

Great Teachers for 21st Century Schools:

*A realistic plan to address the recruitment
and retention of teachers*



**Kansas National Education Association
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Executive Summary

A growing teacher shortage has put at risk the right of every Kansas student to attend a great public school. Kansas public schools have traditionally possessed a key element of great schools for every child: a caring, competent, and qualified teacher in every classroom.

The retirement of a generation of educators, though, is occurring precisely at a moment when a range of policy decisions have made recruitment and retention into teaching particularly challenging. In the heat of the current debate, a range of proposals to “fix” the impending shortage have been put forward. Some have great merit while others are likely to weaken the quality of schools and exacerbate the shortage.

The report “*Great Teachers for 21st Century Schools: A realistic plan to address the recruitment and retention of teachers*” provides the background to understand deep systemic causes for a growing shortage of teachers – a shortage that transcends geography, “hard to staff schools”, and traditional “shortage areas.” Achieving significant improvement in the supply of caring, competent teachers for our schools in coming years requires that we work strategically to address the underlying causes that have created the shortage in the first place.

This Executive Summary provides a short description of the causes, an outline of a strategic plan of intervention, and a short list of specific actions that should be taken. Readers are encouraged to explore more deeply by referencing the full report.

The Problem

For many years, Kansans have heard from other parts of the country about increasing numbers of teaching positions being filled by persons with emergency credentials or no teaching license at all due to a lack of qualified candidates for vacancies. Thankfully, the number of such vacancies in Kansas has remained quite low... until now.

Data from the Kansas State Department of Education indicated that the number of unfilled vacancies at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year was at a 5 year high. Schools of Education around Kansas report declining numbers of teacher candidates in preparation programs. And almost 37% of our current teaching force is over 50 years of age, many ready to retire within a few short years.

At times, shortages apply to particular subject areas (e.g. mathematics, science, special education). Sometimes it is the school with difficult working conditions that find their supply of applicants to be inadequate. And increasingly, geography is a factor as rural schools struggle to fill positions when veteran teachers retire.

Systemic Causes

While policy-makers are waking up to the reality of a teacher shortage, they have not necessarily made the connections between causes (including their policy decisions) and effect. Numerous factors have led to the growing challenge of providing well-qualified teachers for every classroom and it is essential to understand cause IF we hope to implement sound strategies to rectify the problem. Major factors that emerge from a careful analysis include:

- ❖ Opportunities and choices – Career options for women and minorities have expanded tremendously in the last 25 years. Even persons who begin a teaching career can be lured into other fields with increased job mobility in today’s work force.
- ❖ Discrimination – Systemic discrimination following court mandated desegregation resulted in schools that had few, if any, teachers of color to serve as role models for youth and to encourage education as a career choice.
- ❖ Teacher Preparation – Attempts to lower the bar for entry into the profession in many other states has increased the failure and “dropout” rate of new teachers. It has also decreased the status of the profession making teaching a less desirable career option.
- ❖ Respect for public education and educators – From reports of failing schools to concerns about school safety, public education is displayed as an undesirable field for potential teachers to enter. Overemphasis on test results has de-professionalized the work causing some to leave teaching.
- ❖ Salary and career earnings – Entering any other profession requiring a Bachelor’s degree and comparable preparation will yield \$5,000 to \$10,000 greater starting salaries. By the end of a career the annual differential puts teachers \$40,000 or more behind those other careers.
- ❖ Professional advancement – In addition to lagging salaries, many districts fail to provide meaningful opportunities for teacher-leadership through mentoring, curricular work, action research, and fail to encourage service at the regional, state, and national levels in professional roles (e.g. accreditation site visits, professional association leadership.) Professional development also often falls short of “best practice” (ongoing, job embedded, connected to actual content and student achievement.)
- ❖ Workload and stress – Ironically, the myth of teaching as “part time” work abounds even though the work load is driving increasing numbers of educators into other careers. Meeting the demands of testing is stressful... for dedicated educators, the increasing difficulty in meeting the needs of each student is even more stressful.
- ❖ Professional work environment – Ready access to technology, adequate time for planning and collaboration, and use of teacher leaders in a manner that acknowledges their expertise are elements that are in short supply in many schools and districts.
- ❖ School culture and leadership – Administrative leadership is necessary to create a spirit of trust and respect among educators, students, and the community. It is also essential to implementing structural support for a professional work environment. A variety of factors, including overburdening of administrators, make achieving a positive school culture extremely difficult.

Systemic Solutions

The list of factors leading to difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers is daunting. But solutions to overcome these challenges primarily fall into four key areas:

The pipeline – attracting candidates to teaching

- Future teacher programs beginning in middle school and continuing through a dual credit “intro to teaching” high school course have helped some districts significantly increase interest in teaching as a career.
- Kansas has an excellent track record with its “alternate route” programs that provide a transition to teaching from other careers. These might be expanded to include ideas such as the “Urban Residency” found in such places as Boston and Chicago.
- Tuition forgiveness programs provide a method to attract candidates into particularly hard to fill positions or content shortage areas. Overall college affordability has become a barrier that can be eased with targeted grants.
- Advising is an area in which both college and high school counselors may find opportunities to ensure that teaching is given serious consideration by promising candidates.

- Students today are connected, media-savvy, digital citizens. Classrooms must have an abundance of teaching and learning technology both to engage students now and maximize learning AND to paint a picture of teaching as a 21st century career.

Entry into the profession

- Beginning salaries MUST be improved to be competitive with other states AND other career options.
- Health insurance coverage is cited by graduating college seniors as a top priority in choosing a job. Education could raise its overall attraction by providing coverage for ALL public school teachers in Kansas.
- All districts must have the resources to provide significant mentoring and induction support for new teachers. Workload for new teachers should be reduced in recognition of the greater amount of planning and preparation required for the novice.

Continued service

- Career salaries must reach levels within fewer years (salary schedule compacting) so that career earnings can be maximized and teaching can be competitive with other professions.
- Health benefits again is a significant factor in making sure that teaching is not a part-time job or temporary career until a “real career” is chosen.
- Professional development and advancement opportunities must match meaningful opportunities to enhance relevant skills and to lead both within a school, district, and beyond while remaining “in the classroom.”
- Family friendly policies regarding child care, sick leave, and work load have become the hallmark of businesses identified as the “best places to work” by *Fortune* and other business journals. Education should follow these examples to make education one of those best places to work.
- Time and structures must be in place to allow development of professional learning communities. Such communities provide significant professional support for school improvement. Improving the amount of time available for grading, planning, parent involvement, and collaboration will help alleviate one of the most significant factors driving excellent, experienced teachers out of the profession.

