Teachers as "Healers": 21st-Century Possibility? Or Necessity?

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Throughout the modern era in the 20th century, there have been continual efforts to reform schools and make them more efficient, imitating the industrial model of standardization. However, many students were left behind in this process. Certain dimensions of teaching, like making connections with all students, were lost in standards-based initiatives.

The postmodern era brings with it an increased emphasis on preparing teachers to work with poor, at-risk, ethnically diverse, and special-needs populations. To achieve this goal, we must encourage candidates to reach beyond the technical aspects of teaching to become caring professionals. "Teachers as healers" invokes a powerful metaphor for this new paradigm.

In the 1920s, the industrial movement had an extreme influence on educational practices in the United States, which had an economic system that was moving from one based in agriculture to one based in factory production. In this modern era, emphasis was on sameness and conformity: Laborers were needed to perform the work given them without question. The majority of laborers would not rise to management positions, so the only requirement necessary for success in this type of environment was mastery of basic skills (Wise & Leibbrand, 2002). The belief that schools should operate following the model of the factory was promoted, with students viewed as "products" and education dispensed as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. This belief paralleled the industrial arena, but was wholly contradictory to the philosophy promoted by Dewey and his followers in the progressive education movement, which held that a child-centered and process-oriented approach was needed for successful teaching and learning (Edelfelt & Raths, 1999).

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The latter half of the 20th century witnessed many societal transformations taking place in this country. Mandates for changes to accommodate diversity in the workplace and public schools resulted from legislation passed following the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and the 1960s, accompanied by subsequent calls for extensions of equal rights to women and those with disabilities. In addition, entry into a global economy by the United States generated an industry need for knowledge of diverse cultures and creative thinking for marketplace survival (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, Taskforce on Teaching as a Profession, 1986). These events spelled the end of the modern era and movement into our present postmodern world.

As our country continues to evolve in the 21st century, the call for renewing the democratic missions of schools has influenced the system as a whole to provide optimum learning for students. Glickman (1994) charged that accomplishing this goal of remaking public schools must begin with each of us as teachers, as we are ultimately responsible for what and how students learn. He cited the work of Costa and Garmston in the areas of counseling, clinical supervision, organization development, teaching effectiveness, and cognitive psychology as essential elements of "remaking teaching a dignified and thoughtful profession" (p. v).

Standards for Teacher Education

Edelfelt and Raths (1999) traced the history of standards development for teacher education over the last 130 years. As a result of their examination, they found that a continuing dilemma has existed concerning how to choose candidates for teacher preparation programs. According to their findings, various manufacturing and economic practices have impacted the way students were viewed and the desired traits perceived necessary for teachers to be successful in schools throughout history.

In the 1970s, competency-based approaches to education led to behavioral objectives and the splitting of curricula into minute areas. While trying to address

objectives to be achieved by students, teachers in effect lost sight of who those students were. By the mid-1980s with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), there was a realization that if the standard of living in the United States was to be maintained, there had to be greater retention and graduation rates for secondary students. This echoed a need to address the schooling of diverse populations within the nation.

The Carnegie Foundation report at this time also recommended that a National Board for Teaching Standards be created (Edelfelt & Raths, 1999). The establishment of standards for high levels of professional teaching competence included working toward participatory school environments. In 1991, the Association of Teacher Educators Commission on the Education of Teachers Into the 21st Century published its recommendations for preparation of effective teachers. An examination of achievement scores produced by ethnically diverse students established that they had not had the same educational opportunities as White, middle-class students. This finding reinforced the need to examine both curricular materials and educational practices found in schools. The members of the Commission gave particular emphasis to preparing teachers to work with all students, especially those who were at risk, minority, poor, in urban areas, or members of ethnic groups who traditionally had poor records of achieving success within the academic system as it was presently constructed (Edelfelt & Raths, 1999).

This Commission report was followed in 1995 by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE) move to incorporate two new concerns in their assessment criteria for institutions preparing teachers, one of which focused on the diversity of the student body, and the other on faculty and the conceptual framework guiding institutional programming for the development of educators. As affirmed by Guyton (1998), "Awareness of the need for multiculturally adept teachers has increased over the years due to continued demographic and teacher recruiting trends" (p. 5).

