# West Virginia's Voice Education Reform Review of the Literature

## *Teacher Quality*

Having access to a highly effective teacher is, without a doubt, the single most powerful indicator of student achievement (Houlihan, 2019). Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have long realized that teaching quality is the most important variable for the success of students (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Supportive school environments, where educators are valued, trusted, and have the time and ability to collaborate to improve instruction, are necessary for enabling teachers to be successful. It is becoming increasingly clear that the workplace can enable or constrain good teaching (Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2014; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Regardless of initiatives or reforms, the quality of the teacher tips student learning toward success or failure (Darling-Hammond, 2012) and is critical to increasing student achievement (Hirsch, et. al., 2005).

Teacher quality is a multi-tiered endeavor that begins in teacher preparation programs. Teachers who begin with strong preparation and engage in ongoing opportunities for professional growth and learning result in well-prepared, skilled teachers who are committed to the success of their students (Educator Quality, n.d.). The Learning Policy Institute (*https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/*) identifies three key components which are critical to educator quality: recruitment and retention, professional learning, and evaluation and career development.

A restructuring of recruitment approaches is necessary to attract young people into the profession and entice workers from business and industry to consider a career change to join the ranks of teachers. Teachers are the lifeblood of the system (Moir, 2017).The "leaky bucket" effect in which are teachers are the water, is depleting our schools leaving both a financial and academic toll in its wake (Educator Quality: Recruitment & Retention, n.d.). Recruitment is a critical step, but fixing the leak with high quality support results in success for both teachers and students (Moir, 2017). Research identifies effective strategies for attracting and keeping a high-quality workforce including alternative pathways to teaching, improved teaching and learning conditions, and financial incentives as well as academic resources and supportive services (Educator Quality: Recruitment & Retention, n.d.).

Well-structured professional learning equips teachers to meet the needs of all students and enable them to stay in the profession. Teachers can be best prepared by providing a targeted focus on equity, empowering them to design and deliver professional learning that is sustained and collaborative, and establishing professional learning communities (PLCs) that provide strong opportunities for teachers to learn from one another in order to strengthen their practice (Educator Quality: Professional Learning, n.d.).

High functioning schools and districts grasp the connection between highly effective teachers and providing teachers with ongoing opportunities for growth and leadership throughout their careers (Educator Quality: Evaluation and Career Development, n.d.).  Many systems provide support to the novice teacher but we must have the vision to also create career development pathways for

experienced teachers that equip them to take on leadership roles. These enhanced responsibilities include mentoring and coaching to improve their practice as well as the practice of the less seasoned teacher (Educator Quality: Evaluation and Career Development, n.d.).

Opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles in their schools and districts have proven beneficial in deepening proficiency, capability, and skills that contribute to quality practice across the profession (Educator Quality: Evaluation and Career Development, n.d.).

Student learning is influenced profoundly by the quality of the teacher. Ensuring that every student has access to great schools demands we focus on the quality of the teacher in the classroom (Great Teaching and Learning, 2016).

## *Principal Leadership*

Highly qualified school leaders are a key ingredient to increasing student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap in our most underserved communities. Investing in research-based strategies that are proven to impact student achievement and then implementing those strategies with fidelity should be a priority for states (Espinosa and Cardichon, n.d.). Researchers have shown how an administrator's leadership style, communication skills, and supportive behaviors influence teacher recruitment and retention (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005).

Principals play a key role in the academic success of their students. A recent report by researchers at RAND Corporation looked at the six-year "principal pipeline" initiative supported by the Wallace Foundation which targeted six school districts around the U.S. (Superville, 2019). The results clearly indicate that principals who have received targeted attention at every intersection in their development as a school leader - selection, preparation, hiring, placement, and coaching - were linked to robust reading and math achievement and to longer tenures in their jobs at the head of the school. School systems that make deep investments in their school leaders have a substantial return on their investment. Principal pipelines that are designed to be strategic and systemic build student achievement growth, particularly for students coming from under-resourced backgrounds (Superville, 2019).

