

Transforming School Conditions

*Building Bridges to the Education System
that Students and Teachers Deserve*

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Teacher Leadership • Research • Policy

In this report the TeacherSolutions Teacher Working Conditions team — a group of 14 accomplished teachers who work in mostly high-needs schools and districts, both urban and rural, draw on current research and CTQ case studies to identify essential, research-based principles that must undergird sustainable and effective teaching reforms. America’s teachers must have the opportunity to make decisions about instruction in their classrooms and schools in order to reach students with diverse and unique needs. Funded by the Ford Foundation, their year of TeacherSolutions work has identified both the policies and practices needed to ensure great teaching for all students.

*The Center for Teaching Quality
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Teacher Leadership • Research • Policy

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Transforming School Conditions: Building Bridges to the Education System that Students and Teachers Deserve

TeacherSolutions That Improve Student Achievement

Some education reform advocates suggest that effective teachers are born rather than made, and there is little need to invest significantly in preparing our nation's teaching corps. They argue that the key to improving teacher effectiveness is recruiting the right people to teaching and then holding them accountable for student achievement results. As a team of 14 effective teachers from across the nation, we embrace accountability for us and for our colleagues. But we also know that conditions in schools matter for student achievement.

Working conditions can determine whether or not well-qualified and well-prepared teachers can teach effectively, so that their students experience high levels of academic success and learning growth. Our TeacherSolutions team has analyzed the research evidence about working conditions from the perspective of the schools in which we teach. We have developed a vision for creating the teaching conditions that promote the recruitment, preparation, and retention of effective teachers. We point to the following essential principles that must undergird sustainable effective teaching reforms:

Schools and districts should...

- Offer students opportunities to pursue curricula that are relevant and rigorous.
- Assess student learning growth using multiple and meaningful measures that account for the many learning differences and challenges they bring to the classroom.
- Promote aligned, out-of-school learning experiences for students beyond the school walls and through online opportunities that connect schools with the community, locally and globally.
- Participate actively, in cooperation with teacher preparation programs and teachers themselves, in the process of preparing the next generations of teaching professionals, and in sharpening current teachers' professional expertise.
- Equitably support all students, their families, and the teachers who serve them, through wise allocation of resources and programs that meet needs that go beyond academic ones.
- Engage the larger educational community, including parents, policymakers, teacher preparation programs, and business and civic leaders in creating a clear, comprehensive, and compelling path to teaching effectiveness reforms.

Teachers should...

- Have the opportunity to make decisions about instruction in their classrooms and schools in order to reach students with diverse and unique needs.
- Be offered high-quality professional development – focused around the demands of the subjects and students they actually teach – throughout their entire career span, not just in their early years in the classroom.
- Be evaluated by multiple measures of performance, just as their students are, which can be used to help them and their schools make decisions about professional development needs and future career options.

School and district administrators should...

- Cultivate teacher leadership and shared decision-making and help spread the expertise of the most effective teachers.
- Be accountable for ensuring teachers are in teaching assignments for which they were prepared, and have opportunities to develop the skills they need to meet new pedagogical challenges.
- Be accountable for the growth in effectiveness of the teachers with whom they work, as teachers are held accountable for the learning growth of the students whom they teach.

Prologue: A Message from Barnett Berry and the Center for Teaching Quality

For over a decade, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) has sought to advance teaching as a profession in ways that improve academic achievement for all students. While we conduct practical research and craft smart policy, the heart and soul of our work is to elevate the ideas of expert teachers across the nation. Through our expanding and evolving virtual community, Teacher Leaders Network, we are providing policymakers and the public as well as practitioners new ways to think about solving complex educational problems.

All too often policy solutions are developed and driven by researchers, journalists, and advocates who know very little about the day-to-day realities of teaching and learning. This TeacherSolutions report is part of a series of research-driven policy papers and products created by classroom teachers who are directly serving students and their families every day. Increasingly, accomplished teachers are joining CTQ as co-investigators in our efforts to document the conditions and systems that best support effective teaching and learning. And teachers, like those on the team that developed this report, are taking intensive study of policies and research one step further, to create recommendations – *TeacherSolutions* – to the challenges they identify. In doing so, they bring distinguished and reasonable voices from America’s classrooms into national and local education policy debates.

The TeacherSolutions Teacher Working Conditions team brings together 14 leading teaching professionals from districts nationwide. They teach diverse grade levels, subjects, and students. They work in geographically diverse, mostly high-needs districts and schools. They entered the profession through diverse pathways, including traditional university teacher education and alternative programs like Teach for America. They include seasoned professionals and those new to the classroom, both local union leaders and those who have chosen not to join unions at all. Some are National Board Certified, teachers of the year, college instructors, and Ph.D. candidates. The team includes: Eldred “Jay” Bagley (Philadelphia); Glenda Blaisdell-Buck (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC); Mitzi Durham (Clark County, NV); Larry Ferlazzo (Sacramento, CA); Brian K. Freeland, Jr. (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC); Lori Fulton (Clark County, NV); Leona Bost Ingram (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC); Kristoffer Kohl (Clark County, NV); Mona Madan (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC); Kathie Marshall (Los Angeles); Delores Maxen (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC); Susan “Ernie” Rambo (Clark County, NV); Taylor Ross (Jefferson County, AL); and Gamal Sherif (Philadelphia). (See the final pages of this report for team bios.)

Developing TeacherSolutions

The TeacherSolutions Teacher Working Conditions team spent a full year developing the analyses and recommendations contained in this report. They began by studying recent research, policy innovations, and best practices around working conditions, human capital supports, and systems in schools, including school climate and culture. During a series of webinars, the team met virtually with leading experts in these areas, including: Dan Goldhaber (University of Washington); Heather Harding (Teach for America); Susan Moore Johnson (Harvard University); Jim Kelly (Strategic Management of Human Capital project, CPRE); Anissa Listak (Urban Teacher Residency United); Jon Snyder (Bank Street College, NY); and Gary Sykes (Michigan State University). The views and recommendations developed by the teacher team are theirs alone, but were greatly enriched and informed by the discussions with these guests.

As part of its collaborative process, the team met online with leading policy experts and researchers to discuss and analyze the empirical evidence on what makes for effective teachers and teaching. Together they delved into relevant issues, including school funding, teacher labor markets, high quality pre-service preparation and professional development, teacher evaluation and compensation, and the role that social capital in schools and communities plays in improving student achievement. Their work was also informed by a wealth of data from their own districts and states, including teacher working conditions surveys and longitudinal case studies of seven elementary schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Clark County (NV), and Denver. (Highlights from CTQ's case studies appear in green sidebars throughout this report.)

CTQ Case Studies on Teacher Working Conditions

CTQ researchers conducted longitudinal case studies in seven urban elementary schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Clark County (NV), and Denver, making 20 site visits in 2009 and 2010. All the schools served primarily high-needs communities, including large numbers of students with low family income or special needs, who were English language learners (ELLs), who were below grade-level on average, or some combination of these factors.

We conducted individual and small group interviews with staff and stakeholders at each school, using semi-structured protocols driven by teacher working conditions survey data from two of the districts. In addition, we conducted some brief observations of classrooms and common spaces during the school day. Our goals were twofold: first, to fill in the inevitable gaps left by limited quantitative instruments; and second, to surface the more nuanced stories that give stakeholders in the wider community a way to connect with and interpret the survey data more meaningfully.

Over the study period, we interviewed 239 teachers, 19 administrators, 23 non-instructional student support staff, nine parents/guardians, and three community partners. These individuals were able to offer diverse perspectives on how preparation, professional development, collaboration, teacher leadership, community partnerships, and evaluation programs influenced teaching effectiveness – and on “what works” to create and sustain systemic reforms in high-needs schools.

Building from these resources, the CTQ staff created a curriculum for the team that allowed them to engage in an intensive study of research and policy reports related to teacher working conditions and teaching effectiveness. Working primarily in our virtual community space, the team developed empirically grounded policy recommendations aimed at sparking systemic and sustainable school reform, and a teaching profession that students of the 21st century deserve and need. Readers of this report are encouraged also to watch for embedded podcast and video reflections (linked in the purple boxes), which provide opportunities to hear the voices of outstanding teachers on critical issues affecting their students and the schools in which they teach.

Finally, on behalf of the TeacherSolutions team and the CTQ staff, I want to offer our deepest thanks to the Ford Foundation for its generous support of this project. Fred Frelow and Jeannie Oakes have been the best kind of funders imaginable: visionary leaders and genuine partners who shared indispensable advice throughout this initiative. They have embraced the possibilities of teacher leaders leading the way for systemic school reforms. We are grateful for their investments in advancing the kind of teaching profession that students must have in the challenging decades to come.

