

LET'S
TALK



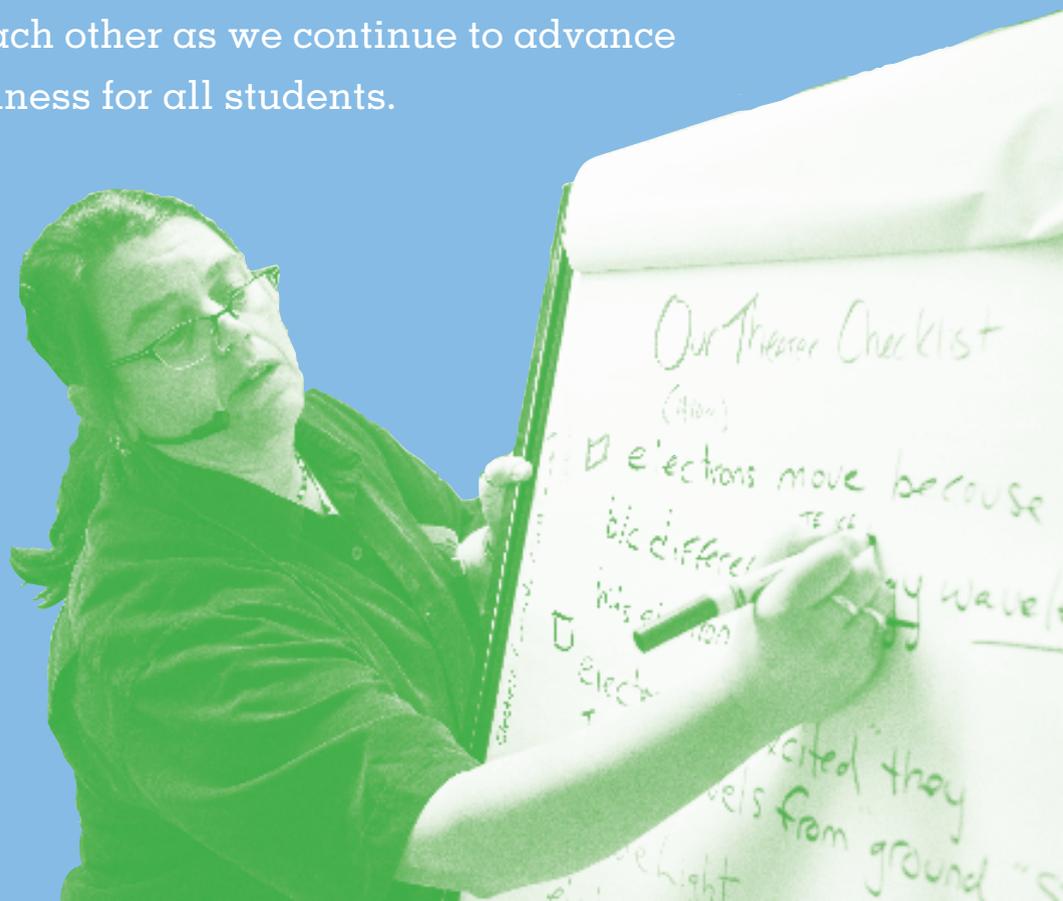
Nobody Knows
Teaching Like

TEACHERS

BILL & MELINDA
GATES *foundation*

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is producing the Let's Talk series to share what we are learning from our investments and the work of our partners. Our goal is to share what districts and schools should consider—and avoid—so that we can all learn from each other as we continue to advance college readiness for all students.

OCTOBER 2015



Nobody Knows Teaching Like TEACHERS

Introduction	3
What We Believe	5
Our Guiding Principles	7
Listening and Learning	9
Connecting Teachers	18
What We Suggest	21
Hungry for More?	23



HOPE IS THE UNSEEN

She never said much.
I wasn't sure she cared.
The year ended with a 4-page,
hand-written thank-you note. I cried.

**Chris Bronke, 9th Grade
English Language Arts Teacher**

INTRODUCTION

This booklet summarizes what we have learned from working with teachers and calls all of us to action on their behalf.

