



Talking About Teachers and Teachers' Unions Toolkit: Sample Editorials

The following are three examples of ways to incorporate the framing research into short guest editorials between 250 and 650 words each.

Supporting High-Quality Teacher Preparation Is Key to Improving Schools

Improving our nation's schools will only happen when we put forward commonsense solutions. Redesigning school systems for 21st century learning in a practical step-by-step way – coupled with increasing teacher supports and improving teacher quality – will go a long way toward ensuring that our country gets the educated workforce it will need to ensure our future. Unfortunately, we too often settle for an educational system that operates on an agrarian-industrial model from a century ago, when students helped their families run farms and when there were plenty of good jobs for people who didn't graduate from high school. We don't live in that world anymore; instead, we have a rapidly changing world, and our teacher preparation system must adapt to the needs of our country as part of a new global economy.

But not everything we know is antiquated. Like a house that needs remodeling, some of what we have in place in our education system is working well and some of it needs updating. As we work on that remodeling effort for education, teachers will need to rely on the scaffolding of resources and colleagues that is necessary to support their work. Scaffolding helps them share plans, information, tools and materials, while it safely supports them to do their jobs. Teachers need a similar kind of scaffolding in order to be prepared and successful in their work of building children's brains.

Well-prepared teachers will be effective teachers. It's easy to see why every teacher candidate should receive adequate support and training in order to

meet high standards for teacher skill, knowledge and ability. It's harder to see the invisible supports that make this process work. By overlaying these key components with quality content, universities, school districts and state licensing agencies can help ensure that preparation and licensure programs are producing the quality teacher candidates that both schools and students need.

There are many innovative and proven approaches to improving teacher preparation, locally and nationally. One promising approach is that of Urban Teacher Residencies. In this program, aspiring teachers, known as residents, are selected according to rigorous criteria aligned with district needs. They integrate their master's level course work with an intensive, full-year classroom residency alongside experienced mentors. This is their scaffolding – which means that by working closely with mentors, teacher residents share information and resources with others while developing the knowledge, skill, and ability they will need to be effective teachers.

Another approach is that of the creation of a national education institute that would accept college graduates who are in the top third of class rankings, expose them to a rigorous and relevant training leading to a master's degree in education and, in exchange for free tuition, would send these fine teachers back into our country to teach in the nation's highest needs schools for at least six years.

What we know about effective teaching is that when teachers get the scaffolding they need to do their job well, students learn the skills and knowledge to best prepare them for the future demands of our changing society. It's in our country's long-term interest to provide the necessary financial assistance to improve teacher preparation programs. This includes working with teachers' associations and unions to provide targeted professional development for educators. Leadership initiatives are needed strategy to this end. By supporting our teachers through these various professional opportunities, we provide them the access to tools and resources they need to educate our children.

Great public schools have well-connected teachers who can learn from each other to support student learning. By committing ourselves to practical initiatives to improve teacher preparation, we will reap the rewards in better outcomes for students and for our country. (Words: 613)

Celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week

It's national Teacher Appreciation Week, and that makes it the perfect time to take a moment to reflect on great teachers. We all remember certain teachers that had a profound impact on our lives. These are the teachers that really made a difference, the teachers we will never forget.

But I want to lift the curtain a bit and think about all that goes into creating a great teacher, or the "scaffolding" that every great teacher relies on for support. First of all, great teachers are supported by great colleagues. Early on, these are the mentors and master teachers that help new teachers cultivate the skills and expertise they need for success. Later, it's opportunities for continued education and teacher training opportunities. Good scaffolding also provides access to the resources teachers need to do their jobs. This includes physical things, like a decent building, classroom supplies, and books, but also classroom volunteers, engaged parents and community members, and a supportive school administration. Finally, great teachers are sustained by support systems that work efficiently to attract, train and retain the very best educators for our children.

When this scaffolding is firmly in place, teachers have what they need to apply their full energy to the important work of building young brains. Today, during Teacher Appreciation Week, consider how you can be a part of creating and sustaining the supports that make great teachers possible. (Words: 233)

Remodeling Our Education System to Support Effective Teaching

Preparing our children for the future requires our nation to “get smart” about remodeling our education system and borrowing ideas from the practical solutions we see working in communities around the country. Let’s be clear – the next generation of Americans will need much more in the way of skills, competencies and talents if our country is to be successful in the 21st century. Teachers are a critical part of student success and, as a result, a critical part of our nation’s success in creating the blueprint to get us there.

Successful schools already know that effective teachers are those surrounded by supports, good coaching from other teachers, and engaged in continuous quality improvement with other education professionals. They know that by working together, they can build the scaffolding – the resources and supports – teachers need to improve the scholastic outcomes for children. Similar to the scaffolding builders rely on for tools, materials and support from other builders when constructing buildings, teachers also rely on the scaffolding supports from other teachers, administrators, and professional organizations to teach effectively. Having a strong collaborative network of external supports available to teachers is an effective approach to achieving quality educational outcomes for our nation’s children. In effect, the stronger the scaffold for teachers, the more effective they are in building the brains of America’s future workforce.

School districts in Long Beach, California, provide a great example of what really effective scaffolding looks like. In those districts, teachers, administrators, and teachers’ unions work to support, evaluate, and reward great teaching. By building effective supports, they provide the essential scaffolding that teachers need to manifest great schools, and by extension, that schools need to provide quality education to our students. Through their efforts, the districts have received state-wide commendations on their efforts to improve teacher supports: a teacher effectiveness task force, engagement of the teachers’ unions, joint plans for managing fiscal resources for curricular materials and professional development opportunities, as well as initiatives that make better use of student and teacher evaluation data. In the end, working smart means providing the supports that teachers need to do their jobs so that our country can take advantage of the strong minds and capable citizens that result. (Words: 368).