VOICES from the CLASSROOM

“I teach because I want my students to use their gifts to make the world a better place. . . .”

HOLLY FRANKS BOFFY, 2010 Teacher of the Year, Louisiana
This chapter is about reform and how it will affect your life as a teacher. Never in its history has education been faced with so many proposals for change, and you need to understand these reforms so you can adapt to them when you enter the profession. Let's look at one teacher's experience.

Emma Harrison has landed a teaching job in a district near her home, and she’s ecstatic. Her worries are over. She can begin paying off her college loans and start to “live.” However, during her new-teacher orientation and conversations with experienced teachers at her school, she finds that the teaching world is quite different from what she thought it to be. She knows about standards because they were emphasized during her teacher preparation program, and she also encountered them during her internship. But at the time, she didn’t quite realize how important they were, because they were ultimately the responsibility of her directing teacher. Now, both her principal and the district emphasize that her students will be held accountable—by having them take state-mandated tests—for meeting the standards, and her students’ performance on the tests will influence her evaluations and possibly even her pay increases. And, it gets worse. These same scores will also help determine whether she will be awarded tenure in her district.

When she inquires about joining a professional organization such as the National Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers, the experienced teachers give her a funny look. Apparently she hasn’t heard. The legislature in her state has eliminated collective bargaining by teachers in her state.

Emma has a lot to think about. And her students arrive next Monday.

You are likely to have experiences similar to Emma’s when you begin your career. Reform means change, and sometimes change is good and sometimes it…
 isn’t. Sometimes reform is promoted for political or economic reasons, with the good of students and teachers ignored or neglected. Proponents of change paint themselves as fighting against the “educational establishment” and “educational bureaucracy” and their opponents as “obstructionist.” Critics of reform counter that many reforms are poorly thought out, lack a solid research foundation, and at worst, are fronts for conservative politicians and industry backers.

The goal of this chapter is to help you understand the major changes in education that will affect your life as a teacher and help you decide how to navigate through these changes as you become a teacher. As we discuss these reforms, we’ll continually ask the question, “Does reform mean better—better for the students we teach, better for the schools we teach in, and also better for teachers and the profession?” Too often, reforms are promoted by organizations that don’t have these people or constituents in mind. But before we begin, please respond to the items in the This I Believe: Educational Reform and My Teaching feature here. We address each of the items as the chapter unfolds.

**Understanding Reform**

**Reform: What Is It?**

Reform means change—change to schools, change to classrooms, change for students, and change for teachers. Educational reform is designed to improve our nation’s schools and make them better places to learn and work.

Reform takes many forms. It can mean changes in the way you and other teachers are screened as you enter the profession,
how your teaching will be evaluated, or the way you’ll be rewarded for quality work. It can also mean changes in the ways student learning is assessed, and even whether students are promoted based on these assessments.

These changes address the questions we asked in Teaching and You. Teaching for you will be different, and perhaps even radically different, from what it was for your teachers when you were a P–12 student. As you anticipate your first job, you’ll need to understand these changes if you expect to thrive in your career. The time to begin developing this understanding is now—at the beginning of your teacher preparation program.

A Brief History of the Reform Movement

The modern reform movement began with concerns about students’ lack of knowledge and skills. This movement is often traced back to 1983, when A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) appeared, and this is where we’ll begin. This publication famously stated:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 9)

The report came at a time when other industrialized countries, such as Japan and Germany, were outcompeting us both industrially and educationally, and it struck a chord with our country’s leaders; if we were to compete internationally, we needed better schools. Since 1983, public education has been immersed in a wave of efforts to address the concerns raised in A Nation at Risk. The most important include:

• 1989: President George H. W. Bush and the nation’s governors held a national education conference to establish six broad goals to address the issues raised in A Nation at Risk. Their report emphasized the need for the development of student performance standards. Standards are statements that specify what students should know or be able to do after a prescribed period of study.

• 1993: The National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST) was established to begin the development of national standards and testing procedures for K–12 students. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful.

• 1994: President Clinton signed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which created a special council to certify national and state standards together with state assessments.

• 1996: A National Education Summit, composed of the governors of more than 40 states and national business leaders, attempted to establish clear standards and subject matter content at the state and local levels.

• 1999: A second summit identified challenges facing U.S. schools in three areas—improving teacher quality, helping all students reach high standards, and strengthening accountability.

An effort to improve student learning by creating rigorous performance standards is the thread that runs through each of these efforts, and since 2001, every state in the nation has developed both standards in different content areas and tests to measure students’ attainment of those standards.

Economics was the underlying theme in each of these reforms; the goal was to help make our country’s economy more globally competitive. During much
of the 20th century, educational reform focused on high-ability students, with the goal of producing more scientists and engineers for our growing economy (Schneider, 2011). Reformers thought of education as a pyramid, and the goal was to propel more students to the top and make these high-performing students even more proficient. Leaders didn't worry as much about lower-achieving students because they believed they would continue to find decent-paying jobs in factories.

However, technology and competition from countries such as China and India changed all that. Factory jobs disappeared, and service sector jobs, such as working in fast food restaurants, failed to provide an acceptable standard of living for those near the bottom of the educational pyramid. Our country's evolving economy no longer had workplaces for school dropouts and underachievers. Some reformers even claimed that attaining a college degree should be our goal for every student (Gewertz, 2011b; Gupta, 2011). Excellence for all became the new mantra for educational reformers, and the U.S. Congress passed legislation designed to reach that goal. This leads us to No Child Left Behind.

No Child Left Behind

The current reform movement began in 2001, with the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB was a far-reaching federal legislative attempt to identify and serve students in all segments of our society. The impetus behind this legislation was a growing realization that many children in our poorest schools were indeed being left behind, as indicated by major achievement gaps between poor and more well-off students and between students who are members of cultural minorities and their white counterparts. Leaders concluded that requiring states to create standards in math and reading and constructing tests to measure every student's attainment of those standards was the most effective way to address these disparities. Schools that did not produce adequate yearly progress (AYP) in these academic areas would be subject to a variety of sanctions, including providing students with transportation to alternate schools, supplementary tutoring services, and even takeovers of the school.

As you saw in our introductory case study, when Emma took her first job, she was immediately faced with standards and their implications for both her and her students. Standards and the tests based on them are now a fact of life for teachers in our country, thanks significantly to NCLB.

This complex and comprehensive (670 pages) reform effort has been controversial from the time the legislation was first passed. On the plus side, NCLB has focused our nation's attention on the importance of education and especially on the basic skills essential for success both in school and later life. In addition, by requiring that states report the academic progress of specific subgroups, such as members of cultural minorities, it has highlighted the problem of unequal achievement in our country's students (G. Miller, 2012).

Critics of NCLB center not so much on the idea itself—that all children should succeed in school—as on the way the legislation was implemented (Alexander, 2012). For example, NCLB requires each state to design its own standards and assessments to measure the extent to which students meet those standards. This has resulted in standards and accountability systems that vary widely from state to state and, more significantly, are often inaccurate and misleading. For instance, some states, faced with the possibility of federal sanctions for not meeting their benchmarks, have "gamed the system" by lowering standards and creating lax accountability systems that reward mediocrity and even poor performance (Isaacson, 2009). Requiring all students to become proficient in basic skills by 2014, a key component of the act, has been a major part of the problem. Critics assert that this requirement was as unrealistic as asking the country to do
away with crime, poverty, or cancer by a certain date. It just can't be done, they argue (Feller & Hefling, 2012).

The future of NCLB is unclear, especially with a Congress that is strongly divided along partisan lines. There is no doubt that major provisions of the law will continue to be revised and modified, but its long-term effects on reform in general and standards and accountability in particular, will persist well into the future.

**Check Your Understanding**

1.1 How has the current reform movement in our country been shaped by previous efforts at reform?

1.2 What are two common themes in the current reform movement?

For feedback, go to the appendix, Check Your Understanding, located in the back of this text.

**Reform: Focus on the Teacher**

As reformers try to change our schools, they continually ask, “In order to improve our students’ learning, what aspects of our schools or schooling should be changed?” The answer to this question hasn’t always been obvious, and educational reformers have offered a variety of (largely unsuccessful) answers.

For . . . roughly the last half century . . . professional educators believed that if they could find the right pedagogy, the right method of instruction, all would be well. They tried New Math, open classrooms, Whole Language—but nothing seemed to achieve significance or lasting improvements. (E. Thomas & Wingert, 2010, p. 25)

The answer, however, is simple (but admittedly not easy to implement). No organization, system, institution, or enterprise is any better than the people in it, and the same applies to schools. The quality of a school is determined by the quality of its teachers. You will be the most important factor influencing your students’ learning!

Surprisingly, only recently have educational researchers and leaders begun to understand and appreciate this fact.

. . . In recent years researchers have discovered something that may seem obvious, but for many reasons was overlooked or denied. What really makes a difference, what matters more than the class size or the textbook, the teaching method or the technology, or even the curriculum, is the quality of the teacher. (Thomas & Wingert, 2010, p. 25)

How important are teachers? Research provides answers. One widely publicized study found that students who had highly effective teachers in third, fourth, and fifth grades scored more than 50 percentile points higher on standardized math tests than those who had ineffective teachers in the same three grades (W. Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Another study revealed that 5 years in a row of expert teaching was nearly enough to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students (Hanushek, Rivkin, & Kain, 2005). Additional research has found that expert teachers in later grades could substantially, but not completely, make up for poor teaching in earlier grades (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2001). One expert said it succinctly, “The teacher matters a lot, and there are big differences among teachers” (Hanushek, 2011, p. 34). A massive study goes even further.

Elementary- and middle-school teachers who help raise their students’ standardized-test scores seem to have a wide-ranging, lasting positive effect on those students’ lives beyond academics, including lower teenage-pregnancy rates and greater college matriculation and adult earnings, according to a new study that tracked 2.5 million students over 20 years. (Lowery, 2012, para. 1)
The importance of teachers has even caught the attention of the popular press. “The Key to Saving American Education” was the cover title of the March 15, 2010, issue of *Newsweek*, identifying teachers as the “key” (E. Thomas & Wingert, 2010), and the *New York Times* focused a lengthy article on “Building a Better Teacher” in its March 7, 2010, issue (E. Green, 2010). One expert concluded, “Teacher quality is now a national priority” (J. Margolis, 2010, Introduction, para. 1). And the American public agrees. According to an annual poll of the public’s attitudes toward public education, “Americans singled out improving the quality of teachers as the most important action education can take to improve learning” (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010, p. 15).