TeacherSolutions to Transform Our Schools and Our Profession

We believe that teaching is the profession that makes all other professions possible. Teachers must ensure that the nation's next generations have the academic skills they need to excel in college and careers in an evolving, dynamic global economy. We must also prepare young people to become successful *citizens*, whom we will someday charge with resolving 21st century dilemmas as diverse as managing climate change, redeveloping urban cores, and others we cannot begin to imagine today. To engage in this fulfilling but complex work, teaching professionals need a new kind of preparation and support system. In fact, current "systems" are not very systemic at all. Whether any given teacher will receive the training and supports that he or she needs to remain and be successful in schools is a hit-or-miss proposition. And unfortunately, that is most true in the high-needs schools in which CTQ case studies were conducted and in which many of us teach.

The current conventional wisdom in education "reform" circles is that all teachers need to be effective is to have book smarts, possess the right dispositions, and work hard. This viewpoint also suggests that if teachers did not have to work under the constraints of collective bargaining agreements forged by their unions, schools would flourish. Proponents often conclude by proposing that schools and student achievement could be improved if administrators had more leeway in firing ineffective teachers and hiring effective ones.

But sustainable strategies for improving teaching quality require more and better ingredients than these oversimplified suggestions. They require more than new teachers with higher academic scores or Ivy League degrees. They require more than new recruits with a few weeks of training in classroom management or how to interpret standardized test scores, or new teacher supports that go no further than occasional meetings with a mentor who offers general guidance in implementing the latest curriculum. Any of these proposed solutions may sound like a step in the right direction, but the research evidence is clear: none of them is associated with significant learning gains for students.

What the research and our teaching experience tell us is that the real and sustainable solutions are much more interlinked and complex. By drawing on solid evidence, stripped of ideological agendas, and our many decades of combined classroom practice, we have crafted meaningful TeacherSolutions that will benefit students and support the profession that serves them.

Challenging Conditions for a Challenged Profession

Currently, teacher preparation programs (both traditional and alternative) are not organized to support the sustainable strategies we envision for our profession. Neither pathway does enough to prepare teachers to work with second language learners and become the student assessment experts demanded in today's and tomorrow's classrooms. As documented carefully in the new book *Teaching 2030*, co-authored by Barnett Berry and twelve of our colleagues in the Teacher Leaders Network, neither approach is preparing future teachers for students whose brains are being re-wired to match the virtual reality games they play and the social media they use to

communicate and learn from each other. A lack of alignment between the supply of teachers being prepared to enter classrooms and districts' staffing demands and needs means that it is common in all our districts to have teacher shortages for some positions (e.g., special education, math) and an excess of candidates in others (e.g., English, social studies).ⁱ And while traditional programs offer much needed internships in teaching that most alternative approaches bypass (to save investments of money and time before teachers enter the classroom), those traditional programs may not fully prepare teachers to teach content in ways that engage diverse learners and cultivate teacher leaders.

These challenges in aligning preparation with schools' and districts' needs also contribute to overall churn and attrition among teachers. Without adequate pre-service preparation and support as beginning professionals, too many teachers leave before they develop the teaching expertise their students deserve. Nationwide, attrition rates for teachers are nearly a third higher than for other professions.ⁱⁱ About half of all teachers leave the classroom within the first five years of entry – ironically, at just about the time they achieve real proficiency in their craft.ⁱⁱⁱ These issues are especially prominent in high-needs schools, which have the highest rates of out-of-field teaching, experience turnover rates that are two times those of other schools, and lack adequate overall funding and facilities.^{iv}

The main reasons for teachers' departures are not a lack of prestige or competitive salaries, although both are important to us as professionals and could affect the career decisions of the Millennials who are beginning to consider (and perhaps to reject) teaching careers now. Instead, the research we have studied as a team over the past year suggests that new teachers choose to stay in or leave the profession based on the *conditions* in the schools in which they work.^v These factors include whether they feel well prepared for the subjects and students they teach, whether they have the supports and leadership they need to teach effectively, and whether they are empowered as professional decision-makers and leaders themselves. And importantly, these factors not only affect attrition, but also teachers' *effectiveness* while they are in the classroom.

Better Conditions for Teaching – and Learning

It's true that not all teacher turnover is inherently bad. However, most experts agree with what we've observed in our own districts: very high levels of turnover have serious costs for schools. Teachers are the single most important school-based factor in educational quality, both because of their technical expertise as educators and because they are often the most stable and supportive adults in some students' lives.

We know that high levels of stability and experience are certainly not perfect proxies for teaching effectiveness. However, new research is showing that teaching experience can have positive impacts on student achievement, when teachers have opportunities to work with colleagues over a longer period of time, and spread the expertise among those teams of teachers.^{vi} Moreover, a "revolving door" of underprepared and less experienced new teachers leaves schools without the stable faculty needed to sustain long term school improvement, and students without a critical mass of effective teachers. High-needs schools typically have higher staff turnover, retain the less experienced staff, are more likely to place teachers out-of-field, and more likely to assign teachers a relatively high number of class preparations than schools

serving more advantaged communities. As a result, these schools are disproportionately affected by the challenges of staff churn and poor conditions for effective teaching.^{vii}

Of course, many excellent teachers do remain in high-needs schools for the long term, as many of us have done. The next question is whether the systems in place in our schools and districts support our efforts to be fully effective teaching professionals. In many cases, the answer is unfortunately “no.” Despite access to Title I dollars, we tend to have fewer material resources available to us in our schools, including less well-kept and modern facilities. Most importantly, we frequently lack the human resources we need to reach a “tipping point” for success with our students. Our discussions surfaced a deep need for more extended time for students to learn in and out of school; more ways to involve parents and community partners; extra intervention and support staff to tutor and counsel students and families with intensive non-academic needs; and even the time and opportunities to work closely with staff and volunteers who are already in our buildings, in order to leverage their expertise and resources for the benefit of students. And we need schools and teachers who know how to put these pieces of the educational puzzle together in ways that make sense for increased student achievement.

“The Smartboards Weren’t So Smart”

In some CTQ case study sites, schools were struggling to stay on the cutting edge of instructional technology in buildings that just couldn’t support those efforts. One principal said:

We had to spend down our Title I and [reform] dollars or lose them, and central office encouraged us to get 21st century tools, like Smartboards. So we put them in nearly every classroom and got all new connected computers. But it’s an old building, and we didn’t have the wiring to support those tools, and the central office said we couldn’t rewire yet. So they just sat there. I guess the Smartboards weren’t so smart. In hindsight, we could have spent that money so much better another way.

The fact is that many high-needs schools don’t (or lack resources to) create or sustain the conditions that teachers need to teach effectively. We recognize that some of what needs to be done for our public schools is expensive. But these much-needed reforms are less costly than the expense of teacher turnover, estimated at approximately \$7.3 billion *each year*.^{viii} This sum represents more than 17 percent of the U.S. Department of Education’s budget for 2010.

It is much harder to put a price on what it costs our society to operate schools in which poor conditions for effective teaching and learning lead to high dropout rates and students who are under-prepared for college and careers. Yet we know, from seeing these systemic failures play out in individual students’ lives, that these costs are also unacceptably high for children and for our society.

Taking the Next Steps

These findings about the importance of school conditions to teaching and learning are not new revelations to those of us who teach, and for the most part they are not even new research results. But they have not been part of the narratives that dominate the national reform conversation today. Many of us who teach in Clark County School District or Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools have participated in teacher surveys in our schools for years, as our state or district has invested in documenting working conditions that impact our students and us

every day. This organizational leadership in identifying specific challenges in our school communities has been a critical first step in helping us understand what makes schools more effective. In some cases, progress toward improving conditions has been made. But surveys often do not ask the most important questions, and our school leaders have yet to address fully and seriously the fundamental issues that undermine our efforts to teach students effectively and advance their achievement.

What is new about our report is that it represents a teacher-led attempt to forge solutions that target these fundamental challenges. We point to five ways in which conditions in schools, state and local education agencies, and preparation programs are holding back student learning and a 21st century teaching profession:

1. Recruitment and preparation pathways for teacher candidates;
2. Assessment and evaluation systems for students and teachers;
3. Development of professional networks within and across schools to support teaching and learning;
4. Empowerment and professional leadership for teachers; and
5. Investment of community resources to develop and support effective schools.

As teaching professionals whose perspectives are informed by our everyday practice as well as sound empirical evidence, we have looked to recent studies and evaluations as guides to what works for schools. These findings have helped to shape our thinking around these five issues, and underlie the recommendations we make. In some cases, we found research studies enabled us to frame our classroom experiences in a larger context. Many of the reports we reviewed seemed familiar and intuitive to us, because their findings resonated with what we already knew from our day-to-day work as classroom teachers. Others seemed to be more ideological and ignored well-documented evidence about the impacts of important conditions for school success, such as relevant and high-quality professional development, or wrap-around and extended day services for students.

