

TEACHSTRONG POLICY PROPOSAL: PRINCIPLE 7

PROVIDE TEACHERS WITH MORE TIME, TOOLS, AND SUPPORT

Provide significantly more time, tools, and support for teachers to succeed, including through planning, collaboration, and development

#TEACHSTRONG

THE NINE TEACHSTRONG PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE 1

IDENTIFY AND RECRUIT MORE TEACHER CANDIDATES

PRINCIPLE 2

REIMAGINE TEACHER PREPARATION

PRINCIPLE 3

RAISE THE BAR FOR LICENSURE

PRINCIPLE 4

INCREASE COMPENSATION

PRINCIPLE 5

PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR NEW TEACHERS

PRINCIPLE 6

**ENSURE TENURE IS A MEANINGFUL SIGNAL
OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT**

PRINCIPLE 7

**PROVIDE TEACHERS
WITH MORE TIME,
TOOLS, AND SUPPORT**

PRINCIPLE 8

**DESIGN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO BETTER
ADDRESS TEACHER AND STUDENT NEEDS**

PRINCIPLE 9

CREATE CAREER PATHWAYS

THE TEACHSTRONG THEORY OF CHANGE

The TeachStrong coalition has adopted nine principles we believe must be put in practice in order to modernize and elevate the teaching profession. This policy proposal from the TeachStrong coalition explains how we can provide teachers with more time, tools, and support, including through planning, collaboration, and development. This proposal builds out Principle Seven, the seventh of the nine TeachStrong principles. Although this proposal addresses just one principle, the nine principles affect and build upon one another and must be aligned to achieve systemic changes to the teaching profession.

Thoughtful changes across the teaching career continuum are necessary to improve teaching and learning for all students—especially students of color and those from low-income families. While higher expectations for students and schools have heightened the demands placed on teachers, the systems that are designed to support teachers have not kept pace. These gaps are especially apparent in high-need schools.

This campaign seeks to promote changes that span a teacher’s career, starting with recruitment and preparation and continuing on through compensation and career pathways, paying particular attention to the importance of the professional context in which teachers work. The TeachStrong coalition believes that all aspects of the teaching profession must be addressed in a systemic way; only then can we create a self-reinforcing cycle through which the status of the profession is raised along with the quality of teaching and learning in our nation’s classrooms.

We need a comprehensive approach to addressing the teacher pipeline because we have seen that piecemeal policy changes do not work. In the past, there have been attempts to address singular aspects of the teacher pipeline, and while these efforts may have made significant changes to one area, the system as a whole remained largely unchanged. For example, if we were to focus solely on preparation programs, it might give beginning teachers a stronger start. But student learning will not significantly improve if teacher training and development are ineffective or if teachers do not have opportunities to lead. In combination, however, changes in these areas could have powerful, lasting effects. Moreover, if we are to ensure that great teaching consistently reaches all students, we must explicitly address inequities in access to our strongest educators for low-income students and students of color.

No one simple policy fix will be enough to move the system as a whole. Many of the institutions responsible for educating, training, and setting policy for teachers operate in isolated silos that are sometimes disconnected from teachers themselves. The work is not easy: Policymakers must strive for a comprehensive system while factoring in other realities, such as existing political landscapes and the unique situations and contexts of individual states. However, as demonstrated by the consensus achieved by the diverse TeachStrong coalition around these nine principles, success is possible.

To achieve the kinds of dramatic changes we need for student achievement—and for those changes to be sustainable for teachers, students, and taxpayers alike—we need dramatic changes to all aspects of the systems designed to support teachers.

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“How did it get so late so soon?”

– DR. SEUSS

TEACHERS NEED MORE TIME, TOOLS, AND SUPPORT TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

In order to successfully manage a job description that has grown significantly more challenging in recent years with the advent of higher standards, greater accountability, and increasing pressure to ensure all students are on track for college and careers, teachers desperately need more time. In every profession, time to plan and practice is an essential part of what it takes to excel. We expect professional athletes and performers to spend significantly more time practicing than they spend in games or on stage. Likewise, lawyers working on a big case spend the vast majority of their time researching and preparing and only a small percentage of their time in the courtroom. Scientists conducting research spend countless hours in the lab before they are able to document and present their results.