As reformers began to realize the centrality of the teacher to any efforts to improve our schools, they looked for ways to shape and improve the teaching force. One of these was a reexamination of teacher tenure, designed to protect teachers from undue political pressure. A second area of reform focused on teacher evaluation and asked whether our current evaluation procedures are identifying excellent teachers and culling out the bad ones. And related to teacher evaluation is the whole question of how to reward good teachers, both monetarily and professionally. Finally, what role should teacher professional organizations or unions (which negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions) play in educational reform? We examine each of these teacher-related efforts at reform in this section, beginning with teacher evaluation.

### Teaching and You

Did you have any ineffective teachers when you were in school? How did you know they were ineffective? Why didn’t your school do anything about them? What should schools do about teachers who aren’t performing adequately?

### Teacher Evaluation

**Teacher evaluation** is the process of assessing teachers’ classroom performance and providing feedback they can use to increase their expertise. Historically, this process has existed in a variety of forms, many of which continue to be used today. We outline them in Table 12.1. As you see in the table, prospective teacher candidates, such as yourself and your peers, are graded during your undergraduate course work and are required to pass tests when you enter and exit your teacher preparation program. During your internship (student teaching), you will be evaluated a number of times by your cooperating teacher and college supervisor. After completing your program and before you’re employed, you will be evaluated by prospective employers who will interview you and examine your professional portfolio. When you begin teaching, and as you move through your career, you’ll be observed and evaluated by your school administrators.

Critics argue that existing teacher evaluation procedures are grossly inadequate and do little to reward good teachers and eliminate those who are ineffective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Type of Evaluation</strong></th>
<th><strong>When</strong></th>
<th><strong>Purpose</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National (e.g., Praxis) or state competency tests</td>
<td>Before and after teacher preparation programs</td>
<td>To guarantee minimal levels of basic skills and subject matter knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grades and course work</td>
<td>During teacher preparation programs</td>
<td>To provide information about a candidate’s knowledge of content and motivation and aptitude for learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student teaching observations</td>
<td>During clinical experiences</td>
<td>To verify a candidate’s ability to perform in the classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolios and teacher interviews</td>
<td>After teacher education program and before employment</td>
<td>To provide additional information on a candidate’s qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisor observation</td>
<td>First 3 years of teaching</td>
<td>To make decisions about tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual supervisory observation</td>
<td>Typically every year</td>
<td>To ensure continued teacher competence and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student test scores</td>
<td>Typically every year in some content areas and states</td>
<td>To corroborate and add to the information provided by other evaluations</td>
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For example, a comprehensive study of teacher evaluation practices involving 15,000 teachers across 4 different states found current teacher evaluation practices infrequent, inefficient, and ineffective (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). Others call them “perfunctory” and haphazard (Pallas, 2010/2011), while still others question whether the instruments used accurately assess teacher quality (Goodwin, 2010).

The teacher evaluation systems used in most districts today fail to differentiate between good and mediocre teachers and also fail to identify teachers needing professional help to improve their abilities. In fact, the vast majority of teachers (often more than 99%) receive “Satisfactory” ratings when they are evaluated. (When you were a student in school, did you think that 99% of your teachers were “satisfactory”?) Worse, current teacher evaluation practices rarely provide teachers with information they can use to improve their teaching. For example, in one study more than 7 of 10 teachers reported that their most recent evaluations failed to identify any areas for future improvement (Weisberg et al., 2009). It’s difficult to improve without constructive feedback.

In our Teaching and You feature at the beginning of this section, we asked if you ever experienced any ineffective teachers. Most of us have. The prevalence of inadequate evaluation systems that fail to weed out ineffective teachers is one major reason why we all have experienced as many poor teachers as we have.

Current reforms in teacher evaluation are attempting to remedy this problem by creating more valid and reliable teacher evaluation systems and rewarding the most highly effective teachers. These systems have three goals (Pallas, 2010/2011). Certifying that a beginning teacher has the skills needed to manage a classroom and to promote student learning is the most basic goal, and verifying that veterans are doing a competent job in their classrooms is a second. If teachers in either group are found lacking, these evaluations are intended to provide feedback that can help low-performing teachers improve their practice. Identifying and rewarding exemplary performance is the third goal of these evaluation systems. These goals lead us to the idea of value-added models of teacher evaluation.

Value-Added Models of Teacher Evaluation

The basic idea behind value-added models of teacher evaluation is simple: assess the amount students learn—as measured by their performance on standardized tests—while in a particular teacher’s classroom and recognize and reward these accomplishments (Pallas, 2010/2011). When using value-added models, researchers use statistical methods to accommodate extraneous factors, such as student background, ability, socioeconomic status (SES), and class size, in an attempt to determine how much a teacher contributes to students’ learning. This contribution is then considered the “value” the teacher added. For example, if a second grader scores at the 50th percentile on a reading test at the beginning of the year and on the 60th percentile at the end of the year, researchers conclude that the gain is a result of the teacher’s expertise, and value had been added.

This process isn’t as simple as it appears on the surface, however, and value-added models are controversial (Martineau, 2010). First, critics question the assumption that tests accurately measure what teachers are accomplishing...
in their classes. If the tests aren’t valid, then the value-added measure is also invalid (Papay, 2011). Second, can test results capture important learning outcomes that may not show up immediately? We’ve all had teachers who presented intriguing ideas and asked thought-provoking and even puzzling questions that only made sense to us later, sometime even years later. And we’ve also had teachers whose inspiration had a long-term impact on our motivation and even career choice. Value-added models can’t capture these important, long-term outcomes, critics assert. Also, value-added models can’t measure important dimensions of professional competence, such as collaborating with colleagues, demonstrating leadership, and working with parents (Pallas, 2010/2011).

Adding to the controversy is a movement to publish the results of teacher evaluations based on students’ test scores and to make these evaluations open to the public, with listings of the scores and names of individual teachers in newspaper articles (Sawchuk, 2012a). (How would you like to have your evaluations made public during your first year of teaching?) Currently, this is legal in 18 states under the mantle of parents’ rights to know who is teaching their children. However, experts caution that multiple years of data are often necessary to make valid conclusions about a teacher’s performance, and publishing these data indiscriminately could damage individual teachers as well as schools (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

In addition, there are practical concerns about value-added evaluation procedures. One of these is the absence of valid and reliable tests for many subjects outside the traditional ones typically used to evaluate elementary teachers: math, reading, and sometimes science. Experts estimate that between 50% and 70% of teachers work in areas not currently covered by standardized tests (Gratz, 2010; Springer & Gardner, 2010). An unanswered question is how to evaluate the large numbers of teachers who work in areas such as art, speech, music, physical education, and preschool programs where no valid tests exist. Further, many students transfer in and out of classrooms, so teachers have limited amounts of time to prove their effectiveness.

Finally, value-added models have special significance for you as a beginning teacher. You will learn a great deal in your first year of teaching, and you will almost certainly possess more expertise at the end of your first year than you had at the beginning. How can a model that uses a standardized test to take a snapshot of student achievement provide an accurate picture of your developing expertise? And value-added models provide no information about how to solve problems—such as less-than-expected student performance on the tests—if problems are identified.

In spite of these conceptual and logistical problems, value-added models are being implemented in hundreds of school systems across the country, including those in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC (S. Dillon, 2010). Student test scores are then added to classroom observations and principals’ judgments of a teacher’s contributions to the school community (Pallas, 2010/2011).

In a sign of changing times, the National Education Association (NEA), the nation’s largest professional teacher organization, which historically has resisted attempts to assess teacher competency through standardized tests, issued a policy statement stating that teachers should be required to demonstrate their impact on student learning—exactly what value-added models attempt to do (Sawchuk, 2011a). Bowing to external political pressure, the NEA now recommends
combining student achievement measures with classroom observations to achieve a composite picture of teacher competence. In addition, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the second-largest teacher professional organization, has participated in several pilot teacher evaluation projects where the emphasis is on group or school-level incentives, rather than individual teacher-based plans (Springer & Gardner, 2010).

What are the implications of these changes for you when you begin teaching? First, realize that you will be immersed in some form of teacher evaluation throughout your teaching career. Second, thoroughly understand how you will be evaluated and learn to “play the game.” If you’re going to be observed, ask to see the observation instrument and familiarize yourself with its categories and weightings. For instance, if the instrument has a category saying, “Learning objectives are displayed for students,” be sure to write your learning objectives on the board before you’re observed. If student involvement is going to be evaluated, then plan an activity in which all of your students are actively involved. Think of teacher evaluation as an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and skills, and then do your homework so your evaluations will allow you to shine.

It is likely that you’ll be faced with value-added models when you begin teaching. In other words, the way your students perform on standardized tests will be considered in evaluations of your teaching. Even here you can take steps to perform well. For instance, become familiar with the content measured on the tests, as well as test formats, and do everything you can to ensure that your students have mastered the content and are familiar with test formats and procedures. (This suggestion differs from “teaching to the test,” which focuses on specific test items and instead provides practice with those item formats.)

In Teaching and You at the beginning of this section, we asked about the ability of tests to capture how much students have learned. This is the essence of value-added models of teacher evaluation, and their ability to gauge teacher performance depends on the validity of the tests used; if the tests don’t accurately assess what students learn, then the system is invalid. In addition, many other factors, such as students’ home backgrounds, as well as their past experiences in school, also influence test performance.

Having considered how you will likely be evaluated when you begin your career, we turn now to a discussion of the monetary rewards you might expect for exemplary performance.

Pay for Performance

As a beginning teacher, you will certainly want to know how much you’ll be paid and how your pay increases over the years will be determined. Emma Harrison asked these questions early, and the answers she got influenced her actions over the course of her first year of teaching. Historically, salary increases have largely been based on years of experience and the number of graduate and in-service credit hours that teachers earn. This is represented by the “traditional” wing on the left side of Figure 12.1. If you’re involved in a traditional plan, for example, you can expect a “step” increase in salary each year that you teach, and you will receive an additional increase if you take additional course work or earn a master’s degree.

Most districts also include pay-for-performance plans, which offer teachers higher salaries and bonuses for taking on extra responsibility, working in high-need areas, or performing in an exemplary way, and they address the questions we asked in Teaching and You here. For example, if a pay-for-performance system
exists in your district, would you be eager to participate? In districts that use these systems, teachers receive a salary supplement for coaching, such as athletics or debate, serving as a team leader or grade chairperson in an elementary school, or a department head in a middle or secondary school. Some districts offer teachers incentive pay for working in urban schools and other hard-to-staff environments. And some districts pay teachers higher salaries for working in high-need areas, such as math, science, special education, or foreign language. Each is a form of pay-for-performance, as is paying teachers bonuses if their students perform well on standardized tests. As you move through your career, you will probably encounter some of these options, such as serving as a grade-level chair or department head, not only for the professional challenges, but also for the extra pay.