Throughout the report, we have shared personal stories around these themes. We hope these will provide a compelling narrative for teachers, parents, policymakers, and community partners to understand how the recommendations we make might impact schools – and to understand just how much is at stake for students, educators and communities.

Preparing Effective Teachers with Rigor and Relevance

As teachers who were recruited and prepared through diverse pathways – including traditional university-based programs and alternative routes like Teach for America – we believe that the debate between traditional university-based preparation programs versus alternative routes is unproductive. We are motivated instead by the strengths each brings to the table and how the

best elements of traditional and alternative teacher preparation can increase the effectiveness of new professionals before and during their first years in the classroom.

In today's reform climate, the call for quality educators is increasing, even as the pool of interested candidates diminishes. We believe that the teaching profession is seriously in need of innovative teacher recruitment pipelines. But the issue is about more than supply and demand. Effective teaching begins with more effective preparation for the demands of today's students and schools. We can and must develop policies that make professional preparation more rigorous and more relevant to the schools and communities in which teachers teach.

Teacher candidates should be prepared in programs that combine rigorous study of education theory with hands-on opportunities to advance teaching practice.

Many of us recall that our own preparation did not leave us well prepared to teach on day one. We had few opportunities to watch accomplished teachers at work with students, and even less closely-mentored, hands-on experience in classrooms ourselves. Some alternate route programs do offer more clinical experience than in typical traditional preparation programs. Even so, these experiences are usually too brief, or in classrooms that are too different from the ones in which candidates later actually teach. And they are rarely accompanied by opportunities for candidates to learn deeply about the theories that underlie good practice, which we believe are essential for teachers to understand as they consider how best to tailor instruction to the needs of individual students.

“The Way to Go with Teacher Preparation in America”

For many teachers interviewed in CTQ's case studies, early clinical experience and excellent mentoring was essential to prepare them to teach students in high-needs schools and contribute to school improvement efforts successfully. One teacher told the story of a program that made the difference for her:

What helped me most was a year-long internship at a high-needs school. And you know, that is really the way to go with teacher preparation in America. I opened...and closed the school year. I saw it all: not just learning about instruction, but also how to set up an effective classroom, to work with students from all different backgrounds, to communicate well with parents at conference time and find common ground with diverse families. And I worked with a wonderful mentor who was an effective teacher and could show me how to be effective too. Not like other programs, where you student teach full time for just six weeks. [Laughing.] That just doesn't prepare you for the real world.

The concept of urban teacher residency (UTR) programs offers a promising third way approach. Here, teacher residents work alongside specially trained master teachers — similar to the way that medical residents work with fully credentialed doctors — before they are released to teach independently. Residents are well-supported but held to rigorous standards, and those who are not successful in both grasping theory and executing practice are not recommended for licensure. [Dozens of UTR programs](#) are successfully and rigorously preparing new teachers in urban communities nationwide, and residents are frequently described as being more skilled and effective than other early-career teachers as a result of this intensive training. UTRs often offer another benefit to the districts with which they work: master teachers frequently receive

generous professional development opportunities, stipends, or reduced teaching loads. These reward teacher leadership in sharing expertise, compensate them for being “teachers of teachers,” and provide advancement opportunities for effective veterans that don’t require them to leave the classroom.

Teacher preparation programs should align selection and training of teacher candidates with the needs of local students and districts, and be held accountable for the quality of the teachers they produce.

We know that most teachers are trained by and ultimately work in schools near their home communities.^{ix} However, most preparation programs train teacher candidates for “just any” public school rather than the ones in which they will actually teach, missing valuable opportunities to teach them about the local community and district contexts. (Some traditional and alternative teacher education programs are beginning to move toward this model.)

As a result, teacher candidates often do not gain cultural competencies specific to the population of students they will teach. They also are rarely introduced to social service agencies or community-based organizations that could help them better support students and families. For instance, preparing teachers to help create and work in extended learning opportunities for students is one of the new essentials of teacher education. Shortcuts in preparation often set new teachers *and their students* up for failure, and are one reason why one of every two early career teachers leaves the profession before they have a chance to become fully effective.

“We Bring Them into Our Teaching Community”

Teachers at case study sites agreed that professional preparation doesn’t end with completion of a formal preparation program. One teacher described how her school organized peer mentoring and collaboration processes to help new colleagues learn to be most effective in their building:

And I know at our school, in our district, we have a professional growth team in place where [peer] mentors have been trained on the teacher evaluation process. And when new teachers come in...we’re trained and assigned to assist them, and they have four evaluations. And we meet with the new teachers, we look over their lesson plans before they have their first observation and their second observation, [and discuss] any problems that they might be having. And then...we try to pair up [new and current teachers] on the grade level so that there’s a common community there. We bring them into our teaching community, sharing ideas and planning collaboratively so that the new teacher isn’t out there planning on her own. We give them support, whether it is doing bulletin boards in the beginning, setting up [their classrooms], or meeting with the group of new teachers at our school to say, “This is what our first day together is going to look like.” We all share what we’re going to do – not telling them what to do [directly] but at least setting an example of what needs to be done. Because I know as a first year teacher opening the school year, I wish I would’ve had somebody to tell me those things.

Of equal concern, preparation programs – especially the ones at institutions of higher education where most teachers are still prepared – rarely select and prepare candidates based on the actual needs of local districts and schools. Instead, schools of education tend to admit and train any candidate who expresses interest in any licensure area, irrespective of the staffing needs in the local districts. Too many schools of education exist to serve their students, not the school

systems and communities in which they are situated. But by failing to align student interests and local needs, they fail to serve either one. This orientation must change, because it also contributes to the chronic undersupply of teachers in the highest-demand licensure areas: STEM subjects, special education, and instruction for English language learners.

Moreover, most preparation programs, including alternative routes, still focus on 20th century approaches to 20th century skills. Reading, writing and arithmetic remain important, but our students need to learn these basic competencies in new ways. The ability to find, select, and analyze relevant information, and to communicate and collaborate in teams (face to face and virtually), are threshold skills for college and careers in the information age – more important in today’s world than the memorization drills still prevalent in too many classrooms. Indeed, teacher candidates often lack training in how to work in teams themselves. Teachers should be just as proficient at managing collaborations with their colleagues and administrators as they are in managing a classroom of students, and their preparation programs should help them learn to do both. Research shows that increased collaboration will make teachers more effective by allowing them to learn best practices from one another and develop mutual accountability with peers.^x Additionally, collaboration will have the extra benefit of modeling an important professional skill for our students.

Most important, we believe that all preparation programs should be held accountable for the quality of the teachers they produce. Candidates’ developing effectiveness should be evaluated using the same evaluation measures that are used in their local districts throughout their pre-service training, to ensure they’ll meet or exceed competency standards on the first day of independent teaching. And just as states are now creating data systems that link student and teacher data to evaluate teaching effectiveness, college curricula and alumni performance data should be linked to track the effectiveness of pre-service training programs. The [Data Quality Campaign](#) encourages states to release such data to give teacher preparation programs badly needed feedback about how to improve their rigor and relevance – an idea that education policymakers, education reformers, and teacher educators should all support.

Once in the profession, teachers should have access to ongoing, high quality, differentiated professional development to keep their knowledge and skills sharp.

Even the best-prepared new teachers still require careful in-service mentoring alongside more expert educators — a learning experience many of us craved but did not receive at the start of our careers. Research suggests that mentoring and other forms of peer learning are hugely important to building teaching effectiveness, especially at the beginning of teachers’ careers, and can contribute to retaining them for the longer term.^{xi}

Teacher preparation programs and school districts must work together to ensure that student teachers *and* beginning teachers are well matched with master

Taylor Ross is currently in her sixth year in the classroom, as a special education teacher in a high-needs school in Birmingham, AL. But Taylor has already established her professional leadership, as a member of the Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching and a National Board *Take One!* candidate. Listen to her story about how she developed her teaching practice even more deeply – *and* spread her teaching expertise through her school – through mentoring.

teachers who have time and training to mentor them carefully as they enter the teaching profession.

“Teachers Are Carrying the Expertise”

A teacher at one case study school that was built around teacher collaboration structures spent some early years in the classroom in more traditionally organized schools. This teacher connected collaboration among teachers with increasing teaching effectiveness, and noted how the value of administrators’ feedback could be limited by their lack of regular contact with students and classrooms:

What I’ve always believed in is that teachers are carrying the expertise, because they are working with the children, hour by hour, day after day. In the past, I’ve rarely seen an administrator [who could] come in and spend time in the classroom and then go to an evaluation process where they can actually give you suggestions about something new – something that you could actually take back and try in your classroom and really...improve effectiveness. And that [emphasis on building effectiveness] is really where we are going. ...

