

## Understanding the Teacher Experience Working Group Meeting Notes

Task Force Members Present: Jennifer Kuehne, Raymond Falcon, Pam Fischer, Tiffany Kilcoyne, Alexandra Fain, Sergio Estrada, Tiffany Klaerner, Joshua Sciara, Kisaundra Harris,

Staff Members Present: Allison Friedlander, Kyla Jaramillo, Ivan Nieves, Colin Dempsey, Charles Cuccia, Natalie Brown

### **Understand the Teacher Experience Opening:**

Allison Friedlander welcomed the group and introduced the process for developing recommendations. She explained the categories recommendations may fall into as either regulatory, statutory, or district level practices or policies and that today's objective was to generate ideas related to recommendations. She mentioned the group would go through a process over the coming months to further analyze ideas on the current list, considering intended impact, actors, possible unintended consequences, costs, etc. She stressed the objective for today was to generate an initial list.

Task Force members discussed potential pitfalls that may arise in the process of developing recommendations such as unique district challenges, the research and data needed to support recommendations, unrealistic recommendations, scarcity of resources, and the overwhelming nature of developing recommendations. The recommendations framework was introduced to working group members to illustrate the anticipated timeline for developing and finalizing recommendations throughout the year. Ms. Friedlander stated that the focus of this meeting will center around issues and root causes related to specific subgroup topics and the goal or objective of each that will impact change.

Working group members then broke into subgroups on the topics of Instructional Supports, Teacher Time and Requirements and School Climate. They began their session with a debrief of the Third Future Schools presentation. The working groups then broke into a deeper discussion of potential recommendations.

### **Understand the Teacher Experience Subgroups:**

#### **Instructional Supports Subgroup:**

Through small group discussions, the Instructional Supports subgroup generated initial ideas around instructional support:

- Provide mentoring to better support and increase retention.
- Ensure teachers have access to High Quality Instructional Materials.
- Provide teachers with internalization support for curriculum implementation.
- Provide mechanisms that make providing discipline more effective so instructional time is not lost.

The group shared their initial ideas with the entire Teacher Experience Workgroup.

After lunch, the group more deeply discussed High Quality Instructional Materials and Mentorship and highlighted the following.

## 1. High Quality Instructional Materials

- **Specific Issues:** Teachers lack access to high quality instructional materials and spend a significant amount of time preparing and planning lessons outside of the normal workday.
- **Area of focus:** Task Force members suggested there should be a statewide framework that provides high quality instructional materials and resources for teachers to ensure that all lessons are aligned to TEKS to reduce the amount of time teachers spend planning or vetting materials. Materials should also provide flexibility and allow for teacher autonomy. Additionally, school districts should share these resources with their teachers to help support their instructional preparation.
- **Questions /Next Steps:** Group members wondered about the frequency with which districts change materials and how the funding for instructional materials works. Additionally, group members asked that more guidance be given on instructional materials implementation.

## 2. Mentorship

- **Specific Issue:** Improve teacher mentorship to support and improve instructional delivery. Currently, effectiveness of mentorship depends on the quality of the mentor assigned and the time available during the workday to provide mentorship.
- **Area of focus:** Expand the current mentorship allotment so that more districts have access to the resources provided as part of this program and the funds needed to compensate quality mentors.
- **Questions/Next Steps:** Group members wondered how to expand the mentorship allotment and what funds would be needed to ensure that all Texas districts have the resources they need to support both teacher mentors and mentees. Other wonderings were what oversight or feedback is given to the mentors to ensure they provide quality mentorship and are meeting the needs of the teachers they are assisting. Additionally, the group wanted to see examples of quality mentorship across the state.

### Teacher Time and Requirements Subgroup:

The Teacher Time and Requirements subgroup discussed challenges with teacher time requirements, and generated initial ideas for those challenges:

- Reengineer schedules to allow for additional collaborative planning time for teachers.
- Set limits around extra time requirements.
- Provide compensation for extra hours worked beyond the school day.
- Examine staffing models to provide extra support personnel to eliminate extra duties.
- Consolidate and streamline paperwork and requirements.
- Rethink school calendars to allow for more teacher work time.