Throughout, you'll find a series of short stories written by teachers to remind you how hard they work, how much they care about their students, and how much of an impact they've had on those students. It's important to share their realities in their own voices. We hope this booklet encourages more listening and inspires more action. Time to lean in.





If more of us entered into conversation with teachers and got to hear them talk about what's possible for our kids and our classrooms, we'd be a lot more optimistic about education. I know I am.

Melinda Gates

What We BELIEVE

At the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we believe that nobody knows teaching like teachers.

The most innovative ideas about how to dramatically accelerate student success will come from classroom teachers as they find better ways to give feedback to and get feedback from their students.

We believe that teachers are central to dramatically increasing student learning. There is nothing more powerful in the classroom than the relationship between teachers and students. Research shows it, and each and every one of us knows this from our own experiences as students.

We believe that the most radical shifts in the teaching profession will come from classroom teachers when they are given opportunities to share their stories, collaborate with their colleagues around improving practice, and increasingly hold leadership roles without having to leave the classroom. Research suggests that an increase in teachers' reported sense of professional community is a leading indicator of improved practice and greater student achievement.





THE PLACE IN BETWEEN

We all break somewhere.
I learned that meeting students in
the middle places, between struggle
and success, between trauma and
healing is the best place to be.

**Brice Hostotier, High School
Special Education Teacher**

Our Guiding PRINCIPLES

Since 2008, our investments have focused on ensuring that teachers have the tools, time, and networks to enhance their teaching. We have:

- ➔ **Listened** to teachers and elevated their views through Primary Sources and the Teachers Know Best reports;
- ➔ **Cultivated** more than 40 teacher practice networks, with partners like the National Writing Project and the New Teacher Center, involving more than 500,000 teachers;
- ➔ **Supported** the development and distribution of effective instructional tools through teacher-led collaborations and organizations like the Literacy Design Collaborative, Mathematics Design Collaborative, Learn Zillion, and Better Lesson;
- ➔ **Supported** teachers as they help others improve their practice as Center for Teaching Quality Teacherpreneurs, National State Teachers of the Year, Nationally Board Certified Teachers, Hope Street Fellows, and Student Achievement Partners' Core Advocates; and
- ➔ **Celebrated and fostered** teacher leadership and the profession through national, regional, and local Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teachers and Teaching (ECET²) convenings and through partners such as Teach Plus, the Opportunity Culture, and Leading Educators.

These principles have guided our investments in teachers:

1. Focus on practice
2. By teachers, for teachers
3. Elevating and celebrating the profession of teaching
4. Authenticity and professionalism
5. Community and collaboration
6. Transparent engagement





FLUCTUATIONS

A former student's father of mine has cancer. She said that if he passes away soon, she wants me to walk her down the aisle when she gets married. Five minutes before this, I broke up a fight in the library.

