

# Overview

*by Con Lehane*

**I**n September, Dennis Van Roekel, a middle school math teacher from Phoenix, Arizona, took over as NEA president, succeeding Reg Weaver, who had served the Association, including its higher education members, admirably for the past six years. But a new president does mean change, and one of the change President Van Roekel brings is a heightened interest in higher education's role within the Association and an awareness of the increasing interconnectedness of all levels of education.

One example of NEA's new president's interest in higher education appears in this issue's Special Focus. In one of his first acts after taking office, President Van Roekel set aside time for an in-depth interview specifically for NEA's higher ed members, in which he discusses the Pre-K to Graduate School movement, the important role of higher education within NEA, and the need for increased cooperation between all levels of educators, especially within the Association. "I would love for the outside world to see NEA as an organization of all educators, including universities and colleges," Van Roekel told the interviewers.

Besides the Van Roekel interview, the Special Focus features bold proposals for revamping teacher education and the relationship between college professors and K-12 educators from Bard College president Leon Botstein, a longtime pro-

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ponent of early college high school. In addition, Stanford University professor emeritus Michael Kirst argues that the disconnection between K-12 and postsecondary education is a primary reason for low college completion rates at broad access colleges and universities. His solution: only K-12 and higher education working together will improve college readiness and increase college completion rates.

Also in the Special Focus, Massachusetts writing teacher Amber Vayo critiques the standardized test culture and Roger Davis, a higher education leader, and Jerry Hoffman, a higher ed staff person, both from Nebraska, outline the challenges presented by P-16 and P-20 councils in their state and across the nation.

Other topics in this issue include Charles Abate's analysis of the efficacy of multitasking, in which he suggests the younger generation may not be as adept at keeping all those balls in the air as they sometimes seem to be. Alexander Stanoyevitch, appropriately enough a math professor, proposes a solution to what he sees as an insidious practice in higher education: grade inflation. P.M. Forni offers ideas on restoring civility to the academy in the digital age. Chad Hanson sees a different threat to higher education from technology. His article warns of the deskilling of faculty work as college administrators increasingly 'borrow the ideology and techniques of industrial management.' Lest we be taken for Luddites, the issue also includes Douglas Harrison's confessions of a *blogademic*, a consideration of the role of the blog in academic scholarship.

The issue also includes Lance Newman's assessment of the California Faculty Association's groundbreaking 2007 contract negotiations that produced one of the most significant collective bargaining victories in the history of higher education unionism. In a similar vein, Daniel Maguire writes of the ongoing campaign by Marquette University's theology department faculty to win fair working conditions for their non-tenure track colleagues.

Finally, but not least importantly, we feature two commentaries by colleagues concerned about how to effectively measure learning without infringing on the instructor's love of teaching and the student's need to learn.

The *Thought & Action* Review Panel hopes you enjoy the Fall 2008 issue of the NEA's higher education journal and, as always, looks forward to your comments.