

# Education Matters Great Teacher Initiative

April 25-26, 2013

## Symposium #1 Report

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VIEWPOINT  
LEARNING

2013



## Education Matters: Great Teacher Colloquium

April 25–26, 2013

### SESSION 1 REPORT

**I**N APRIL OF 2013, EDUCATION MATTERS convened the first session of a 3-part “Great Teacher Colloquium” bringing together more than 50 educators, state and local school board members, teacher’s union officials, elected officials, business and other community leaders to consider approaches to ensure that every classroom in the Anchorage School District has a “great” teacher.

Education Matters was founded at the conclusion of the Mayor’s Education Summit, a year-long effort to engage community leaders and the public in identifying strategies to improve outcomes for all K–12 students in Anchorage. Education Matters is a non-profit that will serve as a convener and catalyst for action to ensure the community’s voice is heard. It is focusing on the high impact reforms identified by the Mayor’s Education Summit, beginning with great teaching.

The initial meeting of the Great Teacher Colloquium was designed to explore:

- 1) The qualities that define great teaching and great teachers;
- 2) Possible approaches in regard to recruiting, training, evaluation, professional development and compensation that would ensure a great teacher in every classroom in Anchorage.

Over the course of the one-and-a-half day session, participants had the opportunity to hear from national and international experts about high-performing school systems in other countries and the validity and usefulness of standard U.S. measures of teacher quality. In addition, they heard from the Superintendent of the Anchorage School District about ASD’s teacher corps and professional development and evaluation efforts. Over the course of the meeting participants identified the qualities they would like to see embodied in all Anchorage teachers, as well as a small number of high-leverage actions they would like to explore further in subsequent sessions.

The Great Teacher Colloquium, while featuring several expert presenters, was designed as a forum for the community’s open dialogue and the development of common ground around ways forward. As noted above, many of the participants were from the community and were not educators or experts in the education field. They were all, however, thought leaders in Anchorage, many with deep connections to a wide range of constituencies. What is presented below is a record of the discussion as it unfolded, representing the perspectives, opinions and conclusions of the colloquium participants.

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## MY FAVORITE TEACHER

As an introductory exercise, participants in small groups discussed teachers that had made a significant difference for them and talked about some of the qualities that stood out. While they noted a range of attributes, participants most commonly cited those on the personal side, rather than those related to teachers' subject matter expertise. Many focused on teachers who were able to establish a personal connection, and teachers who struck them as particularly passionate, inspiring or creative. Teachers' ability to connect with parents and the community at large was high on the list of memorable qualities as well. Participants also mentioned teachers who raised the bar: maintaining high expectations for their students, pushing each student to be the very best they could be, and accepting nothing less.

This discussion served as a touchstone for participants as they delved into the specifics of teacher qualifications, training, certification and more. Remembering what had really made a difference for them—teachers having the time and ability to make personal connections with students and meet each student's individual needs—helped participants focus on finding measures that might enable every teacher to do the same.

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## PANEL 1

### ***International models of excellence in teaching: Lessons from Singapore and Finland***

#### ***Presenters:***

- » ***Dr. Ee Ling Low (Associate Dean for Program and Student Development, Singapore National Institute of Education)***
- » ***Dr. Pasi Sahlberg (Director General, Finland Ministry of Education and Culture)***

The first evening's panel was designed to present radically different models of teacher recruitment, training, evaluation and professional development in education systems where student outcomes were among the highest in the world. Finland and Singapore, with very different education systems, both have extremely high student achievement and both have dramatically different approaches to teaching, beginning with the screening process for students hoping to pursue a career in teaching. While many aspects of these systems reflect unique political, geographical and cultural aspects of their respective countries, understanding their approach to teaching raises many important questions and suggests possible avenues of exploration for Anchorage, and by extension other U.S. school districts.

During the session, Dr. Ee Ling Low of Singapore and Dr. Pasi Sahlberg of Finland each gave a presentation on teaching in their respective countries. Both are internationally sought-after speakers and experts on teaching. Both were asked to speak about:

- The characteristics/experience/qualities that define “great teaching” (that is, lead to high outcomes) and how to identify them;
- Measuring the connection between teacher quality and student outcomes;
- Recruiting highly-qualified teachers (including high school, college and university students or mid-career professionals);
- Evaluating and improving the skills of the current teacher workforce (evaluation and professional development);
- Retaining and incentivizing good teachers (for example, opportunities for promotion, compensation, benefits).

Both presentations are available online at [www.anchorage-education.com](http://www.anchorage-education.com).

