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ABSTRACT

Research extending back into the 1890's reveals that the quality of classroom instruction depends not upon differing curricula, for example, but rather upon the attitudes and actions of teachers. Instructional effectiveness is especially important for independent schools, yet availability as well as quality of candidates has dropped markedly. Nonetheless, independent school trustees can attract quality teachers if they shift their focus of concern to issues of school climate and instructor motivation. Such a task encompasses a comprehension of the task of teaching, classroom life, positive trustee attitudes and policies, and a supportive climate. In the first place, trustees should realize that teachers face obstacles ranging from finding it difficult to evaluate their own effectiveness and thus generally feeling uncertain about their roles, to lacking the necessary time and support for analyzing just what they are doing, and thus remaining oblivious to needs for change. Taken together, such factors are detrimental to classroom life. Yet incentives related to job satisfaction--recognition for teaching excellence, for instance--can lead to an improved learning environment and increased achievement among students. It is this incentive/satisfaction concern that trustees must address if they want to retain and attract high-quality faculty. (KS)

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HOW THE BOARD CAN PROMOTE FACULTY EFFECTIVENESS

Milbrey W. McLaughlin

The quality of the school's instructional program, what happens in the classroom-- what all of us care so much about-- depends, finally, upon what teachers do and what teachers think. It is as simple as that.

Research extending back into the 1890's shows no significant effect on learning related to differing curricula, differing training strategies, or differing grouping strategies. What seems to matter most is the classroom interaction between student and teacher. Drawing on research and experience, I want to highlight some of the factors that promote teacher effectiveness.

The effectiveness of teachers is particularly important for independent schools right now. Not so long ago, they had a somewhat captive pool of talent, consisting of teachers who wanted to teach in independent schools and remain in independent schools. This is no longer the case. We are all too aware that profound teacher shortages are just around the corner, if not already here. For example, a recent survey of University of California at Berkeley freshmen asked how many were even considering a career in teaching. Only four said they thought they might wish to pursue this career.

Other research shows that in this attenuated candidate pool the quality of those available for public and private school teaching has also diminished greatly. Scores on standardized tests place undergraduate teaching candidates in the lowest quartile of all college seniors. Those who are already teaching in schools may not be as effective as we think they are, either, and they might not be as effective as they could be. This is an area of particular concern to independent school trustees.

Unlike their colleagues in the public school arena, independent school trustees are in a position to attract and retain teachers of high quality. To do so, however, they need to change their perspective by altering the agenda of most board discussions to focus on school climate and issues of professional motivation.

To understand school climate and teacher motivation, we need to see where teachers are--what it is to be a teacher in the classroom and what the research tells us about it. Then we need to think about how teachers change and grow--about the factors associated with effective teaching as well as those that seem to inhibit professional effectiveness. Finally, we

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need to think about the roles that boards of trustees play in climate and motivation.

The task of teaching

What is the task of teaching? An enormous amount of research has been done during the last 10-15 years on life in the classroom. In fact, Philip W. Jackson, at the University of Chicago, wrote a well-known book entitled just that, Life in Classrooms (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968). People generally agree on what it is like to be in the same school, in the same classroom, teaching the same subject with the same kids day after day:

1. The cellular organization of schools means that teachers are alone for most of their professional hours--physically and psychically apart from their colleagues and from professional support.
2. Partly because of this isolation and partly because of teachers' practice or tradition of not sharing, there is little common "technical" culture in the school. Not only are the good things not shared; the bad things--the less successful practices--also go unnoticed and, by and large, unremarked upon. The absence of a professional culture is a major impediment to professional growth.
3. When teachers do ask for help, assistance they rate more useful typically comes from fellow teachers and administrators, not from specialists, outside consultants, or university gurus. However, the normal course of events in a school day makes this kind of collegial assistance very difficult to acquire.
4. What do teachers care about? When asked what they care about--their greatest rewards, their greatest sources of pride--teachers point consistently to the success of students, both of individual students who have achieved something and of groups of students who have moved or progressed. The second most frequent response has to do with the respect of their colleagues. Both responses are rooted in professional incentives, for teachers care most about professionalism and about what brought them to teaching in the first place. Professionalism is

foremost in determining how teachers view their working climate.

5. A sense of uncertainty characterizes teachers and teaching, for teachers say they have difficulty in assessing their own effectiveness and evaluating their own work to such a degree that most see this as an obstacle to their own growth and development. The intangibility, complexity, and remoteness of learning results and other influences on students--peers, community, family--make it hard for teachers to determine what effect they have on their students. Ironically, this uncertainty, which teachers articulate clearly, undermines the very pride and satisfaction they cite as a source of motivation.

6. Teachers generally do not have time or support for individual or collective reflection on or analysis of what they are doing. Most teachers are unlikely to see or act on the need for change, whether it be change that they themselves identify or change that colleagues might identify for them. Yet research studies on planned change and teacher evaluation give clear evidence that, when interaction of this sort does occur, especially on a regular basis, it has a substantial, powerful, and positive effect on what and how well students learn.

7. We also have powerful evidence that teaching does not become more rewarding as time passes. Without exception, those who have taught five years or more admit that they no longer feel the enthusiasm, excitement, recognition of their talents, and challenge they once did. They see no professional growth ahead and rarely experience a sense of personal or intellectual growth either. John Dewey spoke to the implications of this phenomenon in 1916 when he said, "If teaching becomes neither terribly interesting nor exciting to teachers, how can one expect teachers to make learning terribly exciting to students?"

