

**IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY
HERE'S HOW**

TheJoyceFoundation

Once kids walk in the school door, the most important factor for how well they learn is the quality of their teachers.

Having good teachers is important for all kids.

But it's especially important for kids who are falling behind.

Research shows that students who are taught by a really good teacher can make as much as a year and a half's worth of progress in a single year. They start to close the achievement gap. They catch up to where they should be.

But how do we know who's a good teacher?

How do we find the best teachers and attract them to schools where kids need them most?

How can schools help teachers do the best job? How should they reward them when they do?

We have some answers. Some school districts are working on how to find and reward the best teachers. Others are seeking better ways to evaluate teachers and help them improve performance. At the Joyce Foundation, we've supported some of these innovative ideas and have funded research to evaluate the results. This report summarizes the results of that research and practice on how to improve teacher supply, distribution and evaluation systems—what's called "human capital management" in education.

Those studies have identified what strategies work best. But they also tell us that no single strategy is enough. We need a comprehensive approach that incorporates all the policy changes described in this guidebook.

WE NEED TO IMPROVE HOW WE RECRUIT, SUPPORT, EVALUATE, AND REWARD TEACHERS TO GET THE BEST TEACHING FOR KIDS WHO NEED IT MOST.

HERE'S HOW.

GO FOR THE TALENT.

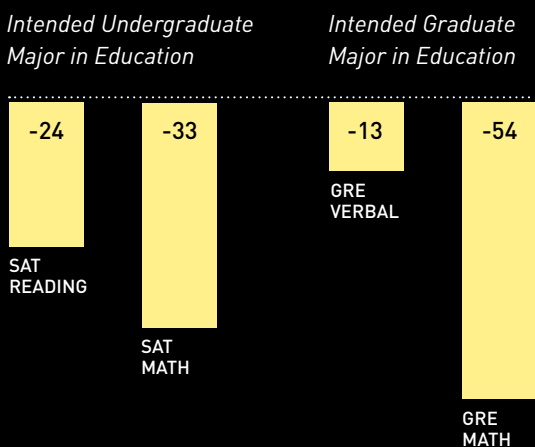
START WITH A BETTER POOL OF CANDIDATES.

Sad to say, most top students don't go into education. Among seniors going to college, those who plan to become teachers score in the bottom quarter in reading and math tests.

Once in college, education majors take courses in subject areas (math, social studies, etc.) and in teaching methods. But there's no strong evidence that education courses help make people good teachers. Most states don't even collect meaningful data to find out. Only two states (Louisiana and Tennessee) track how well teacher training boosts student achievement.

Not the cream of the crop

*Comparing Scores of Education Majors and Test Scores Overall
2008 Mean Scores*



Source:

Education Testing Service. "Guide to the Use of Scores 2008-09"; College Board SAT "2008 College Bound Seniors Total Group Profile Report"

WE NEED TO DRAW MORE TALENTED PEOPLE INTO TEACHING.

That includes college grads who majored in other, more rigorous subjects and people who have pursued another career and then decide to share their experience by becoming teachers. We can improve the talent pool by removing barriers—for example, by not making such candidates take education courses of questionable value.

IDENTIFY WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER.

That's harder than it sounds. Nobody has figured out what qualities predict success in teaching. Having an advanced degree doesn't mean someone will perform better in the classroom. Experience doesn't either: teachers, like everyone else, do better after a couple years on the job, but after that, teachers with a few years experience do just as well at boosting kids' achievement as those who've been around a long time. We do know communications skills are important. People who score well on tests like the verbal sections of ACT or SAT consistently make good teachers. But overall, school districts can help figure out the puzzle by collecting a lot of information about the teachers they hire, and then seeing what qualities consistently show up in those who become successful teachers.

HIRE THE BEST TEACHERS FOR EACH SCHOOL.

In many school districts, central office administrators do the initial screening and interviewing of prospective teachers; only after that do principals meet them. New teachers have little control over where they are assigned—sometimes they don't even enter the building until the first day of school. And many positions are filled by teachers with seniority transferring from elsewhere, with little input from the principal. This system should be changed. Principals have the best understanding of the school's needs, and they are accountable for results. They should have much more control over hiring. They should choose teachers strategically—pick those who can meet identified needs and work as a team to close the achievement gap.

One more thing: big city schools would have a better shot at getting the best candidates if they started recruiting much earlier. Right now, city schools typically announce vacancies in late summer, by which time suburban and private schools have already snatched up many top prospects. City schools should jump to the head of the line.

MAKE RESULTS COUNT.

SCRAP MEANINGLESS TEACHER EVALUATIONS AND START AGAIN.