Brandon White, Middle School English Language Arts Teacher

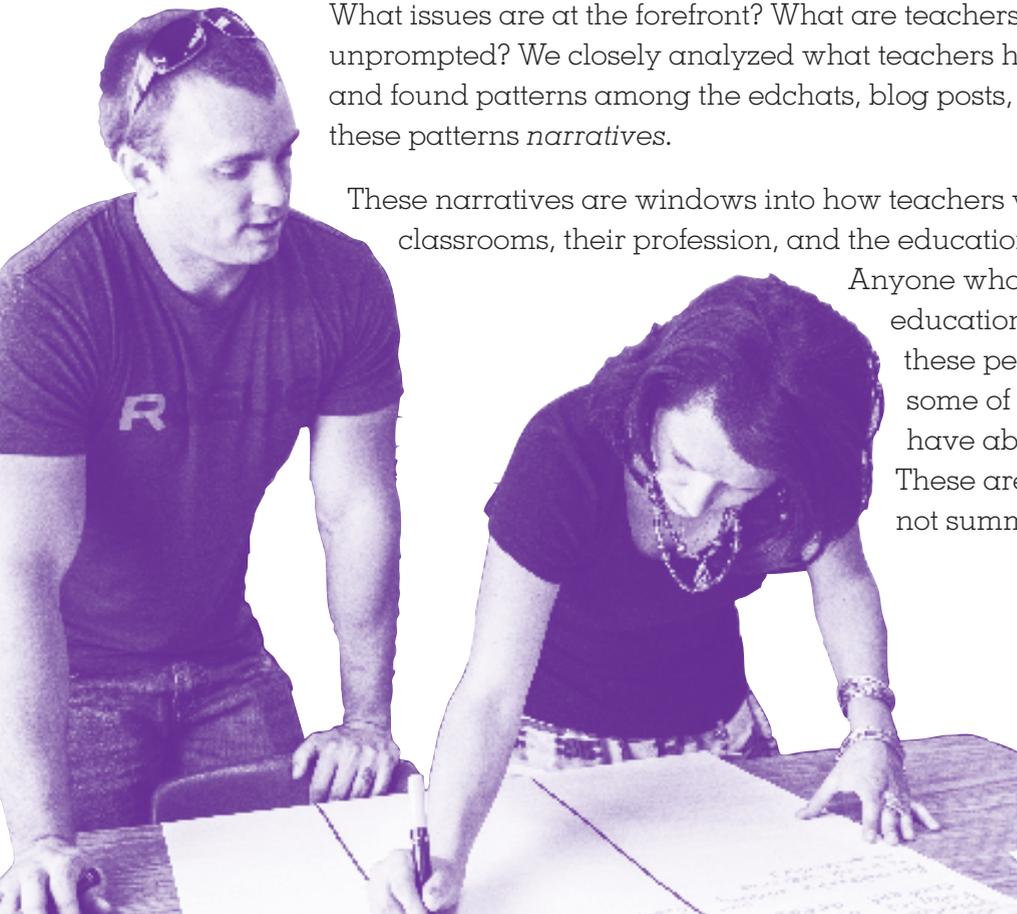
Listening and LEARNING

We wanted to better understand teachers' ideas and experiences in their own voices, unfiltered.

What issues are at the forefront? What are teachers saying when unprompted? We closely analyzed what teachers have been saying online and found patterns among the edchats, blog posts, and tweets. We call these patterns *narratives*.

These narratives are windows into how teachers view everything—their classrooms, their profession, and the education system as a whole.

Anyone who wants to impact education needs to understand these perspectives. Here are some of the views that teachers have about their profession. These are their words directly—not summaries of what they said.



Teacher as LEARNER

It's important that educators share their learning and resources. Collectively we are better than being in silos.



Diane,
Teacher
tweet

Great teachers are lifelong learners. They constantly reflect on and develop their practice in order to better help students succeed. However, teaching has traditionally been an **isolating experience**, making it difficult for teachers to grow and develop. Teachers across the country face **common challenges**—inspiring students, conveying content, and managing classrooms. Yet they face these challenges alone, working behind closed classroom doors and constantly reinventing the wheel. While some teachers embrace this isolation, many would prefer to learn from fellow educators.

Unfortunately, school cultures don't allow teachers to develop a **sense of community** with other adults in or beyond their schools. Teachers do not have **time** to connect with other educators and share best practices. Instead of being allowed to discuss teaching with other teachers, educators are forced into one-size-fits-all sessions with gurus who have not been in the classroom for years.

Administrators and teachers need to work together to **open the classroom doors**. Administrators must encourage teachers to build relationships with one another, swap ideas, and exchange **meaningful feedback** on their practice. Only then will teachers be truly empowered to improve their craft, reach their full potential, and boost student achievement.



Professional RESPECT

Most teachers teach because they want to make a difference in students' lives. Teaching is the profession that makes all others possible, and being a great teacher requires expertise, passion, and years of hard work. It also requires support—teachers need **planning time, resources, and the freedom** to make tough calls. However, school systems and parents don't respect teachers' expertise and refuse to empower teachers to succeed. Higher-ups who have never taught micromanage educators from outside the classroom, constantly dictating new "**flavor of the month**" **policies** before teachers have had a chance to adapt to the previous initiatives.

Teachers' salaries and district budgets continue to shrink. School buildings are decaying. Meanwhile, class sizes, paperwork, and demands for more "rigor" and expensive technology grow day by day. Even worse, the media, politicians, and the public call teachers lazy or greedy. As a result, many good teachers are **burning out**, losing their passion, and leaving the profession.

