Retaining Teacher Talent:

The View From Generation Y

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Contents

Introduction

Members of Generation Y (those born between 1977 and 1995) have been characterized as creative, innovative, self-confident, highly educated, and educationally minded.[1] They like to share what they've learned in small groups and are dissatisfied with workplaces that are technologically inferior. They have a strong moral drive to make a difference in society. Because members of Gen Y are accustomed to positive reinforcement, they desire constant feedback and want to be rewarded when they do things well. They prefer to "text" with their thumbs rather than with their pointer finger, and they do not see any career as a lifelong pursuit.

Little empirical evidence to support these claims exists, yet considering how critical this generation is to the workforce in general and to the teaching profession in particular—Gen Y teachers currently make up more than 18 percent of the teaching force, doubling in proportion in just the last four years[2] —keen attention must be paid to Gen Y teachers' needs and preferences to ensure that the most effective Gen Y teachers continue to teach for more than just a few years. Retaining Gen Y teachers is a concern because in 2004–05, turnover among public school teachers under age 30 was 44 percent higher than the average teacher turnover rate (which includes retirees).[3] The loss that this teacher attrition and mobility represents in terms of human and financial capital is staggering (see Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Milanowski & Odden, 2007). To gain a better understanding of why this may be occurring and what human resources practices may stem the loss, researchers from Learning Point Associates and Public Agenda partnered together with the support of The Joyce Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to conduct the Retaining Teacher Talent study. This report describes some of the most telling findings from this work.

The *Retaining Teacher Talent* study was an exploratory mixed-method research project. We conducted eight focus-group interviews across the country using hypothetical scenarios to provide a context-rich point of departure for the group discussions (although this report does not include data from the final two focus groups). Based on initial findings from the first six focus groups, we designed a teacher survey to paint a national picture of Gen Y teachers. The observations in this report are based on a national, random-sample survey of 890 public school teachers conducted in spring and summer 2009; the survey included an over-sample of 241 teachers aged 32 and under and those first six focus groups.[4]

Two overarching themes were uncovered in this analysis of teachers' views on emerging policy and practice strategies intended to inform the successful management and retention of the most talented teachers:

- Teachers' views on the "hard factors" of their employment are evolving, particularly in terms of how they wish to be compensated.

- Teachers' views on the "soft factors" of their employment are influenced by their generation and experiences.

However, in both cases, there is strong evidence of a confluence and constancy of teacher views that span the generations. The six key findings in this report indicate that supporting teacher effectiveness will have a profound impact on teacher retention for Gen Y teachers as well as their colleagues.

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[1] See Behrstock and Clifford (2009) for a review.

[2] Coopersmith and Gruber (2009) analyzed the 2007–08 national Schools and Staffing Survey data set and found that 18 percent of public school teachers are under the age of 30. In 2003–04, Gen Y teachers made up roughly 9 percent of the workforce (internal Learning Point Associates analysis).

[3] According to Marvel et al. (2007), between the 2003–04 and 2004–05 school years, the total percent leavers + movers for all teachers = 16.5 percent. For teachers under 30, this figure is 23.7 percent (which is 44 percent higher than the average). These data underestimate total turnover, as they do not capture the teachers who left before the survey was administered.
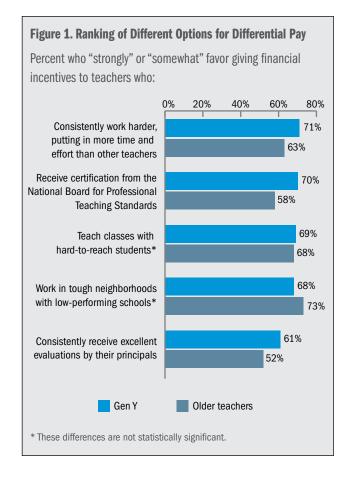
[4] A description of the methodology can be found at http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/teaching-a-living-methodology.

Finding 1: Gen Y teachers are more open to rewarding teachers differentially for their performance and responsibilities in the classroom than earlier generations; however, they are skeptical about using their students' standardized test scores to measure such performance.

In the late 1960s, a sociologist named Dan Lortie conducted an in-depth study of teachers in 13 schools in New England. He was interested in the economics of teaching—wherein teachers' salaries were (then as now) differentiated based only on seniority and education level and the most experienced and educated were paid only about twice that of the least—and what this meant for the work of school teachers. He claimed that the reason behind this tradition was in part because teachers remained "consistently egalitarian," resisting further differentiation in salary, in part because the "service ideal [of teaching] extolled the virtue of giving more than one receives; the model teacher has been 'dedicated'" (Lortie, 1975, p. 102). Teachers considered individual ambition for greater rewards, whether based on merit or other factors, to be suspect.

With the influx of this new generation of teachers, there are modest signs that this egalitarian approach is beginning to change. Teachers are becoming more comfortable making distinctions among their number. As Figure 1 demonstrates, more teachers of all generations support some type of differentiated pay, with Gen Y teachers somewhat more supportive of all types of pay differentiation than older teachers (with the exception of paying teachers more for working in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools).

Gen Y teachers in particular are overwhelmingly supportive of giving financial incentives to teachers who consistently work harder and put in more time and effort than other teachers. This sentiment emerged clearly

Figure 1. Ranking of Different Options for Differential Pay

Percent who "strongly" or "somewhat" favor giving financial incentives to teachers who:

Consistently work harder, putting in more time and effort than other teachers — Gen Y 71%, Older teachers 63%

Receive certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards — Gen Y 70%, Older teachers 58%

Teach classes with hard-to-reach students* — Gen Y 69%, Older teachers 68%

Work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools* — Gen Y 68%, Older teachers 73%

Consistently receive excellent evaluations by their principals — Gen Y 61%, Older teachers 52%

■ Gen Y ■ Older teachers

* These differences are not statistically significant.

