

America's schools are about to be hit by the largest teacher retirement wave in history. Are we ready?

LEARNING TEAMS

Creating What's Next

From a report prepared by The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

OVER 50% of the nation's teachers and principals are Baby Boomers. During the next four years we could lose a third of our most accomplished educators to retirement. The wave of departures will peak during the 2010–11 school year, when over 100,000 veteran teachers could leave. In less than a decade more than half of today's teachers—1.7 million—could be gone.

The traditional teaching career is collapsing at both ends. Beginners are driven away by antiquated preparation practices, outdated staffing policies, and inadequate rewards. At the end of their careers, accomplished veterans who still have much to contribute are being separated from their schools by obsolete retirement systems. In five years, two-thirds of the teachers in America's classrooms could be gone.

Unless we act now, we will lose an unacceptably large number of our best educators, just as the largest generation of children in our history must gear up to assume its place in a complex world—and new data indicate that student enrollment is on the rise again. We have less than a decade to develop a new education workforce strategy to prepare today's students for college, the work-

force, and civic engagement, and to mobilize our nation's resources to support our education system.

WHAT'S NEXT: Learning Teams

We can offset the loss of years of hard won expertise by beginning now to develop collaborative learning teams composed of veterans and beginners trained to share their expertise and experience with each other across the generations. These teams will leverage the best of each generation's skills and knowledge to improve student learning. These teams will provide the opportunity for veteran teachers phasing out of full time teaching to give back to their schools and students in a different kind of "retirement."

Through learning teams, we can pass on the knowledge and expertise of effective veteran teachers, keep them engaged in education, and enlist their support for new teachers and in transforming their schools into genuine learning organizations. Learning teams can be comprised of many different roles, including teachers, coaches and learning team leaders, online educators and mentors, media designers and digital content experts, apprentices and interns, Digital Age students and parents, adjunct industry partners and community members.

Teaming Works

A 2008 Education Sector report found that the effect on student achievement of merit pay for new

teachers was less than the effect of increased mentoring, support, and stronger collaborative leadership. "Teacher effectiveness is not a fixed trait," according to the report, but rather can be improved through consistent and targeted efforts. Effective teaching can be taught.

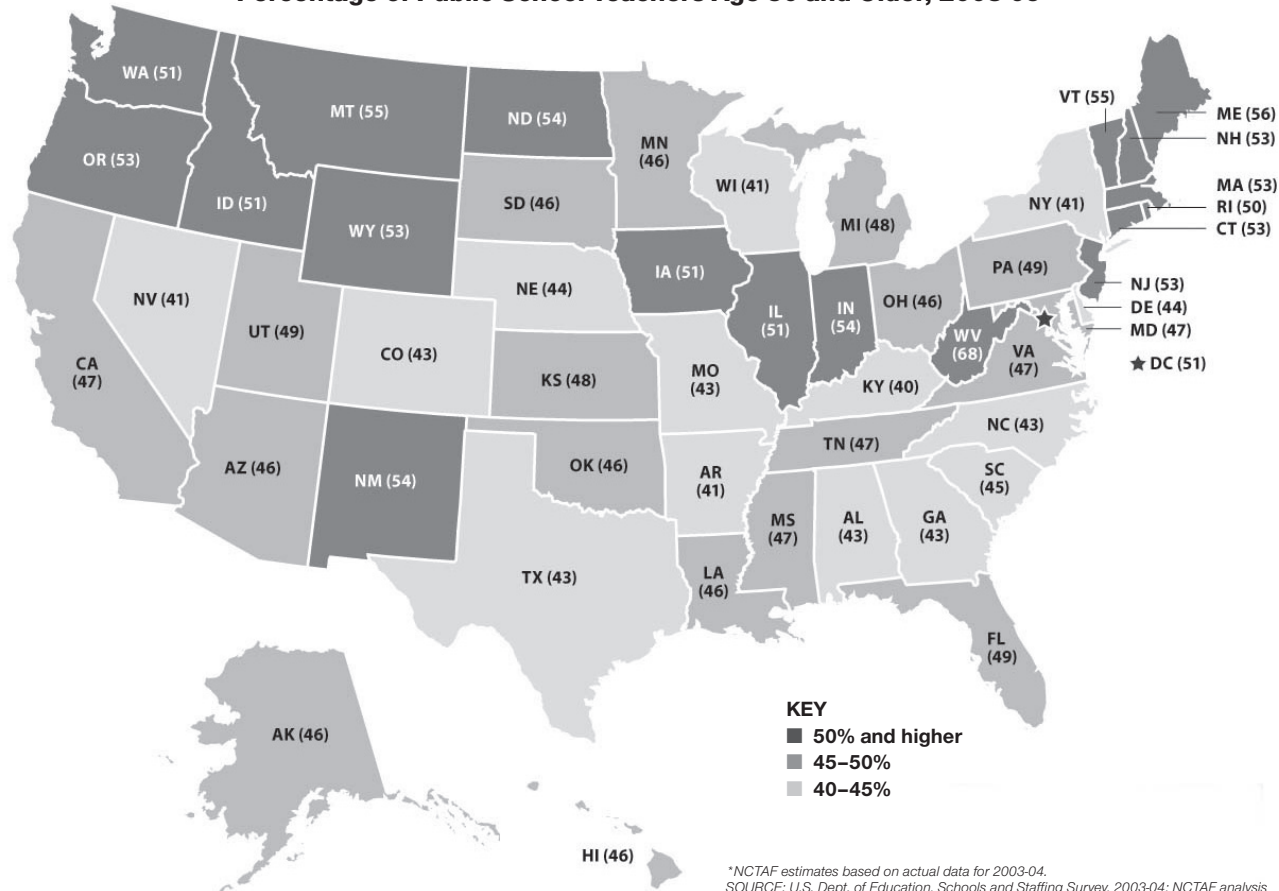
A related National Center for Educational Achievement study conducted in 2006 of 250 schools in 20 states examined the "best practices" of 140 elementary and secondary schools that outperformed demographically similar schools for at least three consecutive years across several grades on state exams. These proven track records of success were found in schools that had clear goals and instructional strategies developed through school-wide collaborative teamwork.