Just like other professionals, teachers need time to plan and practice—both alone and with their colleagues—in order to improve their skills and expertise. Excellent instruction isn’t something that just happens on its own. It is a result of careful planning and preparation; collaborative problem-solving and learning from expert teachers; and thoughtful, targeted skill practice. Specifically, great teaching requires significant planning and preparation, as well as chances to work as a team with colleagues over matters of curriculum, pedagogical techniques, and management issues. Teachers also need opportunities to receive feedback and respond to evidence of student learning—all of which have the potential to improve instruction and student outcomes.

Unlike in teaching, professionals in other fields can carve out significant time during the workday to plan and prepare as a matter of course. Even casual viewers of legal procedurals know that lawyers’ work includes meeting with clients, strategizing with other attorneys, researching previous cases for precedent, and preparing opening and closing arguments. We do not expect lawyers to be in court 40 hours a week each and every week because we know that much of their job takes place elsewhere. We can also intuit that, if they were to be in court fulltime, they would not be able to serve their clients to the best of their ability.

Teachers also have a significant workload that must be completed outside of class time, but this work is less widely understood. Instead, teachers' jobs are too often treated as if their work only includes the hours they are interacting directly with students, and the paucity of time granted to teachers for their other responsibilities detrimentally affects their capacity to serve students.

Working in a time-strapped environment is also detrimental to teachers. In a recent survey measuring teachers' views on the quality of their work lives, one of the two most-cited "everyday stressors" in the workplace and classroom was time pressure.² Teachers are so crunched for time that even finding time to use the restroom can be a problem: In the same study, a quarter of respondents cited a "lack of opportunity to use the restroom" as an issue that created workplace stress.³ Another survey found that while 60 percent of teachers believe that collaborating with other teachers in their school is helpful to a great extent, nearly half of teachers reported that their school did not provide sufficient time for valuable teacher collaboration.⁴

Sometimes the time crunch is a matter of too little planning time being built into teachers' schedules.⁵ In a survey of the nation's largest school districts, those that provided the least amount of planning time only provided teachers with 40 minutes per week—8 minutes per school day. Even in districts that provided teachers the most planning time—about an hour a day⁶—teachers find that their planning and collaboration time is regularly overtaken by other demands, such as coordinating assessments, planned or unplanned meetings with administrators, or covering other teachers' classrooms.⁷ While some of these activities may be important, many are not directly tied to instruction or student learning.

"If teachers had less student contact time and more collaboration time, the level of both rigor and student engagement would be higher."

— REBECCA WADE, Special education building coach and TeachStrong ambassador, St. Paul, Minnesota⁸

American middle and high school teachers report spending more time at the front of the classroom than teachers in nearly every other country in the developed world.⁹ While U.S. teachers deliver instruction for about 80 percent of their workday, the international average is around 60 percent—and teachers in high-performing nations like Japan, Korea, and Singapore spend only about one-third of their time providing instruction directly to students.¹⁰ We know that it does not have to be this way for U.S. teachers. High-performing nations are not spending more per pupil than the United States,¹¹ and their academic achievement is higher than ours,¹² all with teachers working directly with students for fewer hours each week.

Not only do American teachers spend more time instructing students, they also tend to work in relative isolation as compared with teachers in other nations. At least half of lower secondary teachers in the United States report that they never teach jointly in the same classroom with a colleague and/or never observe other teachers and provide feedback on their teaching.¹³ Additionally, 42 percent of these teachers report never engaging in joint projects across classes or age groups.¹⁴ Teachers in high-performing countries, by contrast, spend considerable planning time working with each other to develop high-quality curriculum and instruction.¹⁵

In these other nations, the additional time teachers are given is put to good use, perhaps contributing to their overall better academic outcomes. In Japan, for example, teachers set aside 10 hours to 15 hours over the course of a few weeks to plan one lesson as a team—a practice called *kenkyuu jugyou*, or “lesson study.”¹⁶ After developing a lesson together as a team, one teacher teaches the lesson while the other team members watch and observe. The group then comes together again to review the learning data and provide feedback on the lesson, further refining it.¹⁷ The high-quality lessons that are the outcome of a lesson study cycle are then sometimes published or integrated into the school’s curricular materials.¹⁸

“I am an exceptional, caring, and competent educator who makes a difference every day, yet I am actively looking for other jobs because the stress and lack of time, tools, and support are too much for one person to handle.”

