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Escalante Stood and Delivered. It's Our Turn.

The teachers union opposed his effort to expand his class beyond 35 students.

By ANDREW J. COULSON

Jaime Escalante, the brilliant public school teacher immortalized in the 1988 film, "Stand and Deliver," died this week at the age of 79. With the help of a few dedicated colleagues at Garfield High in East Los Angeles, he shattered the myth that poor inner-city kids couldn't handle advanced math. At the peak of its success, Garfield produced more students who passed Advanced Placement calculus than Beverly Hills High.

In any other field, his methods would have been widely copied. Instead, Escalante's success was resented. And while the teachers union contract limited class sizes to 35, Escalante could not bring himself to turn students away, packing 50 or more into a room and still helping them to excel. This weakened the union's bargaining position, so it complained.

By 1990, Escalante was stripped of his chairmanship of the math department he'd painstakingly built up over a decade. Exasperated, he left in 1991, eventually returning to his native Bolivia. Garfield's math program went into a decline from which it has never recovered. The best tribute America can offer Jaime Escalante is to understand why our education system destroyed rather than amplified his success—and then fix it.

A succinct diagnosis of the problem was offered by President Clinton in 1993 at the launch of philanthropist Walter Annenberg's \$500 million

education reform challenge. "People in this room who have devoted their lives to education," he said, "are constantly plagued by the fact that nearly every problem has been solved by somebody somewhere, and yet we can't seem to replicate it everywhere else." Our greatest challenge is to create "a system to somehow take what is working and make it work everywhere."

The most naïve approach has been to create a critical mass of exemplary "model" schools, imagining that the system would spontaneously reconstitute itself around their example. This was the implicit assumption underlying the Annenberg Challenge and, with donor matching, more than \$1 billion was spent on it. As a mechanism for widely disseminating excellence, it failed utterly.

President Obama wants a government program for identifying and disseminating what works. In his blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act released in March, he proposed the creation of "'communities of practice' to share best practices and replicate successful strategies."

He's not the first to advocate this approach. The secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education pursued the same idea—in 1837. Horace Mann, father of American public schooling, thought that a centrally planned state education apparatus would reliably identify and bring to scale the best methods and materials in use throughout the

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system. Despite a century-and-a-half of expansion and centralization, this approach, too, has failed. Without systematic incentives rewarding officials for wise decisions and penalizing them for bad ones, public schooling became a ferris wheel of faddism rather than a propagator of excellence.

Rather than repeating the errors of the past, we would do well to look to the successes of the present. The highly regarded KIPP network of charter schools now operates 82 sites around the country. This is a great boon to the many students benefitting from its services, and clearly a step in the right direction. But its growth is only a pale shadow of the scaling-up we've come to expect in other sectors—think of Facebook or the iPod.

Is expansion on that scale achievable in education? Consider the Kumon chain of after-school tutoring centers. Founded in 1954 by Japanese math teacher Toru Kumon, it now serves more than four million students in 42 countries. Not only does the tutoring sector reveal the feasibility of globe-spanning education growth, it offers a glimpse of how brilliant educators can and should be treated. Thanks to profit sharing and Web broadcasting of their lectures, top teachers in Korea's tutoring sector earn big salaries and have virtual class sizes in the scores of thousands. The combination of high technology and market incentives not only allows but compels tutoring firms to recognize and make the most of their top teachers.

Asian tutoring services are often criticized for focusing too narrowly on exam preparation. But in Japan, Korea and other East Asian countries, college admission hinges almost exclusively on high-stakes entrance exams, and degrees from elite colleges play a far greater role in determining career opportunities there than in the U.S. If parents demanded a broad liberal arts education, these entrepreneurially run schools would respond or be driven from the market.

America not only needs more teachers like Jaime Escalante, it needs an education system that recognizes them and helps them to reach a mass

audience. The tutoring sector is a proven model for doing so: Unleash the freedoms and incentives of the marketplace, so teachers like Escalante become the Steve Jobs or Bill Gates of education, profiting from their exceptional ability to serve our children.

Mr. Coulson directs the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.