America needs to show teachers the **respect they deserve** and provide them with **better pay, more support, and a genuine voice** in decisions that affect the classroom. Real reform must happen with teachers, not to them. Treating teachers like **professionals** will do more than prevent teacher burnout—it will lead to better education policy and improve student achievement.

If I hear one more time "you get your summers off"—I invite anybody who says how easy our job is to come into my classroom for a half day.

Sandra,
Elementary
School
Teacher



New Roles for TEACHERS

We lose a lot of good young teachers because they don't see any way to advance except out of the classroom.

Laurie,
High School
Teacher

For too long, teachers have spent much, if not all, of their careers in one classroom. Seniority was traditionally the only path to higher pay or status. If a teacher wanted more responsibility, they had to leave the classroom for administration. Today, some teachers who remain committed to classroom teaching also aspire to grow professionally in ways that the classroom alone cannot provide.

Administrators and policymakers need to support ambitious teachers by creating a **new career ladder** for them. Entrepreneurial teachers should have the opportunities and support they need to pursue **"hybrid" roles**, which should allow teachers to continue teaching while taking up leadership and mentorship positions in schools and getting involved in the education policymaking process.

Though many teachers will continue to be fulfilled by a career in the classroom, these new hybrid opportunities will empower master teachers that yearn for **greater responsibility** with a means to share their expertise, strengthen the profession, and contribute to systemwide success. This enthusiastic and ambitious group of teachers is growing. Creating a new career path will not only help schools **retain** high-performing teachers, but also **attract** more talent to the profession.



Crafting New NARRATIVES

All of this listening and learning led us to wonder what narratives teachers might want said about them and their profession five years from now? What role might all of us play in helping teachers build the next generation of narratives, and what would the central themes be?

We asked teachers what a narrative about their profession might sound like in the future. Here is what two teachers said.



TRUSTED

I don't need to be empowered. I know what I want to do, why I want to do it, and I trust myself to get the job done. I need you to recognize the challenges I face and create solutions. Don't empower me. Share power.

Jeffery Cipriani, Teacher

NETWORKED

I am part of a network of educators who are passionate and at the top of their game. We create the space where change can happen.

Joanne, ECET² Teacher



MAIKIA RECONNECTING

As she walked past the fence of the neighboring high school, she smiled and hid her face for a moment before breaking away from her friend—“I have to talk to my teacher.” She said: “Hi, you probably don’t remember me.” But of course I did. She was my favorite student of all time.

**Eric Russo-Maikia, 8th Grade Special Education,
Reading Teacher**

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. And we have supplemented that work with qualitative research, including 10 focus groups and dozens of in-depth, one-on-one conversations among teachers. This research confirmed some of what we have been hearing anecdotally from teachers and added depth to our understanding of teachers' experiences.

Teachers welcome opportunities for more collaboration.

In the past, you would teach five classes a day. Now we're teaching six plus. But then we have this day to collaborate. And the one block of time has been much more productive.

Dave Cadelina, 9th Grade Math Teacher

Time is a constant challenge.

As I reflect on my 20 years as a classroom teacher, I cannot recall a night that I've fallen asleep and thought: "I've done everything I need to do for my students today." There is always more to do.

Sarah Woodard, High School English Teacher

Teachers feel isolated.

When you are a teacher in your class with your kids, you can get very myopic. It's difficult to get perspective. You can reflect better on your own practice when you listen to other teachers and hear what they are doing.

Darren Burris, Math Teacher, Instructional Coach and Director of Instruction

Teachers are looking to be part of professional networks.

The professional development offered by my district was not always enough for me. I felt the need to see more, create more. I was looking for a community.

Elizabeth Stein, Special Education Teacher

Teachers firmly believe that no one knows teaching like other teachers.

