



Improving Teaching Quality

One of the greatest challenges facing our schools is the ability to provide every student with high-quality instruction. Research shows that teacher quality is one of the most important school-related variables affecting student achievement. As teaching and learning conditions in many areas have deteriorated and teacher salaries have not kept pace with inflation, it has become more difficult to attract and retain the best teachers in America's classrooms. The AFT believes there is much that can be done to remedy this situation.

Based on research and members' experience, the AFT has identified key elements that are essential to ensuring that all children have access to quality teachers and teaching. We are committed to pursuing improvements in teaching quality by working with states and local school districts to develop and implement high-quality professional development through legislation and negotiations. It takes equally committed community partners who want to eradicate the nonschool factors that impede student learning to collaborate with us in these efforts. Working together on the recommendations outlined below, we can accomplish our shared goals of improving teaching quality and student achievement alike.

Eliminate Hard-to-Staff Schools

Right now, high-poverty, low-achieving schools nationwide are losing good teachers. The teachers needed in these schools are not applying for the vacant positions. And the teachers who are recruited often leave these schools because working conditions make it impossible for them

to do the best job they can. This turnover typically means a less cohesive and less experienced staff. How can we stem this turnover? What would attract teachers to teach in these challenging schools?

Certainly a substantial salary increase would be part of any solution. But, survey data, as well as conversations with scores of teachers, make it clear that increased pay alone will not get teachers to teach in schools that have historically failed their teachers and students. Teachers are more likely to come—and to stay—if a school is known to have an effective principal, safe and clean facilities, exciting opportunities for professional development and collaboration, supportive conditions that include teachers having a say in decision-making, and the staff and resources to quickly and effectively provide the one-on-one and small-group work necessary to help struggling students.

Beyond the basics, districts vary on the specific conditions that need to be in place to attract and retain quality teachers. In some cases, the most appealing incentives also might include tuition reimbursement, housing vouchers, and classroom management; in other cases, pension credits and opportunities to transfer as a group along with other qualified colleagues would work.

Implement high entry standards and support for new teachers through Peer Assistance and Review (PAR)

Teaching is a hard job—and novice teachers need significant support as they come to understand curriculum goals and objectives

while also dealing with professional expectations and responsibilities. When support is not provided, teachers leave—and our kids are shortchanged. As financially strapped school districts waste money on the endless cycle of recruiting, training and replacing new teachers, the education of students suffers from the faculty turnover. Further, under the current system, tenure decisions are often made on the fly, by ill-prepared principals without the time or the expertise to make informed judgments.

To address both issues, we propose a professional induction program for new teachers, ending in peer review. In Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) programs, new teachers benefit from intensive assistance and training from skilled colleagues—and the integrity and quality of the teaching profession benefits as new teachers meet the standards of a rigorous pretenure review by knowledgeable peers.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Teacher quality is an issue that affects everyone. The students in our nation’s classrooms are the leaders of tomorrow. We know the value of high-quality teaching. We owe it to the future to guarantee that today’s students have access to the high-quality teachers, teaching and resources they need to be successful.

It’s important to educate yourself and your community about the educational equity that exists in the school district. This information can be used to support teacher-quality initiatives. Begin with some of the basic information below and build from there.

Staffing Hard-to-Staff Schools

- Contact the AFT and find out what programs/ incentives and contract language have been successfully implemented to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools.
- Identify the hard-to-staff schools in your district. Meet with the teachers in these schools to discuss their resources, professional development and working conditions.
- Meet with the superintendent to discuss the supports and resources available to teachers

in your local hard-to-staff schools.

- Invite a local union leader who has dealt with this issue to speak with your executive board.
- Identify a team to develop contract language that targets teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools.
- Develop a pilot project for a limited number of hard-to-staff schools that would implement programs to increase teacher retention at these sites. Then present the plan to the local school board.

Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) for New Teachers

- Engage your superintendent in discussions about PAR programs in your state or in other states.
- Invite a leader from another AFT affiliate that has a PAR program to talk to your governing board, negotiations team and/or building representatives. The AFT can help you find a speaker.
- Use the AFT’s Web-based resources to find examples of contract language you can use as you develop proposals for a PAR program.
- Learn about other locals that have developed successful induction and mentoring programs through the AFT’s Web-based resources.
- Develop contract language that guarantees union participation in the design of the mentoring programs, and in the training and selection of mentors.
- Develop contract language that provides union participation in the PAR design and implementation.
- Consider starting with a new-teacher mentorship program where novices are supported by carefully selected colleagues—but the mentor does not make a recommendation regarding continued employment.
- Develop a pilot PAR program in which only a few teachers receive PAR supports—make it an optional program or start it in only a few schools.
- Ask state leaders to invite a local leader who has developed and implemented a successful PAR program to make a presentation at a convention or conference.
- Ask state leaders to seek legislation that supports locally negotiated PAR programs.

