Voices from the Classroom

VIVA National Task Force Report

Prepared for: U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

Prepared by: Members of the VIVA Project
Online National Teachers’ Task Force

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Abstract & Summation: Classroom teachers from all corners of the United States spent hundreds of hours together exploring big-picture education policy questions from the vantage point of their classrooms. Empowered by cutting-edge technology and informed by their real classroom experience, ordinary teachers collaborated to identify ideas for improved professional development. A small group of active teachers then worked together to organize all the teachers’ collective thoughts, ideas and visions for effective teaching into this report.
Introduction

VIVA National Task Force

We believe that the common-sense wisdom America’s teachers gain from days, months, and years of working directly with students is invaluable – but too often left out of the important public policy debate about teacher effectiveness, public funding allocation, and success measures that actually capture teaching and learning.

The VIVA (Vision Idea Voice Action) Project offers teachers across America a truly unique opportunity – the chance to share their ideas, their voice, and their real-life classroom experiences directly with national and state-level policy makers. Empowered with the technology of the VIVA Project Idea Mine¹ platform, the experiences of students and teachers in the classroom are, for the first time, being brought directly into the heart of the debate over public education policy.

Between September 13 and October 10, 2010, more than 150 teachers from 27 states registered and engaged in a thoughtful, passionate online discussion of issues ranging from class size to professional development using SocialSphere’s Idea Mine platform. Teachers from rural, suburban, charter, and public classrooms across the country worked together for the first time to create classroom-based solutions.

Facilitated online by Cindy Richards, a nationally recognized journalist with a background in covering education, the VIVA Project’s Idea Mine was conducted in three stages:

- During the first stage, which lasted four weeks, teachers were asked to offer ideas on how they would direct funds to “meet the real-world classroom challenges of teachers and improve teacher quality and the effectiveness of professional development programs.” Teachers offered a total of 159 ideas and comments, and those ideas were voted on by their peers in the Idea Mine;
- The second stage began at the conclusion of the four-week idea-sharing phase and lasted between October 28 and December 8, 2010. A forum moderator, along with VIVA advisors, selected and assembled online a small group of teachers that became the VIVA
National Task Force. These teachers, representing diverse classrooms and geography, were selected based on their level of contribution and their ideas and commentary during the initial stage. The Task Force members were responsible for summarizing all of the activity from the first stage and for highlighting and reporting on a select number of ideas that had the greatest potential for broad impact for inclusion in this report.

- The third and final stage of the process was completed on December 17, 2010, when the members of the VIVA Task Force traveled to Washington, DC to present this report in person to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

The VIVA Task Force collaboration resulted in classroom-based recommendations across five key areas:

- Clinical Training for Teachers
- Teacher and Administrator Evaluation
- Performance-Based Compensation Systems
- Appropriate Support for Teachers
- Parental Community Involvement

We believe in the power of inspiration that grows from real life experience and in the power of individual voices to make big change. VIVA teachers are an example of that power in action. We are inspired by their example and grateful for their positive contribution to the strength of our democratic process.

The VIVA Project Task Force:

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1 Idea Mine is the propriety technology and collaboration methodology of SocialSphere, Inc.
Executive Summary

Clinical Training for Teachers

*There should be a national teacher education curriculum and all novice teachers should be given structured, systematic support.*

It is crucial that the quality of teacher education programs in the United States meet rigorous national standards that provide all teachers with an exceptional theoretical foundation, paired with research-based, hands-on clinical training. Ensuring every pre-service teacher meets the rigorous standards of a national curriculum ultimately results in novice teachers who walk through classroom doors each day fully prepared to make a lasting impact on student learning and achievement. Supporting novice teachers in their first two years in the classroom is critical to maintaining a strong foundation rooted in theory, practice, and reflection. Providing support in the form of master teachers, co-teaching opportunities, and increased time for collaboration and planning ensures that novice teachers will be successful in establishing learning environments that focus on increasing student achievement.

*All teachers benefit from self-selected and differentiated professional development.*

Meaningful professional development opportunities for novice and experienced teachers best occur through self-selection from a professional development menu and result in increased implementation of research-based strategies. Tailoring professional development sessions to the needs of teachers allows the school to target the needs of their student body, while maximizing the time teachers have to effectively implement new strategies.

*When teachers have a skill deficit which cannot be addressed by professional development or administrative support, they need “targeted teacher remediation.”*

Ineffective teachers require intensive, multiweek remediation on specialized topics to dramatically improve their classroom effectiveness. A single company or support organization using research-based, targeted remediation can help hundreds of teachers at multiple schools within a single school year, positively impacting student learning.
Consideration of Performance-Based Compensation Systems

It is time for authentic dialogue on performance-based compensation.

Performance-based compensation is perhaps the thorniest issue in education today, with the administration and teachers often seen as being firmly planted on opposite sides with no hope of reaching a consensus. Perhaps the VIVA Project can help begin building a bridge over this divide, by providing teachers an opportunity to share both what they see as potential advantages to various types of incentives and their concerns about how performance-based pay would play out in the classroom. The Department of Education, in turn, would have an opportunity to allay those concerns and win broader support for these proposed changes.

Performance-based compensation can take many forms.

The biggest fault with the single-scale pay system is that it does not reward teaching excellence. Through VIVA discussions, teachers have expressed support first for a variety of nonmonetary incentives, such as allowing more individual creativity and choice in curricular decisions and giving excellent teachers the opportunity to use professional development time for projects of their own choosing. As for monetary incentives, the VIVA Project recommends that if cash bonuses prove too expensive for local districts to implement, the federal government should consider rewarding excellent teachers with a tax credit, with a multiplier used as an incentive for consecutive years of achieving excellent ratings. VIVA also recommends offering either smaller cash bonuses or smaller tax credits to those who teach in struggling schools, who take on master or mentor teacher roles, and who earn National Board Certification.

Research-based results and a fair system are crucial.

The teachers involved in the VIVA Project are eager to give the Department of Education an opportunity to address the concerns that many teachers have about performance-based compensation. Foremost among these is the need for independent research showing that some model of performance-based compensation has been proven to boost student achievement on all levels. Equally important, teachers wonder how pay systems can be based on teacher evaluation ratings when so many teachers work in disciplines not covered by standardized tests and how a teacher who instructs struggling learners can be assessed fairly when compared to a teacher who instructs advanced learners.

Effective Teacher and Administrator Evaluations

It is helpful to redefine the purpose of both teacher and administrator evaluations.

Redefining the purpose of both teacher and administrator’s evaluations is recommended. There are four important reasons to conduct teacher/administrator evaluations: 1) provide meaningful feedback from all stakeholders in all aspects of the educational experience; 2) inform administration’s decisions on hiring, firing, compensation, tenure and staffing decisions; 3) identify educators and administrators who need extra support in the form of professional development or outside support; and 4) document which pedagogical practices lead to the highest rates of student growth.

Time, money and energy should be spent on targeted outcomes instead of trends.

The information needed to compile a comprehensive evaluation with be collected and shared by an evaluation manager who will meet with the teacher or administrator throughout the year for true ongoing, reflective professional development and evaluation. The evaluation manager will also work in conjunction with the curriculum director to establish meaningful professional development opportunities for the district, leading to greater student achievement.
This would provide an opportunity for tax dollars to be spent where they are really needed instead of continuing to waste money on programs that don’t work by investing in the latest trend. This could create an excellent opportunity to actually document what is and is not working in classrooms. It could also provide a true determination about whether or not a teacher or administrator is highly effective and thus deserving of extra compensation or if that person is highly ineffective thus needing some support/remediation.

**It is necessary to look beyond standardized test scores when focusing on student achievement.**

The highly controversial issue of standardized test scores was considered in regard to the teacher evaluation. Standardized test scores rank lowest on the list of priorities from teachers in comparison to other information from stakeholders that is more valuable. Thus, their weight in the evaluation is comparable to the lack of their priority – less than 10 percent. Given the countless number of assessments taken by students throughout the year, there are better, more reliable measures than standardized test scores to document student achievement.

**Appropriate Support for Teachers**

**Changes in our culture are forcing teachers to take on even more responsibility.**

Over the past half-century, societal change has created an increased number of students entering the classroom with socio-emotional barriers to learning. To compensate for the dynamic needs of students, teachers have taken on the roles of mentor (dispensing advice), therapist (listening to disheartening life stories), social worker (watching for signs of abuse), peer mediator (intervening in bullying), parent (teaching respect and responsibility), tutor (staying late to re-teach concepts), and life coach (providing a shoulder on which to cry).

