



TEACHER RESEARCHER POLICY PAPER SERIES



Teacher Morale, Motivation and Professional Identity:

Insight for Educational Policymakers
from State Teachers of the Year

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Dr. David Bosso is the 2012 Connecticut Teacher of the Year and 2012 National Secondary Social Studies Teacher of the Year. Over the course of his teaching career, Bosso has traveled to Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe as part of educational delegations for global understanding. Bosso currently serves as the President of the Connecticut Teacher of the Year Council and the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies, and he was a 2014 fellow at the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes in Fort Scott, Kansas. Bosso has written a number of articles and blogs on educational policy, cross-cultural comparisons, teacher leadership, and social studies education. He holds a Masters of Education degree from the University of Hartford in Educational Technology and a Masters of Arts in History from Central Connecticut State University. Bosso earned his Doctor of Education degree from American International College.

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The National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) Teacher-Researcher Policy Paper Series



With the publication of this paper, the National Network of State Teachers of the Year is embarking on a new series of policy papers authored by our members who hold advanced degrees. In this series, these teacher-researchers, most of whom hold full-time teaching positions in addition to conducting research, explore issues and trends in education that directly impact educators, through the lens of the teacher-researcher.

Many of these papers, including this one, will directly report findings garnered from focus groups, interviews, and surveys with and of State Teachers of the Year and Finalists themselves. Through this series, the voices of these outstanding educators will be heard.

It is with great pride that NNSTOY publishes this first paper, an exploration of the attitudes, motivation, and professional identity of outstanding educators. Dr. David Bosso collected these findings in the course of completing his doctoral dissertation for his Ed.D. at American International College in Springfield, MA.

We trust that you will be enriched by reading his findings and, through them, hearing the voices of some of our nation's best teachers.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Katherine Bassett'.

Katherine Bassett

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Teacher Morale, Motivation and Professional Identity:

Insight for Educational Policymakers from State Teachers of the Year

"We're all ready to jump forward. But I think we need to make sure that as we're jumping forward, we're actually jumping in the right direction, not just going somewhere because we need to go somewhere. I think the biggest thing, the number one thing with policymakers and making these changes, is to get teachers involved as much as possible. They should be the heavy, not the light weight, on every decision that's being made in education."

"Amy," a 2012 State Teacher of the Year

Executive Summary

In response to changing educational and societal dynamics, the teaching profession is evolving. Although their perspectives, concerns and beliefs have been largely absent from the national educational debate, teachers are eager to position themselves at the forefront of this discourse and to be intimately involved in shaping the course of a broader educational transformation. From an educational policy and broader cultural standpoint, a better appreciation for the causes and effects of teacher motivation, morale, professional identity and related dynamics is essential for a more positive educational climate, strengthened teacher efficacy and an enhanced educational experience for all students. It is therefore imperative to examine the impact of such efforts, the current educational environment, school contextual factors, and personal views and values on teachers' lived experiences.

Informed by a qualitative study involving 24 individuals, each of whom has been recognized as a State Teacher of the Year, this report presents an exploration of the phenomena of teacher morale, motivation and perceptions of job satisfaction as related to professional identity and professional growth in the context of educational change. The findings presented in this report, as well as other sources reflective of the perspectives of State Teachers of the Year (see Bassett, Behrstock-Sheratt, Jacques, & Olson, 2014; Bassett et al., 2013), suggest that meaningful professional experiences, supportive and collaborative educational environments, opportunities for teacher leadership, and more direct involvement in the decisions that affect their work lives are significant sources of teachers' motivation, morale and professional identity development throughout one's teaching career.

Policymaking informed by this report will be more attuned to the realities that exist in educational environments, more aware of potential unintended consequences of policy decisions, and more responsive to teachers' concerns and perspectives. The ideal outcome of this report, then, is to encourage the expansion of appropriate, collaborative and productive opportunities for dialogue and action between educators and policymakers. By establishing an educational context characterized by mutual trust, respect and understanding, educators and policymakers together can develop the necessary structures, practices and culture for policy shifts to occur in a meaningful and positive manner that optimizes the teaching and learning experience for teachers and students.

Introduction

The Emotional and Vocational Context of Teaching

The variables that attract individuals to the teaching profession, keep teachers motivated and contribute to the formation and evolution of their professional selves are numerous and complex. Teaching is an “emotionally intense form of work” (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008, p.4), and teachers’ emotions are central to their professional experiences, identities and values. For most teachers, because “teaching is not a job but a vocation” (Lens & de Jesus, 1999, p. 197), it is difficult for teachers to separate their professional and personal identities, and the vocational nature of teaching – or a sense of calling or mission – is a potent force in their lives. The professional orientation of teachers, or their self-perception, is often related to non-cognitive attributes – i.e. the social, emotional, interpersonal traits that impact human thought, values, beliefs, behavior, and interaction. Teachers’ beliefs, commitment and sense of moral purpose likely were important factors in their decision to enter the profession, and such forces remain essential to their professional identities, so much so that a teacher’s self-image and sense of moral mission are strongly linked with their professional self-efficacy and identity.



Because emotional labor “exposes teachers, making them vulnerable” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 561), when circumstances impede the emotional nature of education, teachers’ feelings, values, sense of efficacy, and professional identity are likewise affected. Although many have argued over the years “that the affective and emotional dimensions of teaching are central” to teachers’ work and professional identities, and teachers themselves recognize the impact of these forces, “in practice, teachers have often been besieged by external directives or controls which mitigate against these aspects of education” (Osborn, 2008, p. 67). For a variety of reasons, but most certainly due to the increased demands of the evolving educational landscape, teachers often experience a discrepancy between the moral and affective purposes of their work and the external forces that affect it. In other words, as Hargreaves (2001) points out, the service ethic of teaching “is trapped within a rationalized and bureaucratized structure,” (p. 1069), and many teachers feel that such conditions are mounting.

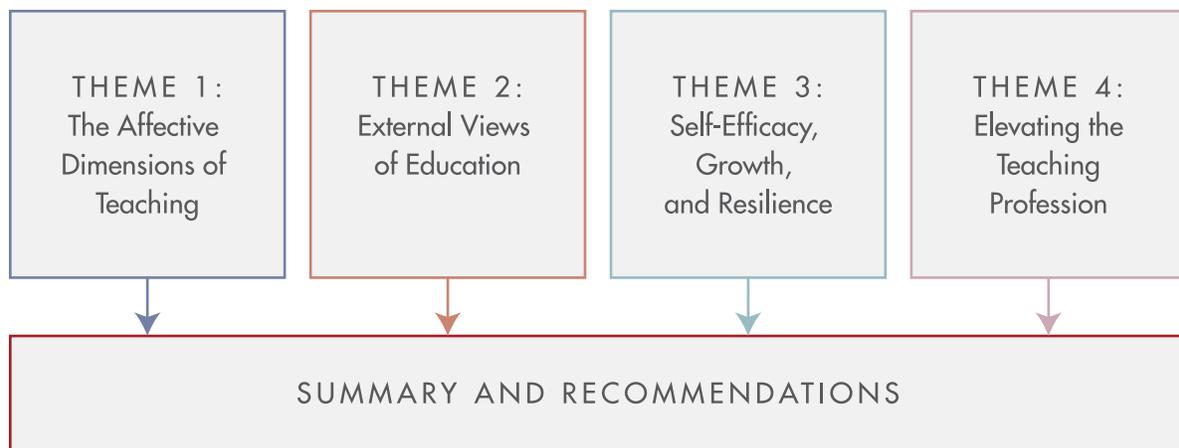
Considering the Impact of Educational Change on Teacher Motivation and Morale

Unfortunately, as Ryan and LaGuardia (1999) argue, educational policies often are not fully “informed by what we know about students’ motivation to learn or teachers’ motivation to teach” (p. 46). Similarly, Fullan (2011) advises that as educational transformation takes place, there is a crucial need to align “the goals of reform and the intrinsic motivation of participants” (p. 3). As the effects of education policies act upon teachers’ professional identities, motivation and morale, it makes good sense to consider the complex forces at play on how teachers perceive themselves, their students and their work. Positioning teachers’ views, values, norms, attitudes, and sources of morale and motivation in the broader inter-relational context of schools, communities and wider elements of educational discourse is advantageous when considering how to best go about school change. Educational cultures that are appreciative of the multitude of factors that affect teacher motivation, morale and professional identity can ensure that such a transformation, with an em-

phasis on meaningful professional growth and nurturing teacher leadership, happens in a positive, supportive and constructive way. Such cultures can emerge and be sustained by honoring, respecting, trusting, including, and supporting teachers throughout the policymaking process.

The insights offered by the State Teachers of the Year into the pressing issues of today's educational climate and how their motivation, morale and professional identity are impacted are unique and compelling. Such accomplished teachers have experienced elevated levels of morale and motivation for having their apparently high degree of efficacy acknowledged and honored by others, even as they continue to navigate the many challenges present in their work lives. Considering the expertise for which they have been recognized and celebrated, as well as their experiences as teacher leaders and in the policy realm, the perspectives of State Teachers of the Year are extremely valuable, and indeed, vital for policymaking endeavors.