during the focus groups. For example, a Gen Y elementary teacher from North Carolina who is National Board certified said, *"It would be nice to be recognized for those people who go above and beyond. Why am I going to give so much, when so-and-so can get away with doing nothing at all, and I'm still getting paid the same or less because I'm younger, or whatever it is?"* One of her middle school colleagues also stated, *"I think a teacher who just comes in and teaches their class and leaves is a lot different from the person who is the school improvement chair and runs this many clubs. For your hard work, you should be rewarded."*
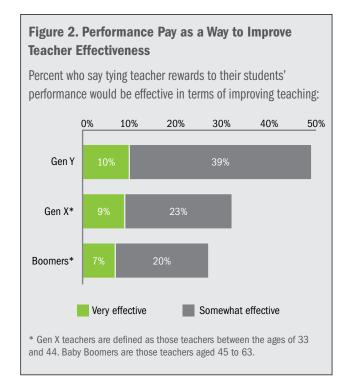
Differentiating financial rewards based on performance was problematic for the teachers in Lortie's study because of the uncertainty of teaching, and the external definitions of performance in terms of the most valued instructional and relational outcomes were untrustworthy (Lortie, 1975). Almost 40 years later, Gen Y teachers are showing signs that the teaching workforce may be becoming more open to differentiating pay based on the performance of their students. As Figures 2 and 3 indicate, Gen Y teachers seem to be more supportive than older teachers of the idea of differentiating pay based on how well their students perform, with more Gen Y teachers saying they believe tying rewards to student performance would be a "very" or "somewhat" effective way of improving teaching.
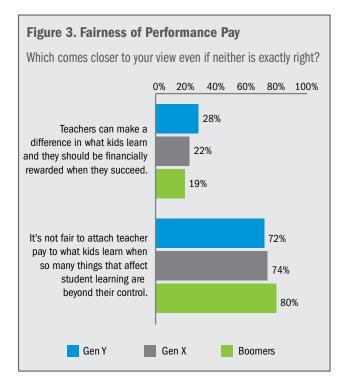
One Gen Y teacher who had the experience of receiving a bonus in Illinois said the following:

It's exciting to say, "I've worked this hard and in addition to working so hard, and seeing my kids make gains and do well, we get a bonus." It came around Christmastime. It was excellent. Honestly, the bonus is exciting. I wouldn't say that I work harder because of the bonus. I think I work hard because I want to see my kids do well, but the bonus is exactly what it is.

This supports research from the corporate sector that indicated that Gen Y workers in general value being recognized for high-quality work (NAS Recruitment Communications, 2006).

Nevertheless, although members of Gen Y seem to be less resistant to performance pay than their older colleagues, seven in 10 Gen Y teachers believe it is not fair to attach pay to

Figure 2. Performance Pay as a Way to Improve Teacher Effectiveness

Percent who say tying teacher rewards to their students' performance would be effective in terms of improving teaching:

Legend: Very effective / Somewhat effective

Gen Y: 10% (Very effective), 39% (Somewhat effective)
Gen X*: 9% (Very effective), 23% (Somewhat effective)
Boomers*: 7% (Very effective), 20% (Somewhat effective)

* Gen X teachers are defined as those teachers between the ages of 33 and 44. Baby Boomers are those teachers aged 45 to 63.

Figure 3. Fairness of Performance Pay

Which comes closer to your view even if neither is exactly right?

Teachers can make a difference in what kids learn and they should be financially rewarded when they succeed.
Gen Y: 28%
Gen X: 22%
Boomers: 19%

It's not fair to attach teacher pay to what kids learn when so many things that affect student learning are beyond their control.
Gen Y: 72%
Gen X: 74%
Boomers: 80%
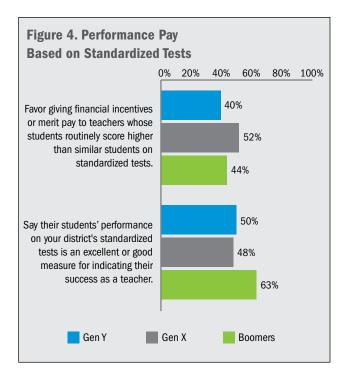
Legend: Gen Y / Gen X / Boomers

what students learn when so many factors that affect student learning are beyond their control. Thus, although it is theoretically possible to design measurements of teacher effectiveness that take into account nonteacher influences on student learning, as in value-added models, many teachers will need to be convinced that these are valid, reliable, and fair before they would be more open to basing performance measures on standardized test scores, even if they do control for outside factors that affect student growth over time. In the survey, we did not differentiate between snapshot achievement scores versus value-added scores. In the focus groups, we spoke only of "gains" in student achievement but not specifically about value-added measures.
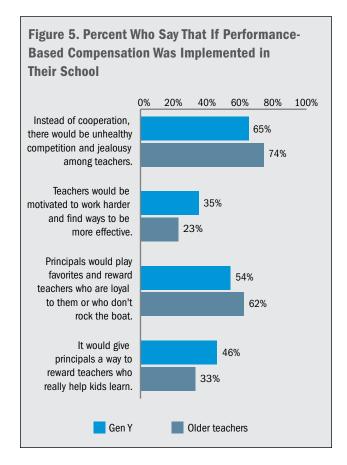
Contrary to what many educator compensation reformers may hope, Gen Y teachers are skeptical about the ability of standardized tests to fairly assess their performance. Generation Xers and Baby Boomers are actually slightly more comfortable basing financial incentives on their students' standardized test scores than their younger counterparts. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 4, 63 percent of Boomers as opposed to 50 percent of Gen Yers thought that student performance on district standardized tests was an excellent or good indicator of their success as teachers.

Interestingly, all but approximately 2 percent of teachers said that their students' standardized subject matter test scores increased either "a lot" or "somewhat" as a result of their instruction, though Gen Y teachers were somewhat more circumspect, with only 38 percent saying that they rose a lot compared to 44 percent of Baby Boomers. This perspective may explain some of the hesitancy of Gen Y teachers.

In the focus groups, some Gen Y teachers expressed their doubt for the ability of test scores to reflect their effectiveness as a teacher. One elementary teacher from the District of Columbia, who was supportive of individual performance bonuses, said, *"I don't like basing anything just on test scores. I just think it's just luck of the draw, and it [just represents students' performance on] one day, too."* Others thought that teachers would go so far as to cheat or at least teach to the test, as this California focus group participant said, *"Really, with 'no child left untested,' all of us have kind of started teaching a little bit more to the test. …[L]earning stops when you teach to a test because it becomes how much can I cram into their head, not how much are they understanding."* Other Gen Y teachers cited concerns such as not having enough time with their students to make an impact, especially in places with high student mobility; the stress testing causes new teachers; and the difficulty in making valid comparisons between teachers teaching special needs students when such students have different learning needs.

Figure 4. Performance Pay Based on Standardized Tests

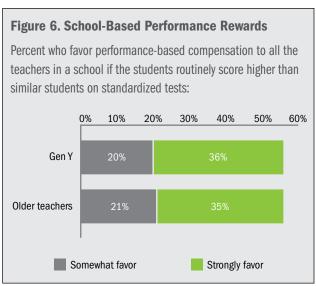|	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers
Favor giving financial incentives or merit pay to teachers whose students routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests.	40%	52%	44%
Say their students' performance on your district's standardized tests is an excellent or good measure for indicating their success as a teacher.	50%	48%	63%

As Figure 5 indicates, Gen Y teachers also are concerned with other consequences of implementing individual performance bonuses no matter how "performance" was measured. In particular, they were concerned that it would result in competition among their colleagues and that it might give the principal an opportunity to reward teachers unfairly (though Boomers were more concerned with this possibility). The fear that individual bonuses might lead to competition among colleagues suggests that egalitarian norms among teachers remain strong.

