



Jim Broadway

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On building a high quality teaching corps

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

Yes, last week I promised not to clutter up your email inboxes until early January. But I got steered to some information that relates directly to my rant of a couple of weeks ago about the ["teacher shortage"](#) and what caused it and what can be done about it. With guidance, I found there are some good ideas out there.

I've been guided, again, by my friend Marcus Albrecht, Uniserv Director for IEA Region 5 based in Edwardsville (where, long ago, I was a reporter, and later the editor, of the local newspaper, the Intelligencer, [as this nice article asserts.](#)) Anyway, Albrecht reminded me of the [Learning Policy Institute](#).

The Institute reported last year that teacher preparation program enrollment fell by 35%, from 691,000 in 2009 to 451,000 in 2014. Like most education leaders, Albrecht is concerned that policymakers might try to address the teacher shortage (which they created) by lowering the standards for a person to become a teacher.

Since most recent research points to teacher quality as the most important factor that a school can control (in contrast with home environments that a school can't control) in causing learning to take place, you would think policymakers would maintain teacher quality as a public policy matter at all costs.

But teacher quality has been affected by the current national shortage of teachers. In an extreme case, Arizona law now puts teachers in the classroom after having had [zero preparation for teaching](#), zero instruction as to how learning happens. (That's a lot cheaper than paying their teachers a living wage.)

The Arizona law, according to Gov. Doug Ducey (a Republican), the no-training-for-teachers policy will attract "great teachers" to Arizona. That's a pipe dream. The Learning Policy Institute's [extraordinary interactive map](#) gives Arizona a "teaching attractiveness rating" of just 1.5. (Illinois gets 3.42.)

We'll just keep using Arizona for comparison. That state got a "compensation" rating (factors are starting salary plus competitiveness) of 1; Illinois got 3.5. Pupil-teacher ratio: 23-1 in Arizona, 15-1 in Illinois. Percent of teachers who say they have "classroom autonomy": Arizona 71%, Illinois 81%. Percent of teachers uncertified: Arizona 5.04%, Illinois 0.6% (so they have 30 times the concentration of uncertified teachers in Arizona as in Illinois).

Are any of Illinois teachers likely to move to Arizona? The fact is, in most respects the teaching profession in Illinois is better off than it is in most other states. And yet it is getting harder for Illinois principals to fill vacancies with teachers of demonstrable quality. The situation is bad in Illinois, worse in other states.

So what can states do about the teacher shortage without eroding professional standards? The Learning Policy Institute has [some ideas to consider](#), some which have already been implemented by states. For example, as a way of reducing the costs of entering the profession, student loan forgiveness is recommended. Arkansas and North Carolina enacted laws in that direction this year, the National Conference of State Legislatures reports. Montana makes loans easier to get.

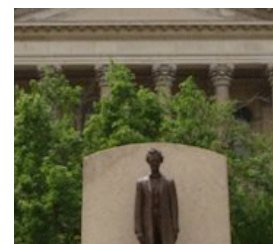
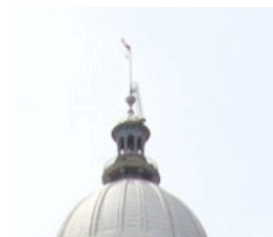
[There's an NCSL 50-state bill-tracking database [you can search at this link.](#)]

Creating teacher "residencies" (such as medical practitioners often have) is another notion considered by the Institute, as is the ["Grow Your Own"](#) concept that Illinois has used for years to gather more urban teachers who look like their students. Mentoring programs, even housing incentives, are on the list.

Government relations recommendation: Those ISNS readers who occasionally talk with their state legislators (and I hear there are many of you) should think about the teacher shortage. While you're demanding reasonable school funding hikes (\$650 million more each year, at least), urge legislators to find ways of making more teachers available without eroding professional standards. Give those who don't know about it the URL to the [Learning Policy Institute](#) web site.

[Now, except for some paragraphs below, I am finished with my scribbling for 2017. Most of you won't hear from me again until about the second week of January. I do plan to send a few thoughts out to those who have agreed to share their thoughts with me about the future of ISNS and about mortality in general. If you want to receive those paragraphs (and I hope you do), let me know by filling out and [submitting the form you find here](#). Happy Holidays! friends.]

