

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE
LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION HEARING ON
TEACHER WORKFORCE**

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by
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Compensation and Teacher Working Conditions

I applaud the state's efforts to increase beginning teacher salaries to the level that will attract highly qualified candidates. This should be a continuing priority as the competition for a quality workforce grows. Of course, enhancing salaries is just a first step toward making teaching a lucrative and rewarding career. Enhancing the overall image of teaching as a profession, and raising the general perception that teaching can be both a career that nurtures ones spiritual interests as well as providing financial stability are equally as important.

Individuals who aspire to become teachers need to have some incentive, other than humanitarian, to choose teaching over other careers. Salary is, of course, one significant enticement. But in addition to raising salaries we must raise the esteem of teaching, making it a career that others look upon with respect and admiration; a career that is viewed as noble and worthy of pursuit. New teachers are very idealistic and generally feel as though their work is valuable, rewarding and purposeful; that they are contributing something to "the great ledger" as Steinbeck speaks of in his novel Sweet Thursday. They have a sense of wonder about teaching that fosters contagious enthusiasm. This intangible attribute that is present in young teachers is something that must be nurtured so that it develops into mature understanding and efficacy about the art of teaching. In a sense, we must be careful not to put out the fire before it has a chance to reach its full potential.

In order to nurture this passion, beginning teachers should be afforded plenty of opportunities to build their skills and learn the craft of teaching as they progress through their first few years in the profession. In trade jobs workers progress through apprenticeships to eventually become skilled masters, all the while honing their skills and learning valuable "tricks of the trade." In education we often immediately thrust beginning teachers into very difficult assignments that are far too challenging with little or no support. Consequently they become frustrated, often feel overwhelmed, and quickly become disillusioned about the teaching profession. Research points to a significant number of teachers who leave the profession early in their careers, perhaps because of these reasons. Adopting some sort of apprenticeship model may do much to ease inexperienced teachers into the profession in a way that will increase the chances of their long-term professional survival.

There are a variety of ways of facilitating this "easing in"--pairing a new teachers with experienced mentors, arranging co-teaching partnerships, reducing new teacher workload to provide opportunities to observe experienced educators, providing additional preparation time, and other such creative practices.

A proven practice for new teacher induction is the intern model. In the model we use at Courtyard, intern teachers are given full responsibility for a classroom, but are provided with direct support as they learn the art of teaching. Intern teachers are assigned a university supervisor who meets with them on a regular basis during the school year, observing lessons and providing feedback. They are also paired with a mentor from our staff, a senior teacher who will help guide them through the rigors of their first year on the job. Mentor teachers are paid a stipend for their responsibilities and are asked to meet with interns at least once a week throughout the year. Finally, new intern teachers meet regularly with administrative staff (the principal and assistant principal) to monitor progress.

In addition to focusing on attracting highly qualified beginning teachers, it is also critical that the state devote significant efforts to keep highly trained, experienced educators. As with young teachers, mid-career educators need to feel as though their work continues to have meaning and that there is a purpose to what they do. Unfortunately, they often have to struggle under very difficult circumstances and may ultimately lose the idealism that brought them to the profession in the first place. As the gloss of novelty wears off, some become disillusioned about the limited opportunities for them to achieve financial security and professional job satisfaction.

Currently there are few opportunities for experienced teachers to enhance their salary or achieve a higher standing in the education community, short of going into administration. A variety of options should be available for these individuals that would both keep them in contact with students and give them the opportunities to pass on their significant knowledge to others.

Some teachers may be ready to leave the profession with dignity after a successful career, but before full retirement age. The military style "20 and out" retirement might be a desirable option for those teachers who feel as though, after 20 years or so in the classroom, they are ready for a career change. This "livable wage" retirement option would provide a dignified way out of teaching for those who feel that they have given their best years to teaching. This early out option could also serve to entice some into the profession knowing that they would have the opportunity for more than one successful career in their lifetime.

For individuals who still have the "fire" for teaching and perhaps are just reaching their prime after 20 years, significant incentives should be in place to remain in the profession. As with young teachers, experienced veterans might be given reduced workloads allowing them to mentor intern teachers, do educational research, provide in service instruction to colleagues, take a sabbatical, or even to become part-time university educators to train new teachers. These should all be paid opportunities and compensation should be commensurate with training and experience. And, of course, salaries for mid-career educators should be raised to the point of allowing for a comfortable living in today's economy.