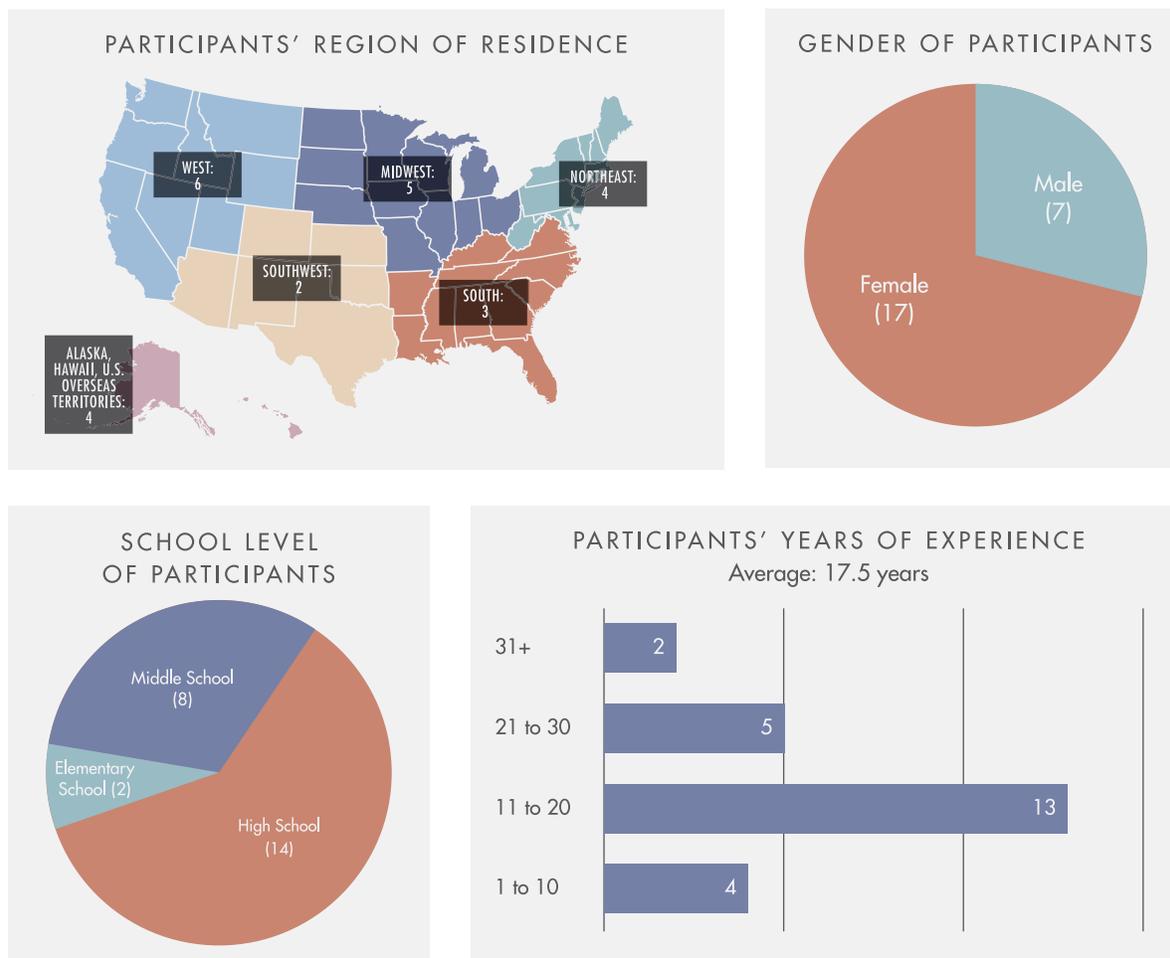
Derived from the interviews with the 24 State Teachers of the Year, four major themes – related to the affective dimensions of teaching, external perceptions, self-efficacy, and professional validation in relation to the role and effects of educational policy – comprise the basis of this report.* Each theme and related subthemes that emerged from the teachers' responses are explored using the teachers' observations and insights, and reflect their attitudes, experiences, beliefs, and accumulated wisdom. Considerations for policymakers, based on the perspectives of the 24 State Teachers of the Year and designed to offer a revised approach to educational policymaking that bolsters the teaching profession in a meaningful and sustainable way, are offered as well. These are powerful findings and suggestions. Educational policy discussions and decisions influenced by such perspectives will be more enlightened, responsive, conscientious, inclusive, and better situated to engender positive educational change.



*To maintain confidentiality, the names, subject areas and grade levels used herein are pseudonyms.

Demographic Information of Study Participants

State Teachers of the Year typically are exposed to, discuss, and are involved in state and national educational policy efforts on multiple occasions. The 24 educators who participated in the qualitative study† that informs this report represent a wide range of schools with diverse demographics. They represent differing degrees of teaching experience and education levels, teach a variety of subjects and levels, and live and work in different regions throughout the United States.‡



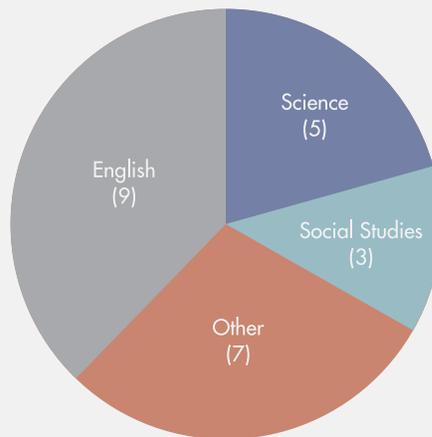
† The qualitative study upon which this report is based utilized purposeful, non-random sampling. Twenty-four teachers who have been recognized as their state's Teacher of the Year and participated in the 2012 cohort of the National Teacher of the Year Program, as conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers, made up the sample. While each state's respective Teacher of the Year selection procedure varies, according to the Council of Chief State School Officers, candidates are chosen as a result of a rigorous multi-stage process by which teaching abilities, professional disposition and capacity to speak on broader educational issues on national and state levels are assessed. Participants were interviewed separately during the summer of 2013. The interview questions that guided the research process were constructed with a thorough understanding of the extant literature and informed by multiple measures of teacher efficacy, job satisfaction, motivation, perceptions, and the like. Interview transcripts were analyzed with the assistance of an online qualitative research analysis tool. Each interview transcripts was coded or "tagged" using a variety of words and phrases, resulting in 85 preliminary codes. Utilizing code co-occurrence, which created a matrix to identify codes that appeared together in interview excerpts, the paired codes with the highest frequencies informed the subsequent phase of theme and subtheme identification.

‡ Of the 24 participants in the original study, 75% remained in the same K-12 teaching position during the 2013-2014 academic year. The remaining 25% of the participants transitioned to support, administrative, or higher education positions.

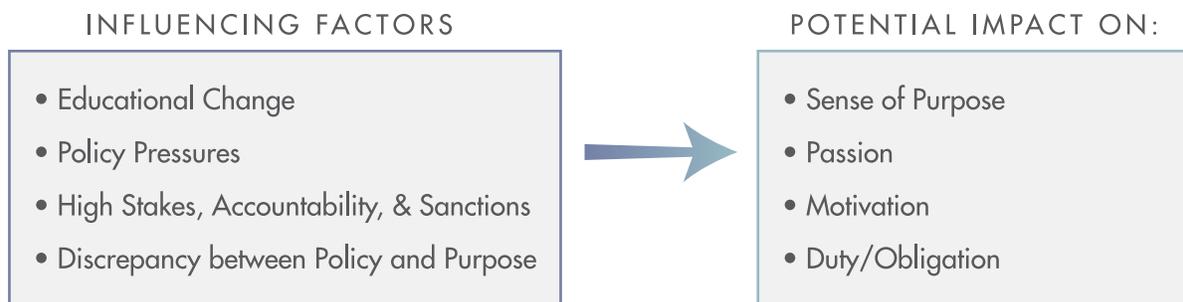
HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION OBTAINED



SUBJECT AREA TAUGHT BY PARTICIPANTS



Theme 1: The Affective Dimensions of Teaching



The affective dimensions of teaching strongly influence teachers' professional identities, morale and motivation.

Teaching is generally characterized and regarded as a vocation, and teachers tend to feel a sense of moral purpose connected to their work. This often manifests in teachers' values, emotions, interactions, and sense of self. Sense of purpose, passion and self-esteem seem to be strongest when teachers are able to act in accordance with their values, have agency within the environment, and are intrinsically motivated, though the presence of demanding external pressures often results in the opposite outcome (Fullan, 2011; Hargreaves, 1998; Nias, 1999; Ryan & Brown, 2005). When teachers are limited in the capacity to carry out their moral mission or when policy measures and daily realities erode at intrinsic motivational forces, lower levels of morale and motivation may result (Hargreaves, 1998; Ryan & Brown, 2005; Ryan & LaGuardia, 1999). Teachers tend to talk of teaching as a calling, and they often feel that they are making a difference in the lives of their students and in society as a whole. Because teachers' professional identities are influenced by the larger educational environment, among other factors, teacher morale, motivation, and performance are a reflection of the many dynamics within that setting. Significantly, because teachers often feel that policy decisions may overlook these integral elements of teachers' lives, these paramount characteristics must be better understood for meaningful change to take place.

Sense of Purpose, Passion and Motivation

A sense of moral purpose, an obligation toward students, dedication to their profession, and overall passion related to their work are salient sentiments expressed by the 24 State Teachers of the Year, and they are fundamental aspects of teachers' identities that the public and policymakers must better understand and value. For many teachers, and as conveyed by the State Teachers of the Year, their sense of purpose and understanding of the moral mission of education guides them in their work, and their sense of self is reliant on, and entangled with, their professional lives and interactions with others in the school environment. It is clear that these teachers' values and beliefs are coupled with their vocational and professional core.