Figure 5. Percent Who Say That If Performance-Based Compensation Was Implemented in Their School

Instead of cooperation, there would be unhealthy competition and jealousy among teachers.
- Gen Y: 65%
- Older teachers: 74%

Teachers would be motivated to work harder and find ways to be more effective.
- Gen Y: 35%
- Older teachers: 23%

Principals would play favorites and reward teachers who are loyal to them or who don't rock the boat.
- Gen Y: 54%
- Older teachers: 62%

It would give principals a way to reward teachers who really help kids learn.
- Gen Y: 46%
- Older teachers: 33%

Gen Y · Older teachers

Some of these fears may be unfounded. Analyses of teachers' perceptions after the implementation of certain pay-for-performance plans show that few teachers report less cooperation (Solomon, White, Dohen, & Woo, 2003; Springer et al., 2009). An evaluation of the Texas Educator Excellence Grant program, for example, which provided individual bonuses based primarily on test scores, showed that only 18.5 percent of

teachers agreed or strongly agreed that compared with the previous year, teachers seemed "more competitive than cooperative," and 81 percent even said that teachers now felt "more responsible to help each other do their best" (Springer et al., 2009).

Finally, as more evidence that the egalitarianism among teachers has a strong hold, all teachers seem to be more supportive of schoolwide performance-based bonuses, in which everyone gains, rather than individual bonuses, with more than half of teachers saying that they either strongly or somewhat favor such an approach (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. School-Based Performance Rewards

Percent who favor performance-based compensation to all the teachers in a school if the students routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests:

Gen Y
- Somewhat favor: 20%
- Strongly favor: 36%

Older teachers
- Somewhat favor: 21%
- Strongly favor: 35%

Somewhat favor · Strongly favor

As earlier reformers have realized, sometimes painfully, policymakers and others face a dilemma when they attempt to implement policy that does not have support among those it most directly affects. Thus, listening carefully to teachers' voices on compensation reform is recommended. Based on this first finding from this study, policymakers who intend to successfully implement a differentiated compensation model might consider the following policy recommendations.

"If you want teachers to teach, and really it takes a few years to become an effective teacher—it took me five to really be a good teacher—you want to reward that staying power, that consistency."

—High School Teacher, California

Policy Recommendation 1a:
When developing an alternative compensation plan, local policymakers should implement and communicate a transparent approach that clearly identifies the rationale and methodology used to distribute performance-based incentives—especially when including student outcomes as one measure.

Most teachers of all generations will have difficulty trusting an evaluation system that is based solely on students' standardized test scores or, indeed, any system that unfairly differentiates between teachers. The first step toward developing a transparent and valid evaluation system is to incorporate multiple measures that meaningfully account for the factors that are beyond a teacher's control. For example, at the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center in San Fernando, California, school officials have implemented the Peer Assistance and Review System, a teacher compensation program that uses three sets of reviews, each based on a four-point scale.[5] All three reviews take place three times per year, and program administrators then average the scores of all of the evaluations to determine the level of compensation for a teacher.

Once the evaluation measures and approach have been developed in collaboration with key local stakeholder groups, district leaders should focus their efforts on building understanding and awareness of the new system. Schools that intend to implement the Teacher Advancement Program, for instance, are required by their local union affiliates and the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching to administer a faculty vote; in general, 65 percent to 75 percent agreement is required among teachers, depending on the union stipulations in the particular district.[6] This vote is essential to achieving and maintaining stakeholder buy-in and is a way to promote information sharing between administrators and staff.

Policy Recommendation 1b:
When designing policy based on an alternative compensation system for teachers, local policymakers should be aware that those affected will be more likely to support a schoolwide bonus model than one that is based on individual awards.

Schoolwide incentives are more immediately agreeable to teachers than individual rewards, in part because of the egalitarian traditions of teachers. Thus, compensation reformers will face less resistance to schoolwide incentives and may want to develop a hybrid model that incorporates both individual and schoolwide performance measures.

For example, during the 1999–2000 school year, the Colonial School District in suburban Philadelphia implemented a mandatory performance-based pay system for all of its classroom teachers as well as some groups of nonteaching staff (LaFee, 2000). The district hired a consultant to identify appropriate criteria and alternative sources of input to judge individual teacher performance and developed a separate evaluation system to assess the performance of teacher groups by grade level, team, and department at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

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[5] For more information, see: http://www.cecr.ed.gov/initiatives/maps/pdfs/CECR_CA_SanFernando.pdf.
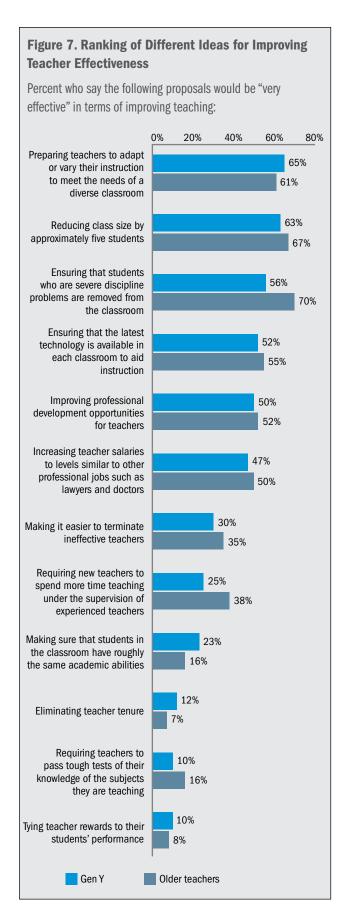[6] For more information, see: http://www.tapsystem.org/.