Teaming Is Cost Effective

In a 2007 analysis of the cost of teaming, Arthur Wise suggested that compensation costs for teaching 150 students in six traditional classrooms—with six stand-alone teachers—would be the same as the cost of serving those same students with a cross-generational team of 17 individuals, who could bring a wider range of pedagogy and content knowledge to those students. Wise assumes that the combined average compensation package of six teachers (totaling \$360,000), could be used to support a team led by an accomplished educator with the assistance of a senior teacher and two novice educators. These core team

Condensed, with permission, from the report Learning Teams: Creating What's Next, prepared by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, April 2009. To read the full report, visit www.learningteams.org.

Percentage of Public School Teachers Age 50 and Older, 2008-09*



members would design and manage student learning with the help of 13 adjuncts and interns from industry, higher education, and the community. The team would support the professional development of its members in partnership with university faculty, district specialists, or other external resources, who would work with them part time to improve their teaching effectiveness.

As a general matter, the simple assumption that it is cost effective to replace veterans with beginners does not factor in the costs of recruiting, training, and mentoring each new hire, which can range from \$4,300 in a small rural district to \$17,000 in a large urban district. And school administrators developing new cost models should factor in the possibility that a large number of retired educators and Boomers from the wider workforce can make significant contributions in part-time positions. In the public and private sector workforce is a reservoir of retirees who have existing pension benefits

that could make it possible for them to make a significant contribution to schools at little additional cost.

Teaming Leverages Resources

Learning teams provide the structure to effectively utilize the talents of retiring Baby Boomers (educators and non-educators alike). Encore careerists will work with Millennial Age teachers and Digital Age students to together deliver the knowledge, skills, and tools to help all students develop the competencies they need. This does not mean that “anyone can teach.” But it does mean that if 21st century learning teams are led by accomplished, certified educators, a host of experienced individuals from the wider workforce could be deployed within those teams to make effective contributions.

Twenty-first century schools will only become great places to learn when we make it possible for individuals to join forces with colleagues and community members to improve

student achievement beyond what any of them can accomplish alone.

Teaming Brings Service to Schools

Cross-generational learning teams can respond to the movement toward a new era of service. Such teams could leverage the human resources made possible by the proposed Serve America Act, which includes incentives and programs for Americans of every generation, adding more than 175,000 participants to AmeriCorps and other national service programs. Middle and high school students will be able to enroll in a Summer of Service volunteer program and earn \$500 toward college costs. College programs can engage students in national service while they take classes, and “Silver Scholarships” and “Encore Fellowships” will give retiring Baby Boomers a hand in breaking into new careers in public service as they earn grants transferable to children or grandchildren. Well-structured learn-

ing team opportunities can provide an access point for these service-learning teams in schools. Effective learning teams provide opportunities for individuals to serve in well structured, short term, part time, and adjunct positions while they pursue other personal and professional opportunities.

Policy Challenges and Opportunities

The challenges that our nation must address as we consider strategies for reinventing our educational workforce are previewed here:

Outdated pay and retirement policies. As we restructure staffing, our pay systems need to be brought into the 21st century to ensure that length of service and years of education are not the only basis for pay increases, that salaries and incentives are competitive in the current job market, and that teachers and principals are rewarded for teamwork that improves school performance and student achievement.

