

# Thinking K-16

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## HONOR IN THE BOXCAR Equalizing Teacher Quality

**R**EBECA HURST IS A SPECTACULARLY GOOD TEACHER. Though her Algebra II classroom is in one of Los Angeles' poorest neighborhoods, if you dropped by for an afternoon you wouldn't see either the disengagement or unruly behavior that we're often led to believe is inescapable in such settings. Instead, sparked by their teacher's commitment to instilling in her students the same passion for mathematics that she has, students vie to participate in solving complex math problems—problems many teachers would consider beyond the reach of these students. As she writes logarithm after logarithm on the board, eyes light up and pencils move fast and furiously on paper as students begin to understand what it is that is happening in each of the examples.

Every day, poor children in every city in America benefit hugely from terrific teachers like Rebecca. Underpaid, overworked, and stretched sometimes beyond human endurance to respond both to the intellectual and personal needs of their students, these dedicated adults devote themselves selflessly to sharing the riches of their own

education with young people growing up without riches of any other kind.

But as the pages of this issue of *Thinking K-16* show, poor children and children of color are far less likely than other children to be taught by outstanding teachers like Rebecca. Indeed, no matter how you measure teacher qualifications—licensed vs. unlicensed, in- vs. out-of-field, performance on teacher licensure exams, or even actual effectiveness in producing learning gains—low-income and minority youngsters come up on the short end.

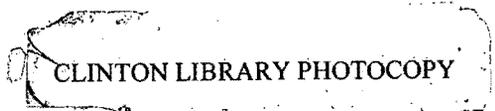
This fact is hardly lost on Mark Roberts, an African American father who observed that his daughter's low-income friend Tiffany wasn't having the same kind of school experiences that he saw in his daughter's so-called "gifted and talented" classroom.

In the GT classrooms, wrote Mr. Roberts, "children with the proper pedigrees... enjoyed the best teachers, smaller classes, an enriched curriculum, exciting field trips, challenging assignments, and the protective watch of the principal. They would never be assigned a teacher like Mrs. Simmons, who screamed at her students, kept a brick on her desk, and made frequent calls on her cell phone. Tiffany was in her class."

When Roberts questioned the principal about these differences, the response was chilling: "Remember who we are talking about," the principal explained. "There's only so much we can do for those kids."

For years, of course, we've known about inequities

Inside Thinking K-16	
Honor in the Boxcar	1
No More Settling For Less	3
Statements from National Leaders: Teachers Administrators Higher Education Business & Community	13
Actions for Communities & States	26



continued next page

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