EDUCATOR QUALITY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

PROLOGUE

“The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and principals, since student learning is ultimately the product of what goes on in classrooms”

PISA 2009: What Makes a School Successful?

Introduction

Education is essential to keeping our democracy vibrant and our economy strong. The demands on public education in the United States have changed dramatically in the last several decades. Not only has there been an increase in the diversity of the student population, the number of children who enter as non-native speakers of English and the number of students living in poverty, but the demands on what students must know and be able to do to thrive expanded exponentially as we transitioned to a knowledge economy. Furthermore, as other countries in the last decade have increased their investment in education by creating highly selective teacher education programs, subsidizing tuition for teacher candidates and elevating the teaching profession in general, the United States has lost its footing as number one in the world for the educational opportunity and advancement of its citizens.

By focusing on the quality of teaching in every classroom, we can make a promising investment in the education of our children. Ranking among the top five countries in the world in terms of educational achievement of our students by the year 2020 must be our collective goal. This will require that all students have access not only to great educators, but also to rich and meaningful curriculum, health and social services as well as an array of supports and cultural experiences in their local communities and beyond. In addition, we must confront serious structural challenges that are holding back our achievement levels, such as an outdated schooling model based on a bygone industrial economy, a widespread disrespect for educators in general and teachers in particular, and an unacceptable level of childhood poverty.

This framework, which is the product of a collaboration between the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), addresses only one critical issue in reforming our current system—the continual support and development of the educator workforce. We want to create world class school systems that systematically recruit, develop and retain exceptional educators. In order to succeed in this endeavor, we will need to work together and draw on the expertise of educators. As Dan Domenech, the executive director of AASA emphasized, “It is those of us who have long worked within the system who know it best and can bring about the changes that will lead to a high-quality education for all of our children.”
A Shared Vision

AASA and AFT are proposing a new model of educator quality—a continuous improvement model, based on what the most successful countries in the world use to develop and sustain a highly trained and well supported educator workforce. Through shared goals and labor-management cooperation, we believe that we can ensure that meaningful reforms will strengthen our public education system and significantly raise student achievement, particularly for those students who face the greatest challenges and have the greatest needs. Our model grows out of a careful examination of the most effective education systems both in the United States and around the world.\textsuperscript{iv} While the lessons learned were easy to identify, they will be challenging to implement. Success will require the commitment of not only our two organizations, but support from other key stakeholders and advocacy organizations, federal, state and local policymakers and the public. It will necessitate that we get serious about teacher selection, preparation, development and evaluation—from recruitment into teacher education, to rigorous preparation, to on the job training and support throughout an educator’s career. We can not focus our efforts only on struggling teachers. We must create an approach that develops and improves the practice of all teachers throughout their career.

An investment in educators \textit{is} an investment in students. Teaching quality is widely recognized as the most essential in-school factor affecting student learning.\textsuperscript{v} Improving teaching quality begins by attracting the best to the profession. One way to do this is to ensure that the teaching profession is respected. The responsibility we entrust to educators and their influence on the future of our country are too great to allow a public discourse that denigrates educators and belittles the profession. Both in policy and in public rhetoric, we need to treat teaching as a respected profession and all educators as the experts in their profession.

In addition to attracting strong candidates to the profession, we must also focus on the preparation, practice, and performance of all educators. We need to dramatically increase the quality of teacher preparation programs, which, at a minimum, must emphasize both subject matter knowledge and pedagogy, provide a meaningful clinical experience, and institute rigorous and relevant exit and licensure exams. Preparation programs should be held accountable for providing prospective teachers with the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in their classrooms. Without this upfront focus on teachers—recruiting high quality candidates and providing them with a rigorous program of study—we are unlikely to improve teaching quality or increase student learning.

Furthermore, to do their best work with students, educators need supportive working conditions that maximize their opportunity to be effective. A supportive, respectful and healthy school environment is one where safety is a priority; where school staff significantly influence and take responsibility for decisions that affect their school and its programs; and where teachers are supported by their leaders and have opportunities to develop professionally.

Ultimately, students pay the price when promising teacher candidates do not enter the profession or when great teachers leave it prematurely. Poor working conditions make it
difficult to attract skilled educators to the profession and lead to reduced staff and teacher retention, especially in schools that serve the neediest children. Supportive and collaborative working conditions are essential to creating schools where teachers and administrators want to work. Therefore, we must improve the conditions under which many teachers teach and students learn.

Our Framework

In this paper, the AFT and AASA offer a two-pronged approach to educator quality that respects and builds on the expertise of educators. First, we focus on designing and implementing high quality teacher development and evaluation systems. Second, we present a fair, efficient and expedient process for addressing poor performance and misconduct. These two foci—cultivating excellence and addressing concerns efficiently—are crucial; you can not have one system without the other. A robust and rigorous system of development, support and evaluation is the foundation for a continuous improvement model for instruction. As Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers has observed: “If all we do is dismiss bad teachers, we will not significantly improve public education. You can neither hire nor fire your way to better schools.”