Retirement policies built around the notion that accomplished veterans should leave the classroom, simply because they are in their fifties, are also obsolete. States and school districts need to re-examine the fiscal consequences of pension provisions that push teachers in their fifties out of the workforce. In some states, retirement “bumps” that encourage teachers to retire early, ultimately strain the finances of individuals’ whose life expectancies will continue to increase. Also, early out provisions can create additional stress on public pension systems—some state pension systems could be strained to the breaking point if we continue to accelerate large numbers of Boomers into retirement. And confusing regulations and pension penalties that limit a retiree’s contributions and hours are in need of a thorough reexamination across every state and school district.

Selection of participants. Not all retiring teachers are interested in working in retirement, nor should all stay. We must develop selection

criteria and processes that enable veteran teachers to contribute to schools according to their expertise and level of commitment. NCTAF will work with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards—the organization that has certified 74,000 accomplished teachers across the country—to examine effective criteria for selecting teacher and team leaders.

It will also work with Civic Ventures, Experience Corps, and others to develop best practices for incorporating the valuable skills of non-educator Boomers into the learning teams of schools.

Rising student enrollment.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics “more babies were born in 2007 than in any other year in American history,” breaking the previous record set by the first Baby Boom in 1957. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has projected that enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools will increase by more than 3 million by 2015. NCES also projects that an additional 418,000 teachers will be needed by 2017 to meet this rising enrollment, based on the single-teacher per-classroom model. We cannot prepare enough teachers to meet the needs of the next generation if we continue with this outmoded approach to school staffing.

Today’s students are the most diverse generation in the history of our country. Meeting their individual needs requires more support and services than ever before. They come from complex communities in challenging times, and as adults they will be expected to contribute effectively to the success of their communities. They will pursue multiple careers in a globally integrated economy that rewards continuous learning, sustained teamwork, and constant innovation. Stand-alone teachers working in self-contained

classrooms cannot meet the needs of 21st century learners.

Low-performing schools. The problem of teaching quality and school performance for low income students and children of color involves recruitment and hiring incentives to attract highly qualified individuals to hard-to-staff schools. The conventional wisdom that offering these teachers higher salaries will encourage them to stay is wrong. Pay is not the deciding factor on why so many new teachers are leaving. We need to go a step further.

In every story about high-performing schools, a strong collaborative teaching culture is at the heart of the effort. No single teacher can—or should be expected to—meet myriad challenges alone.

Students lose the most when good teachers leave their schools—but high-turnover schools are also extremely costly to operate. Trapped in a chronic cycle of teacher hiring and replacement, schools sap their districts of precious dollars that could be better spent to improve teaching quality and student achievement. It is time to change the conditions that make these schools so hard to staff in the first place. In every story about high-performing schools, a strong collaborative teaching culture is at the heart of the effort. No single teacher can—or should be expected to—meet myriad challenges alone.

Teacher preparation and careers. We must become explicit and intentional about our efforts to build a seamless continuum of professional growth that begins with teaching apprenticeships and extends to multiple roles for accomplished teachers. “Teaching Residencies” that embed teacher preparation and continuous professional development in learning organizations and evolve to meet the needs of today’s students show considerable promise. With the emergence of a new learning economy, we

have entered an era in which education workforce knowledge and skill requirements are constantly growing because the job is no longer static.

At the same time, we need to re-imagine the teaching career to sustain

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—Arne Duncan,
U.S. Secretary of Education

the growth of teams of educators over time. The tradition of hiring young teachers in their 20s and expecting them to do essentially the same job for the next 30 years is a thing of the past. Sustaining teachers’ growth through-

out their careers calls for the creation of new roles and opportunities to support intern and apprentice teachers who develop their skills alongside more accomplished educators. Veterans in turn have opportunities to take on new learning challenges with the support of Millennial Age teachers who bring new skills, knowledge, and passion to their learning teams.

Schools as community centers.

In the new model, schools become not only hubs for the work of teams but also for entire neighborhoods. A growing body of evidence shows that students learn better when the major forces in their lives—family, school, and community—work together. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, a strong advocate for using school facilities as community hubs, has said, “I am just convinced that when families learn together and where schools truly become the heart and center of a neighborhood—a community anchor—there are tremendous dividends for children.” Cross-generational learning teams provide a clear model for how teachers in our schools can work

with other neighborhood agencies to address real life social, economic, environmental, and health care challenges that their students face.

Reinventing American Education

There are two ways to deal with change: wait and the change will come to you, or create the change you want. It is time to create the change we want to see.

Secretary Duncan has called on the nation’s education leaders to “think very creatively and to think very differently.”

If our states and school districts use federal stimulus investments, along with the expanding resources available in a new learning economy, and the wealth of knowledge and experience that cross-generational learning teams can bring to the task, they can build a 21st century education system. ©

NCTAF invites input on ways to build the 21st century education system at www.learningteams.org.

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