Has another turning point occurred? It was back in about 1988 when I heard a voice on the radio speaking illegally. No, it wasn't that he was talking dirty, exactly. Rather, he was ranting about political candidates, naming names and saying how



terrible it would be if any of them - all Democrats - were to be elected.

As a journalist and a communication major, I knew about the "Fairness Doctrine," a federal policy that required "equal time" for opposing views whenever radio or TV airwaves were used to broadcast opinions about candidates for political office or about pending issues of public policy.

The basis of the Fairness Doctrine was this: (1) The "airwaves" are public property and, therefore, should be regulated in the interest of the public and of democracy; (2) broadcast communication influences public opinion, which is the essence of decision-making in a democracy; (3) fairness demands that diversity of views be aired; but (4) airwaves limits preclude such diversity unless it is demanded of all companies holding broadcast franchises.

The impact was amazing, in retrospect. You don't remember this because you're too young, but issues of public policy were not skewed, Fox News-style, back then. If an important topic was controversial, opponents would be given time to express their opinions on it, the same amount of time as that allotted to proponents.

But the Reagan Administration had [shelved the Fairness Doctrine](#). The voice I heard sneering at Democrats without any voice of dissent was that of Rush Limbaugh. He was unconstrained by law or by any sense of obligation to the truth or by any sense of public decency whatever. There was money in such "entertainment."

Limbaugh led the way for Sean Hannity and Matt Drudge and Bill O'Reilly and Ann Coulter and Laura Ingraham and all the talking heads that spew the hateful ideology corporate sponsors will pay to have on the air. Relatively fewer liberal ideas make the cut. The format is less of a "talk show" than it is a shouting match.

Has democracy suffered as a result? I'd say it has been savaged. Years ago, a brief but very cogent analysis of the topic was made by environmental activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (yes, brother of Chris Kennedy, current candidate for Illinois governor); he [did it on public television](#), the Travis Smiley show.

"The devolution of the American press began in 1986 when Ronald Reagan abolished the Fairness Doctrine," Kennedy accurately asserted. Indeed, corporate interests were essentially handed the microphone of public communication in America. More recently ([Citizens United](#)), they got control of political communication.

But this is not news. What's the "other" turning point? Public school [education is likely to lose a major asset](#) because of last week's deregulation of Internet service providers by the Federal Communication Commission, which recently came under Republican control like it did prior to the end of the Fairness Doctrine.

Will the consequences be as great, as profoundly influential on our society's very shape, as the 1986 FCC decision? As to schools, Richard Cullata, CEO of the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) told NPR that "when carriers can choose to prioritize paid content over freely available content, schools really are at risk."

Verizon? Comcast? AT&T? They control almost all the Internet provider service. Would they *prioritize paid content* over information needed by schoolchildren? Oh, business is business you say. Speaking of that, thriving established companies will lose nothing but the cash to pay the rate increases. Start-ups will suffer.

Sen. Daniel Biss, the smartest candidate for governor of Illinois, said he was "deeply disappointed" by the net neutrality repeal, calling it "the latest example of how corporate profits are prioritized above working people." (Biss can't win, of course. Instead of tried-and-true empty slogans, [he's peddling substantive ideas](#). Ha!)

Meanwhile, more than 100 Illinois school districts are already at an Internet disadvantage, lacking the band-width they need, according to an Illinois State Board of Education [news release issued Monday](#). ISBE is urging districts to apply for grants under the agency's [Illinois Classroom Connectivity Initiative](#).

[Information on grant opportunities [for FY 2019 is on this form](#). Further [information is here](#).

Districts are also encouraged to seek consulting services from [educationsuperhighway.org](#), ISBE's "partner" in its efforts to connect every classroom with bandwidth sufficient to download 100 kilobyts of data per second for every student in the classroom, which is the minimum educational bandwidth recommendation.

"A quality education today absolutely includes high-speed internet access," State Superintendent of Education Tony Smith said in the news release. Upgrading to fiber "opens up limitless opportunities to use free online resources, teach coding, and integrate technology across the curriculum," Smith said. "The state's investment today is essential to preparing all students for the jobs of tomorrow and fueling our growth as a state."

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