



## New Survey of Education Professors Shows Subtle Signs of Change

*Study Finds "Cracks in the Ivory Tower" as Some—but Not Enough—Professors Leave Ideology and Romance Behind*

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Contact:

Amy Fagan, TBFI, 202-223-5452

WASHINGTON, D.C. – More than eighty percent of the nation’s education professors think it’s “absolutely essential” that teachers be lifelong learners, but far fewer believe it’s as necessary for teachers to understand how to work with state standards, tests, and accountability systems (24 percent), maintain discipline and order in the classroom (37 percent), or work in high-need schools (39 percent). Still, there are signs that some of the education faculty is warming to change, including a small cadre of reformers that are strongly dissatisfied with the status quo in their institutions.

*Cracks in the Ivory Tower? The Views of Education Professors Circa 2010* surveyed 738 teacher-educators in four-year colleges and universities to determine their views on pressing questions surrounding teacher preparation and school reform, including tenure, academic standards, measures of accountability, and alternative programs for preparing and certifying teachers. (A similar survey was given in 1997—and some of the changes since then are instructive.)

“Too many education professors still cling to outmoded, romantic views of what education is about and what teachers need,” said Fordham Institute President Chester E. Finn, Jr. “America has grown very practical and demanding about its primary-secondary education system. Unfortunately, most of the professoriate hasn’t kept pace.”

Education professors, for example, are far likelier to believe that the proper role of a teacher is to be a “facilitator of learning” (84 percent) not a “conveyor of knowledge” (11 percent). When asked to choose between two competing philosophies of teacher education, 68 percent believe they should be preparing tomorrow’s class instructors to be “change agents” versus 26 percent who believe they should prepare teachers to “work effectively within the realities of today’s public schools.” And while 83 percent of professors believe it’s “absolutely essential” to teach 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, just 36 percent say that about teaching math facts and 44 percent about teaching phonics in the younger grades.

Yet the survey also revealed cracks in this worldview, including signs that some attitudes are shifting in a more pragmatic direction. For example, the pool of professors who believe it’s more important for kids to struggle with questions than end up with the right answer has dropped from 86 to 66 percent since 1997. And only 37 percent of today’s professors believe that early use of calculators will improve children’s problem-solving skills, a 20 percent drop from 1997.

“The success of Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like a Champion* indicates that teachers crave practical tips and tools that will improve their classroom practice,” said Michael J. Petrilli, Fordham’s Executive Vice President. “To date, however, our colleges of education remain keener on teaching theory than providing pragmatic preparation. It looks like that might be starting to change.”

A few more key findings:

\*Professors of education show some support for financial incentives for teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with challenging schools (83 percent favor this). Yet by 65 to 30 percent, they resist tying teacher pay to student test scores. And they’re evenly split on whether it’s a good idea to measure teacher effectiveness by the academic gains that teachers produce in their pupils.

\*Most education professors (66 percent) believe that the present teacher preparation system has many good qualities but “needs many changes.” The study also identifies two factions that feel quite strongly: Twelve percent of professors—dubbed “Reformers” —are particularly unhappy with the current teacher education system and are strong advocates for reform while another 13 percent—dubbed “Defenders” — are mostly content with teacher education programs and resistant to reform.

\*A full 63 percent of education professors think programs like Teach For America are generally a good idea. Just 33 percent however, think it’s a good idea to recruit school leaders based on their success in other fields, and just 17 percent support teacher prep programs run by school districts or charter organizations.

\*Seventy-eight percent of education professors support the idea of a core curriculum with specific knowledge and skill standards spelled out for each grade. Forty-nine percent believe state governments should adopt the same set of standards and give the same tests in math, science, and reading nationwide.

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For more information on this study, or the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, please visit [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net).

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