
Rethinking the Teaching Job

Summary of Findings from Community Discussions | Spring 2023

Introduction

Teaching quality has a bigger influence on student achievement than any other school-related factor. Despite decades of research proving the importance of great teachers, little public attention has focused on realistic solutions that would allow teaching to be a more sustainable, flexible, attractive profession. Teachers report high levels of job stress, insufficient support, and a lack of schedule flexibility.

To enable teachers to do their best work, it's time to rethink the role of the teacher. The Rennie Center hosted one community forum focused on hearing directly from educators and a series of additional discussions focused on gathering input from educators, administrators, district- and state-level leaders, teachers union leadership, and representatives from teaching-focused organizations throughout the Commonwealth. During these discussions, attendees shared their ideas about opportunities to rethink the teaching profession. A summary of their ideas is included below. The inclusion of an idea or recommendation in this summary does not signify the Rennie Center's endorsement.

Teacher Preparation

Provide **low or no-cost preparation** options for aspiring teachers

- Provide robust support for those taking teacher licensure exams. Subsidize the cost of exams and provide free test preparation. MTEs are a known barrier for people of color seeking to enter the profession. DESE's Teacher Diversification Grant has been helpful in this area.
- Teachers should not be burdened with loans or debt for teacher prep programs. To aid against teacher burnout, make required education degrees and training (e.g., bachelor's degrees, teacher preparation program costs) free, in exchange for a certain commitment to public schools.

Revamp traditional **teacher preparation programs**

- Begin classroom experience/apprenticeships in the first year of teacher preparation programs.
 - Extend pre-service training into the first year of teaching. Pre-service programs can share the responsibility for coaching and mentoring first-year teachers who graduated from their programs. This would minimize risk for students receiving instruction from inexperienced teachers.
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- Expand opportunities for high school students to gain classroom experience to begin to strengthen a local, regionalized pipeline of educators.
- Ensure teacher preparation programs are designed in a way that attracts and retains a diverse teaching force that is representative of the student population.

Refine and expand **alternative pathways into teaching**

- Participants expressed confidence in residency models and see these as a valuable pathway to teaching, but these should be paired with robust support during the first few years of teaching.
- Strengthen pathways for paraprofessionals to become teachers. Ensure that paraprofessionals receive strong mentoring and instructionally focused feedback from mentor teachers.
- Incentivize teaching as an option for career changers. Market residency models in a way that accounts for prior work experience.
- Expand pathways for high school and higher education students to begin paid student teaching opportunities, simultaneously building the educator pipeline and providing support in classrooms.
- Offer additional, innovative methods for aspiring educators to obtain necessary teaching licenses and credentials.

Early Career

Provide opportunities for new teachers to **co-teach with experienced educators**

- Offer a co-teaching and co-planning model for all first-year teachers. Build upon effective, existing examples seen in many special education team teaching models.
- Ensure new teachers have many opportunities to watch and learn from veteran teachers. When co-teaching is offered, ensure teachers are purposefully matched and veteran teachers receive training on effective co-teaching.
- Consider a dual certification requirement for co-taught classrooms to support meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities and English learners.

Strengthen mentoring supports for new teachers

- Consider clustering support by pairing one excellent, experienced teacher with three novice teachers. In addition to support from the veteran educator, this will allow new teachers to support one another.

- Model early teaching based on medical residency model. Pair new teachers with experienced teachers for at least half of the first year. Gradually remove scaffolds for new teachers over the course of three years.

Reduce new teacher workloads to provide more time for coaching, planning, and professional development

- Inventory all responsibilities on teachers' plates and divide them among a team of people. Do not require new teachers to do all things.
- Provide a reduced workload with more time for collaboration with experienced teachers. Ensure veteran teacher compensation reflects the added workload of supporting new teachers.
- Shift union contracts to reduce the burden on new teachers. Currently, many union contracts make the workload more intense for early career teachers, while lightening the workload of experienced teachers.
- Provide a bank of collaborative lesson plans for teachers to reference and use to differentiate for their students.