Prestige for the profession

- Compensation is more than about money. It speaks volumes to the best and brightest high school and college students to hear the old phrase “nobody goes into teaching to get rich.” Teaching must be financially competitive, though, even if it doesn’t offer stock options and the like.
- The profession needs to be given greater control of the profession. An autonomous Professional Standards Board should oversee licensing, accreditation, and design of professional development. Collective bargaining should be recognized as a collaborative tool to give teachers meaningful influence on the structure of their work lives. And teachers should serve on all relevant commissions and task forces charged with “fixing” aspects of education.
- Schools are educating more children with more challenging learning needs and attaining higher achievement than ever before. Education has been given the task of overcoming generations of societal ills... and is making real headway against the odds. Rather than labels of “failing”, teachers need the resources identified in study after study in order to meet the needs of every learner. And they need positive press and politicians to recognize them for their efforts.
- Teaching is not part-time work. Combine the extremely heavy workload from August 1st through early June with committees beyond the school year and with self-funded professional development and it is apparent that teaching is a full year job. It should be compensated as full time work with a paid vacation, with coursework for advancement paid by the employer, and with committee work paid at full salary rather than at “fast food” hourly rates.

Taking the First Steps

We cannot expect to solve the problem unless we are willing to view education as system that includes progression through a career and a variety of supports within the system. In addition to the obvious financial issues to make teaching a competitive career, it requires investment in a support structure that includes:

1. Induction and mentoring,
2. Time and resources,
3. Professional development,
4. Professional empowerment and advancement, and
5. A humanistic approach to human resources

As we implement the range of solutions cited above, we must view teachers as part of the solution, not as the problem. It is also time to stop imposing ideas on teachers and start collaborating with them in meaningful, substantive ways.

In conducting the 2006 Kansas Teacher Working Conditions Survey, we have for the first time given credence to what the teachers think and feel about serving our schools. It is imperative that what we learned from that survey be taken to heart and form the framework for discussions about making a school the kind of environment that encourages a career-long commitment.

It will take the commitment of policymakers and our communities to implement these recommendations. Doing so is at the heart of ensuring that we provide a great public school for every child into the 21st century.

Great Teachers for 21st Century Schools:

A realistic plan to address the recruitment and retention of teachers

Introduction

Kansas has enjoyed over two decades in which the number of teaching candidates graduating from our colleges and schools of education met or exceeded the number of vacancies. At times, the fact that some Kansas graduates were likely to seek employment in other states or not enter teaching at all did not negatively impact the ability to fill vacancies within the state. Those times have passed.

A growing teacher shortage has put at risk the right of every Kansas student to attend a great public school. Kansas public schools have traditionally possessed a key element of great schools for every child: a caring, competent, and qualified teacher in every classroom.

The retirement of a generation of educators, though, is occurring precisely at a moment when a range of policy decisions have made recruitment and retention into teaching particularly challenging. In the heat of the current debate, a range of proposals to “fix” the impending shortage have been put forward. Some have great merit while others are likely to weaken the quality of schools and exacerbate the shortage.

In this report, we consider factors that have led to the growing shortage of teachers both in specialized fields, selected geographic areas, certain types of schools, and across all settings. Understanding these factors leads to a series of recommendations for action – actions that promise to ensure that every Kansas student will have a caring, competent teacher in the classrooms of the 21st century in Kansas. Demographic differences between the current Kansas teaching force and the student population are also noted as we seek to provide positive educator role models for all Kansas students.

Understanding Systemic Causes

Several systemic factors contribute to the current shortage and demand attention if we are to find real solutions that will work in the long term. A variety of factors affect both the recruitment (pipeline) of promising candidates into the profession and retention of teachers beyond induction into the profession.

Opportunities and Choices: For many generations, about the only “professional” employment choices for women in the United States were teaching and nursing. Both of these fields are now experience critical shortages as women find greater opportunities in a broad range of career choices in business, science and engineering, politics, etc. It is not reasonable to expect that we could reverse this trend... nor is it desirable to reduce these expanded opportunities for women. We must, however, recognize that education as a career must be viewed as equal in status and opportunity to other careers if it is to compete for its fair share of women as teachers.

Subtle societal messages continue to impact the choice of teaching as a career for men along with all other potential candidates. Only about 20% of the current teaching force is male and this matches statistics for enrollment in teacher preparation programs around the state and nation. If women are increasingly choosing other careers, then we **MUST** find ways to make teaching more attractive as a career for both genders. To the extent that both male and female potential teachers perceive teaching as a “second career income” rather than acceptable for the primary breadwinner in a family, it will continue to lag behind in the ability to compete and recruit promising candidates.

While opportunities and choices primarily affect the “pipeline” to teaching as candidates select a career, our society has changed significantly in the past 40 years regarding the number of career paths an individual will pursue in a lifetime. Persons who may have selected teaching as a career for life a generation ago are now recognizing other opportunities and switching to other fields. Unfortunately, the litany of factors included here that explain why teaching is less often a first career choice also apply to why it is not at the top of the list of later career choices in life.

One additional note about career changes and teaching – decades of research into development of beginning teachers shows that it takes fully five years (or more) for a novice educator to become a well-skilled practitioner. If our desire is to provide a great public school for every child, we must work to retain teachers in the profession longer than the average job. Beyond the initial 5-7 years, we ought to work to ensure that teachers remain in the profession, bringing their knowledge and skill to serve both their students AND to act as a support and mentor for newer colleagues.

Discrimination: In 1954, the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision in Topeka was intended to send the message that every child should have access to a great public school. Unfortunately, one of the most common responses to Brown v. Board in Kansas and across the country was to integrate student populations... and fire all of the minority teachers. A generation of children grew up with no role persons of color as role models or professional exemplars. As a result of both the discrimination against minority teachers AND the message to students, we now see a teaching profession with only a fraction of the diversity in society at large.

Minority students in the United States must also ask the question, “if I am to overcome the negative effects of generations of poverty for my family, is teaching the career to help make that difference?” Is the diversity gap strictly a function of increasing diversity in our population? The answer is a resounding NO. In 1990, about 12% of Kansas were of ethnic or racially diverse backgrounds compared with over 5% of the teaching force. By the 2000 census, overall diversity had risen to 17% in Kansas while the teaching force’s diversity had dropped to near 4%.

Teacher Preparation: Some have cited “causes” for the difficulty in recruiting teacher candidates that do not stand up to careful scrutiny. For example, some say that teacher preparation programs are too involved or demanding. Data from a wide variety of alternate route preparation programs across the country, though, demonstrate that this is simply not a valid critique. While the quality of alternate route programs is a factor in retention in the profession, it is important to understand why the “preparation programs are too difficult or require too many hoops” excuse is NOT a factor to solve the recruitment dilemma.

Efforts to create shortcuts to teaching without appropriately rigorous attention to both content and pedagogy result in high rates of failure on the part of the new teacher. Well over 50% of candidates from “Teach for America” don’t last past their third year in the profession. Just as importantly, their students don’t do nearly as well on standardized achievement measures. In other words, under-preparing people for this challenging profession simply provides substandard teaching for large groups of students year after year and results in a high turnover in staff, undermining school culture AND student achievement.