NCATE has continued its work on standards for teacher education programs and expectations for teacher performance, including demonstration that teachers are able to work with all students in the teaching–learning process (Wise & Leibbrand, 2002). In a recent development, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P. L. 107–110). The provisions of the act make it imperative that educational institutions be inclusive in their thinking about promoting success for all students, regardless of ethnicity, special needs, or social class. Accordingly, teacher preparation institutions must develop teachers who are able to be effective for all, not only with those who have excelled in traditional school settings. The need for in-service education for school practitioners concerning successful practices for teaching diverse populations is readily apparent as well.

A New Paradigm for Education

Prior to the postmodern era, communities were considered to be built on the construct of sameness, or commonalities such as cultural backgrounds, being related to other community members, and sharing common values (Furman, 2002). Today's school communities no longer reflect sameness, but include a number of diverse populations, cultures, values, and ways of teaching and learning. As a result of changes in latter part of the 20th century, educational institutions have awakened to the imperative to change from the industrial management model with its emphasis on sameness and complying with management's decisions to that of creating relationships that are oriented in people and actions, or as described by Costa and Garmston (1994), "It is a revolution of relationships and a new revolution of the Intellect, placing a premium on our greatest resource—our human minds in relationships with one another" (p. 5). This new paradigm focuses our attention on human capital rather than on economic and industrial capital.

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McIntyer and Byrd (1998), among others, called for an understanding of "systems" thinking in teacher preparation to transform the way we develop education professionals. With systems thinking, connections are sought between actions and the effects of actions. Therefore, the focus is not just on one part of education, such as examining achievement scores as indicators of children's learning, but on how different parts of the system affect children, families, and society as a whole. This is very different from the past when various areas affecting students' lives were considered separately by educators, or outside the realm of schools. A problem might be recognized in one area, without consideration for overlap in other areas. For example, Testerman (1996) stated that when some students do not perceive school to be a warm and friendly place they will either act as if they are invisible or they will act out. Children who have difficulty with reading and therefore score low on achievement

tests could benefit from the services of reading teachers, but if nothing changes in their regular classrooms to re-inforce improvements students make, these changes might not last.

Maeroff (1998) stated that for families in suburban areas, schools are as much a part of their lives as their backyard grills. There are expectations that children need a certain amount of stimulation in the form of en-richment programs from the time they are little until they are adults to ensure they will be prepared with the social capital needed to succeed in life. However, in ur-ban areas there is often disconnection between school and the rest of life. Consequently, students do not have the support networks that prepare them for and allow them to succeed in school. "Those who want to raise ed-ucational standards and improve classroom learning must acknowledge—especially so far as the one in five students who live in poverty are concerned—that the out-of-school lives of these students cannot be ignored" (Maeroff, 1998, p. 426). He concluded that connectedness with the school is strengthened when bonds are forged among home, neighborhood, and com-munity, fostering a sense of ownership in the school and well-being for students, which is often missing in the lives of the urban poor.

Clearly, there is a need for change in the way we think about schools and the roles we play in the lives of students. As teachers, we cannot exist in isolated bub-bles, but need to be part of the changing system to affect students positively in their educational experiences. Bronfenbrenner (1989) presented us with a social ecol-ogy model showing the interrelationships of children, families, schools, and other community systems that touch all of our lives. What happens in one part of the system (e.g., the increase in gang membership by pre-teens and teens) affects what happens in homes, commu-nities, and schools. Educators who teach for social justice must understand the concept that one area of stu-dents' lives affects all other areas.

