Nation at Risk’ in 1983, a national effort designed to improve the academic performance levels of American high school students. In 2001, the ‘No Child Left Behind’ legislation focused on improving student achievement levels by raising academic standards for all P-12 students; in 2009, ‘Race to the Top’ challenged all educators to enforce rigorous standards and assessments for all students; and presently the

'Common Core State Standards' have taken center stage for the educational rebirth of America's P-20 institutions, serving as a forceful reminder that achievement standards need to be seriously addressed in all corners of the country in order to regain the prominent place in world leadership once associated with the United States of America. For years, members of The Renaissance Group, as well as colleagues from TECSCU, AASCU, and AACTE, have responded positively and constructively to these and other challenges, as leaders and authors of educational initiatives and events, by developing and sharing research-based best practices, regularly communicating with the U.S. Department of Education and elected representatives at local, state and national levels, and serving on state and national education committees. Member institutions of these organizations have been effectively preparing the majority of teachers, counselors, and administrators for America's schools since the beginning of the Twentieth Century. For a more detailed description of the contributions of The Renaissance Group, read "The Chronicles of the Renaissance Group" in the electronic journal, *Educational Renaissance* (Giovannetti, 2012). In spite of the work and efforts of the many faculty and administrators from our higher education institutions, criticism of public education and public educators in America will undoubtedly continue, as evidenced by the events referenced above, and by the newest proposed "cure-all", the GREAT Act.

Senator Michael Bennet, Democrat from Colorado, introduced senate Bill 1250 on June 22, 2011. The bill, Growing Excellent Achievement Training Academies for Teachers and Principals (the GREAT Act), died and was referred to committee; it was re-introduced as Senate Bill 1052 on May 23, 2013, again sponsored by Senator Bennet, and co-sponsored by Senators Alexander (R-TN), Mikulski (D-MD), Kirk (R-IL), Klobuchar (D-MN), and Landrieu (D-LA). Claiming support for the bill are the New Schools Venture Fund, Democrats for Education Reform, Stand For Children, Teach For America, and the National Council for Teacher Quality, just to name the leading contributors. Should our schools and colleges of education be concerned about this latest effort? Is this a movement orchestrated to remove the practice of preparing the country's educators from local colleges and universities? Should higher education institutions, public and private, be concerned? Will Teacher Prep Academies, as referenced in Senate Bill 1052, replace schools and colleges of Education?

Let us examine the content of this proposed legislation to draw our own conclusions. The GREAT Act, authorizes the Secretary of Education to award grants to states to (1) create or approve teacher or principal preparation academies and create or designate authorizers of those academies; (2) support the creation and operation of such academies; and (3) award sub-grants to nonprofit entities to establish or expand such academies, measure their effectiveness, or recruit enrollees who have demonstrated strong potential to be effective teachers or principals. Additionally, it requires each academy to enter into a charter with an authorizer that specifies the goals and outcomes expected of the academy and the obligations of the authorizer. Furthermore, it prohibits authorizers from renewing an academy's charter if it fails to produce the minimum number or percentage of effective teachers or principals specified in its charter.

The GREAT Act requires each academy to provide (1) enrollees with a significant portion of their training through clinical preparation that partners them with successful teacher or principal mentors, and (2) awards certificates of completion only to graduates who demonstrate a track record of success in preparing students for college and careers. Additional requirements mandate

(1) state grantees to recognize a certificate of completion from an academy as at least the equivalent of a master's degree in education for the purposes of teacher or principal hiring, retention, compensation, and promotion in the state, and (2) directs the Secretary of Education to enter into an interagency agreement with the Corporation for National and Community Service, under which the Corporation approves national service positions for candidates at each teacher or principal preparation academy receiving financial assistance under this Act.

In light of these latest affronts, how will the next generation of educational leaders respond? What strategies or tools will they use? Who is “the next generation?”

As Executive Director of The Renaissance Group since July 1, 2008, working with members and friends of TRG, and having evidenced educational leadership and teaching “par excellence,” I have some thoughts about the essential qualities of this next generation, particularly as the Executive Office of TRG is preparing to relocate to another member institution after eight years of residence at California State University, Fresno.

The Renaissance Group comprises institutions of mid-to-large size and comprehensive in programming and is the only national consortium of colleges and universities in which presidents, provosts, deans of education and deans of arts and sciences commit to the preparation of educators as an all-campus responsibility, addressed in collaboration with local PK-12 school districts. These institutions have sizeable teacher education programs indicating that the program serves an important segment of the institution’s mission. Furthermore, they are committed to the following additional principles and demonstrate that commitment: The member institution values and models teaching excellence. Teacher preparation is integrated across the curricula of general education, in-depth subject matter content, and professional studies in both general content and specific teaching methodologies. The education of teachers incorporates extensive and sequenced field and clinical experiences in various settings with effective supervision. The institution meets and exceeds national and state standards for the preparation of school personnel. The university assesses learner outcomes in order to monitor its program effectiveness and assure teacher quality. Pre-service teachers and faculty members reflect our pluralistic society and are committed to the education of all students in diverse schools. The continuing professional development of teachers is the shared responsibility of the individual, the university faculty, and other professional educators. The university provides learning experiences and mentoring that develop teachers who are creative and innovative leaders, and integrates technology throughout its teacher preparation program.

In order to continue and improve upon these valued, needed practices, the next generation of TRG members must continue to brave the implementation of these principles, respecting the organization’s unique structure and culture. The survival of colleges of teacher education depends on it. Tomorrow’s educators cannot be prepared by entities, such as those outlined in the GREAT Act, or by groups, which include the National Council of Teacher Quality. The divide-and-conquer strategy used by these entities is never too old or outdated; it still works exceptionally well today, as demonstrated by tactics from the above-referenced groups. For these simple, basic reasons, the united, unconditional voice of organizations like TRG, TECSCU, AASCU and AACTE has never before been more important, more meaningful, and so very much needed as it is today. The next generation of educational leaders cannot operate in

isolation. Knowing our institutions are better equipped and more capable than anyone else to prepare highly qualified teachers is no longer sufficient. We must join forces and voices and form highly visible, effective partnerships internally, externally, and with local school districts. Together we can more convincingly demonstrate how the educators we prepare are the very best qualified to teach and support all students in America's schools. There is no mystery regarding how the next generation of educators must act in order to grow the tradition of excellence promised and practiced for over 100 years in our public schools. We must demonstrate with our work and actions that we can improve student achievement, not for some students but for all students, through positive, proactive actions, not reactions or defensive arguments. Our energy must be spent on cultivating measurable evidence that illustrates the effectiveness of our educator preparation practices. By doing so, our century-old traditions of educational excellence will be renewed, respected, and reborn. This is The Renaissance Group, the Next Generation, ready to turn the pages of the next chapter, operable from anywhere in the United States of America, moving education forward, and serving generations to come.