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## Teachers Must Be Trained For Leadership

By Leo I. Higdon, Jr.

A new state panel reviewing teacher preparation is expected to put forth recommendations for improvement in April. As the Educator Preparation Advisory Council reviews everything from classroom management training to higher admission standards for teacher training programs, I hope it will not overlook the need to enhance the leadership skills of our country's future teachers.

Education is ripe for change. In a world where companies can hire talent from all over the globe, it's vitally important for Connecticut to educate students who are clearly the best. To accomplish this, we need to change the way teachers view themselves and, in many ways, the way they are viewed by our state. We need to better recognize our teachers' vital role in a society that simply couldn't be successful without them.

Our teachers can and must lead this charge.

This critical role of teachers as leaders sometimes gets lost in a public conversation that is focused on funding, policies and practices that often have little connection to what happens in school. But I believe our colleges and universities can do more to prepare our teachers as leaders in their classrooms, schools and communities.

It starts with attracting the very best people to education. We need to not only attract them; we need to make sure our good teachers stay, are professionally satisfied and are supported in their work. Importantly, we need to ensure that teachers understand their roles as leaders and have the education and the tools to effectively carry out that role.

This is not easy. There is a lot coming at teachers right now as they grapple with curriculum reform, an over-emphasis on high-stakes testing, and the very real day-to-day problems of children who may not have eaten since yesterday's school lunch or who have no permanent home to return to when the school day ends. In this environment, budget constraints only add to the pressure.

Yet through the struggles, most of our teachers are consummate and caring professionals. That's because every day the best teachers remind themselves that:

- They are leaders, role models and mentors — in class and out.

- They are strong communicators who collaborate with colleagues to improve student learning.

- They are key sources of new ideas about pedagogical approaches. Consequently, they must themselves be continuous learners.

- And, lastly, they can be agents of positive change by ensuring all decisions are based on hard data and best practices.

There is more attention today than ever before on school systems. Higher education can and must support teachers and help them achieve the best possible outcomes for students. Colleges and universities that educate our state's teachers should:

- Ensure that education and leadership are synonymous. Leadership should be integrated into the curriculum for all future teachers, and emerging accreditation standards support this important work.

- Encourage students who want to be teachers to take advantage of leadership opportunities in co-curricular programs.

- Bring expert teachers who are role models into education programs to help student teachers better understand the ways they can be leaders within their schools, their school systems and their communities.

- Have more proactive outreach efforts in the community. Schools need to encourage relationships with local companies, local nonprofits and local governments — with any entities, in fact, that hire students coming out of school, have a great influence on education or have an important stake in the national education discussion. The bottom line is we need to increase communication efforts.

Improving the quality of our teachers is the right goal — for our students and for our state. As we work together to find ways to strengthen teacher training, we must respect and value the important leadership role teachers have in our society.

*Leo I. Higdon Jr. is president of Connecticut College*