**Merit Pay**

**Merit pay**, a supplement to a teacher’s base salary used to reward exemplary performance, is a type of pay for performance (see Figure 12.1). Why shouldn’t we pay good teachers more if they do a better job? This seemingly simple question is at the heart of a controversial and contentious reform proposal that is being considered across the country.

Merit pay differs from other pay-for-performance plans in two ways. First, it is available to all teachers, not just those who take on extra responsibilities, such as being a team leader. Second, it is based entirely on exemplary performance, which is usually determined by student test scores and/or observations by school administrators. Interest in merit pay has existed for many years, but it got a major boost when the Obama administration targeted part of the $4.35 billion Race to the Top funding to support its development. This funding required successful competitors to develop merit pay plans in their states (Springer & Gardner, 2010).

True merit pay, sometimes referred to as “differentiated pay” or “cash incentives,” takes several different forms. Some systems reward individual teachers based on their students’ performance on tests; others reward them based on administrators’ observations or on teaching artifacts such as exemplary lesson plans or student work. A third rewards entire schools for student test performance. Rewarding exemplary or meritorious performance is the common factor in each of these plans.

The U.S. public is generally in favor of most incentive proposals. In a 2008 poll, for example, 76% of the general public supported incentive pay for teachers; for those who had children in school, this figure rose to 79% (Bushaw & Gallup, 2008).
However, merit pay is highly controversial. Proponents argue that rewarding exemplary teaching performance makes sense and that money can provide incentives for teacher excellence (Honawar & Olson, 2008). Advocates also claim that effective merit pay systems would encourage brighter and more competent people to consider teaching as a career and will also encourage the best and brightest teachers to remain in the profession. Some advocates further argue that evidence from student achievement data supports the process (Jason, 2011).

Critics make precisely the opposite arguments. They contend that while superficial examinations suggest that merit pay systems make sense, a closer look shows that they are ineffective (Strauss, 2011). For instance, a merit system in the New York City schools was permanently discontinued because research indicated that it failed to produce gains on student achievement (E. Green, 2011; Otterman, 2011). Critics also contend that merit pay is divisive, damages morale, and makes teachers less likely to cooperate with each other (J. Marsh & McCaffrey, 2011/2012). They also question the assumption that teachers will work harder for more pay.

To believe that teachers will try harder if offered a financial incentive is to assume that they aren’t trying hard now, that they know what to do, but simply aren’t doing it, and that they are motivated more by money than by their students’ needs. These are unlikely and unsupported conclusions, which teachers find insulting rather than motivating. (Gratz, 2009, p. 40)

Critics also contend that merit systems are often too complex and fail to address the need for higher base salaries for all teachers (Koppich, 2010). In addition, critics assert that many merit-pay systems are put into place without clear guidelines, agreed-upon and objective measures of teacher performance, or effective processes for identifying high-performing teachers. They contend that teachers won’t buy into a system if they don’t understand it, if they believe it’s unfair, or if it doesn’t truly reward the best teachers (Hulleman & Barron, 2010). Finally, research—in addition to the study in New York City schools, just mentioned—has failed to find a strong link between merit-pay systems and increased student learning, the ultimate criterion for any educational reform (Honawar, 2008).

Teachers’ attitudes toward merit pay have historically been mixed. For instance, a poll taken in the early 1980s found that 63% of teachers favored merit pay, but by the middle of the decade a different poll indicated that 64% opposed it (Goldhaber, DeArmond, & DeBurgomaster, 2011). A poll taken in 2003 found that more than 60% of teachers supported higher salaries for their colleagues who work in challenging schools with low-performing students, but only 38% supported merit pay systems based primarily on student test scores (Public Agenda, 2003). More recent surveys indicate that teachers’ attitudes toward merit pay continue to be mixed (Goldhaber et al., 2011). So if you talk to two different groups of teachers, you may get views that directly contradict each other.

In spite of mixed research results and widely varying teacher attitudes toward the practice, the trend in our country is toward merit pay programs. For instance, the National Governors Association, a group that advises America’s governors on policy decisions, has recommended a move toward merit pay (Koebler, 2012). In the Washington, DC, school system, a program has been implemented so that teachers rated “highly effective” for 2 years in a row are eligible for large bonuses. One, for example, received bonuses totaling $30,000 over a 2-year period, an amount virtually unheard of in education (S. Dillon, 2011b).

But several important questions about merit pay remain unanswered:

• Does it work? Will merit pay encourage teachers to work harder or differently?
• Will merit pay based on student achievement encourage teachers to focus on some aspects of student learning (i.e., aspects that are tested and rewarded) while neglecting others?
• Are individual or group awards, such as rewarding an entire school for achievement gains, more effective?
• What are the long-term effects on student achievement, teacher morale, and teacher recruitment?

Obviously, increased research is needed to accompany development efforts in this area. But unfortunately, reformers aren't waiting for this research to be done before implementing merit pay plans. Tennessee and Idaho are two good (or bad) examples. Tennessee implemented a statewide system in the 2011–2012 school year with only 3 months of field testing (Heiten, 2011). In addition to tightening tenure laws, the new legislation also created a merit system in which half of a teacher’s evaluation would be based on student achievement measures and half based on principal observations. Teachers in nontested areas such as music and art receive value-added scores that are not based on their students’ performance but on school-wide math and reading scores. One first-grade teacher for whom no achievement scores were available had to use fifth-grade language art scores; a high school math teacher had to use her school’s writing scores (Winerip, 2011e). When no standardized scores are available for a specific teacher, he or she is given a choice, and the game becomes one of choosing an area where a teacher thinks the school will do well.

Understandably, teachers are upset, not only about being evaluated on the merits of someone else’s work, but also for the extensive amounts of time required to prepare for principal observations. Will Shelton, an experienced middle school principal commented, “I’ve never seen such nonsense. This destroys any possibility of building a faculty atmosphere. It causes so much distrust.” One of his teachers concurred, replying, “Will, morale is in the toilet” (Winerip, 2011f, p. A16).

In Idaho, the situation was even worse. Teacher bonuses in over two-dozen districts were based to some degree on how well teachers engage parents (Bonner, 2011). One district required teachers to make contact with parents at least twice every 3 months; another based up to 70% of potential bonuses on parents’ attendance at parent–teacher conferences. Teachers who have taught for a number of years will tell you that many factors besides a teacher’s eagerness and receptivity to meeting with parents determine attendance rates at parent–teacher conferences; low-SES parents who are required to work several jobs or who may not appreciate or value the importance of these conferences are much less likely to attend them than their more wealthy counterparts. An additional problem with the Idaho plan was that funds for merit pay were extracted from the general funds available for education, resulting in fewer teachers and greater class sizes.

The problem is that while states and school districts are experimenting with merit pay plans, they are also playing with teachers’ lives and careers. Experts are concerned that these hasty, ill-conceived experiments will poison the water for future merit pay efforts (Heiten, 2011).

Despite all these problems, some form of merit pay may await you in your first teaching job. As with teacher evaluation, you need to understand what these plans are, how they work, and what it takes to “win.” Talk to experienced teachers, and find out from them how the system works and what strategies they are adopting to function in them.

In the long term, our schools need well-thought out plans that actively involve teachers in their design and that address the multitude of issues and problems currently connected to merit pay plans. One expert in this area commented, “The fix-it-now approach to pay, with its over-reliance on value-added measurements, turns a blind eye to the technical challenges involved and to the fact that reading and math scores are a profoundly limited proxy for instructional effectiveness (Hess, 2010a, p. 53).
In *Teaching and You* at the beginning of this section, we asked if you would be willing to forego automatic pay increases for the possibility of larger merit ones. This is the essence of merit pay systems, which depend on teachers' confidence that effort and hard work can result in larger pay raises. In addition, their effectiveness depends on their ability to truly capture superior (and inferior) teaching performance. Our guess is that their acceptance by teachers will depend, in large part, on teachers' beliefs that a system can actually do this.

Despite mixed research results and attitudes, and a number of problems, some form of merit pay may await you when you take your first teaching job. As with teacher evaluation, you need to thoroughly understand these programs and prepare yourself to survive, and even flourish, in them.

**Professional Organizations and Collective Bargaining**

A *professional organization* is an organization (usually non-profit) seeking to advance a particular profession, the interests of individuals engaged in that profession, and the public interest. The two major professional organizations in education, the *National Education Association (NEA)* and the *American Federation of Teachers (AFT)*, represent over 80% of our nation’s public school teachers (Koppich, 2010), and understanding their role in your professional life addresses the questions we asked in *Teaching and You*. For example, you could turn to the local chapter of your professional organization if you felt you were being taken advantage of and wanted to do something about it, and you would probably do the same in the case of a lawsuit. Professional organizations also provide staff development experiences, hold conferences, and provide professional information about a variety of topics.

Educators use the terms *professional organization* or *professional association* because they emphasize the professional aspects of their jobs, but reformers and the popular press often use the term *union* instead. Educators try to avoid the term, because it conjures up the image of blue-collar workers and the sometimes negative perception of unions—corrupt, inefficient, and a form of protection for incompetent or lazy workers. When we refer to unions in this section, we will be talking about the professional organizations in education—the NEA and AFT or their local counterparts.

Reformers have taken steady aim at these organizations, claiming they are primarily concerned about teacher welfare and focus on bread-and-butter issues such as teacher salaries, pensions, and health care packages instead of making schools better places for students to learn (Cavanagh, 2011c). In addition, they claim that these organizations are obstructionist, consistently blocking efforts to modify teacher tenure laws and evaluation procedures that protect incompetent teachers and fail to reward the best teachers for their efforts (Hanushek, 2011). In short, critics claim that professional organizations (unions) are major obstacles to reform.

The NEA began in 1870 and quickly attracted members due to a number of inequities involving teacher pay and other forms of compensation (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Differentiated pay scales favored secondary teachers who were
Teacher Tenure

Jake Kramer is a high school science teacher in a rural district. He has completed his second year of teaching and is looking forward to achieving tenure after his third year. But he’s worried. He has taught a unit on global warming and has criticized the process of strip mining coal and clear cutting forests in the local area. Members of the community have complained to his school board, and word of the community’s displeasure with his positions has filtered down to him through his principal. Business people in his community say he’s anti-growth and that his positions will cost local jobs and hinder the local economy. He believes there’s a good chance that if the controversy continues, he won’t receive tenure at the end of his third year.

