

EDITOR'S NOTE

Photo © Stephen Pottage



The year of “The Koop” was an exciting one at our house. My son would come rushing home from middle school to relate Mrs. Koopman’s latest ploy to draw the class into lessons on world history. One day, they reenacted a decisive battle between the British fleet and the Spanish Armada—turning the desks into battleships. Another time, each student came to class dressed as an historical figure and recited his life story. Every day, it seemed, brought a fresh adventure.

We all remember great teachers who transformed our lives by bringing history to life, instilling a love of literature, nurturing a talent for solving equations, inspiring self-confidence, or bolstering a fragile ego. You only have to flip through *Lighting the Way for Others*, a collection of inspirational stories published by the North Central Educational Service District in Wenatchee, Washington, to know the power of a teacher’s influence. In the slim volume, Rich McBride, superintendent of North Central ESD, recalls that being in Mrs. Bezdicek’s fifth-grade room was a “key point” in his life:

She was atypical in so many ways ... unbelievably kind and caring, with extraordinarily high expectations as well as an unmatched tenacity and reputation for teaching. Every parent in our small community wanted their child in Delores Bezdicek’s room.

The research is clear on the relationship between good teachers like Mrs. Bezdicek and good students. As the Education Trust points out, “students who get several effective teachers in a row will soar no matter what their family backgrounds, while students who have even two ineffective teachers in a row rarely recover.”

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, there’s more emphasis than ever on ensuring that all students have their share of effective teachers. By the end of the 2005–2006 school year, NCLB will require all instructors in core academic subjects to be “highly qualified.” The law defines a highly qualified teacher as one having state certification (or alternate certification), a bachelor’s degree, and demonstrated competence in subject knowledge and teaching skills.

To meet that mandate, states have been ratcheting up licensing requirements for prospective teachers, especially at the secondary school level. More states are requiring high school teachers to pass subject-matter tests to receive their initial licenses and there’s a growing trend to require new

high school teachers—and to a lesser degree, middle school teachers—to major in the subjects they plan to teach. In addition, states are holding teacher education programs more accountable by identifying low-performing programs and by publishing report cards that show how different institutions’ teacher education graduates do on licensing examinations.

Under the law, veteran teachers must also demonstrate subject matter competence. They can do this by passing assessments or obtaining a degree in their subject area or by meeting a “high objective uniform state standard of evaluation” (or HOUSS) set by their individual state. According to a 2005 report by the Center on Education Policy, about half the states have created and adopted either a new test or another method for evaluating teacher knowledge and competency.

The push to improve teaching by both new and experienced instructors is playing out in other ways in the classroom. Research linking successful schools and a collaborative school environment is prompting teachers to throw open their doors and to join colleagues in examining—and changing—their practices.

For some, that movement couldn’t have come soon enough. In the 2004 Regional Needs Assessment conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 70 to 80 percent of teachers and administrators agreed that their schools should put more effort into collaboration within and across grade levels. Two out of three principals said that their schools need to collaborate more in evaluating the effectiveness of current school and classroom practices.

In this issue of *Northwest Education*, we describe some of the different ways that kind of collaboration is happening across our region. Whether it’s fostering one-to-one mentoring relationships, gathering in professional learning teams, engaging in lesson study, or uniting behind a districtwide push for literacy coaching, teachers are reaping the benefits of working together. We hope the new emphasis on collaboration will lead to more stories about great teachers who make a lasting difference in their students’ lives.

—Rhonda Barton, bartonr@nwrel.org

For more information about *Lighting the Way for Others*, published by Wenatchee’s North Central ESD, visit www.ncesd.org.