

File: Teacher Quality

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

June 29, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR ANN O'LEARY

FROM: ERIC MORSE

SUBJECT: TEACHER QUALITY MEETING, THURSDAY JUNE 29, 2000.

The purpose of this meeting was to provide information on improving the quality of teachers in the United States. Attendees of the meeting include:

Education Trust:	Patti Barth
Department of Ed:	Beth Blegen
	Liz Eisner
OMB Staff:	Barbara Chow
	Pete Weber
	Jennifer McGee
	Kathleen Fitzgerald
	Leslie Mustain
	Dave Rowe
DPC:	Kendra Brooks
	Eric Morse

• **WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**

Professional development is an enrichment program for teachers allowing for a constructive dialogue with peer teachers and administrators. The key factor for improving quality in the classroom is through professional development. In order to achieve this, the teachers themselves need to be involved in the general decision making process and feel empowered. We need to start asking the teachers directly what they would like to see changed in the classroom environment, curriculum, and in the administration. One of the primary obstacles in attaining professional development is teachers' feeling that they are not part of the decision making process. A recent Teach for America survey of schools with a high poverty population, showed that teachers who were involved in decision making and given more control of their classroom, produced higher achieving students than teachers who did not feel involved or in control.

• **HOW DO WE ACHIEVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**

In order to achieve professional development, we must begin early, allow for plenty of training and actually help our instructors learn how to teach. For instance, traditionally we only require one semester of student teaching at the end of their college program before they are able to obtain a teaching certificate. It would be much more beneficial for students to be exposed to the classroom environment early in the program so that they can draw upon and have diversity in

their experiences throughout the process. Additionally, many teachers who teach specialty subjects such as math courses, hold degrees in their field, giving them an advantage at performing the discipline, but not necessarily teaching the subject. We need to focus more attention on making sure teachers are not just authorities in their field, but are also experts in helping others understand their discipline.

• **RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS**

Through research the Education Trust has made some important conclusions with regard to professional development. First, they found that larger/poorer districts do a better job at assuring professional development. One reason is that most larger districts have more resources available to them such as libraries and museums. Second, the Education Trust found that four elements should be taken into consideration when assuring successful professional development.

1. Duration—the greater the number of hours devoted to promoting professional development the more successful the program.
2. Evaluation—the teachers should be actively involved in the evaluation process of themselves and their peer teachers.
3. Coherence—we need to show teachers how to teach in a method of coherence (building activities on one another). For example relating all subject matter each week to a common theme.
4. Groups—studies have shown that teachers working in groups on professional development are more effective than working alone.

• **OBSTACLES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS**

1. There is not enough time in the school day to devote to professional development. We must begin to expand the school day so that more teachers can use the afternoon hours for professional development.

2. Teachers don't have control in professional development. Administrators should provide a universal outline of a professional development program in which teachers could manipulate to suit their unique circumstances.

3. How do we make sure that weak teachers are involved in professional development? We make the programs mandatory for all teachers and/or give them incentives to participate. For example, contests could be implemented among teachers for the class with the highest test scores on the end of the year exams.

4. How do we acquire and retain quality teachers in high poverty areas. We need to implement incentive programs such as tuition grants and intensive support programs for teachers to come into high poverty schools. In addition, we need hiring and staying bonuses and tax breaks for teachers in these areas.

5. How do we weed out the bad teachers? A possible solution is through peer review, but this can be very difficult. It is hard to get teachers to talk badly about their colleagues and personal bias can become an issue.

- **CREATING SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

In order to create successful professional development programs, we must develop testable pilot programs which allow for teacher support groups where the principal's chief role is in setting the tone. We need to move away from the idea that schools need a good manager; instead we should start thinking of schools needing good instructors.