

# New Teacher Education

Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation program brings change, one state at a time

By Susan C. Thomson  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

**A**RTHUR E. LEVINE is a hurried man on a big, bold mission. His goals, he says, are to dignify classroom teaching, attract exceptional people to it, transform the college and university programs that prepare them, and create the teacher-education models of the future. He's thinking nationally, but he's acting a state at a time, starting with Indiana.

There, 56 high-achieving, handpicked men and women are rounding out a transformative year, earning master's degrees while spending long hours in classrooms, learning to teach by watching and doing. Come late summer, when the bells ring in a new school year, they will begin new careers teaching science and math in some of the state's lower-income public secondary schools.

As teaching recruits, they're a decided breed apart—and above. Each brought to this challenging year at least a bachelor's degree, typically in math, science or engineering. More than a quarter came with advanced degrees—Ph.D.s and MBAs included—as well. They range from fresh college graduates to 60-something retirees returning to the workforce. More than half are career changers with resumes that include jobs like laboratory technician, medical technologist, respiratory therapist, veterinary assistant, wildlife manager, pharmaceutical researcher and bench scientist.

They are the inaugural class of a new Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation program for would-be teachers—the above-average kind that the high-energy, highly

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persuasive Levine had in mind when he became the foundation's president in 2006.

He arrived on the job after a dozen years as president and professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he had established himself as a vigorous advocate of greater, research-based rigor in teacher education.

Then came a timely convergence of his and the foundation's priorities. The foundation, famous since its founding in 1945 for providing stipends to prospective college and university teachers, was looking for a new direction. Levine, at the same time, was wrapping up "Educating School Teachers," a 148-page report that offered an unflattering assessment of the nation's 1,206

schools, colleges and departments of education.

"At the moment, teacher education is the Dodge City of the education world," Levine wrote in the report. "Like the fabled Wild West town, it is unruly and disordered. The disorder is increasing as traditional programs vie with nontraditional programs, undergraduate programs compete with graduate programs, increased regulation is juxtaposed against deregulation, universities struggle with new teacher education providers, and teachers are alternatively educated for a profession and a craft."

Levine led the team that did the underlying research, which included case studies of 28 departments or schools of education, plus surveys of thousands of education faculty, deans and department chairs, as well as teachers and principals. The report, published under his name alone, faulted teacher education in general for, among other shortcomings, low admissions standards, over-emphasis on theory at the expense of practical, classroom experience, and, for beginning teachers, a lack of follow-up and on-the-job support.

Levine concluded by advocating, as a new standard in the field, five-year, research university-based training that would allow teachers-to-be to both complete an academic major and get plenty of classroom practice. To attract the most promising teacher candidates, he suggested a new scholarship, equivalent in prestige to the Rhodes, created by, for instance, the federal government or a philanthropy.

Or, as he recalls proposing in his job interview, perhaps such a scholarship could be created by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. What better sponsor than an organization with decades of experience working with colleges and universities, and with several dozen Nobel laureates, MacArthur fellows and Pulitzer Prize winners among its 20,000 alumni? The foundation seized on the idea and hired Levine to implement it.



**Arthur Levine, president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, hopes to spread the foundation's teaching fellowship programs to all 50 states.**

Joe Guertler, Black Star, for CrossTalk



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Levine hit the ground running. The teaching fellowships he had in mind would be competitive, limited to outstanding students who had already earned their undergraduate degrees, typically not including education courses. Successful candidates would receive \$30,000 stipends for a full-time year at a university, where they would divide their time between study toward their master’s degrees and equally demanding “clinical” work in schools, where they would be accepted and mentored more like medical interns than old-school student teachers. In exchange, the fellows would commit to then teach three years in “high-needs” middle or high schools. And their universities would continue to mentor them on their jobs.

As Levine concedes, none of these ideas originated with him or the foundation. If not in widespread

use, all had been strongly endorsed by research, and they added up to “a collection of best practices,” he said. “We just put them together in ways you don’t usually see them.”