– HEATHER MCCARTHY, Fourth-grade teacher and TeachStrong ambassador, Buffalo, New York¹⁹

These kinds of practices are not unique to Japan. Teachers in Singapore have 20 hours every week to develop lesson plans collaboratively and observe their colleagues, allowing them to glean best practices from other teachers. Because there are many leadership roles for teachers in Singapore, it is the norm to provide beginning teachers coaching and mentoring from more accomplished teachers within their schools during noninstructional time. Other nations are catching on: In Canada, a new initiative is giving teachers in Ontario lighter workloads to allow more time for development and peer collaboration.²⁰ Countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland give teachers time for professional development as part of their normal workday or week.²¹

Providing more time does not necessarily change practice on its own.²² Teachers would benefit from capacity building to facilitate this time well, build the trust necessary to support a culture of critique, collect and analyze data effectively, and remain focused on student needs. Teachers need training to learn the skills associated with managing and collaborating with teams of adults. As school districts provide teachers with more time, they must also provide the necessary tools and support for teachers to learn how to coach, lead teams, and master the competencies associated with adult learning.

Some schools in the United States, including several in Illinois and Florida, are adopting models from abroad, including Japan’s lesson study strategy.²³ Yet, by and large, schools and school districts are not employing innovative solutions to provide teachers with more time, tools, and support. To foster the kind of instruction that drives the learning gains the United States needs to remain internationally competitive, we must make these same changes here.

HOW PROVIDING TEACHERS WITH TIME, TOOLS, AND SUPPORT CAN MODERNIZE AND ELEVATE THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Providing teachers with more time is not sufficient in itself. Teachers must also use their planning and collaboration time purposefully. According to Robert Travaglini, senior director of school and district support in Connecticut for the National Center for Time and Learning, “It’s one thing to expand time. But it just gives you the structure to create additional

opportunities. It's not going to give you the impact if you don't align it with an instructional component where teachers identify needs for support."²⁴

In addition to providing teachers with the time they need, we must also support them in taking advantage of the potential performance gains that come from teamwork, collaboration, and group problem-solving. Just like other professionals—engineers, architects, and designers, to name only a few—teachers also benefit from a team approach to improving their craft and from the support that peers provide. In a 2007 study of 47 schools, students who attended schools characterized by higher-quality teacher collaboration demonstrated higher performance in math and reading.²⁵ Likewise, a 2016 study found that when a teacher struggling with a particular skill is paired with a high-performing teacher in that area, student growth increases.²⁶

Providing teachers with more time, tools, and support is also a critical retention strategy. Strong relationships with their administration and colleagues and a positive and supportive school atmosphere make it more likely that teachers will stay at their jobs and in the profession. These favorable work conditions are also predictors of higher levels of student growth and improved academic achievement.²⁷ New teachers, especially, can benefit from additional time, tools, and support—possibly provided as part of residency and induction programs—during their critical first years in the classroom. Time for planning and collaboration is an essential strategy to make entry into the profession a smoother experience and ensure that new teachers have the capacity to meet their professional responsibilities and improve their practice. When new and more accomplished teachers work together, it leads to increases in students' engagement and motivation for learning.²⁸

Providing educators with additional time, tools, and support also can allow for additional teacher leadership and professional learning opportunities. When teachers have the time and support to pursue leadership roles, they can act as coaches, mentors, models, and policy influencers.²⁹ Time is also a key resource for ensuring that professional learning is high quality, drives instructional improvement, and is responsive to the current needs of students, teachers, and schools. Additional time, tools, and support can affect the entire teaching workforce in a school or district by making all kinds of other changes—from induction programs to teacher leadership opportunities—possible.

It is often said that time is our most precious resource. This axiom holds true for both teachers and students. Teachers can't provide high-quality instruction day after day without the structures in place—time, collaboration, and coaching—to make daily planning, preparation, and problem-solving possible. Likewise, students can't afford to waste time in classrooms where the instructional quality is anything less than excellent. To create schools where students are being prepared for the competitive, globalized reality of tomorrow's world, providing teachers with time—and the tools and support to use it effectively—is a necessity.

SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS IN THE UNITED STATES THAT ARE RETHINKING TEACHER TIME

In order to alleviate the teacher time crunch, it is essential that teachers and school districts work together. To make this a reality, school officials and teachers need to develop school schedules and deploy related resources in ways that meet the unique needs of teachers in their building and reflect shared school improvement priorities, which will look different in each location and context.

Below are examples of schools and districts across the country that are employing unique strategies to provide teachers with more time.

Generation Schools Network

The Generation Schools Network, a nonprofit that partners with schools and districts in New York and Colorado to launch new schools, has added up to 30 percent more learning time for students without increasing costs or teacher workload while simultaneously increasing the time for teachers to plan and collaborate.³⁰ Through innovative school schedules that include three types of teachers with dual roles, teachers have up to two hours daily to plan lessons with their colleagues and receive coaching.³¹ Schools utilizing the Generation Schools Model hire three different teaching teams for distinct teaching roles and stagger the teams throughout the day and year to increase instructional time for students. The schedule is designed to reduce the need for teachers to spend their out-of-school hours planning.³²

In the Generation Schools Model, teachers of core subjects teach three classes and a total of 75 or fewer students per day. Teacher roles vary: Some are in charge of instruction for their grade or subject area, while others provide administrative support for the school or other mandated services to students. Class sizes are smaller than the national average, with between 18 and 25 students in each course. Teachers who have demonstrated expertise over their content can spend more than 20 days per year—and two hours per day—serving as grade-team leaders, providing professional development to other teachers at the school.³³

Don Reynolds, a ninth-grade teacher at West Generation Academy—part of the Generation Schools Network—praised this system: “With a minimum of ninety minutes a day of collaborative planning time, all grade level and content teams have the necessary time to develop standards-based, fully-aligned, yearlong plans, unit plans, and daily lesson plans as well as ample time to review and act upon student data. I simply cannot imagine trying to teach without this amount of collaborative time and support.”³⁴ Brooklyn Generation School has increased its student graduation rate to exceed citywide graduation averages and also doubled the percentage of students receiving a New York State Regents diploma.³⁵

Martin County School District, Florida

Following the implementation of Common Core State Standards, teachers in the Martin County School District struggled to adapt their instruction to the new standards with their limited collaboration and planning time.³⁶ To address teacher concerns, the school district created a time study team that, after six months, suggested that the state grant the district a waiver of 15 minutes from Florida’s required amount of daily instructional time. In addition to their individual planning time, thanks to the waiver from the state, teachers in the Martin County School District now have 120 minutes of time each week over three days for collaborative professional learning and planning.³⁷

After the first year of additional time, teachers reported that they felt more confident in implementing the district’s new curriculum aligned with Common Core standards, had a greater respect for their peers’ contribution to their success, and valued the time to learn and work with their colleagues.³⁸ Teachers also reported a stronger sense of community within the school. The benefits were not exclusive to teachers: Student achievement also increased during the year.³⁹

Meriden, Connecticut Schools

In Meriden, Connecticut, efforts to give teachers more time reflect successful collaboration between teachers, district officials, and union leaders. With a grant from the American Federation of Teachers Innovation Fund, the Meriden School District and American Federation of Teachers worked together to create a system in which teachers have increased collaboration time along with compensation for all additional hours worked as the district moved to extend the school day.⁴⁰

Teachers in Meriden are encouraged to collaborate with their grade-level teams and are provided with additional professional learning opportunities. What's more, students in participating schools receive 40 more days of instructional time each year than many of their peers statewide.⁴¹ The district points to increased time for teachers to collaborate and extra time for students to learn as major factors behind increased student success. In one participating school, average daily student attendance increased more than 10 percentage points to 98 percent.⁴² At the same school, following implementation of the new scheduling system, third- and fourth-graders achieved the greatest reading growth in the district. According to Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy (D), "Things are happening [in Meriden] because of the level of collaboration."⁴³

The Equity Project Charter School

The Equity Project Charter School in New York City—known for compensating teachers with annual salaries of at least \$125,000—also prioritizes teacher observation and collaboration. The school's schedule is designed so that each teacher spends at least five total periods each week observing, being observed, and debriefing and planning with a partner teacher.⁴⁴ Pairs rotate each quarter, allowing teachers to develop relationships with each of their colleagues; learn from each other's best practices; and create a more robust school culture. A 2014 Mathematica report found that students who attended the school for four years gained an additional 1.6 years of school in math, an additional 40 percent of a year of school in English language arts, and an additional 60 percent of a year of school in science when compared with the learning gains of their peers across New York City schools.⁴⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools that seek to provide teachers with increased time during the existing school day face a number of challenges. More than half of principals report that it is difficult to access and capitalize on school resources—including money and time—to provide opportunities for teachers to build their competence and skills.⁴⁶ However, there are a number of different methods that states and school districts in varied contexts can utilize to ensure that teachers are provided the time and support they require to be successful.

