

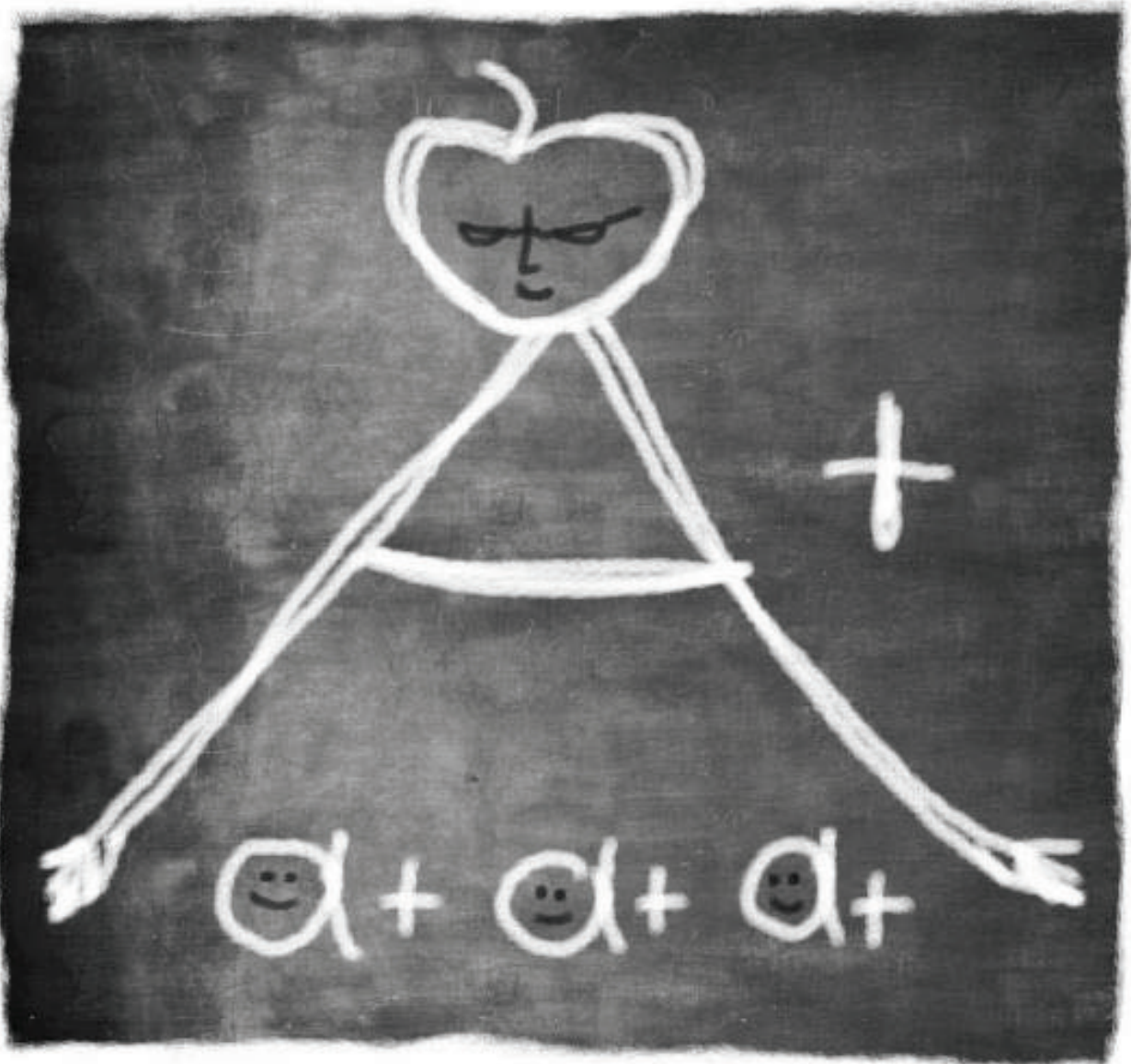
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The talent strategy

How to make sure every student has a great teacher



THE ROOT cause of the nation's failing educational system is now widely recognized as the lack of well-prepared, high-performing teachers, especially in high-poverty areas. Research shows that having a strong teacher for three to four years in a row can bring disadvantaged students up to the level of affluent students. This is one area where federal policy, state policy, and public opinion coincide: making sure that every student has a great teacher is everyone's top priority.

So why haven't we done it yet? It isn't just lack of money, since up to 80 percent of public school budgets already goes for staff. Districts and states lack a *system* for managing the nation's four million teachers. They comprise the largest profession in the country, but their training, hiring, evaluation, and reward vary wildly, and their quality does, too. We need to rethink and reinvent the way teachers are trained, recruited, developed, and rewarded, and we need to do more with the talent we have.

First, teachers need to be trained better. A third of new teachers leave the profession within three years, often because they're under-prepared for the real challenges of the classroom, having studied more educational theory than classroom practice. Turnover is highest in high-minority, low-income, low-performing public schools where classroom challenges are greatest and where first-year teachers tend to congregate.

Teacher training should provide much more hands-on experience, as medical schools do. Promising new approaches include residency programs, like one pioneered here in Boston, that are, in effect, apprenticeships, offering novice teachers intensive in-classroom experiences alongside mentor teachers. Alternative teacher certification, a model that Teach For America has popularized, allows teachers to start teaching before they are fully certified, learning on the job and in real-time, and attracting some of our brightest college graduates.

But since most teachers still come out of schools of education, these institutions must be held accountable for proving that the students their graduates teach are actually learning. Federal initiatives like Race to the Top, through which Massachusetts won \$250 million for its ambitious reform plan, have placed new emphasis on data systems that can trace teachers' success in raising student achievement. Creating a culture of accountability would encourage all teacher training to move in the direction of constant innovation.

Next, school systems must select stronger applicants. The top-performing systems outside the United States recruit 100 percent of their teachers from the top third of graduates; the comparable United States figure is 23 percent.

Once qualified teachers are in place, schools must do more to support them. Why do we expect a brand-new teacher to be able on the very first day to impart knowledge to a classroom of struggling teenagers who are years behind and attend a failing school? And why do we expect teachers to be satisfied doing the very same thing five, 10, or 20 years later?

Like business executives, teachers deserve a professional growth plan that builds skills and confidence and improves performance. Ongoing, data-based, on-the-job professional development is critical in school reform. Boosting teacher results requires accurately capturing what students have and haven't learned, communicating these outcomes to teachers in a timely way, and providing teachers with the skills and knowledge to improve the specific methods they use.

Finally, rewards must track performance. We must measure teachers' effectiveness and account for it in important decisions like promotion and firing. We need to offer great teachers a career path that provides opportunities to expand their reach and have greater impact on more students, along with greater recognition and remuneration. We must design new ways to bring people with expertise in subjects like math and science into our classrooms to complement and enhance our existing teacher force, with a focus on technological innovations that allow for virtual and distance learning.

We must be much more deliberate about whom we grant tenure to. Just giving principals data about teacher performance and asking them to affirmatively sign off on tenure decisions has been shown to decrease the rate at which tenure is granted to the lowest-performing teachers. This is particularly important since only 1 percent of tenured teachers are dismissed for incompetence. Teachers' unions are working with districts in New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles on novel contracts that spell out how teachers will be developed, evaluated, and rewarded. As these experiments proceed and inevitably face tensions at the bargaining table, we must keep the quest for a perfect system from becoming the enemy of a good one.

No flawless talent strategy exists. But half the current teacher workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next 10 years, so now is the time to move toward this new approach. It cannot come too soon for America's children.

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