#WhyITeach

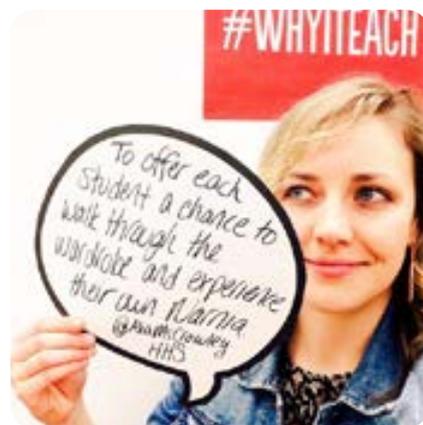
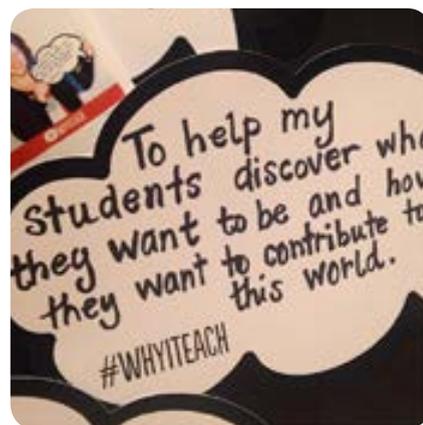
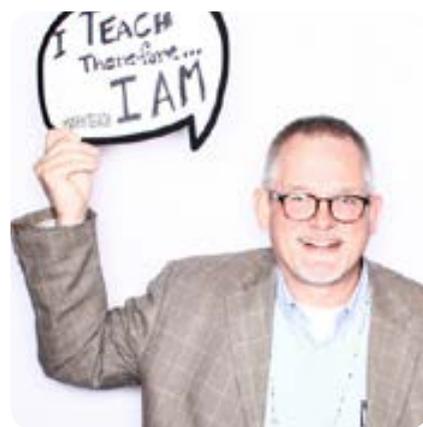
Many teachers want to tell their stories rather than be defined by the stories that others tell about them. To encourage more storytelling among teachers, we created a mobile storytelling booth with the hashtag #WhyITeach. We piloted it at the Oppi Learning Festival in New York City in May 2015.

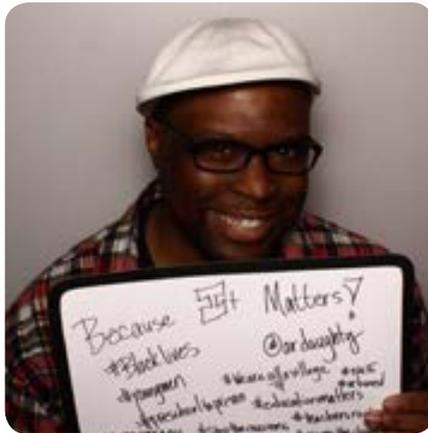
We asked teachers to respond to the question, take pictures of themselves with their responses, and share them via Twitter. It was an easy, simple way for teachers to share the essence of their stories and connect with each other at the conference while also contributing to the larger teacher narrative online.

The storytelling booth has travelled to the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and Thinkitup! and will be at the National Council of Teachers of English convention and other conferences.

Thanks to **Elizabeth Maine**, a language and literacy specialist for grades K–6 from Highline Public Schools in Washington, there is a DIY kit that allows teachers to create their own storytelling booths in their own communities.

We've seen #WhyITeach travel from New York to Kentucky! We're proud to put a tool in teachers' hands to engage other teachers in cocreating, networking, and storytelling. They've made it their own. Check it out [here](#).