### *Lessons from Singapore*

In her presentation, Dr. Low spoke in depth about Singapore’s system of recruitment, training, support, evaluation and compensation. She posed the initial question: How does Singapore ensure and sustain a high quality teaching force, and provided a detailed answer. Her remarks must be understood in the context of Singapore’s completely centralized teacher education and compensation system. All teachers are trained by the same system in the same way and are assessed and compensated based on centralized decisions. This is very different from the U.S. and Anchorage, where teachers come through many different teacher education programs.

#### **LESSONS FROM SINGAPORE: KEY POINTS**

- ***Recruitment and Selection:*** Very selective (1 in 8 applicants selected). Includes early identification of potential teaching candidates (as early as elementary school); interviews and ongoing assessment for aptitude, attitude and personality; and scholarships to bring people in.
- ***Incentives to become teachers:*** Includes paid pre-service education; beginning salaries competitive with those going into law; and mid-career salaries pegged to previous work experience.
- ***Highly rigorous teacher education program*** driven by core values and working towards detailed and universal set of core competencies.
- ***Formal reflective practice*** a key element of teacher education and professional development; constant self-assessment, formal assessment and focus on improving and deepening skills.
- ***Holistic evaluations strategy*** with three-fold purpose:
  - *Identifying areas for further professional development and improvement;*
  - *Identifying and grooming talent so as to retain the best teachers;*
  - *Upholding the quality of teaching and integrity of the profession.*

*Continued* ⇨

**LESSONS FROM SINGAPORE: KEY POINTS (CONT'D)**

- Enhanced performance management system (used with all teachers):
  - A tool for self-evaluation;
  - A tool for coaching and mentoring;
  - Performance-linked financial recognition (based on assessment of specific competencies);
  - Non-monetary rewards (nationally recognized awards).
- “Systemic Enablers”: Paid professional development and professional development leave, support for postgraduate studies (related to teaching field) and sabbatical for principals.
- Academy of Singapore Teachers: Organization that represents and champions professional excellence for the teaching fraternity by establishing a shared culture of professionalism among teachers.
- The Teacher Growth Model (TGM): A professional development model aimed at encouraging teachers to engage in continual learning and take ownership of their professional growth and personal well-being. Includes three career progression tracks:
  - Teaching track (Senior, Lead and Master Teachers);
  - Leadership track (Principals and Heads of Departments);
  - Senior Specialists track (Experts in curriculum design, measurement, educational psychology, etc.).
- Singapore Education Story:
  - Selecting and attracting top quality educators;
  - Competitive compensation and career development packages;
  - Professionalism of the teaching profession;
  - School leadership development;
  - Systemic coherence;
  - Learning from other systems.

## Lessons from Finland

Dr. Sahlberg took a high-level approach in his presentation, beginning with the overarching philosophical principles of the Finnish Education Reform and the conditions he believes are critical for broadly successful student outcomes. He then went into some detail about the Finnish system. As in Singapore, teacher education and compensation decisions are highly centralized and there is one program of teacher education. However, unlike Singapore, individual schools, principals and teachers in Finland have a great deal of autonomy, and Dr. Sahlberg stressed that because the quality of teachers is so high, ongoing evaluation based on student outcomes is not a major component of the Finnish system.

### LESSONS FROM FINLAND: KEY POINTS

- **Debunking three fallacies about teaching:**
  - “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.” — **False**
  - “The most important single factor in improving quality of education is teachers.” — **False**
  - “If any child has three great teachers in a row they will soar academically regardless of their racial or economic background.” — **False**
- **Finland’s goal:** Not to be the best, but to create a great school for each and every child.
  - Required building trust in the system: 89% of the population trusts schools in Finland.
- **Broad conditions for educational success:** Finland is at or near the top internationally in prosperity, economic competitiveness, technological advancement, global equity, child poverty (very low), child well-being, political empowerment of women, etc. (The U.S. falls behind Finland on all of these measures, and often far behind.)
- **Comparing the global education reform movement to “the Finnish Way”:**
  - Global (Marketization): Competition, standardization, test-based accountability, choice. Focused on winning and achievement;
  - Finnish (Professionalism): Collaboration, personalization, test-based responsibility, equity. Focused on learning.
- **National investment in critical policies and programs:**
  - School funding;
  - Early childhood development;
  - Child health and well-being;
  - Special needs education.
- **Key factors in success of teachers in Finland:**
  - Highly selective application process;
  - Teacher professionalism through human capital, social capital and decision-making capital;
  - Teacher education system involving advanced academic education, a research based degree, teacher training schools and a departmental structure;
  - Rigorous pathways to leadership positions.
- **Key lessons from Finland:**
  - More collaboration, less competition;
  - Standardize teacher preparation, not teaching;
  - Sustained and productive contexts of learning cannot exist for students if they do not simultaneously exist for teachers;
  - “Teaching is a difficult job—it takes 10,000 hours to become a great teacher.”
  - It is equity that drives quality improvement, not the other way round.