**Schools need more staff.**

Additionally, a stressed economy has left schools short-staffed. As a result, those same teachers have also taken on the roles of secretary (making their own copies, answering phones and writing hall passes), administrator (assigning discipline and creating behavior support plans), substitute teacher (covering classes when other teachers are out), supervisor (monitoring students in the cafeteria or at recess), custodian (sanitizing desks during peak germ seasons), guidance counselor (filling out college applications and keeping an eye on grades), and grant writer (scraping together money for basic supplies and textbooks).

**Teachers need more time and support.**

At the end of the day, the overwhelmed and exhausted teacher work force is left with little time or energy to focus on planning standard-aligned lessons or improving instructional practices. Consequently, it is not surprising that student academic achievement is suffering. If student success is the ultimate goal of educational reform, then the VIVA Task Force recommends that funding should be invested in supports that allow teachers time to focus on teaching. Those supports include increasing the number of qualified teaching, administrative, and support (social work, guidance, clerical, and special education) staff, and providing adequate and current resources for positive learning environments. Adding additional staff will allow districts to double the time teachers are given to plan for instruction, remove social and behavioral barriers to learning, create more effective class sizes, add co-teachers to classrooms in need of extra support, afford teachers opportunities to collaborate with peers and communities, and provide substantial clerical breaks for teachers. All of which will provide classroom teachers with energy, the invaluable resource necessary for professional growth that breeds student success.
Parent and Community Partnerships

*Invest in early education and early parental engagement.*

Parents who are informed, involved, and invested in the educational process of their children contribute significantly to successful student outcomes. With a plan for universal family access to early education services, we can develop proactive partnerships and build strong foundations at crucial times of family bonding, brain development in children, and attachment to school. This foundation will set up increased engagement with parents, stronger ties between schools and families, and shared accountability. The VIVA Project has identified increased parent participation and shared accountability as key issues to be addressed as they relate to professional growth and teacher job satisfaction.

*Provide on-site coordinators for all schools.*

As the educational system has been stretched thin with increasing demands and as our family systems face their own growing and sometimes desperate needs, it has become extremely difficult to develop and maintain ties between schools, parents, and community. Stressed schools may be unintentionally unwelcoming, closed to engagement, or too overwhelmed and/or understaffed to enhance partnerships. Parents may have negative attitudes regarding schools, lack skills and time, face cultural or poverty barriers, or be uninformed of the entry points into the education system. By providing on-site coordinators to schools, we address these issues that negatively impact student learning, and we ensure that educators focus on educating and the advancement of professional development.

*Fund full-service community schools.*

Passionate, informed parents, powerful community partnerships, and supported, highly effective teachers make schools work to improve student achievement – especially when they work together. Disparity in services by locale, difficulty accessing services, disorganized state departments, and cuts to social service budgets often defeat the goals of education. Schools are left in a constant upstream journey attempting to help students meet basic needs so learning can take place. Through the creation of full-service community schools, children, families, teachers, and communities will share in the education process to improve student achievement.
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Part One
Clinical Training for Teachers

Introduction
Students throughout the country receive vastly different educational services and instruction due to the varied university training available to pre-service teachers and professional development (PD) opportunities available to all teachers. These training variances exacerbate the discrepancies in student achievement. The quality and relevance of the professional development that teachers receive is also often dependent upon school administrators who must align their PD with federal and state mandates. The VIVA Task Force does not support production line training for teachers; rather it advocates for a universal framework from which states and districts can work to increase the rigor of pre-service training for teachers and continued PD while in the field. Over the course of the Idea Mine, teachers expressed a desire for flexible PD programs tailored to meet the specific needs of individual teachers and local schools.

Recommendation 1
Create National Education Standards for Teachers
A National Teacher Curriculum, similar to the Common Core State Standards for Student Learning, should be developed for education majors at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This curriculum would be developed in conjunction with classroom teachers and school administrators. Each state would adopt the National Teacher Curriculum (NTC), ensuring all pre-service teachers participate in rigorous coursework focused on the theory, practice, and reflection cycle1 (Wollman, 2007). NTC would increase the amount of hands-on and performance-based experience and assessments for pre-service teachers rather than rely on lecture coursework, theory-based readings, and test-based learning. States that adopt the National Teacher Curriculum would be given incentives to ensure effective restructuring and implementation of the curriculum, as well as grant money to provide financial incentives to pre-service teachers. All pre-service teachers, regardless of specialization or certification area, must be required to take university coursework in education that meets rigorous national standards in the areas of:

- Classroom instruction
- Behavior management
- Differentiation
- Working with students with special needs
Basing all training/teaching programs on a theory-practice-reflection cycle will ensure teachers are embedding their instruction in research while planning and implementing strategies based on student need. It also holds promise for new ways to allocate more funding directly to the classroom and for increasing efficiency of expenditures on public education.

The curriculum would:

- be aligned with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards rubrics and standards;
- focus on the teaching and application of educational theory, ensuring teachers are able to meet the needs of all learners, regardless of ability (ELL, special education, poverty), as well as practical skills in the areas of classroom management, curriculum development, assessment, and collaboration with parents and colleagues as stakeholders in education; and
- be supported by federal grant money that would be made available to students who pursue a degree in education at a university that aligns its curriculum to the above recommendations. In return for a grant, the students must maintain a 3.5 GPA in their core studies each year and agree to teach in a low income/at-risk school for a minimum of five years upon completion of their degree.

**Recommendation 2**

**Dramatically Increase the Amount of Mandatory Pre-Service Training Hours**

Pre-service teachers would participate in a minimum of three years of educational clinical work under the supervision of a master teacher. *Note: Hereafter, the term “master teacher” will be used to denote a “highly effective” teacher supervising the pre-service teacher.*

All clinical training would be under the supervision of a master teacher in the school who would serve to co-teach with and mentor the pre-service teacher. Master teachers can provide pre-service teachers with emotional support, expert guidance, and a model classroom environment from which to learn and increase their repertoire of skills while working with their own students. Further, due to the complexities of the teaching profession, pre-service teachers have a tremendous amount of information to synthesize and apply. Increased clinical training under the supervision of a master teacher would ensure pre-service teachers are able to successfully tackle the demands of the profession early on. The three-year clinical work cycle would be as follows:

- **Year 1:** 40 hours of clinical training per semester, focusing on classroom observation and small group instruction
- **Year 2:** 40 hours of clinical training per semester, consisting of whole class instruction, curriculum development, assessment, differentiation, and communication with parents/caregivers
- **Year 3:** 10-month paid internship under the supervision of a master teacher. The pre-service teacher would co-teach with a master teacher, gradually assuming responsibility throughout the year and should be fully immersed in curriculum development, staff meetings, and IEP/parent meetings
- Students in a two-year graduate program would begin clinical work in their first semester, gradually increasing the number of hours and classroom responsibility as they progress through their coursework
- All pre-service teachers, regardless of certification area, would have one clinical experience (of approximately 30 hours, in addition to the other 80 classroom hours) per year in a special education setting
Recommendation 3  
**Build a Specialized Training Structure for Novice Teachers (First and Second Years)**

First-and second-year teachers will be provided opportunities to:

- participate in an apprenticeship alongside a master teacher for either (1) a single course/subject area or (2) 25 percent of their day, and teach independently for the remainder of their school day;
- select their own learning goals and choose their own professional development;
- be evaluated according to a national teacher evaluation rubric that identifies each novice teacher’s strengths, as well as areas in need of improvement, and ways to benchmark continued growth in those areas; and
- be provided a mentor who would work with the novice teacher using a nationally suggested curriculum that would be developed in conjunction with classroom teachers and school administrators that would focus on practical skills (e.g., classroom management). Mentors may deviate from the curriculum, as applicable.

Master teachers will serve as mentors to novice teachers. If a school is unable to provide a mentor from its staff, a retired teacher with a proven record of success in the classroom would be used.  
**Mentors would:**

- assist novice teachers in all aspects of teaching, including collaboration with parents, participation in IEP meetings, and in curriculum/grade level teams in the school;
- be compensated, either financially or with an additional preparation period every week;
- receive (1) ongoing professional development and support from the school and district in the form of additional prep time to meet with their mentee during the day, (2) substitute coverage to allow for observation of the novice teacher, and (3) workshops on “Best Practices” in working with novice teachers; and
- observe the novice teacher through the lens of a pre-selected area of instruction or need as identified by either the mentor or the novice teacher.