Kansas has taken a well-reasoned approach to alternate route programs: guarantee a strong content knowledge base, build a theoretical AND practical understanding of pedagogy, and then provide high levels of mentoring and support.

One additional issue has been raised by some as a “barrier to teaching”. Teacher candidates are now required to successfully complete several gateway assessments to reach full licensure in the profession. Some pundits have indicated that the challenge of passing these assessments is discouraging potential teachers from pursuing that career. During a recent discussion session by student teachers at Fort Hays State University, one beginning elementary teacher may have said it

best: "Why would we want someone in the profession who isn't willing to work hard enough to succeed on a Teacher Work Sample? The TWC is what our work is all about and if we can't do that, we aren't ready to teach!" We certainly would never agree to eliminate assessments of doctors or other professionals because they might discourage some from pursuing those careers. We care enough about our health care to demand someone who is not going to engage in malpractice! Certainly Kansans deserve comparable rigor in determining who will be afforded a career of opportunity to impact the lives of our children.

Respect for Public Education and Educators: Schools now have over 45 ways to be labeled "failing" under the No Child Left Behind matrix of grade levels, testing, demographic subgroups, and indicators. Isolated incidents of violence make headlines while the press remains silent to the fact that public schools are probably the safest place children and students spend their time.

The overemphasis on testing and the high stakes for schools based on the results has led to significant restructuring of many schools in extremely negative ways. While this topic is addressed at greater length as a retention issue, recruitment of candidates into teaching is increasingly difficult as the career moves towards reciting scripted lessons that lead to drill-and-practice exercises that lack creativity or a positive sense of engagement for students and teachers alike.

Ironically, one so-called strategy to overcome shortages in the teaching field is likely to have exactly the opposite result in the long run. As previously noted, lowering standards for entry into the profession has proven to invite persons who are ill-equipped to meet student learning needs. The reputation of public schools suffer, particularly hard-to-staff schools working with students with the greatest needs, as achievement data shows greater numbers of students

Salary and career earnings: While some authors have attempted to justify the low salaries afforded to teachers by arguing that they do not work "full time", a more careful analysis shows this premise to be false. In 2005, researchers at the Education Policy Institute discovered the following:

- "A comparison of teachers' weekly wages to those of other workers with similar education and experience shows that, since 1993, female teacher wages have fallen behind 13% and male teacher wages 12.5% (11.5% among all teachers). Since 1979 teacher wages relative to those of other similar workers have dropped 18.5% among women, 9.3% among men, and 13.1% among both combined.
- A comparison of teachers' wages to those of workers with comparable skill requirements, including accountants, reporters, registered nurses, computer programmers, clergy, personnel officers, and vocational counselors and inspectors, shows that teachers earned \$116 less per week in 2002, a wage disadvantage of 12.2%. Because teachers worked more hours per week, the hourly wage disadvantage was an even larger 14.1%.
- Teachers' weekly wages have grown far more slowly than those for these comparable occupations; teacher wages have deteriorated about 14.8% since 1993 and by 12.0% since 1983 relative to comparable occupations."¹

The New York Times reported that beginning salaries lagged behind other comparable fields by \$5,000 to \$10,000 while annual earnings after 20 years in the job were likely to be at least \$40,000 behind.

At times, the argument was presented that teachers need to enter the profession with a sense of calling and service. These personal characteristics are desirable traits that will help the teacher succeed. It seems far more sensible, though, to pay sufficiently high salaries so that a greater number of dedicated and caring people are able to choose teaching without sacrificing their spirit of

¹ From Alegretto, Corcoran, and Michel. (2005). "How Does Teacher Pay Compare? Methodological Challenges and Answers." http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/books_teacher_pay

dedication and caring for their own children and families. If less altruistic individuals are led to the profession, it will become the job of careful personnel screening to bypass them in favor of the more caring candidates.

Professional, induction, advancement, and leadership opportunities: One of the most notable features of teaching as a career (traditionally) is the fact that the job description and responsibilities were largely identical for the beginning professional on her/his first day of employment to those for the 35 year veteran preparing to retire. Beyond some informal mentoring of new teachers by experienced colleagues, the profession has been virtually flat – no differentiation or advancement short of moving out of the classroom to become an administrator.

For years, KNEA and our members have proposed that new teachers should be given lighter schedules, possibly with smaller class sizes and fewer “difficult” students. During the induction years in the profession, the burden of planning to meet the diverse needs of students is extremely demanding. Add to those normal stresses before/after school supervision, attending Individual Education Plan meetings, and school or district induction workshops and a workload is created that drives many promising young educators out the door.

What do administrators say?

When asked how state legislation could improve the district's new teacher program, the majority of administrators suggested that funding was the best way for the state to improve the program.

Teacher Induction in Kansas City: State Policy, District Trends, and Their Implications,
from New Teacher Center: University of California at Santa Cruz – study of Kansas and Missouri districts in the greater Kansas City area, p 30.

Support by mentors for new teachers is also uneven across districts and across the state. In some cases, mentors are assigned without any training, without any attempt to match critical characteristics, etc. In other cases, no mentor is assigned at all. The beginning teacher may be left to her/his resourcefulness and resilience to see if they can “make it” and are willing to weather the struggles to become a well-established veteran.

The typical teacher who sticks with the profession progresses through the first five to seven years and becomes a fully capable independent practitioner. As one becomes more confident in the profession, her/his interests might also expand to include a desire for greater influence on the selection of instructional materials, a desire to engage in more collaborative planning of instruction, or possibly a natural skill for mentoring newer colleagues. Some of these activities may be encouraged in a school district, but often, the emerging teacher-leader finds difficulty in their path to greater responsibility.

Systemic barriers to advancement are often in place to make it more difficult for excellent, experienced teachers to assume new roles. For example, if a teacher is asked to serve on a state-wide task force or on an accreditation visit for a school of education, she/he is likely to be denied any professional leave due to the critical shortage of substitutes. There is also little thought of reducing the class load for the master teacher in order to assign new duties related to teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment. Again, if someone wishes to “advance”, they are often forced to completely leave their role as teacher.

Relevant and significant professional development: Most experienced teachers can describe the array of activities that are labeled as “professional development” by schools and districts. Often, the refrain can be heard: “just let me work in my classroom.” There may be a role for inspirational speakers as part of an overall plan for professional development. There may be a role for a drop-in workshop by a leading expert in some teaching strategy. But neither addresses the critical attributes that have been identified for truly impactful professional development.

All too often, the professional development experiences are not linked to the actual content area of the teacher or to the specific student learning challenges she/he is faced with in the classroom each day. The idea of teachers meeting together to analyze student work and to jointly research ideas for improved teaching would fall outside what many schools or districts would view as “professional development.” Inherent within this flawed analysis is a belief that teachers are not reflective practitioners who can collaborate, conduct action research, and improve their professional practice without an intervention by some external expert or motivator. Actually, it is each teacher’s reflection and action research that has the greatest impact on her/his professional practice!

