

## Working Group for Educator Excellence

**Briefing on the Comprehensive Educator Quality Platform  
Wednesday, February 24, 11 a.m. - Noon, Room 222  
for Representative Martha M. Walz and Senator Robert A. O'Leary,  
Co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Education and other guests**

**I am going to outline a system of educator preparation and support which aligns with the ten levers that the Working Group for Educator Excellence has adopted from Teachers <sup>21</sup> <sup>1</sup>. We know that many schools engage with some of these levers but what we need is for all of them to engage with all the levers, in order to support teachers, the single most important influence of a child's success as a learner.**

**Almost all the examples of the system's levers I am detailing are derived from my own experience as a high school principal and three-time superintendent of schools. I present them in the present tense as if the reader is observing the school district and I ask you to imagine each of the activities as a continuous thread that runs through a teacher's experience.**

**This is a complex and comprehensive system. And the bottom line is that if a district pays attention to ALL ten levers and makes sure that they are linked together, not a series of separate steps with no coordinating vision, the teachers in the district are in position to ensure that students learn what they need, experience what they should and emerge as competent, confident learners.**

**If the chain is broken once the teacher is part of the school, particularly with regard to **Preparation, Induction, Professional Development, Supervision and Evaluation, Teacher Leadership, Organizational Structure and Culture** since these can be within the school's control, we are liable to losing 50% of our new teachers within the first five years. Annually, MA loses \$56,049,714 in costs associated with leaving the profession.<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.teachers21.org/about\\_believe2.htm](http://www.teachers21.org/about_believe2.htm)

<sup>2</sup> State estimation based on analysis by Richard Ingersoll, Professor of Education and Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, from the National Center for Education Statistics Student and Staffing Survey, and therefore include a slight margin of error. Additional data available at [http://www.gse.upenn.edu/faculty\\_research/Shortage-RMI-09-2003.pdf](http://www.gse.upenn.edu/faculty_research/Shortage-RMI-09-2003.pdf).

## **(1) PREPARATION**

*is the sine qua non for an educator. During pre-service training, an educator establishes his/her knowledge base and instructional tool kit without which he or she cannot enter the profession.*

The district has a “clinical school” relationship with a nearby higher education institution where simulating the real experience a beginning teacher might have is a required part of the curriculum.

The district greets candidates from certain preparatory institutions because they have a history of giving students what they need to be a beginning teacher: skills, content and attitudes.

Candidates are given the district’s standards and before they come to an interview, either virtually or on paper. Candidates bring portfolios (virtual or hard copies) to demonstrate proficiency and provide examples of practice and/or candidates teach a class so peers and administrators can observe... Observers use a set of established criteria to determine the candidate’s proficiency.

The candidate that meets these criteria and whose chemistry aligns with the interviewers gets the job.

## **(2) LICENSURE**

*Licensure does not guarantee proficiency but is a required step in the development process and the symbol of a profession.*

Candidates provide evidence of licensure. Only in cases where there is no appropriate supply, the candidate indicates the intention of getting licensed and a waiver is requested. That happens in low incidence subjects occasionally. The district takes the responsibility of ensuring the teacher’s acquisition of a license.

The district periodically reviews the licensure requirements of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and makes suggestions for improvements as a result of the evolving conditions in our society and of the changes in education.

The teacher who has been hired has a license and so needs to consider re-licensure for the future as she/he thinks about professional development.

### **(3) RECRUITMENT, HIRING, PLACEMENT**

*This is a process, the procurement process, not a series of actions or events.*

On its website the district posts all pertinent information about the demographics, goals, programs, etc. and directs candidates to acknowledge they understand the requirements of the position, the culture of the learning community and the larger community, the expectations for students... This resource saves time for the Human Resources department which can field fewer calls and inquiries.

The district encourages in-service faculty to recruit colleagues to create a critical mass of like-minded professionals serving the needs of youngsters.

Hiring is a process not a series of actions:

A. The dossier is screened by other teachers, department heads, sometimes parents or community members, principals.

B. All use a predetermined although not identical protocol which covers content area and skills knowledge.

C. The interview and portfolio review are next. We ask, among other questions:

a. What would you do if...?

b. What would I see when...?

c. If this were the problem, how would you resolve it?

D. The "trial" class

Notes taken and/or video made

E. Checking of references

Again using an established protocol

I always asked for and about technology proficiency...in the early days if someone did not have it, a commitment to learn and use the technology was acceptable and became a goal on which the teacher was evaluated.

## **Placement**

Ensuring a good match between the students and the teacher, the team of teachers, the teacher and his/her mentor, ensuring the proper program for the teacher to teach require thoughtful management.

I have always maintained that the faculty that respects and likes each other spends the extra amount of time and energy to produce the desired results.

## **(4) INDUCTION**

*The teacher is now situated and is about to relate to colleagues and a mentor. This system is designed to prevent isolation.*

Prior to the opening of school, beginning teachers spend a week together and with the mentors who have been “assigned”. They have time to explore the school, the curriculum (they receive the aligned curriculum guides), the classroom before the students arrive and identify essential sources of information and support.

A matrix has been developed (and given) to help beginning teachers with such questions as:

- a. How do I learn what I need to know about the particular students I will be teaching and guiding?
- b. How can I find teaching materials, the curriculum guides, the standards?
- c. Who do I go to if a student tells me something in confidence?

Each beginning teachers is paired with a mentor who is a content area colleague and “an angel,” an experienced teacher who is not an evaluator and does not report these interchanges to the evaluator but provides help with non-content related issues. The angel forestalls possible isolation of the beginning teacher. Because mentorship is seen as a legitimate part of a veteran teacher’s assignment, the beginning teacher and mentor have frequent and regular conversations. The mentor feels free to and does observe the beginning teacher’s class often. The beginning teacher is invited to observe classes of more experienced colleagues.