**Novice teachers and mentors would:**

- be given one class period of substitute coverage twice a month to allow for classroom observations of grade level colleagues, other master teachers in their building, and teachers throughout their district teaching the same grade level or subject;
- identify teachers in their district to observe who are using instructional strategies they would like to implement in their own teaching. Observations will include pre/post conferences to discuss classroom strategies that can be utilized, adapted, and/or modified to best meet the needs of the novice teacher and his or her students; and
- continue to meet monthly during the novice teacher’s second year of teaching. The novice teacher would identify specific areas in need of improvement and work with the mentor to identify resources which would assist in improving those areas, as well as metrics for assessing growth.
Recommendation 4
Offer Professional Development That Links More Tightly and More Directly to Classroom Practice and Teachers’ Working Skill Set

Professional development opportunities would be tailored to meet the specific needs of teachers with a focus on research-based best practices. School administrators will design PD-based on schoolwide initiatives, as well as teacher-selected topics. All teachers would:

- be given a menu of PD options offered through their school, district, and union;
- be given the opportunity to self-select meaningful PD sessions directly related to their instructional practices;
- have the option of participating in PD leadership opportunities to demonstrate mastery, earn recognition as experts in a specific area, and coach in their immediate professional community; and
- have access to additional funding to attend two PD sessions a year at local universities or private organizations.

Giving teachers autonomy to self-select PD allows them to target their own needs and control their personal growth. It is also a major step towards awarding teachers the professionalism and trust seen in other professions; self-determination works as an excellent motivator and can be implemented at relatively little cost.

Recommendation 5
Make Professional Development More Efficient by Embedding it More Centrally in Classroom Activities

Time is a scarce commodity for teachers. PD hours must be used efficiently to provide meaningful, best practice content for direct use in the classroom. Therefore, teachers must be included on the PD team that will create, implement, and evaluate each PD session.

- The school administration would survey the staff throughout the school year to identify schoolwide wide PD topics of interest and then choose PD sessions based on the results of that survey.
- The PD team would provide additional support to teachers following each PD session. Support may include modeling new strategies, assisting teachers in the planning and implementation of new initiatives, answering additional questions, and locating resources.
- Teachers on the PD Team would be financially compensated and/or receive substitute coverage to assist other teachers in the building after a PD session.

Teachers would:

- have the option of attending PD sessions at their school, through their district, or online through a pre-approved PD provider;
- be given a day every other month to attend an off-site PD session provided through their school district on pre-selected topics related to district initiatives;
- be given a half-day each month to attend a PD session on a pre-selected topic of their choosing directly related to their classroom instruction; and
- evaluate each PD session throughout the year, and administration would use that feedback to adjust subsequent sessions.
Ability to choose which PD sessions to attend would be accorded in the following manner:

- Novice teachers, in their first two years, would self-select 20 percent of their PD sessions; their administration and mentors would select 30 percent, and they would be required to attend 50 percent of the districts’ mandated PD sessions.
- Teachers with a teacher rating of “effective” would self-select 40 percent of their PD and participate in 60 percent of their districts’ mandated PD.
- Mentors and master teachers would self-select 60 percent of their PD sessions and participate in 40 percent of their districts’ mandated PD.
- Administrators would self-select 50 percent of PD and attend 50 percent of mandated workshops directly related to schoolwide initiatives, as well as district and federal mandates.

Recommendation 6
Offer More Thorough and Timely Teacher Remediation Support

A mechanism for improvement is needed for teachers, novice or experienced, who have a skill deficit that cannot be addressed by professional development or administrative support. The VIVA Task Force hereby puts forth the suggestion of “Targeted Teacher Remediation” when pre-service training, mentoring, and professional development are insufficient for a teacher to become “effective” or “highly effective.” Note: Before effective remediation is possible, a clear understanding of which skills are most necessary to effective teaching must be determined. Therefore, nationwide research must be conducted to determine which skills are most directly linked to effective teaching and have the largest impact on student learning. This can be influenced by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards rubrics. A good candidate for this is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation study “Measures of Effective Teaching,” which is already underway. Once that is accomplished...

- Each state would create a mechanism whereby individual schools can request assistance, either through their support network or through an outside organization, for teacher remediation on a specific essential skill (e.g. classroom management, unit planning, etc.). This support would be funded 25 percent by the school, and 75 percent by the district or state.
- The organization would visit the school and, through classroom observation and/or assessing products (unit plans, tests, etc.), determine which teachers are struggling with that topic. Teachers identified by the administration would receive special attention during the screening process.
- The organization would target only those teachers who need significant remediation with that specific skill and provide them with intensive support for no less than two to three weeks. Every day, the organization would offer specific, targeted strategies before class, observe the teachers implementing those strategies during class, and debrief with the teachers after class to determine improvement and future goals.

A teacher’s growth and sustained improvement would be measured using a rubric, goal setting, and brief visitations throughout the year.

The intent is that this type of intensive, targeted remediation would allow organizations to significantly improve teacher effectiveness in a relatively short amount of time, allowing them to have a large impact on student achievement over the course of each year.
Impact on Student Learning

Teacher quality is the single largest determining factor in student growth. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers are trained rigorously before entering the classroom, supported extensively in their first years, and given structured opportunities to improve their pedagogy throughout their careers.

- Nationally standardized university coursework will ensure all pre-service teachers receive the necessary pedagogy and clinical training, regardless of specialization or certification area, to positively impact student learning.
- Scaffolded pre-service training will provide pre-service teachers with hands-on opportunities to learn from master teachers and their students. First-year teachers will be prepared to meet the challenges facing their students and differentiate instruction from the beginning of the year.
- Structured mentoring for novice teachers will ensure ongoing, meaningful support throughout the year from a master teacher, which will have an immediate impact on student learning.

Matters to Consider

In order to ensure students across the United States have an equitable opportunity to succeed, all states must adopt a national teacher curriculum. States adopting the curriculum would receive grant money to recruit students at the secondary level to enter the field of education, provide pre-service teachers with financial aid and scholarship money to fund their schooling, and allocate resources for novice teachers, such as mentoring from a master teacher.

The federal government would distribute the funds to states that successfully adopt the curriculum and increase the number of secondary students applying for programs in education. Every state would allocate the grant money to support teachers from their university training through their first two years in the classroom.

"The spring before last, I was asked to mentor a novice teacher, which I gladly took on. In the fall, I was asked to mentor another teacher on probation. I took this on hesitantly, but excited to use my knowledge about her special population and what it takes to succeed. In order to complete either task, I was asked to use my own planning time, meet after or before school, or get a substitute to cover my own program. I then had to balance the needs of my students. My students didn’t deserve the inconsistency that would ensue. I ended up feeling that I was doing very little effectively. To this day, I don’t have a solution. All I do know is that we need the commitment of time in order to truly mentor. We also need the commitment of consistent coverage for our classrooms, not a different substitute every day depending on availability."

"I can’t count the times that I have attended in-service trainings, so extremely frustrated because the majority of teachers in the room knew more than the speaker or weren’t at all interested. Often, administrators do not take the time to research teacher needs, obtain the qualifications of the speaker, or consider members of the audience worthy as potential leaders. Hours, maybe an entire day, of PD can go by and I sit...thinking...trying to focus, but I’m distracted...by the dozens of tasks that I could be doing during that time frame. Instead, I end up doing them on the weekend....as do so many of my co-workers. My students receive nothing from these poorly planned, frustrating PD ventures. Teacher participation is crucial, feedback necessary, proper PD planning – keys to teacher effectiveness."
“Completing my undergraduate work at Western Michigan University, I completed most of the components in preparation for becoming a teacher. I felt well prepared for stepping into a classroom. Whatever gaps there were in my undergraduate education were filled in by my mentor. In Michigan you are assigned a mentor for the first three years of your career. You meet with your mentor before school ever starts and ongoing throughout the beginning of your career. Obviously, I only have experience with Michigan’s teaching requirements, but I don’t know how I would have “made it” without the solid foundation and support I received, and I’m amazed that it’s not the norm across the country.”

“I started teaching through an alternative certification program. My coursework focused on theory, with very little concrete application of procedures, management, or priorities for my first few weeks of teaching. My first year was very much sink or swim, and unfortunately I had trouble keeping my head or those of my students above water. If I had been given intensive mentoring and modeling, or a tenth of the tips I know now, my students would have learned a lot more. For the past two years my administration has started differentiating our PDs, and drawing on the experts within our school, which has helped a lot. As for remediation, we all know teachers, at different stages in their careers, who could use that little bit of extra support to make their children grow.”
Part Two
Effective Teacher and Administrator Evaluations

Teacher Evaluations
Introduction
In most schools, the process for teacher evaluation involves the principal observing a teacher once, maybe twice a year. Afterwards, they meet for a brief post-observation conference where a weakness might be discussed for the teacher to work on, with little to no follow-up. In some districts, tenured teachers go as many as five years without an evaluation. The entire experience is usually cursory and results in very little actionable information. Without a thorough identification of professional strengths and weaknesses and authentic encouragement for growth, some teachers become mediocre. Thus, little improvement is seen in the achievement of students. While the VIVA Task Force realizes the current system of evaluation is flawed, a unanimously suggested solution to the problem could not be reached. The following is offered as a starting point for further development and research of effective methods for evaluating teachers and their methods.

