

Higher calling

Recruitment of Aggies, uncertified teachers by national program a worthy cause

A shortage of certified teachers is having a negative effect on school districts and students across the nation.



ERIC DICKENS

In Texas, according to numbers from the State Board of Educator Certification, about 45,000 teaching jobs are vacant.

Many of today's public schools are understaffed, falling apart physically and short on up-to-date textbooks and other resources. Public school districts in rural or inner-city areas are hit hardest.

Because they can pay higher salaries and offer better benefits, wealthier suburban school districts and private schools are able to attract certified teachers.

To combat classroom overcrowding, many school districts are using alternate ways to get talented, uncertified teachers.

Programs that allow uncertified educators to teach should be supported by the districts and potential teachers as ways to combat the woes of public education.

For years, districts in Texas have granted emergency certification to individuals who agree to enroll in summer training classes.

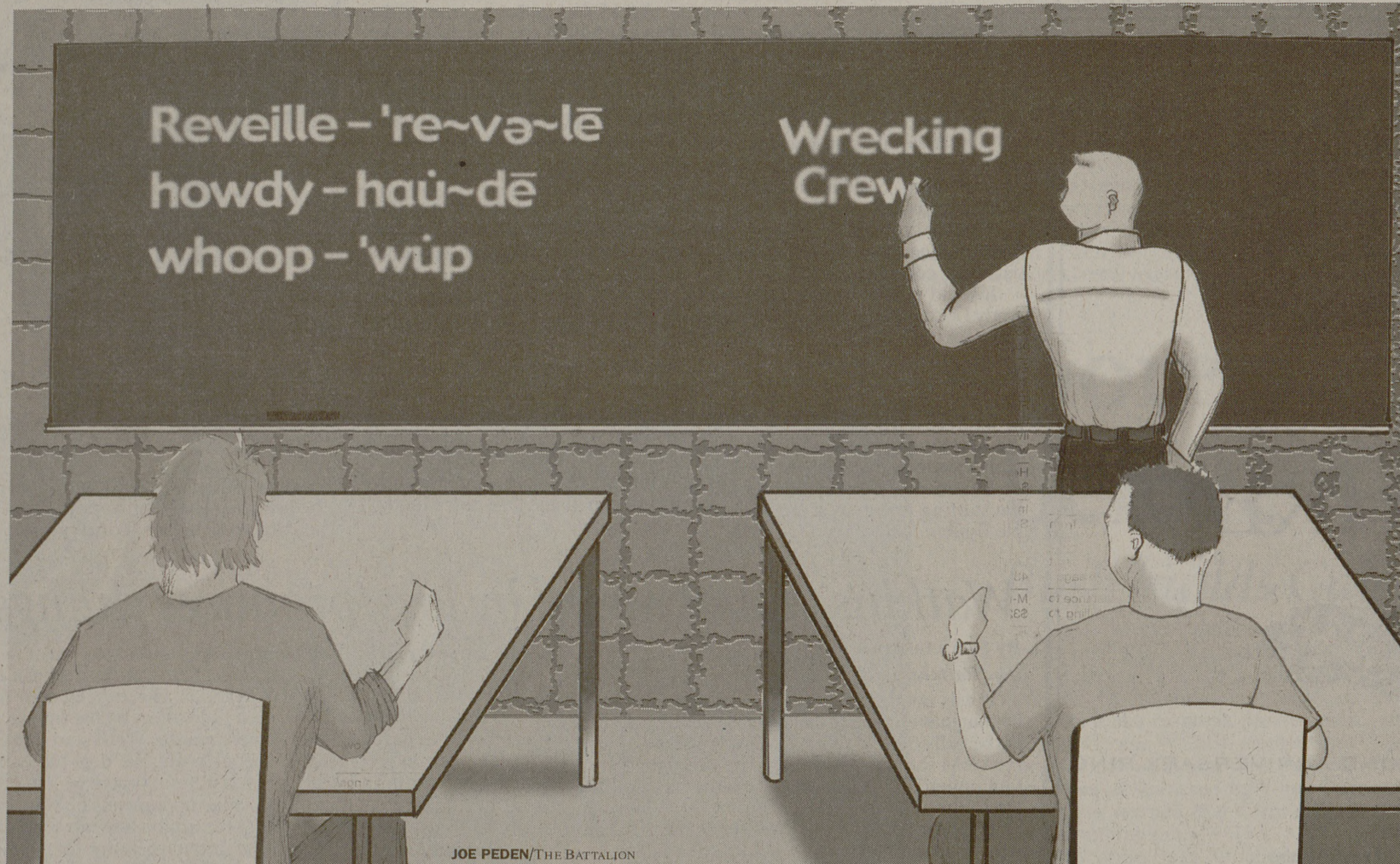
Now, the State Board of Education is reviewing a proposal that would allow Texas public school districts to hire college graduates, even those without a teaching certificate or training to teach.