During a Q&A session following the presentations, participants asked the presenters about issues that had resonance in Anchorage and explored whether and how Singapore and Finland had addressed those issues.

- **Differentiation and individualized instruction:** Drs. Sahlberg and Low both described the ways in which their countries' systems work to meet each student's needs. Both countries track students into vocational versus academic tracks.
- **Equity:** Participants focused on questions of equity—the level to which students share an equal playing field on a range of social and economic measures like housing, income, health care—and the role a lack of equity plays in educational outcomes in Anchorage. This was in response to Dr. Sahlberg's discussion of measures of equity in Finland (all very high) and how they provide critical support for Finland's educational success. In both countries access to housing, quality early childhood programs, parental leave, health care and more were all discussed as factors in student outcomes and the success of their teaching pool. Participants noted that this was not the case in the U.S. and in Anchorage, and that it was a continuing challenge for teachers working with economically challenged students whose basic needs were often not being met.
- **Selectivity of teacher education programs:** The extreme selectivity of teacher education programs in both countries was of particular interest to the participants, as this is generally not the case in Alaska or the United States (and certainly not to the same degree as in Singapore and Finland). Improving the quality of the recruiting pool became a focus of the remainder of the meeting. Both Dr. Low and Dr. Sahlberg pointed out that their systems start with the most highly qualified high school students—the best and brightest—all of whom have been screened specifically for teaching aptitude in addition to academic qualifications and whether they like children. Both agreed that starting with such a highly qualified group, whose selectivity in and of itself raises the prestige of the teaching profession, make professional development, evaluation, retention and other issues less problematic. They also stressed that this selectivity has not diminished the diversity of their teaching pools, and that teachers in both countries come from a range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.
- **School choice:** The question of school choice also came up (another of the high-leverage initiatives identified in the Mayor's Education Summit). School choice is not an issue in Finland: parents trust local schools to an extraordinarily high degree. In addition, while teacher education in Finland is highly centralized, school administration is not, so schools are able to adapt their style and curriculum to meet the needs of their communities. In Singapore parents are allowed to choose a school other than their neighborhood school for their child; however most parents do not see this as necessary and it is not commonly done.
- **Systemic differences:** Some of the systemic differences between the U.S. and Finland and Singapore were highlighted in the Q&A. Some notable points:
  - Both Finland and Singapore have highly centralized teacher education systems, which is a complete contrast to the US and its 1000+ credentialing institutions.
  - Teachers' salaries are also centralized and the same in all parts of the country.
  - Singapore relies heavily on high-stakes testing to determine which schools and programs students attend.

- Finland relies far less on testing, and students have opportunities to participate in either vocational or academic tracks.
- In Finland, students start school at age 7, but the vast majority of children are enrolled in some sort of early childhood program before that.
- High schools in Finland have shifted to a “blended learning” model (more like a university model) where a certain number of credits are required, but students have more say in their curriculum and the pace at which they finish those credits. In part as a result of this shift, drop-out rates in Finland have gone from 30% twenty years ago to 4% today.

The following morning, participants reflected further on what they had heard in the previous evening’s presentations and discussion. Several themes rose to the surface:

- Alaska’s unique geography gives it strong potential as a place to pilot new approaches.
- Having a large applicant pool of the best and brightest groomed for teaching is key to success.
- Rigorous standards are needed for teacher training.
- Creating a unified teacher prep scheme like that found in Singapore and Finland may not work in Anchorage where 65% of teachers are trained Outside.
- Most ASD teachers (particularly in grades 6-12) come from Outside: shifting this ratio could be important to improving outcomes, especially if the selectivity and rigor of Alaska programs is dramatically increased.
- In Finland and Singapore teacher education students do not pay for their education: this is a possible option for a wealthier state like Alaska.
- We must change the cultural norm for college degrees in education; move away from the “if you can’t—teach” mindset and increase the status of teaching as a profession.
- Making teaching a higher-status profession requires more than just money—it is also a matter of respect. Money is not the only (or even the prime) motivator for people who choose teaching as a profession.
- Singapore and Finland’s models of leadership and collaboration (extensive among the teaching corps) are key success factors. We need to protect time that allows for teacher/site connection/collaboration.
- Focus should be on empowering the individual student to maximize potential.
- Giving students the ability to opt for vocational or academic track improves outcomes.
- Good outcomes is not just a matter of teacher quality: the community needs to do more to meet all needs in Maslin’s hierarchy of needs (including providing social supports in areas beyond education). This will lead to greater equity and higher achievement.
- Attention to early learning is needed.