For a full discussion of quality professional development, consider the principles identified by the National Staff Development Council and the rubric based on NSDC work that was developed by the Kansas Learning First Alliance.

Workload and stress: The “No Child Left Behind” reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has had many unintended consequences. For example, the curriculum has been strategically narrowed in many schools in an attempt to focus on those topics that are on “the test.” Some schools have eliminated science, recess, music, and other activities at least temporarily in an effort to make a few points on the NCLB-mandated assessments.

While teaching has long been a profession with long hours beyond the school day, NCLB and other bureaucratic acts have exacerbated problems of workload and stress in several ways. For example, the joy of teaching in a manner that generates “aha” experiences of understanding has been diminished by an emphasis on rote learning rather than a student’s ability to analyze and solve problems.

Scripted instruction programs have forced teachers to abandon genuine interaction with students. Students who are subjected to these new conditions also react to the stress – motivation decreases when the curriculum is narrow and test-focused rather than open to connection with a student’s natural areas of interest. Further, students are pressured through test preparation drills and an awareness that these are high stakes events for their schools.

The most overwhelming concern to emerge from the 2006 Teacher Working Conditions Survey was time. This includes a lack of collaboration time (with some variation at middle school level if team planning time is in place), individual planning time, time to grade and provide feedback on student work, time to maintain a good communication link with parents, time to review professional journals, and the list goes on.

What do teachers who left the profession say?

One teacher to recently leave the profession noted that she used to work fourteen-to-sixteen hour days August through May were hard. But now in another professional field, “I’m not on call right now, but I may work an occasional weekend. I go home at 5 p.m., I don’t have grading or planning, and I’m not thinking about how to make Hamlet new and exciting.”

From “Young, Dedicated – and Out the Door?” Issues, 19(4), p 1.

As noted in the discussion of salaries, teaching is a profession that demands more hours each day and week than other professions with comparable preparation. Add to that the stress of public pressure and political rhetoric about “failing schools” and teaching loses even more of its allure for the student considering career options.

Professional work environment: What characteristics describe the typical teacher’s work environment, at least historically? Depending on the particular school, the conditions vary greatly: isolation versus collaboration, micromanagement versus autonomy, prescription versus professional judgment are all areas that impact student achievement AND professional fulfillment.

Studies like the Teacher Working Conditions survey conducted in Kansas and across the nation have emphasized the link between a professionally empowering work environment, increased student learning, and teacher retention.

Research reported by the American Educational Research Journal noted that the greatest factor in dissatisfaction-related teacher turnover in high poverty schools was poor administrative support. While salary was the prime dissatisfier in low poverty schools, administrative support was the second highest issue.²

Additional background research was analyzed and compiled by the National Education Association as part of their long term project entitled KEYS to Excellence for Your Schools. For more information about this analysis, consult the KEYS web site at <http://www.keysonline.org/>.

School culture and leadership: In addition to time, the most important single factor in creating a positive and productive work environment described above is the formal school leadership provided by administration. And just as there is a critical and growing shortage of teachers, there is an equally significant shortage of school and district administrators.

The shortage may result in some individuals who are less skilled in creating desirable school cultures being called upon to fill administrative vacancies. The stresses and pressures on teachers apply to administrators, as well. Thus, retention of school administrators is a major concern. Kansas should be looking for ways to support administrator longevity that is sufficient to establish a sustainable culture and to mentor emerging leaders within a school.

What do researchers say?

“The importance of leadership and its connection to both achievement and retention have been noted. Ensuring that school leaders have the support they need to create trusting school environments where teachers are comfortable raising issues and empowered as partners in decision making is critical.”

Creating Conditions for Student and Teacher Success: A Report on the 2006 Kansas Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Center for Teaching Quality, Eric Hirsch & Scott Emeric, p 30.

Empowerment is a crucial element of a true professional learning community. It is possible to craft and utilize a vision statement within a school via the boss simply telling all what to do, the boss trying to sell everyone on what to do, the boss seeking reactions to a proposed vision, the boss consulting with others before making her/his decision, or the boss and members of the organization co-creating their vision through a collaborative process. According to DuFour and Eaker, co-creating may not be the most efficient method, but it is the process most likely to lead to a vision that is widely shared and likely to have real impact.³

² Ingersoll, R. (2001). “Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis.” AERA Journal 38(fall 2001), 499-534.

³ DuFour, R. and Eaker, R. (1998). Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement. p. 65.

Systemic Solutions to the Teacher Shortage

KNEA proposes that a long term approach to addressing the issues of recruitment and retention of quality individuals into the teaching profession is the only way to really address the problem. We will not solve the problem with a band aid approach that might get a few more teachers into the classroom today only to have them leave tomorrow. We must seek a solution that addresses both the present and the future.

To that end, we urge Kansas policy makers to address four areas in crafting a solution:

1. ***The “pipeline”*** – getting more young people to pursue teaching after high school.
2. ***Entry into the profession*** – once a candidate graduates from a teacher preparation program, how will we compete with the pull from more lucrative employment opportunities?
3. ***Continued service*** – Once someone has begun teaching, what must we do to ensure that they make teaching a career, including how we can entice them back to the classroom should they take a break for family responsibilities.
4. ***Returning prestige to the teaching profession.*** Policy and policy makers must honor teaching, not degrade it; teachers must be treated and respected as professionals on the same level as attorneys and physicians. We must never forget that the foundation of every physician’s training is the education he or she received in grades k through 12.

Addressing the “pipeline”

How do we encourage more people to consider teaching as a career option?

- **The role of high schools and middle schools**

If we want young people to consider teaching as a viable career option, we must expose them to teaching as a career early on. Contrary to what some believe, experience as a student does not count as exposure to the realities of – nor the joys of – teaching. To that end, middle schools should be encouraged to form future teacher clubs sponsored by enthusiastic career teachers who can share their love of the profession with the students. Ideally, students in education programs from local institutions of higher education should work with these clubs and share their enthusiasm for their prospective profession. As students enter high school, they should have the opportunity to participate in Future Teacher Clubs that put an emphasis on pre-professional experiences. Such students would serve as teacher aides, work with students as tutors, and support early reading and math programs in the elementary schools. It is important that these young people have real contact with students – as opposed to grading papers and delivering messages. The most often given reasons for choosing teaching as a career are altruistic – the desire to make a difference or change the world or seeing the light in a child’s eyes when he “gets it.” Club experiences should provide members with that experience; the chance to experience having taught someone something. These kinds of programs would develop in young people a greater appreciation of the difference one can make in the life of a child when choosing teaching as a profession and serve to inspire young people to pursue teaching.

