

BHEF issues "An American Imperative"

Keeping America competitive requires attracting more Americans into STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) careers and taking the mathematics and science courses needed to enter those careers. Because good teachers are the most important factor in effective learning, and "the Business-Higher Education Forum [BHEF, an organization of Fortune 500 and higher education CEOs] has projected that our nation will need more than 280,000 new mathematics and science teachers by 2015," the Forum has issued a report on what it calls "An American Imperative: Transforming the Recruitment, Retention, and Renewal of Our Nation's Mathematics and Science Workforce." It does this as part of its initiative, "Securing America's Leadership in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)," the goal of which is "doubling . . . the number of college students with degrees in STEM fields."

To recruit more and better qualified teachers, the Forum would expand recruitment strategies, strengthen the pedagogy and content of teacher preparation courses, and offer scholarships, signing bonuses, and pay differentials. To retrain these teachers, the Forum would make the effort to address causes of teacher job dissatisfaction, including inadequate pay, lack of administrative support, and professional isolation. To insure that the teachers stay renewed in their careers, the Forum would track teacher effectiveness through student progress and provide high-quality professional development.

To implement its program, the Forum has targeted more than 100 specific recommendations for what it sees as five stakeholders: the federal government, state governments, school districts, higher education, and businesses and foundations. While many recommendations will sound familiar, others are quite innovative, including a vice principal for academic affairs to implement the recruitment, retention, and renewal recommendations within each individual school. Higher education is singled out for a dual role -- not only the preparation of teachers but also research into the elements of the most effective student learning.

Finally, the Forum advocates four coordinated actions among the stakeholders to improve the recruitment, retention, and renewal of science and mathematics teachers: 1) a national consortium to elevate the status of the teaching profession, 2) advocacy for "new and expanded federal policies," 3) needs assessments conducted by each state, and 4) "state and regional P-16 education councils."

The full text of the report, as well as a summary, is available at <www.bhef.com>.