**PANEL 2:****Identifying and supporting quality teaching in the U.S. and in Anchorage****Presenters:**

- » *Dan Goldhaber Ph.D. (Director, Center for Education Data and Research; Bothell Professor in Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, University of Washington)*
- » *Ed Graff (Superintendent, Anchorage School District)*

Following Friday morning's refection, a second panel spoke from a domestic perspective about research and practice regarding how best to identify and support quality teaching. The first presenter, Dan Goldhaber, is an education researcher who has focused on the indicators and effects of teacher quality on student outcomes. The second, Ed Graff, the Superintendent of the Anchorage School District, presented the district's approach to teacher recruitment, training, and professional development along with key ongoing initiatives on this front.

Both presentations are available online at [www.anchorage-education.com](http://www.anchorage-education.com).

***What the Research Says about Teacher Quality***

In his presentation Dr. Goldhaber focused on "Adopting schooling policies that recognize the important differences that exist among teachers." He talked about the importance of teacher quality and the empirical research demonstrating the difference teacher quality makes. And he reviewed the research on what are seen to be traditional measures of teacher quality and their relevance and usefulness in differentiating teacher quality as it relates to student outcomes.

### WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT TEACHER QUALITY: KEY POINTS

- There is an increasing body of empirically-based proof for the common sense belief that teacher quality has a major impact on student outcomes.
- School system human resource management policies generally fail to recognize and act on differences between teachers.
- Current measures of effectiveness are limited by evaluations.
- “Value added” is one of the only options to quantitatively measure the differences in teacher quality (“Value-added” = the improvement a particular teacher’s students show compared to the average rate of growth.)
- Dr. Goldhaber’s research shows teacher quality (as measured by value-added) to be the most important factor in student growth.
- Inputs currently used to measure and evaluate teacher quality—licensure status, degree, experience level—are only weakly linked with teacher effectiveness.
- No one talks about it, but we have high-stakes policies today that determine teachers’ compensation and retention, and those policies largely rely on easily quantifiable teacher characteristics that only weakly (at best) predict teacher effectiveness.
- Even when characteristics do predict effectiveness, the differences between the best and worst teachers who hold a particular credential are far larger than the differences between those with and without the credential. (In other words, teacher experience tends to matter, but there are still lots of novice teachers who are more effective than more experienced teachers.)
- These findings about what sorts of tools best measure differences in teacher quality and the disconnect with the methods we use to determine compensation and retention have implications for teacher evaluation and professional development:
  - *Professional development is typically not targeted toward individual teacher needs and, not surprisingly, is generally found to be ineffective.*
  - *In most districts’ teacher evaluation systems, large majorities of teachers receive the highest possible ratings. This makes such ratings an ineffective measure for decisions about retention and needed professional development (and in the case of budget cuts and layoffs, takes teacher quality off the table as a factor).*
- How to improve teacher effectiveness:
  - *Recruit higher quality teachers into the profession;*
  - *Increase the skills and effectiveness of existing teachers (a popular option, but one with very little research saying it is possible);*
  - *Change retention policies.*
- Some research indicates that “deselecting” the least effective bottom 5% of the teaching workforce would have wide-reaching positive impacts on student achievement.

### *Anchorage's Quality Teaching Initiatives*

The Superintendent gave an overview of the Anchorage School District's recruiting, professional development and assessment and evaluation plans, entitled "Identifying and Supporting Quality Teaching. He began with an overview of the district's make-up and its 3600 teachers, and then provided background on ASD's strategic plan and important initiatives to achieve targeted outcomes.

#### **ANCHORAGE'S QUALITY TEACHING INITIATIVES: KEY POINTS**

- **Destination 2020—ASD's strategic plan: Every child. At least one year's growth. Every year.**
  - 90% proficiency in reading, writing and math;
  - 90% graduation rate;
  - 90% attendance in school.
- **What constitutes effective instruction?**
  - Instruction that is engaging, data driven, purposeful differentiated, and culturally responsive.
- **Plans for teacher evaluation:**
  - ASD is transitioning to a system more focused on student achievement, both as a district objective and in keeping with state requirements that achievement account for increasing percentage of teacher evaluation (up to 50% in 2018–19 school year).
- **Philosophy for professional development:**
  - Everyone is speaking the same language;
  - Intentionally targeted to meet specific needs;
  - Use natural learning opportunities;
  - Help all teachers use good teaching practices;
- **Critical importance of community support.**
- **Challenges faced by ASD:**
  - Quality professional development takes time and money, and the district has limits in place about pulling teachers out of their classes;
  - Solving these challenges is difficult but essential.
- **ASD core principles:**
  - Support every teacher to become world-class;
  - Develop meaningful, ongoing and collaborative professional development;
  - Sustain efforts to continually provide best instruction.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ANCHORAGE

After the presentations, participants worked in small groups to identify the most important takeaways for Anchorage, recommendations for change based on the speakers' conclusions, as well as some questions they had for the presenters.