The overwhelming majority of the 24 State Teachers of the Year expressed that their motivation, morale and professional identity are strongly associated with a belief in the moral purpose of their work. Moreover, nearly all of the teachers firmly articulated that their passion for teaching is a central feature of their individual professional identities, and that their belief in the moral pur-

pose of their work and interactions with their students are fundamental sources of this passion. For example, Amy, a well-respected high school English teacher in New England, believes that as a teacher, “it feels like everyday you have some sort of reaffirmation that you have this purpose. Even on the tricky days, there’s always a feeling of great purpose.” Likewise, Josephine, who also teaches high school English in New England, considers the humanistic work she does as a teacher as “a kind of missionary work.” Although hesitant to use such a parallel, she strongly feels that “it’s connected to just my ethos, a love ethos I guess you could say.” Teachers’ sense of professional identity and sources of motivation cannot be divorced from their belief in the larger moral purpose of education, and such forces remain potent throughout their lives. Meredith, a long-time teacher in a small rural community in the Southwest, spoke thoughtfully and deliberately as she pondered her retirement, stating: “This is what I am....I cannot imagine putting myself in a situation where I can’t say to people, ‘I’m a teacher.’” It is clear that, like so many teachers, Meredith’s professional identity is intimately intertwined with her overall sense of self.

*Teachers’ Sense of Duty
and the Affective Dimension of Education*

A sense of obligation to their students and feeling responsible for their academic, emotional, and social well-being, growth, and success appear to be fundamental to the professional identities of each of the 24 State Teachers of the Year. Their sense of efficacy and motivation are tied to this belief in commitment to their students as well. Perhaps because of the bond that is forged between teacher and student as a result of this sense of duty, teachers feel a strong emotional connection to their students and their work. Because teachers’ interactions with students are central to their work, teachers often talk about their love for their work and their love for their students, and they find personal and professional fulfillment through the acts of teaching and learning. Each of the 24 Teachers of the Year characterized their interactions with, and views of, students using non-cognitive terms. To illustrate, Krista, a dynamic and compassionate elementary teacher in an urban district, conveys her love for students and her contributions to their learning:



I just love being with children and talking with them and seeing what they know and, you know, every kind of interaction you could really have in an education setting is something that I get a lot of fulfillment from. I love seeing them try, I love seeing them struggle, I love seeing them succeed.

Although teachers are charged with delivering a curriculum and developing students’ academic skills, many will suggest that the pedagogical aspects of teaching and learning become all the more challenging if the non-cognitive elements are neglected. Many teachers understand, like Michelle, a science teacher from the Midwest, that “the emotional labor of teaching is the most exhausting part of teaching, but also the most fulfilling part of teaching.” Todd, a popular high school science teacher in the Midwest, feels such a strong commitment to his “kids” that he regards them as members of his own family:

I don’t want to let my kids down....We get this relationship where there’s a mutual respect, I don’t want to let them down, they don’t want to let me down. And there’s this, just a bond, I guess, that I don’t – I just don’t want to screw it up. I value that too much....I feel responsible. If it was my kid, I’d want them to have the best.

I kind of treat them like my own son....When I walk in the classroom I feel like they're mine, these are my kids, this is my class.

Like many teachers, Melissa, a high school English teacher in the South, is full of energy and is glad she chose teaching as her career. Still, she occasionally has difficulty leaving her work at school, stating that "there are lots of things you can't turn off, because we deal with people, we deal with kids." The stresses on teachers not only come from external forces, but students demand teachers' attention and energy on a frequent basis as well. Brad, a high school teacher from the Midwest, captures not only the obligation teachers feel to be attuned to their students' progress, emotions and needs, but also the concern that teachers have for their students' well-being and accompanying stresses:

You look at your first hour and you've got this kid that you know is trying to make the hockey team, you know, this kid just broke up with her boyfriend, and this kid – and you're worried about all of them and you've got to touch base with them and you've got to see how they're doing and you've got to see what's coming up, and then you've also got to try teach them something and maybe you've got to try to say, "did I make their day a little better, did they learn something from me, are they better for being in my class an hour and a half or whatever?" It's challenging and it's hard.

Leslie has been teaching in an inner city school most of her career. She believes her students rely on her as much as she relies on them to maintain a positive morale and to remain motivated. Reflecting on the death of a student several years ago, Leslie speaks compellingly of the importance of her relationships with her students: "And you think to yourself, 'What was the last thing I said to that child.' Did they know they were important? Did they know I cared?"

The Impact of Policy Pressures

Despite these salient forces in teachers' work lives, expectations of teachers, daily demands, and policy pressures often challenge teacher morale, motivation and self-perceptions of efficacy. It is not surprising that teachers feel that their morale and motivation are threatened as a result of such views, and the expectations of teachers as moral guides, diagnosticians and parental proxies, among other duties and workplace demands, generate heightened levels of stress and conflict. These challenges often are exacerbated given the many changes taking place in education. Many of the 24 State Teachers of the Year acknowledged the presence of increased pressures and demands associated with student, parent, community, policy, and cultural expectations of teachers and schools, and how such stresses might interfere with the affective dimensions of their work.

For instance, Bridget, a former teacher at the K-12 level who has since moved on to higher education and has transferred her passion to prospective teachers, believes that with increased demands on educators, regrettably, "sometime students, I think, get the short end." She points out that when students are the beneficiaries of effective "preparation and innovation and strategic planning," it is often the result of teachers having "given up something" to meet those ends. In such instances, "we've given up family time, we've given up sleep because time is so short and time is so precious. I really think that teachers are really spread thin." Despite the many demands on teachers, Bridget feels that there is "not enough time built in to really do it strategically and do it in the best way possible in terms of meeting students' needs." Intensified demands can challenge teacher efficacy, which in turn, can impact student performance. Melissa suspects that many of "the struggles I have in my classroom come from external sources, even things like, you know, having students who can barely stay awake because they work 40 hours a week to put food on a table with their parents." In the midst of "having to deal with the day-to-day – think about all the extra paperwork teachers have piled on you, or 'now you need to fill this form,' and 'now you have to document this,'" Melissa admits that "sometimes, it shakes you and you're not what you need to be for your students."

Discrepancies Between Policy and Purpose

Given the moral enterprise of schooling, teachers' sense of obligation toward their students, and other intangible elements of teaching and learning, there may be a discrepancy between how policymakers and teachers view the purpose of education. Despite good intentions on the part of policymakers, teachers feel that education policy is sometimes constructed in a manner that may diverge from the moral purpose of education and teachers' values and beliefs. A majority of the 24 State Teachers of the Year touched upon characteristics of the global education reform movement (Sahlberg, 2011), including high-stakes standardized testing, accountability measures and other sanctions-based approaches, and suggested that such developments often are not aligned to teachers' perceptions of the qualities of effective teaching and teachers.

Josephine, for example, laments that "when adults get in the way, and by that I mean, you know, when policies are adopted that aren't thought through or when there isn't a sense of a mission or when the focus shifts from doing something to documenting something," then priorities are misplaced. She senses that over the last few years, there has "been a big push,...it feels like, anyway, documentation versus doing,...just documenting what we're already doing to prove to someone, some force out there, the public, the politicians, whatever it is, but that's the frustrating piece." Consequently, for Josephine, "it's never usually the kids" that are the driving force, but rather politics and other extrinsic motivators. Calling attention to the depth of understanding of students and teaching that teachers possess, Josephine believes that

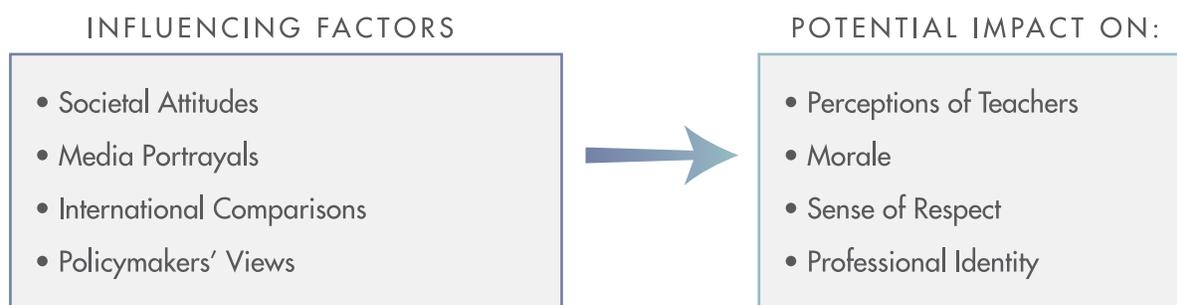
the impulses behind some of the policy [and] the philosophy is much more empirical, it's much more business-model and...it feels at odds often when you talk about a policy that says what really matters is the test scores and what really matters is a date that we're going to pull out of the air and say, by 2014 all students will do this...Anyone who knows the true landscape of where we're teaching and the human sides of that and all the complications of that, I don't know, I don't think there's too many people that I know that can say any of the policies, any of the bigger overarching policies have been great for all schools, at least the way they've been interpreted.

Jason is a young social studies teacher from the Midwest with strong views about teaching and schools that are appealing to many who want to transform the profession from within. In Jason's opinion, because policy tends to overlook accepted understandings of human motivation, it is often detrimental to teachers' values and professional identity. To Jason, teachers' original motives for entering the profession, "because they want to make a difference or whatever their reasons," tend to get "buried under all of the nonsense and bull that we often have in the profession." Jason feels that the commonly held views that have led to success in other sectors of society have been ignored when it comes to education. Citing "all these businesses that are super-successful [that] are using that thinking and that thought process with their employees," he is unclear why "then the entire country's education system is built on the exact opposite: carrots and punishments." In a similar fashion, Ted, another social studies teacher from the Midwest, "philosophically," has "a huge problem with that. It's like, 'let's use the hammer and fix this, and if it doesn't work, let's get a bigger hammer.' You know, the carrot and the stick." Amy argues that current education policies often conflict with the very goals to which many policymakers and the general public subscribe:

They want us to teach civics, they want problem-solving, they want collaboration but yet we're living under, "let's minimize that and make a high stakes test extremely important and let's sanction you if you don't perform, let's punish." And then it's like a huge dichotomy of the ideal of public education with the structure of what we have in place.

