

Strengthening the Teaching Profession in Kentucky

A Report of the Prichard Committee Team on Teacher Effectiveness

December 2013

Executive Summary

Nothing that happens in school matters more than quality teaching in determining whether a student has a successful or mediocre educational experience. But no single policy or practice will ensure Kentucky achieves its goal of giving every child an effective teacher every year. Instead, progress can be assured only from initiatives that recognize and support the interrelated nature of the elements involved in recruiting, preparing, supporting and retaining high-quality teachers.

The Prichard Committee Team on Teacher Effectiveness conducted a 14-month review of the array of issues that affect the state's efforts to expand its workforce of high-quality teachers. Specifically, the Team reviewed the following areas:

- Recruitment/Preparation
- Hiring/Induction/Internship
- Professional Development/Leadership
- Retention/Working Conditions
- Compensation
- Tenure
- Evaluation/Student Achievement

The Team's work culminated in the development of recommendations for improvements in policies and practices to help Kentucky build and sustain a high-quality teacher workforce. Some of the recommendations would require legislative action while others suggest regulatory or programmatic changes. In many instances, financing would be a key factor – raising an issue of particular concern for the Team as well as for educators and advocates statewide: school funding.

School funding levels have dropped consistently in Kentucky over the past several years, resulting in cuts in such vital areas as school staffing, professional development, textbooks and technology as well as in teachers' economic benefits. The declining investment in our future threatens to reverse the progress the state has made in student learning and national rankings. This situation cannot be allowed to continue if we are to create a strong and prosperous future for our state and its citizens.

Recommendations of the Team on Teacher Effectiveness

To recruit more high-performing candidates to teacher preparation programs, the Team recommends:

- **A public-private informational campaign to raise awareness of the need for high-quality teaching in all areas and of the benefits of entering the profession and to build greater respect for teaching and teachers**

To upgrade the preparation of teachers, the Team recommends:

- **Providing earlier clinical and field experiences for teacher education candidates to provide more hands-on opportunities and ensuring the quality of those experiences**
- **Requiring deeper content knowledge for elementary, middle, secondary and special education teacher candidates**
- **Encouraging/requiring universities to give arts and sciences faculty members more tenure and service credit to work in local school districts to assist new teachers with subject-matter content delivery**

To better support new teachers, the Team recommends:

- **The Education Professional Standards Board establish clearer methods to continuously evaluate and streamline the documentation requirements for Kentucky Teacher Internship Program**
- **The EPSB and school districts ensure that every teacher has a qualified mentor and that the mentoring relationship continue for a teacher's first three years on the job**
- **New teachers be given more opportunities to work with master teachers during the initial years of their career**
- **District leaders address new teachers' need for additional support as identified in the TELL survey**
- **Districts and schools be discouraged from assigning new teachers to the schools and/or classes with the most challenging teaching situations, which may include the lowest-performing students**

To improve professional learning opportunities for teachers, the Team recommends:

- **Supporting school districts and councils in their implementation of the recommendations of the Kentucky Department of Education addressing a comprehensive professional learning system for educators**

<http://education.ky.gov/curriculum/lit/Documents/Comprehensive%20System%20Final%2010-25-12.pdf>

To providing meaningful educator evaluation, the Team recommends:

- **Supporting the Kentucky Department of Education and school districts' implementation of the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System for teachers and principals**
- **Encouraging the creation of a program to raise awareness of the new system**
- **Conducting a cost-benefit analysis to determine district costs of the new system**

To assess and address issues related to educator working conditions, the Team recommends:

- **Continued encouragement of teachers to participate in the TELL survey to produce the most complete information about school working conditions**
- **Scheduling the survey to conclude by the end of March before school personnel decisions are made**
- **Continued and expanded dissemination of the TELL survey results, with guidance to schools and districts in using the data to further improve working conditions for educators and learning conditions for students**
- **A review/expansion of the time provided teachers for review and study, individually and in teams, to improve instruction**

To professionalize the teacher compensation system, the Team recommends:

- **Developing career pathways to professionalize teacher pay levels and encouraging the adoption of differentiated pay scales to reflect teacher expertise and activities and the status of teaching as a true profession**

The Team reached no conclusion on whether tenure should be retained or eliminated but recommends:

- **Conducting a complete review of teacher tenure in Kentucky to determine what, if any, changes are needed that would benefit the teaching profession and student learning**

The Vanguard Initiative

The Team initially considered proposing a demonstration project to incorporate various elements of its recommendations for elevating the teaching profession. As its work continued, the Team became aware of the proposed Vanguard initiative and concluded that its provisions offer an important opportunity to move Kentucky forward in the critical area of quality teaching.

The Team endorses the Vanguard project and will work on behalf of its implementation. Elements of the project range from a redesign of teacher training programs to regulatory structures that support career pathways for teachers to subject-matter specialization for elementary teachers to enhanced professional development and numerous others. A more detailed overview of the project is included in this report.



Without question, Kentucky has made significant, measurable progress in improving education on multiple fronts. While we celebrate that progress, we remain vigilant in tackling the many challenges that remain. It is critical that steps to elevate the teaching profession be taken as soon as possible, whether through the Vanguard project or other initiatives. Finally, as noted earlier, the Team encourages Kentucky's leaders to restore education funding and once again make investing in our schools Kentucky's top public policy priority to ensure the state reaches its goals for excellence.