Change is never easy, especially changes in social in-stitutions. Education, in particular, has been described as conservative and resistant to change. Making classrooms participatory and responsive to the needs of all students will not happen quickly. To do so, teachers must first begin to practice critically responsive teaching (Brookfield, 1990). This type of teaching entails willing-ness on the part of teachers to explore their students' in-terests, backgrounds, and cultures. They can then relate subject matter and critical thinking to what is important to their students, creating synergy in learning that was absent in the older transmission of information para-digm. Critical thinking skills are fostered in this model as we explore with students how cultures influence what we think and how we relate to the world around us. As Brookfield (1990) explained:

Teachers must foster critical thinking of issues as well as adjust their methods, content, and approaches to promote learning in diverse settings. Teachers who are critically re-sponsive assist students in realizing dominant values, "commonsense" wisdom, generally accepted standards, and prevailing social or political arrangements are cultural constructs. Because these are cultural creations, teachers point out they can be dismantled and reframed by human agency. (p. 10)

Glasser (1998) reinforced the need for this new para-digm shift by utilizing the term *quality teachers* to desig-nate those who practice critical pedagogy, leading students to their learning, and giving them opportunities to develop their interests and talents. Quality teachers lis-ten to their students' ideas and problems and act as friends to them. The boundaries of quality teachers are permeable so that students feel connected to their classrooms.

Emergent Quality, Reflective Teachers

Those who enter the teaching profession do so pri-marily because they have a fervent service or client ori-entation, and they remain in the profession because they experience intrinsic rewards that accompany student success (McLaughlin & Lee, 1988). Social exchange theorists describe the relationship that develops between teachers and students as typical of communal relation-ships involving participants in giving and receiving ben-efits without regard for repayment (Clark & Jordan, 2002). Communal relationships are very strong, and are exemplified by parents, caretakers, and other community members; these relationships can be of short or long du-ration. As teachers, we are part of communities and therefore develop communal relationships with our stu-dents and families. In turn, we influence the develop-ment of prosocial behaviors by our students as we model caring and relationships in the classroom.

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For Glasser (1998), quality teachers work in schools where they come together to create environments based on caring for students. To make these environments a re-ality, the education system as a whole must be reexam-ined. This process can be designated as *holonomy*, the term applied by Costa and Garmston (1994) to describe the process of focusing both on the system (*holos* = whole) and the individual (*on* = part). The goal of

holonomy encompasses creating opportunities for self-actualization and interdependence among members of the school community. To be able to accomplish this goal, we must become more flexible and reflect on our classrooms and teaching, transforming our roles from dispensers of knowledge to collaborators with fellow teachers and learners.

An impediment to creating such systematic changes in schools can be found in the demographics of those who enter the teaching profession. Although the percentages of children of color are increasing in our schools, only 12% to 14% of the teaching force is non-White, and this percentage is shrinking (Guyton, 1998). The majority of individuals enrolled in teacher preparation programs have had little experience with ethnicities different from their own. Consequently, we might be unaware of the cultural patterns of the students we are teaching, which might then lead to miscommunications and misunderstandings, undermining our efforts to create supportive environments.

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To create classroom communities of learners, we must be able to create caring environments that reflect adaptations of curricula for students' needs and that allow them to make connections with what they have already experienced outside the classroom. Warmth and trust must be evident in the classroom environment that is supportive of students as they are engaged in useful work connected to world reality.

A new concept of teacher needs to be developed for aspirants to the profession to accomplish this transition in schools. Although expectations exist for changes in education, models are lacking that exemplify this concept. Constructivist thinking informs us that the more abstract a concept, the more concrete examples must be of that concept (Vygotsky, 1978). It is our belief that "teachers as healers" can act as a powerful metaphor for the type of teachers needed in our nation's schools today.

Teachers as Healers

Teachers have the power to make children feel unique and that they have special gifts to contribute to learning communities. How can we accomplish this goal? One model of teaching for social justice is that of the healer in Native American communities.

The goal of the healer is to make everything whole. Katz and St. Denis (1991) described the concept of teachers as healers as that of affirming experiences others have in daily life, sharing personal knowledge, and blending individual points of view into shared insights for the community. Healers connect communities in an effort to recreate the spiritual and ethical dimensions of societies. Discipline and control grow from the teaching situation itself, not from the outside. All subject matter is placed in relation to the knowledge needed for everyday life.

