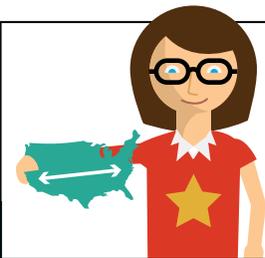


OPPORTUNITY AT THE TOP

HOW AMERICA'S BEST TEACHERS COULD CLOSE THE GAPS, RAISE THE BAR, AND KEEP OUR NATION GREAT

SUMMARY



Public Impact asked a simple question: “Will our nation’s boldest efforts to recruit more top teachers and remove the least effective teachers put an excellent teacher in every classroom?” We ran the numbers and discovered the disappointing answer: No. But that’s not the end of the story.

With a change in schools’ strategies, we realized, 87 percent of classes could be taught by excellent teachers—those who close our achievement gaps and raise our bar to internationally competitive levels—in a mere half-decade. That change requires extending the reach of our top teachers to more students—and keeping those teachers on the job through vastly expanded career advancement opportunities. Just as important, all teachers need a wider range of roles providing opportunities for development, team collaboration, and excellence at work. Together, these changes form what we call an “Opportunity Culture” for America’s teachers.

WHY STUDENTS NEED EXCELLENT TEACHERS—CONSISTENTLY



American children deserve the one ingredient we know creates stellar learning results: excellent teachers. These teachers produce *well over* today’s typical year of learning growth. Research indicates that teachers in the top 20 to 25 percent produce learning gains approximately three times that of teachers in the bottom 20 to 25 percent.

What happens to the students left without those top-25 percent teachers? They all suffer, but especially those students who start out behind—they simply can’t catch up. Without excellent teachers year after year, students who start out behind are likely to stay behind, even if they have solid teachers able to produce a year of progress each year.

But students who start out *one year behind* their peers can catch up—if they have an excellent teacher *two years in a row*. Children who start out *two years behind* can catch up—if they have an excellent teacher *four years in a row*.

With excellent teachers, schools can get students up to speed, and more: Students who start out at grade level leap ahead, looking like their “gifted” peers, every year that they have an excellent teacher. Likewise, students who have caught up from behind can also leap ahead—like those “gifted” peers—every additional year they have an excellent teacher.



In other words: With excellent teachers, we can not only close our gaps—we could move toward having a whole nation of high-achieving students.

Unfortunately, even our current, boldest reform efforts won’t get us there:

- * Even if schools could recruit 50,000 more excellent new teachers per year than they do now—which would be a breathtaking achievement—70 percent of classrooms would still lack top teachers after five years.
- * Even if schools could triple the dismissal rate of ineffective teachers—to 6.3 percent per year—nearly 70 percent of our nation’s classrooms would still lack gap-closing, bar-raising teachers.

Meanwhile, our nation fails to make the most of its top teachers every year:

- * The U.S. loses 64,000 top-25 percent teachers each year, diminishing the learning prospects of more than a million children.
- * The top teachers who stay reach only a small number of students each year. Just 600 students benefit from the instruction of an excellent elementary school teacher even if she stays on the job for 30 years. And our nation’s best teachers reach no more students than the very worst teachers.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS GIVE EVERY STUDENT AN EXCELLENT TEACHER?

First, schools must extend the reach of top teachers to many more students. The excellent teachers we have now—more than 800,000 of them—already achieve results that could close our nation’s achievement gaps and raise our bar to internationally competitive levels in less than half a decade.

How can excellent teachers extend their reach?

In-Person Reach Extension involves changing instructional roles and how schools are organized to allow the greatest use of excellent teachers, and teammates, while keeping them in classrooms.

Remote Reach Extension enables excellent teachers to use technology like webcams and online whiteboards to engage directly and live (though not in person) with students in schools that lack sufficient local talent. Teachers can work from home but teach students in need anywhere.

Boundless Reach Extension involves using digital recordings of excellent teachers and software based on their insights and practices to deliver top instruction to any student, anywhere. Boundless instruction is paired with excellent, accountable in-person or remote teachers to ensure great learning for all.

Schools can use these modes in a wide variety of financially sustainable models that enable pay increases of up to 130 percent. More than 20 models are described at **OpportunityCulture.org/reach**. In every model, teachers who most consistently produce excellent outcomes are responsible for student learning. Models fall into one of these categories:

- * **Class-size Changes:** Excellent teachers teach larger classes, within limits and by choice, in some cases allowing other teachers to have smaller classes.
- * **Specialization:** Excellent teachers specialize in high-priority subjects and roles, leaving other instructional tasks and paperwork to teammates.
- * **Multi-Classroom Leadership:** Excellent teachers lead teaching teams, and they assign roles and develop team members to produce excellent outcomes for multiple classes of students.
- * **Time-Technology Swaps:** Digital instruction replaces enough top-teacher time that they can teach more students. Digital lab monitors supervise digital instruction for 25 percent or more of student time, and teachers focus face-to-face instruction on higher-order thinking and personalized follow-up.
- * **Multi-Combinations:** Combining models—such as time-technology swaps, specialization, and multi-classroom leadership—and adding time-saving features such as homework flipping and new student data technologies may let excellent teachers reach even more students effectively.

In most cases, teachers work **in person**, teaching face to face in a school and/or leading other teachers. But when not enough excellent teachers are available in person, excellent teachers can work **remotely**, with help from on-site monitors and learning coaches. Every child can have excellent teachers this way.

Second, reach extension must go hand-in-hand with an “Opportunity Culture,” in which all teachers have career opportunities dependent upon their excellence, leadership, and student impact. In

an Opportunity Culture, teachers’ career opportunities are limited only by their hard work, creativity, team leadership, and commitment to excellence. Excellent teachers earn more—from existing per-pupil funds—by reaching more students. An excellent teacher is accountable for each student’s learning in each subject and has new authority to lead and develop peers. Other teachers and teammates collaborate with excellent teachers, working closely with and learning from them—giving everyone opportunities for meaningful development and career advancement, *within budget*.

In an **Opportunity Culture**, all teachers have career opportunities dependent upon their excellence, leadership, and student impact. Advancement allows more pay and greater reach.



The prospect of career advancement opportunities that enable excellent teachers to have more impact by reaching more students, with commensurate pay, will keep more top teachers in instructional roles and attract more to the profession, as well.

Additionally, dismissals of truly ineffective teachers will become far easier, because the replacement pool will be stronger.

New team roles will enable new and solid teachers to learn from outstanding peers and have the chance to excel and advance their careers, while contributing to excellent student outcomes immediately.

After five years of combining strategies—top teacher reach extension, recruitment, and retention, coupled with low-performer dismissal—nearly 87 percent of the nation’s classes would be taught by excellent teachers, up from 25 percent today. At any one time, some 46 million students would be taught by top teachers, compared with just 13 million if current trends hold.

The normal, expected experience of a student would be to have a truly excellent teacher in every subject—the kind that today most children have only a handful of times in their whole school career. The end result? An Opportunity Culture for all.



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