

The 21st Century Teaching Profession...
Ensuring Every Teacher Succeeds with Every Child

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A highly qualified teacher in every classroom! Merit Pay for Teachers! Get Performance Pay Right! How can you argue with any of these headlines? We all strive to have every one of our students attain high levels of achievement. We have many schools in our nation where that occurs on a daily basis. We also have many exemplary schools that “beat the odds” and have great successes in spite of their challenges – high percentages of children in poverty, high percentages of children of minority ethnicity, and high percentages of children whose native language is not English.

What can we learn about those schools, school districts and communities that are beginning to see great successes in student achievement? What transformations have been made? What does teaching and learning look like in those schools? And how can we ensure every teacher is successful with every child? Are such aspirations achievable? Should the focus be on the quality of individual teachers in each of the classrooms in the United States? Or, is the answer more complex? Should the focus be less about individual teachers and more about the collective work of teachers (and administrators) in a school? Put simply: ***As a parent, would you rather send your child to a school where only certain teachers are highly successful, or one where the whole school community is successful?***

Unfortunately, the teaching profession continues to be viewed as a singular entity where the teacher is evaluated for his or her performance in the classroom. This environment encourages individual recognition. Merit pay and performance pay both assume achievement is all the result of the individual teacher. But, it is not.

Achievement *is* about the collective work of effective teams of educators focused on individual students. We know that schools are complex environments and that learning takes more than the effort of the individual teacher. We must move our thinking to creating “21st Century Teachers” just as we are preparing students who exhibit “21st Century Learning” skills and behavior.

21st Century Teachers

Teaching is no longer an individual sport, but rather a team sport! Successful schools have teams of teachers working together on complex teaching and learning strategies for all students in their schools. Teachers must not only be focused on the students in his/her classroom, but all the students in the school. There is no question that teachers must have individual competence. However, I would argue that a teacher’s basic competence spans both their academic knowledge and the art of knowing when and how to use particular strategies with groups and individual students.

While the principal tends to be the instructional leader in the school, the truly effective school has multiple instructional leaders working synergistically with the principal orchestrating and facilitating exceptional teams of teachers. In addition to their normal classroom duties, teachers must fulfill the following roles to be truly successful for ALL students.

Teacher Leadership Roles

- **School Improvement** Teacher Leader – Responsibilities include additional school instructional leadership responsibilities – performance analysis, team building, program evaluation, etc. – that are shared with the principal.
- **Feeder/Cluster Improvement** Teacher Leader – Responsibilities include a focus on the instructional and curricular connections, collaboration, and expectations across schools within a K-12 cluster of schools.
- **New Teacher Trainer/Mentor** – Responsibilities include focus on training new teachers prior to the start of school, and mentoring and coaching the new staff during the school year.

- **Extended Student Learning** – Responsibilities include a focus on tutoring and nurturing students who are performing below grade level. Such work would be done after school, and during school breaks, to ensure each child is successful.
- **Student Transition Leadership** – Responsibilities include a focus on analysis of individual student's academic and social progress and coordination of support services for children needing added social/transition skills within and across schools. This would also include addressing students who are transient during their schooling years – this is an ever increasing issue.

These are the roles teachers must fulfill in any successful school for 21st Century learning. These are the responsibilities that teams of teachers must fulfill in today's schools. These roles are why teaching is no longer a 10-month job. Teaching is a full-time, 12-month job. We must recognize these are expectations for 21st Century teachers. We must completely change our image of the teaching profession. We must rethink the totality of the teaching profession. We can no longer think about teaching "the way it was when I was in school." We must re-frame our public policy discussions to acknowledge the roles and responsibilities of the 21st Century teacher.

Policy Decisions for 21st Century Teacher Leaders

There is a growing national debate on how to ensure there are quality teachers in all classrooms. The debate must be expanded beyond expectations for content knowledge and classroom instructional skills. The debate must also include the complex demands of high performing work teams. The expanded teacher leadership roles and responsibilities must be well defined and utilized in personnel hiring, training, and evaluation decisions.

In Fairfax, we are using the tenets of Professional Learning Communities to more fully define team responsibilities of teacher leaders. We are working with some external organizations to better define these more complex responsibilities for 21st Century teaching. The national task force for the Strategic Management of Human Capital (www.smhc-cpre.org) is working on the complexities of education's most valuable asset – human capital. We are participating with the Educational Testing Service to more explicitly define Teacher Leadership.

Equally important to the selection and evaluation components of 21st Century Teaching is the ongoing research and training that ensures we move from the current state to a new paradigm where virtually all teachers are highly successful. This may seem monumental, but perhaps when we reframe the teaching profession, it becomes more strategic and less monumental. Data from the three-year pilot in Fairfax suggests that it is very possible to have all teachers in a given school learn to take on the larger set of roles and responsibilities of 21st Century Teacher Leaders. The pilot schools show student achievement performances levels well above other schools.

Another major arena of policy changes is the compensation structure aligned with these new roles. These 21st Century Teacher Leaders work full-time, 12 months of the year and their compensation package must reflect these additional responsibilities. Minimally, the work contract for these leaders should be an expansion of their current contracts. Typically, this would imply a 10-15% increase in pay. This compensation package also has the benefit of being much more competitive with the private sector and more attractive to those wishing to change careers.

The final set of implications for creating 21st Century Teacher Leaders, is the ability to scale back on the central office. When you imbed the professional development within the teaching force, there is less need for those responsibilities to come from the central office. And for every central office position eliminated, the resources can fund at least 7-10 Teacher Leadership positions, a very good return on investment!

We cannot be satisfied with only 10-20% of our teachers being highly successful. That will be the consequence of merit pay or pay for performance. We must completely overhaul the teaching profession and align it with the demands in today's world, align it with what we know about very successful schools, and align the profession with what works. Now is the time to ensure 21st Century Teacher Leaders are in every school, working for everyone of our nation's youth. The only question is whether we have the courage and conviction to make that change!