

BACKGROUNDER: CONDITIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Challenge

Imagine the school bell just rang, and students are pouring into the classroom—each one heading to his or her assigned seat. The teacher begins the lesson but is constantly disturbed by a leak from the ceiling. One student has to move her desk to avoid getting wet. The leak, however, is the least of the students' concerns. The class is comprised of 68 percent of students who access free and reduced-price lunches. Half of the students begin the school day hungry, tired, or distracted by the previous night's events. In this over-crowded classroom of 30, three students are food-insecure, one is homeless, and 11 have been victims of violent crime.¹

Across the country, students and teachers are going without the supports they need to learn and teach. Students deserve and require more. Large class sizes inhibit successful class management and reduce valuable personalized instruction and attention. Students have a wide range of needs, and these needs cannot be met without a well-trained teacher's attention and support services offered by specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) and education support professionals (ESP).

The Opportunity

The National Education Association (NEA) believes that we can mitigate the issues that distract students and ensure that they arrive at school ready to learn by providing small class sizes, educators with training in culturally relevant pedagogy, and sufficient support from SISP. With these conditions in place, teachers can dedicate more time to individual students and understand the environments in which they live. Students can receive the social and emotional supports they need from their school social worker, nurse, and psychologist, and both teachers and students will be free to accelerate achievement.

Research shows that when students are well-fed, have proper health care, participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day, and receive culturally responsive instruction, they are more likely to perform better academically, have fewer absences, and graduate.²

Indicators for Conditions of Teaching and Learning

A great public school recognizes the unique needs of every student and addresses those needs by providing both students and teachers the supports they require to learn and teach effectively. A great public school provides guidance and supports for instruction, guidance and supports for learning, educator voice in accountability, a positive classroom ecology, and a positive school ecology. Indicators of these salient conditions include:

Guidance and Supports for Instruction

- ▶ State provides resources for planning, instructional support, and collaboration.³
- ▶ 100 percent of educators surveyed indicated satisfaction with the time dedicated to planning.

Guidance and Supports for Learning

- ▶ State allocates funding towards comprehensive school guidance systems with standards and benchmarks that address the academic needs of all students.
- ▶ 100 percent of students surveyed indicated they feel supported in their school.

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Educator Voice in Accountability

- ▶ State requires that all planning and decision-making bodies related to the educator profession include active preK-12 educators.
- ▶ 100 percent of educators surveyed indicated satisfaction with the number of opportunities to participate in district policy setting.

Positive Classroom Ecology

- ▶ State developed a comprehensive cultural competency policy to increase educators' cultural and linguistic competence through preservice education, licensure, and ongoing professional learning
- ▶ 100 percent of licensed teachers have received preservice education in culturally relevant pedagogy

Positive School Ecology

- ▶ State developed a policy that requires annual reporting by school on school climate and student engagement.
- ▶ 100 percent of students surveyed indicated they feel safe at their school

Conclusion

NEA believes that every state can implement these policies regarding conditions of teaching and learning and collaborate with school districts, school leaders, educators, and the community to provide the quality instructional supports and services educators and students require.

For more information please visit
nea.org/gpsindicators

Notes

1. U.S Department of Agriculture, (2008). Household food security in the united states, 2007. Retrieved from Economic Research Service website: www.ers.usda.gov/media/189567/err66_reportsummary.pdf
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U.S. Department of Agriculture, (2013). National school lunch program: Participation and lunches served. Retrieved from Web site: www.fns.usda.gov/pd/slsummari.htm
2. Cammarota, J., & Romero, A. (2006). A critically compassionate intellectualism for Latina/o students: Raising voices above the silencing in our schools. *Multicultural Education*, 14, 2, 16-23.
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(n.d.). Retrieved from www.californiahealthykids.org/articles/NPA_3.pdf
3. Instructional support and collaboration may include professional learning communities, professional learning teams, lesson study, cohort learning, mentoring, and induction/residency.