Finding 2: Paying for performance is seen as the least important policy option for improving teacher effectiveness and retention; having meaningful learning opportunities, reducing class size, increasing parental involvement, and raising salaries across the board still rank higher.
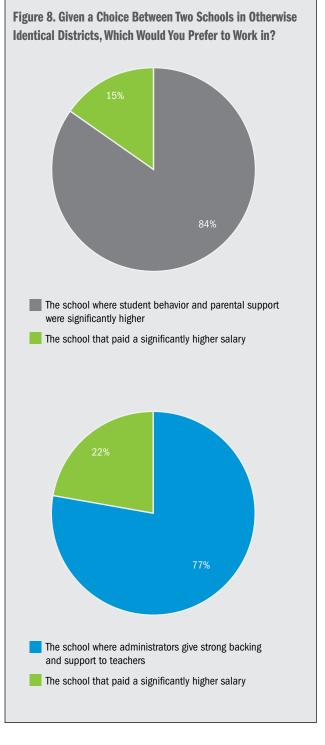
The *Retaining Teacher Talent* survey asked teachers to provide their assessment of 12 different policy options that covered a wide range of proposed strategies to improve teaching. Although teachers—and Gen Y teachers in particular—do seem to be opening up to the idea of basing pay on student performance, it still is the least popular of policy options to increase the effectiveness of teachers among teachers themselves. Although some reformers argue that changing the way teachers are paid will drive other reforms of teaching conditions as schools and districts change how they operate (Slotnik, 2009), teachers do not seem to believe this to be the case. As shown in Figure 7, only 10 percent of Gen Y teachers and 8 percent of older teachers thought that "tying teacher rewards to their students' performance" is a "very effective" way to improve teaching. Interestingly, the overall rankings of all options are strikingly similar for teachers of all generations.

As in an earlier study of first-year teachers (Rochkind, Ott, Immerwahr, Doble, & Johnson, 2008), there is clear evidence that young teachers desire more opportunities to learn to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of a diverse classroom and that this desire may be closely related to teachers' consistent desire for smaller class sizes. As this high school teacher from Colorado said, *"I have 37 kids in my class, and so how do you find time for all those conferences, and how do you really individualize instruction the way you want to make sure that each kid is learning the things that they need to learn, which are totally different?"*

The other options listed in Figure 7 are similar to the kinds of practices that are regularly used in the corporate sector. Wellins and Schweyer (n.d.) found that talent-management practices related to professional development and working conditions were viewed as most effective among the human resources personnel surveyed (pp. 8–9). Specifically, 89 percent believed the main influences on employee motivation to perform well at their jobs were opportunities for training and development, whereas 83 percent believed constant learning opportunities were key drivers. Recognition for accomplishments also was considered important by 77 percent of respondents. Other top responses included high performance expectations (76 percent), high degree of autonomy and independence (75 percent), and relationships with coworkers (72 percent). Salaries were lower down on the list, believed important by only 45 percent of respondents. Salt (2007) found that strategies such as providing merit pay and providing voluntary professional learning opportunities and job rotation into other departments were considered the most effective practices for developing Gen Y workers (not specifically teachers).

Teachers of all generations tend to see teaching conditions as more important than salary, all other factors being equal. Mirroring findings from earlier studies (Farkas, Johnson, & Foleno, 2000; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007; Rochkind, Immawahr, Ott, & Johnson, 2006), teachers consistently prefer schools that provide professional support to schools that pay a higher salary (see Figure 8).

Figure 7. Ranking of Different Ideas for Improving Teacher Effectiveness

Percent who say the following proposals would be "very effective" in terms of improving teaching:

Proposal	Gen Y	Older teachers
Preparing teachers to adapt or vary their instruction to meet the needs of a diverse classroom	65%	61%
Reducing class size by approximately five students	63%	67%
Ensuring that students who are severe discipline problems are removed from the classroom	56%	70%
Ensuring that the latest technology is available in each classroom to aid instruction	52%	55%
Improving professional development opportunities for teachers	50%	52%
Increasing teacher salaries to levels similar to other professional jobs such as lawyers and doctors	47%	50%
Making it easier to terminate ineffective teachers	30%	35%
Requiring new teachers to spend more time teaching under the supervision of experienced teachers	25%	38%
Making sure that students in the classroom have roughly the same academic abilities	23%	16%
Eliminating teacher tenure	12%	7%
Requiring teachers to pass tough tests of their knowledge of the subjects they are teaching	10%	16%
Tying teacher rewards to their students' performance	10%	8%

Gen Y   Older teachers

Figure 8. Given a Choice Between Two Schools in Otherwise Identical Districts, Which Would You Prefer to Work in?

- 84% — The school where student behavior and parental support were significantly higher
- 15% — The school that paid a significantly higher salary

- 77% — The school where administrators give strong backing and support to teachers
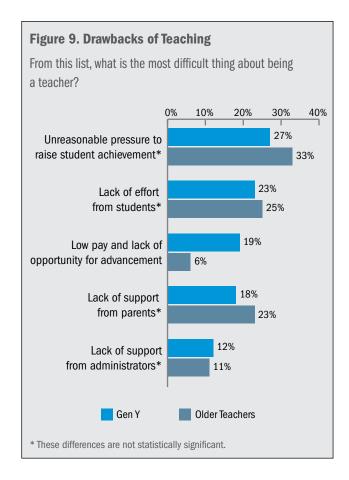- 22% — The school that paid a significantly higher salary

This finding could be evidence that the "service ideal" continues to reign among teachers; they would prefer to work in places in which they are effective with their students and the students benefit from their effort than in places where they make personal gain. One focus group teacher from Wisconsin discussed her experience with transferring to another district that paid less than the district in which she taught previously. She didn't realize why the teachers at her new district didn't mind the lower pay. *"Then, after a couple years, I kind of realized because things were really good and so people were okay with that. They were supported by the community. They were supported by the administration. They could do things, allowed freedom."*

"The planning time that they allot is ridiculous. I get 46 minutes a day because the other 46 is devoted toward meetings. So 46 minutes a day to grade, plan, print, copy, walk up and down the halls to and from the office—there's no way that you could do what you need to do."

—Elementary Teacher, Washington, D.C.

Moreover, most teachers do not consider "low pay and lack of opportunity for advancement" as the chief drawback of the profession, although Gen Y teachers are substantially more likely to be concerned about these factors than older teachers. Approximately one fifth of Gen Y teachers (19 percent) selected low pay as "the most difficult thing about being a teacher" (see Figure 9).

The overwhelming popularity of policy options that improve teaching conditions points to the fact that teachers desire workplaces in which they are given more social and technical resources to be effective. Improving the way and the amount teachers are paid will likely serve to promote retention and the equitable distribution of teachers, but deploying as many resources as possible to improve effectiveness may be just as powerful if not more so.

Figure 9. Drawbacks of Teaching

From this list, what is the most difficult thing about being a teacher?

	Gen Y	Older Teachers
Unreasonable pressure to raise student achievement*	27%	33%
Lack of effort from students*	23%	25%
Low pay and lack of opportunity for advancement	19%	6%
Lack of support from parents*	18%	23%
Lack of support from administrators*	12%	11%

* These differences are not statistically significant.

