

## Cepeda: Treating teachers as sports stars?

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### Opinion

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*Teaching is considered a learn-as-you-go craft, not a profession to be adequately prepared for. This is probably why so many teachers quit within 5 years*

Recently, a Comedy Central skit called "TeachingCenter" about the career moves of star educators in the fictional 2015 "Teacher Draft" went viral.

In it, two SportsCenter-like anchors lavished adoring attention on a system offering multimillion-dollar salaries for high-performing teachers, astronomical cash incentives for high test scores -- in the case of "star teacher Ruby Ruhf," \$40 million. Screen crawls compared competing school SAT scores on writing, reading and math.

The Internet put its collective hands on its indignant hips and said "Well? Why *don't* we treat teachers like pro athletes?" -- imagining that if we treated teachers like sports stars, our education system would be just as awesome.

Aisha Harris at Slate gushed, like so many others: "The clip cleverly reimagines athletes as the educators we entrust our children to every day ... the best part of ['TeachingCenter'] might just be the incredible ads dropped in throughout -- being a teacher has never looked so sexy."

Yeah, right.

Having been a teacher myself, I can attest that it is the educational system itself that keeps this fantasy of star educators from ever coming true.

Pro athletes start preparing for their sport as children, often driven by admiration for successful sports heroes, and excel past high school and/or college if they have extremely high natural aptitude for their discipline, some of which is strictly genetic. For instance, professional baseball hitters have off-the-charts super vision for seeing the seams on a baseball traveling 90 miles per hour.

Additionally, athletes practice their sport under the gaze of experienced professionals and perform in front of crowds, their every move scrutinized by trainers, coaches and fans. Their performance is measured by hard statistics and those numbers are ranked objectively against others in their field.

The teacher preparation system is, as has been detailed and backed up by research for years, designed to attract low performers through substandard admission criteria for teacher training programs.

In 2014, The National Council on Teacher Quality found that "prospective teachers are almost half as likely as students in other majors to graduate with grade-based honors" and that "using evidence from more than 500 higher education institutions that turn out nearly half of the nation's new teachers each year, we find that in a majority of institutions (58 percent), grading standards for teacher candidates are much lower than for students in other majors on the same campus."

Once out of teacher training programs -- which generally do not offer sustained direct instruction on classroom management, academic rigor or evidence-based testing and evaluation methods -- teachers do not ply their trade under the watchful eye of accomplished educators.

Yes, there are mentors for student teachers -- but they are rarely accountable for instruction or systematic deep evaluation of their students' performance. Most of the time, they aren't even in the room for the majority of an internship.

Almost all teachers work alone, without day-to-day support, guidance or evaluation. Teaching is considered a learn-as-you-go craft, not a profession to be adequately prepared for. This is probably why so many teachers quit within 5 years of getting a teaching job.

And just ask the teachers unions whether they would mind if teachers were videotaped for the purposes of monitoring, evaluation and improvement. They'd freak out at you enough that you wouldn't dare ask if teachers would perform in public via streaming video that administrators or parents could monitor. This happened at a high school near me.

Same goes for statistics and other objective assessments of student achievement. Grades and test scores are already hated measures that are criticized for not including intangibles such as student joy, teacher impact and emotional safety.

Lastly, pro athletes sign contracts, but are generally able to either renegotiate them or wait them out to take on more lucrative engagements. The teachers' tenure system, however, makes it nearly impossible for them to move to schools where they might be rewarded with higher salaries for stronger student achievement without giving up seniority and associated salary entitlements.

Plus, teacher unions don't really buy into the idea that some teachers are "better" than others -- or that there could be any way of truly determining excellence in a standardized way. The premise of teachers being rewarded based on student performance is always an education reform show-stopper.

It is a wonderful instinct to want teachers to be valued as much as sports heroes. But let's consider why we don't already and advocate for fundamental change.

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