Strengthen professional development for new teachers

- Provide robust coaching for the first three years with a particular focus on classroom management and high-quality instruction.
- Ensure observers for new teachers are warm and supportive. Provide frequent observations that are not connected to evaluation.
- Offer professional development that includes opportunities for teachers to step outside of their school building to better understand and engage with their community.
- Prioritize opportunities for educators to share and develop what brings them joy in the profession to build a culture of belonging.
- Utilize technology to connect teachers across different school buildings—especially those teaching in different types of schools—to create a larger, more diverse ecosystem of educator support and community.
- Offer ways for educators to see other policy levers and decision-making tables that impact their classrooms (e.g., visiting the district's central office, having discussions with district or state education leaders)

Increase compensation more rapidly for high-performing new teachers

- Ensure that high-performing new teachers receive higher compensation than lower-performing teachers.

Experienced Educators

Incentivize experienced educators to **remain in the classroom**

- Work to combat the stigma that classroom teaching is a stepping stone before “moving up” to administrative positions.
- Provide paid opportunities for classroom teachers to influence school or district policy.
- Provide growth opportunities that temporarily bring teachers out of the school/classroom (e.g., externships), especially those that offer a focus on advocacy or education policy.
- Offer additional ways for experienced educators to better understand and collaborate with teachers unions’ negotiations and decision-making processes.

Make **new teacher development** a core component of experienced educators’ role

- Provide a leadership role for veteran teachers in new teacher onboarding and coaching
- Provide flexible instructional coaching roles that enable experienced educators to teach part-time and coach part-time
- Compensate experienced teachers for new teacher development

Flexibility and Sustainability

Shift teachers’ work to a **team-based structure**

- Have educators work as a team, sharing the responsibility for more students while allowing teachers to take on more individualized roles and areas of expertise. Create flexibility on the team when teachers need to miss a day of school, attend PD outside of school, create lesson or unit plans, etc.
- Change teacher mindsets around collaboration. Recognize that team teaching will be a significant shift for many teachers, and teachers will need significant professional development to prepare for team teaching.

Provide teachers with **more support for non-instructional tasks**

- Inventory all components of teachers’ roles. Take certain roles off of teachers’ plates such as making copies, cleaning the classroom, etc.
- Provide more robust social emotional support. Clearly differentiate what can and should be the responsibility of the teacher vs. where teachers need the support of another professional.
- Utilize technology for as many administrative or non-instructional tasks as possible to lighten educators’ load.

- Build a flexible schedule that allows educators the space and time to visit with families within reasonable working hours.
- Provide educators with mental, emotional, and physical health support to promote an inclusive, sustainable educator community.

Provide teachers with **more schedule flexibility**

- Make teaching a more attractive profession by offering less rigid work hours while maintaining a consistent school day for students. This will require different staffing models.
- Shift to a four-day teaching week, with one school day led by community partners and focused on enrichment activities.
- Allow teachers to occasionally work from home while maximizing benefits of hybrid work opportunities and less commute time.
- Provide teachers with flexibility to leave the school building for a lunch break.
- Utilize paraprofessionals to lead certain components of lessons, freeing up more of teachers' time for meetings and other tasks.
- Provide time in the workday for non-teaching tasks (grading, prep, etc.) while ensuring teachers do not have to take work home with them.

General

A range of other themes emerged during conversations. Themes not captured above are highlighted below.

- **Increase teacher compensation** to match similarly demanding professions and work to ensure teaching is viewed as a necessary and respected profession.
- **Strengthen a sense of community** for school-based staff. Intentionally create opportunities for teachers/school-based staff to connect outside of school. Develop ways to intentionally bring members of the **community into the school building** to build lasting relationships.
- **Revamp the MCAS** to measure and prioritize student growth.
- Provide teachers with **greater curriculum autonomy**, including time to adapt curriculum to ensure it is culturally responsive.
- Ensure schools are **fully funded**.
- Strive for schools to be **a place full of joy and belonging** for students, teachers, and staff where everyone feels **physically, mentally, and emotionally safe**.