Deliberate strategies such as the developing a "principal pipeline" can really make a difference for all students, specifically students in places like West Virginia where many students face significant challenges. In the districts used for this research, new principals went through rigorous selection, received relevant training, and were matched based on their strengths and the school's and community's needs. Participants were provided with mentor and other support systems (Superville, 2019). Building leaders by sharpening their skills with intentionality will result in a return investment in student achievement even in the most challenged schools (Superville, 2019).

School improvement is not possible without skilled, knowledgeable leadership that is responsive to the needs of all teachers and students. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school (Leithwood & Levin, 2010). It appears that supportive school leaders who create trusting environments where teachers are engaged in decision making impact the latter group's decisions about where to work.

## *Teacher Induction and Mentoring*

West Virginia is facing a crisis in education. Currently, there are more than 2000 fewer preservice teacher candidates in West Virginia colleges and universities than there were five years ago (Explorer West Virginia's Higher Education Data Portal, 2019). Action must be swift to recruit and retain high-quality educators to staff our classrooms.

American schools treat new teachers as experts from the first day they enter the classroom (Birkeland & Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Unlike other high performing countries, the United States has not cultivated a vision of what high-quality instruction looks like and then developed consistent teaching-practice frameworks that will lead beginning teachers to success (Brenneman, 2016). Teachers in their first years of experience need to acquire skills specific to their needs gaining support in the areas of policy and procedure, materials, curriculum, differentiating instruction, relationships, classroom management, and student motivation (Birkeland & Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Dealing with the daily stress of teaching is important to avoid early burnout that results in many novice educators leaving the profession (Mandel, 2006).

Algozzine, et al. (2007) suggest beginning teachers engage in a three-year induction period with formal orientation, mentor support, observations, and evaluation. Several studies over the past three decades indicate that novice teachers do not have the pedagogical knowledge to understand management, behavior, and academic tasks without targeted support (Melnick & Meister, 2008).

By developing a shared understanding of what high-quality teaching looks like, mentors and other induction supports can assist new teachers dealing with the time constraints and the workload (Melnick & Meister, 2008). Induction develops the skills to effectively plan and prepare, design an appropriate classroom environment, exhibit professional skills, and instruct students efficiently (Danielson, 2007). To meet the needs of beginning teachers, more investment is needed to prepare and develop programs that will enable new teachers to accomplish gains in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Top priorities for recruiting and retaining new teachers includes selecting mentors who have identified qualities of an effective mentor; providing ongoing professional development for mentors and new teachers; designating time for mentor-teacher collaborations, multi-year mentoring, and intensive and specific guidance to move teaching practice forward (High Quality mentoring and Teacher Induction, n.d.). The top priorities of professional learning designers for new teachers should be to assist teachers to learn deeply about their content; develop effective classroom management skills use technology tools to enhance student learning; and develop the skills to meet the learning needs of diverse groups of students (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

School systems must provide new teachers with the specific pieces of information and skills they most need to move from the survival stage of teaching into productive, effective practice. Otherwise, we will continue to lose potentially promising teachers to other vocations (Mandel, 2006).

## *Professional Learning*

If professional development efforts are yielding uninspired results, school systems must identify the areas in which teachers need to improve and then provide access to professional learning activities that are perceived as useful to improve their practice (The Mirage, 2015). Specific characteristics of high-quality professional development evident in the literature include, but are not limited to, longer duration, greater frequency, activity-based, collaborative, and content-focused learning that meets the needs of the teacher (Blank & de las Alas, 2008). To produce highly effective teachers, high-quality professional learning that is designed thoughtfully, organized appropriately, and delivered in a meaningful context must be implemented (Hirsch, Mizell, & Aviset al., 2005).

