

## The Center for High Impact Philanthropy

School of Social Policy & Practice | University of Pennsylvania

# High Impact Philanthropy to Improve Teaching Quality in the U.S.

## OVERVIEW

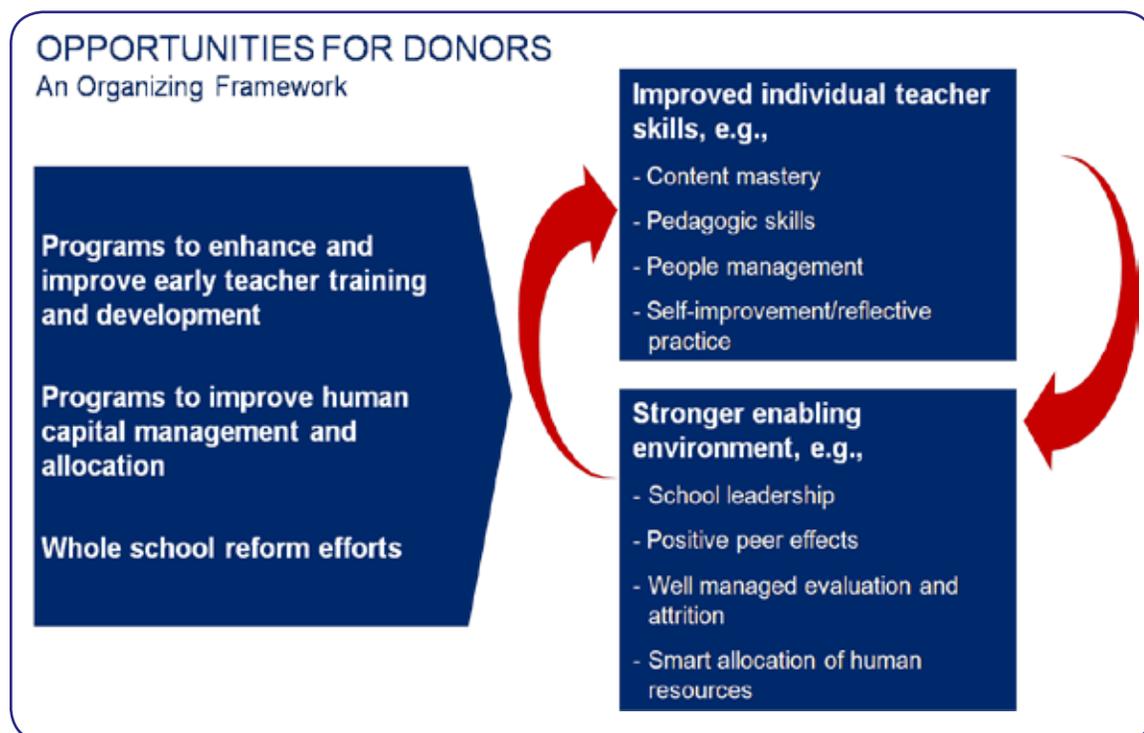
The failures of the U.S. education system are all too familiar to education philanthropists: alarmingly high drop-out rates<sup>1</sup> and persistent achievement gaps<sup>2</sup> are leading to limited opportunities for individuals<sup>3</sup> and an undereducated workforce that threatens our economic,<sup>4</sup> social,<sup>5</sup> and national security.<sup>6</sup>

Current education debates are often highly political, personal, and polemical. Furthermore, with so many initiatives taking place at once, it is difficult to tell what is working and what is not. However one thing is clear: conclusive evidence and practical wisdom point to teaching quality as the greatest in-school factor affecting student achievement today.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, for those philanthropists committed to improving student outcomes, the logical question

to pose is, “How can philanthropic capital improve teaching quality?”<sup>8</sup>

Over the next several months, our team will be developing a philanthropic investment guide to provide practical answers to that question, with a focus on at-risk secondary students in the U.S. We hope this blueprint is useful as a first step in helping donors determine how they can have the greatest impact.



## THE CONTEXT

Despite all the press about teacher shortages and increasing retirements due to an aging baby boomer generation, recent analysis indicates no overall shortage of teachers in the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Even in the fields of math and science, data show that growth in newly certified teachers is outpacing growth in numbers of secondary students.<sup>10</sup> [See Figure 1.] And although teacher retirements are increasing, the loss of teachers due to retirement is small compared to the loss of teachers due to job dissatisfaction or better opportunities elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> [See Figure 2.]

When it comes to preparation and ongoing development of teachers, efforts are inconsistent and too often, woefully inadequate. Today, the highest need students are being taught by less experienced, less qualified, and less effective teachers compared to their more privileged peers.<sup>12</sup> And just as in every industry, it is unrealistic to think that we can identify enough superstars to fix the problem completely. Even the most skilled teachers cannot fulfill their potential in the poor environments in which many teachers work today.