“My perspective on the evaluation process is that it is a joke,” said one Chicago teacher. She was rated “superior,” but, she said, “I have never seen or heard of someone getting anything less than superior.” Like her colleagues, the vast majority of teachers get positive evaluations, no matter how well or poorly their students perform. Evaluations typically contain little detail to show who are outstanding teachers and who are poor performers. They don’t relate teacher performance to school goals or identify strengths and weaknesses that could be used to start turning things around. And because so few teachers are rated “unsatisfactory,” few teachers are ever fired. Of the nearly 100,000 tenured teachers in Illinois, on average only two are fired each year for poor performance.

Really?

91%

of Chicago Public School teachers received a “superior” or “excellent” evaluation rating in 2007-08

66%

of Chicago Public School schools failed to meet state standards that same year

Source: *The New Teacher Project (2009)*

ACCURATELY MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS IS KEY TO IMPROVING QUALITY.

Evaluations should take into account student progress, thus recognizing teachers who help low-achieving students improve. Schools should create a feedback loop that recognizes progress, identifies problems, offers help, and measures results. And evaluations should have consequences. The best teachers should be rewarded, and low performers should be encouraged to seek other work.

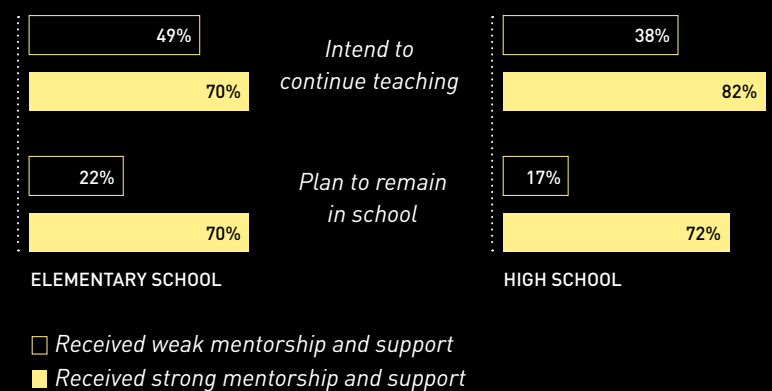
More meaningful evaluations can lead to better hiring and placement decisions, as well as incentives and rewards for great work. Policy changes in this area should be an urgent priority.

HELP TEACHERS IMPROVE.

DON'T LET NEW TEACHERS FLOUNDER.

Many school districts throw new teachers into the toughest classes and watch what happens. That’s not fair to teachers or students. Kids who are struggling need the most skillful teachers, not those who are just figuring out what they’re doing. And most new teachers don’t get the help they need in those first critical months.

Sink or Swim



Source: *Chicago Tribune*

Fortunately, some districts are experimenting with strong programs for new teachers. These include mentoring by an experienced teacher, opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, and extra resources. These ideas make sense; we need more of them. And we should insist that new teachers get manageable assignments until they’re more experienced.

OFFER TRAINING THAT MAKES SENSE.

School districts spend an estimated \$14 billion a year on courses and workshops to improve teacher skills. But those courses often have little to do with what’s actually happening in the school, and there is little follow-up to implement what teachers have learned. Well-intentioned though they may be, such courses are often a waste of time.

Effective professional development should be tied to the school’s goals and its curriculum. Data on where students need additional help, or where teachers need better skills, should determine priorities. Teachers should be encouraged to work and learn together, so that lessons are implemented. Top teachers should choose their own enrichment courses, but less effective teachers should be directed to activities to improve their skills.

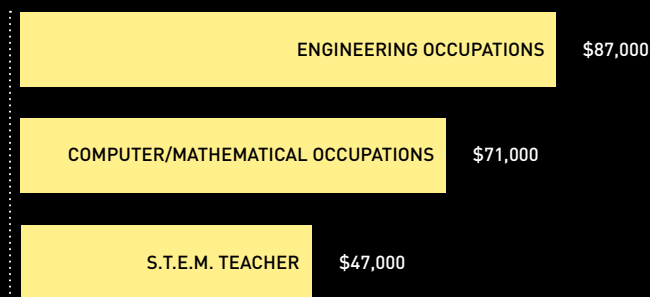
REWARD EXCELLENCE.

PAY FOR PERFORMANCE.

Teachers' paychecks are calculated based on how long they've been teaching and what degrees they have. They don't get paid extra for doing a good job or for taking on a really tough assignment and succeeding. And schools can't pay more in fields like math and science, where private sector jobs offer higher salaries.