As a result of these opposing paradigms, teachers find themselves in a dilemma, as they strive to meet the demands placed on them by policies while at the same time attempting to do what they feel is best for their students. Certainly, however close the gap may be between policymakers' views and values with teachers' understandings and beliefs of their work, many of the State Teachers of the Year perceive a significant disconnect.

Theme 2: External Views of Education



External views of the profession impact teachers' self-perceptions and morale.

The many stresses associated with educational change add to the multiple demands already placed on teachers, a trend that exerts pressure on teachers' professional identities and sense of efficacy. Professional vulnerability and anxiety are related to administrative, policy and workplace demands, thereby limiting agency and self-efficacy, particularly when top-down forces conflict with teachers' views and experiences (Leithwood, 2006; Kelchtermans, 1993, 1996, 2005). These concerns are worsened by often negative or misconstrued views of teachers and schools. Stereotypes and erroneous perceptions of the teaching profession, regardless of their origins, have influenced societal and political views of teachers and schools. Subsequently, they also have the capacity to negatively impact teachers' professional identity, morale, motivation, and perceptions of efficacy. Such forces manifest themselves in the policymaking realm, thereby influencing teachers' work lives. A combination of policy efforts and cultural change that enhance teacher voice and leadership roles can alter these trends.

The Impact of Policy on Perceptions of the Teaching Profession

Education policy can either work in favor of teachers and schools, or can further erode teacher morale and agency. Many teachers feel that the bureaucratic and behaviorist nature of many policies reflects a limited amount of trust in, and respect for, teachers as professionals, and compliance, oversight and evaluation are often emphasized more than professional support and growth. These trends are reflected in the responses of the 24 State Teachers of the Year, nearly all of whom spoke of the impact that education policy and policymakers are having on views of the profession, their work lives, their sense of efficacy, and overall morale and motivation.

To illustrate, Rachel has been teaching English for over ten years, and she has the noticeably

boundless, contagious energy possessed by many middle school teachers. She believes that policy has shaped not only the views of schools and teachers, but also the self-perceptions that teachers hold of themselves and their work. To Rachel, policy efforts have “served to make teachers feel terrible, underperforming,” even though “the news isn’t that bad actually.” If policymakers and the general public had “a clear view of what’s happening in schools across the country...they’d have a lot more respect for teachers and they’d be upset with what’s happening above the teacher level to have let it get to this.” The emphasis on “how we’re not doing compared to that standard rather than how we can positively move forward,” according to Carolyn, a high school science teacher in the West, has led some to believe that “it’s all about the negative instead of what our kids are having success in.” Carolyn approaches her work with much enthusiasm and feels strongly about the impact of external policy and perceptions on her work. She remains concerned about how the processes of teaching and learning are affected by those with minimal understanding of the



complexities inherent in classrooms and schools. Consequently, the view that schools are failing or underperforming “has eroded us to this lower and lower level instead of some kind of positive driving force.” To Jason, policy actions are reflective of a broader, systemic issue that debilitates teachers and threatens efficacy and morale: “We’ve created a system where teachers are afraid to fail, they’re afraid to try something new and have it blow up in their face and so that’s a big piece of that culture of, ‘we have to be perfect everyday,’ and that’s just not fair, that’s not right.”

The Effects of International Comparisons on Perceptions of the Teaching Profession

One significant way that schools and teachers have been in the spotlight is related to the predilection toward international comparisons (Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2008; Sahlberg, 2011; Schleicher, 2011; Stewart, 2012; Tucker, 2012; Wagner, 2008, Zhao, 2009). Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, many pundits and politicians have suggested that American student performance relative to their international counterparts portends a loss of competitive strength on a global stage. The relative international standing of American education coupled with present social and economic challenges have contributed to often flawed and negative perceptions of teachers and schools. The oft-cited international comparisons by policymakers and politicians undoubtedly reinforce and perpetuate such attitudes. Teachers, who often possess a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the needs of their students, the daily operations of schools and the reliability of assessments, remain rather dubious toward the importance, fairness and necessity of such comparisons. For these reasons and others, most of the 24 State Teachers of the Year maintain that international educational comparisons influence public perceptions of the teaching profession and teacher morale, and they question the validity of, and need for, international comparisons.

Many of the 24 State Teachers of the Year indicated that rather than boosting performance, international comparisons contribute to decreased morale. Moreover, teachers are perplexed as to why the policy and cultural changes that have generated improved academic outcomes in some of the higher performing countries have not been replicated on a wider scale in the United States. Rachel, for example, perceives the use of international comparisons in a negative light, proclaiming that “all of the news is negative and bad, all of the comparisons only serve to make American teachers and Americans feel less than.” While “it’s great to look at the different perspectives,” Carolyn believes that “we’ve been put up against that standard a little too incorrectly and too

much." With a lack of in-depth knowledge regarding the issue, when the general public "sees other countries doing great and ours is not," they are likely to wonder, "'what's the problem?' You know, 'why can't you just fix this?'"

The Disconnect Between Policy Goals and Classroom Realities

Multiple factors – such as policymaking, international comparisons and media portrayals of teachers and schools – not only reflect broader cultural perceptions of the profession and education in American society, but also fuel and perpetuate commonly held views. Policy changes stemming from the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and *No Child Left Behind* policies in the early 2000s have been responsible for "[t]he dominant image of American public education today [as]...a system that is broken and obsolete" (Zhao, 2009, p. 28). Such perceptions are compounded by the United States' performance on international standardized tests and related media reports, further reinforcing the anxieties of those who believe America's educational system is failing. In addition to the view that teaching does not "require highly esoteric knowledge or training" (Bascia, 2009, p. 483), the service orientation and altruistic ethos of teaching often conflict with the bureaucratic nature of many educational policies, perhaps even more so today within the context of standardization, accountability, compliance, and high stakes measures.

As such, the conditions of schools and teachers' work lives are colored by how society and policymakers treat teachers and regard their work, as well as the ways by which such educational critics recollect their own schooling experiences. Approximately two-thirds of the 24 State Teachers of the Year believe that the media influences the public perception of the teaching profession and teacher morale, often in an adverse way. Alarming, almost all of the 24 State Teachers of the Year were of the opinion that policymakers and the general public generally misunderstand teachers, teaching, and current educational values and dynamics. Given the rapidly changing nature of society and corresponding demands on the institution of education, such perspectives affect the attitudes of outsiders toward schools and teachers, and likely influence how teachers go about, and feel about, their work. It is very obvious from the responses of the State Teachers of the Year that there is a troubling disconnect between how teachers perceive their work, their understanding of teaching and learning, and their sources of motivation with the views of policymakers and the general public.

For Amy, the dynamics of teaching and learning are so multifaceted that "it's a very difficult thing to deal with the reality and the complexity of what happens in classrooms." Despite these challenges, "there are people who are making policies and laws that are perhaps very smart people, but that don't understand how what this looks like when their policy is put into practice with real human beings and children." Likewise, Carolyn believes that policymakers and the general public lack an understanding of "what the life is really like, what the struggles are like, the amount of work that goes into it." Similar sentiments are expressed by Krista, who decries the likelihood that policymakers and the general public "really don't have a sense of what the work is like....I don't think that people really understand, especially nowadays, you know, what it's like to be a teacher. I don't think policymakers, I don't think anyone really does except for teachers." Whether real or perceived, the dissonance between the expectations and goals of policymaking with the realities in classrooms and schools has an impact on teacher morale and the views that they hold toward their profession.

Teachers' Perceptions of Respect

Policy influences have an impact on how people feel about the profession and how teachers feel about themselves, particularly in the degree of respect afforded to the profession as a whole and

to teachers individually. Perception of respect is a powerful predictor of teacher empowerment, which influences job satisfaction (Bogler & Nir, 2012). A large majority of the 24 State Teachers of the Year expressed concern over the influence of external views of the profession on the respect afforded to teachers, teacher morale, and the status of the teaching profession. Interestingly, three-fourths of the 24 State Teachers of the Year said that while they feel respected at the local level, they perceived diminished respect at the state and national levels. As Josephine relates:

It's unfortunate but I don't think that teachers feel respected. I don't think we feel valued right now. I think we feel like, you know, the stuff that's been happening recently sort of drives that home....I think it's a really tough climate to feel respected right now. But I think those types of messages that come directly and indirectly have started to pile up quite a bit.

Michelle feels similarly, stating that, for teachers, "a lot of the morale is because they don't feel valued, they don't feel like the community in general or, you know, the policymakers or, you know, the upper administrators value them, or parents, for everything that they do."

While many of the State Teachers of the Year did not to perceive high degrees of respect on a policymaking or societal level, they reported feeling respected within their school environment and individually. Within the local educational environment, teachers who feel respected by their colleagues and are recognized for their expertise and knowledge tend to contribute to their school culture in a positive manner. It is quite possible that an individual teacher's morale may remain high even as school morale and that of the broader environment may suffer. The coalescence of these "micro," "meso," and "macro" factors, respectively, is expressed through teachers' professional identities, emotions, beliefs, and actions (Woods, 1999). In this sense, the majority of the State Teachers of the Year conveyed that they feel respected at the micro level, but that degrees of respect diminished along the continuum to the macro, or state and federal, level. Melissa discusses the notion of a range of respect as reflective of broader societal views of teachers:

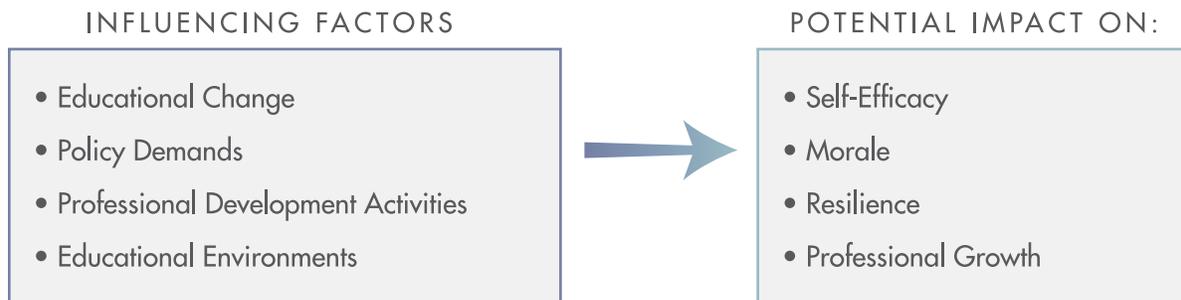
By my students, yes. By parents, sometimes. Politicians, absolutely not, and if we are talking about the general public, I'd say no. I'd say no....You know, where we feel the most respect, our students, parents. Those are the people who actually are familiar with what's going on in our classrooms and they have the interaction with us. And so I think that disconnect there, that lack of respect comes from a lack of awareness. People who have no idea what's going on in our classrooms, and you have no idea what it's like to sit in a desk and learn from us.