Policy Recommendation 2:
Given stagnant and declining state and local funding for education, state and local policymakers may want to consider targeting scarce resources toward improving school working conditions with the intention of retaining high-performing teachers.

Despite prompting teachers in focus groups and our survey multiple times, it is clear that there were no generational differences when it comes to the relative importance of teacher pay over many aspects of teachers' working conditions. New pay structures that give consideration to performance awards or innovative pension models are not at the top of teachers' lists when it comes to retention strategies. As such, policymakers should consider focusing reforms on a variety of school-level working conditions, such as

providing more structured common planning and learning time; developing and committing to a strong, schoolwide behavior-management system; or investing in the latest instructional technology.

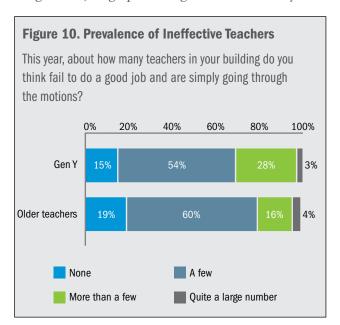For example, at Broad Creek Middle School in North Carolina, Principal Cathy Tomon transferred $40,000 out of her textbook budget to purchase SMART Boards, ELMO projectors, and other pieces of cutting-edge education technology. As a result, the retention rate of her teachers has soared; last year, 25 percent of teachers could have retired but chose to stay on and continue working for her.[7]

Finding 3: Many teachers view removing ineffective colleagues from the classroom as a way to boost teacher effectiveness and think that unions sometimes protect ineffective teachers, yet they feel it important to preserve tenure protections.

Frustration with ineffective colleagues is a common phenomenon in any workplace, but in schools, where the stakes are high and the classroom walls thin and where ineffectiveness is rarely formally punished or remediated, it becomes that much more palpable. As one Gen Y focus group participant from North Carolina said, *"I feel like, unfortunately, in some schools, teachers do need to be fired. In some schools, there are teachers that shouldn't be there. They're not there for the children."* It seems that many teachers, not just Gen Y teachers, agree with her. As shown in Figure 10, large percentages of teachers say that they know of a few teachers who are underperforming, with 31 percent of Gen Y teachers and 20 percent of older teachers saying they work with "more than a few" or even "quite a large number" of such teachers.

Moreover, according to Figure 11, both Gen Y and older teachers agree that making it easier to remove ineffective teachers would be either "somewhat effective" or "very effective" in improving teaching. Recent research has shown that there is a "spillover effect" among teachers—that when a new, more effective teacher is hired, the effectiveness of all

Figure 10. Prevalence of Ineffective Teachers

This year, about how many teachers in your building do you think fail to do a good job and are simply going through the motions?

	None	A few	More than a few	Quite a large number
Gen Y	15%	54%	28%	3%
Older teachers	19%	60%	16%	4%

Figure 11. Terminating Ineffective Teachers

Percent of teachers who say that making it easier to terminate ineffective teachers would be an effective way to improve teaching:

	Very	Somewhat
Gen Y	30%	49%
Older teachers	35%	41%

[7] Tomon, C. (September 1, 2009). Principal of Broad Creek Middle School. Personal communication.

teachers, as measured by value-added test scores, increases (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). The findings from the current survey perhaps suggest that teachers perceive a spillover effect in the opposite direction: teachers with ineffective colleagues have a more difficult time teaching themselves and miss the opportunity to learn from more effective colleagues.
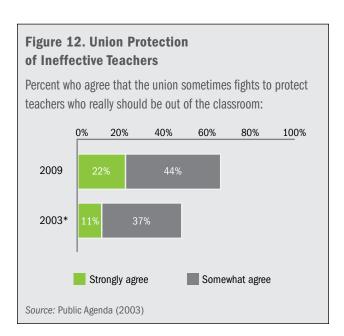
In addition, the survey found that there is rising concern among teachers that unions too often protect ineffective teachers, doubling the number of those strongly agreeing with that concern between 2003 and today (see Figure 12). And although unions do not set tenure policy (such policy is implemented by each state), Gen Y teachers perceive unions as entities that protect tenured teachers more than untenured. As one teacher from North Carolina stated, *"So that's one drawback of the union is that people, kind of like with tenure, we were talking about people getting away with not doing as much, a union allows that to happen in some respects."*
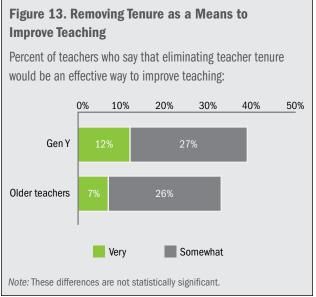
"I've never needed the union but when I do…, if I ever do need them, it's really nice to know that they're there."

—Elementary Teacher, Wisconsin

Nevertheless, as noted in Figure 13, the surveyed teachers do not perceive that eliminating teacher tenure would be an effective way to improve teaching, though Gen Y teachers are slightly less sanguine. Focus group participants did not place a great deal of value on tenure, some saying they either did not know why they had it or how they could get it. Nevertheless, several expressed strong opinions about tenure as it is currently practiced. As a middle school teacher in Colorado stated, *"I think if you're not good at something, you shouldn't be guaranteed to have a job in it. I think it makes the rest of us look bad. It's nice to have support, and I think it would be important to have a series of legitimate complaints or issues over a period of time before you're let go, but I don't think tenure's a good idea."* Another high school teacher from North Carolina talked about the attitude that some tenured teachers have: *"I've got tenure; I can do whatever I want to. I can slack off, I can leave early, I cannot go to this meeting, I can do whatever I want to, and you can't touch me."*

Focus group teachers saw tenure as a nuanced issue, however. One teacher from Wisconsin asserted that administrators can do more to

Figure 12. Union Protection of Ineffective Teachers

Percent who agree that the union sometimes fights to protect teachers who really should be out of the classroom:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree
2009	22%	44%
2003*	11%	37%

Source: Public Agenda (2003)

Figure 13. Removing Tenure as a Means to Improve Teaching

Percent of teachers who say that eliminating teacher tenure would be an effective way to improve teaching:

	Very	Somewhat
Gen Y	12%	27%
Older teachers	7%	26%

Note: These differences are not statistically significant.

work with ineffective teachers before firing them, saying, *"I've seen pressure put on ineffective teachers, and I've seen it work."* Other surveys have shown that many teachers are concerned about ineffective teachers staying on the job. In Public Agenda's 2006 survey of public school teachers, more than four in 10 gave their principals fair (30 percent) or poor (12 percent) ratings for making sure the "worst teachers" don't stay at the school (Johnson, Arumi, & Ott, 2006).