To understand this concept, we need to appreciate the traditional meaning of the healer for Native American peoples. A healer is not a physician in the Western sense; a healer is someone who is able to identify the needs of members of the community. Healers attend not just to physical needs but also to the social, emotional, and mental aspects of a person's being. A healer in this sense could be a friend, a parent, a grandparent, or a teacher. In the Native American view, all of life is interrelated (Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Pewewardy, 1998). If anything is out of balance in the spiritual, physical, emotional, or mental arenas that constitute one's being, the other areas are affected. A healer helps identify where difficulties lie and how to make things right again. In the Navajo (Diné) tradition, balance is expressed as "walking in beauty."

This concept is reflected in the Native American Medicine Wheel, a symbol for maintaining balance throughout one's life (see Figure 1). All areas—spiritual (including social), physical, emotional, and mental—are represented with the Medicine Wheel (Pewewardy, 1999). If for some reason a person becomes out of balance in one or another area, healing is needed to restore a sense of well-being. This life-integration model is extraordinarily different from the European paradigm.

In the European model of life, if someone is physically ill, a doctor is called. If someone is experiencing spiritual difficulties, a priest, minister, or rabbi is requested. A psychologist or psychiatrist is enlisted if psychological problems are being manifested. A social worker provides assistance to families experiencing difficulties. In native communities, the model of healer allows for overlap of these roles and flexibility in attending to the needs of communities and their members. This model reflects what occurs in many Latino (Okagaki & French, 1995), Hawaiian (Kape 'ahiokalai Padeken Ah Nee-Benham, 2000), and other predominantly non-Western and immigrant communities, where we find the emphasis on family systems and support to be crucial in children's development (Cross, 1995).

Native healers rely on the Medicine Wheel as a way to attend to all of the areas of existence. It is a guide to life, a powerful symbol to Native peoples, similar to the Ten Commandments for those who are of the Jewish, Christian, or Islamic faiths; or teach-

ings of Confucius to certain Asians. This symbol gives concrete expression to abstract ideas about what it means to live in harmony. Social relationships are affected when people are put down by others. Causing someone emotional pain places another at risk of being out of balance. Competition in school settings affects the abilities to function within communal settings.

European culture is developed on a radically different linear model, wherein responsibilities for areas of people's lives are accorded to different professions (Cross, 1995). A physician does not act as a classroom teacher. A mail carrier does not act as a minister. Roles have become standardized and professionalized so that they are not interchangeable. In some areas, such as medicine, there are strict regulations about who can and cannot practice. Capacities within this area are broken into different professions according to nurse, doctor, aide, or laboratory technician. Conditions are established as to who is permitted to perform associated functions in new fields, such as magnetic resonance imaging.

Healers are those who exemplify care and concern for others. They take time to be with other people and to listen. Healers encourage others to discover who they are and how they best function in addition to discovering their talents and potentials, which are cultivated for the benefit of society as a whole.

Healing in classroom settings. Teachers who are healers are those who are able to dialogue with students, the school, and the community. They promote shared responsibility with students and community members. Individuals, such as elders, are brought in to work with students. Other
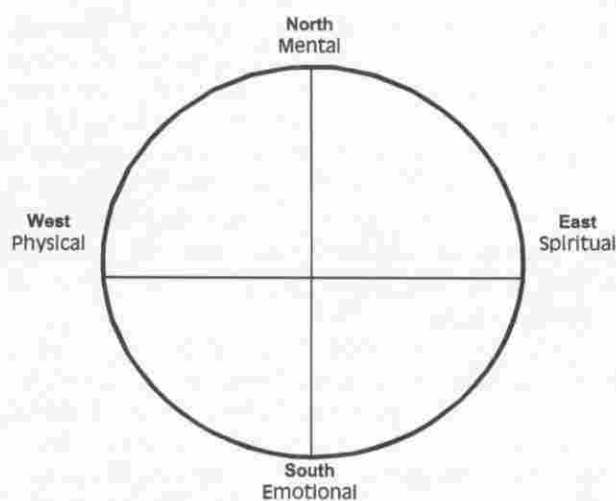

Figure 1. **Native American Medicine Wheel. Not all Tribal Nations depict the Medicine Wheel in exactly the same ways. However, the areas found are the same for every nation.**

resources are added to the curriculum and classroom to maximize students' learning experiences.

