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EDUCATION

Teacher Training Termed Mediocre

By Jennifer Medina

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Calling scores of education school programs “mediocre,” Education Secretary Arne Duncan on Thursday implored universities to significantly change the way they prepare teachers to run classrooms, saying a “revolutionary change” was needed to train as many as one million new teachers in five years.

During a speech at Columbia University’s Teachers College, [Mr. Duncan said](#) that too often the schools of education were simply seen as a “cash cow” for universities, because they are relatively inexpensive to run and have high enrollment.

“By almost any standard, many if not most of the nation’s 1,450 schools, colleges and departments of education are doing a mediocre job of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st-century classroom,” he said.

Mr. Duncan said that he had met hundreds of teachers who complained that they did not get enough practical training with classroom behaviors, particularly with poor students.

A report by a former president of Teachers College, Arthur Levine, found that roughly 60 percent of education school alumni said that their programs did not prepare them to teach.

The debate over teacher education is particularly loud in New York City, which has a number of schools.

Mr. Duncan noted that more than half of the country’s teachers are trained at colleges of education and only a fraction come through alternative programs such as [Teach for America](#). But nontraditional programs have continued to grow in New York City; roughly a third of the teachers hired in 2008 came through Teach for America and the city’s [Teaching Fellows program](#), which places rookie teachers in high-needs schools.

David M. Steiner, the new state education commissioner, was previously dean of the education school at Hunter College, and has made similar critiques of traditional

training programs. When he was appointed in July, he said the fact that the state's licensing exam had a pass rate of more than 90 percent showed that the bar was too low.

While Mr. Duncan was generally critical, he was careful to praise programs at some education schools, including Teachers College, that require intense practical training.

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