Participants' key takeaways and recommendations reflected their understanding and perceptions of the current situation in Anchorage:

- **Effective professional development:** Participants felt that some of our traditional methods for improving the quality of teaching are not effective in improving student outcomes and that some experimental approaches do not fare much better. In particular professional development after the first few years of teaching is ineffective unless highly targeted, and even then the results are muddy. Participants concluded, however, that instead of doing away with professional development, Anchorage needs to shift its current system to allow for more targeted, consistent, effective professional development, with more differentiation based on student needs.
- **Reflective practice and learning communities:** Building in opportunities for reflective practice and creating professional learning communities (both within schools and between schools and Alaska's teacher education programs) struck participants as a potentially game-changing step. Finding ways to standardize teacher preparation also seemed like an approach worth considering, despite the challenges in Anchorage and in the U.S. system.
- **Incentives that work:** Simply having a Master's degree does not seem to have an effect on the quality of teaching, and even National Board Certification is questionable. Merit pay also does not seem to have a significant effect. However, in underserved schools incentives for things like extra time and/or value-added do seem to have an effect.
- **Identification and recruitment:** Participants became increasingly certain that Anchorage needs to pay attention to how it identifies and recruits teacher candidates. This seemed especially important given that many felt that a teacher's disposition, rather than his or her certification, is a critical factor—and one which professional development does not really alter or improve. Tied in with this issue of recruiting was a discussion of raising the prestige of the teaching profession.
- **Evaluations:** Participants also wanted to give serious consideration to how ASD evaluates teachers and principals, and how those evaluations might better lead to targeted professional development. They thought that perhaps a different evaluation approach was called for when it comes to Title I schools or otherwise challenging classrooms.
- **Retention and seniority:** Finally, participants considered teacher retention and the assertion that while it takes 5-8 years for teachers to reach their maximum potential, Anchorage has a large number of newer teachers. Some said that this had to do with Alaska's policy of giving teachers coming from Outside credit for up to 5 years seniority and no more. They felt this may reduce the incentive for more experienced teachers to fill available teaching positions in Anchorage.

In a Q&A session following the panel, a number of groups raised questions for the panelists around evaluation and teacher effectiveness, incentives and pay differentials, and early childhood programs along with a wide range of other queries. In addition to Dr. Goldhaber and Superintendent Graff, Dr. Sahlberg and Dr. Low also shared their perspectives on some of the questions raised. Some of the key points from the responses are described below:

- *Data Sources*

- Participants were struck by Dr. Goldhaber's statement of the significant differences in teacher effectiveness, but some expressed confusion about how he was determining that effectiveness.
- When asked about the data in his presentation, Dr. Goldhaber stated that it came from North Carolina where there is a long-standing data tracking links between individual teachers and individual students. Washington State is also tracking outcomes and their links to particular teachers, but has not been doing so for as long. North Carolina has made changes in their policies on teacher retention and professional development based on this data and Washington State is also now using multiple measures for retention decisions.

- *Evaluation/Effectiveness*

- National Board Certification is correlated with teacher effectiveness, but does not appear to be definitive. It is possible that the certification process leads to greater effectiveness, but it may also reflect self-selection, as the more effective teachers are those who choose to become board-certified.
- While principals and other school leaders clearly have a critical role to play, there's been little study of principal effectiveness.
- Dr. Goldhaber mentioned a few U.S. school districts that seem to be taking important strides in improving their evaluation processes and differentiating teacher quality, including Pittsburgh and Washington D.C.
- He noted that schools do not want to rely only on measures of "value added" (the difference individual teachers make in student achievement over time) and so include other factors in teacher evaluation. However, often these other factors reveal very little differentiation, which means that value-added by default becomes the only measure by which teachers can be differentiated. He stressed the importance of both basing teacher evaluation on multiple measures, and making sure that all these measures truly allow differentiation.
- Superintendent Graff, in reviewing some of the planning in ASD around evaluation, pointed out that what's happening in Alaska (and in districts throughout the U.S.) often happens in response to federal funding parameters. He stressed that the district wants to focus on moving to more of a "formative assessment" approach in which students are regularly tested to see whether they are learning critical skills, and teachers then use that information to shape instruction for each individual student to help them succeed.
- Dr. Goldhaber took some time to review the research on the relationship between practical experience in teaching and teacher effectiveness. A handful of quantitative studies seem to show some features of student teaching are related to effective

teaching in the classroom, but the methodology (self-reporting) is suspect. What does seem to matter is:

- » Time spent student teaching;
  - » Important to expose students to teaching early and as much as possible (for example, the “Teaching Hospital” model);
  - » Feedback from mentors;
  - » If the school where teacher did student teacher training is aligned with the school where s/he teaches as a first year teacher.
- Participants and panelists agreed that teaching effectiveness is hard to standardize, and it was suggested that it might be possible to use a “heuristic,” experientially-based approach to problem solving for teaching and evaluation. Such an approach could apply differently to different teachers or disciplines and still measure effectiveness.