The dynamics of feeling respected on a local level but less so at the state, federal and societal levels are epitomized by Amy's concerns:

I feel respected...as a teacher, personally. I do. But the larger the audience, like, the wider the lens, the less I think that I feel confident in saying that....Do I feel respected by people who have the capacity to make decisions at that critical level? No, I mean I'm glad that I have parents in a community that I feel in general respect teachers, but the fact that I don't have key decision makers in our state and perhaps, you know, at the national level, I think that's really concerning. I don't think respect becomes part of the equation.

Commonly held cultural views toward teachers and education are significant factors that influence teachers' professional identities, as well as their motivation and morale. It can be argued that policymakers have not only contributed to certain attitudes toward teachers and schools, but remain influenced by them as well, resulting in a vicious cycle in which teachers' involvement in decision-making for their own profession is limited, teacher efficacy is called into question, and teacher morale and motivation are challenged. Greater attention and responsiveness to such trends can bolster the prestige of the teaching profession and enhance the cultural status of teachers.

Theme 3: Self-Efficacy, Growth and Resilience



Teachers' sense of efficacy is dynamic, contextual, and influenced by many factors.

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's abilities to be effective and to have agency in given situations, thereby influencing "how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). For teachers, self-efficacy is an important feature of their professional identities and correspondingly, their morale and motivation. Teachers' efficacy beliefs are typically associated with their skills related to student engagement and performance (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). It is important to point out, however, that teachers' interactions with the many aspects of the school environment, relationships with colleagues, views of external mandates, attitudes toward teachers and schools, and any number of related dynamics certainly influence efficacy beliefs as well. Over the course of their careers, teachers' perceptions of their own abilities and efficacy fluctuate and affect their performance. When teachers' sense of efficacy is threatened, it can negatively impact the workplace environment and individuals with whom they work, thus potentially damaging the performance of the organization as a whole. Teachers' resilience, however, can mitigate the impact of policy changes, workplace demands and other attendant stresses.

Teachers' sense of efficacy relies on their self-perception of their own individual pedagogical skills, content knowledge, interactions with students, perceived levels of autonomy, and other environmental dynamics, and it remains an important element of their morale, motivation and professional identity. Importantly, teacher empowerment as related to self-efficacy is the most significant determinant of intrinsic satisfaction (Bogler & Nir, 2012). Slightly more than half of the 24 State Teachers of the Year pointed out that their morale, motivation and professional identity are influenced by their sense of efficacy. To Michelle, it is crucial "to uplift the profession," and one way to do this is to promote teacher efficacy. In order "to make incredible changes in education," improved teacher morale as an outcome of greater teacher efficacy is a must, "because if you feel good about what you're doing, then you're going to do a good job. So, morale directly affects your performance." Donna, an elementary teacher from the Midwest, feels that "teachers' morale improves with their certainty, with their own efficacy."

Professional Identity and Professional Needs

Teachers' professional identities change as they undergo various forms of professional growth.§ When professional growth is focused on professional development and support rather than solely evaluation and accountability, it parallels teachers' needs and beliefs, and facilitates the strength-

ening of teacher efficacy. As conveyed by the 24 State Teachers of the Year, aspects of professional growth and learning are reflective of teachers' sense of mission and are integral to their overall motivation, morale and professional identity. Professional growth geared toward enhancing teacher leadership is also desired by many within the profession, and may indeed contribute to the greater professionalization of teaching. This aspiration to have a wider influence and a greater voice in policymaking and to cultivate meaningful educator-policymaker partnerships that enhances the professionalism of teaching is a vital shift that will serve to elevate educational practice, teacher quality and student performance.

Professional identity is not static, and the evolution of one's sense of self is emotionally laden, subjective and complex (Zembylas, 2003). Teachers' self-esteem is often elevated when they feel that they are acting according to their core tenets, as well as when they believe that they contribute to student success and growth. Recognizing that teachers have diverse professional growth needs, expertise and trajectories relative to the various stages of the career continuum, it seems detrimental for a uniform approach toward professional growth. It therefore is not uncommon for teachers to perceive that many formal, mandated professional development activities are often irrelevant or incongruous to their professional growth needs and perspectives. What is often a purely technical approach to professional development may neglect the expertise, experiences and resources teachers possess. If intrinsic motivators, support and growth are emphasized, however, self-esteem and engagement will likely improve. Educational environments responsive to teachers' needs, concerns, responsibilities, and expertise are better situated to provide suitable professional growth endeavors and thereby improve teachers' efficacy, morale and motivation. Likewise, when policy engenders and supports such practices, professional growth will be more productive, practical and embraced by teachers. Similar sentiments are supported by the key findings of the *From Good to Great* report from the National Network of State Teachers of the Year and the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes for Research (Bassett, Behrstock-Sherratt, Jacques, & Olson, 2014).

Meaningful Professional Growth

Formal, well-designed and effective support systems are valuable for cultivating efficacy in new teachers, as well as for veteran teachers at various stages of their careers. On the other hand, unreasonably high expectations, external demands and self-imposed pressures may imperil the development of strong self-efficacy beliefs. Almost four-fifths of the 24 State Teachers of the Year expressed the important relationship between meaningful professional growth and building a strong sense of efficacy.

Like many teachers, Marie, a middle school English teacher, is critical of many professional development programs, particularly those that are not well thought out or irrelevant. Professional development, to Marie, is often done for the sake of it, and such activities are thus poorly designed and not suited to teachers' work. In other words, she feels that "they have one in the district calendar so they have to come up with something. So I don't always think that they're well thought out in terms of what we need." Similarly, Kara, a high school teacher from the South, describes the

§ It is important to point out that professional growth and/or development, as presented here, entails not only engagement in standard professional development activities, but also the various experiences that shapes one's professional identity, the evolution of one's educational philosophy, independent professional development experiences (such as graduate coursework, conferences, travel grants, etc.), classroom observations and evaluations, and other ways by which teachers grow over the course of their careers.

formalized, formulaic nature of professional development: “We attend conferences and we are taken outside of the classroom and we all sit together in a very sterile – typically – a fairly sterile environment, someone speaks to us.” Such standard, ritualistic activities are limited in their impact on teacher growth and improved expertise, according to Kara, because “we don’t see each other in action. We don’t see how we’re applying our learning and our wisdom over the years.” Melissa also describes “mandatory work sessions that we have to log so many hours, we’re usually given tasks to do, you know, here are these scores, disaggregate this and, you know, follow the trail to skillsets and what grade levels are responsible for what.” Kara states that “for so many teachers, what’s missing is a support component and feeling like they are living under a microscope where they can’t fail, they can’t make a mistake.” The more that Amy “learned and the more opportunities that I could immediately apply to my classroom experience...and see the result,” the stronger she felt as a teacher. As a result of her professional growth experiences, Amy feels that “learning and continuing my professional growth has helped me feel more effective as teacher.”

Poorly designed, inadequate, or inapplicable professional growth experiences are a source of frustration for teachers because such practices are often perceived as incompatible with effective teaching and learning strategies and beliefs. To be fair, such approaches to professional growth often are determined at the district or building level. When meaningful, practical, professional development activities take place that are deemed valuable to teacher practice and growth, teacher efficacy likely will increase. Professional growth opportunities that are reflective of trust in teacher professionalism, involve meaningful support and feedback, encourage greater levels of teacher autonomy, and are connected to a shared vision are often associated with heightened efficacy (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Furthermore, professional growth endeavors that genuinely seek to develop teachers, as opposed to a controlling, behaviorist approach rooted in compliance and accountability for their own sake, boost morale, motivation, and self-efficacy. Because teachers desire more relevant and better-designed professional growth activities to build their professional competence, policy measures can assist their creation and implementation.

Professional Growth and the Evolution of Self-Efficacy

Changes in one’s professional life and setting can generate role conflict, role ambiguity, added stress, a diminished sense of self efficacy



and agency, unclear expectations, and other burdens and challenges to one’s comfort level, values, beliefs, and goals (Smylie, 1999; Woods, 1999). Change is associated with loss, which can cause feelings of anxiety, failure and frustration (Olson, 2002). As a result of educational reform efforts and the attendant demands placed on educators, teachers may experience feelings of vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1993, 1996). These feelings of vulnerability may be more pronounced in educational environments that are more controlling, less supportive and less trustful of teachers as professionals. A large number of the 24 State Teachers of the Year spoke of the impact policy changes and/or changes in their work lives have had on their sense of efficacy and professional identities. Kara speaks about a colleague with many years of experience who is considering leaving the profession as a result of the changes taking place:

I see peers who’ve been teaching over 30 years...I’m thinking of a specific teacher in my high school, and she is phenomenal. She is probably one of the most creative teachers on campus, she devotes so much time, but yet she’s going to choose to retire after this year because she’s just generally frustrated with the laws, the policy...So, she is an extremely positive person and just fears that, “will I really be able to keep the positivity? It’s my time, I don’t know what I’m going to do, but I’m going to do something else.”

