

WRITING SAMPLE – OP-ED

America's Schools Need New Blood

With only weeks left before school starts, states across the nation, from Florida¹ to South Dakota² are grappling with worrisome teacher shortages.

Rapid City Area schools have 50 teaching positions to fill.³ Georgia's Houston County has 90,⁴ and San Francisco has more than a 100.⁵ Florida's Orange County: a staggering 300.⁶

America's education system is plagued with not only teacher shortages but a lack of diversity among educators and lagging quality of instructors. To boost the competitiveness of American students, the nation's leaders need to get new blood in the educator force. One way to do that is to help mid-career professionals become full-time and part-time teachers through e-learning.

The U.S. education system today faces significant challenges.

Across the nation, school districts are struggling to hire new educators. That's largely because fewer people want to become teachers. Enrollment in teaching programs in California has fallen by 50 percent over the past five years.⁷

Moreover, there's an astounding lack of diversity among educators in the United States. While over 40 percent of U.S. public school students are students of color, more than 80 percent of their teachers are white.⁸

A lack of minorities in the educator force has serious consequences for students. A recent study found that the dropout rate for black community college students was six percent lower among those who had a black instructor.⁹

But perhaps the most problematic issue plaguing U.S. education is the lack of quality teachers in classrooms.

American students are falling behind the rest of the world in math, reading, and science. The United States isn't even among the top 20 performing countries in international student achievement assessments. More than twenty other countries outpace the United States in average science scores.¹⁰

While many factors might contribute to the nation's relatively poor performance on such tests, one element society can't overlook is that American teachers simply aren't prepared to do

¹ <http://www.wftv.com/news/local/orange-county-faces-teacher-shortage-weeks-before-school-starts/407984269>

² <http://www.kotatv.com/content/news/Rapid-City-Area-Schools-tackles-teacher-shortage--387333391.html>

³ <http://www.kotatv.com/content/news/Rapid-City-Area-Schools-tackles-teacher-shortage--387333391.html>

⁴ <http://www.13wmaz.com/news/local/teacher-shortage-hits-central-georgia/255456203>

⁵ <http://www.sfchronicle.com/education/article/SF-offers-rare-signing-bonuses-amid-big-teacher-8344621.php>

⁶ <http://www.wftv.com/news/local/orange-county-faces-teacher-shortage-weeks-before-school-starts/407984269>

⁷ <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/08/19/432724094/teacher-shortage-or-teacher-pipeline-problem>

⁸ <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/race-matters-classroom-why-are-all-my-teachers-white>

⁹ <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/race-matters-classroom-why-are-all-my-teachers-white>

¹⁰ <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/12/03/248329823/u-s-high-school-students-slide-in-math-reading-science>

their jobs. Recent studies have shown that U.S. middle school teachers and high school student math teachers lack the appropriate content knowledge needed to teach their students.¹¹

Educators have to be honest: An education degree alone usually isn't enough to tackle student curriculum. That might have to do with ed school programs' low entrance requirements¹² and lack of rigor. A recent study found that students in education study about 10.6 hours a week while science and math majors who study 14.7 hours a week.¹³

To improve student achievement, the nation needs to help mid-career professionals get into teaching. Imagine if students could learn computer science from computer engineers or writing from advertising executives. Students would not only be able to pick the minds of experts; they would be able to get valuable insight into their teachers' careers firsthand.

Take, for example, educators such as Arlene Steenkolk, a former computer engineer that turned her passion for computers into teaching coding to K-5 students at Elmonica Elementary in Beaverton, Oregon.¹⁴

But many of these individuals don't have the time, resources, and information to make the leap to a teaching career. It's difficult for mid-career professionals to quit their jobs and study toward teaching certifications for several years. And many people just don't know how to get started.

The solution? Allowing mid-career professionals to obtain teaching certifications online.

Some people think e-learning can't adequately train teachers. They fear that online learning can't replace face-to-face learning and fails to produce the same results.

However, learning outcomes of e-learning are actually comparable to, and sometimes exceed, those of face-to-face learning. A recent study found that college students taking a hybrid of online and traditional courses performed better on tests than those that took traditional courses alone.¹⁵

And that's how e-learning for educators would work. Mid-career professionals wouldn't just be taking online courses. These teachers-in-training would be expected to visit classrooms and interact with real students. And they'd be taking the same certification exams that students at more traditional ed schools would take.

Online learning for future teachers is already a reality. UMass Online, for example, offers more than 20 degree and certificate teaching programs.¹⁶ Liberty University Online offers associate, bachelor, master, and doctorate degrees in education.¹⁷

¹¹ <https://www.carnegie.org/news/articles/us-teachers-not-well-prepared-to-teach-mathematics-study-finds/>

¹² <http://dropoutnation.net/2011/08/31/we-need-high-quality-black-male-teachers-and-good-and-great-teachers-overall/>

¹³ <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/0302/Why-the-weak-students-end-up-as-teachers-Education-programs-lack-intellect>

¹⁴ http://www.oregonlive.com/beaverton/index.ssf/2014/12/elmonica_elementary_students_t.html

¹⁵ <http://www.usnews.com/education/online-education/articles/2012/07/25/study-online-learning-outcomes-similar-to-classroom-results>

¹⁶ <http://www.thebestschools.org/blog/2012/05/31/top-25-online-teacher-education-programs/>

¹⁷ <http://www.thebestschools.org/blog/2012/05/31/top-25-online-teacher-education-programs/>

America can turn its education crisis into an opportunity for improvement. Helping mid-career professionals transition into teaching by promoting alternative certification programs will help solve the teacher recruitment crisis, give American students new opportunities, and get their academic achievement back on track.

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