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The Key to Changing the Teaching Profession Pages 60-65

Rebuild It and They Will Come

Elena Silva

Redesigning the school schedule not only improves teacher quality—it also makes teaching a more attractive profession.

Improving teacher quality tops the list of today's education reform goals. State and federal policymakers, along with a wide range of philanthropists and education leaders, are pouring unprecedented support, including billions of stimulus dollars, into reforms intended to ensure that all students are taught by effective teachers.

Tackling the teacher-quality problem, particularly in schools that serve the lowest-income and highest-need children, is the right goal. Research has established the importance of good teachers for student learning (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Indeed, the consequences of lacking and losing good teachers in high-need schools are devastating for student learning, school improvement, and the overall economic well-being of the United States. Yet less experienced and less qualified teachers routinely teach the neediest students, and roughly 20 percent of new teachers in low-income urban schools will leave before the end of their first year (Peske & Haycock, 2006).

Two worthy strategies drive the current teacher reform agenda:

1. Enticing new talent into teaching, largely through financial incentives and
2. raising the stakes for existing teachers, mostly through new evaluation and compensation programs. These strategies, however, will not matter much in the long run if they ignore the structural design problems of teachers' work.

More than 100 years after education leaders first campaigned for teaching to become a prized profession, akin to law and medicine, the design of teachers' work still lacks core characteristics of most other professional work. Teaching today has few mechanisms for meaningful feedback or collaboration, no rational system for development and promotion, and a work schedule that is disconnected from the reality of what teachers actually do and what students actually need.

The Generation Schools Approach

Emergent staffing models illustrate how schools can arrange people and organize time in ways that make teaching both more attractive and more effective. "It doesn't have to be an either-or," explains Furman Brown, creator of Generation Schools, "where student needs and teacher needs are pitted against one another or where success means you've broken your budget." Founded in 2004, Generation Schools is a Brooklyn, New York-based nonprofit organization dedicated to wholeschool and systemic innovation in urban education. Its school design model incorporates promising strategies for reforming teachers' work, at an operating cost no greater than that of a typical public school.

Winner of the 2004 Echoing Green prize for being one of the "world's best emerging social innovations," the Generation Schools model is about changing the way schools arrange and schedule teachers' work. At its pilot high school, Brooklyn Generation, which opened in 2007 as a district school under a contract with the United Federation of Workers, teachers work in and across grade-level teams, with each team designed to blend different types of expertise and levels of experience.



Time facilitates rather than constrains good teaching at this school. Each day, teachers teach two 90-minute blocks of core academic classes in the morning in classes that average 14 students. In the afternoon, they teach one 60-minute block of larger elective "studio" courses and have two hours of planning time. In addition, the calendar is designed with two monthlong blocks in which students take intensive courses—much like intersession courses in college. A separate corps of teachers runs the intensive courses, enabling teams of regular teachers to take three weeks off. These breaks are staggered throughout the year. During the last week of the two monthlong blocks, teachers engage in team-based planning and observe their colleagues at their own school as well as other schools throughout the city.

The school extends students' time in class, then, to 200 days—20 more days than the national average. But because of the two three-week breaks that teachers receive, the school doesn't extend teacher time (or pay).

So far, Brooklyn Generation has posted impressive scores according to New York City High School Progress Reports, which measure student progress primarily by credit accumulation and pass rates on New York State's Regents exams. The school, which currently serves 240 mostly low-income black 9th and 10th graders, has surpassed the scores of comparable city schools and earned proficient ratings overall. The school also rates well in every category of the New York City Department of Education's School Quality Review, which assesses such areas as student performance, classroom teaching, use of data, and collaborative interaction among school professionals around academic improvement. The goal of quality reviews is to ensure that schools use information to accelerate student learning.

Most notable, the design principles of the Generation Schools model—namely, using people strategically and time intentionally—represent a new and much-needed approach to the teacher-quality challenge in public education.