The State can:

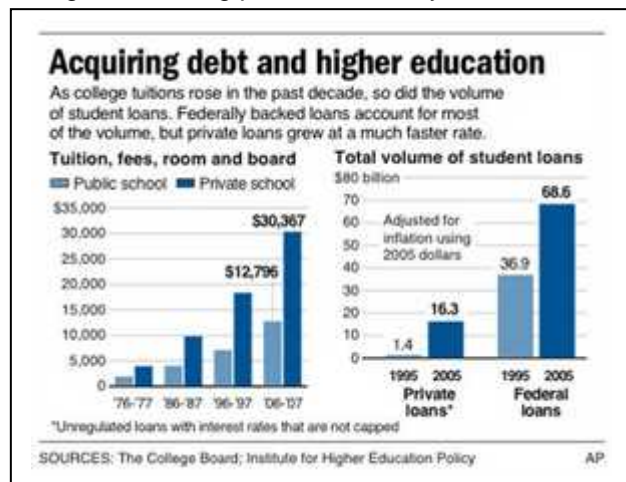
1. allow the creation of programs that would include classes for credit in high school. Such classes would be taught by licensed, practicing teachers.
2. provide funding for such programs so that rich experiences might be provided including experiencing the difference a teacher can make and visits to teacher preparation programs at universities in Kansas.

- **Grow your own transition to teaching programs**

There are support personnel across the state who, for whatever reason, have not completed a degree program which could lead to them entering the teaching profession. Many paraprofessionals have some college education – perhaps even hold an Associate’s degree. Every effort should be made to transition these people into the profession.

State and business partnerships can

1. pay tuition or provide loan forgiveness,
2. provide instruction either on-site or through interactive distance learning opportunities, and
3. provide living expenses during the time they would be completing their student teaching experiences.



- **Tuition forgiveness**

Recent analysis of student loans and the rising costs of college education have been called “a new form of indenture” by the Kansas City Star. Students pursuing a teaching career must complete an undergraduate program and are then often encouraged to complete an advanced degree as well. With Kansas teacher salaries among the lowest in the nation, it is foolish to expect young people to stay in a career that will not allow them to pay off their college debt. Kansas must dramatically expand and market loan forgiveness programs for students entering the profession.

Tuition forgiveness programs can be crafted in such a way as to encourage recipients to take hard-to-fill positions. There must be a commitment by the student receiving tuition forgiveness grants to work in teaching. If any student entering teaching could receive tuition forgiveness at a rate of one semester for each year of teaching, more would consider entering and staying in the profession. Additionally, tuition forgiveness could be ramped up for those willing to teach in isolated rural communities, hard to staff schools, or license shortage areas. Such teachers might receive one year (two semesters) tuition forgiveness for each year taught in that position. These tuition reimbursement programs should include currently licensed teachers who agree to become endorsed in and teach hard-to-fill areas.

For more information on the crisis in student loans, see the following articles:

[High-priced student loans spell trouble](#)

[Graduates with higher-cost private loans face a tougher road](#)

- **University advising**

University advising programs must be more in tune with the reality of teaching career opportunities. We know that Kansas teacher preparation programs are turning out more elementary classroom teachers than there are jobs for those teachers while we are not producing enough math or music teachers. It is not enough for advisors to assist students in choosing the appropriate classes; they must be more vigilant about advising students on employment realities. While the ultimate decision on what to pursue remains with the student, the advisor should encourage students to think about options that will meet the needs of the state as well as providing for a greater possibility of finding a job after graduation.

Further, students with majors in science and math, or other hard-to-fill teaching positions, must be encouraged to consider teaching positions in these areas, if their skills, interests, personality, and values indicate they would thrive in the teaching profession. Cooperative education programs can be used to get non-teaching majors into classrooms to determine whether teaching would be a good career fit.

Addressing entry into the profession

What will bring people into the classroom and get them through the first years?

The [National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#) annually examines issues of what students are looking for in job offers after college.

"Students responding to NACE's 2006 Graduating Student & Alumni Survey have made it clear that while salaries are important, benefits also matter to them. Overall, students rated medical insurance, yearly salary increases, 401(k) plan, and dental and life insurance as the most important benefits to them. Other benefits students look for, in order of importance, are:

1. Medical insurance
2. Yearly salary increases
3. 401(k) retirement plan
4. Dental insurance
5. Life insurance
6. Tuition reimbursement
7. More than 2 weeks vacation
8. Pension plan
9. Flextime
10. Family-friendly benefits"⁴

- **Entry level salaries**

The average Kansas teacher salary today ranks 38th in the nation. In 2006-07, the average starting salary for a teacher in Kansas was \$30,408, while starting salaries across the state range from a low of \$25,000 to a high of \$38,500. These figures are based on an examination of teacher salary schedules across the state. They do not necessarily reflect what a beginning teacher might expect to earn. When these salaries are weighted based on where they are – for example, a large district with a higher starting salary will likely hire more beginning teachers than a very small district with a low salary – a beginning teacher might expect to earn \$32,619.

The American Federation of Teachers also conducts a periodic survey of beginning teacher salaries which is published in a report entitled the [Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends](#). The latest of these surveys published in 2007 is the analysis of 2005 data. The report on beginning teacher salaries comes to this conclusion:

"The average salary earned by the 227,000 teachers who were in their first year in 2004-05 was \$31,753 or 3.1 percent more than the average earnings in 2003-04. Although beginning teacher salaries increased at a faster rate than average teacher salaries, they still did not keep pace with inflation, earnings for other workers or economic growth.

"For example, between 1995 and 2005, the buying power of the beginning teacher salary grew by 3.3 percent or roughly \$100 a year. The buying power of private sector salaries generally grew by almost 13 percent. For every new dollar in average earnings in the private sector, beginning teacher salaries have risen by just 22 cents.

"The National Association of Colleges and Employers conducts an annual survey on the job offers received by college graduates. The average salary offer to those graduating with

⁴ National Association of Colleges and Employers, [Frequently Asked Questions](http://www.nacweb.org/press/quick.htm), <http://www.nacweb.org/press/quick.htm>

a major other than education was \$42,229 or \$10,476 more than the average beginning teacher salary. Beginning teacher pay is not competitive.”⁵

Whether we look at the data nationally or on the state level, we can see that beginning teacher salaries are not competitive with private sector salaries and are becoming less so over time.

Efforts to address this issue are a necessary component of any plan to attract young people into the teaching “pipeline” and to move new college graduates into the classroom.

- **Health benefits**

Providing health insurance benefits to school employees should be a priority of the state. As we noted earlier, in the NACE *2006 Graduating Student & Alumni Survey*, “students rated **medical insurance**, yearly salary increases, 401(k) plan, and dental and life insurance **as the most important benefits to them.**” (emphasis added) Knowing that one’s health care needs are taken care of is a strong incentive for joining the profession and continuing.