#### • *Incentives/Pay Differentials*

- The Superintendent reviewed some of the current pay differentials in Anchorage. Teachers in ASD currently get some bumps in salary for NBCT, Ph.D. and Master’s degrees, as well as for accepting hard to fill spots, some specialized and much needed certifications like speech, and special education. Anchorage does not offer any sort of financial incentive to teach in disadvantaged schools, which Dr. Goldhaber suggested was an approach worth considering. He also suggested that effective teachers could be given larger classes in return for increased compensation.

#### • *Selection, Pre-Service and New Teacher Induction*

- Multiple questions dealt with pre-service training, and Drs. Sahlberg and Low shared some background about student teaching in their respective countries:
  - » In Finland, teacher education is completely centralized. There are 8 universities with a school or schools where practicum is taught, and student teachers spend 15–20% of their time in clinical training schools with higher prepared faculty.
  - » In Singapore, also a highly centralized system, teachers can use any school for student teacher training. 40% of time spent is practicum on site: student teachers are on site and in the classroom as soon as possible, as much as possible. Student teachers are posted into multiple school settings and ultimately are evaluated Pass/Fail/Merit/Distinction.
  - » Faculty from UAA shared that they are exploring a shift to increased field experience.
- Ed Graff spoke about some of the expectations and screening tools for new teachers in ASD. He mentioned that cultural responsiveness is now a required part of universal pre-service teaching. He also discussed a recent innovation in screening applicants for teaching positions. ASD now screens all applicants using the FIT teacher model (an online assessment of various character and aptitude measures) and is studying its effectiveness. When exploring some of the success factors for young teachers, presenters stressed that an alignment between student teaching and first year posting is critical to success. How new teachers are introduced and acclimated to a new school (the “induction” process) is also critical. ASD has a mentoring program (optional but nationally recognized) for first-year teachers, and this program continues informally beyond the first year.

### • *School/Community Relationships*

- Another topic that participants and presenters addressed was community engagement and how to build trust. Dr. Sahlberg explained that aside from teacher education programs, Finland's education system is very decentralized: about 300 county-like units, each with their own tax revenue, each fund their individual schools. Some decades ago schools in Finland had a highly regulated and standardized curriculum, but the country has moved towards a more professional/trust-based system in which schools have significant autonomy and design their own curriculum. Public trust in schools is extremely high.
- He went on to note that the U.S. tends to focus more on discussions of “achievement” rather than learning. This approach, he said, plus the competitive nature of our education reform efforts, does not tend to build trust.

### • *Early Childhood Education*

- Finally, the group raised a number of questions about the school district's involvement with early childhood programs. Superintendent Graff agreed that early childhood services were extremely effective in supporting children's academic success, but explained that limited resources meant the district had to target resources to high-need students. He provided an overview of the district's current activities:
  - » Education is compulsory from age 6-16;
  - » ASD partners with Head Start at one elementary school;
  - » ASD's Migrant Education Program offers preschool for families who travel outside the Anchorage School District boundaries to engage in seasonal fishing or agricultural activities;
  - » The district offers 13 preschool programs, with 9 at Title I schools;
  - » King Career Center High School includes early childhood classes for students interested in working with young children.

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## PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

After the conclusion of the presentations and Q&A, participants and presenters spent the remainder of the day working in small groups to identify the qualities and characteristics Anchorage teachers should embody. In plenary, several themes rose to the surface, repeated in different forms by several groups:

### *Qualities for ASD Teachers*

- Passion for content first and for teaching more generally;
- Flexibility to adapt to different learning types and the ability to deliver differentiated instruction;
- Skill with technology;

- Engaged in the larger community and civic minded;
- Concern for learning and for pushing their students to achieve their highest potential;
- Excellent classroom management skills;
- Lifelong learners, curious about the world around them;
- Possessing strong social and emotional skills and able to teach those skills to their students.

While participants were invited to include specific certifications, credentials, pre-service training, and other more formal measures, the most common ground arose around the disposition and aptitude of teachers. This was in keeping with the belief that a major focus for future efforts must follow along the lines of Finland and Singapore, creating a recruiting and screening process and a “pipeline” that funnels the best and most well-suited students into the teaching profession.