My experience has been [that] when I’ve talked to my colleagues [about teaching challenges], they’ve said, “Oh, I did this.” They were the ones that were sitting with the information that helped me try things in new ways with the children. So that [collaboration] has been the most valuable thing for me [in growing more effective].

This teacher’s experiences coincide with other research evidence suggesting that peer learning and collaboration is the best way to grow teaching effectiveness. Administrators still have important roles to play in many schools, as facilitators and managers of programs in the building. However, research evidence and the combined experience of this TeacherSolutions team point to the importance of structuring schools to maximize opportunities for formal and informal collaboration, feedback, and mentoring among teachers — both through mindful scheduling, and group and individual rewards for increased effectiveness.

To be most effective, mentors must undergo a careful selection process that assures that the *most effective* rather than just the *most experienced* are selected for these positions. They should then be paired with novice teachers whose challenges match the mentor’s strengths. Mentors should observe and coach, model good teaching practice, and design professional development for novices. They should also be held jointly accountable for the progress of their mentees’ students. Our colleague Taylor Ross had experience with this type of matched mentoring and found it transformative for mentor and mentee, allowing each an opportunity to become better teachers.

Professional development must be ongoing throughout the career cycle. However, just as fourth graders and eleventh graders learn science concepts in different ways, beginning and veteran teachers have different professional development needs. Several of us are National Board Certified Teachers. Undergoing this certification process leads experienced teachers to closely analyze their teaching habits and develop a more reflective, outcomes-focused practice. Meanwhile, new teachers need more immediately practical skills to help them organize teaching and learning routines and tools in their classrooms.

Where possible, professional development for accomplished veteran teachers should include leadership training, allowing them to be mentors, designers and deliverers of professional development — and to become instructional leaders within their schools as well. Finally, all teachers should be placed in positions that match their licensure areas and, where possible, in the same specific subjects and grade levels. New studies show that attention to these specific

working conditions allows the benefits of teachers' experience and professional learning to accumulate, translating into greater student learning gains.^{xii}

Evaluating Students and Teachers Using Fair, Valid, and Reliable Measures

In the current accountability era, students are expected to make quantifiable gains on state assessments, which in many states now play a large role in teacher evaluations. Every one of us is on board with the notion of rigorous teacher evaluation based on evidence of student learning growth. However, the metrics put in place by No Child Left Behind and state accountability laws are at best incomplete — and at worst completely inaccurate — depictions of teachers' individual impacts on our students. Moreover, standardized test scores reflect an emphasis on narrow, short-term outcomes that do not impact meaningful student learning for life, college, and career.

We must develop processes of student and teacher evaluation that allow us to collect measurable *and* meaningful evidence of effective teaching, but that do not circumscribe the range of learning experiences for our students. No single data source, including the value-added modeling that has dominated recent education news stories, will be a perfect measure for assessing teacher effectiveness. Lee Shulman has made a compelling case that any single measure of teaching effectiveness is “insufficient” for full and accurate teacher evaluation.^{xiii} We believe that using multiple measures — each providing a window into specific aspects of teachers' knowledge and skills — is critically important to create a full and accurate picture of teaching efficacy.

Student assessment systems should put student learning at the center, offering teachers formative feedback on student progress and flexibility to design instruction that meets student needs.

The use of multiple-choice tests as the primary high-stakes benchmark of teaching and learning has served our students poorly. Many policy experts and researchers have found evidence of teaching to the test — either by manipulating the testing pool, drilling

Implementing Multiple Measures of Teaching Effectiveness

Current teacher evaluation metrics tend to be limited in the scope of the kinds of information they can collect about teaching effectiveness. To obtain a fuller and more accurate picture of teachers' performance, districts and states should use a combination of tools to identify teachers' strengths and challenges. This information will allow them to make the best decisions about targeted professional development, identify teachers who are well suited to leadership roles alongside their instructional duties, and compensate teachers accordingly.

Less commonly used, but successful, formative and summative measures of teaching effectiveness include:

- Peer and assistance and review (PAR) programs;
- Individual analysis of teaching practices (e.g., based on viewing videos of one's own teaching as in National Board Certification processes);
- Analysis of classroom artifacts, including lesson plans and student work;
- Portfolios that demonstrate the kind of assignments teachers give and how they assess student progress; or
- Student engagement (e.g., surveys).

This list is far from exhaustive. More information on these metrics and the specific teaching behaviors and competencies that they excel at measuring, can be found in a recent [Learning Point report](#).

students in testing skills, or over-focusing on content simply because it is often tested, regardless of whether it advances learning and the most important skills. As accomplished teachers, we advocate that we should instead teach to the standards and curricula, and to our students' individual abilities and needs.

Multiple measures of assessment are essential to interpret student growth accurately. Test scores give teachers a sense of how our students measure up overall, but are just numbers. They tell us nothing about which specific skills and concepts students did or did not master, and what we need to change in our instruction. For example, multiple-choice tests are poor metrics for assessing 21st century communications skills, like learning to write and produce effective podcasts that can lay the groundwork for careers in broadcasting and new media. We need new measures that are adaptable to specific topics and competencies that we teach. Non-standardized assessments allow us to evaluate students based on work they have constructed themselves, as opposed to their skill in selecting the one right answer from a list of possibilities. We all develop and use performance-based assessments in our classrooms every day, and we advocate that student evaluation systems incorporate these as components of formative and summative assessments.

Shifting to new assessment frameworks is not impossible. Kentucky's Alternate Assessment Program and Vermont's Portfolio Project implemented precisely these types of multiple, performance-based measures at scale statewide starting in the late 1980s – also a time when public budgets were slim. A RAND evaluation of Vermont's portfolio assessment found that teachers' ratings of student work were surprisingly unbiased, suggesting that costs and time could be held to a minimum by having teachers themselves score the assessments.^{xiv} Doing so might also offer an extra role for master teachers seeking to develop or exercise additional expertise in student assessment. Providing additional training for scorers, and having multiple teachers review each assessment, would improve the reliability of scoring to at least that of current standardized tests. To this end, the federally funded Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium will be drawing on teacher leaders to help create performance-based tasks administered throughout the year, while also using “computer adaptive” technology to customize test questions relative to a student's responses.^{xv} We must get teachers ready for these reforms – an investment that was not made in years past when accountability reforms failed to take root.

Our colleague **Susan 'Ernie' Rambo** has considered assessment issues both from the perspective of her middle grades electives classroom *and* from her current research as a Ph.D. candidate. Hear Ernie talk about the importance of getting student assessments right, across all grades and subjects.

Likewise, teacher evaluation systems should put teaching effectiveness at the center, by aligning formative and summative evaluations with professional development and advancement opportunities.

We all want to be held accountable for our work as educators, including student outcomes. But we want to ensure that we are held accountable for the right things and in the right ways. Teachers who are ineffective in the classroom – after being evaluated on multiple metrics by experienced, trained professionals and being offered access to meaningful systems of support to improve – certainly should seek out another line of work without delay. However, many

teachers receive rare, incomplete, or inaccurate feedback, or lack systems that help them translate that feedback into better classroom practice. Just as students need more information than a letter grade in order to grow as learners, teachers need more information to grow as professionals.

Student test scores cannot be used as the sole measure of teaching effectiveness, because too many factors that impact student achievement are unaccounted for in these instruments. Whether students' buses arrived at school too late for breakfast on test day, whether teachers have been able to draw on accomplished peers to improve their teaching, or whether students' learning growth (or lack of it) was due to instruction from one teacher or several during the previous year – all these factors matter.

As a result, even very sophisticated value-added models have been shown to be highly unstable measures of teacher effectiveness,^{xvi} suggesting that they are not reliable as stand-alone metrics. Research suggests that observations by principals – widely used and often criticized – are at least as accurate (and more stable) predictors of teaching effectiveness as value-added measures are.^{xvii} We don't mean to suggest that schools and districts should continue the traditional "checklist" approach to observing teachers and providing feedback. Like multiple-choice tests for students, these types of metrics lack specific information about what teachers do well and where they need to improve their instruction.