- **Support for new teachers**

Teaching is challenging. While Kansas teacher preparation programs do an excellent job with prospective teachers, no program can fully encompass the realities of dealing with one’s own students and the variety of personalities, backgrounds, and levels of students that form today’s classroom.

Data from the State Department of Education reveals some alarming facts. The attrition rate of new teachers in Kansas over the first five years of teaching is nearly 50 percent. While some of this exodus can be attributed to taking time off to raise children or the transfer of a spouse, we are not losing half of our new teachers to those two factors alone.

Unfortunately studies of the problem have been conducted by asking Superintendents why teachers leave and not by attempting a real survey of those teachers who have left. But all educators agree and national research confirms that there are certain practices that, if done well, can dramatically reduce new teacher attrition.

- **Induction**

The successful transition from novice teacher to skilled practitioner demands a comprehensive program for the induction of new teachers. Such a program orients the novice teacher to the school, the district, and the community. It goes further by linking professional development opportunities, school improvement initiatives, and appraisal with a mentoring system designed to support the teacher in mastering the art of classroom management, instruction, and student assessment.

The induction program also must function within the context of the novice teacher’s working conditions. Successful completion of the probationary period is more likely when the new teacher’s assignment considers such factors as the number of preparations, class size, extra-curricular responsibilities, and the challenge of the assignment. Successful teachers also count on the sustained support of school administrators, professional colleagues and mentors, resource personnel, professional organizations, and the community.

⁵ American Federation of Teachers, [Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2005](#), AFT, Washington, D.C., 2007, p ii.

- **Mentoring**

The mentoring program functions within the context of the comprehensive induction system. Its purpose is to pair the probationary teacher with a highly skilled teacher or team of teachers trained in working with peers and providing support. Through the support of a caring, specially trained mentor, the novice teacher is able to focus on developing his/her instructional skills and utilize the learnings from professional development experiences in improving practice. Mentoring is not an isolated experience but rather is on-going support, built into the day-to-day activities of the novice teacher.

The mentor teacher program passed by the legislature is not adequate to do the job. First, the program has never been funded to provide support for every teacher through the first three years of teaching. Secondly, while the state program provides funding to give a stipend to mentor teachers – a needed component – it does not provide funding for any of the other necessary ingredients of a quality mentoring program. There is no funding for program planning, materials or training; there is no funding to support release for both the mentor and the mentee to engage in observation and immediate feedback.

In order to be an effective program in addressing new teacher attrition, the mentor teacher program needs an influx of funding.

- **Work load**

New and inexperienced teachers need to be able to focus on learning the job. To that end, practices that distract them from that learning need to be abandoned. Many school districts and local associations are doing just that but such efforts need to be stepped up.

When assigning new teachers, attention must be given to their preparation load. For secondary teachers, the preparation load should be minimized. Whenever possible, the new teacher should have fewer courses to prepare for than the experienced teacher.

Care must also be given not to overload the new teacher with students with special needs. While new teachers must gain experience with these students, they should never be expected to take on more challenges than necessary.

Finally, new teachers need time to assess student work and prepare for the lessons they will teach. New teachers should not be asked to take on more than one supplemental duty in addition to their teaching.

These are policies that need to be promoted from the state level and supported by school boards, school administrators, and the new teacher's fellow faculty members.

Addressing continued service

What will keep people in the classroom for a long and successful career?

- **Earning career salaries**

Nationally, the AFT Teacher Salary Survey shows a disturbing trend in average teacher salary:

“[T]he average teacher salary increased between 2003-04 and 2004-05 by 2.2 percent to \$47,602. But teacher pay lost ground against the cost of living, which rose by 3.4 percent. It is the second consecutive year that average teacher pay has declined relative to inflation. In that time, the buying power of the average teacher salary declined by \$775, or 1.6 percent.

“Growth in average teacher pay has not kept pace with overall economic growth either. In 2004, the U.S. economy began to come out of recession and grew, on a per capita basis, by 5.8 percent. In 2005 it grew by 5.4 percent. In each year, the growth in teacher pay did not match the growth in the economy. This is not a surprise, because average teacher pay has only grown at a faster rate than the economy 15 times in the last 45 years. But the difference between annual economic growth and the growth in teacher pay is the highest it has been since 1981.

“And when compared with the average pay of American workers overall, average teacher pay is losing ground. In 1991, average teacher pay was worth \$47,262 in 2005 dollars. The average U.S. worker who qualified for unemployment insurance made \$39,188. Teacher pay was 21 percent more than average pay generally. Teachers earned more, on a comparable basis in 1991 than they ever had before – or have since. Real average teacher pay has grown by less than 1 percent since 1991, and earnings for all workers have grown by 14.5 percent. Teachers now make just 6 percent more than the average American worker.”⁶

“In the last 10 years, real average private sector compensation has grown by \$4,580. Real teacher compensation has grown by \$487. For every \$1 increase in average private sector salaries, average teacher pay has risen by 11 cents.”⁷

Kansas teacher salaries have consistently lagged behind other states. In 2004-05 (the same year used in the AFT survey), the Kansas State Department of Education reports that the average Kansas teacher salary was \$39,351 – a full \$8,251 less than the national average. By 2006-07 the average Kansas teacher salary had risen to \$43,334 – still \$4,268 less than the 2004-05 national average!

The most recent analysis shows the Kansas average teacher salary to be 38th nationally. This is good news in that we have come up from 42nd just a few years ago. The rise however is due to the resolution of a school finance lawsuit under which the state legislature provided much larger increases in funding.

Teacher salary increases for 2005-06 and 2006-07 were larger than those in previous years, moving the average up relative to other

What do teachers say?

“If more than 40 percent of the faculty believed they need to work a second job during the school year, schools are 1.7 times more likely to have a high expected turnover rate.”

Creating Conditions for Student and
Teacher Success: A Report on the 2006
Kansas Teacher Working Conditions
Survey, p 16.

⁶ American Federation of Teachers, [Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2005](#), AFT, Washington, D.C., 2007, p i.

⁷ Ibid, p ii.

states. Kansas remains far from the national average.

The state can take the lead in addressing the salary issue by providing continued increases in base state aid per pupil. BSAPP is the primary source of funds for teacher salaries and the best way to make salaries more competitive is to provide more money that can be used for salaries.

The move to the national average would take an enormous infusion of funds. For this reason some have advocated a somewhat scaled down approach by targeting the median of the states. This approach would still move Kansas teacher salaries significantly forward.

Yet another approach to improving teacher compensation is to focus on career earnings. Until recently there were districts with 40-step salary schedules. What this means is that a teacher would not earn the maximum salary level until after 40 years in the same district, significantly decreasing the amount of compensation earned over a career.

KNEA local negotiations teams have been advocating for compacting salary schedules so that teachers earn higher salaries earlier in their career. Such a system would make the salary more attractive and allow teachers at younger ages to invest some of their earnings or purchase their own homes.

