

Discussion on the NCTQ Report:

On compensation:

"I do not see widespread support for merit pay until there is buy-in on an evaluation system -- both on what it covers and how it is administered." – PTSA member

"A differential and/or merit-based compensation system for teachers [should be instituted]." – SPS official

Comment on the "continually changing requirements for certification and continuation": "The constantly shifting ground under teachers' feet vis-à-vis certification and credential renewal requirements and salary increases creates the impression that no one in charge (Legislature, OSPI) really has any firm handle on what's important to student learning. The financial burden for increased requirements falls on individual teachers, because that gives the appearance of action on the part of politicians and bureaucrats, while avoiding financial commitment.

"As the latest example, the recent emphasis on National Board Certification is downright mysterious. Show me the definitive research that says National Board Certification produces significantly different student outcomes. I'm a NBCT, so I should know a little bit about it." – Teacher

Comment on page 21 of the NCTQ report, "The district does pay teachers at low-performing schools that have been targeted for improvement a small bonus": "The amount of time commitment for a 'bonus' and the 'privilege' of working at a high needs school is very taxing. Reading that SPS calls three weeks plus an unknown number of evenings and Saturdays required attendance a 'bonus' is unfair and misrepresentative to say the least." – Teacher

On transfer and layoffs:

Comment on the NCTQ recommendation to "base teacher layoffs on a combination of factors": "It would be nice to know what the proposed factors are rather than seniority alone." – SPS official

"Secondly [to evaluation, a top priority should be] making sure that teaching effectiveness, building leadership and professional evaluations in addition to seniority be taken into account during layoff and transfer decisions. That recommendation is pretty straightforward." – Teacher

On hiring:

"Recent experience and anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a concerted effort to pass over experienced Seattle teachers in favor of bringing in personnel from outside the district, with "fresh" and "better" perspectives." –Teacher

On length of work day:

"I think there would be tremendous support for several suggestions in the 'work day' category. Making sure teachers have the time and support to do their jobs, and facilitating collaboration among staff/parents/students are important to many PTA members. I do not rank these highest because frankly I don't think they address the most serious problems. But they are areas we can work on: provide elementary teachers with more planning time (district; contract negotiated); designate weekly meetings for team/grade level collaborative planning (district); [and] meet the state's legal requirement of 180 instructional days (district)." – PTSA member

Comment on "the disconnect between contract time and actual working time": "Every teacher I've talked to about this report found this section completely ludicrous. The teachers in my department work a minimum of 50 hours a week at school, and take lots of work home. The day we cut our work short to actual contract hours would represent a significant labor action: a massive cut in the services we provide to students before and after school, lunchtime, weekends, etc.

– Teacher

On sick leave:

“A lot of us teachers have had to use sick days to support field trips and out of school student activities. Last year, I realized I had NO sick leave accumulated as a result of my donating it all to support the student activities I’ve sponsored over the years.” – Teacher

“Please inform me of how taking sick leave on Mondays and Fridays affects student achievement and teacher success.” – Teacher

On developing effective teachers and exiting ineffective teachers:

“[This] is the key reform to focus on first, but it is likely to be strongly connected to compensation, so I’d rank that as the second [priority] (and Seattle will have some opportunities given the changes the state is making).” – SPS Funder

On evaluation:

“It’s of paramount importance that measures of teaching effectiveness must be included in the evaluation process. Teaching effectiveness can be shown through multiple measures, but one of those must be evidence of student academic growth. The NCTQ report makes several recommendations under that heading all of which should really be part of one package of recommendations. Evaluate based on effectiveness, have a multiple ratings system, include frequent observations, use an outside team of evaluators and hold principals accountable. I would also add to that training for evaluators.

“One of the challenges in this recommendation is the current implementation of the Measures of Academic progress testing that SPS is currently doing. This test could conceivably be used to measure teaching effectiveness; however, my understanding is that the Superintendent has expressly stated that it won’t be (I suspect in order to get buy in to use the test), so the recommendations should address this.”

– Community based organization member

“Principals [should be held] responsible for evaluations (with loads of training in order to assure they can assume the role of instructional leaders). This will require central office support (they have too many tasks on their plates currently - what will fall off) and backing (when they negatively evaluate a teacher, will central office support them or relocate the teacher).” – SPS official

Other comments:

“I think it could be useful to think about where the recommendations of this report and some of SEA’s goals may intersect because we could likely make the most progress in addressing any aligned strategies.”

– Community based organization member

“When research provides insights that happen to coincide with administrative directives, it’s cited. When research directly refutes administrative initiatives, it’s often ignored or deemed unimportant. Case in point: This year, our school started 15 minutes earlier than in prior years, supposedly for transportation logistics. There’s quite a bit of research that suggests that teenagers learn and perform better when school starts later in the day.” – Teacher

“District initiatives over the last decade are largely constructed around whatever outside funding source is willing to put up significant grant money. As soon as the funding dries up, the initiatives are suddenly invisible, and we move on to something else. Gates Foundation Transformation grants, and Department of Education Small Learning Communities grants are the two most salient examples of this tendency. Successful school districts identify their priorities themselves, and build funding support for those initiatives, rather than chasing money.” – Teacher