

# UC Merced

## UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal

### Title

Reforms on the Teaching Profession in the United States

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1sq8h4cq>

### Journal

UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal, 13(1)

### Author

Gutierrez, Emanuel

### Publication Date

2021

### DOI

10.5070/M4131052981

### Copyright Information

Copyright 2021 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

# Reforms on the Teaching Profession in the United States

Emanuel Gutierrez

University of California Merced

**Abstract:** This research is about reforming the teaching profession in the United States of America. It explores varying aspects about what is plaguing the teaching profession from tenure reform to a merit-based system. There is also research from other countries and how they have overcome their challenges to create a better learning environment. The structure will go as follows: introduction, main discussion, and finally the call to action. This is an important topic, because there is a lack of quality educators in the United States public education system. This paper will go into detail about how to fix and reform the system to work better for teachers and students.

**Keywords:** tenure reform, teaching reform, merit-based pay, learning

## INTRODUCTION

The education system like many other big bureaucracies in the federal government are fundamentally broken. Teachers are undertrained, under compensated, under resourced, and undervalued. The effects are trickled down to students, where the students of the United States have been stagnating on their learning growth for many decades now and are being left by other industrialized nations. They have been stagnating in terms of grasping subjects like math and English compared to other generations. Literacy and math rates have not risen much higher than where it is right now for decades. What does this mean to the future of the United States? Theoretically speaking, student learning and quality teaching can be defined differently, depending on how one views society and education. Varying definitions imply a range of foci or teacher education reform. (Wang, 2010.) This means that there will be a population that is not educated enough to get highly skilled jobs which will lead to an influx of people working mid-level jobs and never moving forward. There is a solution to this problem that needs to be enacted to create change. Firstly, tenure reform must be a top priority to policy makers because this is the mechanism that is used to create complacency in the education system. Tenure creates complacency and does not lead to innovation and experimentation. Secondly, classroom experience is extremely important. How can a teacher work at their best if they have never been the authority figure in a classroom? Thirdly, teacher compensation needs to be enacted. Teachers are paid too little in this country and are deterring many great educators from going into the profession which is leading to a teacher shortage. Starting pay in some of the poorest communities in the United States is about 35,000. This is not a livable wage in any profession, especially not a job that requires four years of education plus one entire year of student teaching.

Consequently, with higher pay and no tenure this will lead with an influx of great new young talent that will be better for the student in the long run. Lastly, there needs to be some sort of divide from politics. For example, there needs to be a more democratized version of learning, meaning teachers as well as students should have more freedom of learning the materials that will prepare students for the modern world. These are the arguments that will lead to a better public-school system in the United States, and it will lead to a better future for the country.

Teachers themselves are being frustrated with the bureaucracy of trying to do their job, their low pay, their status on the societal totem pole, and of course with the politics that envelops the education system. A great example of this frustration is the enrollment of new and capable people enrolling into universities with the major of education. The numbers are being decreased, and consequently less American teachers are teaching in America. These problems matter in the long scheme of the things concerning our economic, academic, and overall authority on the world stage. Meaning that an education system that puts the students learning first will create a labor market that is home grown and equipped to get high skill level jobs and create a better future for everyone.

Reforms on the teaching profession are long overdue. To make something completely clear, teachers are not at fault here. There are wonderful teachers in every state that are making real life impacts in students' lives. This paper will focus on the reforms on the teaching profession rather than teachers in general. This is a slight but important distinction.

Public schools across the United States are places of commonality. It is something that almost every single American, except the privileged few, have gone through. Whether the experience was great or completely awful there is a commonality between people saying I can share those experiences with you. Now put the idea that there are amazing teachers in every

school with the few rotten apples that make the entire school look back. President Obama once said that, “The biggest factor of academic excellence is not testing and learning but rather the teacher.” That speaks volumes to how a single teacher can have such a profound impact on a student’s life.

## **DISCUSSION**

Now come the arguments. Let us begin with the most pressing case for a better education system for students and that is teacher training. Teaching just like any other profession takes time to learn and master. It would be nice if every incoming teacher would be spectacular and knowledgeable about all subjects but frankly that is just not true. Many reports have studied the act of teaching other people’s children in fact, there is a paper where it reviews national reports calling for changes in teacher education with regard to their attention to the teaching of “Other people's” children and reviews teacher education program efforts at reform for diversity; finally, it provides analyses of these efforts that point the way for further struggles for change. (Gomez, 1994.) Diversity training as well as in class training is essential for teachers to be able to do their job as effectively as possible. In the state of California, the population is so diverse, Latin X demographic making forty percent of the population, that incoming teachers are mandated to take a diversity training class during university. This strategy can be implemented all over the United States due to the changing demographics that is making our population more diverse.