Teacher tenure, status granted to teachers after a probationary period (typically 3 years), indicating that employment is essentially permanent, has become a focus of reformers at every level of education, from the president of our country down to local school districts (Brill, 2009). Modeled after the tenure process found at colleges and universities, it typically requires teachers to prove their competence over a 3-year probationary period when they are subjected to scrutiny by their principal that can sometimes include student test score results. The movement for teacher tenure began in the late 1800s, when local communities in Massachusetts decided that teachers needed protection from political reprisals and arbitrary dismissals (Chesley, 2011). New Jersey, in 1909, was the first state to establish statewide teacher tenure, and most states followed New Jersey’s lead by either guaranteeing tenure by law or allowing local districts to offer it to teachers.

Tenure is designed to ensure that teachers enjoy academic freedom, protect them from political pressures or administrative heavy-handedness, and provide them with job security. Once granted tenure, teachers can be fired only for gross incompetence; felonies; immoral acts, such as physical violence or sexual advances toward students; or insubordination. For instance, if Jake were tenured, he would have the freedom to discuss politically divisive issues, such as global warming, without fearing for his job.

Currently, the wisdom of tenure is being debated nationally, with reformers calling for its elimination or radical transformation into something more manageable. As of 2011, Florida and New Jersey had essentially eliminated tenure, and a number of other states were considering significant changes in the tenure process (Rotherham, 2011). By the time you take your first teaching job, it’s possible—or maybe even likely—that tenure won’t exist in your state.

THE QUESTION

Should the tenure process exist, and should teachers continue to be allowed to earn tenure? Arguments exist on both sides of the issue.

PRO

• Tenure was instituted at a time when the teaching profession had limited prestige and few safeguards protected teachers from arbitrary dismissal (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). Since that time it has protected teachers’ rights during periods of political turmoil such as the Communist witch hunts of the 1950s.
• Tenure provides job security to millions of teachers, making teaching more attractive to young people considering a career in education and encouraging practicing teachers to remain in the profession.
• Tenure isn’t the problem; legal procedures are currently in place to remove incompetent teachers (Schimmel, Stallman, & Fischer, 2011). Districts need to take responsibility for this problem and do a better job of eliminating and replacing teachers who are incompetent or immoral (Zirkel, 2010c).

CON

• Earning tenure is too easy, and the time frame (typically 3 years) and criteria (infrequent principal evaluations and in rare cases student test scores) are too lax. Nationally, at least 95% (with some experts estimating a figure closer to 99%) of teachers receive tenure. This allows too many incompetent teachers to enter the profession in the first place (Weisberg et al., 2009).
• Removing tenured teachers from classrooms is an enormously expensive and time-consuming process. In New York City, for example, it costs an average of $400,000 to remove an incompetent teacher, and the process can take between 2 and 5 years for cases to be settled by an arbitrator (Brill, 2009). Joel Klein, who at the time was chancellor of the New York City schools, famously stated that death-penalty cases can be resolved faster than teacher-misconduct cases (Rotherham, 2011). And teachers in question receive full salaries and benefits during the process.
• The vast majority of teachers don’t need tenure. Jake Kramer’s experience, for example, is unique because secondary teachers rarely deal with controversial topics, and elementary teachers almost never do. Currently, our country’s Constitution provides sufficient safeguards to make tenure laws unnecessary.

YOU TAKE A STAND

Now it’s your turn to take a position on the issue. Does tenure provide a necessary safeguard for teacher security, or do the problems associated with tenure outweigh its benefits?

Go to Issues You’ll Face in Teaching in the MyEducationLab® Book Resources that accompany this text to log your thoughts and receive feedback from your authors.
primarily male, and secondary teachers were often paid twice as much as female teachers working in elementary schools. Leaders rationalized this discrepancy by arguing that secondary teaching required more knowledge and expertise, and males needed higher salaries because they were the major breadwinners in most families.

Over time, and with a great deal of struggle, salaries were equalized, and the salary schedule based on experience and degrees, which exists in today’s schools, was the result. This salary schedule seemed to work well until reformers began to question whether this form of compensation was encouraging mediocrity and failing to recognize the best (and worst) teachers. In response, legislators in a number of states, including Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Idaho have passed laws aimed directly at teacher unions. These laws mandate the use of student achievement test data in teacher personnel decisions such as pay raises and tenure decisions, and they also limit teachers’ collective bargaining rights (Cavanagh, 2011d). Collective bargaining occurs when a local chapter of a professional organization such as the NEA or AFT negotiates with a school district over the rights of teachers and the conditions of employment. This process is important because national figures show that, across the employment spectrum, jobs protected by collective bargaining pay 35% more than those that aren’t (AFT, 2010).

One of the more acrimonious collective bargaining battles occurred in Wisconsin, where the conservative governor tied teacher benefits to state budget shortfalls. Proposed budget cuts of nearly 10% to state education programs included reduced pension and health care benefits to teachers (Cavanagh, 2011d). These cost-saving measures also attempted to limit teachers’ collective bargaining rights, shorten teacher contracts to 1 year, and restrict the size of future teacher salary increases. Teachers responded by calling in sick, fighting the new laws in court, and attempting to defeat reform supporters in subsequent elections. In Ohio the legislature passed a similar law limiting teacher collective bargaining rights, but voters overwhelmingly rejected it in a subsequent referendum. Experts predict similar battles in other states (McNeil, 2011b).

Their reluctance to address teacher quality issues has tarnished the image of both the NEA and AFT, and their resistance to reform is slowly changing. Under pressure, the NEA has changed its position on the use of student performance data in teacher personnel decisions, but only with major caveats and calls for procedural safeguards to protect teachers (Sawchuk, 2011a). And the AFT has been involved in several innovative teacher compensation pilot projects that link school-wide bonuses (not individual teachers) to test scores (Koppich, 2010). In a sign of changing times, the AFT was integral in an innovative teacher evaluation/compensation project in New Haven, Connecticut, in which teachers traded higher pay for increased teacher evaluation (Kristoff, 2012). Initial results are encouraging, with significant numbers of ineffective tenured teachers being released with the support of both AFT and teachers in the district.

Changes such as these come at a time when the public is requiring more information about schools’ and teachers’ performance. In one poll, for example, more than 70% wanted more information about both teachers’ performance and student academic achievement, and when parents were polled, this figure rose to 80% (Brenneman, 2011). Responding to this need for information, the Los Angeles Times published a database with the effectiveness ratings of 6,000 individual teachers in the L.A. district. Teachers and their professional organizations were outraged at this breach of professional information, but the paper defended its actions as part of the public’s right to information about its schools (Song & Felch, 2011). Arne Duncan, the current Secretary of Education, agreed, citing parents’ rights to know about the effectiveness of their children’s teachers.

What are the implications of all this turmoil for you as a beginning teacher? Does it suggest that you shouldn’t join a professional organization because they have failed to provide proactive leadership in issues related to teacher quality?
Probably not. From a personal perspective, professional organizations can provide you with valuable assistance on a number of important issues that could change your professional life, such as liability insurance against student lawsuits, to professional help and advice when conflicts arise over work conditions. Emma Harrison, in the case study at the beginning of the chapter, realized this when she asked about professional organizations in her state; unfortunately, her state legislature had passed a law limiting the ability of professional organizations in her state to negotiate work-related factors such as merit pay, tenure, and teacher evaluation. In the past, professional organizations played major roles in shaping decisions on these important dimensions of professional life and gave teachers a voice in the process.

How recent legislation will affect both students and the teaching profession is the larger question. One view paints an optimistic picture and sees a new era in education in which teacher salaries are tied to teacher performance and student test scores. The best teachers will be paid more, and those at the other end of the spectrum will be identified, remediated if possible, and removed from the profession if not.

A less cheery perspective views these legislative actions as threats to professional organizations, such as the NEA and AFT, and to the collective bargaining process itself. Teachers are in a unique position to understand and offer solutions to problems facing our nation’s schools, union supporters contend, and refusing to involve them in the search for solutions to these problems—essentially treating them like hired underlings—defies everything we know about making workers productive (Koppich, 2010). Concerns are also being raised about whether these legislative changes will discourage bright young people from entering the profession and discourage good teachers from remaining in it. At this point, no one knows which view will prevail.

Check Your Understanding

2.1 How will reform efforts that focus on the teacher affect your life in the classroom?
2.2 What are the most common forms of teacher evaluation that you will encounter as a beginning teacher? How do these relate to value-added models?
2.3 What is merit pay? Why is it so controversial?
2.4 What are the two major professional associations? Why are they important to you as a beginning teacher?

For feedback, go to the appendix, Check Your Understanding, located in the back of this text.

Reform: Focus on the Curriculum

In addition to reform efforts aimed at improving teacher quality, reformers have also targeted the school curriculum. These efforts have centered on the process of creating standards that specify what students should know or be able to do after a period of study. In the first section of the chapter, you saw how standards have historically been a focus of reform efforts.

Standards, Testing, and Accountability

Spurred on by the NCLB Act of 2001, a major sea change has occurred in the area of curriculum. If you had been a teacher in the past, you would have been relatively free to teach what you wanted. You would have had state and district curriculum guides, and you may or may not have consulted them before you decided...
what was best for your students. Now, as a result of NCLB, every state has constructed standards in all content areas, and if you teach reading, math, or perhaps science, you and your students will both be held accountable for meeting them. **Accountability** means that your students will be required to demonstrate that they’ve met the standards, and you will be responsible for ensuring that they do.

States have also developed standardized tests to hold students (and their teachers) accountable for meeting these prescribed learning standards. In many cases, the assessments are **high-stakes tests**, standardized assessments that states and districts use to determine whether students can advance from one grade to another, graduate from high school, or have access to specific fields of study, like advanced math or science courses. For example, if graduating from high school depends on students’ performance on the test, the stakes are “high,” which is why the tests are described this way. In 2011, 25 states had current or planned policies to require students to pass an exit exam to receive a high school diploma (McIntosh, 2011). If you recently graduated from high school, you might have taken one of these tests yourself. When you teach, you will be on the other side of the fence; you will be responsible for preparing your students to perform well on these assessments.

**Standards in Today’s Schools**

Though most attention has been focused on reading, math, and science, standards have also been written for a variety of content areas, such as:

- Fine arts
- Science
- Physical education
- Economics
- Agricultural science
- Business education
- Technology applications
- Trade and industrial education
- Spanish language arts and English as a second language

And even this list is not exhaustive.

Because space doesn’t allow us to list examples from every state, we present representative samples for the sake of illustration. For those of you reading this text who don’t live in these states, you can easily access your own state’s standards by clicking on the following link:


Then click on the pulldown menu and select your state.

What do standards from different states look like? The following is an example in fourth-grade math from the state of Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2008b).

(4.2) **Number, operation, and quantitative reasoning.** The student describes and compares fractional parts of whole objects or sets of objects

The student is expected to:

(A) use concrete objects and pictorial models to generate equivalent fractions.