The proposal has met some resistance and complaints. Many feel the lack of training and certification leaves the educator unprepared for class and diminishes the quality of education for the children.

In a Houston Chronicle article, Brock Gregg, spokesman for the Association of Texas Professional Educators said "This proposal might fill some classrooms, but it will shortchange children."

Gregg assumes the children are not already being shortchanged by the current state of public education.

On the national scale, a pro-



JOE PEDEN/THE BATTALION

gram called Teach for America is looking to improve public education by reaching out to motivated college graduates with non-education degrees.

They can apply to join Teach for America's "corps of teachers," where they go through an intense, five-week training program to prepare them for one of 15 hard-to-staff inner-city or rural school districts across the country.

Teach for America's recruiting campaign came to Texas A&M a few weeks ago to recruit interested Aggies. Teach for America is scheduled to continue recruiting in the spring as the deadline for submitting applications nears.

Teach for America's system has upset some A&M education majors

who believe the program's five-week course does not offer adequate classroom training.

Although the Department of Education would not comment, it is obvious there is a difference between the ideologies of the department and Teach for America.

Department officials have said they strongly support theory work in the classroom and student teaching in the final semester of an undergraduate's senior year. Officials with Teach for America say they favor more hands-on training and less classroom theory work.

Despite their break from the traditional four-year teacher certification track, these efforts to improve public education on the state and national levels benefit the instructor, the district and, most importantly, the children.

Texas A&M has one of the strongest education departments in the state and one of the nation's highest teacher-retention rates. In a perfect world, all well-qualified and trained education graduates would get a job shaping the future.

Even if they did, all the new teachers could not fill every vacant teaching position. A shortage, and therefore a need for uncertified teachers, still would exist.

According to the program's Website, Teacher for America saw 4,000 applicants last year — that is 4,000 uncertified people looking for a way to make a difference in public education.

Thousands of uncertified appli-

cants are looking to become teachers and many school districts are hurting for additional teachers. Overcrowding in schools has stretched out of the rural and inner-city districts and affected some of the more well-established districts.

Teaching has one of the lowest national retention rates, causing class sizes to grow, and straining on the teachers who stay.

Texas school districts would benefit from the state proposal by being able to tap into a pool of previously ineligible applicants.

There comes a point when the benefits of having a larger class with a single, certified teacher are less than those of qualified, uncertified teachers helping level

out class sizes. Ultimately, those who agree and disagree with putting uncertified teachers to work say the important part is the effect on the students.

There is no denying the usefulness of teacher certification in the classroom. Education majors who have gone through hours of classroom management and education theory classes may have an advantage over uncertified teachers.

However, for many current college students, the teacher who did the most for them in public school was not necessarily the one who managed the classroom the most efficiently, or even the one who knew the subject matter the best.

Often, the teachers who stand out in students' memories are ones who inspired them, who motivated them to do their best in the classroom and beyond — and that is more important than any certificate.

As Mary Stauffer, central recruitment director for the program, said, "Students interested in the Teach for America program need to be resourceful, intelligent, creative and have a desire to improve public education."

Uncertified applicants who are willing to work in hard-to-staff districts in a stressful occupation are the motivated individuals these districts need. These applicants are looking to make a positive impact on the students. In districts troubled by problems like overcrowding, poor pay and few benefits, that idealism is much needed.

If a talented, qualified and motivated individual wants to improve public education and the futures of students in poor school districts, the lack of a teaching certificate should not stand in the way.

For Aggies without teaching certificates, Teaching for America is a great way to make a positive impact.

Professional educators like Gregg who see certification as a mandatory criteria for holding class should not keep those who want to help from doing so.

Eric Dickens is a senior English major.

Closing one chapter, opening another

Clinton's visit to Vietnam welcomes closure, hope for economic growth

While most of the United States watched the drama slowly unfold in Florida, President Bill Clinton made a historic visit to communist Vietnam.

Clinton is the first U.S. president to visit Vietnam since the Vietnam War ended.

Many people find the situation ironic since Clinton is an admitted draft-dodger.

However, the irony is unimportant — Clinton's visit marks a milestone in U.S. relations with Vietnam.