Another teacher from Wisconsin had yet a different take:

[W]e all like to say well, if [teaching is] a profession, then like every other profession, if you don't toe the line, you get fired. Well, in education it's different, because if you get fired, there are—in high school—you have 120 plus kids who now don't have a teacher for that subject, and it affects all of their lives and educations…. If you get fired in another job, they put up a job posting. Your desk is empty. When they get that new person, they put them in; life goes on. In schools, all these kids are stuck in limbo for the rest of the year. You're not going to find a teacher just bam, hire them like that. It doesn't work like that, you know?

This set of findings suggests that teachers feel the impact of their colleagues on the quality and effectiveness of their own teaching, and Gen Y teachers, many of whom are still learning the best ways to be effective, especially desire to work with teachers from whom both they and their students can learn.

Policy Recommendation 3:
School leaders should be supported to make tenure decisions a more meaningful stop along the educator career continuum. Local policymakers, with teacher input, should design and implement an evaluation system that will provide tenure only after teachers demonstrate their effectiveness in the classroom.

Many teachers interviewed and surveyed for this study expressed skepticism with the current tenure systems in their respective school districts. Too often, tenure is seen as a meaningless reward; teachers "earn" tenure merely by putting in their time. Moreover, teachers' tenure chances are dependent on the idiosyncrasies of their principal—strong principals will be much more selective about awarding tenure; other principals, especially those who face great recruitment challenges, will not be as selective. As such, many ineffective teachers are granted job security and increased pay for no reason other than time on the job. Gen Y teachers are more skeptical of tenure, perhaps because they are in the early stages of their careers, and perhaps as a result of the fact that, from their perspective, there are many tenured faculty members in their schools who are no more effective than they are.

In Minneapolis, school district officials worked together with the heads of the local union chapter to create an "Achievement of Tenure" system; gone are the days in which teachers earn tenure merely by showing up to work three years in a row.[8] Instead, practitioners must accomplish the following tasks before they are eligible for tenure:

- Know and understand all curriculum standards (both district and state level).

- Be successfully evaluated by the principal.

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[8] Nordgren, L. (September 10, 2009). President, Minneapolis Federation of Teachers. Personal communication.

- Work with a teacher-mentor and an achievement tenure team closely for at least the first year of teaching.

- Complete courses on nonverbal communication and peer coaching.

- Acquire a certain number of professional development hours in their respective fields.

- Conduct an action research project, complete with professional portfolio, and present findings to a tenure review team.

A teacher's successful completion of all components of tenure achievement results in a recommendation by the tenure review team to rehire that individual. For those who do not immediately achieve this recommendation, there are generally two options:

- If that individual is "right on the line," then the team might recommend that a mentor remain with that teacher for another year, with a reevaluation process at the end of that year.

- If a teacher's body of work shows that he or she is in the wrong locale, content area, or profession altogether, the team often will not recommend rehiring.
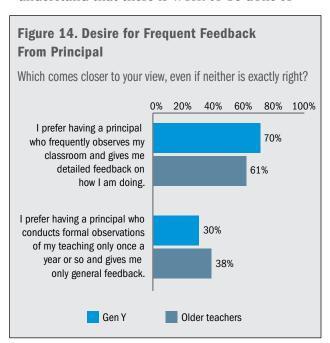

Finding 4: Gen Y teachers tend to desire sustained, constructive, and individualized feedback from principals to help them become more effective in the classroom.

Best practices in private-sector talent management frequently include offering substantive and thoughtful feedback as a strategy. According to Lawler (2008), a critical factor in the successful recruitment and hiring of high-quality employees is "offering to provide [them] with feedback on their performance, in order to attract those who wish to learn and develop themselves, while dissuading those who do not" (p. 11). More specifically, offering feedback to Gen Y candidates is particularly useful, as this is a workplace condition that, on average, they value highly. When NAS Recruitment Communications, a human resources firm, released its seven strategies for retaining Gen Y employees in 2006, feedback was a recurring theme.

Indeed, frequent observation and thorough feedback were found to be very important to the Gen Y teachers surveyed for this study. When given the choice between working for a principal who is a frequent visitor to their classrooms and a principal who only stops in once a year, Gen Y teachers were

overwhelmingly—70 percent—in favor of the former (see Figure 14). Importantly, older teachers also are largely in favor of having the principal offer frequent feedback (61 percent).

The desire to be mentored through observation and constructive feedback also was expressed by the teachers interviewed in the focus groups. In general, the teachers explained that they understand that there is work to be done to

Figure 14. Desire for Frequent Feedback From Principal

Which comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

I prefer having a principal who frequently observes my classroom and gives me detailed feedback on how I am doing.	70% (Gen Y) / 61% (Older teachers)
I prefer having a principal who conducts formal observations of my teaching only once a year or so and gives me only general feedback.	30% (Gen Y) / 38% (Older teachers)

■ Gen Y ■ Older teachers

improve their practice and that they cannot improve on their own. One elementary school teacher from Wisconsin said the following:

I would prefer my principal to walk in. In fact, he does all the time. He walks in and observes all of us. I have no problem with my teaching and I would like people to come in and observe me because I want to hear constructive feedback. I want to know, what am I doing, do you find this effective, what am I not doing? If you're going to come in and evaluate me, make it meaningful for me and my students. Don't just come in and give me a "satisfactory"—I appreciate [when] principals actually take the time to care for the child's education and make sure that the teachers in there are really doing their job.

Teachers expressed a desire to be observed and critiqued to strengthen their own teaching and keep them accountable for their professional decisions. Although some interviewees said that they were initially wary of having an "open-door" classroom, they have ultimately come to appreciate it. A middle school teacher from North Carolina said the following:

The school that I'm at this year, there are administrators in my classroom every single day. The first couple weeks of school, I … was scared, thought I was doing something wrong, but now they know me, they know how I am as a teacher, and I feel like I've earned their respect. I also feel like it's helped to make me a better teacher, because I'm always on my toes and I know anytime somebody can walk in. I want to make sure that I'm doing a good job and what I'm supposed to.

Because of their interest in collaboration and professional learning, Gen Y educators solicit feedback from their supervisors and mentors more frequently than their older colleagues. In general, those who participated in the focus groups were quick to point out that the comments do not necessarily have to be positive or celebratory; they just need to be

available. *"I love feedback,"* exclaimed a high school teacher from Washington, D.C. *"It can be critical; it can be positive, whatever."*

Policy Recommendation 4:
Design and implement a structured system for frequent observations; commit to participating in a genuine feedback loop with the observed teachers.