The number (4.2) identifies this as the second standard in the list of fourth-grade standards in math, and the letter (A) lists one of the ways that each student can meet that standard. Different states code their standards in different ways, but all are designed to describe learning and assessment targets for teachers and students.
As another example, the following standard is from the state of Illinois in middle school science (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008a).

**Illinois Science Assessment Framework**

Standard 12F—Astronomy (Grade 7)

12.7.91 Understanding that objects in the solar system are for the most part in regular and predictable motion. Know that those motions explain such phenomena as the day, the year, the phases of the moon, and eclipses.

Though the way the standard is coded differs from the codes in Texas, both describe essential knowledge to be learned and assessed on tests.

As you see from these two examples, standards are stated in different ways and with varying degrees of specificity. Many states’ systems of describing standards are quite complex, and understanding and interpreting them can be challenging. For instance, what exactly does “use concrete objects and pictorial models to generate equivalent fractions” mean? And this is one of the more succinctly written standards.

Many professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2008), the National Council of Teachers of English (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 2008), and others that focus on science, social studies, early childhood education, special education, the arts, health education, and bilingual education all have produced similar standards. Most of the state standards are grounded in the standards prepared by these organizations.

**Standards and Assessment**

Along with standards, states have also constructed tests aligned with those standards. As with standards, state tests have different labels, such as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) (Texas Education Agency, 2008c), the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (Florida Department of Education, 2008), the California Standards Test, (California State Board of Education, 2008b), and the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008b).

States also vary in the way they administer their tests. For example, the TAKS is given at every grade level 3 through 10 in reading and math, science is given in grades 5, 8, and 10, and social studies is given in grades 8 and 10. On the other hand, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, which also requires all students in grades 3 through 10 to take the reading and math portion, administers the science portion to students in grades 5, 8, and 11. Social studies is not measured on the exam. When you begin teaching, you will become fully aware of the testing schedule for your state.

To help teachers align their instruction with state standards, sample test items that parallel the items on the standardized assessments or older versions of the tests themselves are usually available. Both are linked to specific standards. These sample items and older versions of the tests are useful in two ways. First, as you saw in the preceding section, you must interpret the meaning of the standard, and sample items help you with this process. Second, the sample items help guide you as you prepare your students for the tests. The following are sample items that measure the extent to which students have reached standards presented earlier.

For example, a sample test item from the TAKS designed to measure the extent to which students have reached the fourth-grade math standard shown on page 397 looks like this (Texas Education Agency, 2008c).
23. The model is shaded to represent a fraction.

Which model below shows an equivalent fraction?

A  
B  
C  
D  

Now consider again the Illinois middle school science standard on page 398, and compare it with a corresponding assessment item from the Illinois Standards Achievement Test linked to the standard (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008c).

These sample standards and items are similar in two ways. First, the items measure more than students’ ability to remember factual information, which is typical of many, if not most, standards. Each of the sample items goes beyond factual knowledge and measures students’ understanding of conceptual knowledge. This means that when you plan your instruction to meet standards, you’ll need to teach students to do more than simply memorize information, and you should also develop assessments that do more than measure their knowledge of facts.

Second, the items on the state assessment tests are written in a multiple-choice format, which both increases their reliability and makes them easier to score. The fact that these items are multiple-choice has an important implication for you; you’ll need to be sure your students are comfortable with this testing format. This suggests that some of the teacher-made assessments you create should be in multiple choice as well, so your students have practice responding to this format. This is a demanding process, but one that will help prepare your students for future assessments and increase the likelihood that their test scores reflect what they actually know.

At this early point in your teacher preparation program, standards, accountability, and high-stakes testing might seem somewhat intimidating. However, as you spend time on your state’s website and are provided with support from your school when you begin your first job, the task won’t seem so daunting.
National Standards

In response to the fact that different state’s standards vary widely in quality and rigor, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), another major reform effort, was launched in 2009. This effort was designed to establish a single set of clear educational standards for all states in English-language arts and mathematics (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010a). By 2011 these standards had been formally adopted by 45 of the 50 states (Gewertz, 2011c). The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce, and that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The new standards are also linked to international benchmarks designed to ensure that American students can compete in the emerging global marketplace (C. Lee & Spratley, 2010).

To illustrate, let’s look at two proposed national standards. The following is an example from first-grade math.

First grade:
Number—Operations and the Problems They Solve

Addition and Subtraction
1. Understand the properties of addition.
   a. Addition is commutative. For example, if 3 cups are added to a stack of 8 cups, then the total number of cups is the same as when 8 cups are added to a stack of 3 cups; that is, $8 + 3 = 3 + 8$.
   b. Addition is associative. For example, $4 + 3 + 2$ can be found by first adding $4 + 3 = 7$ then adding $7 + 2 = 9$, or by first adding $3 + 2 = 5$ then adding $4 + 5 = 9$.
   (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010b, p. 13)

Now, here is an example in writing for middle and high school.

Writing Standards for History/Social Studies and Science 6–12
Grades 9–10 students:
1. Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events or scientific procedures/experiments, in which they:
   a. Introduce a topic and organize information under concepts and into categories, making clear the connections and distinctions between key ideas; use formatting and graphics (e.g., headings, figures, tables, graphs, illustrations) as useful to clarify ideas.
   b. Develop a topic that has historical or scientific significance using well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, data, details, quotations, examples, extended definitions, or other information. (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010c, p. 60)

As you see, these standards are similar in format to most existing state standards. The consistency that the standards provide among the states in our country, and even with other countries, is their primary advantage, and these standards have been endorsed by most professional groups (Gewertz, 2010).

However, as with most reforms, the movement toward common standards is controversial, and critics raise a number of questions. For example, will common core standards result in lessons dictated from afar? How will the public in each state have access to and control over what is being taught in their schools? And will common standards lead to a national curriculum and a national test, something that local control advocates resist strongly (Palikoff, Porter, & Smithson, 2011)? Currently, a number of states are working on assessments that would measure students’ attainment of these national standards (Gewertz, 2012b). A similar controversy over local control of schools killed national standards efforts in the 1990s (Gewertz, 2011a). Critics also contend that the new standards aren’t demanding enough and
overemphasize basic skills at the expense of higher-order thinking (Porter, 2011). Finally, skeptics believe many of the proposed standards are vague and wonder if they provide teachers with sufficient guidance for implementation. Model curriculum units, sample lesson plans, formative assessments, and test items linked to standards are all needed to provide teachers with more guidance and support (Gewertz, 2011c).

Despite these concerns, the common standards movement is moving forward, and you will likely encounter them when you begin teaching. The federal government has invested over $360 million in this reform, and private organizations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have added millions more (Gewertz, 2011c).

Controversies in the Standards Movement

Standards, accountability, and high-stakes testing are facts of teaching life, and they’ll influence all aspects of your teaching. Every state has created standards in a variety of content areas, and schools, districts, and states must report the achievement of different groups of students classified by race, ethnicity, gender, and English proficiency. This requirement has focused attention on the considerable disparities in achievement between different groups of students, such as those who are members of cultural minorities.

Schools are graded—A, B, C, D, and F—depending on how their students perform, and in addition to the stigma for being in a D or F school, sanctions, such as school closings, threaten schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress with any of these student subgroups. The pressure on states, school districts, and particularly on schools and teachers within specific schools, is enormous.

Because of these pressures, accountability and high-stakes testing are controversial. Critics argue that they damage both schools and students in several ways (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). First, critics assert, because high-stakes tests focus on math, reading, and science, teachers spend the majority of their time on these subjects and de-emphasize other content areas, such as social studies, art, and music. This narrowing of the curriculum deprives students of a well-rounded education and also stifles teacher professionalism and creativity (Ravitch, 2010a).

The pressure for students to perform well on the tests can also produce unintended consequences. To avoid test-related sanctions, teachers frequently request transfers out of grades that are tested and schools that face sanctions. For example, expert teachers often ask to transfer out of urban and high-poverty schools where students often underachieve, and as a result, students are deprived of precisely the teachers they need most (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011). In addition, high school exit exams may discourage students from staying in school, so they contribute to the dropout problem. And these adverse effects are greater for members of cultural minorities or students with low SES. In Texas, for example, nearly 1 of every 6 high school seniors in 2007 didn’t graduate because of low test scores, and this figure was 1 in 4 for African American and Latino students (Stutz, 2007).

Critics also contend that current tests are not adequate for making crucial decisions about students’ lives and that cutoff scores are often arbitrary. For example, when the state of Virginia lowered the cutoff score for a test by 1 point, nearly 6,000 failing scores became passing (Bracey, 2003). In New York City, just the opposite happened; 82% of students passed their math tests in 2009, the next year, only 54% passed (Noddings, 2010b). Did students suddenly become dumber? Not really, school administrators just changed the cutoff passing score. Deciding student grade promotion or graduation on the basis of one score is being increasingly criticized by a number of professional organizations, both within and outside education, including the American Educational Research Association (1999) and the American Psychological Association (cited in American Educational Research Association, 2001).
Educational Research Association, 1999). Other experts also warn that high-stakes tests have negative side effects such as decreased student motivation and ultimately decreased learning (Berliner, 2009).

Finally, questions related to high-stakes testing with minority students remain unanswered. One involves test bias and whether existing tests provide an accurate picture of minority achievement, and particularly the achievement of students who are not native English speakers (Plank, 2010).

In summary, critics argue, “The pressure to score well on a single test is so intense that it leads to nefarious practices (cheating on the test, data manipulation), distorts education (narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test) and demoralizes our educators” (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p. 672).

However, advocates of testing, while conceding that teacher preparation, instructional resources, and the tests themselves need to be improved, argue that these tests are the fairest and most effective means of promoting success for all students (Buck, Ritter, Jensen, & Rose, 2010). Further, they assert, evidence indicates that educational systems that require content standards and use tests that thoroughly measure the extent to which the standards are met greatly improve the achievement for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Wiggins, 2010).

Public opinion polls show that parents are undecided about both accountability and high-stakes testing. For instance, more than 4 of 10 public school parents believe there is too much emphasis on achievement testing, with only about 1 of 10 saying there is not enough. However, another 4 of 10 parents believe that the emphasis on achievement testing is about right (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011). With respect to the issue of narrowing the curriculum, parents’ reactions are also mixed. When asked if they thought reduced emphasis on subjects other than reading and math—because of the reading-math emphasis—was a good or a bad thing, more than half of parents said it would be a good thing. Slightly more than 4 of 10 said it would be a bad thing, with the remainder reporting they didn’t know (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011).

Check Your Understanding

3.1 Explain how reform efforts focusing on standards, testing, and accountability are influencing the curriculum and classroom instruction.

