



*Great Public Schools
for Every Child*

**United States Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
Roundtable Discussion
“NCLB Reauthorization: Strategies for Attracting, Supporting, and Retaining
High Quality Educators”**

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Statement of Pamela Burtnett

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. It's with great pride that I tell you that I have been a classroom teacher of English Language Arts for over 25 years, teaching in grades 6 – 12. Additionally, I have taught in a middle school drop-out prevention program and was a coordinator in my district's staff development center. I have earned National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification and have also been a Lake County, Florida Teacher of the Year. I graduated from the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas with a Bachelor of Science in Education and hold advanced degrees from Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas with a Master in Education, Theatre and Ohio University, Athens, Ohio with a Master in Fine Arts, Theatre. Currently, I am a full-time release President for the Lake County Education Association, which is an affiliate of the Florida Education Association and both the [National Education Association](#) and the [American Federation of Teachers](#).

I am pleased to be with you here today to discuss what is of great importance to all of us in education—teacher quality—including factors to help ensure a high quality teaching force, professional development, attracting teachers to, and retaining them in, hard-to-staff schools, growth systems, teacher incentive pay, mentoring and coaching, and school leadership . In addition, it is important to recognize that teachers want what is good for students, a safe environment and adequate facilities. When teachers are given the resources to do their jobs, are respected for what they do, are excited about what they do and are given the time to collaborate and work together, they are put in the best possible position to help their students achieve at their highest potentials.

I was asked to focus my comments on two areas of questioning, as follows:

- 1. What specific strategies, programs or polices have been effective in addressing the need for qualified educators in your community?
What outcomes or progress—with respect to the recruitment or retention of these educators—have been made as a result of these strategies?**

Lake County, Florida had three main programs that have been effective with teacher retention. They are as follows:

- The Lake County Effective Teaching Center was started 22 years ago as a combined venture between Lake County Education Association and the School Board using foundation money from the Conrad Hilton Foundation. Every year, approximately 120 teachers are given five days of release time to participate in an education research and dissemination program. The program focuses on pedagogy and helping teachers develop

the deep understanding of how students learn. The information is timely, research-based and relevant; one can use the information immediately upon returning to the classroom. It is concentrated time when teachers do not have students present and they can attend to developing their skills. This time element is of utmost importance because during the school day, the school year, opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share knowledge is painfully lacking. When students are present, teachers need to attend to them; they do not have the time for professional development. This five-day intensive learning opportunity helps to build teachers' knowledge base while giving them the time to network and learn from each other. Senator Kennedy's Teacher Centers Act of 2006 recognized the importance that teacher centers like ours in Lakeland can have in helping students—particularly those in greatest need—reach their highest learning potential.

- The National Board Support System is another strategy that we have in place in Florida. The State provides money to districts in order to help Board certified teachers access additional professional development or learn how to become district coaches. As a Board certified teacher, I am able to use the knowledge and skills I have gained to assist other teachers and help them understand the importance of probing their own thinking about learning and examining curricular and instructional decisions before, during, and after lessons. This type of coaching is designed to help teachers reflect on their students' needs and where the students are on the trajectory of learning, and to then adjust their instruction to help students continue on the trajectory of achievement.
- Lastly, Lake County Schools has a curriculum department that offers professional development at school sites after school and during the summer. The district made a commitment—and has kept its promise—to provide an opportunity for educators to participate in professional development on a regular basis. Based on this commitment, schools implemented early release Wednesdays specifically so that educators can participate in professional development programs. This period of time is crucial for educators so that they have access to quality programs that help them improve their instruction on an ongoing basis throughout the school year.

These programs have had a positive effect on teacher retention, which research has shown to reduce teacher turnover. We know that support of teachers, particularly new teachers, is key for retention and helping them deliver high-level instruction. As a result, we have long argued that states should require high-caliber teacher induction systems to ensure that new teachers receive the support they need to provide effective instruction during their beginning years. The three programs described above demonstrate how supports can mean the difference for an educator.

There is more work to do, however, even though these programs have offered support and improved instruction. For example, the Lake County Effective Teaching Center reenergizes 120 teachers per year and gives them the skills and tools to be successful with children in the classroom. However, more needs to be done to change the school's culture and to provide more time for teachers to share the practices they learned at the Teaching Center. In addition, every teacher, paraprofessional, and school staff member needs to have access to these types of

programs. Consequently, more energy should be devoted to making sure that the resources are available to provide all educators with opportunities for continual improvement and growth, as we have done in Florida through these programs

2. What strategies do you believe are the most effective in terms of providing professional development and support for educators in high need schools? Has professional development been targeted to educators to respond to their needs, and if so, on what criteria or data was the targeting based?

As a classroom teacher, I can tell you that professional development cannot be looked at in isolation from teachers' working conditions. Teachers are no different from other professionals in what they expect. They want a safe learning environment; up-to-date and adequate facilities; high quality, research-based training; and support from their leadership. Providing these basics will greatly assist teachers in the classroom.