Many other qualities were mentioned by at least one group: these were a bit more of a mix of teacher disposition and formal credentials and training. The fact that these were mentioned less frequently does not indicate that there was less common ground around them: quite the opposite. It may be that some participants simply took these qualities for granted (for example, they should be mature and responsible, and they should like young people):

- Team player;
- Must have basic certifications AND meet the requirements to be “highly qualified”;
- They should see themselves as nation and community builders;
- Sense of humor;
- Integrity;
- Leadership;
- Practical experience before certification.

### *What Steps Can Be Taken Most Immediately?*

Once the group had identified some of the most important characteristics, experience and qualities they wanted to see in Anchorage teachers, they worked in small groups to develop a small number of important steps that might help Anchorage ensure all teachers had those qualities. The discussed what steps might be taken, who should be involved and what resources were necessary. In large part, this effort was also an agenda-setting exercise for Education Matters’ subsequent meetings and will help to determine the focus of subsequent Great Teachers Symposia.

### *Rigorous Recruiting to Hire the Best Teachers*

Coming out of the presentations and discussions about the screening process for applicants to teacher education programs in Singapore and Finland, the group identified raising the standards of selection and creating a more rigorous selection process as an important goal. They did acknowledge, however, that this would require some significant



Much of the discussion focused on pay incentives and whether ASD could begin to offer incentives to teachers who teach in more challenging schools, take on additional workload, or agree to take on positions in less appealing locations. The group also suggested looking at current factors that increase pay for ASD teachers and consider, in light of the research presented, whether they are effective in retaining quality teachers. (For example, since having a Master's degree does not seem associated with teacher quality, should pay incentives be restricted to teachers with a Masters in the subject they are teaching?) The group noted that to explore this subject they would need a better understanding of how ASD places its teachers and whether their assumptions (for example, that the least experienced teachers are placed in to the most challenging schools, and that there is higher teacher turnover in more challenging schools) are true. They asked Education Matters to review and summarize key findings on this topic from the extensive research available from ASD and share it with participants.

### *Using Teacher Evaluation to Do More to Improve Quality of Teaching*

There was general agreement that the system in place for teacher evaluation is not a fine enough tool to identify differences in teacher quality or provide useful insight into how to help teachers improve in areas where they are weak. The group felt a wide range of players need to pay greater attention to this subject, including the school board, superintendent, universities, ISER, teachers, principals, the teacher's union, students, parents, and business and community leaders.

This group wanted to see an approach that explicitly links evaluation to the qualities they defined as effective teaching, and to make sure that approach has direct input into a professional development plan for a teacher. They understood that significant changes to the district's evaluation methods are coming in the near future, due to a state mandate that districts tie evaluations to student performance.

In identifying initial steps, the group suggested a review of existing teacher evaluation programs that produce better, more differentiated results, along with a review of the current evaluation tools (Marzano, Danielson and CEL) that ASD is considering adopting in keeping with state regulations. They suggested that there needed to be an increase in administrator training for evaluation, especially with the implementation of the Common Core standards.

A number of obstacles were cited, first and foremost the question of time. Administrators and teachers are currently extremely limited in the time they can take for evaluation and professional development activities: teachers cannot be pulled out of class, administrators cannot be pulled off campus, and in general time pressure makes impossible the sort of in-depth, personalized evaluation and professional development the group thought would be useful (and that seems to be standard in both Finland and Singapore). Not surprisingly, cost issues also surfaced. The time and resources needed to implement a new evaluation system would be significant, and require reallocation or new funds. The group felt that the level of collaboration between the state and ASD could be improved and expressed concerns about the consistency and quality of the current professional development. Finally they cited a common concern, which is how to use student data in a way that helps improve student outcomes without penalizing teachers who may be dealing with challenges in their classrooms over which they have no control.

When asked to suggest the resources needed to dig deeper into this issue, the group suggested that to begin this work, more information is needed: on ongoing efforts in the district and the state, plus a review of innovative and effective national efforts (as well as those that have not been effective).

### *Incentivize Top Students to Become Teachers*

In her presentation, Dr. Low spoke about how teacher education is funded in Singapore, through a bonding program in which students commit to years of teaching in lieu of repayment. The group was attracted to the idea of finding ways to model an Alaskan loan forgiveness program after Singapore's program. Participants pointed to the state's financial resources as an advantage, although others worried that these resources would decline in coming years with the decline in oil production. They saw a big potential payoff in incentivizing top students to enter the teaching program through generous loan forgiveness programs that required students to teach in Anchorage. Some suggested that the program might be statewide, as it would require legislative support and state-level funding.

