Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Teacher Quality
By Robert Reichardt retrieved on June 14, 2003 from mcrel.org

“There are no silver bullets for improving teacher quality.”

“Many policies can influence the quality of the teacher workforce and no one policy is the single most important tool for accomplishing that goal.”

“Only multiple policies working together have the potential to make significant changes in teacher quality.”

The most basic definition of teacher quality is a teacher’s ability to help students reach high standards.

Putting teacher quality in context is important—
• it is difficult to measure; using test scores to evaluate teacher quality is technically complex and requires extensive amount of data;
• it must be understood in each school’s context because certain influences on student performance are not within the teacher’s control.

Key Points:
• An approach that addresses each stage of a teacher’s career is the best strategy for improving teacher quality (preservice—traditional and nontraditional routes, inservice—when beginning a teaching career and during the career).
• Standards that support high levels of teacher knowledge, skills, and effectiveness are essential.
• Feedback should be continually gathered to monitor and adjust teacher quality policies (which suggests a well designed research commitment).
• Compensation, working conditions, and opportunities to grow are key to building and maintaining a quality teacher workforce.

• Four areas of opportunity to influence teacher quality and potential strategies—
  • Pre-service—
    • scholarship, loans, and loan-forgiveness as incentives to enter teaching;
    • licensure/certification requirements;
    • accreditation of teacher preparation programs;
    • models of exemplary practices and programs.
  • Recruitment & Selection—
    • effective communication with applicants (including improved flow of information about vacancies, one-stop site about vacancies, and online clearinghouse where applicants can post resumes and complete applications);
    • alternative approaches to entering teaching including “grow your own” programs and enticements for mid-career applicants;
    • teacher mobility policies (to accommodate increased numbers of teachers who will relocate several times during their careers; redesigning retirement policies and length of time required to be vested).
  • In-Service—
    • redesigned approaches and compensation for professional learning with overt administrative endorsement and resource support
• must be focused of student needs, address teachers’ content knowledge, linked to PD standards, and opportunities to discuss instructional practices and ways to improve them

• induction programs including mentoring for new teachers
  • if program is effectively designed and mentors receive high quality training, retention rates of new teachers increase; it is generally true that teachers’ ability to help students learn increases with years of classroom experience;

• compensation to encourage gaining new skills
  • currently years of experience and college credits is compensated, some are exploring compensation based on skill and performance

• re-certification requirements to support high quality professional learning
  • National Board Certified teachers are encouraged in some settings

• Retention—
  • working conditions
    • the more successful schools are in retaining high-quality teachers, the less effort they need to spend in hiring and training
    • retention is especially critical in high-need schools—the students with the most need tend to have the teachers with the least education and experience
    • attrition due to job dissatisfaction is generally because of low compensation and lack of administrative support, student motivation, and teacher influence in school decision making
    • working conditions can be improved by improved and increased opportunities for professional development, access to technology, increased administrative support, reduced student conflicts, reduced class size or teaching load, increased influence in decisions

• increased compensation
  • Districts with higher salaries tend to have more teachers with better qualifications (having attended more selective colleges and are more likely to have majors or minors in the content they teach which has been linked to higher achievement
  • Some districts are experimenting with higher pay for math and science (better working conditions and pay outside education) and for teachers in high need schools

Others are exploring many of the same avenues to improve teacher quality. Five recommendations from National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future impacts teachers at every stage of their careers.
1. Get serious about standards, for both students and teachers.
2. Reinvent teacher preparation and professional development.
3. Fix teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in every classroom
4. Encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill.
5. Create schools that are organized for student and teacher success.

More on the website www.nctaf.org

The goal is to create a comprehensive system for ensuring teacher quality—
a system that learns from itself and continuously improves.