Professional development historically has received criticism for its inability to significantly impact student learning largely because teachers in the United States have virtually no time built into the school day for professional learning or collegial work. Most professional development sessions are held after school hours, on weekends, or during the limited continuing education days built into the school calendar (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Professional development is often viewed by systems as a supplement to the teacher's work day resulting in learning that is frequently broken up, narrow in content, and often meaningless (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Professional learning should be a central component to the teacher's practice. It should not be an add-on lumped onto the beginning or ending of the school day or year (Brenneman, 2016).

Dissatisfaction often stems from the teacher's perception that the professional development is not customized to their needs (The Mirage, 2015). When professional development is not designed to address educators' needs in terms of motivation, interests, prior knowledge, and skills, it will not be well-received (Mizell, 2010). Teachers who do not experience quality professional development do not improve their skills and have little impact on the learning of their students (Mizell, 2010). It is essential for designers of staff development to recognize that American schools "do not operate like hospital emergency rooms where experienced personnel routinely watch novices work, spot their mistakes, give advice, and model new techniques" (Algozzine, et al., 2007, p. 141). More often teachers receive on-the-job training without the benefit of knowledge, feedback, or support from others (Algozzine, et al., 2007).

Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1971) is often credited with the saying, "If you don't know where you are going any road will take you there." The same can be said when considering the development of professional learning (Warren, 2016). High-quality professional learning is directly connected to consistent standards for teaching that support a vision of educational goals and support instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2012). For the professional learning to have noticeable impact on instruction and student learning, a significant amount of time over an expanded duration allows teachers to process, practice, and reflect on their new knowledge and skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

West Virginia schools will harvest the greatest improvements in student achievement utilizing professional learning approaches that:

- focus on deepening teachers' content knowledge and instructional practices;
- function as a coherent part of a school's improvement efforts—aligned with curriculum, assessments, and standards—so that teachers can implement the knowledge and practices they learn in their classrooms;
- occur in collaborative and collegial learning environments in which teachers participate in professional learning and together grapple with issues related to new content and instructional practices;
- provide authentic activities rooted in teachers' inquiry and reflection about practice within the context of the curriculum and students they teach;
- link to analysis of teaching and student learning, including the formative use of assessment data; and
- are supported by coaching, modeling, observations, and feedback (Lam, et. al., 2016).

## *Social Emotional Supports for Students*

One evidence-based strategy proven to impact student outcomes is the concept of the community school, which is both a physical place and collaborative partnerships between the school and various community resources. This model adopts an integrated approach linking high-quality academic instruction with health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement. In under-resourced, high poverty populations, such as exist in many areas in West Virginia, the implementation of the community school model providing wraparound services has been found to improve student outcomes (Lam, et. al., 2016).

To achieve both academic and personal success, students need more than just high-quality instruction. All children, particularly children in West Virginia, need their basic physiological needs met including, but not limited to, access to housing, food, health care, and social emotional and learning supports. Obstacles such as the opioid crisis, job and food insecurities, as well as poverty, parents and the broader community need access to coordinated, one-stop services that in due course support children's development. This may manifest as on-site health clinics supporting students and families with physical and mental health care; social welfare services; before and after-school care; tutoring and mentoring; expanded preschool; a focus on social-emotional learning and positive discipline approaches; and parent and community engagement that is accessible inside and outside of traditional school hours (Lam, et. al., 2016).

Specific features of schools that implement a community focus are found to result in positive student outcomes including increased academic achievement, fewer grade retentions, and fewer students being identified for special education. Examples include expanded learning time which provides for tutoring; increased frequency in the engagement of parents, families and community entities; wraparound services encompassing academics, health and social support for our most compromised students. Support may also include social-emotional services that include strategies such as behavioral support interventions (e.g. restorative justice practices) which are associated with increased student academic growth and lower rates of suspensions, expulsions, and dropouts (Lam, et. al., 2016).

## Funding

*https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-money-matters-brief*


## ESAs

*https://nepc.colorado.edu/newsletter/2018/01/education-savings-accounts*


## Class size and student achievement

*http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/research/class-size-and-student-achievement*


## Expanded Preschool