Such sentiments should give policymakers and others pause. The convergence of the many changes wrought by education reform policies, constraints on teacher agency, challenges to teachers' values, increased workloads and demands, and other factors, in many cases, can weaken teacher efficacy and impact teachers' professional identities.

The Impact of Policy Demands on Teachers' Self-Efficacy

When significant policy changes occur, teachers may be forced to reexamine their views and abilities, causing higher degrees of stress and self-doubt that often manifest as lower morale and greater job dissatisfaction (Dworkin, 2009). Given the potential for external forces to come into conflict with what intrinsically motivates many teachers, it is possible that educational reform measures can contribute to higher levels of teacher workloads, stress, role conflict, role ambiguity, and possibly, burnout. Saha and Dworkin (1999) claim that educational change has led to "organizationally imposed stressors in the teaching role" stemming from policy changes "that either increase the workload on teachers, add to their paperwork, or question the competence of teachers" (p. 490).

While very few of the State Teachers of the Year spoke specifically of burnout, their responses nevertheless reveal that they themselves, and many of their colleagues, are currently experiencing more anxiety and exhaustion in their working lives. Due to the many challenges with which teachers contend, Rachel feels that "everybody is fatigued. I think every teacher is fatigued." The source of this "lack of engagement or the bitterness or the anger comes from feeling done to." To a certain extent, teachers are often suspicious of policy and feel that external initiatives may threaten teacher efficacy and morale. Melissa thinks that

there's a constant sense of we're failing, we're not doing enough, but then there's the frustration of knowing personally that you are doing everything you possibly can. There's a lack of positivity because of the policies, you know, we're not meeting AYP, we're not meeting benchmark, we're not doing this, and we're not looking at the progress we are making. And we see that progress, we see it every day in our classroom, we know how far students are coming, but that's always being pushed down from outside where you're constantly being told it's not good enough, you're not doing enough, you're failing, the profession's failing, the schools are failing. So I think that's where that policy comes in. You can't feel very good about these private victories you have in your classroom because they're not enough.

While Melissa talks about policy as a whole, specific aspects of policy may impact teacher efficacy as well. For instance, Michelle has observed that new evaluation systems "have really put a lot of teachers into a panic as far as second guessing themselves, as far as feeling like it was an attack on their value." Josephine suggests that if she were to survey her colleagues, many of them "would not report a very high feeling of morale or excitement." While her colleagues might remain "excited about teaching their kids," she feels that the policy demands and changes have threatened teacher motivation, morale and self-efficacy beliefs.

A lot of the initiatives that have come down from the Department of Ed or from our school or from our budget cuts or from our tax meetings or whatever, have left people feeling like people don't value what we do. You know, "it's all too much, I'm overwhelmed, I don't know where to start." And, you know, that feeling of, with a new initiative, we're kind of being told we [are ineffective], and that gets people down like, "I thought I was doing a good job."

In an effort to keep up with the changes and to remain effective, some of Donna's colleagues, "were just being very hard on themselves, just sure that they're not doing well. So it really is their

own perception, how they're doing." The many changes that have been taking place have caused many teachers' efficacy beliefs to deteriorate to the point where once effective teachers are now, according to Donna, "unsure of themselves and these changes brought a lot of uncertainty."

Challenges to Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Morale

Although many teachers have the personal wherewithal and professional supports to mitigate the impact of new educational policies, however positive or well-intended, many struggle with the ongoing challenges of school change and its impact on teacher identity, morale, motivation, and efficacy. Teachers who are often most at risk to increased stress levels and potentially burnout are



those who have the strongest sense of vocation about their work (Nias, 1999; Woods, 1999). These teachers may feel that the moral purpose of what they do is in conflict, or does not align, with the goals and values of the changes taking place. Their intrinsic motivation and sense of efficacy may be threatened, and they may become increasingly demoralized. Furthermore, many teachers, especially those with a number of years of experience, often have difficulty confronting the challenges and demands of educational change. This is even more pronounced when teachers' expertise and values are challenged by those outside of the profession (Hargreaves, 2001; van den Berg, 2002). Lower morale and a weakened or uncertain sense of efficacy may result, and teachers often experience a sense of vulnerability in the face of change.

Donna "was surprised" by these developments because she "thought that...the teachers who would have the most trouble would be the ones who kind of weren't doing real great already, but they were the ones who kind of felt fine." Many of the challenges to teachers' morale, according to Donna, "are because of all the changes that are coming and they haven't given us any extra time." In her opinion, the demands and stresses of educational change have caused many teachers to "feel like they're being asked to do more and more and more, but there hasn't been any increase in prep time." As a result, "these teachers who had the hardest time were already doing really well. They were the experts and so now, they no longer are." Donna feels that "those outside factors and policy, I think they really do affect how we do our jobs and how people feel about themselves."

Teacher Resilience and Contending with the Challenges of Change

Teacher resilience is also reflective of the vocational nature to which teachers ascribe their work (Gu & Day, 2007), and building teachers' self-efficacy, agency and resilience appears to be a critical variable in mitigating the impact of external reforms and limiting the potential for vulnerability and burnout (Dworkin, 2009; Kelchtermans, 1999; Smylie, 1999). Often, teacher resilience is fortified by an ability to limit the dissonance between the moral purpose of their work and external demands that are perceived to be in conflict with that mission. Teachers' beliefs in their ability to nurture student growth, as well as their sense of duty to do so, also appear to be important contributing factors.

Approximately half of the 24 State Teachers of the Year spoke of the importance of resilience and determination in their work. To deal with many of the challenges, Rachel has "always been able to keep a nice brick wall in between" the negatives and her sense of obligation to her students. For

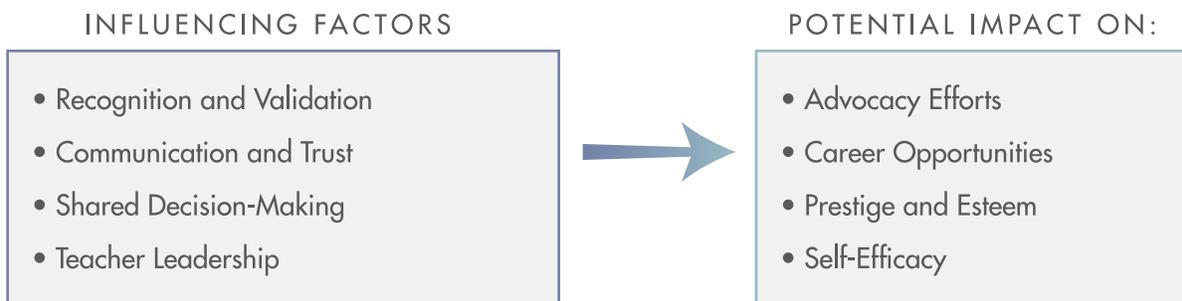
Rachel, although “it’s real easy for me to turn those things off,...a lot of teachers don’t have the ability to turn it off and on.” When such teachers “kind of stay bogged down in the negative,... it carries over into their teaching.” Melissa states that when she is in her classroom and with her students, “none of that affects me or affects what’s in my classroom.” Nevertheless, policy issues and other challenges sometimes cause her to question her efficacy:

I tell you when it does affect me is when I come home at night....I tend to get myself worked up about stuff, but that’s something that weighs very heavily on my mind when I come home or when I’m planning my lessons or when I’m not with the kids. That’s when you really kind of have that struggle of always feeling, “well, am I measuring up?” and “am I doing everything I’m supposed to be doing?” and you have the negativity, you know, and the public perception.

Although “that stuff weighs on” Melissa, she has developed the resilience and the capacity to focus on the task at hand in her daily teaching efforts and performance. She feels that “when I’m in my classroom and I shut the door, that’s when it stops and I know it’s going on and I know it’s real and, you know, the external factors don’t affect me then.”

Teacher efficacy and resilience extend beyond mere pedagogical effectiveness. For many teachers, their sense of efficacy is strongly connected to their professional identity, and the resilience they possess is correlated with their overall morale, motivation and sense of moral purpose toward their work. Resilient teachers who have experienced higher levels of professional efficacy, often as the result of support and professional validation, may be better able to navigate the many challenges resulting from change. Keeping in mind the dynamic, contextual and powerful influence of teachers’ sense of self-efficacy is necessary for effective policymaking.

Theme 4: Elevating the Teaching Profession



Recognized and validated teachers feel compelled to elevate the profession.

In general, teacher morale and motivation has deteriorated in recent years, reflected in a decline in job satisfaction and greater attrition rates (for example, see The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2012). These trends often stem from perceived attacks on the profession, the bureaucratic and behaviorist approach inherent in aspects of the global education reform movement, and low levels of trust in the teaching profession. Increased stress coupled with time constraints,

unclear purposes and expectations, role conflict, challenges to autonomy and vocational values, and extrinsic motivators can aggravate anxieties and undermine teacher efficacy. The general lack of teacher involvement in policy decisions and perceived indifference toward teachers' expertise, experience and perceptions reflect the limited professional status of teachers and their constrained sense of autonomy.

In many ways, although the status of the profession has suffered and teachers' work lives have been impacted, the current educational context offers opportunities to uplift the profession. Creating collaborative partnerships between educators and policymakers, and ultimately, fostering teacher leadership opportunities and teacher voice in the policymaking arena, can serve to enhance teachers' work lives and optimize student growth. Furthermore, the experiences of State Teachers of the Year, as well as their vision for establishing a viable career continuum and bolstering the professionalization of teachers, can be regarded as both an impetus and model for change. Despite many logistical and structural challenges, the development of teacher leadership and educator-policymaker partnerships will confer greater professional autonomy for teachers and boost the status of the profession. Emerging teacher leaders may feel more compelled and empowered to elevate the status of the teaching profession in such a climate.