Time—Not on Teachers' Side

Analyses of occupational data from the U.S. Department of Labor repeatedly show that teaching is one of the most complex occupations. Its skill set is similar to that required of psychologists and social workers, with its sophisticated blend of content expertise and people skills (Milanowski, 2009). The design of teachers' work, however, sits in great contrast to this complexity.

In key ways, the work of teachers mirrors that of low-status and unskilled jobs—work that is solitary, undifferentiated, and measured by time on task rather than on quality of outcomes. Teachers, for example, typically work alone for most of the roughly 52 hours each week they spend managing, instructing, grading, and planning for dozens, or even hundreds, of students with a wide range of needs and skill levels. Even brand-new teachers, nearly one-fifth of whom have not had a single hour of classroom training, must learn to navigate this complicated world of work by themselves (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007).

Evaluated once a year, usually by a principal or vice principal who is often scrambling to oversee the work of more than 100 teachers and other school staff in addition to managing the daily operations of the school, teachers expect to—and do—routinely "pass" the evaluation without incident or reward (Toch & Rothman, 2008). Most teachers understand this pretense. At some level, they know that their performance is managed by what organizational sociologists used to call the "logic of confidence"—where no scrutiny means no evidence of conflict and no conflict means no need for improvement or change (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Teachers' work is governed by the simplest and most rigid measure—time. On the one hand, time is a

teacher's friend, the unchanging variable that helps structure the days and hours during which teachers manage their many students. Time is also the sole driver of the few and most important markers of professional advancement that exist for teachers—tenure and pay.

But time, as schools currently organize it, also constrains teacher effectiveness. With most of a teacher's schedule committed to direct classroom-based instruction, little time remains for teachers to review standards and curriculum, craft new lessons, assess results, share knowledge and planning ideas with colleagues, and consult with students and parents—all essential aspects of teachers' work that directly influence the quality and outcomes of student learning.

Compare this with the arrangements in European and Asian nations that outscore the United States on international tests of student learning, where teachers spend more time in school but less time on direct instruction (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008). For example, although Korean students attend school for 20 more days than U.S. students do (200 versus 180 days), Korean teachers spend at least 250 fewer hours on direct instruction (800 versus 1,080 hours).

Inadequate time for planning tops the list of reasons for teacher dissatisfaction in the United States, with national survey data showing more teachers citing this than any other reason, including student behavioral problems, large class sizes, and poor salaries (Ingersoll & Perna, 2009).

Time for a New Design

The Generation Schools model is designed to maximize talent, foster collaboration, and give teachers the time and opportunity to define and improve their work. Three kinds of courses organize all work and learning at Brooklyn Generation: foundations, which constitute core academic learning (English, math, science, and social studies); studios, which are electives like art, music, and foreign languages; and intensives, which are monthlong literacy units focused on career and college planning. Intensives are designed to expand on English and math literacy instruction, but they function differently from other courses. Students visit college campuses, community organizations, and workplaces; they learn skills to become career and college ready, and they participate in internships.

Most teachers are dual-role; they teach two foundation courses and one studio course each day. For example, a teacher might teach two blocks of English, biology, or algebra (foundations) and then teach one course of art, music, or technology (studios). The principal manages the schedule.

During their planning time, teachers spend a lot of time in grade-level and subject-area teams looking at and sharing data about how well students are doing. New teachers learn from veteran teachers, science teachers plan alongside humanities teachers, and 9th grade teachers collaborate with 10th grade teachers.

Terri Grey, principal of Brooklyn Generation, explains that collaboration is built into the school schedule. Teachers have a two-hour daily planning time, a full week of planning time twice each year, and a two-week summer conference during which they practice the daily schedule, model common planning sessions, and set shared goals and expectations for the year.

Researchers (Miles & Frank, 2008) have identified what they call *strategic schools*, which, like Generation Schools, deliberately organize and use resources to improve teaching and learning. From Quebec Heights Elementary School in Cincinnati, Ohio, to University Park Secondary School in Worcester, Massachusetts, these schools embed blocks of collaborative planning time into the teachers' weekly, if not daily, schedules. New research further supports the importance of teachers sharing their work, documenting the positive outcomes of a "spillover effect," in which average teachers, assigned to work beside excellent ones, emulate good practice and improve their effectiveness (Jackson &

Bruegmann, 2009).

