



Who Will Teach New Hampshire's Children?

AFT-NH's 4 R's Agenda to Recruit, Retain, Reward and Respect School Professionals

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public education's future will shape New Hampshire's future

- New Hampshire's economic future is directly tied to its educational future. Creating high-skill, high-wage jobs in our state will depend largely on the investments our state makes in public education.
- Strengthening public education will require state officials to focus more attention on the men and women who make learning possible — teachers, counselors, librarians, educational assistants, speech and language pathologists, nurses, social workers, occupational and physical therapists, psychologists and the entire family of public school employees.
- The highly competitive economy and the No Child Left Behind Act place added importance on teacher quality. For this reason, our state cannot rely on shortcuts as we recruit the next generation of teachers and other school staff.

New Hampshire faces a potential crisis in the area of recruitment and retention.

- The pool of potential teachers is shrinking even as the baby-boom generation of teachers rapidly retires. Retention problems loom, as 27 percent of new teachers in the state leave the profession within the first five years of teaching. As of 2003, 40 percent of teachers in the schools were approaching retirement. On the recruitment side, there is intense competition among states.
- Efforts to train and support teachers in New Hampshire are inadequate, and this shortcoming hinders our ability to convince many teachers to stay.

Rewards are a major factor that determines a state's ability to recruit and retain teachers and para-professionals.

- Starting teacher salaries in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island far exceed those in New Hampshire. Even Mississippi — a state with much higher poverty — has starting salaries that surpass those in the Granite State.

About AFT-NH

The American Federation of Teachers-NH is the second largest AFL-CIO union in New Hampshire, with more than 3,300 members across the state. Its K-12 Division represents teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses, guidance counselors, food service workers, custodians, school secretaries and other school employees. AFT-NH also represents faculty in higher education and public employees.

Laura Hainey, president
Charlie Reynolds, vice president
Lori Labranche, treasurer



- When average teacher salaries were compared to private-sector earnings, New Hampshire ranked 47th in 2003-2004, below every state that borders us. This hinders our state's ability to attract young people who have a broad range of private-sector options.
- Over an 11-year period, New Hampshire was one of only eight states that saw average teacher salaries, indexed to inflation, fall by more than 5 percent.
- Paraprofessionals (also known as teacher assistants or aides) are poorly paid, and nearly all of them fail to earn a "living wage." Low pay leaves many of these classroom employees and other support staff unable to pay the out-of-pocket costs for health insurance. (See "The 33-cent paycheck" on page 10.)
- State-initiated improvements in teacher pay can make a real difference in recruitment and retention.
- Health care and retirement benefits for public school employees are important rewards. Maintaining and improving these benefits is a way to demonstrate the value we place on education and the individuals who make it possible.

Respect is also a major factor that determines a state's ability to recruit and retain teachers and other school employees.

- Teachers and other school employees face a "respect deficit." Even though they work on education's frontlines, their input is not sought and valued as fully as it should be.
- Research proves the link between working conditions in a school and a district's ability to retain teachers. For teachers and other staff, a school's class sizes, its discipline policies and other conditions can be a source of pride or frustration.
- When school officials truly reach out to and collaborate with teachers and other staff, it's a win-win. A teacher evaluation process in Hillsboro-Deering that was shaped by a district-union joint committee offers a positive example.
- School districts that eliminate or cap the number of secretaries, nurses and other paraprofessionals are being penny-wise and pound-foolish. These school employees make important contributions and are often the first point of contact for students and parents.
- The best way to respect teachers is to treat them professionally and fairly. This includes providing effective mentoring programs for new teachers and respecting the due process rights of teachers.

AFT-NH has a 4 R's agenda — recruit, retain, reward and respect — to successfully confront the challenges we face. (See page 14.)



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AFT-NH's 4 R's Agenda to Recruit, Retain, Reward and Respect School Professionals

"Improving public education is the best long-term strategy for strengthening our economy."

Gov. John Lynch

"Quality education is dependent on quality teachers."