"We Are All Accountable to Each Other"

A number of major urban districts (including Los Angeles Unified; Montgomery County, MD; Minneapolis; and Cincinnati) have implemented peer assistance and review (PAR) teams, in which master teachers observe and give feedback to colleagues. These programs offer often-missing formative evaluations, link evaluations to professional development, offer structured leadership opportunities in which the most effective teachers can spread instructional expertise among their peers, and lead to more effective teaching and learning. But there is growing evidence that these programs also build a deeper sense of accountability for effectiveness among a school's staff. Here's how two teachers at case study sites that use PAR described it:

[At my other school,] obviously every day I was accountable to myself as a teacher, accountable to my students and their parents. But I also felt I was only accountable to my administrator one day out of the year, [on the single day that I was observed in the classroom]. But here I know I'm accountable to my PAR team because they're coming in and they're watching me [teach] and saying, "Is she actually listening to what we're saying [about improving classroom practice?]" I want to make sure that I'm valuing their time and valuing what they're giving to me to help me grow as a teacher.

I feel I know what is expected of me because we are all accountable to each other. I feel that the leadership that I get is with my peer group and our evaluation groups where we go to each other's rooms and evaluate what each other are doing. Before we do that we set goals and tell each other this is what I think I need to develop -- what I want you to watch for. So it's very structured and very helpful.

We do see some growing consensus around the importance of multiple measures of teacher evaluation. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, is investing in a [Measures of Effective Teaching Project](#), which will investigate how to combine the best of many measures. A move towards wider adoption of evaluation systems with multiple measures would ensure

greater reliability and accuracy in assessing teacher performance. Moreover, like National Board certification processes, these evaluation metrics are likely to incorporate substantial time for teachers to reflect on their practice, both individually and collaboratively with peers. In this way, evaluation not only leads to and “tests” professional development, but also becomes another opportunity to learn about and improve on classroom practice.

Finally, the detailed feedback that new tools could provide would allow for individually tailored professional development, focused leadership opportunities for teachers, and performance-based compensation systems that accurately rewarded the most effective teachers and enjoyed widespread buy-in among educators. In fact, basing those decisions on a better evaluation system is probably the only way in which teachers will feel secure enough to support such linked policies at all.

Implementing these assessment and evaluation systems is possible, if officials make strategic choices about how to use existing resources.

Once the technical and political issues are resolved, policymakers must contend with pragmatic barriers to new assessment and evaluation programs. Designing them well, with appropriate validation and piloting before taking them to scale, can be an expensive proposition. However, budget constraints did not prevent the implementation of No Child Left Behind accountability provisions — which cost states and districts \$312-388 million annually, not counting the time teachers and other staff spent to administer or prepare for tests.^{xviii} We believe that investments in redesigned evaluation systems that can improve student outcomes and teacher effectiveness simultaneously and dramatically are worth making.

As a high school biochemistry teacher, educational consultant, and former administrator, **Gamal Sherif** is intimately familiar with what resources schools have — and how they can use them better. Listen to his proposals for developing integrated student assessment and teacher evaluation systems by spending smarter.

Districts and schools can choose to minimize costs of needed reforms by repurposing existing staff, time, and other resources. For instance, more frequent and intensive evaluations require additional time for evaluators, but it may not be necessary to hire new administrators to share the load with already-overburdened principals. Instead, master teachers could be trained as expert evaluators who are able to recognize quality teacher performance through walkthroughs, formal observations, and student work, taking into account all aspects of teachers' performance.

Peers of the most accomplished teachers in schools already call upon them for informal mentoring and collaboration. Capitalizing upon, and formally cultivating, in-house expertise makes sense as a smart human capital management strategy for districts — one that some districts are beginning to make. These master teacher roles could provide a more diversified career ladder to help retain the most effective veteran teachers.

Reallocating Resources for Reform

These ideas are not impossible to implement. The Generation Schools Network, a Brooklyn-based nonprofit, has been helping urban schools reallocate the ways in which they use existing resources, especially staff and time. Since 2004, they have worked with schools to give students more time to learn and teachers more resources to teach more effectively. Without spending anymore money they have expanded learning time by up to 30% for all students without increasing the teacher work year; reduced class size in core content courses to an average of 14 to 1; reduced the total teacher load by two-thirds; increased professional development and provides common planning time daily for all teachers; enhanced the capacity of teachers to collect, analyze and respond continuously to data; and leveraged current and emerging instructional technologies in the classroom.

Spreading Expertise in Schools Through Collaboration and Community-Building

Even the best evaluation programs won't result in real improvements to teaching effectiveness without meaningful professional development systems that help teachers translate feedback into changes in classroom practice. Our team has experienced professional development of all types, through all the training trends of the past several decades. Many of us have been exposed to (and sought out) learning opportunities invaluable for our work in the classroom. Most of us have also experienced poorly planned, disconnected sessions with little practical application to our students and schools. We believe that, just like students, adults need learning opportunities and coaching to improve. We also know from experience that a culture of continued growth directly benefits our students and the evolution of our profession. To create such a culture, professional development should be relevant to the needs of students in the school or district, job-embedded, differentiated, onsite, compensated, ongoing, teacher-driven, and collaborative.

Building an effective professional community requires dedicated, uninterrupted time for collaborative professional development.

Historically, teachers have been isolated from their peers as solitary professionals working with a discrete group of students, best described as the “egg crate” nature of the profession.^{xix} In this model, even if teachers have information or expertise that could help a colleague, they are unable to share what they know and increase the faculty's overall effectiveness. Recent research confirms what we've learned from experience: access to this type of peer learning can actually help teachers increase their students' learning gains. In fact, one study found that teachers' value-added scores stayed higher for years after being in such collaborative professional learning environments.^{xx} Another study revealed that participation in regular collaboration reduced new teacher turnover by 43 percent.^{xxi}

Schools that facilitate rich and meaningful collaboration share one common characteristic: they have healthy professional learning communities (PLCs) — teams of teachers organized by subject area, grade level, or professional development interests who work together to better their practice. PLC members may offer each other ongoing support through peer observation and

practice. PLC members may offer each other ongoing support through peer observation and reflection on practice, co-teaching, analyzing student data for joint interventions, lesson studies, conducting action research, or discussing recent research or books together.

“Setting Aside Time Communicated the Importance of Working Together”

One case study school exemplified well-structured collaboration. Teachers at “Amherst Elementary” get a 45-minute individual planning period daily, in addition to two 90-minute collaborative planning blocks each week for each of the grade-level “families.” These meetings include all teachers and assistants at the grade level as well as their facilitator, the exceptional children (EC) specialist, and the English as a second language (ESL) specialist. Vertical teams also met monthly to align curricula across grade levels and assure seamless “hand-off” of students from one grade level team to another. Meetings followed a formal agenda that the teams developed together in advance, to keep discussions on track around goals or issues with target students. Having such structure, the teachers said, was critically important to the success of their collaborative work:

Setting aside that time communicated the importance of working together, showed that [the principal and staff] valued that. It wasn't like at other schools, where you just had to grab someone in the halls, maybe, or take time after school when you were too tired to think. Or not talk [to each other] at all.

However, simply putting a team in place is no guarantee of effective teamwork, and research suggests that collaboration doesn't “just happen.” School and district administrators must work with teachers to structure PLCs for success. Their role is so important to PLCs' success that we recommend administrators be trained and supported by their supervisors to facilitate collaboration and team-building within their schools. In fact, the degree to which school administrators facilitate collaboration and peer learning could become one element of their evaluations.

Those of us who have forged successful and sustainable PLCs with our colleagues find that there are four critical components of effective and efficient communities:

1. A clear structure and norms for collaboration;
2. Dedicated non-instructional times in which teams can meet;
3. Experienced PLC leadership; and
4. Strong administrative support.

Achieving high-functioning PLCs requires training teachers to lead collaborations among colleagues in ways that make a difference for student learning. It will mean making weekly team meetings a priority when setting school schedules. Some schools have successfully used substitute coverage, early release days, or shared duty-free lunch periods as ways to make more collaboration time available to PLCs. Again, the focus must always be on specific outcomes for students.

In settings where PLC participation is impractical for all teachers, such as in rural high schools with only one or two teachers in a given subject area, districts might implement virtual PLCs. With the support of the Center for Teaching Quality, some school districts in North Carolina have used such virtual communities to good effect in helping teachers achieve National Board certification. These types of collaborative communities can be low-cost investments – especially when measured against their research-proven results in producing sustainable student learning growth.

Building an effective professional learning community requires that teachers be full partners in and leaders of that community.

The “egg crate” model for the teaching profession means not only that teachers are – uniquely among other professionals – limited in their ability to collaborate with colleagues, but we are also limited in our ability to exercise influence and leadership outside our classrooms. Instead, school or district administrators often make decisions about issues beyond the classroom door, like professional development, for us. But administrators are not in classrooms every day and

not as well attuned to students’ needs as we are.