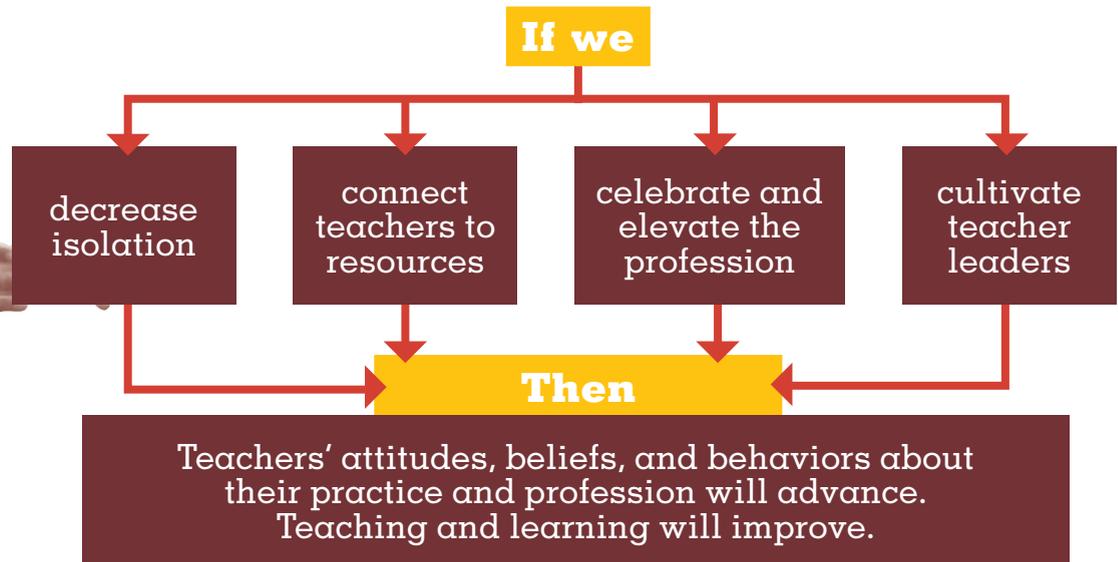
So What? NOW WHAT?

Connecting TEACHERS

What teachers tell us they care about and our experience on the ground working with teachers in districts and networks across the country have led us to believe that one of the single most important things we can do is connect teachers to the experts they trust most: other teachers. It's not good enough to work with states or districts; nor is it sufficient to simply invest in new tools for teachers. Teachers crave collaboration and are seeking professional networks to share ideas, solve problems, advance innovations, and be part of something bigger.

We 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 because we believe...



Elevating and Celebrating EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHERS

ECET²

together with teacher2teacher

A few years ago, we became more and more dismayed at the sorting and shaming of teachers that was occurring and the lack of respect for teachers. It was time for a change. ECET² began as a small teacher convening in 2012 to see whether an initial group of teacher leaders could create a community to support each other's work in the areas of practice, policy, and the public arena. It engaged teachers who were in formalized teacher leadership roles—teacher coaches, instructional facilitators, and union leaders—as well as teachers who were informally recognized by their peers or the public as leaders. This first convening involved 300 teachers and was co-designed by the Teacher Advisory Council supported by the Gates Foundation.

In just three years, ECET² teachers from across the country have taken the reins of the community. They've led **more than 100 state, regional, and district convenings** involving **more than 9,000 teachers** and are connecting with even more teachers through their #ECET2 online presence. ECET² is becoming the go-to teacher-led community for collegial support and concrete strategies that help teachers find their voices, solve problems, and take on new leadership roles. Most importantly, ECET² uplifts teachers in the way those engaged in such a noble profession deserve.





WHY ARE YOU HERE SO EARLY?

Y'all just don't get it.
The world is a tough place and
that will chew you up and spit
you out if you are not ready.
I do this to help you get ready.

**William Anderson, High School
Social Studies Teacher**

What We SUGGEST

We have learned a lot about what to do and what not to do to work effectively with teachers.

CONSIDER

- ➕ **Involve teachers up front and early.** Engage them in co-designing projects, tools, and solutions rather than asking them after the fact, as is often the case. Teachers are the key: They're the ones face-to-face with the students. They're the ones who are there when it all gets real.
- ➕ **Make the engagement meaningful.** Involve teachers not only in design but also in execution and implementation.
- ➕ **Identify teacher leaders to help spread effective practices.** Teachers are more powerful influencers than any external professional training for the adoption of new tools or behaviors.
- ➕ **Create safe spaces for teachers to have hard conversations with one another** focused on improving practice, whether online or face-to-face.
- ➕ **Give teachers the time to collaborate with the people they trust most: other teachers.** This will require rethinking school schedules and resources.
- ➕ **Keep teacher practice at the center of any teacher engagement effort.** Teachers want to focus on what's happening in their classrooms and work together to design strategies to accelerate student success.
- ➕ **Give teachers flexibility and choice.** With good standards and better feedback systems, let teachers decide which instructional tools work best for their particular students.

