



IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO BUILD EDUCATION

Public Engagement Initiative

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Winter 2006

The San Francisco Education Fund believes all children in the public school system should have the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. For more than 25 years, the Ed Fund has worked to promote quality public education and to support student achievement and teacher professional development. The Ed Fund recently committed itself to strengthening San Francisco schools in a new way by increasing community engagement in public education.

Research shows that in improving a student's academic achievement, the quality of teaching may matter more than any other factor. However, recruiting and retaining quality teachers remains an ongoing challenge facing San Francisco public schools, especially in its lower-performing schools.

It will take a community to address this challenge. In 2004, the Ed Fund launched "It Takes a Community," a Public Engagement Initiative to reach out to students, educators, parents, policymakers, and the community at large to work toward solutions to support teachers and promote the quality of teaching and learning in our public schools.

To better understand the challenge of attracting and keeping teachers in our classrooms, the Public Engagement Initiative collected data on the San Francisco Unified School District's teaching workforce, including information about recruitment and retention trends. We held focus groups, conducted surveys, and led small community conversations with key stakeholders to formulate a working definition of "quality teaching" in San Francisco. We began to gather ideas for how to keep teachers in our public schools, and we researched policies and programs of school districts around the country to identify best practices that could be applied locally.

The Public Engagement Initiative will release a series of reports on how the community can recruit and retain quality public school teachers in San Francisco. In this first report, we discuss two guiding questions that serve as a framework:

- + What does quality teaching really mean in San Francisco?
- + How can we support quality teaching and learning in our schools?

The answers to these questions are crucial as we work together to attract and keep quality public school teachers.



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**The mission of the San Francisco Education Fund's Public Engagement Initiative** is to engage the community in effecting changes in policy to ensure that all students in San Francisco public schools have quality teachers and supportive learning environments.

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“Quality teaching is engaging all of the kids at their own levels and using different strategies for different students, including strategies to reach English language learners and students with special needs.”

- San Francisco parent

## Defining Quality Teaching in San Francisco

Across the nation, parents, educators, community leaders, and policymakers are increasingly turning their attention to teacher quality and its impact on student achievement. Parents and educators have long known that having a quality teacher in the classroom is a crucial component to improving children’s learning. Research shows that a quality teacher is one of the most powerful and consistent predictors of student achievement.<sup>1</sup> Nationwide, the strongest positive predictor of student achievement is the percentage of teachers with full certification and a major in the subjects they teach.<sup>2</sup> Researchers in New York found that differences in teacher qualifications accounted for more than 90% of the variation in student achievement in reading and math,<sup>3</sup> and researchers in Texas found that teacher expertise accounted for 40% of the variation in student achievement in reading and math.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past year, the Ed Fund’s Public Engagement Initiative talked with key stakeholders in San Francisco, including students, educators, parents, and policymakers, to determine how our community defines quality teaching for our public schools. Using focus groups, surveys, and small community conversations, we asked participants to imagine great teachers and then consider the characteristics that make those teachers great. What we found was that quality teaching in San Francisco can be viewed as an equation<sup>5</sup> that combines teacher characteristics with the teaching and learning environment.

**Quality Teaching =**

**Teacher Characteristics + Teaching and Learning Environment**



**Teacher characteristics** include the knowledge, skills, and temperament a teacher brings to the classroom, such as a teaching credential, a college degree in the subject they teach, prior classroom experience, and the ability to communicate effectively with students, parents, and colleagues.

The **teaching and learning environment** includes factors such as the time made available for lesson planning and collaboration with peers, leadership by the school’s principal and administration, class size, parent involvement, community support, and the availability of critical resources.

National experts tend to define quality teaching in terms of teacher characteristics. For example, according to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards,<sup>6</sup> accomplished teachers:

- + Know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students;
- + Are committed to students and their learning;
- + Are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning;
- + Think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and
- + Are members of learning communities.

Indeed, these characteristics are essential elements of quality teaching. But as we talked further with San Francisco students, educators, and parents, it became clear that the environment in which teachers work and students learn is a major factor impacting the quality of teaching. School leadership, resources, teacher support, professional development, and community perception of teachers have a real and tremendous impact on teachers' ability to do their job well. Here's some of what the San Francisco community had to say about quality teaching:

“Quality teaching also means having people and material resources in and outside the classroom so teachers can meet students' needs.”

“To be the best, you need to have administrators and teachers cooperating to support our kids.”

“We need to disarm the perception that our children's teachers are not competent, not professionals, and not accountable.”

“Teachers need access to quality and sustainable professional development opportunities, which are relevant, useful to teachers, and conducted by teachers.”

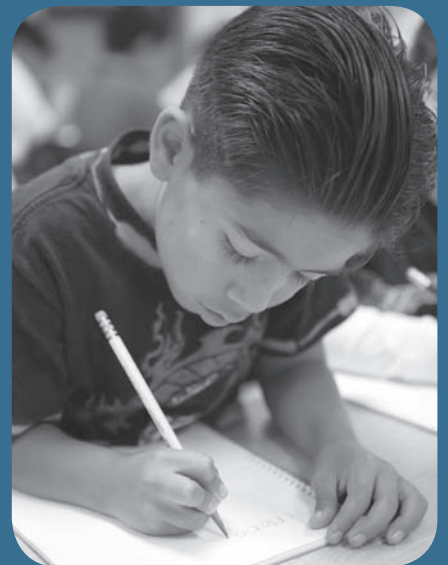
“Teachers need recognition from parents, students, and society in general for what they do.”