Secondly, teacher tenure reform is necessary to create a sense of competition. Competition is a great motivator for a teacher to create the best environment for a student to learn. In the state an Education Reform Act in Michigan where tenure reform was enacted is the first step to determining who deserves tenure. The requirements for obtaining tenure have been revised. As before, a teacher first employed as a full-time teacher prior to the PERA

implementation date must teach under probationary status for 4 consecutive terms. A teacher first employed in a school district after the PERA implementation date is subject to new rules altering (and in some cases accelerating) the acquisition of tenure. (Act, 1998.) This Act can go even further, for example teacher pay reform is needed to bring in new talent. In the United States there is a massive teacher shortage for many reasons like society's point of view, compensation, and under-resourcing. Teacher compensation is an easy fix. A simple policy change is to have teachers sign a contract to reject tenure to get paid more on merit paid basis. Some evidence in India leads to the conclusion that merit based pay leads to better learning outcomes for the students. For example, in India it is used to ask whether there is evidence for the payment of performance related pay and whether such pay structures do impact on student achievement. It is shown that—after controlling for student ability, parental background, and the resources available—private schools get significantly better academic results by relating pay to achievement; government schools do not. (Kingdon, 2007.) India has around 650 million more people than the United States. Theoretically this should indicate that a policy change can pass in India it could most definitely be effective in the United States. It is a logical and sound solution to improve learning outcomes in the United States. Merit pay gives individual teachers more money to do the same work better. Job enlargement pays them more to do different work. The study suggests that job enlargement is more likely than merit pay to improve teacher motivation. It also enriches teaching practice while merit pay standardizes it. Job enlargement increases intrinsic incentives for teachers, but these must be bought by purchasing more time. (Firestone, 1991.) The wage gap between teachers and other professions is getting so wide that a lot of people are opting to leave the profession all together. An effective teacher is the most important school-based determinant of education outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial that school districts

recruit and retain high-quality teachers. This is increasingly challenging given that the supply of teachers has been greatly affected by high early to mid-career turnover rates, annual retirements of longtime teachers, and a decline in students opting for a teaching career. At the same time, many factors are increasing the demand for teachers, including shrinking class sizes, the desire to improve diversity, and the need to meet high standards. (Allegretto, 2016.) It is a smart move for the future of the United States for us to stay competitive on the world stage.

Lastly, the politics that teachers must overcome to do their jobs is ridiculous. The amount of bureaucracy that they must deal with leads to teachers and educators to have to adapt to a style of teaching they are not comfortable with. Education like any other part of government is full of bureaucracy and politics that ultimately hurts the children's growth and learning. If the teacher or educator is not performing at their best, how can they expect their students to give their all? Teaching reform should be a main topic on any political candidates list of issues because it is the most essential part of our society. If children are not learning or becoming more intelligent, we will eventually lose the global intellectual and technological war we are soon to face. It is time for teaching reform for the following reasons. Firstly, education was made to teach the best and most relevant information to the mass populations of this great nation and everyone from preschool teachers to the secretary of education must understand that. Secondly, it is time to take the politics out of education. Lastly, teacher's tenure should be eradicated completely or greatly restructured. Teachers should not have the comfort of knowing their job is secured for life, but rather be in competition to create the best environment for the children. Eradication of tenure does not mean that the teachers will have the same pay, but rather they will have a salary increase for teachers to have a livable wage and still perform at their best. Who would not

perform at their best if they are making six figures? Politics should stay out of education in the sense that we need to create a better student-oriented system.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, there are many things wrong with the education system, but there are definite things that can be done rather quickly to improve learning in this great nation. To recap, tenure must be revised either scrapped or criteria to meet tenure must be stricter, classroom experience is a must in order to teach in a classroom in the United States and this includes diversity training as well. Merit based pay is a need for the great teachers across the land that are what make learning fun but do not get adequate salary to live comfortably. Lastly, politics should stay out of education. Politicians with no education background should not be dictating where capital is best allocated and how to deal with students, rather education specialists should be dealing with these issues especially because it is their area of expertise. The United States of America can learn a thing or two from other industrialized nations and how they have overcome their challenges to keep their young population learning. So, as for future research questions to keep furthering the growth of the teaching profession as a society we must ask, how will this benefit the students, thinking long-term is this a good investment for the future generations, and of course how will these changes keep us competitive on the world stage. The world is changing rapidly. It is only right that the United States education system changes and adapts as well. The United States will always be a world leader in global politics and policy. It is only right that the US education system reflects that leadership.



## Bibliography

Act, E. R. (1988). Education reform act.

Allegretto, S. A., & Mishel, L. (2016). The Teacher Pay Gap Is Wider than Ever: Teachers' Pay Continues to Fall Further behind Pay of Comparable Workers. *Economic Policy Institute*.

Firestone, W. A. (1991). Merit pay and job enlargement as reforms: Incentives, implementation, and teacher response. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 13(3), 269-288.

Gomez, M. L. (1994). Teacher education reform and prospective teachers' perspectives on teaching "Other people's" children. *Teaching and teacher education*, 10(3), 319-334.

Kingdon, G. G., & Teal, F. (2007). Does performance related pay for teachers improve student performance? Some evidence from India. *Economics of Education Review*, 26(4), 473-486.

Gutierrez, E. Personal Interview, 10/5/20

Wang, J., Odell, S. J., Klecka, C. L., Spalding, E., & Lin, E. (2010). Understanding teacher education reform.