Recommendation 7
Redeﬁne the Purpose of Evaluation

• Provide meaningful feedback from all stakeholders in all aspects of the teaching craft (including, but not limited to areas of instruction, classroom management, differentiation for students with special needs, etc.)

• Inform administration’s decisions on hiring, firing, compensation, tenure and staffing decisions. Refer to Part 3: Consideration of Performance-Based Compensation Systems for details regarding evaluation and compensation.

• Identify teachers who need extra support in the form of professional development or outside support.

• Document which pedagogical practices lead to the highest rates of student growth.

The VIVA Task Force proposes a model of evaluation that is closely tied to improved practices in professional development and data-based instruction that lead to improved outcomes for students.
Recommendation 8

Create a Comprehensive Approach to Teacher Evaluation by Implementing Evaluation Managers

Each district would designate an evaluation manager for each level of education – early childhood, elementary, middle and secondary. The requirements and role of this position would:

- include previous work as a classroom teacher, a master teacher rating, and experience working with schools with similar student populations;
- facilitate a teacher’s evaluation using a team approach that aggregates data from multiple sources into a portfolio and provides ongoing feedback for the teacher;
- inform administrators of trends of strengths and weaknesses across the teaching staff and work with the curriculum director to provide meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities; and
- provide a comprehensive analysis of a teacher.

The evaluation manager would build a portfolio for the teacher that would allow the teacher to identify areas for personal and pedagogical growth. The portfolio would compile information from various sources, including:

- evaluation manager’s observations and scoring using a rubric
- administrative observations from both formal observations and constructive walk-throughs and scoring using a rubric
- a fellow educator’s observations and scoring using a rubric
- results from parental surveys
- results from student surveys
- test scores (as defined below)
- examples of teacher work – lesson plans, unit plans, and assessments
- examples of student work that illustrate the above-submitted lesson plans and assessments
- teacher self-reflection
- contributions to school climate, culture, leadership, and teams

In addition, the evaluation manager would:

- continue to meet with the teacher throughout the year, updating both the teacher and the administration on the teacher’s growth and progress.
- administer a survey to students and parents asking about the teacher. All questions would be objective and focused on student growth, rather than on the teacher’s popularity. Possible topics include: rigor of work, level of expectations, differentiation and scaffolding, punctuality in parent communication focusing on classroom instruction, the learning environment, differentiation in assignments, and other areas identified by the teacher.
- analyze assessment-related data such as standardized test scores and other comprehensive summative assessment results (district-wide tests, performance-based projects) that align with the district’s school improvement goals and with state and/or national standards.
“Because so many teachers don’t teach tested subjects, and because most standardized tests today measure only a narrow range of mostly low-end skills, test scores should account for less than half of teachers’ evaluation ratings, and they should be based on schoolwide increases in students’ scores during a school year. Using averages would also encourage cooperation among teachers rather than competition.”

The evaluation manager would work as part of an evaluation team that would also include the principal and/or assistant principal and another teacher of the same developmental level. Each member of the evaluation team would use a pre-determined rubric to score the teacher’s preparation, classroom management, differentiation, the lesson’s rigor, student engagement, assessment of understanding, etc. Recommended rubrics would be posted on the Department of Education website. Administrators, union leadership, and evaluation managers would work together to choose which rubric(s) to use.

What is the Federal Role?

Schools and districts that choose to implement this type of evaluation system would:

- receive federal money for professional development if they use the evaluation system to determine their professional development needs;
- provide funding so schools can transform some of their (willing) master teachers into evaluation managers; and
- provide funding so that both the master teacher who assumes this new role and the teachers who participate in this system receive compensation equal to the amount of extra time needed to fulfill these obligations. For the teacher being evaluated it might be comp time for meeting with the evaluation manager during planning or after school. If the comp hours are not used by the end of the school year, they can be traded in for financial compensation – maybe using the same hourly formula used to pay a substitute teacher within one’s given district. For the evaluation manager, the salary should be similar to that of a school district employee who works year round (like an administrator).

The rewards? Targeted professional development and teachers who are continually working to improve through ongoing professional reflection would positively impact student performance and achievement. Student performance would improve as professional development is aligned with the individualized needs of each teacher and district. As student achievement goes up, so will the future success of those students, increasing their employability and decreasing the government-funded costs of unemployment and incarceration.

Recommendation 9

Change the Evaluation Structure so that Evaluations Play a Meaningful Role in Actual Teaching Practice in a Single School Year

Evaluations for all teachers would happen annually, regardless of tenure or number of years teaching. VIVA Idea Mine participants stressed a desire for evaluation standards that take into account the unique differences of teachers; while providing early intervention and assistance for underperforming teachers.

- All teachers would receive a minimum of two formal classroom observations from the evaluation manager and their administrator per year.
- Post-evaluation conferences would be comprehensive, focused on replicating strengths and creating actionable plans for growth.
• Evaluations would be focused on continuing growth. At each evaluation, teachers would create explicit goals that would be revisited at the next conference.

• Evaluations would focus on practices that directly impact student growth and learning, and should not include items such as teacher dress or bulletin board presentation.

• Evaluations would be weighted with more emphasis placed on observation rubrics, lesson plans, approach to teaching required standards, and progress towards the yearly improvement goal.

• Evaluation ratings would include at least four categories (e.g. “highly effective,” “effective,” “needs improvement,” or “ineffective”). “Satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory” are not precise enough to be meaningful.

• The above ratings need to be set out in an explicit rubric. The rubric should be focused on improving student achievement by examining the teacher’s classroom environment, classroom management, lesson planning and design, instructional teaching practice, assessment, professional development and responsibilities.

**Matters to Consider**

Since the VIVA Task Force did not reach consensus on the issue of teacher evaluations, we present the following concerns:

**Validity of Test Scores in Evaluations**

No one has developed a system for incorporating test scores into teacher evaluations that even comes close to being reliable, as evidenced by this summer’s federal study showing a 26 percent error rate.\(^2\)

**Universality of Test Scores in Evaluations**

Only a third of the country’s teachers work in subjects covered by standardized tests. The remaining two-thirds could be evaluated by the schoolwide test scores, but those scores are not an effective way to show student growth for individual teachers.

**The One-Size-Fits-All Approach Doesn’t Fix All**

Many recommendations for education reform come out of experiences in urban settings, but not all schools face those challenges.

There are some large urban districts where it may be nearly impossible to fire a bad teacher, and systemic change may be needed there. At most suburban school districts, firing a teacher only requires a time commitment from an administrator: putting in the time to observe the teacher in question; delivering an unsatisfactory evaluation and make a plan for remediation; and observing whether progress is made or not. Yes, this is time-consuming, but firing a bad teacher is one clear way to improve a school, and any administrator not willing to commit the necessary time is not doing her job.

The various stakeholders in public education have competing views about what needs to be fixed based upon their own experiences. Teachers who have witnessed poor administrators don’t want them to have complete control of the evaluation process. Teachers who have had conflicts with coworkers don’t want them to play a part in the process. Finally, teachers who have witnessed colleagues alter their curriculum to meet the demands of parents and students believe that makes student and parent evaluations an unreliable measure of teacher performance.
Parent and Student Surveys
Incorporating parent and student surveys into teacher evaluations could lead some teachers to water down their curriculum in an attempt to curry favor with some parents and students.

Who is Qualified to Evaluate?
A common argument against the current model of teacher evaluation is that an administrator who originally taught art cannot effectively observe and evaluate a chemistry teacher. But why not? Any good administrator can identify key components of effective teaching.

We Need a Boost Rather than an Overhaul
In many suburban districts, teacher evaluation is not broken so much as it is in need of renewed focus and increased administrative staffing. No one at VIVA believes that a single observation and a perfunctory 15-minute post-observation conference constitute meaningful teacher evaluation. Instead of creating an elaborate, expensive, and time-consuming new system, why not turn to existing evaluation methods that are already working? In Kentucky, where one VIVA Task Force member has taught, veteran teachers were observed twice a year and had a meaningful follow-up meeting with the principal after each one. The discussions covered the observation, the teacher’s lesson plans, the teacher’s approach to teaching required standards, and the teacher’s own individual yearly improvement goal. This seems to some of us to be a better model for teacher evaluation.

