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To Help New Teachers, Schools Need Updated Organizational Models

By Teaching Ahead Contributor | Oct. 19, 2016

Imagine this scene at a college career fair: As potential job seekers mill about, they notice one recruiting poster that stands out: "Come work in a hierarchical organization where your voice will be underappreciated, where you will have few opportunities for professional collaboration, and your career choices are essentially the same as they were 50 years ago!" The representative at this display begs the soon-to-be graduates to come to her table, saying, "Wait! You will be relentlessly evaluated by systems that don't accurately measure your true worth, you will have long hours, and the pay is low!"

Of course, I exaggerate. But not my much.

The U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Shortage Area [report](#) for 2015-16 highlights the fact that school districts across the country are having significant difficulty finding and keeping new teachers. And while much has been written about why we are not able to find enough qualified people to teach our next generation of citizens and leaders, we seem destined to continue down a path towards what is truly a national crisis. In addition to the examples I alluded to in my imaginary example above, the reality of inconsistent administrative support, excessive paperwork, pressures of state testing, and inadequate funding are obviously having a major impact on our ability to attract and retain new teachers.

Over the past year, I have had the privilege of participating in a number of initiatives that are taking a much needed look at this chronic problem, both for my state of North Carolina, as well as on a national level. This includes working with a team from the [Center for Teaching Quality](#) on recommendations about alternatives to my state's compensation model, using my role as a TeachStrong Ambassador to highlight ways to modernize and elevate the teaching profession, and most recently, participating in an Innovation Lab hosted by BEST NC, where education stakeholders from across the country were asked to reimagine the PK-12 teacher pipeline.

While each of these initiatives was different in overall scope and detail, one overarching outcome was striking: We will never attract and retain enough high quality teachers by simply relying on outdated models that are misaligned with the expectations of the Millennial generation, especially as we move to a [gig economy](#).

Individuals with the capacity and skill to be highly effective teachers will readily choose to enter and then stay in this profession when they are not only paid a competitive wage, but when they are valued for what they bring to the table from day one; when they have ready access to formal and informal leadership opportunities through which they can take advantage of incentives to foster peer-collaboration and shared expertise; and when there exists a culture of empowerment to drive innovation and creativity throughout

every classroom in every school. These are the characteristics of any highly successful organization and it's well past the time that we should expect them to be embedded in the DNA of every school in this country.

Call me naive, but I firmly believe that if we can boldly move away from the top-down models that were designed for a different era and embrace what has been proven to work dynamic organizations both in and out of education, then we will indeed begin bringing more new teachers into a profession that so desperately needs them. It would put a whole new twist on my hypothetical career fair. Sign me up!

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Teaching Ahead, an interactive project jointly developed by Education Week Teacher and the Center for Teaching Quality, is designed to bring greater exposure to the ideas of standout classroom educators on the future of their profession. Each month, selected teacher panelists will be asked to respond to and discuss key issues in education policy and instructional practice. The discussions are intended to help inform the national conversation on the direction of public schools.

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