The group suggested a series of steps necessary to put a local loan forgiveness program in place:

- Research existing/previous programs and the level of effectiveness;
- Articulate the steps, framework and timeline of forgiveness;
- Create a statewide task force (Education Matters, UAA Education Department, State Legislature, Governor, Commissioner, State School Board);
- Take steps NOW in preparation for the next legislative session.

And they also identified the resources needed:

- Sound research findings and better analysis;
- Financial support.

### *Improve Success through Teacher Placement and Mentoring*

This group looked closely at two elements of success for new teachers: placement and mentoring. They were struck both by Dr. Goldhaber's comments and their own experience regarding the importance of a new teacher's match to a school. Just as important, they wanted to ensure that mentoring programs were strong and well supported at all schools in the district, as all felt these programs have long-lasting positive effects for new teachers.

The group also wanted to see a much stronger alignment between where teachers do their pre-service and the schools where they complete their first few years of teaching, as they believed better alignment and increased continuity would positively impact a teacher's effectiveness in his or her first three years of teaching.

They identified several critical objectives:

- All pre-service teachers and new teachers need to clearly understand individual school culture, meaning schools need to define and articulate their unique philosophy and goals. The group believed this would benefit student teachers, new teachers, and families.

- A more coordinated effort by district administration, principals and new teachers to strategically plan where to place new teachers within the district and even within an individual school.
- Expand and support mentoring programs in which experienced teachers mentor new teachers, and increase professional support and development for mentors.
- A hybrid professional learning community for mentors and teachers at each school—including both veteran and new teachers to create a truly collaborative community bringing a range of skill sets to the table.

Obstacles identified included staffing, time, training, disposition and funding. In particular this group expressed concern about the challenges of having mentors leave their own classrooms to observe and support new teachers. Mentor teacher's classes then have more substitutes and mentor teachers spend more time preparing plans for substitutes.

### *Community Engagement to Increase Respect for and Quality of Teaching*

This objective encompassed a number of important goals, including raising the prestige of and respect for teaching AND improving the quality of education by making it highly relevant to students' experiences and community. Participants in this group believed, first of all, that if teachers were more visible and making a real contribution to the greater Anchorage community, the prestige of the profession would increase (and the desirability of the profession as well).

But they also believed that serious community engagement was a hallmark of effective teaching. They held that the best teachers design their curriculum in ways that are highly relevant to the student's life both in and outside of the classroom, rather than teaching in a decontextualized way for the sake of testing. For example, a lesson might involve going out on a fishing boat and working with the local fishing industry and applying biology, history, writing, math and other subjects to the experience. They felt that a deeper understanding of the community and its institutions would create opportunities for more experiential learning that would increase student commitment and connection to school, especially in key subjects like science and math.

Participants viewed creating deeper ties between educators and the broader community as a way to increase the number of "home-grown" teachers, particularly those from underrepresented groups, that would enroll in local teacher education programs (UAA or APU) and choose to stay and teach in Anchorage. They believed that expanding these connections and building a large scale professional learning community would allow students and community to be involved in initiating projects and service, and would improve students' engagement and academic achievement.

The group agreed on a set of key elements, at the crux of which is increased and ongoing partnerships among ASD, the community at large (especially businesses) and the local teacher education programs, with an emphasis on early and extensive field experience. These elements included:

- Creating in depth pre-service collaboration that connects school work to community engagement and builds in a formal community engagement element. This element of pre-service (student teaching) education would, prepare teachers to go into schools and engage students in community through coursework.

- Partnerships bringing together university, business and other sectors to build more formal and continuous structure for collaboration and community engagement.
- Having high school and university students engage in peer-teaching, providing education for community members as well as students in their school. These students would work thorough community organizations to provide classes on subjects in which they had some expertise, perhaps creating engineering or writing projects for younger students. The group believed this activity could be very useful in encouraging students from under-represented groups to go into teaching, as they gained experience and confidence working with other students.
- Creating a more visible network of teachers participating in the life of the Anchorage community and engaging students (especially education students) in this network.
- Creating a “Laboratory school”: a formal collaboration between the teacher education programs and the school district.

The group suggested inviting a speaker to an upcoming Education Matters meeting who could focus on community engagement in schools, community-generated services and grass-roots relationships within the settings of schools. They wanted to find someone who has experience in bringing the community into the school system (in particular participants cited Baltimore as a district doing innovative work along these lines).

## EDUCATION MATTERS' NEXT STEPS

The Anchorage community will be involved in setting the work plan for the Great Teachers Initiative by prioritizing the above recommendations, which will be done with input from Education Matters' community advisors, Education Summit and Symposium participants and the board of directors.

To build on the work to-date, another two sessions are being planned at which experts will be invited to assist community participants to work through the above and other ideas that will move Anchorage closer to having great teaching and a great teacher in every classroom, thereby preparing high school graduates for whatever career path they may chose.



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