The Importance of Validating Teachers' Work

Given the possible deleterious effects of role conflict, role ambiguity and stress during times of educational change, validation and recognition of teachers' work and efforts, whether in a formal or informal manner, may augment teacher efficacy, motivation and morale. Seeking out and valuing teacher input, building teacher capacity and supporting teacher growth require trust in teachers' expertise and perspectives. Because lower feelings of competence and autonomy are likely reflective of limited agency and have negative effects on teachers' self-perceptions, building teacher efficacy through formal or informal validation and recognition mechanisms can act to boost self-efficacy and morale. The strengthening of self-efficacy that may result from being recognized and validated for their efforts and effectiveness may bolster teachers' resilience, agency, and morale, and reduce feelings of vulnerability. This is particularly true for many individuals who have been recognized as their state's Teacher of the Year, and these sentiments are revealed in many of their responses from the original study.

About half of the 24 State Teachers of the Year articulated that being recognized and validated as a Teacher of the Year has been a momentous variable in their overall professional growth, and several of the State Teachers of the Year described how receiving such a professional award provided an important morale boost.** For instance, Jason questions what his morale would be "if I hadn't won the award," as well as the many ensuing professional experiences in which he has been engaged. Although Michelle's "morale is great," she adds, "I also wonder had I not been named Teacher of the Year, would I still continue to be questioning my value too?" The professional, collaborative, networking experience was important for Carolyn in that it "rejuvenated me after wanting to give up after eleven years of teaching and having no one" in her previous school as part of a support system. Had it not been for her State Teacher of the Year experience and cohort, Carolyn thinks she "would have been floundering." In addition to recognition and validation of one's work, creating opportunities for teachers' perspectives to be solicited and valued in various capacities appears to be crucial for the elevation of the teaching profession.

** As important as a prestigious public award has been for the State Teachers of the Year, each teacher also spoke of the significance of professional validation on a more localized level (from leadership, colleagues, students, and other sources) on their sense of efficacy.

Inclusive Educational Cultures

Inclusive educational cultures demonstrate trust in teachers' expertise and perspectives, validate teachers' work, and strengthen teacher motivation and morale. Conversely, environments that are controlling, hierarchical, lack connectedness, and are unduly influenced by external motivators can hinder self-perceptions of competence, individual autonomy and agency, and collaborative mind-sets and behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In such instances, when the locus of control is perceived as deriving from an external source, teacher morale, motivation, efficacy, and performance may suffer (Ryan & Brown, 2005). As a result, the development of self-efficacy, professional growth, motivation and morale, job satisfaction, and overall performance can be impeded. In many cases, when teacher autonomy and professionalism are constrained, lower morale and feelings of efficacy result, impairing professional growth and affecting professional identity. Lack of teacher involvement and input in decision-making tend to reflect a lack of trust in teachers' perspectives, experiences and expertise. When the reverse is the norm, however, teachers are more likely to experience positive morale and motivation, a heightened sense of efficacy, and higher levels of enthusiasm and trust. Educational cultures in which teachers are trusted and their perspectives are valued, a shared vision and a shared leadership style are present, and effective communication is the norm are quite often positive, supportive and productive educational environments with higher levels of intrinsic motivation among teacher and students.



A preponderance of the 24 State Teachers of the Year affirmed that genuine teacher involvement in decision-making positively affects teacher morale and sense of efficacy. This is as true at the district and building level as it is at a state and federal policymaking level. Todd suggests that "people need to feel like they're valued and that they're listened to." If not, he thinks "people can really shut down and it can get toxic pretty quick." Rachel feels that "in education, the team's never brought together. People are never explained how important their role is." Even if good intentions and the necessary structures are in place to identify and incorporate teacher voice, "as the year rolls on, stuff just gets done to, handed to. You know, we just stop being an important person at the table." The result of such actions for Rachel is that "it definitely feels like the decisions get made up above and we don't matter. Just keep teaching,

you know?" Jason takes umbrage with what he calls "the illusion of input." As he explains, "you can talk all you want, but if they're not going to listen to you,...you can have a meeting and ask me my thoughts, but if we're not going to do anything with it, then...you've wasted my time and your time." Melissa is dubious of this tendency as well, and is concerned of its impact on teacher morale, stating, "it's kind of we're just going through the motions to make you feel like you have a say, to get that perceived buy-in."

An Obligation to Advocate for the Profession

The responses of several of the State Teachers of the Year reveal a desire and sense of obligation to advocate for the teaching profession, an impulse that is perhaps more pronounced due to being

formally recognized and validated for their work. With the professional recognition comes a platform by which teacher voice can be prominent. Three-fourths of the 24 State Teachers of the Year believed that there is a high need for teacher voice to be at the forefront of policymaking, and approximately half felt a stronger sense of responsibility to advocate for their profession as a result of their professional recognition and validation. As a result of his newfound status, Jason shares:

I'm thinking I have a position, I can use my voice and push that envelope a little bit farther than a traditional teacher, and I feel an obligation to do that, because to many I know, the frustrations...are shared by millions of teachers, but they won't say anything because they don't have that...luxury of that security.

With more control over their profession and meaningful engagement in decision-making, professional autonomy is valued and teachers' prestige is strengthened. It is clear from the responses of the several of 24 State Teachers of the Year that the time is right for greater teacher involvement in shaping views of the profession and directing the course of teaching and the work of schools. It seems obvious to many State Teachers of the Year that what takes place in schools ought to be determined by those at the frontlines of education. As Bridget questions, "who knows better than teachers who have studied the content, who know the students? They're just in the best position to effect change and to help each other grow." Perhaps best exemplifying the attitudes of many teachers toward policymaking and educational change, Ann states, "it's crazy to me that we would ever think of doing it without teachers."

Obstacles to Teacher Participation in Policymaking

Despite the seemingly dire need for teachers to more strongly advocate for their profession, however, a variety of factors constrain their ability to do so. These variables include not only cultural constructs, but political and structural barriers exist as well. The many demands on teachers are often overwhelming and lead to diminished efficacy when supportive environments are lacking. Furthermore, many teachers are unclear how to go about advocating for their profession, lack the requisite knowledge to engage in policy, may experience role conflict and role ambiguity, and remain burdened by large workloads. Coupled with unclear purposes, pressures on teachers' time, and other stresses, the lack of supportive structures and logistical challenges may work against teachers in their quest to provide greater input into policymaking and efforts to bolster the profession. Given these many hindrances, it is not surprising that many teachers remain unaware of their capacity to advocate for their profession by engaging in policymaking, or stay out of the policymaking realm altogether.

Just under half of the 24 State Teachers of the Year described a variety of factors that limit their own ability, and teachers' ability in general, to advocate for their profession. From Michelle's experience as a teacher leader, she has found that "the people who are often times testifying to legislators are not teachers, and it's because we are all in the classroom teaching during the day when those testimonies are occurring." Many of those testifying or providing input to policymakers "giving all these opinions about education...aren't teachers...because they're all teaching." As a result, according to Michelle, policymakers then "make their decisions based on that, having not heard the entire story of what's happening in the classroom." Kelly, a high school teacher in the Midwest, has a passion for helping high school students who find themselves in difficult life circumstances. She takes pride in watching them grow and mature. As much as she enjoys working with her students, however, she also feels an obligation to work with policymakers and others to change their views of the profession and to enlighten them on what teachers do. Kelly believes that, as challenging as it may be for teachers to become more involved in policymaking, if teachers want to change their profession and public perceptions, then they must take a more active stance. Kelly is concerned that even if teachers were able to become more involved,

would we all get there or would it still be the 20% of us that do the work for 80%? Probably. I mean it's not everybody's thing, politics and policy...I would love it during teacher prep if teachers knew that this is part of your job but they don't. I mean, you very rarely find a preschool teacher who says, "Gee, let me get out of this circle time and run up to the Capitol with you." You have to teach people to do that. And I don't think it used to be incumbent upon us to understand every policy, and it is now.

As Kelly suggests, teachers do not enter the profession to be involved in policymaking. For many teachers, as Ann explains, "we kind of just do our own thing and we do what we think is best, and I think most teachers are doing that, but we don't look a whole lot outside our classroom." The impact of educational policymaking efforts, however, has perhaps caused more teachers to become more attuned to external forces seeking to influence the work of schools and teachers. Ann captures the issue of teacher advocacy challenges, teacher involvement in policymaking, and respect for the profession very well, stating, "we kind of are aware what's going on but probably not enough. So I think we probably do need to definitely be more proactive, because most policy-makers aren't going to call us up."



The Need for Meaningful Career Opportunities

In addition to a more consequential presence in the policymaking realm, there are others levers for bolstering teacher motivation, morale and perceptions of efficacy. Approximately one-third of the 24 State Teachers of the Year stated that a well-designed career continuum would contribute to meaningful professional growth, and

suggested that such opportunities would improve teacher efficacy and bestow greater prestige to the teaching profession. Leslie, for example, argues that if prospective and new teachers "knew they could have different career paths, I think they'd be happier. I really do. I think that they need to know that they're not just going to be in the same position for twenty years." Amy has found it to be

a bit frustrating in terms of job satisfaction because it's very difficult to kind of move around. There aren't a lot of opportunities to sort of move, not just laterally but kind of to become anything other than you're a teacher or you're an administrator...I think that the one frustration in terms of job satisfaction is just that you can be a teacher who's really passionate about teaching but the only way that you really move up, so of speak, is to be an administrator, and I think there's got to be something in the middle.