In all professional fields, members of Gen Y desire feedback. Gen Y professionals want to be respected through their superiors' dedication to observe them and then meaningfully reflect on that observation. They want to be effective and appreciate assistance in accomplishing that. And the teachers of this generation are no different. Data from both focus groups and the nationwide survey indicate that Gen Y educators are calling for a more structured system of observation and feedback so as to test instructional strategies and improve practice. One important component of a sustainable system of observation and feedback is the inclusion of peer review— a model successfully being used by teachers and administrators in Toledo, Ohio, since 1981.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), created by researchers at the University of Virginia, is a structured system of classroom observation that has been shown to correlate with student achievement. CLASS is a performance-management system that uses in-class and video observations to evaluate teacher-student interactions (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2007). The CLASS cycle involves practitioners videotaping their instruction, sending it for a targeted review, and receiving thoughtful and pointed feedback. CLASS is currently being implemented in Virginia and is used by professional development providers throughout the country.

Finding 5: All teachers desire meaningful collaboration with their colleagues—not just younger ones.
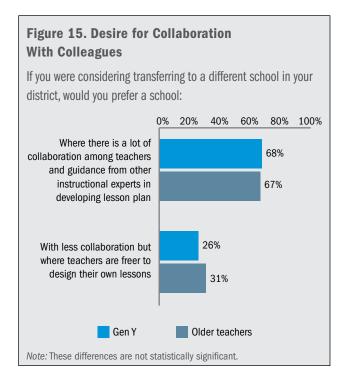
The literature on Gen Y workers in the private sector suggests that opportunities for collaboration are extremely important for this new generation. Research indicates that Gen Y strongly values working collaboratively in teams (Shaffer, 2008, p. 4) and, more generally, developing solid relationships with their coworkers and, in particular, their immediate supervisor (NAS Recruitment Communications, 2006; Wellins & Schweyer, n.d.).

Our findings reveal that, like other professionals, Gen Y teachers do want to collaborate with colleagues. But this finding was not unique to Gen Y; all teachers expressed a desire for such collaboration. When asked whether they would prefer to teach in a school with a lot of collaboration among teachers and guidance from instructional experts or a school with less collaboration but more freedom to design lessons independently, roughly two thirds of both Gen Y and non-Gen Y teachers preferred the former (see Figure 15).

As with their interest in receiving regular feedback, Gen Y teachers desire collaboration because they want to be as effective as possible and view collaboration as a learning opportunity. An elementary school teacher from Washington, D.C., said the following:

We all can grow. No one has reached their highest level. We can all be better teachers all the time. The way to do that, I learn from so many other teachers. My teaching style is what I take from everyone I see and what works for me.

Gen Y teachers mentioned various formats for collaboration that were helpful, including collaboration both with teachers in the same

Figure 15. Desire for Collaboration With Colleagues

If you were considering transferring to a different school in your district, would you prefer a school:

Where there is a lot of collaboration among teachers and guidance from other instructional experts in developing lesson plan
- Gen Y: 68%
- Older teachers: 67%

With less collaboration but where teachers are freer to design their own lessons
- Gen Y: 26%
- Older teachers: 31%

■ Gen Y ■ Older teachers

Note: These differences are not statistically significant.

subject area as well as teachers from different subject areas but similar situations. An elementary school teacher from Chicago said the following:

I've been extremely lucky. Ever since the school has been founded, we have things like teacher talk, critical friends, where we meet every week, and we either develop our curriculum or we see each other teaching and help each other with what problems or how to target students better and what things we can apply to and improve ourselves in our school. That has been vital to our school.

Collaboration was likewise seen by one Gen Y teacher as a way to avoid stagnating, or *"getting stuck in my ways."* Although improving instructional practice was seen as the primary benefit of teacher collaboration, time spent on collaboration can, in fact, save time, as mentioned by a high school teacher from Northern Virginia:

We don't have to reinvent the wheel, so if you want to refine something, we can go ask for advice. It saves a lot of time…we can finish each other's ideas and develop something that works for the team, which is very helpful.

Although 60 percent of workplaces experience intergenerational tension (NAS Recruitment Communications, 2006), cross-generational collaboration can foster positive relationships that celebrate the unique contributions that teachers from different generational groups can add to the school (Carroll, 2009). Gen Y teachers clearly have much to learn from their older, more experienced colleagues about being an effective instructor. At the same time, these more experienced teachers may be able to learn from Gen Y teachers, particularly about certain technologies that can aid instruction or recent educational research from preparation programs that may still be fresh in their minds. In sum, ample opportunities should be provided to make the most of this cross-generational eagerness to collaborate to improve teacher effectiveness and, in turn, retention.

Policy Recommendation 5:
School and district leaders should ensure that collaborative activities are designed to enhance the instructional practice of all participants, which also will serve as a mechanism for creating cross-generational understanding and trust.

The Gen Y teacher's desire for feedback is reflective of a larger need expressed by this group of young educators to collaborate, working with their peers toward a common goal or mission. Focus group participants in this study reacted favorably to a hypothetical school setting that involved teachers working in "cohort groups," making comments such as, *"I think the thing that really turned me off about [hypothetical school A] more than something that turned me on about [hypothetical school B] was the fact that it said that teachers do not collaborate. I think that… the most important part of my day is the time that I have to collaborate with my fellow teachers, and how much I can learn from them and copy things that work well for them."* In the survey data, this finding is corroborated for teachers of all generations; two thirds of teachers in each of the age brackets would, if given the choice, move to a school where collaboration is highly valued.

For local policymakers, the most salient implications of this report involve school scheduling—creating common planning time, either by grade level, student cohorts, or content area. In the Lynwood Unified School District in Southern California, for example, district officials have used Teacher Incentive Funds to launch the Quest for Success Program.[9] Although the main goal of the program is to incentivize changes in instructional practice that result in higher student performance, Quest for Success also is designed to foster collaboration and collegiality by providing bonuses to all teachers at a particular grade level when students within that grade meet important benchmarks.

