

COMMENTARY

A Grand Bargain

Using 'Race to the Top' Money to Realign the System

By Theodore Hershberg & Claire Robertson-Kraft

Education policymakers and practitioners have long searched for a fair system that will help teachers and administrators reach higher levels of performance, identify and reward good practice, and, most importantly, accelerate student achievement. The new Race to the Top grants being made available to states may finally provide the necessary resources to create this new and better school system. In fact, the convergence of necessity, knowledge, resources, and political will taking place now could sweep fundamental reform into American public education.

After two decades of research using value-added methodologies to track the annual progress of individual students, we now know empirically that teachers are the single most important factor affecting academic growth. Yet, despite teachers' importance, recent studies have demonstrated that our evaluation and compensation systems are not designed to effectively identify, reward, or develop high-quality instruction.

The U.S. Department of Education's proposed guidelines for awarding grants from its Race to the Top Fund have made clear that these systems need to change. In [recent remarks](#), President Barack Obama has let policymakers know that the \$4 billion in Race to the Top money will go only "to states that use data effectively to reward effective teachers, to support teachers who are struggling, and when necessary, to replace teachers who aren't up to the job."

A Democratic president, in this Nixon-goes-to-China moment, has challenged two of the pillars on which the educational status quo rests: the single-salary schedule, driven largely by longevity, and a job-security system that rewards failure and protects a person from its consequences.

The message is clear. States will have to determine an approach for measuring student growth, employ this measure as part of a rigorous process for differentiating teacher effectiveness, and use the data to make decisions on evaluation, compensation, career advancement, and tenure. In fact, states barring the use of student data in decisions about teacher and principal evaluation will not even be eligible for funds.

The recently published book *A Grand Bargain for Education Reform*, which we edited in collaboration with some of the nation's most prominent educators, responds to the president's call by providing innovative and fair means for rewarding outstanding teachers and dismissing ineffective ones. But it also goes further, laying out a comprehensive framework for school reform that acknowledges the importance of teachers and seeks to empower them as equal partners in reform.

The framework we propose begins by realigning the system so that the interests of individual educators are tied to student-learning results, and so that all educators are provided the assistance they need to improve their practice. Unlike top-down, command-and-control approaches, comprehensive reform must be done *with* teachers and not *to* them. Thus, at the heart of this framework is a new system of "professional unionism." Its goal is not to replace teachers' unions' long-standing focus on the material well-being of their members. Rather, that core mission simply expands to ensure that teachers are given the necessary *rewards* and *supports* to increase student achievement.

We begin with rewards. To receive Race to the Top funds and use them successfully, states will need to create an accurate and fair means for measuring and rewarding teacher quality. This new system must recognize the complexity of teaching, use a balanced approach to gauge teacher effectiveness, and promote professional growth by offering all educators meaningful feedback and opportunities to advance in their careers.

In the framework we envision, value-added assessment would provide an empirical component in both teacher and administrator evaluation by identifying the most-effective and least-effective performers. These student-learning results would be accompanied by a peer-review process that uses rigorous evaluation protocols to differentiate the quality of teaching behaviors. Taken together, they would replace simplistic ratings of "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" and offer a much more comprehensive picture of teacher and administrator effectiveness.

These multiple measures would then be used to determine the progress teachers and administrators make in climbing a career ladder. No teacher would earn less in the new system than he or she did in the old. Much higher salaries would be available for highly effective educators and those serving in leadership roles, and all teachers, regardless of subject taught or specialist function, would have an opportunity to earn additional compensation.

Rewards, while necessary, are far from sufficient. Taken alone, they will not result in higher student achievement because they do not include other systemic changes necessary to help teachers increase their effectiveness. Educating all students to high standards is challenging work, and because of this, states must ensure that Race to the Top money is used to provide teachers with ample time and resources to improve their practice.

The framework offers a vision of new supports that is team-based, job-embedded, driven by teachers, and sustained over time. Educators would receive extensive professional development to understand how the growth metric differs from the achievement metric, and how assessment data can be used to maximize, rather than simply measure, student learning. With data driving the decisionmaking, additional assistance would be made available to *all* teachers: multiyear mentoring for new teachers, consultants for struggling teachers, and coaches for all other teachers wishing to improve their classroom instruction.

A system of “peer assistance and review,” or PAR, would govern the remediation process, which would provide struggling teachers with extensive support, but would lead to timely dismissal if a panel of teachers and administrators agreed on that recommendation. Unions would still provide legal representation to ensure due process, but experience suggests that courts would not be likely to overturn decisions made by a PAR panel.

These new supports promise a daily experience that is far more intellectually stimulating and emotionally satisfying for educators than the current system. Accompanied by the new rewards, they would deliver what most teachers have long wanted: better working conditions, more valid evaluation systems, meaningful professional development, leadership opportunities, and higher pay.

President Obama has **urged** Americans to escape from the “same stale debates that have paralyzed progress and perpetuated our educational decline.” It’s not about “more money vs. more reform,” he says, it’s about “new investments” and “new reforms.” The “grand bargain” we propose offers a simple but powerful quid pro quo: carefully targeted investment in return for fundamental reform. At the core of this approach, teachers are held

responsible, as individuals, for student-learning gains, but in return, they are given a greatly expanded role in schools—one that encompasses peer review, a key role in the process of remediating struggling colleagues, and an equal say in major issues that affect their classrooms.

The Race to the Top Fund provides an unprecedented opportunity for states and districts to embrace this type of systemic change. Though reformers will disagree about what the new system should look like, this is not the time to allow the perfect to drive out the good. As state policymakers complete their grant applications, it is essential that they remember the goal should not be “getting tough” with teachers and administrators, but creating a “new deal” in which appropriate responsibility is paired with necessary assistance. In this realigned system, new forms of accountability must go hand in hand with new rewards and supports to help educators succeed in their instructional tasks.

*Theodore Hershberg is a professor of public policy and history at the University of Pennsylvania and the director of **Operation Public Education**, a comprehensive framework for school reform. Claire Robertson-Kraft is OPE's associate director, a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, and a former elementary school teacher. They are the co-editors of *A Grand Bargain for Education Reform: New Rewards and Supports for New Accountability*, published in August by Harvard Education Press.*