- **Health benefits**

Health care costs continue to eat away at American's earning power and public employees are not immune to the health care crisis. In Kansas the handling of health benefits varies widely from district to district. The majority of districts provide most of the cost of the employee's health benefits; very few fully cover the cost of the employee. Family coverage as part of the compensation package is rare although it is often available out of the employee's pocket. And in the last State Department of Education survey of school districts, it was found that in 11 districts employees are ***not even offered health insurance at their own cost.***

Providing health insurance benefits to school employees should be a priority of the state. As we noted earlier, in the NACE *2006 Graduating Student & Alumni Survey*, "students rated **medical insurance**, yearly salary increases, 401(k) plan, and dental and life insurance **as the most important benefits to them.**" (emphasis added)

In addition, as teachers continue in their careers, family health benefits become even more important. The state recognizes this in the provision of the state health care plan to state employees. Under that plan, the state provides nearly all of the employee's premium and a significant portion of the family coverage.

The lack of support for family coverage in many school district health insurance plans is a disincentive to continued employment.

- **Professional development**

As with any job, an employee's enthusiasm is often fed by support for exciting new approaches to the task at hand. Quality professional development helps teachers to learn new skills, encourages them to try new approaches to learning, and bolsters their enthusiasm for and commitment to teaching.

Unfortunately the state has never fully understood the potential of quality professional development. Despite establishing a funding formula for professional development in the mid 1980's, the formula has ***never*** been fully funded. This has left districts in the difficult position of carving such funding out of other resources and programs or ignoring professional

development. And too often professional development is done “on the cheap” as a cost savings measure rendering the experience frustrating and meaningless to the teachers.

Professional development becomes critically important as states and the federal government institute “school reform” policies that effectively mandate changes to curriculum, assessment, or teaching. In order for teachers to fully integrate such changes into their practice, professional development that is meaningful, related to the mission of the schools, and embedded within the school day would improve overall job satisfaction and encourage teachers to stay with the profession.

The state can play a meaningful role in two ways:

1. fully fund the professional development formula, providing districts with the resources to provide quality opportunities, and
2. insist that Professional Development Councils, as the oversight and planning council of the district, have meaningful involvement in and sign-off on the professional development plan.

- **Family friendly policies**

Teachers are not teachers first and people second. Like all other Americans, teachers are parents, community members, and children themselves. School districts may have mottos like “Where the kids come first,” but those mottos too often do not apply to teachers as parents and children themselves. As young teachers become parents and veteran teachers become care-givers for their own parents it should be the policy of the state to support them as employees and as care-givers.

The following three issues address another of the 10 benefits that new graduates look for in an employer. The list of ten includes “*flextime*” and “*family-friendly benefits.*”

- **Child care**

Young teachers with small children are, as we have shown, working for low wages. Schools are the perfect place in which to offer child care for the children of employees. In its emphasis on early childhood opportunities, the state should consider funding more school-based child care and provide it as a benefit to employees.

- **Sick leave**

Sick leave policies are in need of a dramatic overhaul. It must not be forgotten that teachers face classrooms full of children who come to school ill because their parents are out of sick leave at their own places of employment. In addition young teachers have to consider the health of their own children and baby boomers now have the responsibility of caring for elderly parents. The state should encourage and help fund sick leave policies that support families and children.

- **Work load**

What do teachers say?

“Only a slight majority of teachers were positive about the professional development they received. More than half (58percent) of Kansas educators agree that professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills most needed to teach effectively.”

Creating Conditions for Student and Teacher Success: A Report on the 2006 Kansas Teacher Working Conditions Survey, p 30.

As with beginning teachers, it is often important to consider the same work load issues with career teachers – particularly those with children of their own.

Other work load issues are specific to particular jobs. Special education teachers for example teach all day long but must still find time for student assessment, writing IEPs and meeting with parents on IEP teams. Their work load is extraordinarily high and the result is a shortage of special education teachers. Licensure data reveal that Kansas has more teachers with special education licenses than positions, yet school districts can't find people to take those jobs. Perhaps work load plays a part in the willingness of a teacher to take a special education assignment.

- **Professional communities**

A school is a system. Every part of that system has a contribution to make in the success or failure of the system as a whole and of each student in the system. Unfortunately the constraints put on schools by funding and time result in a system in which each individual teacher is closed within his or her own classroom and rarely is able to work with others to accomplish the goals of the school.

The requirements of No Child Left Behind and the state's own accountability and accreditation system demand that teachers work collaboratively to analyze student assessment data and create plans to address the weaknesses identified in the data. Comprehensive school improvement cannot be done by teachers working in individual silos.

Schools need the resources to provide for collaborative work opportunities.

What do teachers say?

"About one-quarter of Kansas teachers receive less than three hours per week during the school day to plan and collaborate. It is not surprising, then, that only 42 percent of teachers agreed that they receive sufficient time to collaborate with colleagues."

Creating Conditions for Student and Teacher Success: A Report on the 2006 Kansas Teacher Working Conditions Survey, p 24.

Returning Prestige to the Profession

The public schools and the teaching profession have been under relentless attack since the 1980's. Report after report – often written by “think tanks” with an interest in destroying government support for comprehensive public education – has damned the system as inefficient, bloated, and uncaring. Newspapers routinely print stories of “failing schools” rarely taking a serious look at the data they are reporting.

At the same time state legislatures and the congress have put ever increasing demands on public schools without providing the funds necessary to address those demands. Special education, passed in the mid-1970's has never been fully funded by the federal government and the state of Kansas has rarely funded 100% of the excess costs of the program. The federal No Child Left Behind Act is underfunded by hundreds of millions of dollars and yet takes a punishing sanctions approach to schools that can't achieve its standards.

What do teachers say?

“Overall, less than half of Kansas teachers (44 percent) agree that teachers are centrally involved in decision making, and only five percent strongly agree with this statement.”

Creating Conditions for Student and
Teacher Success: A Report on the 2006
Kansas Teacher Working Conditions
Survey, p 28.

Underpaid teachers are shelling out hundreds of dollars of their own to supplement school materials at the same time that their own buying power is shrinking.

In the past few years in Kansas bills have been introduced and debated that have all but called teachers pedophiles and pornographers. Legislators berate teachers because too many children are not meeting math proficiency standards but are

unwilling to take the high school test themselves.

Yet by all measures schools are doing better than ever before. More children are graduating from high school than ever. We are educating children who were considered “throwaways” in the “good old days” of many a pundit's youth. We had no special education 35 years ago. We did not have English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Years ago no one would have considered what to do about educating the crack babies; no one would have cared if inner city youths dropped out of school. Today's teachers care about all of those children and more. And they struggle to meet their needs in underfunded schools.

The legislature, the state board of education, and other policy makers wonder in the context of all of this why enrollment in teacher preparation programs is declining, why school districts can't find enough teachers to fill their classrooms, and why teachers seem so anxious to retire.