Evaluation of Administrators
Introduction
Nearly all of the public debate about improved evaluations has focused on teachers. The VIVA Task Force strongly believes it is equally important to improve evaluations of administrators. If students’ success is the responsibility of their teachers, it is equally true that the teachers’ success is the responsibility of their administration.

The VIVA Task Force believes many of the same components of a revised teacher evaluation system can and should be applied to a revised evaluation system for administrators. In addition, this system should address job churn among administrators.

Recommendation 10
Improve and Align the Administrator Evaluation Process to the Teacher Evaluation Process
The system would require the designation of an evaluation manager for administrators who would observe the administrator at work, collect data from multiple sources, and build a portfolio for the administrator that would include:

- the evaluation manager’s observations
- a fellow administrator’s observations
- results from surveys of parents, which would focus on: timeliness, clarity, and consistency of communication; quality of education they feel their child is receiving, how welcome they feel as partners in the educational process
- results from surveys of teachers, which would focus on: timeliness, clarity, and consistency of communication, the level of support teachers receive, both for initiatives and in the classroom;
the effectiveness of schoolwide structures and how they implement the school’s mission and vision; the administrator’s presence – how often and the quality of how s/he interacts with staff and with students, including feedback to teachers planning and instruction; and how the administrator prioritizes and addresses issues of day-to-day administration.

- schoolwide test scores
- examples of the administrator’s work and self-reflection
- examples of support systems put in place for teachers and of teacher evaluations
- an examination of how often the administrator has changed positions or districts, with three changes within a 12-year period negatively affecting the evaluation

**Recommendation 11**

**Create Incentives to Reduce Administrative Turn-Over Rates**

In addition to improving school and student achievement, a new and comprehensive approach to administrator evaluations would focus attention on one of the great unspoken issues in education today: the widespread trend among administrators to stay in any given job for only a few years, before moving on to a new position at a new school.

This continual “churn” among administrators undercuts the very notion of administrator accountability: these principals, assistant principals, and curriculum coordinators walk into a new district and immediately require the faculty to, yet again, redesign the curriculum, standards alignment, or instructional plan. Then, all too often, they leave for a new job before they can be held accountable for the success or failure of their plans.

**VOICES**

“... I literally got a pat on the back one year and was told “good job” as I was walking out the door for summer vacation."

“During an observation this week, my AP came into my room while my students were engaged in literacy centers and I was working with students one on one. At my post conference, my AP held up a blank piece of paper and told me she wrote nothing down, that it was “just centers,” and that she wanted to observe me again because she wanted to see a lesson. Never mind the 15 individual conferences/lessons I had with students while she was there. Because she didn’t place enough value in the work I do with my 6/7 year olds, I now have to waste my energy and time with another observation and post conference.”
“Given that I am a parent with two small children, I would love the chance to earn comp time instead of being financially penalized when I run out of sick days.”

“High school English and math teachers already are under more pressure than any other teachers in their buildings, due to No Child Left Behind state tests. Yes, every teacher in our school “adopts a learning anchor” in reading or math and tries to incorporate it into their lessons. But when the test scores come back, they belong to the English and math teachers. Is it fair that they soon will face the additional threat of being fired due in part to scores on these tests -- while the foreign language, computer science, and gym teachers just down the hall will be largely exempt from such pressures?”

“I had a mom call me to complain that her daughter earned an 89 percent in Advanced English 9 last quarter, instead of a 90 – despite the fact that her daughter had done poorly on a few quizzes. I held firm, despite the parent’s repeated e-mails to the guidance office seeking support for a grade change. Of course the girl in question then learned that she needs to work harder in high school advanced classes than she had to in middle school, and in the second quarter she has responded by earning a 96 percent so far. Trust me – when parent evaluations help determine my pay, it will be a lot harder to hold firm with the accurate grade and maintain rigor.”


Part Three
Consideration of Performance-Based Compensation Systems

Introduction
Teachers would happily take more money as acknowledgement for the good job they are already doing. Yet, it is clear from the comments on the VIVA site that teachers do not believe, even for a minute, that more money will motivate committed, high quality professionals to do any better. The rationale is that the best teachers already work far above and beyond the basic requirements of the position. Further, the system by which “better” is determined would have to be improved before the disbursement of any reward can be fair. For that reason, the VIVA Task Force believes that without continued research and development, performance-based compensation will not deliver the results its proponents hope for.

Recommendation 12
If a Fair System for Determining Excellence Can Be Devised, Award Annual Bonuses to Teachers Who Meet that Standard of Excellence

Monetary performance-based compensation systems are the most controversial topic in educational reform. While there is nothing inherently wrong with awarding bonuses for effective teaching, there is a huge amount of concern that the system will be opaque and fundamentally unfair. If value-added formulas are improved to the point where they are reliable metrics for all teachers – regardless of subject area, student population, and experience – they would become valuable tools, but they are not there yet. Once the formulas are there, teachers who are judged as “most effective” will earn a cash bonus.

An appropriate alternative to cash may be a federal tax credit. A multiplier could then be used to reward teachers who earn this distinction in consecutive years.
**Recommendation 13**

**Implement the Use of Tax Credits as Incentives for Employment in High Need Schools and Individual Professional Growth**

A smaller, supplemental tax credit also could be offered to all those who teach in struggling schools, as well as those who take on mentor and master teacher roles.

An additional supplemental tax credit could be offered to teachers who successfully complete the rigorous study, self-assessment, and peer review required in the National Board Certification process.

**Recommendation 14**

**Institute Various Low-Cost, Immediate, and High-Impact Incentives to Reward Teachers for Outstanding Work**

Money is not the only way to reward effective teaching. Sometimes simple acts of positive reinforcement can serve as rewards and do wonders to improve morale and achievement. The following are illustrations of some suggested incentives:

- Encourage districts that have extremely regimented curricula to allow more teacher choice, as long as students still master state learning standards. Two ninth-grade English teachers, for example, could choose to teach different stories during a short story unit. The sense of autonomy, mastery, and purpose a teacher would derive from being able to choose her own short stories to teach would motivate more inspired instruction and result in higher student achievement.

- Allow small groups of teachers to design skills remediation programs for low-achieving students. Teachers who personally know the students with whom they will be working will know how to best reach them. Different groups would use different approaches, and teachers would be more motivated to use a program they designed, yielding greater student achievement.¹

- Afford teachers a system for choosing and figuring comp time or “overtime” pay for hours spent working outside their contractual school day. Hour for hour may not be feasible, but teachers would appreciate the flexibility of time or pay that many other professions are given.

- Encourage teachers who are driven to invest time in their own learning and professional growth to do so by being given day-long or short-term leaves for self-selected professional development or some tuition reimbursement.

- Award those reinforcements that can be given immediately for positive teaching methods, including early dismissals when schedules permit; small gifts or gift certificates; recognition through awards, school newsletters, and local media; casual dress days; or mini-massage days administered by licensed therapists.

**Matters to Consider**

There are obvious limits to the use of financial incentives for better teaching. If just 10 percent of the nation’s 6 million teachers were evaluated as being “most effective,” and if a differentiated pay bonus was set at just $5,000 per teacher, it would require $3 billion per year. Even tax cuts would impact government budgets. It is doubtful the federal government could sustain such an outlay over the long term; it is even less likely that local districts could pick up the tab when federal funds dry up.

Recent studies have shown that linking differentiated pay solely to increased test scores does not work.²
• If any comprehensive incentive compensation system is going to be effective and fair, three major issues must first be resolved: (1) the structure must be backed by research that demonstrates actual student growth resulting from the differentiated incentives, (2) a solution must be crafted to cover the approximately 70 percent of teachers who teach subjects or settings not covered by any standardized test (yet alone a solution to address the reliability of the testing approach), and (3) differentiators must be put in place to address teachers with high percentages of at-risk or special needs students. To date, TAP™ and other such approaches have not proved as effective as could be because they have not conquered these issues.

• Framing the issue also needs a more sophisticated touch. The vast majority of the current conversation leaves most of the public (including many public officials) with the impression that the basic structure is a test score for cash swap. This characterization is a disservice to the public discussion and flies in the face of what we know is needed to have a reasonable and effective financial incentive for superior teaching and successful student learning.