IMPROVED TEACHING QUALITY: EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

The ABC Unified School District, located in southeast Los Angeles County, in partnership with the ABC Federation of Teachers (ABCFT), its local union, launched a comprehensive initiative to address the challenges within the district's hard-to-staff schools. They instituted an interconnected set of recruitment, retention and retirement practices to target the district's teacher recruitment and retention challenges. At the annual New Teachers' Orientation, newcomers are welcomed and acclimated to ABC, its expectations, and the district's available resources and supports. During the summers, the district offers a Professional Development Academy for teachers to focus on ways to improve student learning, such as curriculum training and classroom management. The negotiated contract provides entry salaries that are in the area's top quartile as well as \$5,000 to new hires, which can be used to defray the high costs of housing and transportation that come with teaching there. This incentive is just one component of an aggressive package developed through collaboration between the district and the union. Today, there are no hard-to-staff schools in ABC. Federal and state funds are used to support such district/union efforts.

New York state provides a unique network of more than 100 teacher centers that have the capacity to support teachers in learning the instructional strategies that lead to success in hard-to-staff schools. This kind of professional development lessens the isolation of teachers who struggle to implement effective strategies while facing obstacles that often lead to teachers looking for jobs in other schools. Teacher centers are funded by grants directly from the state Legislature, and each center is governed by a policy board. As defined in New York law, these policy boards must include a majority of teachers appointed by the collective bargaining agent. There are three models of teacher centers in the state, and each center has the capacity to respond to the unique and targeted professional development needs of its constituents. The New York City center is a multiple-schools model; the single-district model is a direct-service model; and the comprehensive model provides smaller districts with a collaborative framework that brings together their resources to maximize capacity and reach.

The **Toledo (Ohio) Plan** is an effective teacher-performance tool based on peer coaching and evaluation. Boldly different from the traditional evaluation procedures used by other school systems, intern-intervention has generated considerable national and international attention for Toledo. Negotiated by the Toledo Federation of Teachers in the early 1980s, this program provides a formula for the professional development of beginning teachers and an evaluation system that detects and screens out those who show little aptitude for the classroom. Additionally, experienced teachers who are severely deficient in performance are given intensive peer assistance to bring their work up to acceptable standards. The program provides assistance from peers who are themselves excellent teachers. All new teachers participate in the Intern Program, in which they are assigned consulting teachers (mentors) who provide both professional development and evaluation. The consulting teacher conducts a complete evaluation of the intern's progress in meeting the performance standards of the Toledo Public Schools. The consulting teacher assigned to each intern has final evaluation responsibility and recommends to the Intern Board of Review the future employment status of the intern teacher. This board accepts or rejects the recommendation of the consulting teacher. The nine-member board is composed of five teachers and four administrators. Six votes are required to reverse a consulting teacher's recommendation.

RESOURCES

Staffing Hard-to-Staff Schools

AFT Resolution: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools, www.aft.org/about/resolutions/2007/recruit-retain.htm.

Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools, July 2007, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/h2s.pdf.

“Why New Teachers Stay,” by Susan Moore Johnson and the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, *American Educator*, Summer 2006, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/summer06/Teacher.pdf.

“Cultivate the Right Solution: It’s Attracting and Retaining Experienced Teachers,” by Lynn W. Gregory, Nancy Nevarez, and Alexandra T. Weinbaum, *American Educator*, Winter 2006-2007, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/winter06-07/Experience_gap.pdf.

For more information on staffing hard-to-staff schools, contact Richelle Patterson at rpatters@aft.org.

Peer Assistance and Review for New Teachers

Peer Assistance & Review: an AFT/NEA Handbook Prepared for Shaping the Future, An AFT/NEA Conference on Teacher Quality, Sept. 25–27, 1998, Washington, D.C., www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/parhndbk.pdf.

The Toledo Plan: Peer Assistance and Peer Review—Practical Advice for Beginners, Toledo Federation of Teachers, 2001.

The Toledo Plan—A Description, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/parhndbk.pdf.

A Report of AFT Task Force on Union-Sponsored Professional Development, American Federation of Teachers, June 2001, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/Taskforceprodev.pdf.

For more information on peer assistance and review, contact Joan Devlin at jdevlin@aft.org.



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