No contest

Average Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Teachers' Salaries vs. Comparable Private Sector Salaries



Source: Fuller, Ed. "Secondary Mathematics and Science Teachers in Texas: Supply, Demand and Quality" (2009)

Reworking teachers' salaries could help improve quality across the board. A sensible salary structure would make it easier to attract talented people, encourage teachers to take on tough assignments, reward those who do an outstanding job, hold on to smart young teachers (who now must wait years to reach peak earnings), and entice people with hard-to-match skills to consider becoming a teacher.

REWORK TENURE.

After their first few years on the job, most teachers get tenure. This is a form of job security meant to protect them from political pressure or personal attacks. A tenured teacher can only be dismissed for a serious offense, after hearings and multiple appeals. Tenure could help keep outstanding teachers, but it often works in reverse. Almost every teacher gets tenure, regardless of the quality of their work. Once they do, it's difficult to get rid of them no matter how poorly they teach. One study found that it could take two years to terminate a poorly performing tenured teacher, with many hours of the principal's time spent observing and documenting problems.

Schools should use clear standards to identify the best teachers and offer them tenure. That would improve quality across the board, by holding onto the best teachers and giving others a model and an incentive to improve performance.

REDO RETIREMENT.

Pension benefits are a huge part of teachers' compensation (and a huge part of state budgets). But, like salaries, they are not tied to quality. In fact, traditional pension systems can undermine quality. Some pension arrangements give experienced teachers incentives to leave when they're at the top of their game. Others trap people in teaching jobs they're not very good at and not happy doing, in order to qualify for benefits they earned years ago. And for young people, who are used to portable benefits like 401ks, traditional pensions can actually turn them away from teaching.

Some simple reforms could change the incentives for young people and experienced, high-performing teachers. Completely redoing retirement benefits will be very complicated. But state budget pressures may force policymakers to take up the challenge. When they do, they should make sure the new systems reinforce efforts to attract and retain top quality teachers.

HOW YOU CAN HELP.

Most states and districts could do more to support high-quality teaching, especially for students who need the most help.

States and districts can improve the way they train, select, place, evaluate, and compensate teachers to encourage and reward them for being effective at promoting student learning.

No other school factor has more impact on how much students learn than the quality of their teachers. As parents and concerned community members, you can stand up for all children's right to a good education. Start by searching out other parents, parent organizations or community partners that work for quality schools. They can connect you with others who are interested in education reform, provide you with additional information, and answer your questions on school reform and teacher quality.

You can also ask your principals, school district officials, and state legislators some key questions and press them to make important changes.

ASK YOUR SCHOOL...

- 1 What is your child expected to learn this year and what should progress look like throughout the year? How does this compare to the state standards (available online on your state education website)?
- 2 What criteria does the principal use to evaluate teachers, and what is the rating system? What percentage of teachers are rated at each level (excellent, good, etc.)? What is the principal or district doing to improve instruction by those rated the lowest?
- 3 How long has your teacher been teaching? Do teachers, new and experienced, have a system of ongoing mentorship and collaboration to strengthen their teaching skills? For junior high or high school students, did your child's teachers major in the subject area they are currently teaching?

ASK YOUR SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL BOARD...

- 4 How does the district train school leaders to evaluate teachers? Do they learn how to observe and evaluate classroom instruction? Do they develop the skills necessary to identify the strongest and weakest teachers in their building? Do they incorporate student performance into the evaluation?
- 5 How rigorous are district data systems? Are they able to collect and analyze data to link teacher characteristics and teacher effectiveness? For example, can the district track which education programs their teachers came from and which have higher percentages of teachers who have improved student achievement?

- 6 Does the district offer bonuses for the highest performing teachers or for teachers who take tough assignments? If the district's union contract prohibits these changes, work with the district and the union to support them in changing the contract during the next contract negotiation.
- 7 What types of professional development are provided for highly effective teachers? What is offered for the weakest teachers? Are programs designed to meet the individual needs of each teacher?

ASK YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS...

- 8 To support policies that encourage highly desirable candidates to enter teaching. This can be achieved, for example, by reducing state tuition or offering loan forgiveness programs for highly desirable candidates who want to teach in high-need subject areas or in low-performing schools.
- 9 To support strong teacher and principal evaluation systems that take into account students' academic performance.
- 10 To reserve teacher certification or tenure until after a teacher has demonstrated a track record of effectiveness with kids.
- 11 To require districts to give low-performing schools or those in high poverty areas top priority in recruitment and hiring.
- 12 To support changes in state policy to improve how effective teachers are compensated. States can offer performance-based awards to teachers who succeed in hard-to-staff schools. They can also invest state funds in promising local pilots of compensation reform.

Finally, visit www.joycefdn.org/teacherquality to find a more in-depth report on the research in this book. You'll also find information about teacher quality reform, other resources and organizations you can connect to for support, and more ideas on how you can advocate for change.

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