“I have two specific incentives that would be meaningful to me. 1) As an extremely hard worker, everyone at my school is aware of the hours that I put in. They are just as aware of another special education teacher who arrives at the last moment and leaves on the dot to match her contract. The administration cannot make her “work harder” or get me to “work less,” but we are paid the same given our pay schedule. I would like administrators to have SOME money to provide bonuses. Heck, I might even be happy to get a turkey or a Costco pie once in a while! But still, that’s NOT what drives me to teach. Other than spontaneous bonuses: 1) I’d like to see the entire pay scale raised for all teachers, paired with improved evaluation practice. 2) I would like to be given opportunity to continue to learn while not being stretched thin; time to collaborate to share the wealth, time to build relationships with my students, to be valued by the system that retains me. This can happen through allowing teachers more self-directed PD, opportunities to move in and out of the classroom into other roles for predetermined time frames, allowing teachers paid sabbatical PD time, co-teaching experiences, etc.”

“Some of these incentives would actually develop teachers into gaining a highly effective rating and should not be used only after they receive that rating.”

“I am already spending extra time after school and on weekends to do everything I can to be a highly effective teacher, often sacrificing my personal finances and time with my family. Extrinsic rewards like merit pay or tax credits aren’t going to make me work harder or better than I already do, but it would be nice for the extra effort I do put into my career to be recognized.”

“I once had a principal that would hand out Kudos granola bars to random teachers at monthly faculty meetings to highlight the great things that were going on in the school. As juvenile as it may have been, deep down inside everyone wanted to be the one she called out. We found ourselves doing extra little things to see if she’d see. It always ended up that those efforts helped my students in some way.”

“A little recognition goes a long way. Most of the teachers at my school come early, work late, and do jobs well outside of contract, with little in the way of thanks. We don’t need a lot of extra money in bonuses, just some appreciation for what we do. This is the second year running that I’ve learned about ‘teacher appreciation week’ from a photo-copied flier from another school.”

Part Four
Appropriate Support for Teachers

Introduction
In an ever-changing society, schools are a reflection of the world around them. As communities and families become more complicated, it follows that classrooms do the same. In the Idea Mine on the VIVA website, teachers expressed that the changing lives of students have created changed roles for teachers. These added responsibilities have taken away from a teacher’s ability to focus on curriculum and pedagogy which, in turn, impairs student achievement. Therefore, the VIVA Task Force concludes that reform funding should be invested in supports that give teachers the opportunities they need to focus on creating authentic learning opportunities, planning standard-aligned lessons, and providing students with meaningful feedback.

Recommendation 15
Create Equity Across All Classrooms in the United States Regarding Class Size
The effect of reducing class size is one of the most studied issues in education. Since conclusive results for either side of the argument are limited, it is obvious that continued research is necessary to make final determinations on effective ratios. According to a research study by the Health and Education Research Operative Services, Inc., smaller class size results in increased teacher effectiveness and student achievement in certain circumstances. Therefore, until further research is conducted, the VIVA Task Force suggests that schools should be required to maintain a student-to-teacher ratio of 25:1 or less for a single teacher in the secondary level, and 18:1 or less for a single teacher in the primary level.

Since research suggests that at-risk students benefit even more from reduced class sizes and individualized instruction, we suggest that classes with a high percentage of students with IEPs or 504 Plans, English language learners, students receiving counseling services, and other students identified as at risk should have a maximum ratio of 25:2 (the second professional in the room should be a licensed teacher, counselor, or social worker, depending on the needs of the students). Note: see co-teaching under “Scheduling” for further information (page 27).
**Recommendation 16**

**Increase Cross-Training and Numbers of Administrators**

In order for teachers to be able to focus on instruction, they need the support of a strong administrative team. Just as teachers are stretched thin because of modern demands, administrators are taking on additional roles as well. If there were enough administrators to fulfill the roles of mentoring teachers, supervising meetings, and enforcing discipline, then teachers would have more time to focus on teaching.

**Thus, the VIVA Task Force recommends that:**

- the number of administrators in a school would be based on a ratio to the number of students in the school;
- schools with a high percentage of students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, students receiving counseling services, and other students identified as at risk be given additional administrative personnel; and
- administrators be responsible for behavioral support (schools can make provisions for a staff member to be hired to take on that support role).

**Recommendation 17**

**Increase Non-Instructional Support Staff to Afford Teachers More Instructional Time and Students More Opportunities for Learning**

Other personnel in a school are imperative to supporting the needs of students as well. If students are given the social and supervisory support they need throughout the school day, teachers will have the time to spend the time they normally dedicate to these roles on instruction instead.

**Thus, the VIVA Task Force recommends that:**

- the number of guidance counselors in a school would be based on a ratio to the number of students in the school;
- schools with a high percentage of students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, students receiving counseling services, and other students identified as at risk be given additional personnel; and
- counselors would be responsible for identifying and intervening on social and behavioral issues that are barriers to learning. This would be tailored to the specific needs of the school and district.

**Districts would be responsible for:**

- hiring an adequate number of paraprofessionals and/ or substitute teachers to cover duties (e.g., cafeteria supervision, hall supervision, etc.) to assist teachers with clerical duties (making copies, data entry, etc.) and allowing for teacher planning periods so teachers may maintain focus on pedagogy throughout the school day;
- providing access to social services for all students and their families so that teachers can quickly refer students in need; and
- having available a specialist in curriculum development during teacher planning or professional time.
Recommendation 18
Create School Schedules that Maximize the Effectiveness of Teaching and Learning and Incentivize Collaboration and Co-Teaching

Because each teacher’s day follows a set schedule, it is imperative that teachers be given flexibility for a larger percentage of their work day in order to reflect on instructional practices, provide feedback to students, and prepare lessons.

To make that happen:

- Districts would increase weekly compensated planning time to at least 450 minutes (ideally, daily blocks of 90 minutes).
- Teachers would not be pulled from planning time to attend meetings or cover other classes without their express approval and compensation for the prep time lost (either through financial compensation or comp time).
- Districts would give teachers additional clerical time during each grading period for communicating with parents and grading. The amount of time afforded would be based on further research. Possible scenarios include using substitute or team teachers as fill-ins for time spent out of the classroom or scheduling noninstructional days.

Districts should afford all (not only pre-service) teachers the opportunity to have common weekly planning time with co- or team teachers. At least two double blocks (90 minutes each) a week to ensure true collaboration and co-teaching should take place in order to meet the needs of students.

- Districts will give teachers a set amount of time at their request to observe master teachers or work with curriculum specialists.
- Co-teachers will be encouraged to attend common professional development opportunities in order to improve and develop their working relationships.
- Teachers’ expressed interest in co-teaching with specific colleagues or about co-teaching in general will be taken into consideration by administration for staffing decisions.
- Classes with populations of at least 50 percent at risk students will be given the option for co-teaching.
- Districts will create schedules that afford teachers opportunities to have a break from direct instruction at various points throughout the year. This can be achieved through scheduling students, while teachers work or arranging for shared teaching assignments.

Recommendation 19
Increase Efforts to Ensure that Every Classroom has Necessary Resources Available to Each Student

It goes without saying, but it’s worth saying: resources matter. Teachers spend hours creating comfortable learning environments to increase student learning. If teachers did not have to spend so much time and energy tracking down resources such as school supplies and learning materials, they would have more time to invest in their instructional practices and lesson planning.
Districts would be responsible for providing:

- an adequate number of desks, chairs, or work spaces for the number of students being educated;
- an adequate number of rooms in sizes appropriate to student populations;
- current texts, reference materials, science equipment, computers and other necessary technologies; and
- basic school supplies such as paper, dry erase markers, pencils, facial tissues, hand sanitizer, crayons, and an appropriate number of copy machines.

Matters to Consider

Teachers burn out because of the constant emotional engagement they face in order to do their jobs. Education isn’t a business, so reform needs to allow for the “family” aspect of schools. Each person involved in the educational process is a variable in the equation. Basic human needs like down time structure and support need to be considered at all times while flexibility should be afforded in any action plan developed.

“As a special education teacher so much of my time goes to dealing with immediate, often crisis, situations that interfere with learning....that teaching becomes my secondary job. Often, tremendous amounts of time, from multiple staff members, go to meeting the high needs of a small number of very discouraged or disruptive students. These meetings, on top of standard meetings, often leave me starting my emails and planning at 5:00 or 5:30. I start between 7:30 and 8:00 am.”

“I spend 50 percent of my day doing clerical work, transferring data into data tables for my administration. I turn in 3 data tables every 5 weeks just to show my administration my students are making progress, yet they could easily access this information in my electronic gradebook, so why all the unnecessary clerical work? I would rather spend that time collaborating with my colleagues and reading with all my struggling students.”

