

NANCY ICHINAGA
TESTIMONY
LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION HEARING
February 21, 2001

TOPIC: "HOW TO MEET THE NEED FOR QUALITY TEACHERS:
Strengthening Teacher Workforce in Low Income Areas"

Before the answers to this HOW QUESTION is addressed, the WHY QUESTION needs to be addressed. Only then can there be comprehensive understanding of the problems and only then can reasonable resolutions be made.

WHY:

We are all familiar with reasons that are often quoted: Poverty, Lack of Parental & Community support, Poor English language skills, etc. These are all EXCUSES that can be overcome by schools by focusing on specific curriculum and instructional methods that have been available for a long time. (See NO EXCUSES book published by the Heritage Foundation in April, 2000.) The WHY that is not often brought up is the (1) the typical teacher training by the colleges of education and (2) the socioeconomic backgrounds that most teachers come from. There must be recognition that these two factors are not easily overcome by the schools. Others must address them in order to solve the problems of public school failure. There is little point in placing all the blame on the schools and on the teachers. Once these WHYS are understood, solutions will come. I hope that this Commission will be an organization that will find answers for "strengthening teacher workforce in low income areas."

HOW:

COMPENSATION: Teaching is the toughest job in the world. It is tougher to teach in poor urban and rural communities than in middle class suburbia. For one thing, in poorer communities, everything related to academics must come from the school. In middle class communities, parents can compensate for their school's weaknesses by having their children tutored outside of school. The teachers in less affluent areas must teach more **intensively and extensively** if their children are to compete successfully with children from suburbia. For this alone, teachers who teach in difficult areas, should have compensation over and above those who teach in affluent areas. Just the opposite happens. Pay in the poorer school districts is generally lower than in wealthier districts. The state should at the least equalize salaries in the state and give additional stipends to teachers to work in the more difficult schools. Student performance in these schools should bring in greater dollars than in middle class schools.

TEACHING ENVIRONMENT: (1) At a minimum, all schools must be safe for children and for teachers. Buildings must also be clean enough to meet health and sanitary standards. Too often they are not, and this should be rectified before greater demands are made of teachers and students.

(2) School administration must also make sure that every teacher is given a “**teachable classroom**”, one that is not loaded with behavioral problems and that has a manageable instructional range. A third, fourth or fifth grade teacher should not be expected to teach first, second grade level reading and math as well as that of her grade level. Teachers are human, not supermen.

(3) Every teacher deserves the tools and materials necessary to teach well. A teacher cannot succeed in an environment which is out of control and which does not have the necessary books and materials with which to teach.

(4) There should be a clear Schoolwide curriculum with clear expectations. Teachers should not be expected to create their own curriculum nor scrounge for books and materials.

5) School administration must do everything possible to make teachers successful just as teachers must do everything to make their students successful. **Principals must be held accountable for having a teachable school environment.**

TRAINING: I agree that teacher training by colleges and by school staff development programs have been abysmal. I am pleased to state that there have been improvements made in the past year by state intervention. For example in Los Angeles county and in other parts of the state, thousands of teachers and principals were trained last spring and summer to implement specific reading programs that were to be used in the classrooms. Training must be aligned to specific materials that meet state content standards and not on general theories of teaching reading or math. Teachers need practical and pragmatic training that will help them teach better by learning about specific teaching materials and books in the classroom. They must know their teaching materials backward and forward in order to teach well. Theories, philosophies and exotic, innovative ideas are not useful to the teacher.

Many inner city schools are staffed by emergency credential teachers. This has been the case in Inglewood. We have had to recruit our own teachers, most of whom have not had any teacher training. Our new teachers have been referred to us by our staff, by friends and parents. Our former students, who have finished college and who have passed the CBEST, have come to teach for us. This year, my largest group of teacher recruits came from our instructional aide cadre. Three of our former instructional aides became full time teachers last fall. These girls had been classroom aides from 3 to 6 years while attending college. In effect, they had been in teacher training for that many years, and

each of them took to their very own classrooms like “ducks to water”. For next year, three of our former students have expressed interest in joining our staff.

We have done much of our own training of new teachers. In the beginning of the year, my teaching and support staff have trained new teachers on 1) classroom management techniques and systems and 2) in our school wide teaching programs in reading, writing and math. New teachers have partnered with grade level mentors with whom they work throughout the year. Many of them have become excellent teachers in their first year.

Our Emergency credential teachers have also been involved with colleges to meet credential requirements. Many of these courses have been of questionable value. I have had a few teachers who have been through the college courses, and these courses have hampered more than they have helped, because what they are taught conflict with what we do. Some schools have had more serious problems than we have had. For example, one of our schools hired 6 interns from UCLA last year. They were all bright, dedicated and naïve middle class girls who were out to save our “unfortunate” children. These interns rejected our program of teaching basic skills and strict discipline in favor of teaching social justice, and freedom of choice in school activities. The interns taught the children to feel like victims instead of responsible students. Needless to say the relationship between UCLA’s School of Education and Inglewood became strained.

ADMINISTRATION: Intelligent, good and strong administration is crucial to having a successful school. A good administrator must be a good problem solver and must work on the premise that every problem has a solution. Once again the colleges and the hurdles of the credentialing system are villains, in my opinion. Until colleges realize and focus on curriculum that are content based and that the accountability system is here to stay, they will be ineffective. Administrators must realize that the colleges, district administration and the state bureaucracies do not have all the answers to the problems of school administration. School administrators must learn to become intelligent thinkers in order to succeed. Perhaps principal training will make problem solving techniques and the methods of intelligence the crux of their training programs.