



Teacher Table Initiative

The Challenge

An excellent teacher matters enormously to the success and health of children and young adults. Every student knows it, parents see it, and the research proves it. And yet, despite the critical role of teachers and widespread consensus about their importance, teachers across the country are frustrated, as evidenced by nationwide challenges in teacher recruitment and retention, and a wave of teacher strikes led by educators taking a stand for themselves and their students. If we are to truly respond to this outcry and the conditions that have led to it, we must work to dramatically change how teachers are seen and how they are engaged in the policies and practices that impact them.

An Urgent Need: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

Specific teacher shortage areas are partly caused by a failure to recruit teachers where they are needed most. The current data show historic shortages in areas such as special education and math and in certain geographic locations, like rural and inner-city urban communities. Persistent teacher shortages exist in hard-to-staff subjects, while an excess supply of candidates compete for teaching positions in other subject areas.¹ One cause of current and upcoming shortages may be economic growth and retirements, but evidence suggests that a growing negative view of the teaching profession is likely the primary cause. Interviews with current teachers reveal that many believe their profession is viewed as sub-par or service-oriented, and that they do not believe there is enough effort to encourage ambitious and high-performing students to pursue a career in teaching. Some teachers report that they were initially discouraged to enter the profession, and many report an unwillingness to recommend teaching as a profession to their own students.

Parallel to attracting great teachers is the challenge of keeping great teachers. Although job retention remains strong in education overall, studies show it is difficult to retain teachers in the districts and subject areas where excellent teachers are needed most. Teacher retention, or lack thereof, contributes to teacher shortages as significantly as recruitment failures. In 2012-2013, about 84% of public school teachers taught in the same school for both the current and previous years. However, as poverty level in schools rose (measured by percentage of students approved for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL)), this number fell. For high poverty schools (with 75% FRPL), only 78% of teachers stayed.² Additionally, more than 22% of teachers who continued teaching but in a different school cited school factors as the main reason for moving.³ Among these conditions that impact retention may be a lack of meaningful professional development, engagement, and career development opportunities.

Many efforts at the national, state, and local level have aimed to promote the kind of autonomy, time for collaboration, and school leadership that attract and keep great teachers. However, teachers have still

¹ Rockefeller Institute of Government. Background: A cursory examination of teacher shortages in the United States. June 2017.

² [Schools and Staffing Survey "Table 2. Number and percentage distribution of public school teacher stayers, movers, and leavers, by selected teacher and school characteristics in the base year: 2012-13"](#)

³ [Schools and Staffing Survey "Table 4. Percentage distribution of public school teacher movers who changed schools involuntarily or who rated various reasons as the most important in their decision to move from their base year school: 2011-12 through 2012-13"](#)

traditionally been excluded from system-level conversations about our education system in which they teach. Not being seen or treated as legitimate professionals, leaders, or decision makers, teachers have not been provided the training and support required, nor the platforms to voice their experience and expertise. Because teacher expertise and experience has not consistently and meaningfully influenced attempted solutions, persistent problems have gone unsolved. However, there is an opportunity to operationalize and institutionalize mechanisms to involve teachers in policy-making, elevate the teaching profession, and develop strategies that dramatically change the way educators are perceived, supported, and engaged.

Teacher Table Initiative: Meaningfully Leveraging Teacher Expertise and Experience

Establishing and institutionalizing mechanisms to leverage teacher leadership will be imperative to addressing the most pressing issues in education. It is our responsibility to equip teachers with the tools and skills to effectively share their expertise, experience, and insights with the broader education community and provide them a platform to do so. To do this, states and organizations that care about fundamental changes to the teaching profession and the perception of the profession have a collective responsibility to elevate teachers, bringing together their proven approaches, resources, existing strands of work, and a spirit of compromise to fuel change at the state and local level.

Teacher Tables are designed to purposefully convene the leaders, influencers, and decision-makers in each state at the same table, with classroom teachers making up at least 50% of members. These alliances focus on state priorities and context, with local leaders identifying specific problems facing teachers in the state and identifying shared goals, strategies, and measurable objectives to realize solutions. Teacher Tables rely on academic research and data, as well as previous successes, to identify strategic baselines.

Each state's efforts are implemented in accordance with an action plan that drives political, policy and practical outcomes that will elevate teachers. Specifically, Teacher Tables will aim to change how teachers are seen, how they are engaged, and ultimately what strategies are developed and implemented to address state-specific recruitment and retention issues. CCSSO will collect data on Teacher Table impact based on state goals and generally will include teacher survey data, number of new opportunities and roles for teachers, new SEA strategies related to teacher recruitment and retention and/or involving teacher input, and preliminary data on the impact of Teacher Table workstreams on state teacher shortage areas.

A Bold Vision: Empowering Teachers and the Profession Nationwide

Success in responding to the justified outcry from dissatisfied teachers and seizing the moment to finally change the way our country views and treats teachers will only be achievable if teachers are leading the way to solutions, grounded in local context and data. Teachers are demanding better for themselves and for their students, and they deserve it. We must act with urgency to establish and institutionalize mechanisms to empower teachers to influence policy and practice that impact them and their students. With the launch of the first State Teacher Tables in New York and Florida, there is momentum and a foundation upon which to model future Teacher Tables, with the goal of launching 20 Teacher Tables by 2025.