“My colleagues and I mapped out our job requirements on whiteboards earlier this year and concluded that our work load has tripled this year alone while our time to get it done and compensation for doing so have not. We literally filled one whiteboard with a list of what we did last year, and then we filled two more whiteboards with the list of additional work being required of us this year due to the new drive for acquiring data.”

“It’s very difficult for some of my colleagues to teach when they have to play musical chairs just to get enough seats for their students every day.”
“Every spring we are told we can spend only half of the money we had to spend last year. Last spring that amounted to $75 per teacher to purchase a year's worth of classroom supplies. Notebook paper alone costs $30 per case and comes from a different company than the other supplies. At that point teachers consolidated their supply orders in an effort to save on shipping because part of your supply budget had to be spent on shipping if your order was less than $50. Facial tissues and hand sanitizer are often purchased separately by teachers throughout the year at their own private expense (it's on my grocery list once a month).”

“Any time I want to purchase new texts for my classroom I have to seek out a grant if it is not our subject area's year to purchase books. When we submit a proposal for a grant, we only ask for half of what we really need, and we find a way to share the materials. We figure if we ask for less money then we need, the people who award the grants are more likely to award it to us. The district budget for textbooks is $36,000 per year. That's enough to buy one set of textbooks for one content area for one grade level once a year. And math trumps all! Three consecutive years the need for new math materials took precedent over everything else because the standardized test scores in math were low. Everything else was put on hold because 'those in charge at the state and federal levels' were mandating math programs be overhauled thus creating the need to purchase new math materials was ‘greater’ than those in other content areas (even though the math program had newer materials at that time than social studies or English). And technology? We are told that used computers (laptops less than 3 years old) we could get donated by local businesses - including the Federal Center in Battle Creek, Michigan - are too costly both financially and in terms of man hours to integrate. That we don't have the infrastructure within the school to support the extra electricity needed to run the machines let alone the wifi capability or security measures needed to provide kids with safe access. I personally have been working on getting a mobile writing lab in my room for 4 years, and I get the same excuses for why it won’t work even though the building administration and IT staff have changed. Again, there seems to be more time spent explaining why something won’t work than trying to figure out how to make it work.”

“Often, I find that at the end of the day I am exhausted and emotionally drained yet feel like I have nothing to show for all the energy I invested. I spent so much time nurturing, supporting, and mentoring, but very little time teaching writing or literature. What I did was necessary for the benefit of the students, but how am I going to be held accountable for their learning?”

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1 http://www.heros-inc.org/classsizeresearch.htm
Part Five

Parent and Community Partnerships

The administration has identified parent and community partnerships as critical components in the advancement of education for all students. The teachers involved in the VIVA Project discussions agree wholeheartedly. Although, not part of our original charge, it quickly became apparent from the early stages of the Idea Mine, that no discussion of education reform was possible without discussing the role of parents and strategies for increasing parental involvement. Although parent/teacher partnerships work better in some schools than others, every school is faced with the need to continually strengthen these ties and develop shared accountability, utilizing community support structures.

Introduction

Teachers currently take on varied demanding roles in order to meet the unique needs of their students. Acting as counselors, mentors, resource coordinators, and at times parents, teachers are often stretched well beyond their primary function as educator. Teachers are frustrated as they attempt to plan and teach critical skills while also dealing with critical unmet needs. This splintering of the educator’s role is critical to professional growth as it is what distracts from instruction, takes precious time, and leaves teachers exhausted and emotionally spent, ultimately impacting student achievement.

Many positive models lead the way to building partnerships that support teachers, students, and families with the goal of advancing education. They focus on parent education, on-site coordination, and full-service community schools. The immediate challenge is to find ways to efficiently expand these services to reach more schools while cultivating new models. VIVA Project teachers have begun collaborative brainstorming and have identified several preliminary recommendations for engaging and supporting parents and the community in schools. VIVA Project teachers intend to invite peers from across the country to participate in a fuller discussion and problem-solving exercise during 2011.
Recommendation 20

Begin Parental Engagement During the Preschool Years

- Universal Preschool should be the norm not the exception. We must commit to the early education population and programming.

- The focus should be on improved accessibility, regardless of income or what early education program they attended.

- The standards should be raised for early education professionals in the public and private sectors.
  - All early education instructors must be certified teachers. Teachers will have an emphasis of study or an endorsement in either early childhood education or special education.
  - Given the critical nature of their work, more focus should be given to enhancing this segment of the education work force.

- States should develop comprehensive Premier Family Education Programs (PFEP) in all communities for all children 3-5 years old, not just for those identified as special needs or low income.
  - Premier Family Education Programs will be organized under the Department of Education through federal and state funding, utilizing Head Start, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs (ECEAP); current public school and private early education programs that meet the standards of Premier Programs; newly created early education programs; and local early education interest groups and foundations.
  - Ongoing sophisticated research will be critical in obtaining feedback on program effectiveness and planning for future programming.
  - The programs will all use national early education standards, thereby providing an equitable start for all children and eliminating the achievement gap often seen when impoverished children enter kindergarten significantly behind their peers.
  - All staff will receive high levels of training in working with families and working with families of poverty and in the early identification of abuse and disability issues.

In order to achieve these goals and set a foundation for K-12 learning, parents who enroll their children in PFEP will be aggressively included as accountability partners. All parents will provide a signature of commitment for accepting personal responsibility, such as used by the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP).

Additionally, all parents will receive:

- education which provides modeling, practice, and feedback
- options for attending parent education
- options for contributing to the school
- culturally relevant choices that are not limited to prescribed federal regulations
PFEP will adopt the “whatever it takes” model to promote parent incentives for participation:

• no enrollment fee; parents donate as possible, including financially
• scholarships and funding from community partners, foundations, and other creative means of support at the more local level
• incentive programs dependent on parent participation, matched to the assets and income level of those parents, such as:
  • property tax relief or other tax incentives
  • provisions for gift cards for food and/or clothing, raffle drawings, or other locally desired incentives when parents do not qualify for the prior incentives

Recommendation 21
Provide On-Site Coordinators in All Schools

• Public policy and funding should encourage integrated student service through the use of an on-site student and family coordinators at all schools.

On-site coordinators will be identified or hired to provided services to a school or a group of schools, dependent on student population (numbers and need) and are not to take the place of current school social worker or counselor positions. They are to be provided as additional staff with specific roles, such as:

• working with school staff and parents with the objective of minimizing locally relevant “barriers” to learning and maximizing “protective factors,” as designed in J. David Hawkins and Richard F. Catalano’s “Communities That Care” system.
• coordinate multiple efforts to provide continued education and resources for parents, such as:
  • frequent, quality parenting classes focused on ages and stages of child and youth development;
  • informative classes teaching parents how to support academic growth; and
  • web based and hard-copy materials for parent education, including local/national resource lists
• develop volunteer and mentor programs
Recommendation 22

Fund Full-Service Community Schools

• Demonstrate a priority to transform all schools, or in some cases all small districts, into full-service community school providers through national implementation of a new model. The main objective of this model is to improve academic outcomes for all students through:
  • connecting families and students to needed resources, such as social service, mental health and medical professionals;
  • providing enrichment activities, using schools as access points; and
  • utilizing all potential partnerships which include school staff, on-site coordinators, volunteers, mentors, businesses, and non-profits

• Commit adequate funding to create one Community School Committee per state, consolidating professionals from evidence-based organizations that already excel in full-service community school models and other stakeholders. This committee will be in charge of:
  • consolidating and streamlining state departments and other social agencies so that services related to children will be more easily accessed and potentially supplied directly through school or district buildings; and
  • training local groups to implement best practice services

Community School Committee training will:
• take place at necessary intervals and at the most local level possible;
• include representatives from all stakeholder parties;
• provide early invitation to increase local involvement at all levels of training and implementation;
• publicly request partnerships with philanthropic organizations; and
• support local teams throughout the implementation process and continued follow-up

Also recommended is a national research unit that will use sophisticated research methods to evaluate full-service schools.
• The National Research Unit will be comprised of educators, education analysts, philanthropists, and other stakeholders.
• State and regional research groups, already in existence, will assist in local data projects.
• All stakeholders will commit to transparency of all operations.

From this solid foundation of comprehensive statewide training efforts and sophisticated research practice, grants can then be awarded. Two grant programs come to mind:
Seed Money Grants: For areas that are most lacking in staff and resources, money will be granted to implement first action steps, as decided upon by the local community team with collaboration from the Community School Committee.