Schools and school districts should consider a wide variety of evidence-backed tools and supports to ensure that increased time is used effectively. Some of these strategies may include teacher leadership opportunities, career

pathways, peer collaboration, residency and induction programs, and greater access to technology. Below are several ways districts and school leaders could creatively modify the current structure of teacher time in order to create schools that are more supportive of teachers and beneficial for students. Not all of these options will work in every context, but the variety of options makes it possible for many types of schools and districts to find ways to make increasing teacher time work for their particular situation.

Schools and school districts should explore innovative scheduling options

Possibilities for innovative scheduling options include:

Encouraging block scheduling in secondary schools. Increased planning time for teachers has long been heralded as one of the primary advantages of block scheduling, particularly in secondary schools. If students attend four 90-minute classes per day, alternating classes each day, schools can provide teachers with a daily 90-minute planning period.⁴⁷

Lengthening the school day. Elongating the school day—while providing commensurate increases in teacher compensation—is another way to give teachers more time to plan and collaborate. Extended day models can also provide opportunities to give students access to enrichment or extracurricular activities, a safe space for play and physical activity, or even a less rushed lunch period—all activities that students do not typically have time for during standard tightly packed school days.⁴⁸

Varying class sizes in secondary school. There is evidence to suggest that smaller class sizes are linked to higher student achievement in lower grades but that the correlation fades as students grow older.⁴⁹ With caution, adjusting class sizes in secondary grades may make it possible to give teachers additional time for planning and collaboration.

Schools and school districts should move away from the one teacher, one classroom model

Alternative teaching models include:

Creating leadership opportunities for teachers. Roles like mentor teacher, master teacher, and instructional coach provide the infrastructure for teachers to collaborate and for new or struggling teachers to learn from experienced, high-performing peers.⁵⁰ In some schools and districts, teachers in leadership roles have distinct responsibilities outside of the classroom—including coaching and providing administrative support—while allowing them to continue teaching students for part of the day. By crafting innovative hybrid roles for teachers that allow them to plan and teach collaboratively, schools and school districts can increase the amount of time that teachers can dedicate to improving their skills without having to rely solely on outside providers or professional development days.

Creating co-teaching models, developing teacher residencies, or making use of volunteers. Co-teaching, defined as two or more teachers working together with groups of students, builds collaboration between teachers throughout the school day. It also has some of the same advantages as departmentalization, as it allows teachers to divide the planning load and use the saved time to create better lesson plans for the subjects that they will lead.⁵¹ While residents can't share teaching responsibilities to the same extent that a co-teacher can, they can collaborate with teachers and provide necessary instructional support in the classroom. Meanwhile, volunteers can take on many of the tasks that keep teachers busy but do not necessarily require their expertise, including decorating bulletin boards, drafting letters to parents and guardians about upcoming field trips, or making copies.

Encouraging the use of technology. High-quality educational technology is now capable of providing individualized learning activities to students while allowing them to learn and work at their own pace. While such activities are not a substitute or a replacement for a skilled teacher, these technologies may allow adjustments to teachers' schedules or to class sizes during the time students are working on computers or other devices if other staff are able to provide supervision during this time.

States and school districts should repurpose existing professional development funding

Currently, school districts in the United States spend \$18 billion annually on professional development for teachers,⁵² and the 50 largest school districts spend \$18,000 per teacher per year.⁵³ New research questions whether these funds are being spent effectively, as many forms of professional development have been shown to have little to no effect on teacher practice or student learning.⁵⁴ Redistributing some of the funding currently used for one-off workshops and other less effective professional development activities to more school-based collaborative learning time could make it possible to provide teachers with increased time to collaborate and plan. When teachers have the time to pursue leadership opportunities, schools and school districts should provide ample support to ensure that teacher leaders can effectively serve as mentors.

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