While many remember the war with heavy hearts, this visit helps close that sad part of American history.

The visit does not dishonor the soldiers who fought in the war, but it gives closure to many while working to improve relations with Vietnam.

Clinton's presidency has focused on America's relationship with Vietnam. Starting with the gradual lifting of embargoes in 1994, Clinton has worked to improve ties with Vietnam, including opening diplomatic relations in 1995.

This year saw the earnest beginning of a Vietnamese-American trade agreement.

But the culmination of this progress was Clinton's visit. Although heavily censored by the Vietnamese government, Clinton talked about the issues of human rights and a democratic government.

Clinton believes that when Vietnam interacts with the world through economic means, the Vietnamese will gain more individual and political freedoms.

"I think that the trend toward freedom is virtually irreversible," Clinton said.

When the trade doors open between the United States and Vietnam, everyone will benefit.

Because 60 percent of Vietnam's population is under the age of 30, U.S. companies in Vietnam will have an able work force.

According to The Boston Globe, "At \$370 a year, Vietnam



BRIENNE PORTER

still has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world."

While many Americans would complain about the loss of jobs, America would receive more jobs when companies began exporting goods to Vietnam.

This would be a win-win situation, with more jobs for both countries.

With Clinton's trip to a country where 58,000 American soldiers and 3 million Vietnamese died only a quarter century ago, many people awaited to see what he would say about the war.

Clinton offered no apologies for the conflict, but instead discussed the future of these two countries. He avoided assigning blame for the war.

To many Vietnam veterans, the move was an important one.

Clinton did not dishonor those who fought, and he even visited a site where bodies of American pilots shot down during the war had been found.

At least 20 soldiers who were listed as missing in action will be returned to the United States for burial.

Clinton's trip offered hope to the Vietnamese for a more global economy while introducing a possible market for American businesses.

Yet, he also respected America's veterans by not accepting blame for the war.

Vietnam will be a new market for American businesses to expand their consumer base and their employee pool.

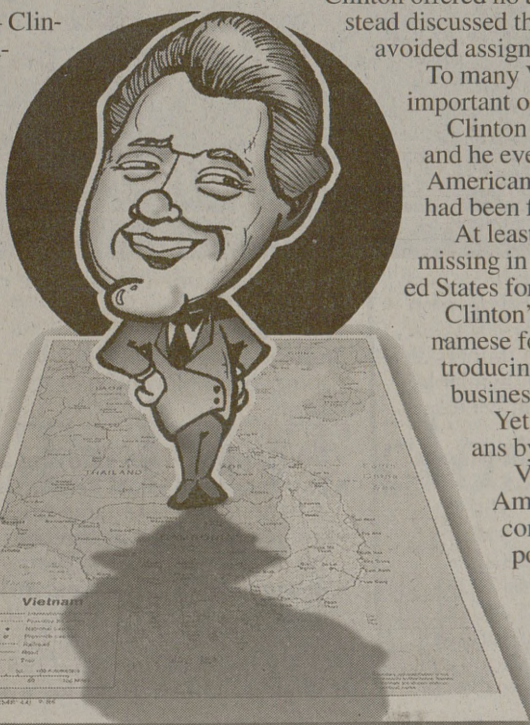
The most impressive part of Clinton's visit is that he got the two countries to discuss their future.

Clinton said that the countries' histories have "intertwined" for many years and that the countries need to put the "painful" past behind them.

While many Vietnamese government officials were nervous that Clinton would discuss political changes, Clinton discussed trade and only lightly touched on other issues.

Clinton's trip to Vietnam respected America's veterans and encouraged discussion of economic opportunities for both countries.

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RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION



Mail Call

Criticism of gun licensing column flawed

In response to James Drew's Nov. 22 Mail Call. Drew talks about [Nicholas Roznovsky's] ignorance of the Constitution, but he should read it himself.

The Second Amendment says, "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

I do not think that most Americans can classify as well-regulated militias. And let us remember that when this was written, America was a different place with many more threats at home and from abroad.

The argument that gun regulation increases crime is too simple. There are probably a number of factors that lead to the increase of violent, gun-related crime. One such possibility is an increase in population.

When more people are in a place, there will be more interaction between them, both positive and negative.

The argument that licensing and registration would lead to confiscation is really moot. If the government wanted to take away the

people's guns, it could at any time because it is stronger. If the government wanted the guns badly enough, a couple of pistols would not stand in its way.

And I certainly do not think the government would ever come to that. People are not so dense that they would miss a trend in government from democracy to totalitarianism.

Terrell Rabb
Class of '02

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