8. The final point of agreement about the life of teachers concerns stress. The business schools have developed a job stress scale based on interviews and other data obtained from people working in a variety of occupations. Couched in terms of the relative stressfulness of occupations, the scale ranks teachers second only to air traffic controllers.

Life in the classroom

How do these points relate to life in the classroom? Taken together, for many teachers, they mean that teaching is an isolated, nonrenewing, nongenerative, professionally stressful experience--hardly the setting for effective teaching or the kind of productivity we would expect to find in independent schools.

Let me put this reality of daily life in the classroom against the reality of motivation to work. What we know about motivation theory, incentives, and how people perform tells us that two kinds of incentives exist: those related to job satisfaction, and those related to job dissatisfaction. These incentives differ greatly. When such things as pay, personnel procedures, basic working conditions, and job security do not measure up, they lead to job dissatisfaction, which obviously inhibits effective teaching.

But job satisfaction is not the flip side of job dissatisfaction. Providing satisfactory working conditions does not guarantee a satisfied person or a satisfied teacher. Just by providing adequate pay, personnel procedures, and the like does not necessarily mean that the school is also providing the climate and motivation that will support teacher effectiveness.

What moves people from being not satisfied to being satisfied and challenged by their jobs? For teachers, job satisfaction consists of achievement and success with and by students, recognition for excellence, professional challenge, professional growth, a high level of collegial activity, and a sense of belonging to a professional community. Taken together, these incentives and other elements of job satisfaction can lead to professionalism and strategies for breaking down the isolation that teachers experience. These incentives are the wellsprings of teachers' pride, satisfaction, and motivation.

What boards can do

Where do boards of trustees figure in job satisfaction? Boards can, and must,

address the incentives associated with job satisfaction and move away from traditionally dwelling on issues associated with job dissatisfaction. Here are some specific suggestions for making this shift.

1. We know that administrators can play an important part in overcoming the isolation of teachers. Boards might examine administrative responsibilities to see whether administrators can spend more time in classrooms working with teachers rather than being continually bogged down with purely administrative chores.

2. Teacher evaluation is an enormously powerful tool. Where we see teacher evaluation in place and working well, teachers praise it as a professionally rewarding experience. The process brings an administrator into the classroom on a regular basis and provides a common language for discussing and identifying what is happening in the classroom. Administrators are able to understand what is going on in the classroom and to work with teachers to build more effective teaching and learning strategies. There is no template for what effective teaching is, for teaching is an indeterminate task, with no checklist to assure boards or heads that such teaching is taking place. But evaluation can provide a strategy for monitoring and evaluating progress and for regular, professional exchange of information.

3. Acknowledging excellence in teaching, difficult to accomplish in the public sector but simple in independent schools, should be high on the agenda of boards of trustees.

4. Substantial and highly differentiated staff opportunities for teachers are particularly important in retaining a high-quality faculty. For example, one district we visited in the course of the Rand Corporation's teacher evaluation study spends close to a million dollars a year on staff development and makes substantial demands on teacher time. When asked why they teach in that particular district, when they have to teach so many classes and engage in continued professional self-development, teachers respond that it is precisely these opportunities that make them feel like professionals. Treated as professionals and given the chance to grow, they respond accordingly.

5. Yet another way for boards to support teaching is to insist on policies that increase interaction among teachers. This is crucial, particularly where few if any dollars are available for staff development. The importance of personal and professional contacts for teachers cannot be overemphasized. Teachers need to participate in skill-building workshops, one-to-one or group sessions for receiving help, or simply to talk about the craft of teaching. Establishing and insisting on occasions for teachers to get together to work, talk, review, and analyze is probably one of the most cost-effective measures a board can take to increase teacher efficacy. Research consistently shows that the resulting satisfaction and sense of professionalism among teachers is reflected in gains and increased achievement among students. Further, we see that the more teachers experience the rewards of working together the more they use and heighten their own criteria for professional growth and excellence. Several studies have found that long hours are not needed to achieve these results. What is important in the isolated world of teaching is that contact, however modest, take place regularly.

6. Maintaining high and explicit expectations for professional excellence is a natural but essential stance for boards to take. Teachers and administrators alike appreciate this expression of confidence, which sets the climate in the school for what is expected and what the norms are. Expectations for professional growth must be part of the teacher's job description. And teachers must be allowed to take risks and fail. Teachers would rather work in a place where they are rewarded for taking risks than where

they are praised for not rocking the boat. Administrators have to make it clear that expectations involve change and professional growth and that mistakes or disappointment are a not unexpected outcome. The important point is to try.

Support for professionalism

The quality of education independent schools provide does not depend simply on what teachers do and think, even though individuals can influence the place they work in important ways. Equally important are the attitudes and thoughts of the people around them--department heads, heads, trustees. How do those people view the task of teaching? Is it a craft? An art? A technology? How do they view the role of teachers in the school?

Far more essential than mere job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction is support for professionalism. Boards of independent schools already have the freedom to create this climate of support and the flexibility to do what needs to be done. But it requires boards to move from a traditional preoccupation with budget and fund raising.

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Milbrey McLaughlin, associate professor of education at Stanford University, recently completed a nationwide survey of teacher evaluation practices. This essay is based on a transcript of her remarks at the 1983 NAIS annual conference, during her tenure as a senior social scientist with the Rand Corporation.

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