Taking early shape along the lines Levine envisioned was the foundation’s Leonore Annenberg Fellowship, funded by the Annenberg and Carnegie foundations, with places for 25 fellows each at Stanford University and at the universities of Virginia, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Levine was pleased—up to a point. “It was a good strong program, but it didn’t have enough leverage,” he said. In other words, he didn’t think it would go far enough fast enough to accomplish his far-reaching goals. He foresaw greater, quicker,

more lasting impact if the states could be engaged as fellowship partners and champions.

States could offer the fellowships high visibility. States could build supportive coalitions of leaders to sustain them. Plus, as Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels pointed out, states are uniquely positioned to take down barriers to teaching, making way for non-traditional candidates.

When Levine came calling about Indiana’s possible interest in Woodrow Wilson teaching fellowships, Daniels was “thrilled” by what he saw as an opportunity

“for real improvement in our time,” especially in the subjects where Indiana students were coming up the shortest on state tests—science and math. So he suggested that the fellowships be restricted to those fields.

Having won Daniels to his idea, Levine followed up by getting buy-ins from the state’s movers and shakers in education, business, government, labor and philanthropy.

The Woodrow Wilson Indiana Teaching Fellowship in

math and science (funded by a \$10 million grant from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment) and the Annenberg fellowship were announced together, in December 2007. Consistent with Levine’s state theory, the bigger headline-maker by far was the Indiana version, with openings for 20 fellows each annually at the University of Indianapolis, Purdue University, Ball State University and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), starting with the 2009-10 school year.

Constance Bond, a foundation vice president, said that the four universities were chosen because all were already offering graduate degrees in teacher education, and all were open to change.

The foundation insisted that each university come up with an entirely new curriculum for its fellows, developed by a committee made up of faculty from math, science or related disciplines, as well as from education. The result had to be an integrated mix of the academic and the clinical, graduate school and classroom, theory and practice. Otherwise, the universities were free to design their programs. “We don’t have a ‘Woodrow Wilson model,’” said Bond. “We don’t go in and give them a program that they must implement.”

The work proved burdensome enough that Ball State decided early on to take an extra year to prepare. The three other universities proceeded.

The University of Indianapolis designed a master of arts in teaching degree consisting entirely of new courses solely for its fellows.

IUPUI created a hybrid of new courses and borrowings from its Transition to Teaching program for non-education graduates, and then combined them into three different tracks, each leading to a different education-related master’s degree.

Purdue tailored its curriculum to its School of Education’s emerging, special mission to prepare teachers for poor rural schools, coming up with a master of science degree in education made up of existing courses, and new fellows-only ones in rural education.

Given the long distances between the campus and its focus schools, Purdue’s fellows began by spending one day a week in classrooms, working up to full days in their last ten weeks. Their population-center location allowed IUPUI and the University of Indianapolis more flexibility in scheduling their fellows’ clinical work.

The foundation took sole responsibility for recruiting and selecting the fellows, and it wasted no time in doing so, inviting applications in July 2008. To amass the largest possible candidate pool, it sent personal invitations to qualified college seniors, advertised on radio and in newspapers and magazines, and notified college alumni offices, state unemployment offices and downsizing employers.

One of those ads, and a newspaper column about the fellowship, grabbed the attention of Laura Cummings, who had “been teaching one thing or another”—including college biology and pre-school music—and loving it for 20 years since earning her master’s in biochemistry. “The fellowship came at just the right time,” she said, because her four children were newly in full-time school. And she was persuaded by “the fact that the foundation was adding some prestige to teaching.”

Hers was among 318 applications—each consisting of a

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resume, transcripts and three letters of recommendation—for the 60 possible slots. She became one of about 130 finalists, selected for a day of interviews and other exercises, including reading, writing and teaching a five-minute sample lesson. She and 58 others—20 each for IUPUI and the University of Indianapolis, and 19 for Purdue—made the final grade.