3.2 Describe the relationship between assessment, standards, accountability, and high-stakes tests.

3.3 What are national standards? How will they influence your life as a beginning teacher?

For feedback, go to the appendix, Check Your Understanding, located in the back of this text.

Reform: Focus on Schools

We have examined reform efforts that have focused on both teachers and the curriculum. In this section we consider reforms directed at schools themselves. We begin with the federal effort called “Race to the Top.”

Race to the Top

Race to the Top was a more than $4 billion U.S. Department of Education competition, open to all 50 states, designed to spur innovation and reforms in state and local district K–12 education. Announced by President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2009, the competition awarded states points for satisfying certain educational policies, such as designing performance-based standards for teachers and principals, complying with nationwide standards, promoting charter schools, and applying technology. Four states—Alaska, North
Dakota, Texas, and Vermont—chose not to participate, and 11 states and the District of Columbia ultimately won the competition and now have 4 years to implement their ambitious plans for reform (Cavanagh, 2011f).

The major goals for the program were to:

- Improve teacher and principal effectiveness through performance-based assessments (student test scores).
- Encourage the adoption of Common Core Standards and develop corresponding assessment systems.
- Target low-performing schools and either improve them or convert them to charters or privately managed schools.
- Improve existing data management systems to provide better information to teachers and decision makers.

These goals were translated into criteria for the Race to the Top competition, which encouraged 28 states to pass laws to improve teacher quality and 16 states to pass legislation to increase their ability to intervene with low-performing schools (McNeil, 2011a).

The Race to the Top program is significant for three reasons. First, it was the first large-scale attempt by the federal government to use a competition to foster educational reform. Second, like NCLB in 2001, it purposely left the specifics of reform to individual states to avoid criticisms that the federal government was being heavy-handed. Third, it sent a clear signal that the federal government was squarely behind its own reform, focuses too narrowly on testing and accountability, and (3) a focus on low-performing schools with charters and privately managed schools as viable alternatives. Each is likely to influence you in your first teaching job.

As with all reforms, Race to the Top has critics, and the criticisms focus more on the criteria used to determine winners than on the competition itself. In fact, some districts in winning states declined to participate because program criteria were inconsistent with their own goals (Cavanagh, 2011g). Critics also argue that accountability and high-stakes testing, two integral components of Race to the Top, haven’t worked in the past and are unlikely to succeed in the future (Ravitch, 2010a). Professional organizations complain that the program mandates top-down reform, focuses too narrowly on testing and accountability, favors charter schools at the expense of support for public schools, and fails to address inadequate funding for all students (N. Anderson, 2009).

School Choice

School choice is a term used to describe a variety of programs designed to give families the opportunity to choose the school their children will attend. Promoted by political conservatives who bemoan the lack of alternatives to public education, and dramatized by popular movies such as Waiting for Superman (Guggenheim, 2011) and The Lottery (Sackler, 2010), the choice movement is transforming the face of education in our country.

School choice exists when a student attends a school outside of the one they would have been assigned to by their geographic location, such as a certain section of a city. School choice encompasses open enrollment laws that allow students to attend other public schools, private schools, or charter schools. Vouchers, homeschooling, and tax credit and deductions for expenses related to schooling outside the public school system are also options offered by school choice programs. (We examine vouchers and homeschooling in more detail later in this section.)

Advocates of school choice argue that the freedom to choose is a central American value. We can choose where and how we live and the occupation in which we work, for example. Shouldn’t we also have a choice in the kind of schools our children will attend? School choice advocates argue that if families had a choice in schools, performance would improve because parents would have an incentive to keep schools accountable to them.

The Race to the Top program included $400 million in funding to support several states that were planning to implement school choice programs. The federal government also passed legislation to increase their ability to intervene with low-performing schools (McNeil, 2011a).
children attend? As presently organized, where students go to school is largely determined by the neighborhoods in which they live. And the schools across our country are remarkably similar. For instance, walk into most public schools across the country, and you’ll see teachers basically teaching the same content in the same way. Even the boxlike architecture of school buildings is nearly the same everywhere.

Critics of our existing system decry this uniformity and argue that we are a nation of 50 states with unique and distinctive histories and subcultures, and our schools ought to reflect this diversity. In addition, they assert, experimentation and innovation have been central to our nation's progress, and conformity discourages innovation. The availability of alternatives would result in healthy competition and better schools. They also argue that the public school system has become bloated, bureaucratic, and unresponsive to individual citizens' needs.

Opponents of school choice counter these arguments by saying that parents already have choices. For instance, they can move to neighborhoods served by better schools, and the quality of schools is a major factor parents consider when choosing where to live (Haughney, 2010). If parents don't like the schools in their neighborhood, they can move or send their children to private schools, and 11% of parents currently do this (Manno, 2010). Districts already allow parents who believe their local schools are subpar to send their children across town to better schools with open enrollment and magnet school programs. Doing so requires some time and expense, but parents still have choices.

But advocates of choice point out that many poor, minority, and inner-city parents don’t have the resources to vote with their wallets or their cars (Goyette, 2008). They can’t afford to move to better neighborhoods with better schools, send their children to private schools, or even to drive across town each day to transport their children to a non-neighborhood public school. In addition, some school districts are so bad, critics contend, that other schools in the district don’t really provide viable alternatives (Kahlenberg, 2011). These parents deserve the right to choose, just as much as more wealthy parents do.

But how can parents be provided with options? School choice has resulted in two major forms of educational reform: charter schools and vouchers.

### Charter Schools

**Charter schools** are alternative schools that are publicly funded but independently operated. The charter school movement began with the belief that the best way to reform schools is to take a school out of the existing bureaucracy and completely redesign it. Charter schools typically begin when a group—teachers, community members, a private corporation, or a combination of all three—develops a plan for a school, including its curriculum, staffing, and budget. This plan, or “charter,” must then be accepted by the local school board or state office of education and serves as a contract with the state.

Most school districts already have alternative schools, such as magnet schools with specialized programs and schools designed to meet the needs of students who cannot function well in regular schools and classrooms, such as young, unwed mothers or children with serious behavior or emotional problems. Charter schools are similar to other alternative schools in that they offer a different curriculum or target special populations, but they differ in that they’re independently administered public schools and are subject to less regulatory control from a district’s central administration.

Charter schools began in Minnesota in 1991, when the legislature approved eight teacher-created and teacher-operated schools. Since that time, 39 additional states and the District of Columbia have passed charter school legislation resulting in the creation of more than 5,000 schools with nearly 2 million students, or about 4% of the public school student population (Lake & Gross, 2012).
The focus of different charter schools varies dramatically, but most attract parents seeking smaller schools and class sizes, better instruction, or alternatives to public school curricula and environments (Ravitch, 2010a). Many—about one third of all charter schools—are designed by urban community leaders to meet the needs of inner-city youth, and nationally, more than 60% of charter students are members of racial or ethnic minority groups, compared to less than half for regular public schools (Manno, 2010). Some focus on developing students’ African heritage through language instruction, literature, and the arts. Others attract parents who want a return to the basics, and still others focus on Hebrew, Arabic, and other languages that parents want to preserve and pass on to their children (Applehome, 2011).

**KIPP Schools**

**KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program)** is a national network of free, open-enrollment charter schools that has the goal of preparing students in underserved communities for success in college and in life. KIPP schools usually target grades five through eight, and they typically have enrollments of about 300 students. In 2010 there were 99 KIPP schools in 20 states and the District of Columbia serving more than 26,000 students, and the program has recently expanded into early childhood education (Zehr, 2011b). Almost all KIPP students come from black or Hispanic families under the poverty line.

KIPP schools significantly increase the length of the school day and the school year. For example, school days are 9 and a half hours long, students attend school on every other Saturday, summer school is required, homework is a must, hard work brings special rewards such as field trips, and principals have a great deal of autonomy, such as the power to hire and fire teachers.

Some evidence indicates that KIPP students perform well academically, outperforming their peers in comparable schools in both math and reading (Zehr, 2010b), but these accomplishments are not uniform. For example, a new KIPP school in Jacksonville, Florida, scored at the bottom of all comparable schools in northeast Florida (Palka & Sanders, 2011), and other research suggests that KIPP schools have higher student attrition rates (Zehr, 2011c). Some critics contend low achievers are “pushed out” rather than remediated (Toppo, 2009), but other research has found that high attrition rates due to transfers were not a problem (Zehr, 2011d).

As with all educational reforms, the effectiveness of KIPP schools continues to be debated. And the schools’ policy of lengthening the school day and school year again raises the question of whether time in school should be increased for all students and how much this increased time will cost taxpayers.

**Evaluating Charter Schools**

Charter schools are growing in both number and students and have received support from every American president since George H. W. Bush. In addition, they are frequent beneficiaries of philanthropic organizations, such as the Gates Foundations (Zehr, 2010d). But are they successful and an effective educational reform?

Evaluating charter schools is difficult because they vary dramatically in both mission and quality. Some are excellent. For example, one all-boys high school in Chicago serving urban African American students placed all 107 of its first graduating class in 4-year colleges, and just 4% of these students were reading at grade level when they entered as freshmen (Paulson, 2010). Effective charters provide a coherent curriculum with excellent teachers to motivated students whose families made the special effort to place them there. Often the competition for these schools is so great that lotteries are used. Desperate parents, searching for viable alternatives to dismal, inner-city options anxiously attend lottery meetings to see if their children can be admitted. *Waiting for Superman*, a documentary about a lottery for one inner-city charter, received national attention and highlighted the plight of urban schools and their patrons (Sackler, 2010). Charter schools provide one alternative in sometimes bleak and discouraging educational landscapes.
On the other hand, a variety of problems with charter schools have surfaced. Fiscal mismanagement, particularly in charter schools run by for-profit organizations, is one. For example, a state audit of California’s Charter School Academy, which operated more than 50 schools, found the for-profit management company had misused more than $20 million in state and federal funds (Hendrie, 2005b). The organization abruptly closed all of its schools, leaving families, teachers, and school officials scrambling (Hutton, 2005). Between 2005 and 2009, nearly 500 additional charters closed their doors, leaving patrons stranded (Toch, 2010).

Whether charters can serve as viable prototypes for educational reform in regular public schools is another issue. For example, charters—as originally conceived—were supposed to offer parents alternatives and also promote educational innovation by becoming models or prototypes for reform in regular schools. But research suggests that most charters are very similar to regular public schools in style and format (Shah, 2011b).

In addition, some critics claim that charters succeed only because they receive extra funding from philanthropic organizations, such as the Gates Foundation (S. Dillon, 2011b; Toch, 2009/2010). Significantly higher levels of funding are unrealistic for regular public schools, but at least these successful charter schools that receive extra money provide evidence that public schools need more financial support.