Teachers need to work with a strong leader with a clear vision, and the time to collaborate as a team so they can focus and work together. If given the time, the resources, and a strong leader who can create a climate of collaboration, then professional development can achieve sustained results that have lasting effects on student learning.

The number one strategy boils down to time and timing. Strong leaders need to find the money and resources to give teachers time during their school day—not after school or weekends—to focus on student learning; and obtain the resources necessary so that teachers can begin to understand how to analyze data and make decisions using the data. Timing is a priority as well because teachers may be asked to make curricular decisions, but if they do not have access to real-time data, then they may not be making the best decisions for the instruction of their students.

In addition, if educators are to do their best work, they must be viewed as valuable partners in the educational system. Policies should ensure that states, school districts, and schools actively involve teachers and other educators in the planning, development, implementation, and refinement of standards, curriculum, assessments, accountability and improvement plans because their training and experience represent a valuable resource in designing programs that work for students.

Building on that theme, it is critical that educators be consulted when professional development programs are designed and selected for them. I think districts often try to respond to the professional development needs of teachers, but due to many factors, they miss the mark. For example, depending on a district's testing schedule, the data they are using in order to make professional development decisions could be last year's data—it may or may not be relevant to the current needs.

Furthermore, if educators are not involved in the decisions regarding their own professional development, the educators may not feel the programs selected for them are beneficial. In Florida, for example, decisions affecting the classroom, which often have professional development implications, are made in the summer after test scores are available when the teachers are not present and have no technological way to be connected to the school. As a result, decisions are made by the school and district leadership without teacher input—strictly based on test scores. Teachers usually are unhappy with the decisions that are made and some are not readily accepting of the professional development that follows from these decisions. We can do better—and we have to do better. Educators are partners in the system and should be viewed as such.

We all agree that recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers for high-needs schools is a difficult problem. Nevertheless, I think we can say that if accomplished teachers are given the time to collaborate, learn and support each other, are given the resources to teach the way they know how and respected for their expertise, are able to work with strong leadership, and are then supported with effective professional development, we will see more teachers not only staying in the profession, but also willing to go to and stay at high needs schools.

The federal Government can play a meaningful role in improving teacher quality by including the following policies in the reauthorization of ESEA:

- Providing financial incentives to school districts to provide teachers with time for collaboration a regular basis. Legislation such as S. 3710, the Teacher Center Act of 2006, introduced last year by Senator Kennedy, would give teachers across the nation access to high-level, ongoing, high-quality professional development programs that are designed and delivered by expert, practicing teachers.
- Expanding support for high-quality, research-based professional development for all teachers. These programs should be developed in a collaborative fashion between school districts' leaders and the local teachers to ensure that teachers—and other educators—receive professional development that is directly linked to their and their students needs and tied to the school's and district's curriculum and instructional needs and strategies.
- Continuing to provide support for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to assist more teachers to obtain National Board Certification. In addition, the Federal government could provide financial incentives for board-certified teachers to go to and stay in hard-to-staff schools.
- Supporting and funding high-quality induction programs for new teachers so they have the assistance they need to be successful in their jobs.
- Providing incentive grants to districts to develop peer assistance programs that focus on the improvement of staff knowledge and skills.

- Providing incentives for local districts to develop compensation systems for teachers and paraprofessionals that have a competitive base pay and benefits for all and, when supported by both management and staff, provide opportunities for staff to improve their salary through the performance of additional responsibilities.
- Providing financial incentives for districts to help recruit and retain high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools.
- Require states to develop a “learning environment index” for all schools, and require districts and states to address the problem areas identified for schools not making adequate yearly progress. Many of the schools not making AYP do not have adequate facilities, safe conditions, teacher retention incentives, and the financial and professional supports needed. The learning environment index should identify and measure teaching and learning conditions in each school.
- Title II (the Teacher Quality State Grant program) should be amended to allow districts to work with local teacher unions to survey principals, teachers, and other school staff about their working conditions. Such surveys can be powerful tools to obtain information that can identify improvements needed in schools throughout the district to help spur student achievement. North Carolina has been a leader in using teacher working condition surveys. Other states that have utilized this tool include Arizona, Kansas, Nevada, and Ohio. Additional information on teacher working conditions surveys can be obtained from the Center on Teacher Quality at:
<http://www.teachingquality.org/twc/whereweare.htm>
- Directly support efforts to improve working conditions through grants for smaller class sizes, and school repair, renovation, and modernization.

I know from my decades of experience that the one thing we do not need are additional federal mandates and hoops for teachers to jump through. Teachers are motivated by their desire to help their students learn. In addition, teachers are always open to improving their instruction because they know it will benefit them, and more importantly, their students. If we are willing to have an honest conversation about what is right for students, I believe we can find the strategies for success for providing professional development and support for educators in high-need schools.