All started flat-out, with summer school courses. In some of the career changers, some observers sensed a certain culture shock—as the fellows became students again, and then as they started working with this new and challenging generation of students. “The demographics are obviously different,” said Ed Kassig, a biology teacher who mentored fellows at the Indianapolis Public Schools’ Broad Ripple High School, where more than 80 percent of the students are African American, and 60 percent qualify for free or reduced-rate lunches. As children of the video-game age, all are visual learners, used to immediate gratification, Kassig said. “Everything happens quicker. Everybody—students and teachers—needs to be able to adapt quickly to change.”

That is no problem for Cummings, whose year included clinical work in 11 different schools, such as suburban Indianapolis’ Ben Davis High School, where half the students are minorities, and half qualify for free and reduced-rate lunches. For her, what took the most getting used to was “a lot of little things,” like taking attendance on a computer.

Gradually, under the guidance of university faculty and the experienced teachers carefully selected as their in-school mentors, Cummings and the other fellows assumed more and more classroom responsibilities. By spring, they were teaching most, if not all, of their mentors’ schedules.

All this while, the fellows were continuing their graduate courses. “I knew this wasn’t going to be a 40-hour-a-week program,” Cummings said. But the 12-hour days of school followed by evening classes were “very hard.” The combination added up to “a lot of work, more work than had been anticipated,” said another of the fellows, Hwa Tsu, who had to put aside his work on a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering.

Traci Schath, once an IBM engineer, said she learned to get

by on about four hours of sleep a night. The demands frazzled even Tim Devlin, at 25 one of the youngest fellows. “Every day at 9:30 (p.m.) I’m barely keeping my eyes open, because I’m so tired,” he said.

Along the way, three of the original 59 fellows dropped out. “We feel OK about that, given that in all three cases it was for personal reasons,” Bond said.

For the remaining fellows, the learning curve was steep, but they scaled it quickly. “I think their transition from when they walked into the program was huge,” said Kathi Walton, an instructional coach who observed fellows at Decatur High School in suburban Indianapolis. “They showed great development quickly.”

Kassig said the fellows he mentored stood out among the two dozen or so student teachers he has had in his 36 years of teaching, exceeding all three of what he sees as the profession’s basic requirements: “If you’re going to teach, you have to have something to say, and you have to care about kids, and you have to have classroom management skills.”

Come spring, the fellows came under the added pressure of looking for the jobs they pledged to do for three years in exchange for their training and \$30,000 stipends. Many are anxious because, in the wake of state funding cuts, the news from schools across Indiana is less about hiring than laying teachers off. Bond is confident, and she pointed out that math and science teachers are always “in huge demand,” and that many schools delay hiring until summer, when they know exactly what openings they have. “We don’t have any indication at this point that these fellows are going to have trouble finding jobs,” she said.

The fellows are at least assured that, once on the job, they won’t be abandoned to sink or swim as so many first-year teachers are. The foundation has seen to that by requiring their universities to continue mentoring them for their three-year classroom commitments. As they firm up their different plans for doing that, the universities are considering, besides the expected one-on-one coaching by school and university faculty, such innovative add-ons as online discussions and video critiques.

The fellows are achievers, accustomed to success—academic and professional. In what will doubtless be a first for many, they will be judged as teachers, in part, by the success of others. Levine said their first measure will be their students’ scores on next spring’s state assessment tests, due for release before the school year is out.

Longer term, he said, the fellows will be followed to see



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Susan Thomson for CrossTalk

how long they last in their new profession. And the fellowship program as a whole will be evaluated on its success in bringing change to teaching and teacher education.

It was in hopes of improving on the U.S. Department of Education's depressing statistic that half of all U.S. teachers leave the profession within five years of entering it that the foundation made closely supervised clinical work a must in the fellows' programs. Research has linked lack of supervision to teacher burnout as well as low student achievement, a point underscored by a policy brief issued in March by the 800-member American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE).

Cummings credits her program for doing "a great job of immersing us in schools from day one." And she considers herself ready to teach until she retires.

Devlin, who said he spent the year between his college graduation and his fellowship living in his van and pondering his future, is also into teaching for the long term. "This is the first time I know what I want to do with my life," he said.

