



# VIEWS & VISIONS

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## Good Teachers Matter

### Effective School Leadership Enables Effective Teaching

James V. Denova, Vice President  
Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

Jim Denova is vice president of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and has primary responsibility for the foundation's education agenda in West Virginia and southwestern Pennsylvania. In addition, he directs several rural economic development projects in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Mr. Denova holds a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh, with a concentration in social research, and has more than 35 years of experience in nonprofit administration and philanthropy. His prior positions include: program director for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh; research director for the Community College of Beaver County; vice president of research and planning for the United Way of Allegheny County; senior program officer for the Jewish Healthcare Foundation; and executive director of The Forbes Fund.

He has published working papers and journal articles on school-based health services, adult education, workforce development and nonprofit management. As chair of the Workforce Development Committee of the University of Pittsburgh's Institute of Politics, he commissioned a white paper and mobilized a cross-sector working group on career and technical education reform in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Denova has received awards from the Children's Defense Fund, the Harless Center for Rural Education Research and Development and the Mon Valley Initiative.

#### **"The Class of 2025: How Will They Learn?"**

This is a provocative title for *Views & Visions*, but it is somewhat dangerous to predict a scenario 12 years into the future. Educational technologies and other innovations have taken learning and instruction in directions that weren't imagined five or 10 years ago. Electronic tablets, educational games, social media and the flipped classroom (where students read teacher lectures online in the evening, and perform "homework" assignments in the classroom) all make learning a 24/7 experience.

While the tools for learning keep evolving and methods of instruction are changing and adapting to unique student learning styles, the pivotal role of a good teacher will be a constant.

#### **Teacher Effectiveness**

It is true that many personal, family and neighborhood factors contribute to a student's academic performance, but a large body of research suggests that teachers matter most. What's less clear, and more challenging, however, is how to measure teacher effectiveness. Teaching is a complex activity, and as teachers are challenged to adapt to new national standards for student learning and the variety of student learning styles, assessing good teaching has become a more complex proposition. Traditional teacher evaluations have relied solely upon the observation of a school administrator, and an overly simplified check of "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory." As we move into the future, teacher evaluation must rely on a more elaborate delineation of what teachers know, how well they perform the practice of teaching and if, in fact, their students are learning.

The Benedum Foundation has worked with West Virginia and Pennsylvania public school systems in the development of new educator evaluation systems that strive to capture the complex dimensions of good teaching and to recognize good teaching by how well students perform. West Virginia adopted a new procedure

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whereby teachers are observed on a discrete set of professional teaching standards (80 percent), student data (15 percent), and school-wide growth in student achievement (five percent). More importantly, the new system empowers teachers through a self-assessment and a teacher-initiated professional improvement plan.

In Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh Public Schools received a five-year, \$40 million Gates Foundation grant to create a comprehensive plan for improving the recruitment, placement, evaluation, retention and support of Pittsburgh's 1,800 teachers. The central feature of this plan is a new teacher evaluation system that calls for observation aligned to professional teaching standards (50 percent), student performance (45 percent) and school improvement (five percent). The student performance component includes a combination of standardized test scores, student progress from the prior year and student feedback.

The West Virginia Department of Education and the Pittsburgh Public Schools collaborated on the development of their respective systems and shared lessons learned in concurrent pilot tests. West Virginia and Pennsylvania will implement the new teacher evaluation protocols, statewide, in 2013-2014.

#### **School Leadership and Instructional Improvement**

These new teacher evaluation systems are not intended to be "report cards." The purpose of

comprehensive teacher assessment is the development of calculated and customized plans for improvement, and school leadership is critical to the continuous improvement of any teacher corps.

More than ever, principals must shift their attention from building management to instructional leadership. Instructional leaders should be prepared to spend more time with their teachers and students, become better “diagnosticians” when it comes to identifying what teachers need, and be able to vet the range of professional development offerings and match them to their teachers’ unique needs. School leaders must keep abreast of innovative instructional practices and the most advanced digital learning tools, while thinking creatively about the redesign of classroom and out-of-school learning spaces. Students, teachers and administrators should be held to a high standard of expectation, which research has shown to be critical to student success.

The shift from building manager to instructional leader cannot be accomplished by merely adding responsibilities to the principal. Educational systems need to look at new, shared leadership structures that engage master teachers, teacher teams, and new administrators who can relieve the principal of operational responsibilities.



West Virginia and Pennsylvania have adopted principal evaluation protocols that parallel their new teacher evaluation systems. Principals will be assessed, to a greater degree, on school-level student achievement, e.g. test scores, attendance rates, student enrollment in high-level courses, grade promotion and graduation rates.

Assessing principals on student impact provides policy makers with the opportunity to create the mechanisms that attract, train, certify and place the best instructional leaders in the schools that need them the most. Other states and districts are looking at nontraditional

means to address this objective. Race-To-The-Top states, like Delaware and Florida, are using job-embedded concentrated training and financial incentives to attract aspiring principals to work in low-performing, low-income schools. Chicago engaged the University of Illinois at Chicago, Loyola University, Teach for America and New Leaders in a collaborative effort to prepare principals in a way that is more rigorous and practice-oriented than the traditional academic track of post-graduate education administration courses.

The West Virginia Board of Education is undertaking a bold education reform agenda, with special emphasis on preparation of tomorrow’s educators, the continuous improvement of practicing teachers and administrators and career ladders for educators in a variety of positions. This agenda presents a great opportunity to look at student achievement, teacher quality and school leadership through one lens. The stakes are too high to do otherwise. ▽