Critics also contend that charter schools entice the best students away from poor-performing schools, leaving urban schools, in particular, in even worse shape (Goyette, 2008). Further, school choice can lead to segregation of students, either by income or by race.

The role that teachers play in charters also varies. Originally intended as opportunities for teachers to become actively involved in site-based management, some charters, and especially those run by for-profit management groups, discourage teacher input and initiative. Many are anti-union, because unions interfere with a top-down management style and alternative pay schedules (Zehr, 2011b).

The ultimate test for any school is student achievement; it’s the bottom line. And it’s also an issue. For example, charter schools in Arizona—one of the leaders in the charter school movement—have been labeled as underperforming at twice the rate of regular public schools (A. Lewis, 2008). Perhaps most significant—because of its scope and the fact that it was conducted by a neutral agency that neither advocated nor opposed charter schools—is a comprehensive study of charters in 15 states and the District of Columbia. The study found that student achievement in 17% of charter schools was superior to achievement in regular public schools, achievement was similar in about half of the charter schools, and it was inferior in 37% (Raymond, 2009).

In Teaching and You at the beginning of this section, we asked if you should consider teaching in a charter school. Charters offer alternative employment opportunities in the current tight job market, and you will want to keep your options open. Although currently small in terms of numbers, charters are likely to grow, given the public’s interest and the political support they are receiving (Friedman, 2010). But investigate carefully before you sign a contract. Understand the school’s philosophy, and know what is expected of you. For example, most successful charters have longer school days, and you may find that you will be expected to work from 7:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., for example. Some also require Saturday classes. Will you be compensated for this extra time? Also, salaries and benefits are often lower in charter schools (Zehr, 2011b). Whether you choose to work in a charter school is a personal decision, but be sure you’re well informed before you make it.

**Vouchers**

How would you like to receive a ticket to attend any school that you choose? **Vouchers**, checks or written documents that parents can use to purchase
educational services, are another approach to school choice reform. Vouchers are grounded in the belief that parents know best what their children need and should be free to purchase the best education wherever they can find it. Some voucher plans give parents the choice of either a public or a private school, whereas others limit the choice to public schools.

Political conservatives promote vouchers, arguing that public schools are a monopoly and that opening up schools to parental choice will allow market forces to improve education. Instead of being required to attend schools in immediate neighborhoods, all schools become viable alternatives. Over time, advocates argue, the best schools will attract more students and flourish, whereas weaker schools will be shut down by informed consumers and market forces.

Because of possible disruptive influences on public schools and issues with funding religious instruction, the voucher movement is highly controversial. Critics, including the NEA and the AFT, argue that vouchers increase segregation, split the public along socioeconomic lines, and drain students and resources from already struggling urban schools (N. Anderson, 2011; Maxwell, 2010).

Some advocates would also like to use vouchers for religious private schools. Why, they ask, should parents have to pay for a quality education twice—once when they pay public-school taxes and again when they pay tuition at private schools? Critics counter that this violates the principle of separation of church and state. Nationally, 75% of private schools are religiously affiliated (Manno, 2010).

In 2002 the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5 to 4 decision, ruled that the voucher program in Cleveland, which allowed vouchers to be used for religious private schools, didn't violate separation of church and state (Schimmel, Stellman, & Fischer, 2011). The idea that voucher funds went to parents rather than directly to religious schools was central to the decision. After the Supreme Court's decision, the number of applicants for the Cleveland voucher program rose significantly, but research conducted by a Cleveland-based nonprofit organization concluded that Cleveland vouchers served more as a subsidy for students already attending private schools than as an “escape hatch” for students eager to leave the public schools (Walsh, 2002).

In 2006, the Florida Supreme Court, in a 5–2 ruling, struck down Florida's voucher system, ruling that “the diversion of money not only reduced public funds for a public education but also used public funds to provide an alternative education in private schools that are not subject to the 'uniformity' requirements for public schools” (L. Romano, 2006, p. A05). More recently, Indiana passed a voucher plan that provided vouchers to families with incomes as high as $60,000 a year (Cavanagh, 2011a). Legal battles are likely to occur in other states and may prove difficult for voucher advocates because 37 state constitutions currently prohibit state aid to religious schools (Schimmel, Stellman, & Fischer, 2011).

As with charter schools, the academic benefits of vouchers are unclear. Some research suggests that voucher programs can lead to small achievement gains, but other research indicates no achievement gains, or small gains in some populations, such as African American, but not in others (Toch, 2011/2012; Trinko, 2011).

In general, the American public does not support vouchers. For instance, in a 2011 poll of the public’s attitudes toward public education, only 1 of 3 Americans supported using public dollars to allow parents to send their children to private schools (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011). But a number of states continue to pursue vouchers despite this general public opposition (R. Coyne, 2011).

State tuition tax-credit plans are a variation of school voucher programs in which parents are given tax credits for money spent on private school tuition. Tuition tax credits have emerged in some states as a more politically viable alternative to publicly financed school vouchers (Robelen, 2009). Research suggests, however, that tuition tax credits primarily benefit wealthy families who are already sending their children to private schools. In Illinois in 2000, for example, tax credits cost the state more than $61 million in lost revenues (Gehring, 2002). Taxpayers earning more than $80,000 claimed nearly half that amount, whereas...
less than 3% went to households making less than $20,000. A similar problem occurred in Arizona, where households earning more than $50,000 received more than 80% of the tax credits (Bracey, 2002). Given these facts, the continuation of state tuition tax-credit plans over the long term is probably unlikely.

Homeschooling

Homeschooling, an educational option in which parents educate their children at home, may be the ultimate form of school choice reform. Homeschooling has increased in popularity, and estimates suggest that 1.5 million students, nearly 3% of the school-age population, are being educated at home. This figure represents a more than 70% increase from 1999 to 2009 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

Parents homeschool their children for a variety of reasons (Lloyd, 2009). Most—more than 8 of 10—do so for religious reasons or concerns about the moral climate of existing schools (A. Boyd & Bichao, 2012). Others want a more academic emphasis or nontraditional educational approaches. All are seeking an alternative to existing public schools.

The governance of homeschooling occurs at the state level, and state laws regulating it vary greatly from state to state (Schimmel, Stellman, & Fischer, 2011). Forty-one states have no minimum educational qualifications for parents who homeschool their children; 8 of the remaining 9 states require at least a high school diploma (Zehr, 2004). In most states, parents must demonstrate that their instruction is equivalent to that offered in public schools. An increasing number of parents who homeschool their children are turning to cyberschooling by enrolling their children in online programs (Gaither, 2009).

Approximately half the states require homeschooled students to participate in regular standardized testing. Homeschooled students who take these tests typically do well, scoring, on average, over 30 percentile points higher than students in public schools (A. Boyd & Bichao, 2012). Whether these differences are due to the quality of instruction or self-selection (i.e., better students are being homeschooled) is not clear.

Despite its growing popularity, homeschooling has its critics. The greatest concern focuses on the lack of safeguards with respect to the quality of education provided for homeschooled children and the possibilities of neglect and even abuse (Gross, 2008). A California court recently jumped into the fray, ruling that homeschooled children must be taught by a credentialed teacher, or parents could face possible fines or criminal charges (Terwiller & Toppo, 2008). Other concerns center on whether children schooled at home will learn important social-interaction skills, and whether narrow courses of study will expose children to alternative views and perspectives (Kunzman, 2009).

EXPLORING DIVERSITY: Reform and Cultural Minorities

Reducing the achievement gap between members of cultural minorities and their white counterparts is the goal of many current reform efforts. This gap was highlighted by the NCLB legislation, which required states to report achievement...
scores for different cultural and ethnic groups within each school and district. We examine the effect of different reform efforts on members of cultural minorities in this section.

The standards movement has been the most pervasive reform movement in our country. As required by NCLB, all 50 states created state-specific standards, and most of the states have now adopted the national standards we discussed earlier in the chapter. Advocates argue that uniform standards and their corresponding assessments will provide more consistent information that can be used to compare the achievement of different groups of students (Cuban, 2012). In addition, advocates assert, accountability based on the standards will motivate students to master essential knowledge and skills.

Critics, on the other hand, point to data suggesting that high-stakes testing is having a negative effect on precisely the students—members of cultural minorities—that this reform is designed to help. For example, high-stakes tests have resulted in large numbers of minority students being held back a grade (Van Horn, 2008), and high-stakes graduation exams, instead of encouraging higher achievement, have discouraged students and resulted in higher dropout rates (Nichols & Berliner, 2008).

Other reform efforts have targeted the teachers of low-SES and cultural minority students. A paradox exists in our educational system: members of cultural minorities and students at risk are often taught by the least-effective teachers (Shah, 2011d) and by teachers who are inexperienced and paid less than their suburban counterparts (Sawchuk, 2011b). Ineffective teacher evaluation systems that fail to identify and remediate substandard teachers add to the problem. Reforms targeting teacher evaluation, tenure, and merit pay are intended to address these inequities, but the effectiveness of these reforms is uncertain at best (Sawchuk, 2010c; Sparks, 2011a).

Other reforms targeting low-SES and minority students are designed to use charter schools to bypass ineffective public schools altogether. Charter schools, advocates claim, can bypass the inefficient bureaucracies of large, monolithic school districts and create innovative learning environments for students. And a few achieve impressive results. But as you saw earlier in the chapter, charter schools vary dramatically in quality, and many perform no better than the schools they replace (Betts & Tang, 2011). So, with respect to diversity, reform efforts are mixed. While many of the reforms have specifically targeted underserved groups of students, actual performance results have been spotty and inconsistent.

Reform Revisited

So, how should we evaluate the recent efforts to reform our teachers and schools? Looking at results—student achievement data—is perhaps the most viable way of assessing these efforts, and these results are mixed at best. For example, comprehensive reviews of the effects of high-stakes testing on achievement have found that this approach to reform has had little or no positive effect on student learning. And in some cases, the efforts have produced negative effects by increasing student dropout rates (Sparks, 2011a). Invalid tests and inappropriate use of test results have been identified as major obstacles to the test accountability reform movement (Sparks, 2011a).

Merit pay reforms have encountered similar negative evaluations. For example, one rigorous and comprehensive study of teacher incentives on student learning in Tennessee found that this reform failed to “. . . yield consistent and lasting gains in test scores. It simply did not do much of anything” (Sawchuk, 2010c, p. 12). One critic argued that for an incentive system to work “. . . you’d have to have teachers who were saving their best strategies for an opportunity to get paid for them, and that is an absurd proposition” (Sawchuk, 2010c, p. 13). Our experience working with classroom teachers supports this view. Teachers
Reform Strategies and Your Work with Cultural Minorities

You’re a new teacher in a large urban district in the Southeast. Your district is under pressure to narrow the achievement gap that exists between more affluent and often predominantly white outer-city schools in the district and inner-city schools serving poor and minority students. The school board in your district is considering different reform proposals, and the professional organization in your district is encouraging all teachers to attend discussions of these proposals because the changes will impact their professional lives.