The group shared their initial ideas with the Teacher Experience Workgroup. The group then discussed more deeply schedules and a teacher time audit and highlighted the following.

## 1. Teacher Time Audit

- **Specific Issue:** The role of the teacher and all the duties assigned to the teacher (included in the job description and the duties assigned beyond the district) need to be examined and captured to better understand the time requirements being placed on teachers.
- **Area of focus:** A state- or district-wide audit would be helpful to capture the time associated with all the teacher responsibilities and requirements done throughout the day to better assess how much time is associated with the teacher workload and be able to identify tasks that can be removed to free up time for prioritized tasks such as planning, collaboration, mentoring etc.
- **Questions/Next steps:** Group members wondered if there was a state definition or list to help gather a consensus as to what the state requires of teachers in various settings. Group members wondered if the teacher responsibilities listed in statute align with the time stated/allotted for each task. They also wanted to find out how can teacher preparation time can be protected without adding to duties or requirements after the school day.

## 2. Teacher Schedules

- **Specific Issue:** Teachers do not have sufficient time within the workday to collaboratively plan with peers and internalize lessons.
- **Area of focus:** Provide districts with support and exemplars of schedules that maximize teacher time, ensuring teachers have extended planning time.
- **Questions/Next steps:** Group members wondered if we could create case studies as examples for districts, possibly creating toolkits of exemplar schedules across the state. The group wondered how schools with innovative scheduling models can innovate within existing budgets and wanted more information on the flexibilities allowed in our state.

### School Climate Subgroup:

The School Climate subgroup generated initial ideas related to School Climate:

- Provide mental health days
- Improve supports for classroom management
- Reduce class size
- Provide guidance on how to create mental and physical health for students
- Improve opportunities for teacher representation and input on decision-making at the school and district level
- Provide affinity groups

The group shared their initial ideas with the Teacher Experience Workgroup. Then, the group had a deeper discussion of mental health days and teacher input in decision-making.

### 1. Mental Health Days

- **Specific Issue:** Teacher burnout and mental health strain are causing teachers to leave the profession. School climate often plays a role in how much a teacher feels supported or valued, yet the factors for school climate are controlled at the local level.
- **Area of focus:** Provide additional mental health or wellness day for staff so that teachers/school personnel can take care of their emotional well-being to better serve students and families when feeling burnt out or overwhelmed. Preferably these days would not be subject to any traditional approval considerations often associated with state and locally allotted personal business or sick days. Additional topics related to school climate included reducing the class size and providing affinity groups.
- **Questions/Next steps:** Group members wondered how to improve staff mental health beyond the mental health days, what policies would need to be implemented around taking mental health days, and what stigmas teachers would face for taking these days. Other thoughts expressed were a connection between principal-teacher-school well-being and how much of what impacts a teacher's well-being is controlled at the school level. The group wondered about current guidance or examples from other school districts on how to create mental and physical health for teachers and students.

## 2. Teacher Voice in Decision-Making Process

- **Specific Issue:** Teachers lack voice and input in the decision-making process at all levels (school, district, region, state).
- **Area of focus:** Improve access and opportunities for teachers to engage in decision making at the district and state level. Improve teacher supports for classroom management and create training/professional development for school administrators on how to create strong school climate and develop teacher leaders.
- **Questions/Next steps:** Group members wondered if there are best practices for engaging teachers in decision making and wondered if there are districts that already do this well and can be highlighted as best practice to share across the state. The group wanted to consider the processes districts currently use to engage teachers in decision making, what systems or structures for doing this already exist, and what role TEA could play in supporting teacher engagement.

The Teacher Experience Working Group subgroups shared their work with the Teacher Experience group. Then, the working group returned to the main Teacher Vacancy Task Force whole group meeting to share an update on their work.