The fellowship has been a learning experience not just for the fellows but also for the three universities that took them on, and they are changing their other teacher-education programs accordingly. "It has reinforced our move to more site-based junior-year methods classes for elementary and secondary programs," said Kathy Moran, dean of the University of Indianapolis' School of Education. "It has allowed the traditional faculty to think outside traditional models."

IUPUI will add more mentoring to its Transition to Teaching program, having learned from the fellowship how valuable that is, said Patricia Rogan, dean of the university's School of Education.

Purdue has been encouraged to increase the clinical content of its secondary education program, said Sidney Moon, an associate dean of education.

Levine said he has heard from still other colleges and universities that have learned about the fellowship, and are adding elements of it to their teaching degrees.

Daniels has been so impressed that he is talking about expanding the Indiana fellowships to history and perhaps special education. Math and science are just "the place to start, not to stop," he said.

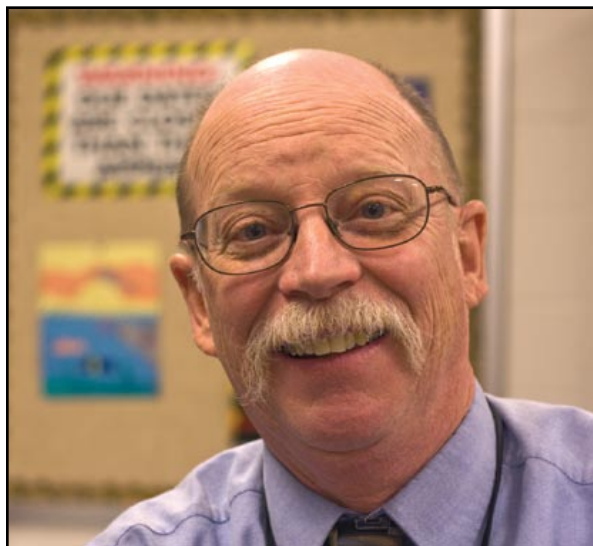
Levine's strategy is to proceed state by state, as, one by one, they find the money and the structure to support their own fellowships.

Earlier this year, the foundation announced that Ohio and Michigan will be next up. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has pledged \$16.7 million to the fellowships in Michigan, where the foundation has chosen as its partners the

University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Eastern Michigan University, Western Michigan University, Grand Valley State University and Wayne State University.

In Ohio, financing is coming from a combination of state and foundation funds, and fellowship sites will be Ohio State University, the University of Cincinnati, John Carroll University and the University of Akron.

The two new states will welcome their first fellowship



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classes for the 2011-12 school year.

Levine happily did some elementary school math: Add 20 more fellows from Ball State University beginning next school year, and Indiana will be producing 80 Woodrow Wilson teachers, increasing the state's total supply of secondary science and math teachers every year by 20 percent. In Michigan, six universities times 20 fellows each equals 120 fellowship graduates a year—enough to fill all of the math and science vacancies in Kalamazoo, Detroit, Battle Creek, Benton Harbor and Grand Rapids. "Extraordinary!" he exclaimed.

Still, Levine presses enthusiastically on. He's in conversations with several other states (no names, please!) about possibly starting Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship programs of their own. And yes, he said, his goal is to spread the fellowships to all 50 states. To that end, he sees spreading the word—getting attention for the fellowships from the media, policymakers and practitioners—as a major part of his job.

He has succeeded in getting notice in some influential and high places. In its March policy brief, AACTE cited the Woodrow Wilson teaching fellowship as one of five "clinical preparation programs that are emerging as potential models." The brief said the programs are "based on the best research and professional judgment," are "innovative and inspiring," and hold "great promise for success." Unlike the Woodrow Wilson model, each of the other four programs is offered exclusively at the college or university that created it.

The highest notice of all has come from no less than the nation's influencer-in-chief. In January, announcing his Educate to Innovate campaign, aimed at getting more U.S. students to study and excel in math and science, President Barack Obama lauded the Woodrow Wilson teaching fellowships as an example of "several new partnerships launched that will help meet our goal of moving American students from the middle to the top of the pack in science and math achievement over the next decade." ♦

Susan C. Thomson is a former higher education reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

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