Those policy makers have it in their power to lead the way in returning prestige to the teaching profession. They can start by vocally standing up for teachers and schools when the narrow-minded ideologues among their own ranks accuse teachers of pedaling pornography. And then they can begin to accept the reality of their own studies. Two costly studies have shown schools to be underfunded – acknowledge it and deal with it. Standard and Poor's has shown that our schools are efficient – accept it and stop calling them inefficient.

What do teachers say?

“If 40 percent or less of the faculty in a school believed they are respected as educational experts, the school is 2.7 times more likely to have a high expected turnover rate.”

“Educator perception that they are respected as educational experts had the greatest impact on whether schools would have a high expected turnover rate.”

Creating Conditions for Student and
Teacher Success: A Report on the 2006
Kansas Teacher Working Conditions
Survey, p 16, p 18.

Policy makers can set a tone that demonstrates respect for the profession of teaching. Relentless attacks on the education system and on those that work in it – administrators and teachers alike – contribute to a young person’s decision to choose a different career.

Legislators and other elected officials can promote policies and legislation that empower teachers:

- Support for collective bargaining gives teachers a measure of control over their compensation, benefits, and work day.
- Ensuring that teachers have a majority voice on professional development committees empowers those who meet our children every day to determine what training is needed to help them meet the needs of those children.
- Appointing practicing teachers to state level committees and commissions formed to advise the legislature acknowledges the value of those teachers to education. Currently for example, there are no practicing teachers on the 2010 Commission; no instructors on the Technical College Commission; no math or science teachers on the Math and Science Advisory Commission.
- The power of educator licensure should be in the hands of teachers. In other professions, active professionals control access to a professional license. Lawyers, Plumbers, Physicians, Engineers, Nurses, Dentists, and Cosmetologists control access to their professions. Only in education are education professionals denied the right to license individuals within their profession. Singling out educators in this way devalues them as professionals capable of understanding and policing their own profession.

Legislators and other elected officials can promote policies and legislation that reward teachers:

- All elected officials from local school board members to the Governor should advocate for significant salary increases across the board.
- Teachers who choose to teach in districts with high levels of poverty, language minority students, or at-risk students should be acknowledged for the extra challenges they face in meeting the needs of those students.
- Teachers who voluntarily choose to pursue National Board Certification should have the fees paid for by the state as well as support during the process to effectively complete the assessment.

Legislators and other elected officials can participate in activities that acknowledge teacher excellence:

- All elected officials should take news media to task when schools are labeled as “failing.”
- Elected officials should willingly and vocally challenge their ideological colleagues who publicly berate teachers or public schools.
- Elected officials should reject accountability systems that are based on a series of punishments and sanctions and instead focus efforts on supporting improvement efforts in schools that fall short of standards.

Ending the myth of “part time” employment

Too many people characterize teaching as if it were part time employment. “The best thing about teaching,” they will say, “is June, July and August.” Others suggest that the teacher finishes work when the children go home. Sadly, many policy makers have bought into this myth. And it is a myth.

The 8:00 to 3:00 myth suggests that there is time built into the day for teachers to plan lessons, evaluate student work, and research and assemble materials for lessons and projects. Imagine the high school English teacher with five class periods of 22 students using their 50 minute planning and preparation time to read and comment on essays by just two of those classes – 44 students.

What time then is left in the day for lesson planning? What time is left to read the next novel that your students will be reading? What time is left for scoring the last grammar quiz, returning the call of a parent with questions about his child's progress report, meeting with your colleagues in the English Department to discuss curriculum, and attending the mandatory staff briefing on blood-borne pathogens?

The June, July, and August myth suggests that teachers might be lounging on beaches or touring European capitals three months of every year. Yet, in reality teachers are often working on their masters degree in summer sessions, attending voluntary professional development programs, researching new materials and methodologies to enhance their instruction in the coming year, and working summer jobs to make ends meet.

The truth is that no teacher's job ends when the children go home – either in the evening or the summer – and to suggest so is to demean the valuable work that teachers do after the students leave and even at home at night.

It doesn't take much creativity to imagine a world in which teachers are compensated like other professionals for the education work they do in their supposed "off time." Imagine teachers as full time employees with a paid vacation period – just like other American workers. Imagine that those teachers are then paid employees when they attend professional development programs, take pertinent university classes, or collaborate with peers on improving student learning.

Such an idea would require a significant increase in teacher pay and a significant influx of state funding to support those salaries. What is done during those non-student days would be subject to negotiations, empowering teachers to take control of their professional community and professional lives. The fact is that in the private sector, when the employer wants an employee trained in new techniques or to attend a class, seminar or conference designed to improve his or her skills, it is done on the employee's work time and at the expense of the employer. Only in the teaching profession do we expect these things to happen and for the employee to fund them from her own pocket.

What do teachers say?

"Due at least in part to [the] lack of planning time, teachers work on school-related activities outside of the school day."

"A majority of teachers not only put in significant time outside of the school day, they work well beyond the number of days in their contract."

Creating Conditions for Student and
Teacher Success: A Report on the 2006
Kansas Teacher Working Conditions
Survey, p 25.

Conclusions

A long term solution calls for a comprehensive plan

Some policymakers have proposed ideas to solve the teacher shortage that are the equivalent of pouring a bucket of water on an inferno and hoping to extinguish the flames. A few solutions are more like pouring gasoline on the inferno. Too much time is being spent on finding quick and cheap fixes to a problem that requires a long-term, comprehensive plan of attack.

One cannot – and should not expect to – solve the teacher shortage problem overnight. That is why the Kansas NEA proposes taking on the issue at a variety of levels and with a variety of solutions. These recommendations include:

- Examining four areas for improvement...
 1. Preservice including middle school and high school programs and post-secondary teacher education programs,
 2. Entry into the profession and what programs and services will reduce the attrition rate of new teachers,
 3. Continuing service to the profession and what programs and services will encourage teachers to view education as a long-term career option that allows one to provide for a family, and
 4. Returning prestige and respect to a profession that has suffered from nearly 30 years of relentless attacks.
- Approaching the problem in a systemic way...

We cannot expect to solve the problem unless we are willing to view education as system that includes progression through a career and a variety of supports within the system. Such supports include:

6. Induction and mentoring,
 7. Time and resources,
 8. Professional development,
 9. Professional empowerment, and
 10. A humanistic approach to human resources
- Viewing teachers as part of the solution, not the problem...

We must stop the practice of ***imposing ideas on the teachers*** and start the practice of ***collaborating with the teachers***.

In conducting the 2006 Kansas Teacher Working Conditions Survey, we have for the first time given credence to what the teachers think and feel about serving our schools. It is imperative that the learnings of that survey be taken to heart and form the framework for discussions about making a school the kind of environment that encourages a career-long commitment.