AVOID

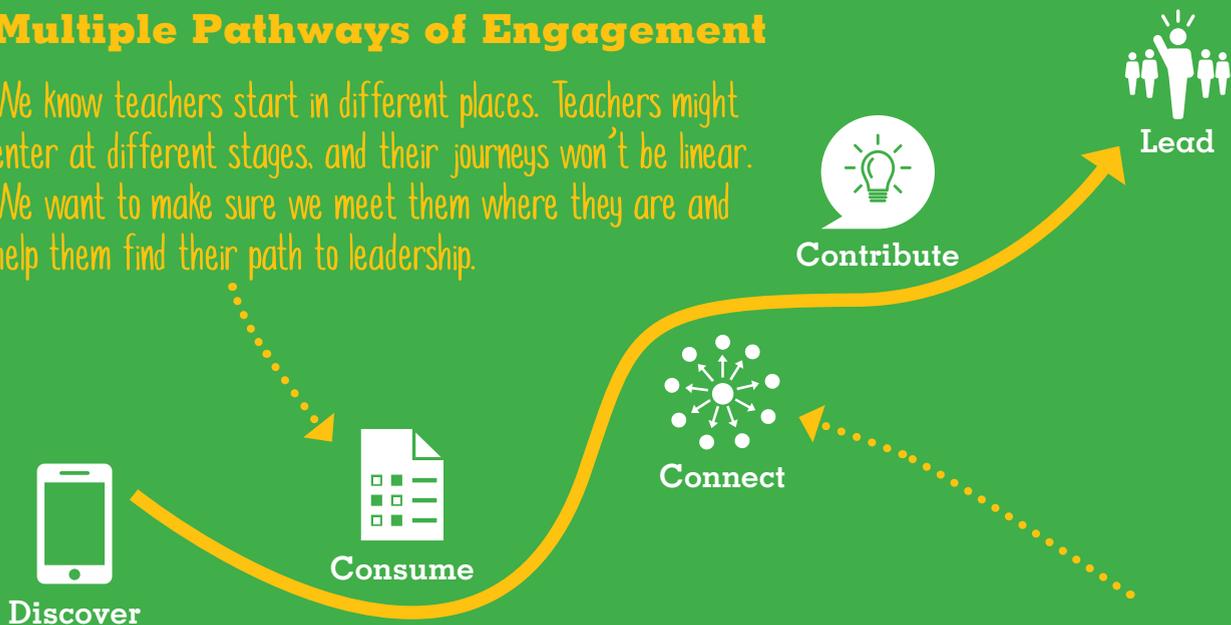
- ✗ **Thinking you can make systemic shifts in schools without the buy-in and innovative thinking of teachers.** Teachers are central to the adoption of anything, and without their support, even the best tools or strategies will fail.
- ✗ **Not listening to teachers' stories and what we can learn from them.** Teachers' experiences and stories are what unite them as professionals, and both the little moments and the big successes are important to teachers.
- ✗ **Dismissing social media as a means to help share effective practices among teachers.** Teachers are forming organic groups on social media and using social media to develop their own professional learning networks.
- ✗ **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.** Many of our partners in the rush to connect teachers just want to know what technology system to use rather than focusing on the purpose and goals of building the community.
- ✗ **Holding on to outdated practices** (such as centralized textbook adoption and procurement) that deny teachers choice and flexibility about instructional tools and resources.

Over the next few years, we plan to use this knowledge to inform our investments. We hope you will join us by:

- ⇒ **Reaching out** to teacher leaders and influencers and helping them become part of Teacher2Teacher;
- ⇒ **Investing** in early-stage teacher networks that are forming organically, like EdCamp and the National Blogging Collaborative, always with an eye toward improving teacher practice;
- ⇒ **Prompting** teachers to tell their stories and change the narrative about their own profession, lifting them to a place of respect;
- ⇒ **Supporting** more robust online community conversations and connections through existing platforms where teachers are, like Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram;
- ⇒ **Helping** teachers reduce the time spent hunting for resources and decrease the isolation they feel; and
- ⇒ **Linking** local, regional, and national efforts to leverage voices and have an impact.

Multiple Pathways of Engagement

We know teachers start in different places. Teachers might enter at different stages, and their journeys won't be linear. We want to make sure we meet them where they are and help them find their path to leadership.