Grade level or department teams set aside time at their meetings to discuss issues beginning teachers want to explore. These agendas are carefully planned and deal with content, instruction and the life of a teacher in school.

On a regularly scheduled basis, sometimes over lunch, beginning teachers meet with the principal and the mentors to discuss issues the beginning teachers have been known to encounter.

#### **(5) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

*The teacher has reliable, regular supports and can now pay attention to maintain and improving practice and remembering that re-licensure can provide the opportunity to grow.*

There is a Professional Development committee, usually volunteers, which designs a program for the district/school based on:

- a. a review of what educators say they need
- b the observations made by administrators when they calculate “needs to know”
- c. levels of experience and knowledge among the faculty
- d. experts in the district such as coaches, instructional specialists
- e. outside experts and resources such as higher education institutions and other providers/vendors
- f. the annual goals of the district/school

The Professional Development program cannot be a series of events; it is a process...substitutes teachers (sometimes called shadow faculty if they are regulars) are provided so beginning teachers can observe veteran teachers regularly as recommended by the mentor and/or the evaluator.

A special opportunity is offered at the high school in “unscheduled” periods. A faculty member leads a seminar about a topic of value and interest to the faculty including books they should read, new curriculum they should consider, changing standards, high stakes testing...Many faculty takes turns.

Talking about teaching and learning in the teachers’ lounge is encouraged and modeled.

**(6) SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION**

*Usually linked--to some educators' trepidation-- these two functions are separate but equally necessary; they provide direction and assessment for the teacher to continue to grow and for staffing decisions.*

**In order to get support from the teachers' association/union in cases where there is agreement that the performance of an individual is not up to standard, despite many attempts at remediation, the criteria on which teachers are observed, evaluated and supervised must be transparent. That often means agreement either in negotiations or in regular meetings of both leadership groups. These standards are given to beginning teachers during the orientation/induction process and are maintained on the website for reference.**

**The evaluation process used includes:**

**a. pre-conference**

**What are your goals for this class?**

**What would you like me to be giving you feedback on?**

**What do you want me to pay particular attention to that will help improve your teaching?**

**b. observations with lots of (verbatim) notes and/or video**

**c. post conference**

**Checking out any questions about what happened in class and why, and giving feedback and suggestions**

**d. the write up which is given to the teacher and placed in the teacher's file after signatures are in place**

**Administrators walk through classrooms often, not just at evaluation time and so they have an understanding of the individual practices and can assess the quality of instruction in the school as a whole.**

**(7) RE-LICENSURE**

*This is designed to guarantee that educators remain fresh, knowledgeable and currently skillful.*

The Professional Development program also reflects the needs of teachers for re-licensure. For example, a physics teacher may need assistance in locating the appropriate source for additional physics knowledge.

A database exists in Human Resources to keep track of teachers' progress to recertification.

Although both licensure and re-licensure are contracts between the state and the individual, the school district accepts the obligation to support teachers as they progress through their career.

#### (8) **TEACHER LEADERSHIP**

*is necessary to offset what is commonly seen as a flat profession (or is it an occupation?). To advance, the common wisdom goes, one must leave the classroom. Giving teachers the opportunity to diversify and differentiate their work keeps them challenged and growing and in the profession.*

The district designs a program of seminars and internships to help beginning and mid career teachers prepare for the next step in their careers. This program is supervised by the superintendent and/or principal with the assistance of volunteer faculty. Teachers who demonstrate skill and interest in leadership are encouraged to participate and to try grade level team or department leadership.

Teachers are encouraged to present at faculty meetings and conferences, write about their practice, join professional organizations and collaborate on action research. And when there are visitors in the building, to answer their questions.

All of these activities support the assertion that teaching is a profession.

#### (9) **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

*Clarity in the organizational chart prevents confusion and increases communication.*

The district has designed an organization chart to help beginning and veteran teachers understand the relationship among the various branches of the district and schools. This is a companion piece to the matrix developed for beginning teachers seeking answers to their questions, mentioned in the induction section.

The school's assessment program is multi faceted (not just high stakes tests) but exhibitions, portfolios, simulations. Teachers are encouraged to be creative in the use of assessment tools, including inviting other faculty to be participant observers. This latter is evident in team teaching arrangements which are also encouraged and/or mandated.

Teachers are scheduled so they have time to meet during the school day and so they can be available to students for additional academic help or counsel.

#### **(10) ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

*supports the achievement of the school's mission and function. It is the tone which is palpable when one enters the building and meets the inhabitants.*

The district champions open and honest communication by devoting a section of every meeting to sharing concerns and compliments.

The superintendent and principals have regularly scheduled "open office" hours. Parents, teachers and other interested individuals can call ahead to make an appointment. The only requirement is to indicate the topic so the administrator will not be surprised.

The superintendent and principals also have advisory councils which meet regularly in the evenings to accommodate working parents.

Data-based decision making is making its way into the fabric of the district and to support that initiative the district has organized, with the help of appropriate individuals, a professional development experience for faculty and support staff since all have joint responsibility for student learning.

This is the district I am inviting you to help ensure by suggesting to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that licensure needs to be constantly reviewed and updated and that the ten levers should become part of the Department's requirements for school districts to observe if they wish state funding.

There was a time when a principal was told, "hire great people and get out of the way." Today we know that even the most naturally talented teachers need collegueship and support. If we provide this kind of support to beginning teachers and to veterans, we will retain teachers (saving millions in teacher turnover) and enable the entire enterprise to prepare all our students well for their futures.