



## HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

### **Building Great Schools Around Great Teachers**

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*For Tony Klemmer (MBA 1983), high-quality education starts with training exceptional teachers.*

Plans for a second career took an abrupt turn in just one day for **Tony Klemmer** (MBA 1983) when, after a quarter century of successful startup launches, he left the business world to pursue personal interests on a professional basis. Answering the call of his high school alma mater, Portsmouth Abbey in Rhode Island, he accepted the post of assistant principal.

Then, during Klemmer's four-year tenure at Portsmouth Abbey, a visit to a charter school in a tough New York City neighborhood further altered his course. Students at the charter school were enjoying high achievement, while their neighbors in other public schools were struggling. For the first time, he understood the stark contrast in public education between the upper-middle-class world he knew and impoverished neighborhoods.

"It's a cliché, but ZIP code in this country has such a gross bearing on the rest of your life," said Klemmer.

Yet the success he had observed at the charter school convinced him that top-quality education was possible everywhere. Suddenly, being an administrator at a boarding school seemed too limiting if he wanted to make a genuine impact.

Turning his sights to improving public education, he met with then-HBS Senior Lecturer **Stacey Childress** (MBA 2000). She presented him with a challenge. Why, she asked, does the US military develop its most promising leaders through academies like West Point, while there are no parallel institutions to nurture outstanding teachers?

Klemmer founded the **Center for Better Schools** to seek the answer. "Having had the Harvard Business School experience and knowing others who had had similar high-octane, elite academy experiences of advanced learning in other professions, I was shocked to learn that nothing exists in the United States for similarly positioned teachers," Klemmer said.

<https://www.alumni.hbs.edu/stories/Pages/story-bulletin.aspx?num=2749>

Two years of research led him to open the [National Academy of Advanced Teacher Education \(NAATE\)](#) in 2011, aided by funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, the Peters Family Foundation, the Bezos Family Foundation, and the Edgerley Family Foundation through [Paul](#) (MBA 1983) and [Sandra Edgerley](#) (MBA 1989).

NAATE's intensive program is designed to develop and reinvigorate high-performing teachers in a setting with others of like talent. Employing the case method, it is predicated upon the same expectations as HBS, that the candidates have real-world experience and exceptional ability.

In the core program, participants receive 360 hours of learning time, divided into three sessions: 10 days during Summer I, a three-day weekend in the winter, and 10 days during Summer II. Before each session, they complete 40 hours of reading and writing assignments.

NAATE will launch a second program in the 2013–2014 academic year, with two five-day sessions during the school year for teachers who cannot attend in the summer.

The goals are to keep great teachers in the classroom, doing their best possible work and to create a Navy SEAL-style elite corps of teacher-leaders, first in high-need schools and ultimately in every school. Klemmer intentionally draws military analogies. National security and education, he suggests, share equal importance in protecting our country's future.

Nearly all of the 76 NAATE Teacher Fellows thus far report that the experience has profoundly changed their classroom practice, increased their leadership opportunities in their schools, and improved student performance.

While Klemmer delights in the anecdotal evidence, he cautions that the sample is too small to claim measurable student improvement.

But he is thinking big.

"Look at World War II. We had 150,000 trained military personnel in 1939, and by 1944 we had 8 million, so don't tell me we couldn't train 200,000 Navy SEAL-level teachers in the next 10 years. We could do it. We could do it in less time if it was a priority," he said.