

## Nobody Knows Teaching Like Teachers

At the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we believe that nobody knows teaching like teachers. Teachers are central to dramatically increasing student learning, and there is nothing more powerful in the classroom than the relationship between teachers and students. In the *Nobody Knows Teaching Like Teachers Let's Talk* booklet, the foundation summarizes what we have learned from working with teachers and calls all of us to action on their behalf.

In addition to listening to teachers directly, we conducted an unprecedented amount of opinion research among teachers to understand their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. In just the last two years, we have engaged more than 30,000 teachers through 10 discrete quantitative surveys. We supplemented that work with qualitative research, including 10 focus groups and dozens of in-depth, one-on-one conversations among teachers. And we analyzed what teachers are saying among their peers in edchats, blog posts, and tweets about their classrooms, profession, and the education system as a whole.

This research confirmed some of what we have been hearing from teachers and generated a set of teacher narratives—windows into how they view their classrooms, their profession, and the education system as a whole. From this analysis, here's what we learned:

- *Teachers need opportunities to build relationships with one another, swap ideas, and exchange meaningful feedback.* Teachers across the country face common challenges, however, the profession has traditionally been an isolating experience, making it difficult for teachers to grow and develop. Many teachers would prefer to learn from fellow educators. Unfortunately, teachers do not have time to connect with other educators and one-size-fits-all professional development sessions are not working.
- *Teachers need planning time, resources, and the freedom to make tough calls.* Many good teachers are burning out, losing their passions, and leaving the profession because they don't have the respect they need from school systems and parents. Treating teachers like professionals will lead to better education policy and improve student achievement—because real reform must happen with teachers, not to them.
- *Ambitious teachers need a new career ladder;* one that open doors for them to pursue "hybrid" roles that include opportunities for leadership and mentorship. For too long, seniority was traditionally the only path to higher pay or status. Today, many teachers aspire to grow professionally in ways that the classroom alone cannot provide. Carving a new career path that empowers teachers with greater responsibility not only helps schools retain high-performing teachers, but also attracts more talent to the profession.

## Connecting Teachers

The single most important thing we can do is connect teachers to the experts they trust most: other teachers. This is why the foundation and our partners are figuring out lots of ways to engage teachers, help them design new solutions, and advance their profession. We affectionately call this array of investments Teacher2Teacher. For example:

- ECET2 (Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teaching and Teachers) is a network of teachers that organize national, regional, and local convenings to inspire colleagues, develop attendees' leadership potential, and improve teaching practice to better serve students.
- We've also invested in more than 40 teacher networks, ranging from the National Writing Project to EdCamp, all with an eye toward improving teaching practice.

## What We Learned

We have learned a lot about what to do and what not to do to work effectively with teachers, and we plan to use this knowledge to inform our investments. Here are some of our takeaways:

What to Consider	What to Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Involve teachers up front and early</li><li>• Make the engagement with teachers meaningful</li><li>• Identify teacher leaders to help spread effective practices</li><li>• Create safe spaces for teachers to have hard conversations with one another</li><li>• Give teachers the time to collaborate with other teachers</li><li>• Keep teacher practice at the center of any teacher engagement effort</li><li>• Give teachers flexibility and choices</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking you can make systemic shifts in schools without the buy-in and innovative thinking of teachers</li><li>• Not listening to teachers' stories and what we can learn from them</li><li>• Dismissing social media as a means to help share effective practice</li><li>• Rushing to build or buy technology solutions to connect teachers before thinking about the professional community you want to cultivate and how you will manage it</li><li>• Holding on to outdated practices</li></ul>

*Nobody Knows Teachers Like Teachers is part of a new Let's Talk series produced by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to share what we are learning from our investments and the work of our partners. To learn more about the series, visit [collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/shared-learnings/lets-talk-series/](http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/shared-learnings/lets-talk-series/).*