Reward Money Grants: These grants will be awarded to successful full-service community schools that are identified with evidenced data of success. The financial reward will be broken into two components:

- award that directly impacts the service in that school or district
- award for a group of school-community members to “pay it forward” through time away from their positions to provide training to a similar school community

Schools or districts will develop partnerships with the Community School Committee and request assistance or be guided to next steps when not producing desired outcomes.

Finally, we request that the government model innovate instituting incentives for stakeholders, such as:

- Property tax relief and tax incentives such as:
  - giving companies a tax credit if they provide their employees with time off to serve in their child’s or community’s school;
  - increasing the amount of teacher expense related deductions; and
  - increasing the amount of deductions to businesses for their contributions to schools.
- For families living in poverty, who do not qualify for the above, a creative use of incentives is recommended, like gift cards to local stores, etc.

Matters to Consider

Our problems in schools reach far beyond those public doors. The VIVA Task Force respectfully requests further attention and dialogue in order to develop quality partnership programs for all students.

Impact on Student Learning

This quote from the National Education Association’s website best sums up the findings:

“When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”

Stated in, A New Wave of Evidence, a report from Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2002), a synthesis of research on parent involvement over the past decade.

Other findings note that regardless of family income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and
- graduate and go on to post-secondary education
Parents must be invested in their child's education and be a true partner with the school.

"At the school where I am a parent, the PTA type organization plays a different role. The PTA organization called PTSO feels it is their role to support teachers and help them enrich what they do in their classrooms. The PTSO organizes regular building wide activities like hat day, school apparel sales, and popcorn day. They also host activities for families such as a Holiday Festival, a Valentine's Day Party, and a Mom to Mom Sale. This group raises funds through Hat Day(s), popcorn sales, school apparel sales, and monthly pizza nights. We've coordinated with a local business to generate 10% of sales back to the PTSO for a particular night each month. Teachers are given opportunities in the Spring and Fall to submit a “wish list”. Items on this list are things that teachers wish they could have in their classroom but simply cannot afford. We accommodate as many of those requests as possible. Last year, we even purchased paper for the school as they had run out in the beginning of May.”

"With smaller class sizes, teachers can work with small groups and even given individual attention at times. However, with class sizes growing to 20 or more students, it is almost impossible to give any one-on-one time during the school day. In addition, money needs to be spent on parent-education programs. Parents must be invested in their child’s education and be a true partner with the school. Parent-education programs are vital, especially in low-income areas. Parents need to be a DAILY participant in their child’s education - go over their child’s homework, study with them every night, make sure they had a quiet place to do work, etc.

Related Findings for Students

Other, more specific factors, impact learning, such as:

- marked gains due to early intervention;
- equitable entry into kindergarten;
- increased bonding to adults and school setting; and
- improved focus to learning when mental health issues are treated

Potential Impact to Stakeholders

Our primary concern is academic achievement for all students. However, other positive outcomes for stakeholders are possible, such as:

- increased job satisfaction of teachers due to support;
- improved focus on instruction in the classroom;
- improved school levy/bonds measure buy-in;
- efficient use of school buildings during the off school hours;
- coordinated local efforts enhance community identity;
- increased volunteerism;
- restored public confidence;
- streamlining state service access; and
- reduce stress for parents trying to figure out how to support their children
VIVA National Task Force Members
the VIVA project Online Forum

**Blake Unger Dvorchik** is a third-year teacher at The Bronx Mathematics Preparatory School in the south-east Bronx. He co-teaches eighth-grade mathematics and is the school’s data specialist. In that capacity he has developed a number of tools to track students’ achievement and inform instruction – both within his classroom, and for his school as a whole. Outside of the normal school day, he teaches chess club and spends time trying to find ways to make teaching more effective. He is also part of the NYC-based teaching reform group Educators 4 Excellence.

**Lesley Hagelgans** is a two-time graduate of Western Michigan University. She has a BA in secondary education with a major in English and a minor in political science. Lesley also earned a MA in teaching in the middle level. She is currently into her 12th year of teaching at Marshall Middle School in Marshall, Michigan. Lesley lives with her husband and two children, ages two and six, in Fulton, Michigan.

**Keith Harrison** has taught high school English for 17 years, first at DuSable High School in inner-city Chicago, and for the past decade at Baldwin High School in suburban Pittsburgh. He and his wife have two daughters.

**Nicky Kenline Lewis** is a high school English teacher in Pittsburgh. She has ten years of classroom experience in Kentucky and Pennsylvania, and prefers to work with at-risk student populations. She and her husband Al, a high school art teacher, artist, and home renovator live in the city with their dog, Chet.

**Freeda Pirillis** has been teaching for 10 years in the early childhood/elementary setting, both private and public schools. She currently works at Agassiz School for the Fine and Performing Arts in Chicago as a first-grade teacher. Freed'a achieved National Board Certification as an early childhood generalist in 2008 through Nurturing Teacher Leadership, a prestigious program directed by Lynn Cherkasky-Davis at the Chicago Teachers Union. She was also awarded a BA in early childhood education 2001 and a MA in early childhood special education in 2010.

**Julie Schrag** is a dedicated advocate for children with special needs and a passionate supporter of all things education related. With a Special Education degree from Western Washington University and a professional certificate from Seattle Pacific University, she has over 20 years of experience as a special education teacher. Her background includes birth-to-three neurodevelopmental family education and public school K-6 self-contained special education, behavior specialist intervention, and autism program development. She has also directed her own educational consulting company and staff. Julie currently conducts independent research and continues her education while living with her husband near Seattle.
New Voice Strategies

New Voice Strategies, a Massachusetts nonprofit corporation operates the VIVA (Vision Idea Voice Action) Project. The VIVA Project is the creation of a group of seasoned, passionate advocacy professionals who believe in the power and wisdom of individual citizens in the public square. Technology is opening new opportunities for individuals to be active, relevant participants in big picture conversations and decisions. Combing our zeal for participatory government with inventive uses of wiki technology, we’re creating websites and conversations that will add new voices to our country’s important public policy decisions. Our first websites launched in September 2010, engaging classroom teachers directly in one of the most important discussions our country is having now—decisions about the future of American public schools.

Board of Directors

JOSE CERDA III, chair, is the vice president for public policy and strategy at IFF, a Midwest regional CDFI. Jose has over 20 years of experience in public policy and government. He served on the domestic policy staff in the Clinton White House, was chief of policy for the City of Chicago, and worked on Chicago’s Empowerment Zone.

JILL BASS taught in the Chicago and New York City public schools for 14 years. She has a master’s in instructional leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has been a professional developer, curriculum writer, educational consultant, and instructional coach. She is currently director of the Mikva Challenge’s National Center for Action Civics, overseeing curriculum development and teacher training.

MATTHEW BREWER is an associate with the law firm of Bartlit, Beck, Herman, Palanhar & Scott, LLC. He is a graduate of Stanford University, where he served as student body president, earned his JD from Yale University and MBA from Harvard University.

ELIZABETH EVANS, founding CEO, is a recognized national leader in building unconventional alliances and bringing innovative approaches to solving difficult policy problems. For the last decade, her work has focused on education reform, and she has spent her career promoting the interests of children. She was executive director of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS), where she was the chief architect of a successful statewide campaign that culminated with Illinois being the first state in the nation to enact comprehensive charter law reforms in 2009. Before joining INCS, Elizabeth was part of the Illinois Facilities Fund leadership team, where her responsibilities focused on Illinois government relations, communications, and advocacy. Elizabeth also worked at the Civic Committee of The Commercial Club of Chicago and was a political organizer in Washington, DC and Michigan. She practiced law from 1990 to 1998 for the US Securities and Exchange Commission Enforcement Division and as a staff attorney in the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

KIPLUND “KIP” KOLKMEIER is of counsel to the Political Law and Government Relations practice groups of Perkins, Cole, LLC & Kolkmeyer Consulting. His legal practice focuses on state legislative lobbying in Illinois, corporate and governmental ethics issues, administrative rulemaking and executive agency lobbying, PAC management, state and federal campaign finance issues, and association management. He previously was a partner at the following law firms: Sidley & Austin, Altheimer & Gray, and Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon.

ASHLEY WARLICK teaches elementary school in the Cambridge, MA Public Schools. She has a concentration in teaching students with special needs and brings a strong interest in the arts to her work. She serves on the Board of Directors of her school’s affiliated nonprofit organization, which brings urgently needed resources to the students at the school.
Part 1

2 http://www.metproject.org/project

Part 2


Part 3


Part 4
1 http://www.HEROS-INC.org/classsizeresearch.htm