“Quality teaching means having time for collaboration.”

“You have to provide mentoring and teacher training. This should be constant, steady, caring, and relevant.”

**“Quality teaching is when everyone is participating and there's lots of interaction.”**

- San Francisco student



## Working Together to Support Quality Teaching and Learning in San Francisco



The Public Engagement Initiative determined that the broader community could play a key role in helping to recruit and retain quality teachers by working to improve the teaching and learning environment. In so doing, the San Francisco Unified School District would not only keep the quality teachers it already has, but also would help good teachers become even better and attract more teachers to the district.

In the coming year, the Public Engagement Initiative will publish a series of reports on issues impacting the recruitment and retention of quality teachers. We will distill and further develop the most viable ideas we heard about how to improve the teaching and learning environment. We will continue to work with students, educators, parents, community leaders, and other stakeholders to shape policy recommendations on how to recruit and retain teachers. In future years, we will work to implement these policy recommendations and continue to apply best practices to improve teaching and learning in San Francisco.

It takes a community to build education. Together, we can give all San Francisco public school students the quality teaching and supportive environment they deserve.

### How You Can Get Involved

Restoring public responsibility and involvement is critical to the future of public education in the country, in California, and in our City. Please join us in our efforts to improve the teaching and learning environment in San Francisco public schools. Visit our website at [www.sfedfund.org](http://www.sfedfund.org) to:

- + **Learn more** about the Public Engagement Initiative;
- + **Fill out our online survey** on quality teaching and learning;
- + **Share your story** about a teacher who made a difference for you or your child (you can also write your story on page 6 and mail it to us);
- + **Sign up** to receive the Ed Fund's newsletter; and
- + **Donate** to the Ed Fund to support our work with teachers and students.

**"To be the best teacher, you have to have passion for knowledge, for the subject, and for the kids."**

- San Francisco teacher

## Share Your Story

We've all had at least one teacher we remember because he or she inspired us, made learning fun, or expressed a genuine interest in our lives. Take a moment to think about your own or your child's favorite teachers. What makes them great? How have they had an impact on your or your child's life?

Write a brief story including the teacher's name and school. Your story can focus on:

- + A particular experience you had with that teacher;
- + Something the teacher said or did that was meaningful to you;
- + His or her teaching style; or
- + A simple description of the characteristics that make this teacher your favorite.

Your story can be as short as a couple sentences or as long as a few pages. You can write separate stories about as many teachers as you would like.

The Public Engagement Initiative will post selected stories on our website throughout the year as part of our effort to support teachers and promote the quality of teaching and learning in our public schools. We may also incorporate selected stories into op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, letters to policymakers, and Ed Fund publications. By submitting a story, you are granting the Ed Fund permission to use your story in its publications. The Ed Fund will only include teachers' first names and authors' first names and affiliation (e.g., parent, student, community member) when we publish a submitted story.

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## Story Submissions

YOUR NAME

TEACHER NAME

SCHOOL

GRADE TAUGHT

STORY



**"Great teachers are lifelong learners themselves, are always interested in new ideas, and collaborate with other teachers."**

- San Francisco teacher

### MAIL TO:

San Francisco Education Fund  
47 Kearny Street, Suite 200  
San Francisco, CA 94108

### ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION:

Visit [www.sfedfund.org](http://www.sfedfund.org) to submit your story electronically.

### QUESTIONS?

Call 415.912.2929 or email [getinvolved@sfedfund.org](mailto:getinvolved@sfedfund.org).



**“Great teachers have the ability to assess their students and then raise the bar to keep expectations high.”**

- San Francisco teacher

#### Endnotes

1. Darling-Hammond, Linda. “Solving the Dilemmas of Teacher Supply, Demand, and Standards: How We Can Assure a Competent, Caring and Qualified Teacher for Every Child.” National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future. 2000: 15. See also, Haycock, Kati. “Good Teaching Matters...A Lot.” The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. 1998: 4.
2. Darling-Hammond, Linda. “Solving the Dilemmas of Teacher Supply, Demand, and Standards: How We Can Assure a Competent, Caring and Qualified Teacher for Every Child.” National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future. 2000: 15.
3. Armour-Thomas, E., Clay, C., Bruno, D., & Allen, B. “An Outlier Study of Elementary and Middle Schools in New York City: Final Report.” New York City Board of Education. 1989. Cited in Darling-Hammond, Linda. “Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching.” National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future. 1997: 8.
4. Ferguson, Ronald. “Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters.” Harvard Journal of Legislation, 28(1), 1991: 465-498. Cited in: Cited in Darling-Hammond, Linda. “Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching.” National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future. 1997: 8.
5. This definition is adapted from the definition of teacher quality developed by the Public Education Network, a national association of local education funds and individuals working to advance public school reform in low-income communities across the country. The San Francisco Education Fund is a member of and receives funding from the Public Education Network.
6. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was established in 1987 to advance the quality of teaching and learning in the United States. National Board Certification, developed by teachers, with teachers, and for teachers, is a symbol of professional teaching excellence.

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47 Kearny Street, Suite 200 San Francisco, CA 94108

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