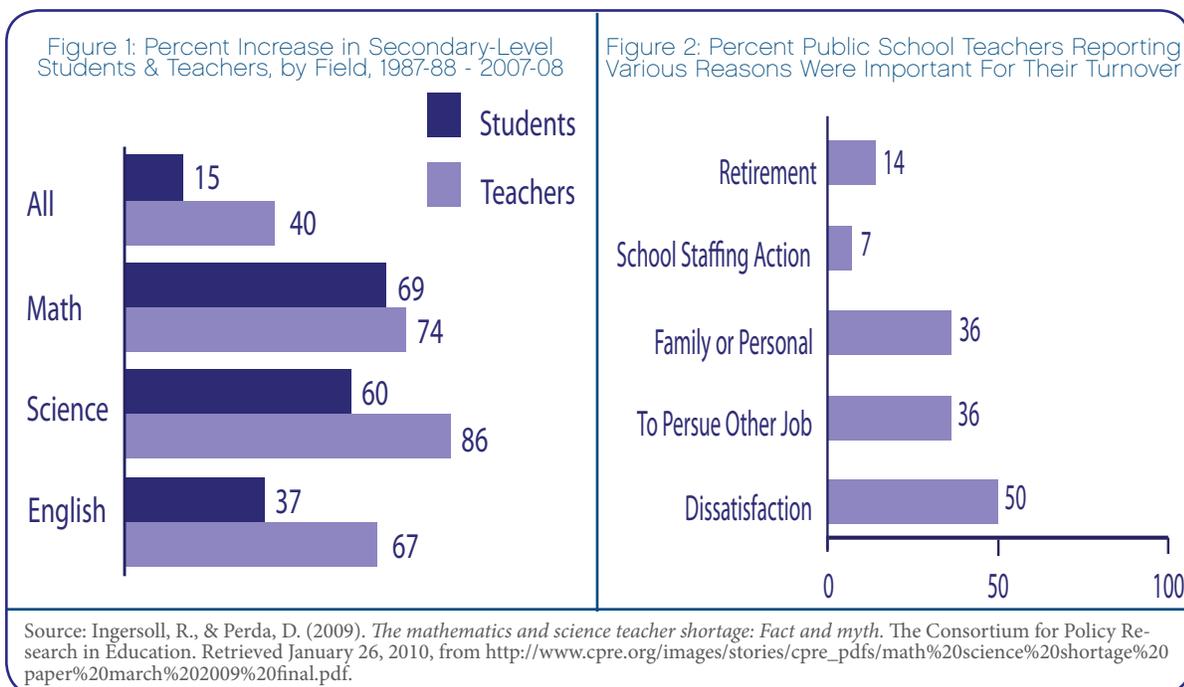
The issue is poor management of human capital in education – from recruitment through to retention.

Too often, the U.S. education system seems to ignore all human resource best practices, instead settling for any teaching candidate who shows interest, training them poorly, deploying them unevenly, failing to support them adequately once they arrive at a school, providing a work environment that is not conducive to teacher or student learning, evaluating and compensating them in a way that fails to recognize strong performers or weed out consistently poor performers, and providing few compelling reasons for good teachers to stay in schools where they are needed most.

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Given these human resource challenges, the teaching quality conversation should focus on two objectives that evidence suggests are mutually reinforcing:<sup>13</sup>

1. Improving the quality of individual teachers, &
2. Creating a more enabling environment for both teacher and student learning



## HOW PHILANTHROPY CAN CHANGE THE SITUATION

In our preliminary conversations with education experts, teachers, policymakers, researchers, and nonprofit leaders, several examples of ways in which philanthropists can help have already emerged. We have grouped these opportunities into three main categories:

### **Enhancing and improving early teacher training and development.**

In order to make sure that teachers arrive in the classroom prepared, recent promising approaches to early teacher training focus on experiential/clinical learning, in which teachers learn to teach through on-the-job training and classroom lessons that mimic a real school environment. Many of these programs, such as *Teacher U*,<sup>14</sup> also involve a selective recruiting process in order to produce the highest quality teachers. Another important model for improving early teacher training involves partnerships between school districts and colleges of education. These partnerships create a feedback and distribution loop in which the schools of education provide a pipeline of teachers, and the districts provide feedback to the schools of education on how well they are preparing those teachers.

### **Improving human capital management and allocation.**

Teachers, like any other professionals, will operate most effectively in a system that is well managed. The term “human capital management” as we mean it includes policies, incentive structures, programs and practices at the federal, state, district and school levels relating to

the recruitment and management of teachers and staff. For example: hiring, placement, and firing of teachers, evaluation of teachers, ongoing professional development, compensation and career progression, and school leadership/administration. We have identified three models that we think are particularly promising in terms of impact: principal training and development, comprehensive teacher evaluations that are linked to ongoing professional development and distribution of teachers, and HR department reform. *New Leaders for New Schools*,<sup>15</sup> the *Teacher Advancement Program*,<sup>16</sup> and *The New Teacher Project*<sup>17</sup> are all examples of organizations working in these areas, respectively.