Individually and collectively, teachers have a good understanding of what we need to learn to help our students more. It makes good sense for teachers to have a role in selecting professional development that is most relevant for our classrooms.

Lori Fulton is a veteran teacher and mentor of 16 years in Las Vegas. She is also a noted science curriculum expert. Lori has presented on science instruction at major conferences and professional development workshops, and was involved in revising Nevada’s state science standards and tests. Hear Lori talk about the importance of teachers’ roles in selecting, and leading, professional development experiences that will make them more effective instructors.

Planning for professional growth needs to be a partnership. Principals and teachers might meet together at the start of each school year to set professional development goals at the school and individual levels. A teacher committee might then be tasked to identify workshops or other experiences that would meet those goals. Teachers who organize, design

or lead professional development for colleagues should be rewarded for spreading their expertise and making others more effective, in the same way that facilitators and instructional coaches currently are. They might receive additional compensation, or to keep costs lower, they could receive continuing education units (CEUs) that build towards re-licensure, or graduate course credit tied to results in the classroom. Such a process would expand teacher leadership and voice on these issues, remove tasks from an overburdened principal’s to-do list, and improve staff buy-in around professional development experiences.

We see an urgent need for these reforms. Increasingly, teachers’ ability to exercise professional decision-making *within* their classrooms is being eroded. “Teacher-proof” scripted curricula or extremely rigid lesson plan templates result from a lack of trust in teachers as experts, stripping us of our ability to develop effective, individualized strategies for teaching the students we know best. These short-sighted strategies take away our incentive to pursue the development of our professional skills. By contrast, sharing our expertise and passion for learning with our students and among our peers will create school cultures that acknowledge teachers’ integrity and competence, and set high expectations for student learning.

“This Copying Doesn’t Make Me a Better Teacher”

One case study district has responded to extreme growth – and corresponding challenges with hiring and supporting effective teachers – by requiring teachers to use scripted curricula. Teachers must then copy pre-set lessons into district-provided lesson planning forms. One teacher that CTQ researchers interviewed explained how this actually undermined inspired, effective teaching:

We copy from books with pre-planned material into boxes [on a form for our lesson planning requirements in our district]. My argument is that this copying doesn't make me a better teacher. That just makes busy work for me, taking me away from getting new materials, thinking of different ways I could teach the lesson other than what's in the book, and how I'm going to present it to my students. It's so ridiculous that I'm copying out of the book. That's not teaching or planning, and it's definitely not effective.

Building an effective professional community requires intentional team-building and trust — grounding the formal work of teachers and administrators in close, collegial relationships.

Trust is an obvious but essential component of effective, sustainable professional communities. Surveys show that the extent to which there is a sense of trust between teachers and administrators makes an impact on teachers’ willingness to stay in their schools. This idea makes a lot of intuitive sense as well. Like professionals in a variety of different fields, teachers are more likely to absorb and implement constructive criticism from a trusted colleague or mentor than we are to take direction from a brusque and disconnected authority figure.

Moreover, teachers need to know that their own attempts to share and spread expertise are not only welcomed, but actively encouraged, by principals and other administrators. Principals can set the tone by setting up both formal team meeting times and informal gatherings among the staff. Recent research on human capital development in schools has employed tools like social mapping, which help illuminate how personal and professional relationships overlap and can induce teaching effectiveness.^{xxii} Schools could consider devoting a staff development day to

Glenda Blaisdell-Buck is a teacher working at the intersection of instruction and policy. She is a classroom teacher and librarian of nearly 20 years, as well as an active member of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg and North Carolina Associations of Educators. Click the link above to hear Glenda talk about the importance of trust in sustaining effective schools – and tips on how teachers and administrators can work together to create it.

mapping their own “hubs” of expertise and trust within their buildings, to help them assess as a group how well they are utilizing the resources they have among their teams. States and districts can also use a combination of individual, team and school measures in their evaluation and compensation systems in order to send a clear message to teachers about the importance of reaching out to peers. Strategies used in virtual communities such as the Teacher Leaders Network, of which our TeacherSolutions team is a part, can also spread pedagogical ideas across schools, districts, and states.

Sharing Leadership and Accountability in Schools

We share a strong conviction that teacher leadership opportunities offer incredible avenues for professional growth and stronger schools. Those of us who have taken on teacher leadership roles feel a greater sense of investment in our profession and in the schools and districts we serve. Whether leadership means mentoring a colleague, serving on a school-wide curriculum planning committee, leading a district level professional development session, or advising district and union officials on matters of teaching policy from a classroom perspective, accomplished teachers deserve opportunities to be central decision-makers in our own field.

Our students and schools also deserve the beneficial input of every available expert, including – and especially – their teachers. Optimal teaching and learning conditions for students result in large part from greater teacher leadership at the school and district level. There is a growing consensus among researchers that teachers' empowerment as leaders is linked strongly with teachers' tendency to engage in behaviors that accelerate student learning growth: soliciting parent involvement, communicating positive expectations to students, and being willing and able to innovate successfully in the classroom.^{xxiii} Moreover, teachers who are able to have influence over school policy and autonomy in their classrooms are more likely to continue teaching and to feel invested in their work.^{xxiv} This combination of greater effectiveness and better retention means that teacher empowerment is a significant factor in improving any school's teaching and learning conditions, and that school's effectiveness.

“We Make All the Decisions, Based on What's Best for the Kids”

In teacher-led schools, teams of highly accomplished teachers work in teams to make all decisions about curriculum and instruction, scheduling, budgets, and enrichment programs. Similar committees of teacher leaders could also operate in traditionally led schools to help ease burdens on administrators, and to develop teachers' leadership skills and understanding of education issues beyond their own classrooms. Most important, increasing teacher voice helps put their knowledge of student needs front and center, so that serving students rather than district processes drives school decision-making:

So for me, one big thing was if we go the opposite way -- empower teachers -- they're going to make the decisions. They're going to decide how we spend our money. How we structure the schedule. How do we structure the day? What programs and activities do we bring in or not? And we could make all the decisions based on what's best for the kids. Not what the district wants, not what adults want, not what anybody else is saying. That's the environment that will attract highly accomplished teachers.

The concept of *shared leadership* in schools is one that is garnering well-deserved attention. Schools that include substantial teacher input across many levels of school decision-making – or that are actually run by lead teachers rather than principals – are being launched in Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, and many other urban districts nationwide. These schools are typified by school cultures of mutual respect and accountability, a focus on achieving learning growth for students and staff, and sustainable and effective school turnaround. Teacher-led schools may not be appropriate for every school or district, but their models suggest some best practices that translate well to nearly any school environment. As Barnett Berry and our teaching colleagues

on the TeacherSolutions 2030 team write in the forthcoming book *Teaching 2030*, it is time to begin “blurring the lines of distinction between those who lead schools and those who teach in them.”

Teacher leadership should be prioritized as a key strategy for sustainable student learning growth and school improvement.

Since teachers are the educators closest to the process of student learning, we are best positioned to suggest and implement strategies that will accelerate and sustain learning growth for students in our schools. We recommend that districts take better advantage of teachers’ untapped expertise by offering a wide range of leadership opportunities and responsibilities outside their classroom roles. These roles might include many we’ve already suggested here, such as developing assessments or professional development modules, serving as mentor and master teachers to early-career or candidate teachers, or working as peer evaluators. Teachers would continue to teach during part of the day and serve in their leadership roles in the remaining time, and would receive additional compensation for these hybrid positions. Teachers wishing to maintain a more traditional career path could do so and remain on existing salary schedules. A similar model has been in use in [Singapore](#) for decades, and contributes greatly to the development of one of the most effective teacher workforces in the world.^{xxv}

Ideally, teachers would help to develop and determine their own leadership work, based on how their expertise and skills intersected with school and district needs. Hybrid positions would be explicitly aligned with school improvement and turnaround plans or other priorities. For instance, a school with a great need for afterschool tutoring might place a teacher on part-time release to manage that program, as one CTQ case study school chose to do. In this way, the school could leverage the teacher’s deep knowledge of individual student needs and strengths to make an intervention even more effective, in ways that outside vendors could never manage.

Of course, some additional role-specific professional development may be necessary to equip developing teacher leaders with additional skill sets. However, this is a worthwhile investment in the most important element in successful schools: teachers. To make the most of these investments, districts might consider implementing these types of shared or distributed leadership structures district-wide, so that teachers who have mastered these skills can train teacher leaders in other schools as well as in their own.

