

LeBrun: Latest report on teaching doesn't make the grade

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A national public school teaching shortage looms, with New York no exception.

This is not breaking news. We've known this was coming for some time, although New York poses an interesting set of internal contrasts and contradictions for what this actually means. Like most of the rest of the nation, New York faces a big bloc of baby boomers aging out as teachers and administrators, leaving a lot of holes to be filled.

That is nothing new, either, and not necessarily a bad thing. Retirements bring opportunity for new blood, fresh ideas and enthusiasm. Teachers, even very good ones, wear out.

New York has always been able to meet the challenge of filling classrooms in 700-plus school districts with qualified, accredited teachers because we arguably have, in the [State University of New York](#), the best teacher preparation network of colleges in the nation for cranking them out. We are so good at it we're a major provider of teachers for other states.

And therein lies New York's problem. It's not in creating qualified teachers, even with teacher preparation enrollment in New York dropping 40 percent in the last six years. It's in keeping them in teaching and in the state, particularly in difficult assignments that aren't hard to guess at.

Nor is it hard to guess why the college-bound are avoiding the teaching profession in droves, or leaving New York once they get a degree.

You'd have to live on another planet to be mystified. Across the country, public school teaching has gone through six years of organized disrespect by opportunistic politicians and morons with big money looking to privatize public education, abetted by morons with higher degrees in education with wing-nut ideas. Teachers have been deliberately made scapegoats for the far-reaching effects of poverty, demonized, demoralized and sneered at by the likes of Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) among others. Cuomo seemed to particularly relish humiliating teachers every chance he got, for reasons that remain a mystery. Public revulsion for what teachers were subjected to finally put a stop to it.

Morale within the teaching ranks has to be low, and my guess is recruitment for the retiring ranks will be tough for some time in parts of New York. You can thank Cuomo and his hedge fund friends for that.

So, when State University of New York Chancellor Nancy Zimpher and Education Commissioner [MaryEllen Elia](#) held a press conference last week to tout an extensive new TeachNY report leading into a campaign for recruiting teacher preparation applicants, it was timely.

I sat down and read all 140 pages of it, and all 62 recommendations. If you can spare a couple of hours, I recommend it. (<http://tinyurl.com/hv4y2xc>)

Not especially for the content. As I was painfully reminded, there is no gibberish like education gibberish. A good editor could knock it down to under 20 pages of actual English, with maybe a dozen rather ho-hum recommendations. But it's worth looking at for what it markedly isn't.

It has only marginally to do with how to recruit teachers to fill a coming shortage. I was astounded at how much a bait and switch it turned out to be, because the report is mostly about how to torque up requirements at those aforementioned teacher preparation colleges in order to make teaching far more demanding, even more rigorous in continual training and evaluation, even more time-consuming in delivery than it is now. More hoops to go through.

The net effect of the recommendations would be to elevate the requirements for becoming – and remaining – a teacher to roughly the status of brain surgery.

I was gobsmacked. Rather than attract more candidates to the profession, the thrust of this report, if executed, will chase more away. What are these people thinking was my first reaction.

Then I took a harder look at the language, and noticed bits like "data-driven" and "evidenced based" and "metrics," and suddenly the reek of familiar garbage brought on a eureka moment. I'd seen this stuff before, in the justification and language associated with the utterly discredited state high stakes standardized testing tied to teacher evaluations nonsense. The work of the Common Core cadets. That took me to scanning the multitude of participants in this study, and sure enough there was the abominable **John King** himself, former state commissioner of education, high advocate of blame the teacher. Come to find out the TeachNY report was funded by Race to the Top, groan.

So, no harm done, at least not yet. So far it's nothing but a think-tank style report of minor merit whose individual recommendations can be torn apart by those in the field who actually teach and administer public education in New York. The mischief in this report is what might be picked up by the Legislature and made into law. Luckily, an entirely different report along the same avowed subject line – recruiting more teachers – is expected at some point from the Board of Regents, for which we have much higher hopes. It's bound to be more realistic. Remember, we regularly need an army of recruits for replacing retirees, not a handful.

And we do need to bring back respect for teachers – existing teachers, the ones in the classrooms right now.

We need respect for what a teacher is and does and can do, and build from there. This goofy report doesn't come close.

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