You attend the first meeting, and after the meeting is called to order, the chair of the committee frames the debate.

“We’re here to consider proposals for changes to our district’s policies that will help decrease the differences in achievement that we see among our schools and students. I believe we all agree that this is a serious problem, and our district must address it. However, considerable disagreement exists about how to address the problem. I’ll open the floor to members of the school board first, and then I’ll ask for opinions from other members of our community.”

“I believe we’re already on the right track with our new standards and tests,” one school board member begins. “We’ve put a lot of time and effort into constructing standards for different subjects. Now we need to take the next step and put some teeth into those standards. We need to make both teachers and students accountable for these standards and basically say, ‘Pass the tests, or don’t advance to the next grade or graduate.’ Let’s send the message that we’re serious about learning.”

A second school board member responds, “I’m sorry to disagree, but that approach is all wrong. It’s like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. More standards and tests won’t change anything; teachers will teach to the test, and both teachers and students will try to game the system whenever they can. Instead, we need to focus on the teacher and create better teacher evaluation and tenure systems. Until we get rid of the poor teachers in our system, nothing else will change.”

“I agree with what you just said,” a third board member adds, “but I don’t think you’ve gone far enough. We need to identify the best teachers and pay them more. It’s crazy to pay the best teachers the same as the worst. We need to develop an effective merit pay system.”

A fourth school board member weighs in. “I agree with everything that’s been said so far, but I’ve sat on this board for years and know that the changes you all are recommending will take time—years to implement and even more years before we see any results. I think we need something new that will change things immediately. And most of you know what I’m going to advocate: charter schools. Let’s free up the chokehold of bureaucracy that is strangling our district and allow charter schools to innovate and lead the way in reform.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How would you respond to the school board member who advocates more testing and accountability?
2. How would you respond to the two school board members who want to target teachers as the key to reform?
3. How would you respond to the school board member advocating charters as a reform strategy?

Go to Diversity and You in the MyEducationLab Book Resources that accompany this text to log your thoughts and receive feedback from your authors.

aren’t waiting for an incentive program to motivate their best efforts; most are already teaching as effectively as they know how.

Other states around the country, such as Texas, Washington, and Iowa, are scaling back performance-based teacher compensation plans. As with the Tennessee study, research from around the country has failed to find any significant positive benefits for reform-based teacher incentive systems (N. Fleming, 2011).

So have these various reform efforts had any effects on education at all? The answer is yes, and unfortunately, many effects on teachers themselves have been negative. As teachers have become scapegoats for many of the failures of our current educational system, teacher morale is declining (Santos, 2012). One veteran Florida teacher lamented, “The guillotine of teacher quality and merit pay is now swinging over my head” (Harper, 2011, p. 24). A principal in New York had similar concerns about a new teacher evaluation system being introduced in his state, “It’s education by humiliation. I’ve never seen teachers and principals so degraded” (Winerip, 2011f, p. A18). Tangible evidence of this problem exists across the country. A recent poll of teacher attitudes found a sharp decrease in teachers’ satisfaction with their profession (MetLife, 2012). In Wisconsin, teacher retirements during the struggle
over teachers’ collective bargaining rights doubled; in Alabama, the state legislature had to call a special session to deal with high teacher turnovers linked to cutbacks in teacher benefits (Associated Press, 2011a). In their attempts to squeeze more out of teachers, state legislators send a clear message, “Do more with less, and don’t depend on us for support.” Ill-conceived teacher-focused reforms are likely to hinder efforts to recruit quality teachers in the future. With teacher pay being mediocre by many industry standards, job security and benefits are seen as major incentives to attract our next group of effective teachers. When these incentives are eliminated by budget-cutting and reform-minded legislatures, the prospect of future recruitment efforts is diminished.

We want to emphasize that we are not opposed to reform, just haphazard, ill-conceived reform that damages both teachers and ultimately students. In fact, reforms are, without question, needed if schools are to improve. However, to produce long-term benefits, implementation of reform efforts must be based on evidence indicating that they’re effective, and how and why they’re effective. This evidence doesn’t exist for many current reform efforts.

To correct these problems we need well thought-out pilot programs that involve teachers from the outset. If good teachers are the key to effective school reform, we need to involve them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of future reform efforts (DeBose et al., 2012). To do otherwise will result in short-term changes that will ultimately fail to address the real problems facing our schools.

Evidence is clear about one factor; the key to improved student learning is the quality of the teacher. This means you. As we said earlier in the chapter, no organization, system, institution, or enterprise is any better than the people in it, and the same applies to schools. You and others like you will determine how much students in our country are learning.

Gradually, some of our nation’s leaders are beginning to realize the truth of this assertion. Here’s what President Obama said in his 2012 State of the Union address:

Teachers matter. So instead of bashing them, or defending the status quo, let’s offer schools a deal. Give them the resources to keep good teachers on the job, and reward the best ones. In return, grant schools flexibility: to teach with creativity and passion; to stop teaching to the test; and to replace teachers who just aren’t helping kids learn. (DeBose et al., 2012)

Teachers do matter. None of the reform efforts we’ve discussed—charter schools, merit pay for teachers, the elimination of tenure, standards, accountability and high-stakes testing, or any other will work if students aren’t taught by expert teachers.

Successful reform efforts must be aimed at and include you in the process of reform. Successful reform requires intelligent, motivated people who will become the professionals our schools and students need. Our goal in writing this book is to help you begin to acquire the professional knowledge that will guide your actions as you wrestle with these important changes in education.

**Check Your Understanding**

1. Explain how schools and schooling are being changed as a result of reform efforts.
2. What do recent federal reform efforts have in common? What do they suggest about the future of reform in U.S. schools?
3. In addition to reform efforts focusing on teacher tenure, teacher evaluation, merit pay, and limiting collective bargaining by professional organizations, how have states used charters to stimulate educational reform?
4. What are the two major forms of school choice? How are they similar and different?

For feedback, go to the appendix, Check Your Understanding, located in the back of this text.
Summary

1. Explain how the current reform movement has been shaped by previous efforts at reform.
   - Educational reform involves changes to current practice that will increase student learning. Current targets for reform include teacher evaluation, merit pay, teacher tenure, limits on professional organizations, standards, testing and accountability, and school choice.
   - The current educational reform movement began with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. This report linked U.S. economic growth to education and claimed that our current educational system was substandard. More recently in 2001, reform was promoted by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which required each state to formulate standards in basic skill areas and construct tests to measure each student’s attainment of these standards.

2. Describe how current reform efforts that focus on the teacher will affect your life in the classroom.
   - Critics claim that current teacher evaluation systems are inefficient and ineffective and fail to differentiate between good and bad teachers. Reformers want to evaluate teachers on the value, or learning gains, they add in the classroom.
   - Advocates of merit pay reform believe that good teaching should be rewarded and poor teaching should be identified and dealt with, either through remediation or dismissal. Most current merit pay proposals use both classroom observation and student test scores to identify exemplary performance.
   - Tenure protects teachers from political pressures and provides job security to teachers. Critics claim that it also shields ineffective teachers and should be curtailed or eliminated.
   - Professional organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have been thrust into the middle of reform debates in many states. Some states are attempting to limit the collective bargaining powers of these organizations. Critics claim that these organizations are obstacles to meaningful reforms and are placing teachers’ welfare above students’.

3. Explain how reform efforts focusing on standards, testing, and accountability are influencing the curriculum and classroom instruction.
   - The most far-reaching reform effort to date has been the standards movement. Spurred by NCLB, the standards movement has resulted in state-level accountability tests that are often high stakes for both students and their teachers.
   - Because of enormous variability on state standards and their assessments, national standards are being formulated and have been adopted by 48 states. Advocates hope national standards will provide greater uniformity between states and ultimately lead to increased achievement for all students. Critics fear that national standards will result in a national test for all states.

4. Describe how schools and schooling are being changed as a result of reform efforts.
   - The federal government is taking a central role in reform. In the Race to the Top competition, states were asked to address the following reform topics: national standards, more rigorous performance evaluations for principals and teachers, merit pay, and charter schools. This competition encouraged a number of states to pass legislation in these areas.
   - State efforts at reform have encompassed a number of different options. The most prominent of these has been school choice in the form of charter schools, vouchers, and homeschooling. Charter schools allow individual schools to govern themselves and create viable options to existing school practices.
Important Concepts

accountability  pay-for-performance plans
adequate yearly progress (AYP) professional organization
American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Race to the Top
charter schools reform
collective bargaining school choice movement
Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) standards
high-stakes tests state tuition tax-credit plans
homeschooling teacher evaluation
KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) teacher tenure
merit pay value-added models
National Education Association (NEA) voucher
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Portfolio Activity

Professional Organizations

InTASC Core Teaching Standard 9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice

The purpose of this activity is to acquaint you with the major professional teacher organizations in your state. Using the Internet, access both the NEA and the AFT sites. Compare them at the national level in terms of goals, activities, and issues. Then within each site, locate the state you’ll likely be teaching in and investigate specific educational issues in that state. When you are out in the schools, talk to teachers about their experiences with either organization. Does either organization seem right for you? Summarize your decision in a one- or two-page summary.

Portfolio Activities similar to this one and related to chapter content can be found at MyEducationLab™.

Educational Reform and You

Go to the topic Assessment, Standards, and Accountability in the MyEducationLab (www.myeducationlab.com) for Introduction to Teaching, where you can:

• Find learning outcomes for Assessment, Standards and Accountability, along with the national standards that connect to these outcomes.
• Complete Assignments and Activities that can help you more deeply understand the chapter content.
• Apply and practice your understanding of the core teaching skills identified in the chapter with the Building Teaching Skills and Dispositions learning units.
• Examine challenging situations and cases presented in the IRIS Center Resources.
• Access video clips of CCSSO National Teachers of the Year award winners responding to the question, “Why Do I Teach?” in the Teacher Talk section.
• Check your comprehension on the content covered in the chapter with the Study Plan. Here you will be able to take a chapter quiz, receive feedback on your answers, and then access Review, Practice, and Enrichment activities to enhance your understanding of chapter content.
• Check the Book Resources to find opportunities to share thoughts and gather feedback on the Diversity and You and Issues You’ll Face in Teaching features found in this chapter.

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