Ariel Sacks, a fellow member of Teacher Leaders Network and contributor to *Teaching 2030*, has used the term *teacherpreneur* to describe teacher leaders of proven accomplishment who have a deep knowledge of how to teach, a clear understanding of what strategies must be in play to make schools highly successful, and the skills and commitment to spread their expertise to others – all the while keeping at least one foot firmly in the classroom. Ariel writes, “The beauty of a hybrid, teacherpreneurial role is that I would always maintain a classroom teaching practice. Teaching is the soul of my work in education. If I lose that, I think I’d feel disconnected from my purpose and passion—and my colleagues.”^{xxvi}

Whenever possible, decision-making should be structured in ways that distribute authority among staff and that are site-based.

We have mixed feelings about the recent move towards common core standards. National standards may help to ensure that more students, especially in high-needs schools, have the same access to high-quality academics as their suburban counterparts. Nonetheless, we know from our own experience in diverse schools that local context matters, and that the use of common standards may not always take those contexts into account. For this reason, we believe that any national standards – for funding, curricula, or assessments – must be flexible enough to accommodate some variation based on local students’ and families’ needs, teachers’ and schools’ capacity, and community resources. The reality is that every student is not going to reach every standard at the same time and in the same way.

Brian K. Freeland, Jr. is the 2009 Teacher of the Year in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, where he teaches in a high-needs high school and is a mentor to urban young men. Through those experiences, he has come to understand the importance of individual and community context in making designing interventions for students and schools. Listen as Brian addresses the importance of flexible systems that allow for site-based, teacher-led decision-making.

With these issues in mind, we suggest that decision-making be site-based to the fullest extent possible. National, state, and district standards should act as general guidelines and goals that schools must fulfill, but how schools meet those goals and implement requirements should be flexible. In particular, we believe it is important for all school staff, including teachers and principals, to have a role in determining how school budgets will be spent, how school wide programs and policies (e.g., discipline or parent policies) will be organized, which new staff will be hired, and how those new members will be inducted into the school’s educational community.

As one way of managing this work efficiently, teachers might be organized into various committees that work with principals around these or other issues. Also, principals and districts might consider implementing annual teacher surveys, to evaluate how leadership systems in the school are working, and to collect suggestions for new programs or improvements on existing ones. Of course, moving towards this level of teacher and school-based leadership requires us to invest more in the teaching profession, including preparing teachers more extensively and supporting them better through job-embedded professional development. This is another reason we believe that preparation and professional development recommendations we’ve made here are so critical to a more effective teaching profession and more effective public schools.

Accountability for achieving student learning growth should be shared.

We are deeply concerned with issues of accountability in public education. Our discussions focused a great deal on teacher and student evaluation precisely because we believe it is important to hold students and teachers to appropriate but very rigorous standards for teaching and learning. We believe that doing so can help our profession gain more respect for the important work we do and result in more effective teachers serving as recognized leaders.

However, teachers are currently not the leaders in most schools, and in most cases are not part of decision-making processes at the district, state, and national levels. We are happy to be held accountable for our efforts. However, if we lack any influence over the decisions – or the resources of time, materials, funding, professional development, and collaboration we need to translate effort into results – we cannot be held *solely* accountable for outcomes.

The national conversation about educational accountability must and will continue – but it should broaden to include accountability for administrators and education officials at every level. Just as teachers are evaluated in part based on how well they support their students, each successive layer of the education system should be responsible for the extent to which they support the staff on the levels below. In sum, we believe strongly in the concept of reciprocal accountability. This idea was put forward strongly by education reform scholar Richard Elmore, who asked policymakers to recognize that when they hold teachers “accountable for some action or outcome,” they have “an equal and complementary responsibility to assure that (teachers) have the capacity to do what they are asked to do.”^{xxvii}

Districts should develop principal evaluation systems that link to and align with teacher evaluation systems, to ensure that principals are facilitating teachers’ professional growth and fully supporting their work with students and families. Likewise, superintendents should be responsible for the quality of leadership they provide to principals and other district staff, and their compensation and continued employment should in part depend on their success in offering these supports. Finally, parents and the public must begin to hold elected officials to higher standards for helping schools and districts obtain the programs and funding they need to assist students in preparing for the 21st century workplace and world.

Building Bridges Between Schools and Communities

Education systems and structures aren’t the only things that impact school success and student learning. Real and sustainable reform also relies on a host of variables outside schools that influence teaching and learning. In fact, one of the central challenges for research-based reform efforts is that *most* of the factors that affect student learning lie beyond school buildings – in families, communities, and other social networks that should support children’s development as healthy, naturally curious, focused young citizens. We understand and embrace the idea that teachers are the most powerful *in-school* predictor of student achievement. But there are many factors outside of the traditional scope of schools’ work with children that must be addressed.

Other countries that have successfully engineered educational systems that work for all students have done so by focusing on larger societal and community concerns: universal and guaranteed health care for children and families; access to affordable but high-quality childcare for preschoolers and after-school centers for students; and programs that seek to equalize economic opportunity for families, including job training programs and other comprehensive supports for the unemployed and underemployed.

Dedication to these important but not strictly academic concerns is why we believe the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) has been so broadly hailed as a successful model for meeting all needs of the students it serves. The HCZ includes both a Baby College, a series of workshops for parents

of children ages 0 to 3, and a K–12 education program through its specially designed Promise Academy charter schools. HCZ’s transformative goal, says founder Geoffrey Canada, is to make it possible for children from high-needs communities to:

Get what middle-class and upper-middle-class kids get. They get safety. They get structure. They get academic enrichment. They get cultural activity. They get adults who love them and are prepared to do anything. [We are] prepared to do anything to keep these kids on the right track.^{xxviii}

The presence of these kinds of efforts, in combination with extensive national investment in developing the skills and leadership of the teaching force, are typical of education systems that minimize the negative impacts of poverty on student achievement and achieve at top-ranked levels internationally.^{xxix} Still, until these broader measures are in place, schools and education systems can do a great deal to leverage the resources, both human and financial, that are available to their students during school hours.

Policies and programs, both for academics and extracurricular activities, should distribute money and materials equitably so that schools have access to resources that align with their particular needs.

Budget cuts are among the most pressing concerns that most states and districts face now, which leave classrooms under-resourced and students under-served. We particularly share the concerns of many experts about equity in funding, since analyses show that the schools and students who need them most often receive the fewest resources.^{xxx} Students in high-needs schools will likely require more resources than their more affluent counterparts to achieve at similar levels.^{xxxi} In other words, equal funding is still not equitable funding for high-needs schools.

Title I funds do help to offset these needs, but total federal funding averages less than 10 percent of all school funding – not nearly enough to help districts and states close achievement gaps. New sources of federal funds such as Race to the Top or the Teacher Incentive Fund are primarily competitive grants that do not consider funding equity as a component of scoring the proposals, and recipient agencies cannot count on these funds for the long term. While we recognize that federal funding formulas are necessarily very complicated, we call on policymakers to do more to ensure funding is not only equal, but equitable, in order to meet the needs of every school.

Kathie Marshall was invited to join an advisory team that is providing guidance to Los Angeles Unified on a new system for teacher evaluation, and rewarding teacher leadership, in the district. But at her middle school, Kathie has already established her leadership as an innovator. Hear her talk about the importance of a service learning program that she began several years ago, and how it impacted one student’s education – and his direction in life.

Moreover, funding cuts in our states and districts have targeted some of the very programs we find to be most important to nurturing an effective teaching force. North Carolina’s mentoring programs have been largely defunded in the past year. In Clark County, Nevada, the district’s cutbacks for substitute teachers have made it harder for teachers to get coverage for their classes while they attend professional development sessions. And of course,

there has never been any consistent or universal funding of nonacademic programs such as afterschool, preschool, extended day, or mentoring programs that help students prepare for and succeed in school. Likewise, extracurricular activities like science clubs or service learning programs that have been shown to help students lower dropout risks and connect to practical applications for classroom learning have typically gone unfunded.

Schools can act as bridges between students and the wider communities in which they live, to ensure that the needs of children and families are met.

One reason why extracurricular and extended day programs are so important is because they help connect students and their families to more resources than schools alone are equipped to provide. We think that the role of schools, and the use of school buildings, could be re-imagined. During World War II, some schools offered extended day programs, or were sites for provision of community meals or preventive health care. The goal then was to provide better for the increased needs of families, in which one parent might be absent due to military service and another might be working long shifts in war-related industries.

Today, communities have need of similar interventions, albeit for different reasons, and schools can help to close the gap in social service delivery. Schools might offer health clinics for students; parenting, GED, or English language classes for parents; food pantries or family breakfast programs; extended day programs that offer academic tutoring and extracurricular enrichment; or counseling and social work services. Operating such programs and services from the school rather than separate sites would increase the likelihood that parents would take up available and beneficial services, and would be yet another reason for them to come into the school, interact with their children’s teachers, and be part of its community.

