Leave No Teacher Behind

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President Bush has always been characterized as a CEO-type president who prioritizes issues and delegates responsibility. He exercises this skill in his education policy when he says that “we believe education is a national priority and a local responsibility” (1). In contrast, one could argue that education is a local priority and should be a national responsibility.

Some educators hopefully speculate that federal and state governments were mistaken when they coupled testing mandates with funding reductions. Many an English teacher was sure the policymakers meant to couple testing reductions with funding mandates. But alas, their hope for a syntactic flip hinges on a change in policy, and a change in policy hinges on a change in leadership.

As with all large scale government issues, the party in power exercises its right to allocate federal funding to projects that support its policies-education policies included. The Bush administration is no different. The administration’s education policies have centered on the slogan “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) (2). The slogan drives the policy position that all children, especially children that are reading below grade level, deserve access to teaching, curriculum, and schools that will help them improve their test scores.

In an effort to support the No Child Left Behind Act and align grant funding with policy initiatives, the Bush Administration has shifted grant funding opportunities away from innovative programs in colleges of education and into early elementary reading projects. The majority of these projects emphasize scripted pedagogy, segmented curriculum, and standardized assessment.

The administration’s disdain for colleges of education has been a matter of public record. Speaking at a major policy forum held by the Council for Excellence in Government, titled “Evidence-Based Education Forum with Secretary Paige,” Reid Lyon, Chief Director of The Child Development and Behavior Branch, of The National Institute of Child Health and Human
Development, and chief policy advisor to President Bush on education issues said “If there was any piece of legislation that I could pass it would be to blow up colleges of education” (3).

Before I seek shelter in a bunker or run to the store for duct tape and plastic, I’d like to take a few pixels to highlight a successful and innovative federal grant program for colleges and schools of education: Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to Use Technology (PT3). The stated goal of a PT3 grant is “to ensure that new teachers enter the classroom prepared to effectively use the computers that await them” (4). The grants support projects that have developed a number of strategies to help future teachers and colleges of education.

Until the Bush Administration stopped funding new PT3 projects, a number of different institutions and consortia received PT3 grants. So it follows that a wide range of strategies and approaches to training teachers to use technology were funded. On the PT3 grant web site (5), the strategies are categorized into seven groups. Institutions and consortia in each group have links to their web sites that highlight their projects.

The projects in group 1 focus on course redesign. In contrast to the standardization approach to education, the course redesign web page states that “There are as many approaches to the redesign of courses as there are schools, campuses, courses and classes” (6).

The projects in the second group focus on digital equity issues and training teachers to understand these issues and work effectively in schools that face this issue. In their words, “future teachers need to learn how to adapt what they are learning to classrooms with fewer and older computers, less technical support, and more students with less hands-on extracurricular experience” (7).

The projects in group three are designed to help future teachers develop electronic portfolios. The projects use a range of approaches to help future teachers learn the necessary content and technology skills (8).

Faculty development projects comprise the fourth group. All the projects hold to the thesis that truly effective faculty development involves a mix of training activities, approaches and strategies that are based on the faculty’s needs(9).

The state-wide change projects give colleges of education an opportunity to train teachers to meet the state-wide technology standards. According to Helen Hawley, the Star TEC project director in California: “In a state as large and diverse as California, we knew that one approach, or even a dozen approaches, would not be appropriate” (10).

Teaching future teachers how to use technology tools is the goal of the sixth group of PT3 projects. Project leaders “are finding, for example, that certain technology tools help them engage students from a wider range of learning styles. Other grantees are discovering how to take full educational advantage of technology tools, such as handheld computers, that are
already firmly established in the non-educational world.” (11).

The seventh group of projects is investigating ways video can be used in teacher education programs. A number of the projects use video case study development as a part of their curriculum. “Video case studies can showcase examples of interesting practice in areas such as dealing with parents, peers, and administrators, as well as dealing with diversity and crisis in the classroom” (12).

To provide some sense of community and connection for the grantees, the PT3 web site has a set of tools that allow the grantees to showcase their projects, communicate with each another, and develop on-line databases.

The PT3 Projects are innovative and creative. They are not standardized and generalized. Collectively the projects and the PT3 program represent a cross section of the talent in our colleges of education. The distribution of large statistical samples characterize both teachers and students. Some students struggle, and some students excel. Some teachers struggle with technology and some teachers excel with technology. Regardless, we know one thing. The talented teachers and the challenged teachers all went to colleges of education. If we are going to leave no child behind, then surely we can leave no teacher behind.

(1) http://www.nclb.gov/next/index.html  
(2) http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov  
(3) http://www.susanohanian.org/show_feature.html  
(4) http://www.wws.princeton.edu/~ota?/ns20?alpha_f.html  
(5) http://www.pt3.org  
(6) http://www.pt3.org/stories/redesign.html  
(7) http://www.pt3.org/stories/equity.html  
(8) http://www.pt3.org/stories/eportfolio.html  
(9) http://www.pt3.org/stories/faculty.html  
(10) http://www.pt3.org/stories/californiacommission.html  

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