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Overview

RON BRANDT

Prerequisites to a More Rewarding Profession

"Most jobs in the real world have a gap between what would be nice and what is possible. One adjusts. The tragedy for many high school teachers is that gap is a chasm."—Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise*¹

After a barrage of reports from commissions and study groups denouncing the shameful state of teaching in America, warning of the probability of a drastic teacher shortage, and touting the relationship between education and the quality of our national life, the school year opened with the usual round of strikes by teachers desperate for recognition and a decent standard of living. The New Jersey legislature appropriated state funds to raise beginning salaries to \$18,500, and a state school board association official asked, "But what do we do with the other two-thirds who are already above \$18,500?"²

Teachers have an answer: make *all* their salaries comparable to those of other professions. Citing salaries and working conditions as the biggest reason, more than half the teachers responding to a recent Metropolitan Life national poll said they have seriously considered leaving teaching.³

The respondents said they thought the best ways to improve the situation would be to raise all salaries, offer sabbaticals for advanced study, reduce time spent on non-teaching duties, and provide time for discussion with other teachers. Possible actions they judged least helpful were those involving differences in status; basing pay on performance (merit pay) and paying extra for added responsibilities, such as helping other teachers.

The Metropolitan Life and other polls⁴ only document what was already known: that, as a group, teachers are dubious about many of the actions being taken to reform their profession. For many reasons, they prefer to

be treated as equals, rather than being ranked according to their credentials or assignments.

Many non-teaching observers, on the other hand, are convinced that the only way to make teaching a more attractive occupation—and at the same time to introduce the kind of institutional flexibility that improves student learning—is to restructure teaching roles. John Goodlad, for example, warns that unless something is done to change the "flatness" of the occupation, "... we might as well resign ourselves to a permanent state of low pay for teachers and the continuation of teaching as a marginal profession."⁵

One reason teachers may be skeptical about career ladder programs is that they doubt the capability of most school districts to develop and sustain the necessary support systems. ASCD members who believe that career ladder programs have potential for making teaching more rewarding can contribute to their success by concentrating on two factors: evaluation and staff development. Critical to any system in which individuals hold ranks according to their qualifications are procedures assuring that those qualifications are accurately and fairly assessed. And if teachers are to be assigned new roles, such as mentoring younger colleagues, they must be given appropriate training.

An impressive example of a program emphasizing both staff evaluation and continuing education is the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Career Development Program. As Phillip Schlechty (p. 14) reports, the cost is high: when Charlotte-Mecklenburg's program is in full operation, it will require 30 full-time observer-evaluators for a staff of 4,200 teachers. But that level of commitment is probably necessary to assure the professional quality the public demands.

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Overview

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Prerequisites to a More Rewarding Profession

Many of the articles in this issue emphasize appraisal and training because without them, career development programs cannot achieve their purpose. With them, however, schools may begin to bridge the chasm between what teaching should be and what it is.

Ron Brandt

¹Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1984).

²*Education Week*, September 18, 1985, p. 5.

³*The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher* (New York: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1985).

⁴*Education Opinion Poll* (Arlington, Va.: Educational Research Service, 1985).

⁵John Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), p. 313.

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