Many other schools, including most of the "strategic" schools that Miles and Frank identified, use types of alternative scheduling and staffing similar to the Generation Schools model. At the Gardner Pilot Academy, for example, an elementary school serving the mostly low-income Latino community of Allston, Massachusetts, a corps of more than 40 people, including paraprofessionals, aides, and interns from nearby universities, support the core teaching staff by overseeing recess, lunch, and before- and after-school programs. They also oversee students during the teachers' dedicated blocks of staff planning and development time.

Because this corps of people steps in to serve the students in noninstructional ways, teachers can focus almost entirely on improving teaching and learning. Teachers have time not only for lesson plans and grading, but also for reading and reviewing student assessment data, exchanging this information with other teachers, and planning accordingly. For example, while reviewing school and student data, teachers noted the underperformance of many of their black male students. They created a plan specifically to address this issue.

Teachers also join the principal and vice principal on regular learning walks. They share what they have observed during Faculty Fridays, two-hour morning sessions held each week while students attend enrichment classes, which are extracurricular activities, such as karate. During their learning walks, teachers observe trends in teaching and student performance—such as whether teachers are delivering instruction that aligns with standards, engaging students using specific techniques, and providing extra support to students who need it. These observations help shape professional development plans.

Extending student time—but not teacher time—means that students can benefit from additional learning time while teachers work demanding but reasonable schedules. Models like Generation Schools keep costs down and appeal to unions, which otherwise demand additional pay for additional work.

Such was the case in Massachusetts's Extended Learning Time initiative, which has extended student learning time by 30 percent or more in 26 schools in 12 districts—but not without extending teacher time through requisite and often lengthy union negotiations. At a time of drastic state budget cuts, the idea of increasing school costs to pay teachers for additional work is far less tenable and makes alternative scheduling and staffing options all the more desirable.

There are trade-offs, of course, to any design choice. Teachers at Brooklyn Generation have more planning time, but they also must play dual roles, teaching both foundation and studio courses; they also experience the additional responsibility of team-based work. "If you want to be an advanced placement German teacher, for example, and just be responsible for teaching German, that's not really going to work here," explained Generation Schools founder Furman Brown.

The school keeps its team strong and its costs low by having only a small number of specialized support staff—such as information technology specialists and athletic coaches—all of whom also hold instructional positions and many of whom are shared with other schools. "It would be great to have everything all the time—to add a separate program for this and then that," says Brown, "but you just keep adding, and that's an expensive strategy."

There is also a challenge to collaboration. When everyone works together, it's harder to ensure that the team approach doesn't come at the expense of individualized growth or accountability. "We're getting better at this," explains Principal Terri Grey, pointing to New York City's new online Achievement Reporting and Innovation System. Using this new citywide database, teachers can monitor the progress of their students, organize student data in different ways, and share resources with other teachers in and beyond their school. Parents have access, too.

Time for Change

Although no single best design exists for the 100,000 public schools in the United States, there's no question that teachers' work is ready for a makeover. Teachers need a schedule that gives them time to think, plan, and assess their own and their students' work. The current intensity of focus on teacher quality—and on funding to support a host of related reforms—offers an opportunity to invest in, build, and evaluate new designs for teachers' work.

Better designs will not only draw more effective workers into the system, but also improve teacher effectiveness from within. Alternative staffing arrangements and schedules—which are growing in large part because of the expansion of charter schools, virtual schools, and extended-time experiments—will also help bridge some of the key policy questions in education reform right now, including how to evaluate, compensate, and develop teachers.

None of these are new ideas. But implementing changes like these is necessary for the success of the myriad teacher reforms brewing throughout the United States, for the teachers and prospective teachers who will resist or promote these reforms—and for the students who undeniably need and deserve a better education.

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Elena Silva is Senior Policy Analyst with Education Sector; esilva@educationsector.org.

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