Many experienced teachers often take summer jobs to supplement their teaching salaries. They do consulting work, start a part-time business or do other work that sometimes pays even more than their teaching income. Second jobs can divert focus away from the primary responsibilities of the classroom and overtax already hardworking individuals. If teachers felt that their salaries were commensurate with their training and responsibility, and that compensation was sufficient to provide all the necessities of life, the practice of supplementing their income might be become less prevalent.

Reduced workload is also necessary to improve the attractiveness of teaching for both beginning teachers as well as experienced veterans. Teaching has increasingly become more complex with additional layers of responsibility being added to as societal expectations of

teachers increase. Along with their complex academic responsibilities, teachers are still expected to perform many non-instructional duties creating a daily schedule that is emotionally as well as physically taxing. Non-teaching duties such as recess and lunch supervision, bus duty and the like should be eliminated. These duties should be assigned to paraprofessionals.

Student load is another factor that should be examined. Rarely are teachers able to complete their daily work "on the clock" because of the many facets of their job. This is directly related to the number of students a teacher must be responsible for each day. Because of the paperwork associated with teaching large numbers of students, most teachers take significant amounts of work home to complete on their own time (grading papers, lesson planning, etc.). This is, in effect, a hidden subsidy that teachers give directly to their schools.

In order to reduce the amount of work that teachers are asked to perform, it is essential that the daily responsibilities of teachers be reduced to include only the essential elements of their instructional duties, and that they have sufficient paid time to complete their work during regular business hours. To accomplish this, teachers need to be given adequate preparation time, a workload that is manageable and clerical support for non-instructional tasks.

Teacher Recruitment

We are currently involved in a collaborative effort with the University of California at Davis to train aspiring teachers. This intern program is an ideal way for us to build a competent workforce and has become our primary pipeline for teacher recruitment.

As are most schools in California, we are facing increasing difficulty in recruiting highly qualified teacher candidates because of a variety of circumstances. With the levels of compensation being about a third less than a beginning teacher could make in a public school, qualified candidates often pass up the opportunities to interview for positions at Courtyard. With the growing disparity between what we are able to offer as a private school and what the public schools offer, I assume that this trend will continue.

In an attempt to deal with the difficult task of recruiting prospective teaching candidates, we have focused our recruitment efforts primarily at grooming teacher candidates from "in house." This begins by searching for talented candidates to become classroom teaching assistants. These are typically college students who have some ambition of entering the teaching profession.

Classroom assistants are given a wide variety of experiential opportunities and responsibilities. As full time employees, they work alongside the classroom teacher to provide support, serve as substitutes when the regular teacher is absent, facilitate small learning groups, administer admissions assessment tests, supervise the playground and lunch room and do other ancillary duties that credentialed teachers might otherwise do. In addition to their work during the academic day, classroom assistants at Courtyard also lead small groups of students in the after-school, extended day care program. All this provides a breadth of experience that gives individuals a good taste of what it is like to be classroom teacher before they actually accept responsibility for their own classroom. It also allows them to hone their teaching skills while receiving comprehensive feedback and support from a variety of experienced individuals.

From this pool of classroom assistants we select new teacher candidates as openings become available. Teaching assistants who are selected to become classroom teachers are given complete responsibility for their own classroom as a regular teacher would be, however they are

provided direct, individualized support as they learn their craft. As mentioned previously, intern teachers are assigned a university supervisor who meets with them on a regular basis during the school year, observing lessons and providing feedback. They are also paired with a mentor from our staff, a senior teacher who will help guide them through the rigors of their first year on the job. Mentor teachers are paid a stipend for their responsibilities and are asked to meet with interns at least once a week throughout the year. Finally, new intern teachers meet regularly with administrative staff (the principal and assistant principal) to monitor progress.

By the time classroom assistants are ready to be considered for teaching positions, we have had numerous opportunities, over a period of time, to observe them in action and assess their potential as educators. And, by developing candidates in house, we are able to proscribe training to meet the specific needs of Courtyard School.

While private schools are not required to staff with credentialed teachers, it is in the best interest of both our school and the teacher candidates for them to become credentialed. A credential itself does not guarantee quality teaching, but it does provide a systematic progression of skill building that allows prospective teachers to develop a solid foundation of teaching pedagogy, which in turn assists them in creating a frame of reference from which to judge their future classroom practices. It also seems to be an important indicator of competence for prospective parents who are interested in our school.

In summary, choosing quality candidates, providing them with gradually increasing responsibility and training, and providing them with proper guidance has, so far, guaranteed us a good pool of qualified applicants who are proven reliable employees.