Hungry for MORE?

Here are some of the ways we have listened to teachers.

PRIMARY SOURCES SERIES

The Primary Sources series of reports, a collaboration between the Gates Foundation and Scholastic, is an ongoing dialogue with America's public school teachers on current issues in education. The surveys provide detailed insights on teachers' views about the Common Core State Standards, evaluations, supports, and related topics.



2009: The first edition surveyed more than 40,000 teachers and is widely considered the largest-ever survey of America's teachers.



2012: The second edition asked more than 10,000 teachers across the country about the state of teaching and the state of their schools.

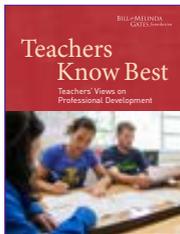


2013: The third edition surveyed more than 20,000 public school teachers from all 50 states on their views about teaching in an era of change.



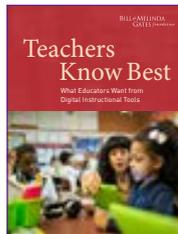
2014: This follow-up survey of 1,600 teachers who responded to the 2013 survey looked specifically at the impact of the Common Core.

TEACHERS KNOW BEST SERIES



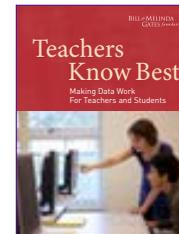
Teachers' Views on Professional Development

More than 1,300 stakeholders weighed in on how to improve professional development.



What Educators Want from Digital Instructional Tools

We asked more than 3,100 educators what kinds of digital instructional tools are essential to help their students be prepared for college and careers in the 21st century.



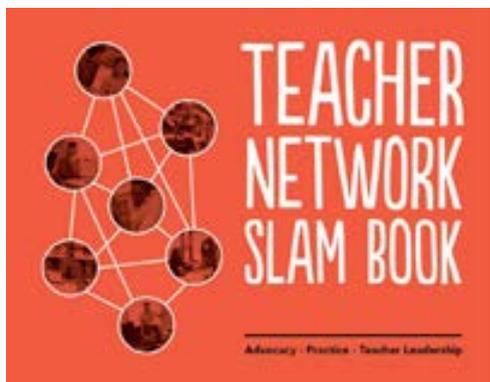
Making Data Work for Teachers and Students

We asked more than 4,600 teachers about the digital tools available to help teachers collect and use data to tailor and improve instruction for individual students.

Here are some of the books that teachers have written or helped us write over the past five years:



The story of ECET²

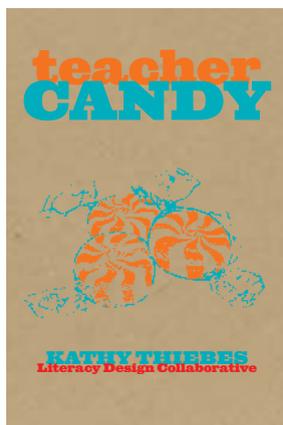


A directory of various teacher networks. *Coming soon.*



A compilation of teacher fellowships that we discovered through research and are updating as teachers tell us about their experiences

Written by a Literacy Design Collaborative teacher to describe how the collaborative changed her practice



Written by a Mathematics Design Collaborative teacher to describe the reaction she had after trying the first classroom challenge



Have a story? Contact us here.

And online:



What if teachers were treated like football players? is a hilarious piece by comedians Key and Peele that has the spirit of Teacher2Teacher in it!



If you are working with teachers we hope you'll encourage them to join the conversation **@teacher2teacher**.

If you want to know more about efforts to help teachers find the time to collaborate, follow [this link](#).

Some teachers isolate themselves in their own classrooms; some limit their impact on their own school buildings; others stay within the confines of their own district, etc. This is a disease that infected me, **the disease that killed my love of teaching in a short period of time: isolation.** I think to myself, what if there was a place that wasn't infected? What if there was a place where you were connected, where you could eventually find a cure for yourself, for your building, for your district? ...

Being introduced to the educational world outside of the classroom has been my cure.

Samantha Sams,
Elementary
Math and Science
Teacher