As teachers grow as professionals and perhaps become more cognizant of policy issues and other opportunities within the field of education, there is occasionally the desire to have a larger impact. Michelle feels that "one of the things we need to look at is, what pathways can we have for teachers that allow them to grow and to share their knowledge, but still stay with their students?" This has an influence on teachers' self-perceptions and their views of the profession as well. Michelle condemns the "lack of a career pathway for teachers who want to remain teachers, there's just – once you're a teacher, you're just at that level, you know what I mean? And in their minds, there's

no way up.” Given the wrong mix of circumstances, these factors can damage teacher morale and motivation. To Ann, a well-designed career continuum for teachers would enhance the profession and have a wide impact:

If we had more vertical growth but within the teaching profession itself, I think that would help and that would give teachers more voice and leadership roles that they’re lacking, and that might make them more proactive to kind of step out and take more of those nationwide issues on.

No matter how rich and rewarding their professional experiences may have been, teachers nevertheless desire opportunities to continuously increase their levels of professional competence. As teachers go through the stages of their career, their needs, views, experiences, levels of efficacy, and other traits evolve. Accordingly, it is important for policymakers to remain aware of the various forces on teachers’ lives, to appreciate the value of recognizing and validating teachers’ work, to acknowledge teachers’ ambitions for meaningful professional growth, and to encourage the genuine inclusion of teachers in policymaking. Enhancing teacher efficacy, motivation and morale through various means can uplift the teaching profession and improve teaching and learning environments for teachers and students alike.

Summary and Recommendations

Largely in response to many of the changes and challenges brought about by the shifting educational landscape, it is clear that teachers’ self-perceptions, particularly in terms of their sense of efficacy, have been affected – a development that impacts school culture and student performance as well. In the face of such challenges, there is a dire need to elevate the status of the teaching profession. Teachers’ professional identities are multifaceted, complex, and dynamic, and educational policies and the broader educational climate are salient forces in teachers’ lives. When teachers are intrinsically motivated, perceive themselves as competent professionals, feel trusted and respected, pursue meaningful professional growth endeavors, and believe they are working toward larger goals, their passion and sense of purpose are reinforced and cultivated. As reflected by the perspectives of the 24 State Teachers of the Year and supported by the literature, recognition of the many intersecting variables that comprise teachers’ identities and work lives is an important initial step for policymakers, educational leaders and others in their efforts to understand the teaching profession and the lived experiences of teachers.

The purpose of this report is to illuminate the intricate interplay and impact of numerous internal and external forces on the development of teachers’ professional identities, sense of self-efficacy, morale and motivation, overall job satisfaction, perceptions of the profession, and various other feelings and emotions related to professional roles in the context of the current educational environment. Given the accomplishments and experiences of the 24 State Teachers of the Year that inform this report, the perspectives offered by such educators ought to be regarded seriously and with credibility. Accordingly, the experiences, insight and statements of the 24 State Teachers of the Year generate a number of important suggestions and considerations for policymakers:

Create Multiple and Meaningful Collaborative Opportunities

- **Seek out, include and respect teacher voice at all levels and stages of the policymaking process.**
- **Create, support and value inclusive, collaborative, solution-oriented partnerships and opportunities for positive, productive dialogue between educators and policymakers.**

- Cultivate inclusive, collaborative environments to allow for, and encourage, genuine teacher involvement in decision-making at the school, district, state, and national levels.
- Provide resources, structures and logistical support for teachers to develop a better understanding of educational policy.

Appreciate the Unique Challenges and Motivational Forces Inherent in Education

- Understand and value the non-cognitive and moral dimensions of teachers' work and perspectives.
- Understand and value the impact of education policy and societal attitudes on teachers' work lives, sense of efficacy, professional identity, motivation, and morale.
- Align educational change measures with teachers' perceptions of effective teaching practices and professional realities.
- Reconsider the value, necessity and impact of international comparisons and other cultural forces on commonly held and traditional views of teachers and education, as well as their role in policymaking.

Strengthen Professional Growth Activities

- Re-evaluate and, if necessary, re-design professional growth activities in a collaborative and distributive fashion to ensure relevance, applicability and responsiveness to individual teacher needs, reflective practice, career stage, expertise, professional growth, and student learning.
- Prioritize growth and support over compliance for all professional development processes, including teacher evaluation, in order to nurture competence, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation.
- Integrate a well-designed career continuum focused on nurturing teacher leadership, professional growth and building professional capacity into the structures and cultures at the school, district and state levels.



Conclusion

There is a crucial disconnect between “bureaucratic policy and classroom reality” (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 124). Regrettably, many teachers find it increasingly difficult to remain in a profession that sometimes seems to be devoid of intrinsic motivation and satisfaction, or when such dimensions of the job are not paramount. If the most effective teachers are those who have the best interests of students in mind and who are guided by deeper values and purposes, they are also the ones who perhaps experience the most dissonance and demoralization as a result of an educational culture that often seems dictated by other aims. If such individuals leave the teaching profession, it “will be seriously impoverished in terms of both quality and status” (Evans, 1998, p. 176), and will have enduring negative consequences on teacher quality, school cultures, student performance, and society as a whole.

The top-down, bureaucratic and behaviorist nature of many education reform policies has inhibited the moral and affective aspects of teaching and learning. The inherently controlling nature of external educational reform policies influences teachers’ work lives, often causing lower levels of efficacy, motivation, autonomy, morale, commitment, and job satisfaction. By imposing an excessively top-down approach, policymakers may impede the very change that is desired. Paradoxically, this effort at control causes teachers to become more controlling, more frustrated, less efficacious, and less motivated, thereby undermining the very goals and ideals that policymakers, pundits and other external forces demand of teachers and schools.

To counter such possibilities as educational change transpires, it remains necessary and appropriate to continue to examine the lives, experiences and perspectives of teachers and their experiences in order to identify, acknowledge and work to improve conditions that impact teacher morale, motivation, job satisfaction, efficacy, and growth. If educational commentators continue to insist on using international comparisons to criticize teachers and schools, then they must also realize that in all of the high-performing countries, teaching is a sought-after profession largely because teachers “are praised and prized for what they do” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 16). Perhaps the greatest lesson that can be learned by American education policymakers is that, in other countries, “teaching is not just referred to as a profession but is actually treated as one” (Tucker, 2012, p. 191). These developments have the potential to “raise teachers’ status while sustaining the ‘psychic rewards’ and vocational principles that characterise their professionalism” (Hargreaves, 2009, p. 227). Most importantly, by doing so, students’ school experiences and overall performance will be strengthened.

Awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness to teachers’ concerns, experience, expertise, values, and perspectives are vital to a genuine transformation, with the goal of providing students with optimal conditions for learning and growth. Mindful of these salient and complex forces at work in teachers’ lives and in the cultures of schools, ensuring that teachers are at the forefront of educational policy efforts is fundamental. By genuinely including and valuing teachers’ voices as the preeminent guiding force in educational policymaking, in concert with perspectives and input of policymakers and other stakeholders, collectively, we will engender an authentic, enduring transformation in education.

Appendix

Theme 1: The affective dimensions of teaching strongly influence teachers' professional identities, morale and motivation.

Percentage of study participants who provided evidence during their respective interviews in support of the following subthemes:

Teacher motivation, morale and professional identity are strongly associated with teachers' belief in the moral purpose of their work.	88
Passion for teaching is strongly associated with teachers' professional identities, their belief in the moral purpose of their work, as well as their interactions with, and views of, their students.	96
Because teachers' motivation, morale and professional identity are strongly associated with their interactions with, and views of, students, teachers feel a strong sense of obligation to their students' success, well-being and growth.	100
Teachers often characterize their interactions with, and views of, students using non-cognitive terms.	100
Expectations of teachers, daily demands and policy pressures challenge teacher morale, motivation and professional identity.	63
Elements of the global education reform movement, including standardized testing, are often not aligned to teachers' perceptions of the qualities of effective teaching and teachers.	79

Theme 2: External views of the profession impact teachers' self-perceptions and morale.

Percentage of study participants who provided evidence during their respective interviews in support of the following subthemes:

Education policy and policymakers influence public perceptions of the teaching profession and teacher morale.	96
International comparisons influence public perceptions of the teaching profession and teacher morale.	83
The media influences public perception of the teaching profession and teacher morale.	63
Policymakers and the general public generally misunderstand teachers, teaching, and current educational values and dynamics.	92
Traditional norms and structures contribute to negative views of the teaching profession.	79
External views of the profession affect the respect afforded to teachers, teacher morale and the status of the teaching profession.	88
While many teachers feel respected at the local level, they perceive diminished respect at the state and national levels.	75

Theme 3: Teachers' sense of efficacy is dynamic, contextual, and influenced by many factors.

Percentage of study participants who provided evidence during their respective interviews in support of the following subthemes:

Teacher morale, motivation and professional identity are influenced by teachers' sense of efficacy.	58
Professional validation from leadership, colleagues, students, and other sources contribute to teachers' sense of efficacy.	100
Meaningful professional growth contributes to a strong sense of efficacy.	79
Policy changes and/or changes in teachers' work lives have an impact on one's sense of efficacy and professional identity.	71
Resilience and determination are important personality traits for teachers.	58

Theme 4: Recognized and validated teachers feel compelled to elevate the profession.

Percentage of study participants who provided evidence during their respective interviews in support of the following subthemes:

Being recognized and validated as a teacher are important contributing variables in one's professional growth and morale.	54
Genuine teacher involvement in decision-making positively affects teacher morale and sense of efficacy.	83
Teachers feel that there is a strong need for teacher voice to be at the forefront of policymaking.	75
Recognized and validated teachers feel a sense of responsibility to advocate for their profession.	54
There are a variety of factors that limit teachers' ability to advocate for their profession.	46
Teachers believe that a well-designed career continuum would contribute to meaningful professional growth.	29

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