### **Rethinking schools and teaching (whole school reform efforts).**

Although there are many struggling schools in the U.S., there are also many success stories. These include both new schools that have been created, and existing schools that have been revitalized. *The Benwood Initiative*<sup>18</sup> in Tennessee demonstrated that a school can reinvent itself by improving the effectiveness of its existing teachers through valuable professional development and the creation of a supportive work environment. New schools like the *Brooklyn Generation School*<sup>19</sup> have shown that successful schools can be created by redesigning teachers’ work to maximize student learning time while maintaining a work environment for teachers that encourages professional growth, collaboration with colleagues, and provides a reasonable lifestyle, all of which increase teacher retention.<sup>20</sup>

## A CALL TO COLLABORATIVE ACTION

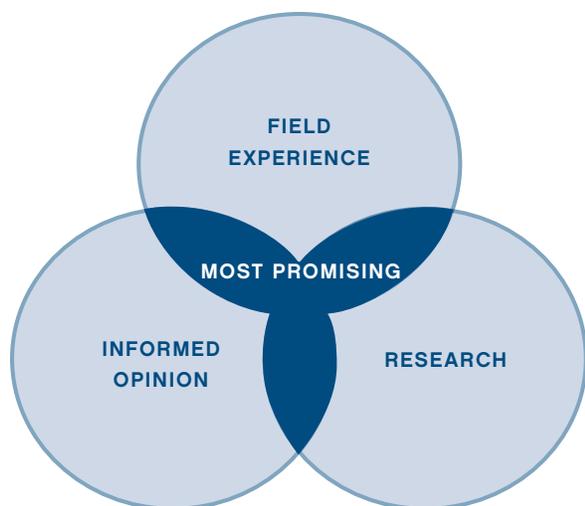
From now through the summer of 2010, the Center for High Impact Philanthropy will examine these and other promising models to determine how philanthropists can have the greatest impact in improving teaching quality.<sup>21</sup> Our goal is to produce a philanthropic investment guide that outlines specific ways philanthropists can help. However, our ability to produce effective guidance relies on others joining our effort. **To that end, we invite researchers, funders, teachers, policymakers, community leaders, and nonprofits to respond to the ideas outlined here and work with us to unlock the philanthropic capital that is so urgently needed. Please contact the project manager of this effort, Kate Barrett, with any reactions or input. Kate can be reached at [barrettk@sp2.upenn.edu](mailto:barrettk@sp2.upenn.edu).**

## OUR MULTI-PERSPECTIVE, EVIDENCE-INFORMED APPROACH

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To meet our goal of providing smart, practical guidance to individual philanthropists, we synthesize the best available information from three domains: research, informed opinion, and field experience. By considering evidence from these three sources, we seek to leverage the strengths while minimizing the limitations of each. We believe the most promising opportunities exist where the recommendations of these three domains overlap.

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION



### FIELD EXPERIENCE

- Practitioner insights
- Performance assessments
- In-depth case studies

### INFORMED OPINION

- Expert opinion
- Stakeholder input
- Policy analyses

### RESEARCH

- Randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental studies
- Modeled analyses (e.g., cost-effectiveness)

## ABOUT THE CENTER

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The nonprofit Center for High Impact Philanthropy was founded in 2006 by Wharton alumni and is housed at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy & Practice. Our aim is to provide information and tools to help philanthropists determine where their funds can have the greatest impact in improving the lives of others. With expertise in business, medicine, the law, and public and social policy, our team brings a multidisciplinary approach, in-depth knowledge of research methods, and seasoned judgment to the analysis of high impact philanthropic opportunities.

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### <sup>8</sup>Center for High Impact Philanthropy Teaching Quality Definition

“A quality teacher is one who has a positive effect on student learning and development through a combination of content mastery, command of a broad set of pedagogic skills, and communications/interpersonal skills. Quality teachers are life-long learners in their subject areas, teach with commitment, and are reflective upon their teaching practice. They transfer knowledge of their subject matter and the learning process through good communication, diagnostic skills, understanding of different learning styles and cultural influences, knowledge about child development, and the ability to marshal a broad array of techniques to meet student needs. They set high expectations and support students in achieving them. They establish an environment conducive to learning, and leverage available resources outside as well as inside the classroom.”

### <sup>9</sup>No overall teacher shortage

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### <sup>10</sup>Growth in math and science teachers outpacing student growth

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## <sup>17</sup>The New Teacher Project (TNTP)

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## <sup>18</sup>The Benwood Initiative

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## <sup>20</sup>Factors affecting teaching retention

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## <sup>21</sup>Center for High Impact Philanthropy Teaching Quality Definition

“A quality teacher is one who has a positive effect on student learning and development through a combination of content mastery, command of a broad set of pedagogic skills, and communications/interpersonal skills. Quality teachers are life-long learners in their subject areas, teach with commitment, and are reflective upon their teaching practice. They transfer knowledge of their subject matter and the learning process through good communication, diagnostic skills, understanding of different learning styles and cultural influences, knowledge about child development, and the ability to marshal a broad array of techniques to meet student needs. They set high expectations and support students in achieving them. They establish an environment conducive to learning, and leverage available resources outside as well as inside the classroom.”

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