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[9] See http://rosaparks.lynwoodusd.org/www/lynwood_rosaparks/site/hosting/District%20Q%20and%20A%20update%20pdf.pdf.
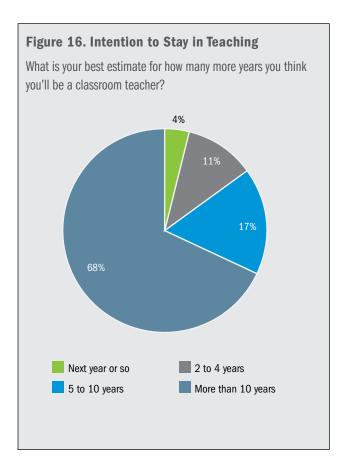
Finding 6: Most Gen Y teachers believe they will stay in education, if not the classroom, for the long haul.
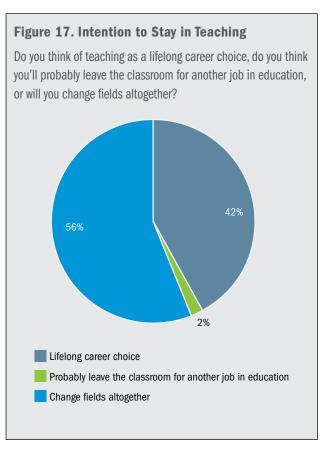
In general, Gen Y is seen as less oriented toward long-term careers (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2007), and yet Gen Y is also seen as a highly education-minded group (Wong & Wong, 2007a, 2007b). Of those in this generation who have entered teaching, 98 percent plan to work in the education field for life.

Their views toward remaining in the classroom, however, are more ambivalent. The survey results shown in Figure 16 indicate that 4 percent of Gen Y teachers planned to stay in the classroom for one more year or so; 11 percent planned to stay for two to four more years; 17 percent planned to stay for five to 10 more years; and the large majority, 68 percent, plan to remain classroom teachers for more than 10 years. Indeed,

56 percent of Gen Y teachers planned to remain a classroom teacher for life (see Figure 17). One National Board certified elementary teacher from North Carolina who viewed classroom teaching as a lifelong career choice said, *"I can't imagine doing anything else and liking it as much."*

This finding that more than half of Gen Y teachers (and three quarters of non-Gen Y teachers) plan to teach for life is somewhat surprising, though hopeful, in light of the oft-cited statistic that roughly half of all new teachers nationwide leave within their first five years in the classroom (Ingersoll, 2003). School leaders wishing to retain Gen Y teachers have at least these teachers' retention intentions going for them.

Figure 16. Intention to Stay in Teaching

What is your best estimate for how many more years you think you'll be a classroom teacher?

4%
11%
17%
68%

■ Next year or so   ■ 2 to 4 years
■ 5 to 10 years   ■ More than 10 years

Figure 17. Intention to Stay in Teaching

Do you think of teaching as a lifelong career choice, do you think you'll probably leave the classroom for another job in education, or will you change fields altogether?

56%
42%
2%

■ Lifelong career choice
■ Probably leave the classroom for another job in education
■ Change fields altogether

Of the teachers who planned to stay in education but leave the classroom, their rationales were to seek new challenges and opportunities and to avoid boredom or burnout. An elementary school teacher from Colorado said the following:

I just don't think that I'll always be a classroom teacher, because I don't know—I've been doing it five years, and I can already see it's starting to wear on me to be quite honest. I just think sometimes people who are always classroom teachers and never branch out to any other parts of education…start to get a little wacky after a while.

Commonly cited opportunities in education outside of the classroom included university teaching, school psychology or speech therapy, or academic advising. Taking on a school principalship was generally not an expected career path for these teachers. Most of the teachers in the focus groups said they would like to keep one foot in the classroom, yet have opportunities to take on additional roles, responsibilities, and challenges. School leaders may want to think creatively about how to differentiate roles for teachers to provide these opportunities, make the most of specialized skills, and keep teachers in the classroom for at least part of the day (Coggshall, Lasagna, & Laine, 2009). Teachers in Singapore, for example, have well-articulated career paths that allow those who demonstrate they have the required level of expertise and skill to become coaches and master teachers (Sclafani & Lim, 2008). Such a system, coupled with myriad other human capital management strategies, has helped Singapore to maintain a highly professional and effective teacher workforce.

Policy Recommendation 6:
Work to design and implement a set of differentiated career options for teachers to increase retention in and satisfaction with the field.

The data collected for this study indicate that 98 percent of Gen Y teachers plan to stay in the field of education for the entire trajectory of their careers. Yet, of that 98 percent, only roughly half plan to actually remain in the classroom for life. Teachers who do not plan to remain in the classroom made statements such as, *"I enjoy teaching, but I want to explore other facets of education."* Research suggests that many young teachers choose to leave the profession not because they are ineffective, but because they feel stifled. Policymakers would be wise to begin envisioning some alternative pathways within the field of teaching, pathways that would provide intelligent, creative, dynamic Gen Y talent with the types of ongoing new challenges and opportunities that members of Gen Y seek.

This innovative approach to the educator career continuum has been adopted by school districts and other stakeholder groups alike. The approach taken by the Teach Plus program of the Massachusetts-based Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy is to promote teacher retention by increasing the teachers' voice in policymaking. By facilitating collaboration between teachers and policymakers, Rennie Center staff help to mobilize teacher advocacy for the profession, connecting teachers to innovative opportunities, developing differentiated roles and pay systems, and providing relevant decisionmakers with high-quality research and technical assistance.[10]

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[10] See http://www.renniecenter.org/ for more information.

On the district side, officials in Fairfax County, Virginia, recognized that some teachers highly valued their long summer vacations, whereas other teachers were more eager to receive more competitive levels of compensation. In 2005–06, they decided to differentiate roles for their teachers while introducing new, creative opportunities to develop a culture of professional learning communities.[11] Teachers in Fairfax County now have the option to extend their contracts an extra nine days, for roughly $3,700; 14 days, for roughly $5,400; or 24 days, for roughly $10,000. The salary increase includes pay and benefits. Those with extended contracts are trained to serve as teacher-leaders in their schools, working to facilitate collaborative teams, and, ultimately, to increase student and teacher learning.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this report consistently indicate that to retain more teachers of all generations, the most powerful thing that policymakers and others can do is to support teachers' ability to be effective with their students. Teachers who can see that they are making a difference in their students' learning will stay in the profession longer. Supporting effectiveness means ensuring that all teachers are surrounded by effective colleagues, given time to collaborate with these colleagues, offered constructive feedback on their teaching, and provided other rich opportunities to learn to teach more effectively. Performance pay may serve to motivate teachers more, or it may just be icing on the cake, but it will be more acceptable to teachers if such reforms are accompanied by a comprehensive set of policies and practices that will support their teaching.

The data also indicate that there is much that teachers of all generations have in common and that egalitarian norms among teachers are still in effect. Growing numbers of Gen Y teachers are slowly beginning to make their mark on the profession.

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[11] Butz, L. (September 2, 2009). Cluster VI Assistant Superintendent in Fairfax County, Virginia. Personal communication.

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