High Quality Teacher Development and Evaluation

We propose a continuous improvement model for teacher development and evaluation that is research- and standards-based and includes five critical components:

- **Professional teaching standards** that advance a common vision of the profession and communicate a shared belief about what is important for teachers to know and be able to do;
- **Standards for assessing teacher practice** that are based on evidence of both good teaching practice and student learning;
- **Implementation standards** that address the important details of evaluation, such as how teachers are involved, who evaluates them, how often evaluation takes place, how the results of the evaluation will be used and how the results are communicated to teachers;
- **Standards for professional context** that describe a school’s teaching and learning conditions. These conditions include both physical and structural elements of schools as well as elements that influence a school’s culture and climate; and
- **Standards for systems of support** that must be available throughout a teacher’s career. While all teachers must have genuine opportunities to improve their practice, it is particularly important that a continuing development system include sufficient and meaningful opportunities for teachers who have been identified as not meeting teaching standards.

Aligning Due Process with Evaluation

A rigorous and robust teacher development and evaluation system must also address the issue of poor performance. Teachers whose work is found to be unsatisfactory or less than
proficient must be provided with targeted assistance as well as the appropriate resources needed to improve performance. If a teacher’s performance does not improve after receiving the necessary support and resources, then the teacher should be dismissed. We have identified a three-step process for guaranteeing fair and efficient procedures for poorly performing teachers:

- **Evaluation** – Teachers will be evaluated on standards, measures, and protocols developed by labor and management. They must be notified within a few days of being observed if they are deemed unsatisfactory, and that status will be confirmed by an improvement team. An improvement plan will be created within a week to address concerns in the evaluation report and how the teacher will improve.
- **Support** – A teacher must be given sufficient time, not to exceed one school year, to demonstrate improvement in all areas that were deemed unsatisfactory.
- **Hearing** – An administrator, along with input from peer evaluations if used, makes a recommendation about the plan’s success at the end of the improvement period. An impartial third party, or a jointly constituted local panel, reviews the recommendations and determines whether each step was handled properly and due process was followed.

The timelines associated with dismissal should reflect the nature of the teacher’s identified area of unsatisfactory performance. For example, a teacher who is identified as needing to improve in the area of record keeping will need less time to improve than a teacher who needs to improve classroom management skills. However, we firmly believe that the time allotted for improvement should not exceed one school year regardless of the identified area of need.

**Teacher Misconduct**

In the rare instances when there are allegations of teacher wrongdoing, such as criminal offenses in the classroom, abusive practices toward students, and discrimination, we propose a procedure for discipline to resolve matters in a period of no more than 100 calendar days from the time the teacher receives notice of the allegation. We believe it is essential to expediently yet fairly address these serious offenses for the welfare of our children and the betterment of the profession.

- **First**, objective criteria must trigger the process. Identifying objective criteria will eliminate disciplinary procedures resulting from vague and subjective allegations.
- **Second**, procedures—including notice and specificity of the complaint, preliminary procedures to help avoid a hearing, and a schedule allowing for 100 days maximum from filing of the complaint to completion of the hearing—must be followed in order to ensure the process is both fair and efficient.

In cases of either poor performance or teacher misconduct, the arbitrator or hearing examiner determines if the procedures and processes have been followed. This makes the hearing and dismissal process for poor performance and teacher misconduct similar. In cases of alleged incompetence, the arbitrator does not "retry" the facts of the professional judgment. However in the case of alleged misconduct, the hearing examiner shall issue a
decision which includes the finding of fact and conclusion of law that form the basis for any possible sanctions.

Conclusion

Developing a high-quality teacher development and evaluation system is at the heart of the joint work proposed by AASA and AFT. Dismissal of teachers for poor performance rests on such a system, but more importantly, strengthening the skills of all teachers depends on professional development linked to educator needs identified through such a comprehensive evaluation system.

Developing our proposed comprehensive system with the five components addressed earlier is neither easy nor inexpensive. It requires a thoughtful process, and meaningful labor-management collaboration must be the foundation for that process.

While the joint ASAA-AFT proposals for Teacher Development and Evaluation, Due Process and Misconduct provide the overarching principles for a comprehensive quality teaching system, specific details of how the system need to be developed jointly by the union and the administration in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations of the local school district. These details must be developed either through the collective bargaining process, or where bargaining does not exist, in consultation with the local teachers’ representatives. Such a collaboration not only assures that the expertise of the educators will be reflected in the new system, but that teachers can be assured that the new system represents their voice and is being developed with them, not imposed on them.

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6 Teachers are twice as likely to want to remain working in schools where there is an atmosphere of trust and they feel supported by school leadership (Hirsch 2010 – findings consistent in MD, CO final reports and NC forthcoming). “Working conditions emerge as highly predictive of teachers’ stated intentions to remain in or leave their schools, with leadership emerging as the most salient dimension. Teachers’ perceptions of their working conditions are also predictive of one-year actual departure rates…” (Ladd, 2009)