These teachers create classrooms that encourage and nurture the abilities of students to participate together to create knowledge. Knowledge is considered a commodity to be shared by all in the community. This model contrasts that of teachers as technocrats with scientific and technical approaches toward teaching. The latter dole out knowledge piece by piece, never pulling information together for students to experience in a whole context or for useful purposes connected to real life.

A forceful metaphor. The metaphor of teachers as healers holds power for classrooms today. We should always strive to develop professional competence, but we must also develop the ethical and spiritual dimensions of teaching that have been missing in efforts to quantify knowledge. Costanzo (2002) maintained that students develop different forms of social knowledge when they are given opportunities to interact with relevant social partners, including parents, siblings, peers, and teachers. This interaction, according to social domain theory, provides children with pathways to moral acquisition based on concepts of community welfare, justice, and shared rights. In this way, teaching becomes a humanistic endeavor where classrooms grow to be caring places for all.

Teacher Transformation

Guyton (1998) concluded that teachers' cognitive development occurs when there is a need entailing reflection on their own practices and that of others. By working together in discussion of how to meet the learning needs of all students, we might be affected in our cognitive understandings of diverse populations and what is necessary to produce classroom changes. This replicates socially mediated learning as suggested by Vygotsky (1978).

Palmer (1998) cited Morton (1985), who believed that one of the great tasks of our time is "to hear people to speech." Palmer believed that students must be able to speak and be heard, and that good teachers "can listen to those voices before they are spoken so that one day they can speak with truth and confidence" (p. 20). These perceptions align with the concept of teachers as healers, helping our students find their voices so that they can speak and be heard, not only in the classroom but also as members of their communities. We encourage learners to find expression by listening to the subtleties, the spaces between words, and the silences, always learning about and from the students. This knowledge enriches our repertoire and leads us across cultural divides.

Palmer (1998) elaborated on the relations among subjects, teachers, and learners as he examined the concept of knowing:

> We say that knowing begins with our intrigue about some subject, but that intrigue is the result of the subject's action upon us: geologists are people who hear rocks speak, historians are those who hear the voices of the long dead, writers are people who hear the music of words. The things of the world call to us, and we are drawn to them. (p. 105)

The kind of knowing Palmer (1998) described is attuned to the non-Western at-one-ness with the world, or a desired state of wholeness. Teachers as healers admit families into the learning experiences for students and learn from them. Volk (1999), a bilingual teacher working with Puerto Rican students, discussed how she uses the togetherness of Puerto Rican families to guide her teaching. She observed how older siblings help younger ones to learn, often incorporating their own school and cultural experiences into instruction they gave the younger children. Volk realized that by using a recitation script and a teacher-centered approach, she limited her students' learning. As result of these insights, she changed her instructional strategies and is currently developing a project to include siblings in her parent involvement projects.

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Shore (1996) described a system that identifies students at risk for dropping out who are matched with high school teachers and administrators serving as their mentors. This relationship does not need to focus on counseling to be effective, but simply concentrates on students' academic lives. The caring shown by mentors seems to be the ingredient needed for teens involved to improve their academic performances and care about success in and out of school.

Preparing aspirants to the profession. In preparing teachers, we must attend more diligently to helping candidates acquire pedagogical skills that generalize best

practices and sensitivity to the students we teach (Brookfield, 1990). This characterizes teachers as healers. Sarason (1990), cited in Fullan (1998), asked several significant questions for teacher educators including these:

> Should not our aim be to judge whatever we do for our children in our schools by the criterion of how we are fostering the desire to continue to learn about self, others, and the world, to live in the world of ideas and possibilities, to see the life span as an endless intellectual and personal quest for knowledge ...?
>
> Is it asking too much of preparatory programs to prepare their students for a "real world" in which they must *understand and seek to change* if as persons and professionals they are to grow, not only to survive? (p. 252)

In other words, teacher education candidates need to understand that they, themselves, must change as they immerse themselves in communities quite different from their own communities of origin. They should know that such change should be an active, internal, and personal process leading to both personal and professional growth and, ultimately, happiness. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) conceptualized happiness as "a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to control the quality of their lives" (p. 2).

