

Recruit, Retain and Respect

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Wake Task Force on Teaching Excellence

The Wake Task Force on Teaching Excellence was comprised of a committee representing higher education, business, public schools, agencies and statewide policy makers. Convened by Wake Education Partnership, the Task Force began its work during the winter of 2004 and completed its report in spring 2005. This executive summary was published in spring 2006.

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A Report from the Wake Task Force on Teaching Excellence



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recruit, Retain and Respect

A Report from the Wake Task Force on Teaching Excellence

The Three R's

Recruiting, retaining and respecting quality teachers is critical for school success, but these are not new areas of concern. Like its precursor *All for All*, this report looks at what makes good teaching and how our community and the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) can ensure quality teachers are teaching in every classroom.



The basic answers are straightforward.

We need to *recruit* quality teachers for Wake County schools. Just to keep up with “normal turnover,” WCPSS will need to hire three teachers every working day of each year.

Once we've hired these teachers, we need to *retain* them. Too many good teachers leave the profession too soon. Experience in the classroom helps novice teachers improve, but many leave before they have that opportunity for growth.

To retain these teachers we need to *respect* them as professionals. If quality teaching is important in the lives of children, if we value experience, dedication and excellence in teaching, if we continue to challenge and raise our expectations of teachers—then teachers should also be able to work in a county that values experience, minimizes distractions, and honors the desire and need for personal and professional fulfillment. Teachers are willing to live up to every measure of accountability so long as they believe there is a tailwind moving with them, rather than a headwind impeding them.

Expanding on these answers, this report also presents priority action items outlining how we should recruit, retain and respect our Wake County teachers.

Numerous other reports, studies and commissions find common ground in recommendations similar to those presented here. In other words, as a community and as a school system, we already know of or have seen most of the recommendations set forth below. In some instances we are already working toward making them a reality. In other instances we prefer to overlook or dismiss the recommendations as wish list items—despite a consensus that implementing them will make a positive difference in the classrooms of Wake County.

Wake County is fortunate to have a public school system where students, teachers, administrators can succeed. *Our schools can either move forward to ensure continued success or risk failure and mediocrity.* If teaching excellence is our goal, WCPSS employees, the Board of Education and the Board of Commissioners, as well as other elected leaders and local corporate and community partners will need to work together to lead our schools and our students to higher achievement and success.

We know what we should do. As a community of parents, educators, businesspeople, civic leaders, taxpayers and citizens, what will we do?

For our students, our teachers and our community.

The high expectations of the Wake County community require that we look closely at our commitment to our teaching force—how we define and encourage teaching quality, how we support the professional development of our teachers, and how we effectively recruit and retain the best teachers for our students. Because these three areas—teaching quality, professional development and recruitment/retention—are inextricably connected, actions taken in one area directly impact the others.

A focus on teaching also has a direct impact on students and their academic achievement—the same conditions that support quality teaching also encourage student learning. To improve education, we must continue to improve teacher quality. Research clearly indicates that teacher quality directly affects student achievement, and identifies the teacher as the single most important factor that impacts student learning.

For teachers, parents and students, the reasons for supporting teaching excellence may be obvious. But what about the 61 percent of Wake County households that do not have children in elementary or secondary schools. How does teaching excellence impact them?



To read the complete Task Force report, including a discussion of the recommendations, visit us at www.WakeEdPartnership.org.

While there are costs associated with raising the bar for teaching excellence, there are significant costs for allowing our standards to slip. For example, consider the impact of high school dropouts on Wake County's economy. Over a lifetime, a high school graduate will earn an estimated \$280,000 more than a high school dropout.

Numerous studies have also shown correlations between high school dropout rates and crime rates. On average, each inmate in North Carolina cost the public \$21,141 in 2002-03, while each student in Wake County cost the public only \$6,810.

In addition to those benefits, the quality of an area school system strengthens the area's underlying property values. Homebuyers value better quality schools, and homeowners community-wide can benefit from improved schools, even if they have no children in the system. Wake County and its municipalities have also received a host of accolades from respected publications, including *Forbes* and *Money Magazine*, referencing the high quality of life in relation to the quality of public education available in Wake County.

The real question for all of us is, “What do we want for our community?” If the answer is success, not only in student achievement, but also in terms of economic growth and quality of life, then all of us have a stake in the quality of our public schools. The preparation of our future workforce begins with the classroom teacher. By helping teachers succeed, we help our students and our community succeed as well.

Recommendations

1. Embed more time within the school day for all teachers to plan and reflect, to participate in professional development and to collaborate with other key personnel.
2. Ensure that principals have the understanding and capacity to create an environment that supports quality teaching and the retention of quality teachers.
3. Support teaching as a profession through career enhancement and leadership opportunities.
 - a. Develop a process for teachers to use critical self-analysis and shared reflection based on the “Quality Teaching Characteristics” index or other tools.
 - b. Make the sharing of best practices routine among teachers within and across schools.
 - c. Ensure that professional development includes a range of opportunities to support teachers as they grow in their careers from novice to experienced teacher.
 - d. Improve mentor programs to more consistently meet the needs of new teachers.
 - e. Create career pathways for teachers using the Teacher Enhancement and Leadership System (TELS).
4. Improve working conditions for special education teachers, including salary incentives, reduced case loads, planning time and paperwork assistance, to reduce increasing turnover rates.
5. Review and upgrade teacher salaries and benefits systematically to keep pace with competitive job markets.
6. More carefully plan how curricular decisions impact teachers with a coordinated, system-wide timeline for new initiatives.
7. Recruit advocates among the business community and parents to support teaching excellence.