

Finding and Keeping the Teachers We Need

Teachers make the greatest impact on students – what they learn, how they learn it, and what they do with it. Decades of research clearly demonstrate that a quality teacher, more than any other factor, enables students to overcome obstacles to learning like poverty and can even erase the achievement gap. The problem is that many teachers lack the skills and opportunities they need to become high-quality educators. And those who are most qualified work in schools where students are doing fairly well on their own.

As standards rise, testing increases, and achievement stagnates, the American high school graduates too few students, and even those students lack the skills they need for life after high school. If we are to help students meet the demands of college and an increasingly competitive global economy, then we must provide them with skilled teachers who stay in the profession long enough to make a difference.

- Teachers make the biggest impact on student learning. The most effective teachers produce student gains almost four times greater than least effective teachers. Students with three effective teachers in a row make gains almost three times higher than students with three ineffective teachers. (Haycock, 1998).
- But many teachers have low skills and qualifications, especially those who teach poor students. One in four high school classes is taught by a teacher without a college major or minor in that subject. Students in poor and minority schools are twice as likely to have an inexperienced teacher. The same students are 61% more likely to be assigned an uncertified teacher (Carey, 2004).
- Yet we do know that certain teaching skills lead to student learning – verbal ability, knowledge of the subject taught, and utilizing good teaching methods. (Leigh & Mead, 2005). High school teachers must also know how to teach literacy strategies, adapt their instruction for English language learners, and meet together to review student work.
- Teachers need 3 to 7 years to ramp up their skills where they consistently improve student achievement (Claycomb & Hawley, 2000; Lopez, 1995). But almost half of all new teachers leave the profession within five years, and as many others transfer to a different school – costing the nation \$5.5 billion a year (Ingersoll, 2003; Alliance, 2005).
- Comprehensive induction programs cut turnover in half and improve teaching skills (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Villar & Strong, publication pending). Induction is a package of training, supports, and assessment during teachers' first few years on the job.

- Teachers and schools deserve a fair and timely hiring experience to ensure a good fit for both. However, many districts hire teachers slowly and as late as the summer or after the school-year begins. The cumbersome process causes the highest qualified teachers to drop out of the process (Levin & Quinn, 2003).
- Teachers who participate in good professional development improve teaching skills which can lead to better student achievement. Unfortunately, only 12 to 27 percent of teachers who receive professional development say it improves their skills (NCES, 2001). Quality professional development is ongoing, long term, focused on subject matter, and requires adults to be active learners (Garet, 2001).

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