Teachers as "autotelic" practitioners.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) described the "autotelic individual" (p. 148; Greek: *auto* = self, *telos* = individual) as one who can create "flow experiences" in a vast array of situations. He spoke of Joe, a multitalented factory worker who could function happily and effectively virtually anywhere in his place of employment. Why? Because early in life, Joe approached problem solving by saying to himself, "If I were this (thing) and I didn't work, what would be wrong with me?" Then he applied this empathetic identification to increasingly complex problems in his work and personal life. What if teachers became autotelic and examined situations that were not working from the same personal perspectives: If I were in this situation and needed to improve, how could I do so? Such an approach would remove the onus from learners and transfer it to situations, enabling us to heal the situation and, in turn, create healing environments for our pupils.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) discussed those who have gone to great lengths to make their work meaningful. In the cases cited, he determined that investment of psychic energy is what gave additional meaning to people's efforts. Such is the path of teachers as healers. By investing psychic energy into the physical, social, emotional, and mental aspects of students' lives, teachers can infuse balance into their classrooms. By engaging communities, teachers widen the circle of support both for them-

selves and their students. This approach requires from us a degree of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) or creating understandings of how we build postmodern relationships with others.

Practicing Our Craft in Communities of Diverse Learners

Healing teachers attempt to bridge cultures by respecting students and the knowledge they bring with them to the classroom, guiding them and relating new knowledge to constructs they have already developed. These teachers recognize children as distinct personalities with experiences and understandings unique to themselves as well as to their cultures (Klug & Whitfield, 1999).

To become teachers who are healers, teacher candidates must understand that for many of our students the importance of leading balanced lives outweighs the necessity of achieving the highest grades in school. This includes affirming knowledge gained from personal experiences outside the classroom. For many, the process of gaining knowledge is culturally valued over the product of knowledge itself (Dugan, 1993; Tafoya, 1989). Yet, despite a decade of reform, we are still challenged in teacher preparation programs to develop teachers with the skills necessary to view pre-K–12 students in holistic terms.

Teacher educators must understand the importance of our own modeling of the types of behaviors characterized by healers to introduce a new paradigm based on caring to our profession. Noddings (1994) maintained that:

> Teachers, like mothers, want to produce acceptable persons—persons who will support worthy institutions, live compassionately, work productively but not obsessively, care for older and younger generations, be admired, trusted, and respected. To shape such persons teachers need not only intellectual capabilities but also a fund of knowledge about the particular persons with whom they are working .... Each student must be guided toward an ethical life—or ... an ethical ideal—that is relationally constructed. (p. 176)

Caring should be included in the sphere of desired characteristics or dispositions for those engaged in the education of our youth, even though it is not a dimension measurable on standards-based assessments. Teacher candidates must themselves experience caring from the professionals involved in their development. Caring should be encouraged in relation to preparatory experiences our college students have in the field as part of their undergraduate programs. The dimension of caring as a value practiced by cooperating teachers should be introduced into class discussions. Teacher educators, principals, and others must also present themselves as models of caring professionals. Only in experiencing these behaviors will the value of teachers in healing roles be recognized throughout greater contexts.

Summary

In schools today, many students risk continued alienation and are left out of the educational processes in their classrooms. The hope for the future of our nation's schools—the teachers who teach and the students who learn together in community—is not dependent primarily on technical information, despite the proliferation of standards calling for degrees of technical excellence for teachers. Relationships are the key to our future. Violence and separation can result from the absence of incorporating ethical aspects of caring in our teaching. We must become sensitive, autotelic professionals who do more than dispense knowledge. It is imperative to become involved in communities, learn more about their cultures, and build linkages between them and our schools.

In our roles as teacher educators, we are impelled to model the value of caring for our students by showing respect and concern toward them in our university learning communities. We are obliged to ensure they are placed in environments where they will experience caring in classrooms. The concept of caring must permeate the curricula in our teacher preparation institutions and be recognized as a desired candidate disposition. The metaphor of teachers as healers is one that can be utilized to support our efforts in moving toward a dynamic new paradigm for teaching in our nation's schools.

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