We believe strongly in creating thriving community-centered schools similar to the “hub” concept embraced and promoted by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation. As the Foundation notes, like the HCZ, the “fundamental purpose of a hub is to create a fully aligned P–20 education system, from early childhood education through college and workforce development, along with lifelong learning opportunities for everyone in the community.”^{xxxii}

Although this is a great vision, some of us have particular concerns about overwhelming already very busy school staff and pushing schools too far afield from their academic missions.

Implementation design matters as we think about how to avoid those outcomes and keep costs down. Service delivery through schools may not require hiring new staff, but simply relocating existing staff from current county and city programs – social workers, other case workers, community college course instructors, and so on – to school sites. Some teachers with particular interest in these bridge services might take on related hybrid roles, such as working as a liaison to parent groups, coordinating intervention teams, or managing the extended day programs. If space and security are concerns,

Offering social services through schools isn’t just an idea from the past; it’s also a practical, modern solution to meeting needs in urban areas. In Charlotte, many of these same services will be available in satellite offices in at least one redesigned public housing community. **Leona Ingram** teaches, and is preparing to become an administrator, near one such project site. Listen as she describes what this kind of service delivery could mean for students and their families, and how schools could be part of such efforts.

mobile units might be made available to house these staff and programs, just outside main buildings at minimal expense.

One thing is certain: teachers of today and tomorrow need to be prepared — and seriously — to work in these “hub-style” schools. Too few of our education schools, and virtually none of the most visible alternative certification programs are preparing teachers for work in these contexts. They need to begin now to include skills that connect teachers and teaching to families and the broad array of services they need so their children will learn and thrive.

Schools with bridge services allow the broader community to feel more connected to and responsible for student and school outcomes.

Teachers and administrators are not the only adults who typically contribute to what happens inside schools. We need to build stronger bridges with parents and a growing number of support providers in the wider community, including groups like Communities in Schools or Big Brothers and Big Sisters. These partners have their own unique expertise on children that needs to be drawn on in more systemic ways. Their leadership is central to school success. But we need broader social capital investments in our schools as well. We believe that expanding the kind of programs that schools offer will expand the networks of people who are connected with and invested in public schools. Businesses can sponsor programs and mentor students who are interested in careers in their industries; community associations can help to stock food banks and tutor young readers; and houses of worship may be able to raise funds for college bound low-income students.

We also believe that breaking down the boundaries between school communities and wider communities can help grow a sense of reciprocal accountability. Stakeholders and local taxpayers want to see a certain level of results from the schools that they help to fund. But their view of “results” is what they can observe easily from outside the school — primarily, it’s student test scores. As we’ve previously discussed, these are important indicators, but limited ones. If community members begin to develop an inside-out understanding of schools and the systems in place to support them, they will be better positioned to know what their local schools and districts need and how they can help support those changes themselves, with their time, expertise, money, and advocacy.

Better Systems to Support Better Schools

The solutions to challenges faced by high-needs schools we have proposed here are far from exhaustive. Schools, districts, and states all over the country are beginning to innovate successfully to make similar changes. It is becoming increasingly clear to most education stakeholders that current education systems are set up for 19th or 20th century norms of learning and of community needs, and they make a poor fit with our 21st century realities. By design, our solutions are also not prescriptive. Following our own recommendations for local flexibility, we have crafted ideas as guidelines for creating policies and practices. We expect that local communities and states will translate our goals in ways that adapt to their specific needs.

We believe that all these solutions are not only feasible, but necessary to ensure that our students are ready for college, careers, and citizenship. It is time to create the conditions that allow teachers to teach effectively and for teaching to become the profession that students deserve.

TeacherSolutions Teacher Working Conditions Team Participant Biographies



Glenda Blaisdell-Buck is an ESL teacher in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. She is a National Board Certified Teacher and highly involved as a teacher leader at the district level: writing grants; leading professional development in English as a Second Language; assisting administrators with school improvement; and more. Glenda is a frequent contributor to NCAE publications and panels and currently serving as vice-chair of the NCAE NBCT Caucus.



Leona Bost has been teaching for 13 years and currently serves as a fourth grade teacher in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. She is a National Board Certified Teacher and now supports her peers through the certification process as a facilitator/reader. Leona is currently participating in CMS' New Leaders for Tomorrow Program—a cohort that will help shape strategic planning for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.



Mitzi Durham is a National Board Certified Teacher at a high school in the Clark County School District. She is her school's English department chair, a member of the learning improvement team and the mentorship coordinator at her school. Mitzi is also currently on a task force for course alignment as well as interim testing revision with the district.



Larry Ferlazzo Larry Ferlazzo has taught English Language Learners and mainstream students at Sacramento's largest inner-city high school for six years. Prior to teaching, he was a community organizer for nineteen years, and has worked to adapt many of those organizing strategies for the classroom. He is a recipient of several awards, including The Ford Foundation Leadership For A Changing World Award and The International Reading Association Presidential Award for Reading and Technology. He is the author of "English Language Learners: Teaching Strategies That Work" and the co-author of "Building Parent Engagement in Schools." Larry writes a popular blog for teachers and a website for students. He also writes a blog for educators and parents particularly interested in parent involvement/engagement issues.



Brian K. Freeland, Sr. is an AP US History teacher in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. He has been teaching for 15 years and has earned recognition as the CMS Teacher of the Year. Brian also serves in the capacity of a new teacher mentor. Outside the classroom, he works with the Emerging Leaders Mentorship program, designed to holistically improve at risk communities by increasing collegiate readiness and leadership skills of black males through intense academic high school preparation.



Lori Fulton has been teaching for 16 years and serves as a science mentor at an elementary school in the Clark County School District. Lori has authored a book, *Science Notebooks: Writing About Inquiry*, and acted in leadership roles on three National Science Foundation grants, the Using Data Project, Assessing Science Knowledge (ASK), and Mathematics And Science Enhancement (MASE). Lori has also worked with the LASER Center's Science Education Literacy Initiative and was an Academy Fellow in WestEd's National Academy for Science Education Leadership. She is currently involved in the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) Leadership Academy.



Kristoffer Kohl is a Title I Data Strategist at an elementary school in the Clark County School District. Kristoffer entered teaching through Teach for America, received his Masters of Education in Elementary Curriculum and Instruction from UNLV, and led each group of his students to more than one year's growth in literacy and math—earning recognition as New Teacher of the Year at his school. Kristoffer brings experience writing school improvement plans, leading staff development, and contributing to the Wiki-Teacher Project to the team.



Mona Madan is a 12th year middle school Spanish teacher in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. She is foreign language department chair of the curriculum council and has adapted existing curricula to articulate an IB program in foreign languages for the district. Mona studied Spanish in Mexico, Spain and Costa Rica. She is also a Professional Development Master Teacher in CMS and has led school-based staff development on topics from technology to authentic assessment.



Kathie Marshall returned to her Los Angeles classroom in the fall of 2008 to teach middle grades language arts, after spending six years as a literacy coach for the district. She writes frequently about instructional practice and the teaching life through the Teacher Leaders Network's partnership with *Teacher Magazine* and is active in the Accomplished California Teachers organization.



Delores Maxen teaches high school math in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Over the course of her career in Indiana, South Carolina, and North Carolina, she has taught all ages from K-college in Computer Literacy, Mathematics, or Teacher Education. She is a National Board Certified Teacher with 32 years experience and is highly involved with the local education association, currently serving as treasurer of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Association of Educators. Delores has participated as a panelist at Columbia University's Hechinger Institute and taught in the India Summer Teacher Program in Delhi.



Susan Rambo, a National Board Certified Teacher, has been teaching for 23 years and is currently an elective teacher at a junior high school in the Clark County School District. She is the elective department head at her school; a presenter in her district's New Teacher Training Cadre; and a fellow of the Southern Nevada Writing Project. Susan has supported her school in roles ranging from sponsoring the school's chapter of the Mighty Milers running team to serving on the school improvement team and is currently working toward her PhD in education.



Taylor Ross spent the past four years teaching first grade at a rural, high needs elementary school in Jefferson County, Alabama. She is now the Exceptional Education teacher at another Title 1 school in the same district. Taylor successfully completed the TakeOne! NBCT program and is currently a candidate towards full certification. She is actively involved in the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching and is a strong member of the Teacher Leaders Network.



Gamal Sherif has been teaching for 18 years in the Philadelphia area. He has Masters degrees from Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania and has history, biology, chemistry and administrative certification. Gamal has facilitated professional development in public and independent school settings across the U.S. Workshops have focused on curriculum design, teacher induction and project-based learning. In 2008, Gamal received his school's "Outstanding Colleague Award."

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