

Is Teach for America good for our kids?

*by Renée A. Middleton
dean, The Patton College of Education
and Human Services,
Ohio University*

Sometimes what seems like a good idea can have unintended consequences. Teach for America (TFA) is one of those good ideas that, through lack of foresight, may have a profound and deleterious effect on the teaching profession in Ohio and, more important, on the education that our children receive.

As dean of The Patton College of Education and Human Services at Ohio University, I am not against TFA in and of itself. It is a worthy enterprise that offers talented college graduates an alternative route to becoming classroom teachers. But the effectiveness of the program is compromised by the fact

that not all applicants appear to be pursuing that goal. Data shows that only one in five TFA participants stay in the field after finishing the required two-year stint of teaching. This statistic leads me to question whether the remaining 80% really have the “purpose to change the lives of young people,” as was stated during the signing of the bill earlier this year.

Teach for America — like other alternative pathways to licensure — has the potential to be a valuable resource for our schools, and I would have supported the TFA legislation had it included a requirement that recruits continue their education to earn proper certification and credentialing. The one in five who truly is dedicated to changing kids’ lives would be a welcome addition to our teaching community.

The act, however, provides that TFA

participants, regardless of whether they have taken a single education class, will receive a teaching license after completing one five-week crash course, leaving additional training as “optional.”

Traditional teaching candidates, by contrast, must complete a minimum of 100 clock hours of clinical experience followed by a professional internship in teaching that requires a minimum of 12 weeks of 7.5-hour days of full-time teaching experiences. Does TFA’s five weeks of training for two hours a day really prepare these recent graduates for full-time teaching, especially in the “hard-to-staff” schools for which the program was designed? My answer is “no.”

Every year at Ohio University, 250 eager education majors enter our program, declaring that teaching will be their life’s work. This is the beginning



Research shows that only one in five Teach for America participants stays in the field after finishing the required two-year stint of teaching.

of an intensive course of preparation that builds both content-area knowledge and practical classroom management skills. Yet, some have called TFA participants “the cavalry,” people “on white horses in white hats” who have come to save the day. To say that recent college graduates without teacher training or experience are “the best and the brightest” hope for our schoolchildren is to discount the unique expertise of master educators who have dedicated their lives to building strong futures for the young people of our state.

The high attrition rate among TFA participants, even those who have a real intention of doing something good for society, suggests that many join the program simply because they aren’t quite ready for graduate school or can’t find a job in law or architecture or business — fields to which they are eventually headed. Teach for America offers them a two-year window with guaranteed full-time pay and an additional \$5,000 toward past or future schooling in any field. This money often is used to earn an advanced degree, but few of the recipients ever return to teaching in K–12 schools.

The data also shows that TFA employees perform equally to participants in other alternative education programs for nonlicensed and noncredentialed candidates. But when they are compared to candidates who go through the traditional route — those who are appropriately trained, licensed and credentialed — students of traditionally trained teachers outperform students taught by TFA-teachers every time.

Teach for America sends its employees into rural and urban school districts that already are struggling with issues that other districts do not face. A single mother, for example, may not have the option or ability to help with homework regularly because she works two minimum-wage jobs to keep food on the table. Shouldn’t her children have the advantage of experienced and proven teachers at school? Supporters of the TFA legislation are saying, indirectly, that these inexperienced and inadequately trained teachers are good enough — for those kids.

Ideally, of course, no students should

be taught by ill-prepared teachers. Our legislators should be working to close the education achievement gap in Ohio instead of widening it, which is exactly what the TFA legislation does.

I challenge parents and educators in struggling communities to ask our state’s leaders to explain how lowering

teaching standards is acceptable for *our* kids, but not theirs. □

Editor’s note: The opinions expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of The Patton College, Ohio University or the Ohio School Boards Association.

PayForIt.net

... **loved** by parents ...

Registrations

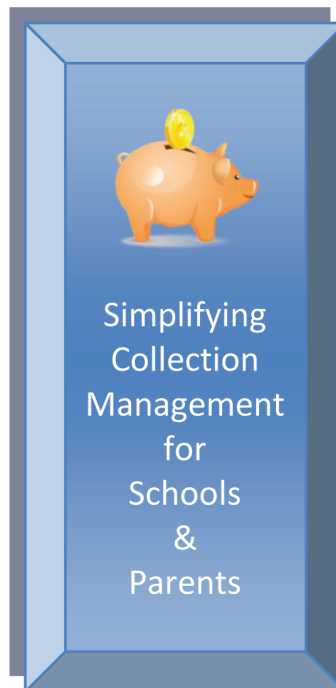
- Fees
- Activities
- After School Programs

Fees

- Tuition
- Book Fees
- Class Fees
- Etc.

Activities

- Swim Classes
- Prom Tickets
- Etc.



Lunch Service

- Student Accounts
- Auto Replenishment
- Adult Menus

After School Programs

- Tutoring
- Child Care
- Etc.

Fundraisers

- Flowers
- PTO Donations
- Etc.

... **needed** by schools ...

**Contact: Bob Reolfi, Esber Cash Register,
1-800-669-0792 or Bobr@ecrpos.org**

Endorsed By:

