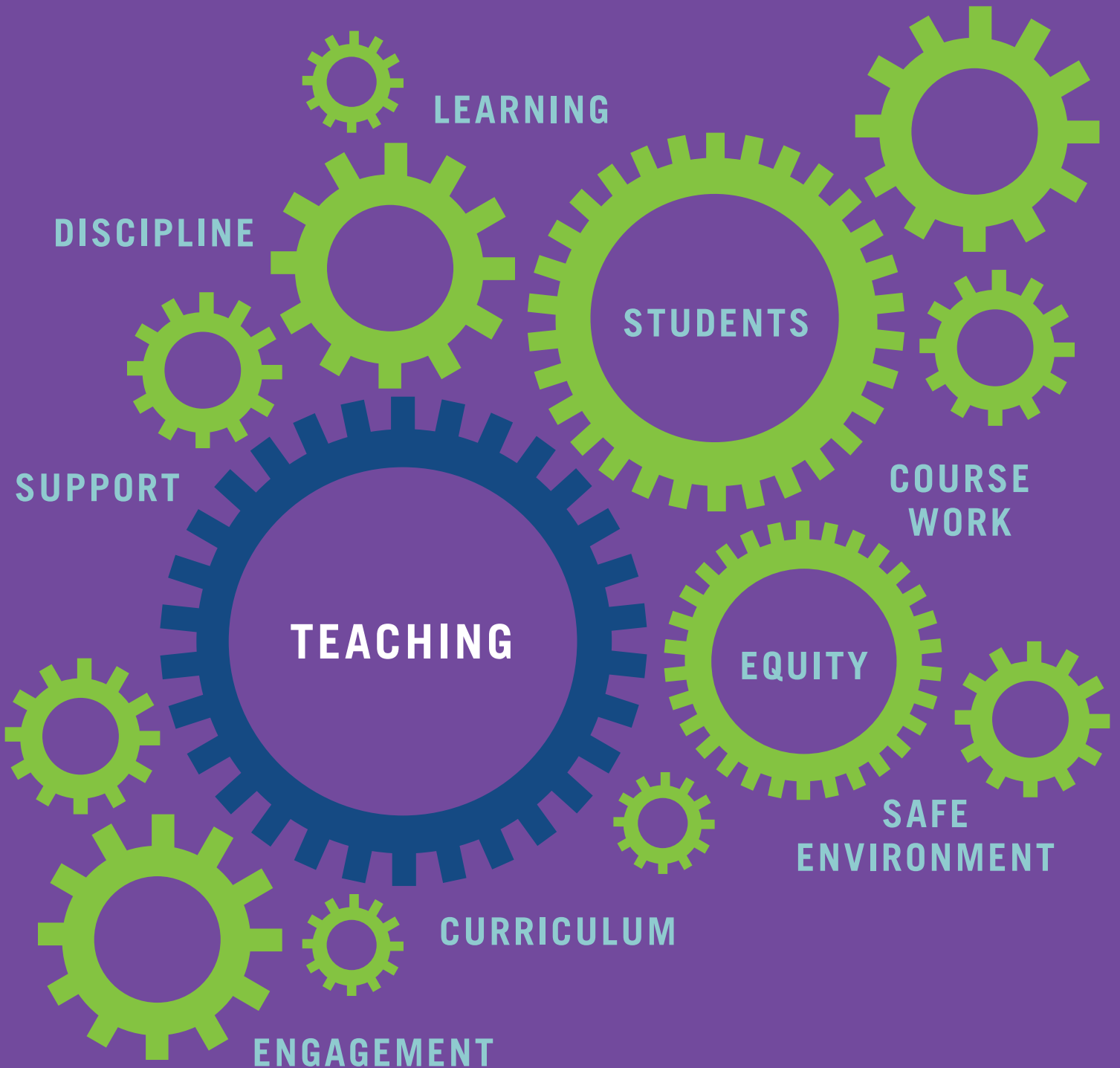




CLIMATE CHANGE: Improving School Climate by Supporting Great Teaching

SEPTEMBER 2014



“BEING ABLE TO TALK OPENLY WITH A TEACHER AND RECEIVE HIS OR HER ADVICE IS A BENEFIT THAT ALL STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE. HAVING A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST GIVES STUDENTS A SENSE OF SECURITY AND SOMEONE TO TURN TO WHEN THEY FEEL LIKE THEY HAVE NO ONE ELSE.”

— GARRETT DEGRAFFENREID, STUDENT

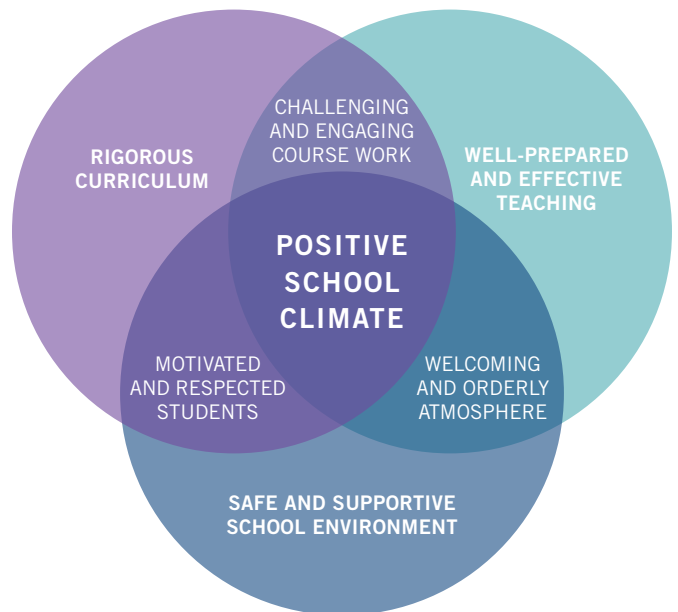
INTRODUCTION

Teachers are an essential part of fostering a school climate that supports student success. As schools across the country move to implement higher, college- and career-ready standards, students need support from effective teachers. Effective teaching reflects a diversity of strategies designed to engage students and support high achievement. These include setting high expectations, increasing academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes, using diverse resources to plan and structure learning opportunities, and collaborating with peers to ensure student success.¹

Unfortunately, far too many students, particularly students from low-income families, students of color, students with disabilities, and English language

learners, do not have access to well-supported, prepared, and effective teachers. Too many students are not learning in an environment that prepares them for college, a career, and life. For a number of reasons, many schools do not offer resources for educators to strengthen their practice, support a positive school climate, and provide students with access to great teaching.

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR), schools in the highest 20 percent in terms of African American and Latino student enrollment are nearly twice as likely as schools in the lowest 20 percent of African American and Latino student enrollment to employ teachers who have only one to two years of classroom teaching experience.^a **In addition, numerous studies indicate that students of color, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families have less access to teachers with the proper credentials and subject-area expertise.**² Years of classroom teaching and earned credentials are two indicators of how effective a teacher will be in his or her classroom, and therefore affect how and what students learn.



^a This analysis by the OCR compares the percentage of teachers in their first or second year of teaching in schools and districts with high and low combined Latino and African American enrollment. Specifically, this analysis reports the percentage of novice teachers in the top quintile of schools and districts by enrollment, ranked by percentage of Hispanic and African American enrollment, with the percentage of novice teachers in the lowest quintile.

This paper, the fourth in the Alliance for Excellent Education's Climate Change series, will discuss

- the role of teachers in fostering positive school climate and the impact of inequitable access to effective teaching;
- promising approaches to providing historically underserved students access to effective teaching; and
- federal, state, and local policy recommendations to support the type of teaching needed to create a positive school climate.

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF TEACHERS IN CREATING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Developing the relationship between teachers and students is a critical step toward meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students, thereby fostering a positive school climate. Access to rigorous and engaging course work is also important to creating a positive school climate. In order for students to achieve higher standards, including more rigorous and engaging course work, teachers need to create a learning environment that is safe, inclusive, and supportive. The following sections highlight three key areas that teachers need to focus on to support a positive climate:

- **providing academic support;**
- **developing positive student-teacher relationships; and**
- **creating a safe learning environment.**

Providing academic support

According to a recent publication by the Teachers College Record, a positive school climate promotes student learning, academic achievement, school success, and healthy development.³ Moreover, a positive school climate promotes cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust,⁴ which, in turn, improves teacher practice.⁵ Teachers assume a key role in ensuring a positive school environment, and helping students feel supported in their academic efforts is a critical component. Research by David Osher and his colleagues indicates that “[b]y providing students with support that addresses their social and emotional needs and by building strong social and emotional conditions for learning, educators can improve learning outcomes that cannot be addressed through instruction alone.”⁶ Research confirms that students who feel supported and encouraged by their teachers and other adults in the school building are more likely to perform better in class, attend school more frequently, and be less disruptive than those who do not. An article in the *Journal of School Health* found that

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IS A CRITICAL STEP TOWARD MEETING THE ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS, THEREBY FOSTERING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE.

both teachers and students believe that support from the teacher is important for student engagement.⁷ Further,

[s]tudents who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school. In turn, high levels of engagement are associated with higher attendance and test scores—variables that strongly predict whether youth will successfully complete school and ultimately pursue postsecondary education and achieve economic self-sufficiency.⁸

For further discussion on providing a rigorous and engaging curriculum to all students, please see the Alliance for Excellent Education’s *Climate Change: Providing Equitable Access to a Rigorous and Engaging Curriculum*.

Student-teacher relationships

The relationships that teachers and students share are critical for meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. According to an American Psychological Association brief on teacher-student relationships,

[i]mproving students’ relationships with teachers has important, positive and long-lasting implications for students’ academic and social development ... [S]tudents who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement than those students with more conflictual relationships. If a student feels a personal connection to a teacher, experiences frequent communication with a teacher, and receives more guidance and praise than criticism from the teacher, then the student is likely to become more trustful of that teacher, show more engagement in the academic content presented, display better classroom behavior,

and achieve at higher levels academically. Positive teacher-student relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn.⁹

These findings hold particularly true for male students, with whom it is often considered challenging for teachers to build relationships. A Phi Delta Kappan study concludes that “boys’ school success improves because of exchanges between a boy and a teacher that make them allies pursuing a common goal of content mastery for the student. Although pursuing content mastery depends on the quality of the student-teacher relationship, a positive student-teacher relationship is unlikely to occur unless the teacher has pedagogical mastery of the subject.”¹⁰

Additional studies indicate that teachers “who know their students well tend to view behavior in context (e.g., ‘he’s struggling right now at home and is taking it out on his peers’) and avoid rigid judgments about the student (e.g., ‘she is a bad seed’),” and these teachers were shown to have students with higher academic outcomes than their peers.¹¹

Creating a safer learning environment

Research again confirms that a safe learning environment contributes to positive student outcomes. A recent study of New York City middle school students found that differential feelings of safety in the classroom may explain an estimated one-quarter to one-third of the gap in test scores between students of color and their white peers.¹² The study also posited that ensuring that every student feels safe in the classroom is a critical first step in improving overall academic achievement and reducing racial achievement gaps. Further, a student survey conducted in California found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students who feel safe at school were more likely to have higher grade point averages and planned to go to college.¹³

SCHOOLS WITH TEACHERS USING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING HAVE SEEN AN INCREASED SENSE OF “SCHOOL AS A CARING COMMUNITY,” AND FEWER REPORTS OF STUDENTS EXHIBITING AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR, LOWER LEVELS OF DELINQUENCY, AND INCREASED ACADEMIC MOTIVATION.

Safe learning environments for all students can result from teachers incorporating social and emotional learning,^b peer mediation, conflict resolution, and other similar strategies into their practice. These strategies ensure student safety in the classroom and help develop the skills, attitudes, and behaviors they will need to remain safe and ready to learn. Schools with teachers using social and emotional learning have seen an increased sense of “school as a caring community,” and fewer reports of students exhibiting aggressive behavior, lower levels of delinquency, and increased academic motivation.¹⁴ For further discussion

on creating a safe environment for all students see the Alliance’s *Climate Change: Implementing School Discipline Practices That Create a Positive School Climate*.

ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Many studies have found that teachers have the single biggest impact on student achievement—more than any other factor in the school.¹⁵ This is especially true for students of color and students from low-income communities, who tend to have fewer resources outside of school. **Unfortunately, students of color and students from low-income families have less access to educators with the skills and attitudes needed to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs.**^c

Students from low-income families and students of color have less access to effective teachers regardless of the criteria being applied for assessing teaching effectiveness—student access to effective teaching, student access to fully certified teachers, student access to teachers certified in the assigned subject area, and student access to well-supported and experienced teachers.

- *Student access to effective teaching:* The Institute for Education Sciences conducted a three-year study of twenty-nine school districts for grades four through eight separately by English language arts and math. Students from low-income families—often measured by qualification for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL)—did not, on average, have equal access to effective teaching.¹⁶ The study concluded “that

^b Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. See <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/> (accessed July 17, 2014).

^c According to a report by the Equity and Excellence Commission, “[T]he most challenging schools have teachers who are less well qualified, on average, by any standard: academic ability, content background, experience, preparation, certification, and education level” (U.S. Department of Education, *For Each and Every Child—A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence* [Washington, DC: Author, 2013]).

the typical FRPL student experiences less effective teaching than the typical non-FRPL student within a district.”¹⁷ Further, the extent to which students have access to effective teaching based on race and ethnicity is similar to student access to effective teaching based on FRPL status.¹⁸ It is important to note that states and school districts are in varying stages of implementing teacher evaluation systems, and there is significant variation of the quality of these systems to measure effectiveness. An effective evaluation system is an essential tool for helping to improve teaching and learning. This is particularly the case for the most vulnerable students, who, upon experiencing ineffective instruction early in their schooling, may struggle to catch up.¹⁹

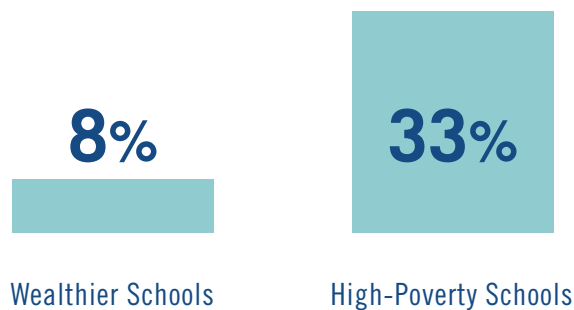
- *Student access to fully certified teachers.* The type of certification—standard or emergency—that a teacher holds is an important determinant of student achievement.²⁰ Studies²¹ consistently show that “teachers in training are less effective before they have completed their preparation than those who enter teaching fully prepared.”²² **These underprepared teachers, who have yet to complete full certification requirements, are primarily assigned to students from low-income families and students of color,^d often over multiple years of schooling.**²³ This is detrimental for both the students and the teacher, who, regardless of his or her intentions, has not yet developed the extensive set of skills needed to create a positive learning environment.

SCHOOLS SERVING STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES AND STUDENTS IN URBAN COMMUNITIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO EMPLOY TEACHERS WHO ARE NOT CERTIFIED IN THE SUBJECT THEY TEACH.

- *Student access to teachers certified in the assigned subject area.* The implementation of rigorous and engaging curriculum requires, in part, teachers with strong content knowledge. Schools serving students from low-income families and students in urban communities are more likely to employ teachers who are not certified in the subject they teach.²⁴ These students have only a 50 percent chance of being taught math and science by a teacher who holds a degree and a license in the field they teach.²⁵ One study of teacher assignment shows that only 8 percent of public school teachers in wealthier schools teach without a major or minor in their main academic assignment, compared to 33 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools.²⁶

^d Examining the distribution of licensed and credentialed teachers provides a window into the dramatic inequalities in access to certified teachers, documented in lawsuits challenging school funding in California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, and Texas, among other states. See L. Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education: How America’s Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Nation’s Future* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2010).

Percentage of Public School Teachers Without a Major or Minor in Their Main Academic Assignment



 Share this stat: #HSClimate

Teachers often make decisions that have a lasting impact on a student’s personal and academic future, including decisions related to course placement and referrals.⁹ At the federal, state, and local levels, increased efforts must be made to support teachers in developing these capacities. The following approaches can help provide teachers with the tools they need to meet the needs of their students.

- *Student access to experienced and supported teachers.* Schools serving predominantly students of color and students from low-income families tend to employ large numbers of inexperienced teachers. This is in part a function of a ballooning workforce in which there are more beginning teachers systemwide.²⁷ When coupled with poor working environments, these factors together result in a revolving door in low-performing schools. More effective and experienced teachers often seek out better-paying and more supportive school environments.²⁸ Lack of experience combined with a less supportive environment often overwhelms new teachers, decreases their sense of efficacy, and leads to dismal teacher retention rates in struggling schools. High turnover makes it particularly challenging for teachers to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with students.

Percentage of Teachers in K–12 Schools in Their First or Second Year of Teaching

Schools with the highest enrollments of African American and Latino students are nearly



as likely as schools with the lowest enrollments of these students to employ teachers who have **only one to two years of experience.**

 Share this stat: #HSClimate

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2009–10.

⁹ Student assignments for gifted and talented programs, special education, and English language learning are primarily determined by educators, so their ability to assess and determine student needs is critical. For example, evidence shows that students of color are frequently placed in special education or remedial classes that do not include critical features of the core curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, *For Each and Every Child*). Similarly, English language learners “may be mistakenly placed in remedial reading programs or under-resourced special education services when their actual needs involve English-language development” (ibid.). Further, students may face restricted access to gifted and talented programs, where entry is primarily determined through educator recommendations. The same can be said of decisions to place students in alternative educational schools or other “programs from which they may never emerge” (Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education*).

Climate Changer

by **Donique Reid**
Former Policy and Advocacy Intern,
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While much of the school climate work is done at the local and school levels, significant steps can be taken at the state level to encourage and support these efforts. For example, a number of states have made a concerted effort to ensure that teachers are prepared to create safe and positive learning environments in their classrooms. Connecticut, for example, has taken an approach that is centered on building the capacities of school-level staff to develop positive school climate. Connecticut is working to provide meaningful, collaborative professional development that allows teachers to move from training to practice. The state also provides school- and/or district-level support and metrics for accountability to ensure that students are receiving effective instruction at the school level.

Connecticut's Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility request references PA 11-232, a state law defining school climate as "the quality and character of school life with a particular focus on the quality of relationships within the school community between and among students and adults."²⁹ The legislation established a new landscape in which school climate is a priority. Accordingly, the Connecticut Department of Education places a strong emphasis on preventing and responding to bullying and improving school climate through adult-centered strategies. The department provides in-service training for teachers, administrators, and pupil personnel through a module called "Improving School Climate to Support Student Achievement: Creating Climates of Respect."³⁰ This is a foundational two-day training module in which participants learn how to collect data,^f develop school climate improvement plans, and

implement the plans in their schools. The module covers topics such as culturally responsive education, effective teaching strategies, and school climate change for leaders. During the session, adults work in groups to complete more than a dozen learning tasks drawing from resources that emphasize restorative justice, emotionally safe schools, and learning to listen.³¹ This interactive approach to professional development provides teachers both the knowledge and the practical skills to understand culture and bias, engage with families, and manage the classroom.³² Participants are also encouraged to participate in additional training modules designed for building school climate teams. Climate teams work collaboratively to focus on the use of data and to develop schoolwide climate initiatives.³³ The department also offers advanced training to become certified to train other professionals and to provide technical assistance within districts.³⁴

To ensure adequate support, each school in Connecticut is staffed with a safe school climate specialist and every district has a safe school climate coordinator. School-level staff also have access to referrals for socio-emotional and community-oriented support services for students. In addition, each school is required to conduct a biannual school climate survey,⁹ which is used as a tool for ensuring a safe and positive environment for students. This tool also highlights varying degrees of student connectedness to school, which is a key component of the department's professional development sessions.³⁵ Connecticut has plans to implement additional school climate measures into its accountability performance index, including parent and staff surveys, disciplinary measures such as suspension rates, teacher and staff attendance, and staff turnover.³⁶

^f The comprehensive model of data used by Connecticut is based on Victoria Bernhardt's logic model for using multiple measures for continuous improvement. This model is also being used by a number of other states. See M. Haynes, "Advancing Adolescent Literacy: Pennsylvania's Keystones to Opportunity Comprehensive Literacy Program," April 1, 2014, <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/PAKeystones.pdf> (accessed June 10, 2014), 5.

⁹ There is proposed legislation (SB 106) currently under review. Should this legislation pass, these surveys would be implemented annually.

PROMISING APPROACHES

As previously established, a strong link exists between teaching capacity and a positive school climate.

Strengthening this link requires enacting policies that focus not only on the individual teacher but also on the broader circumstances and community conditions needed to support achievement for all students. The following promising approaches demonstrate initiatives that begin with teacher recruitment and extend through a teacher's professional career.

Supporting cultural competence

An important element in strengthening relationships and creating a positive atmosphere is cultural competence.^h Teacher perceptions of student behavior, particularly more subjective behavior, may be indicative of the differences between the social experiences and backgrounds of teachers and their students (for additional information, see the Alliance's *Implementing School Discipline Practices That Create a Positive School Climate*). **Teachers should be provided with opportunities, during both pre-service and in-service training, to develop an awareness of their own cultural identity and explore views about cultural differences.** Teachers should then use this understanding to inform and strengthen relationships and celebrate between-group variation.³⁷ Increasing the number of teachers who possess these skills is critical to ensuring a positive school climate that prepares students for college and a career.

Recruit diverse and talented individuals into the teaching profession

Increasing the diversity of America's teaching workforce may have a positive impact on school climate, as students may relate more positively to teachers who look like them and can relate to them based on similar personal experiences.³⁸ Unfortunately, many individuals with the potential to be excellent teachers are not pursuing careers in education. While students of color make up more than 40 percent of the public school population in the U.S.,³⁹

“A GOOD TEACHER IN THIS DAY AND AGE, I THINK, IS SOMEONE WHO CAN TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO LEARN...TEACHERS LIKE THAT HAVE THE TOOLS AND EXPERIENCE TO EXPOSE THEIR STUDENTS TO NEW WAYS OF THINKING AND TO BROADEN THEIR HORIZONS.”

— AMANI BEY, STUDENT

^h The effectiveness of programs that develop positive student behavior increases when programs are coupled with training on multicultural competence (C. G. Vincent, J. Sprague, and J. M. Gau, “The Effectiveness of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports for Reducing Racially Inequitable Disciplinary Exclusions in Middle Schools,” paper presented at the Closing the School Discipline Gap: Research to Practice conference, Washington, DC, January 10, 2013).

teachers of color comprise only 17 percent of the teaching force.ⁱ States and districts should make an effort to attract and retain diverse talent.

In addition, policymakers must embrace policies and legislative initiatives to increase the number of highly effective teachers from diverse backgrounds. Initiatives such as [Grow Your Own Illinois](#), [Urban Teacher Residency United programs](#), and [South Carolina's Call Me MISTER \(Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models\)](#) all seek to recruit, support, and retain individuals from diverse backgrounds who are also committed to educational excellence. These programs prepare highly skilled teachers who will teach in high-need, hard-to-staff schools and remain in those schools for a substantial period of time. Some initiatives also aim to recruit and prepare parent and community leaders and para-educators to become effective teachers and to increase the overall racial and ethnic diversity of teachers in shortage fields.

Fully prepare teachers for the classroom

State policies should support high-quality clinical experiences within teacher preparation that include an emphasis on strengthening the classroom environment

in schools. Entry into the profession should be based on completion of clinical experience and passage of a rigorous exit assessment.^j For example, the state of Delaware offers a promising and rigorous example of entry requirements for educators requiring all incoming teachers to pass a performance-based assessment before becoming the teacher of record.^k State policies should also promote strong partnerships between local schools and educator preparation programs to provide meaningful supports for novice teachers.

Support ongoing professional learning and development

Research shows that educators who are involved in rich professional learning experiences tend to teach in more ambitious and effective ways.^{l40} Too often, teachers experience professional development in episodic and superficial ways that are disconnected from the challenges they face every day in their classrooms. It is also important to note that professional development can be a powerful tool for retention in part by improving school morale and promoting teachers' leadership skills.

ⁱ The rapidly changing faces of America's classrooms create new urgency for states and districts to develop an increasingly diverse teaching force. Staff must combine deep content knowledge and the skills to accelerate student learning with cultural competence and the ability to foster excellence in students of multiple cultures and ethnicities (R. Balfanz et al., "Graduating America: Meeting the Challenge of Low Graduation-Rate High Schools," July 2009, http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/graduating_america_072209_0.pdf [accessed January 3, 2014]). Efforts to recruit more diverse candidates should be paired with professional development that supports culturally relevant pedagogy and working in diverse communities. Numerous studies demonstrate the positive impact that culturally responsive teaching can have on strengthening teacher-student relationships and improving student engagement and outcomes (G. Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* [New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2010]). See also H. Richards, A. Brown, and T. Forde, *Addressing Diversity in Schools: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Teaching Exceptional Children* (Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children, 2011).

^j Harold Wenglinsky notes that student achievement is "influenced by both teacher content background (such as a major or minor in math or math education) and teacher education or professional development coursework, particularly in how to work with diverse student populations (including limited-English-proficient students and students with special needs)." This study examines how the math and science achievement levels of more than 7,000 eighth graders on the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress were related to measures of teaching quality, teacher characteristics, and students' social class background. See H. Wenglinsky, "How Schools Matter: The Link Between Teacher Classroom Practices and Student Academic Performance," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 10, no. 12 (2002), <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n12/> (accessed January 4, 2014). Further, the Equity and Excellence Commission recommends "requiring that states set a uniform entry 'bar' into the profession that includes in-depth academic preparation, diverse clinical experiences and excellent performance on a licensing assessment that measures subject matter knowledge." See U.S. Department of Education, "For Each and Every Child."

^k For the purposes of this paper, a teacher of record is a professional educator assigned by a school entity as the primary instructor for a group of students in a specific course of study.

^l When teachers feel supported by both the principal and their peers, they are more committed to their profession. See K. Singh and B. S. Billingsley, "Professional Support and Its Effects on Teachers' Commitment," *Journal of Educational Research* (1998).

Many states offer exciting examples of professional development and career ladders that could be replicated and should be supported and encouraged at the federal level.⁴¹ A new Iowa effort links professional development opportunities to career growth ladders in the school system. Evaluation systems are tied to an individual teacher's professional progression rather than measuring a teacher's impact solely by standardized test scores. New Hampshire's model emphasizes professional development and teacher recertification, calling for a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to professional learning. It also requires differentiated processes to address the unique professional learning needs of all employees, including teachers, administrators, para-educators, educational interpreters, and other certified or licensed professional staff. These needs should be assessed, in part, on multiple measures of student outcomes.

Develop evaluation systems that improve student learning

Educator evaluation systems should be designed to foster teacher professional growth and learning. An effective teacher evaluation system measures teachers on the practices that, over time, produce desirable student outcomes and encourage them to hone effective practices. Evaluating individual teachers is part of the district's responsibility to improve the educational system and to share accountability and responsibility for student success.^m However, some evaluation systems do not always serve students' needs. Evaluating teachers

significantly on an outcome such as a standardized test score, for example, can lead to excessive test preparation and a narrowing of the curriculum, neither of which advances student learning.

Evaluation systems should use multiple, valid, and reliable measures that include

- evidence of classroom practice;
- evidence of student learning as a significant factor; and
- evidence of related professional practices, such as the teacher's contribution to the school community or feedback received from student surveys.

Compensation plans that recognize successful strategies and practices and encourage educators to share those practices throughout a school can be used to improve performance systemwide. [The California Peer Assistance Review](#) model and the [Massachusetts](#) state regulations on teacher evaluations exemplify the type of comprehensive thinking needed for linking student assessments to the Common Core State Standards. Massachusetts, as part of its state regulations, is the first state to encourage students to evaluate teachers. The evaluation is used to strengthen instructional feedback for educators, not to penalize them. [Boston youth organizations](#) spearheaded the effort in partnership with teachers' unions. Similarly, Chicago is one of several cities pushing for similar ideas in collaboration with teachers.

^m A nationwide study of twenty-nine districts by the Institute of Education Sciences demonstrates that there are persistent gaps in access to effective teachers, yet most districts do not use evaluation data for system improvement and to improve the capacity of teachers to be effective. See Institute of Education Sciences, *Access to Effective Teaching for Disadvantaged Students* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, November 2013), <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20144001/pdf/20144001.pdf> (accessed January 4, 2014).

Teaching and learning conditions

Research shows that school climate enhances or minimizes teacher/staff emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low personal accomplishment.ⁿ⁴² In addition to the teacher preparation process, working conditions (as well as salaries) have been shown to be a strong predictor of turnover problems.⁴³ A number of state policies reflect the growing body of research that suggests that most teachers leave the profession due to school climate, culture, relationships with peers, and the capacity of their principal.⁴⁴ States like North Carolina and Kentucky^o have established standards for teaching and learning conditions to promote student achievement and to foster a positive work climate for teachers.⁴⁵ Some of these standards may include class size, time to collaborate, and school safety. Creating a positive school climate requires that federal, state, and local efforts are focused on both improving the capacity of teachers entering and remaining in the profession, as well as the conditions in which they work.

The impact of inequitable resources on supporting teachers and providing a positive school climate

Within the broader discussion of supporting teachers and students, the impact of school funding must not be overlooked. The world's highest-achieving nations fund schools equally and offer comparable salaries to teachers across schools, with some providing additional

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT SCHOOL CLIMATE ENHANCES OR MINIMIZES TEACHER/STAFF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION, DEPERSONALIZATION, AND FEELINGS OF LOW PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT. IN ADDITION TO THE TEACHER PREPARATION PROCESS, WORKING CONDITIONS (AS WELL AS SALARIES) HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO BE A STRONG PREDICTOR OF TURNOVER PROBLEMS.

resources and support to schools serving students with the greatest needs.^p Education resources in the United States, however, continue to be uneven. Resource disparities often are most prevalent in the way that schools are staffed, including the professional capacity and

ⁿ In addition, according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, school climate (in terms of a learning community) is an important contributing factor to teacher retention.

^o See North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Standards, <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/labor-management-collaboration/presentations/teachinglearning-ntc.pdf> (accessed June 10, 2014), and Kentucky Teaching Condition Standards, http://tellkentucky.org/uploads/File/KY13_standards.pdf (accessed June 10, 2014).

^p The 2013 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on the results of the latest Programme for International Student Assessment reveals that the United States is one of a group of countries in which advantaged and disadvantaged schools show particularly wide differences in the level of teacher shortages. See OECD, *Lessons from PISA 2012 for the United States: Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education*, 2013, [http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/PISA2012_US_report_ebook\(eng\).pdf](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/PISA2012_US_report_ebook(eng).pdf) (accessed January 4, 2014). Further, the U.S. Department of Education reports that the investment in human capital would help "close the achievement gaps between U.S. students and higher-performing systems abroad, and between students of color and their white counterparts," and that "the impact on GDP over time would dwarf the investment in higher-caliber teacher recruits in the years ahead" (U.S. Department of Education, "For Each and Every Child").

expertise of teachers in schools.⁴⁶ Allocating the necessary resources can help address the “teaching quality gap.” The “teaching quality gap” refers to the inequitable distribution of well-prepared, effective, and long-term educators serving most often in schools with the greatest need. This is critical, to ensure that there is a sustainable teaching force and that principals, administrators, and teachers do not have to constantly rebuild their staff because of high teacher turnover (see previous discussion on the connection between teacher preparation and retention). Sufficient resources should be allocated to schools serving students with the greatest needs, with heavy emphasis on building the capacity of a diverse, highly skilled, and sustainable teaching force.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

A positive school climate is one that fosters a safe environment and provides all students with access to effective teaching that includes rigorous and engaging instruction and curriculum and equips them with the skills and content knowledge needed for college and a career. Educators should be provided with the preparation, support, and development necessary to create a positive classroom environment for their students. The implementation of college- and career-ready standards offers educators an opportunity to develop a shared vision for teaching quality that builds teacher capacity to make learning as dynamic as the community and workforce outside the classroom. **The nation’s ability to build a more diverse, talented, and sustainable teaching force will determine whether all schools will meet their original intent as social engines for opportunity, innovation, and the creation of a strong democracy.**

Previously Released Climate Change Publications

Secondary school reform efforts will be limited unless they take a holistic approach that examines every aspect of the school experience for students, teachers, and leaders. In the same way that one recognizes the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child, so too must the needs of the whole school be met. The Alliance has released the following series of papers providing a framework for effective and sustainable reform as they relate to

- *Climate Change: Creating an Integrated Framework for Improving School Climate* (August 2013)
- *Climate Change: Implementing School Discipline Practices That Create a Positive School Climate* (September 2013)
- *Climate Change: Providing Equitable Access to a Rigorous and Engaging Curriculum* (November 2013)

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve educational opportunities for each and every child and to foster healthy and supportive learning environments, more visionary policy is required at the federal, state, and local levels. These policies should result in a comprehensive, systemwide effort to support the ongoing development of teaching capacity and effectiveness. **Policy strategies that represent quick and easy fixes are plentiful, but often do not resonate with practitioners who are seeking more systemic ways of addressing complex issues.** There are number of policies and practices that can help to ensure that all students have access to well-prepared and highly skilled teachers who are effective in preparing students for college and a career.

Federal Policy Recommendations

- Include strategies for improving current recruitment and placement processes in Title I plans for equitable distribution of teachers within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These should include efforts to hire and place teachers in a classroom position at least one month prior to the start of the school year. More than one-third of new teachers are hired after the start of the school year,⁹ which increases the likelihood that they will be placed outside of their certification area in an effort to fill open positions. This practice further prevents teachers from participating in professional development that occurs prior to the start of the school year.

- Incentivize state adoption of an edTPA—a validated teacher performance assessment, such as the one developed by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity in partnership with the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, which many states are using as part of their certification/licensing requirements. Teacher performance assessments such as edTPA help ensure that teachers entering the profession can demonstrate their ability to be effective in the classroom and meet the needs of all students.⁷
- Support the development of minimum standards for state-based teacher licensure policies. Currently, there is no federal standard for teachers in training before they enter the classroom. In fact, almost all teachers are considered “highly qualified” under federal law due to a federal provision that was extended recently under the ESEA. **Before becoming the teacher of record, all prospective teachers should demonstrate the ability to lead classrooms, educate students of differing abilities and needs, and establish a positive classroom climate—a key element of the edTPA.**⁴⁸

⁹ HGSE News, *New Research Finds School Hiring and Support Practices Fall Short* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). This study also finds that of these teachers, sampled across four states, only 23 percent had any sort of reduced load; 56 percent received no extra assistance; and 43 percent went through the entire first year with no observations from a mentor or more experienced teacher.

⁷ Research shows that rigorous, validated, standards-based performance measures can be a powerful tool for capturing high-leverage teaching behaviors linked to improved student performance. EdTPA shares a common architecture and lineage with other successful performance assessments such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, California’s Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) for initial licensure, and Connecticut’s Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) for professional licensure.

State and Local Policy Recommendations

Certification and Licensing

- Support and/or incentivize teachers to receive National Board certification. The certification process has been found to produce positive impacts on teacher retention and improve practice. The process of analyzing students' work and assessing their own actions in relation to professional standards is valuable in improving teaching and illuminates how well teachers are able to engage learners, assess students' current knowledge and skill development, and alter instruction to advance students' performance.

Improving Working Conditions

- Use school, teacher, and student data[§] to assess the working conditions within each school, identify areas of improvement, and implement responsive strategies aimed at strengthening relationships between staff, and between students and staff. Target professional development to strengthen classroom practices that engage and support students. A number of states have adopted teaching conditions standards, and nine states⁴⁹ are utilizing the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey.⁵⁰ The TELL Survey provides detailed information regarding the perceptions about the presence of teaching and learning conditions that research has shown increase student learning and teacher retention.
- Provide professional development to support the implementation of equitable and effective approaches to school discipline (see the recent [joint school](#)

discipline guiding principles and accompanying documents issued by the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Justice for specific strategies).⁵¹ For example, support the development of strategies such as restorative justice and response to intervention, which have been demonstrated to be effective approaches to addressing student behavior in a positive and inclusive way.

- Support teachers in addressing the needs of the whole student by increasing the number of support staff, such as guidance counselors, social workers, and appropriately trained paraprofessionals and assistants to support student achievement.

Building Capacity

- Provide early-career teachers with opportunities to participate in residency,[†] induction, and mentoring programs in an effort to provide support and build capacity. This should include significantly increasing opportunities for teachers to participate in professional learning communities or other opportunities for peer collaboration.
- **Incorporate strategies for assessing teacher attitudes and providing access to training and support that can reduce deficit-oriented approaches (for example, focusing on what students can do rather than what they cannot) that often result in low student expectations.⁵²** Such training can also replace reactive and punitive approaches that create or escalate problem behavior with preventive approaches that address the underlying needs of students.⁵³

[§] Data should include performance, behavior, referral, and attendance data, as well as data collected from staff, student, and parent/caregiver surveys. This should also include data submitted for the Office for Civil Rights Data Collection.

[†] Studies of these types of programs demonstrate that these teachers stay in the profession at higher rates and become competent more quickly than those who learn by trial and error. For example, teacher residency programs help create a pipeline of effective teachers who remain teaching in high-need schools, raising their effectiveness. Further, the effects of strong initial preparation are likely enhanced by strong induction and mentoring in the early years of teaching. See American Federation of Teachers, "Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools," 2007, <http://www.aft.org/pdfs/teachers/hardtostaff0607.pdf> (accessed January 3, 2014).

- Provide opportunities for teachers to develop culturally relevant competencies^u and strategies for teaching diverse learners. Eight of the seventeen states that produce approximately 70 percent of the nation’s dropouts have a large number of students of color and English language learners in their schools.⁵⁴ The rapidly changing faces of America’s classrooms create new urgency for states and districts to develop an increasingly diverse teaching force that is effective in teaching a diverse set of learners. Numerous studies demonstrate the positive impact that culturally responsive teaching can have on strengthening teacher-student relationships and improving student engagement and outcomes.⁵⁵
- Support efforts to recruit more diverse candidates. For example, Illinois created the Minority Teachers of Illinois Scholarship Program, which provides scholarships to encourage academically talented students from diverse backgrounds to pursue teaching careers, especially in certain disciplines or in hard-to-staff schools.⁵⁶

^u Numerous studies demonstrate the positive impact that culturally responsive teaching can have on strengthening teacher-student relationships and improving student engagement and outcomes. See Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, and Richards, Brown, and Forde, *Addressing Diversity in Schools*. Further, the Discipline Disparities Series notes that successful schools “[r]egularly include instructional activities that help adults and students learn about one another. For instance, many teachers have daily morning circles or check-ins about students’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Teachers assign autobiographies or portfolios of students’ interests, skills, and accomplishments, which can be developed, interactively, online, or using multimedia.” In an effort to strengthen culturally responsive practice, “[c]lassroom material and schoolwide events reflect diversity, including the range of racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, and sexual identities of the students themselves. Material and events (thoughtful literature, films, assemblies) can also demonstrate and prompt discussion over the complexity of any identity, rather than presenting stereotypical visions of ‘groups.’” Further, “professional development programming could include the Double-Check program, which uses a framework to help teachers self-assess on their culturally responsive teaching. Teachers reflect on the following dimensions of their teaching: Sensitivity to Student’s Cultural and Situational Messages, Reflective Thinking about Children and ‘Group Membership,’ Effective Communication, and Connection to Curriculum.”

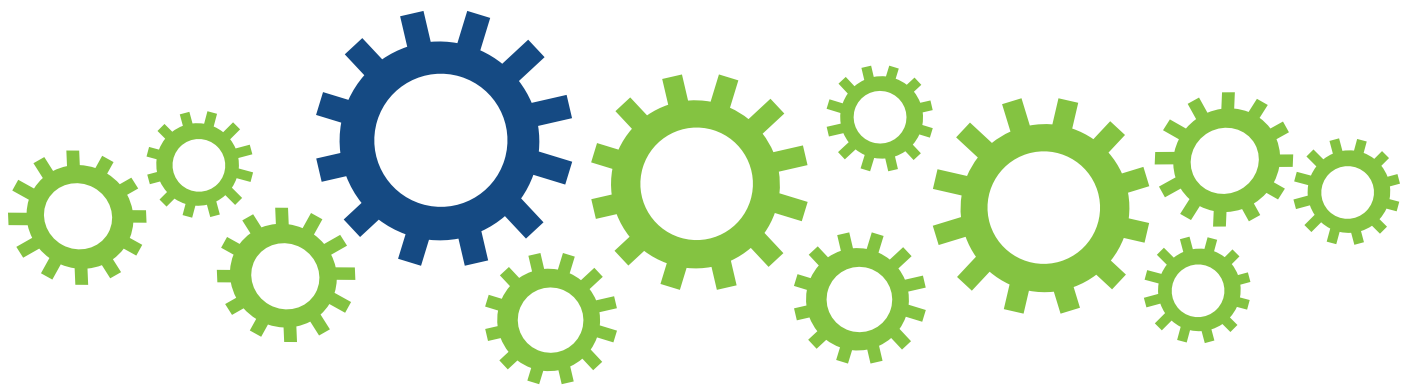
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The **Alliance for Excellent Education** is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. www.all4ed.org

The **National Opportunity to Learn (OTL) Campaign** unites a growing coalition of advocates, educators, and organizers from across the country working to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality public education. OTL includes local, state, and national organizations, grassroots community leaders, policymakers, youth organizers, business leaders, and philanthropic partners. www.otlcampaign.org/. OTL is an initiative of the **Schott Foundation for Public Education**, whose mission is to develop and strengthen a broad-based and representative movement to achieve fully resourced, quality pre-K–12 public education. www.schottfoundation.org/

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