

## Teacher Experience Working Group Notes

Task Force Members Present- Dr. Raymond Falcon, Jennifer Kuehne, Alexandra Fain, Kisaundra Harris, Tiffany Klaerner, Melina Recio, Sergio Estrada, Janie Coheen, Joshua Sciara, Diana Barrera, Pam Fischer, Tiffany Kilcoyne

Staff Members Present- Ali Friedlander, Ivan Nieves, Natalie Brown

### Introduction to Understanding the Teacher Experience

Allison Friedlander went over working group objectives to set the stage for coming up with recommendations as well as logistics for the working group. She encouraged participants to actively engage and share their own personal experiences as well as make room for all voices to ensure equity and that various perspectives from the various regions and teaching assignments were heard/included in the conversation. The facilitator gave remarks that focus on teacher attrition numbers and teacher preparation and recruitment. She reviewed and connected the three areas the Commissioner discussed regarding compensation, working conditions and training from the whole group meeting earlier in the day. Participants reflected on the pre-work from the first task force meeting and examined the articles that were sent out as pre-work. The recommendations from the research included high quality certification exams, expanded pathways to teaching, increased compensation, improving professional supports, strong mentor programs, investing in support staff, developing wellness strategies for both students and staff as well as offering career advancement opportunities. Ms. Friedlander reviewed the survey trends from Region 15's teacher survey that stated the top 3 reasons teachers leave the profession are pay, workload and other reasons such as benefits, etc. The working group was then split into smaller subgroups to discuss in depth the root causes they feel are contributing to teacher vacancies and burnout.

**Subgroup Root Cause Identification:** Once subgroups returned from their breakouts, Melina Recio facilitated the subgroup share-out. Groups shared their top priorities found below-

Group 3 identified the following root causes: workload stresses that includes pressures from the current political climate regarding CRT and book banning issues, the inability to teach what they would like to or pressure to omit certain things as well as post covid recovery for academics which results in a lack of autonomy. Another issue identified was the need for strong mentoring/support for teachers throughout their career to impact retention and not just for novice teachers.

Group 2 identified the following root causes: workload stress is contributing to teacher burnout. Teachers are overworked and underpaid, and there isn't enough time set aside in the workday to get all their responsibilities done. Teacher planning time is not protected, and there isn't time within the contracted workday to complete daily tasks and prepare for quality instruction. Another problem identified by Group 2 was low pay/compensation and the stress from accountability system as it relates to teacher effectiveness.

Group 1 identified the following root causes: workload stress from various aspects of the job that include assessment and accountability, HB 4545 and how assessment and accountability play into the implementation of HB 4545 as well as the lack of capacity for staff to meet these requirements. Additionally, there is stress related to a lack of benefits and limited time to plan and prepare for instructional needs. Another root cause

identified by group 1 was the need for strong mentoring programs and the need to compensate those who mentor and help others for the additional workload this puts on the mentor.

Melina then asked the participants to share what may have been missed but needs to be highlighted. The following factors were raised: A lack of respect for veteran teachers from both the public and within school systems themselves by administrators/leaders who have less teaching experience. Moving up in education shouldn't have to be moving out of the classroom; there should be other ways to be developed as a leader and compensated accordingly. A teacher's culture is not affirmed in schools and the political climate creates fear and division among the public and teachers. The discussions around CRT have impacted the culture of teaching by making some teachers feel unwelcome in the profession as well as impacting the students they teach. School safety and SRO's are of concern as well as access to guns; many teachers have had students who have died by gun violence. A Task force member mentioned that many of these things can be changed at the local level (respect, the way they are treated) but wants to know how teachers can better advocate for these changes locally. Another issue that was highlighted was the post-secondary trauma that teachers experience due to the impact of COVID on students and the broader community. Another task force member shared her experience as a school leader, and the impact trauma and stress has had on teachers from her district.

Participants then broke into their subgroups again to discuss recommendations that would address the root causes surfaced in the previous discussion. Once they returned to the whole group, Melina facilitated a discussion around each group's top recommendations.

**Subgroup Recommendations:** Melina facilitated the subgroup share-out. Each group shared their top priorities for recommendations found below-

Group 2 identified the following recommendations- Increased Pay: there is a need for competitive health care benefits, a sort of "American Dream" benefits package with the ability to provide for your family and take care of their health needs at the same time. It was suggested that there be a statewide health plan offered to drive down costs and examine how much school districts are contributing to their health care plans, especially since many school districts are the largest employers in many areas. Another recommendation was re-engineering the school day to lighten the teacher workload and provide opportunity for teachers to plan as needed to better impact instruction. This may include a 4-day workweek option, increasing planning times (at least one prep for each content taught) by increasing support staff to help with coverage.

Group 1 identified the following recommendations- Provide leadership pathways to support all levels of teachers and teacher leadership (curriculum coordinators, novice, mentoring teachers, etc.). There is a need for stronger curricular resources to focus on pedagogy development and possibly a need to create an assessment and accountability working group.

Group 3 identified the following recommendations- Redesign the school day to support student and teacher mental health that would provide more time to plan and additional time in workday to complete paperwork required for various aspects of the job. A 4-day workweek was an option presented as well as the need to ensure there is funding for quality EAP's for teachers to access to address their mental health. Other recommendations included paying stipends for hard to staff areas, stipends for mentors or for teachers to attain specializations, as well as provide retention bonuses and removing salary caps. There was a suggestion to create a mental health and teacher support/safety working group.

Allison Friedlander closed the working group time by thanking the participants for their time and sharing their experiences to address the teacher vacancy problem. She then explained to task force members the next steps regarding upcoming meetings and optional leadership sessions as well as the importance of completing the exit survey and how the information gathered would help direct the task force moving forward.

Working group participants then joined the main session of the task force to close out the day.