N.H. Department of Education

I. Education: New Hampshire's Future Is Riding on It

In the spring of 2005 New Hampshire economic analysts reported, "At this point, the state economy is growing, although not robustly Economically, we are a small state tossing on waves of national and global economic storms."¹ Among all 50 states, New Hampshire has one of the highest concentrations of high-tech jobs.² Yet, during the recent economic slowdown, our state lost these jobs at a faster rate than other states.³

Whether New Hampshire is able to create more of these and other high-skill, high-wage jobs in the future will depend on the decisions our state's leaders make in the coming days and months. Ample evidence and experience demonstrate that New Hampshire's economic future is directly tied to its educational future. As Gov. John Lynch declared in his inaugural address, "Improving public education is the best long-term strategy for strengthening our economy."⁴

In addition to its significant impact on economic prosperity, public education also encourages civic participation and helps to level the playing field in our democratic society. These are among the many reasons that New Englanders cherished education long before it became the formal responsibility of their state and local governments. Over 200 years ago, Ira Allen, brother of Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen, wrote that education was the "the very foundation and cement of a State."⁵ And Horace Mann, the abolitionist and pioneer of the common school system, called education "the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery."⁶

If New Hampshire's leaders truly believe, as we do, that education is an engine of prosperity, opportunity and democratic values, then they have important work to do. Strengthening public education will require state officials to focus more attention on the men and women who make learning possible—teachers and other school employees. The New Hampshire Department of Education put it simply: "Quality education is dependent on quality teachers."⁷



The 4 R's Agenda

Unfortunately, our state is facing a daunting challenge as it attempts to recruit and retain teachers for its public schools. Given that a chief goal of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is to ensure a “highly qualified teacher” in every classroom by the end of the 2005-2006 school year,⁸ New Hampshire and other states cannot choose to attract new teachers simply by weakening certification requirements and teacher preparation. Even in the absence of the “highly qualified teacher” standard, such a move would shortchange our children’s future and diminish the teaching profession.

High standards are important not only for classroom teachers, but also for other members of the education team. The passage of NCLB has focused more attention on establishing clear standards for the employment and training of paraprofessionals, who are also known as teacher assistants. These classroom assistants are facing the challenge of reaching higher standards both for themselves and for their students, and they are eager to receive training and professional development to help them meet these goals.

The AFT-NH and our national affiliate—the American Federation of Teachers—have been some of the strongest advocates for ensuring that classroom paraprofessionals have access to ongoing training to strengthen their skills. We encourage school districts to assist their paraprofessionals as they take up the challenge of achieving certification.

The recruitment-and-retention challenge is not new to New Hampshire. Five years ago, the state Board of Education convened a special meeting to focus on this challenge, and co-sponsors of the gathering said it reflected “a desire to address the issue before it became more severe.”⁹

While this meeting attempted to send a wake-up call to New Hampshire leaders, it had only a limited impact. The recruitment-and-retention challenge remains severe, and present policies and trends do not bode well for New Hampshire. In fact, since the late 1990’s, recruitment and retention strategies have been knocked to the backburner, overshadowed by the ongoing legal fight over a new school funding system.

Teacher recruitment and retention will become more difficult unless our state takes much more aggressive and comprehensive steps to improve the environment in which teachers work. For these reasons, AFT-NH has developed its *4 R's Agenda: Recruit, Retain, Reward and Respect*.

This year, AFT-NH is launching a legislative and public outreach campaign to advance this *4 R's Agenda*. As public school employees, our experience on the frontlines of education gives us unique insights to help our state meet the same challenges that confront education planners and legislators across the nation. Our officers, our COPE (Committee on Political Education) and our members are ready and able to work as partners with parents, administrators, elected leaders, and other stakeholders to strengthen public schools.

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Forty percent of New Hampshire's public school teachers plan to leave the profession within the next five years.

New Hampshire is losing newly certified educators to other states and other professions.

II. Troubling Trends for the Granite State

Over the next decade, as the baby-boom generation of teachers rapidly retires, our nation's schools will face a major burden trying to recruit millions of new teachers to fill America's classrooms. This crisis touches close to home: According to a 2003 study by New Hampshire's Department of Education, 40 percent of the state's educators are approaching retirement. Another statistic is just as troubling: 27 percent of New Hampshire's new teachers leave the field within their first five years of teaching. Said then-Commissioner of Education Nicholas Donohue, "Our state is losing newly certified educators to other states and other professions."¹⁰

Like other states, New Hampshire will feel added pressure to retain current teachers while recruiting the next generation of teachers. Our state faces a tough challenge for several reasons:

The pool of would-be teachers is shrinking. Overall, New Hampshire's population is growing. Unfortunately, census data reveals that our state has experienced a net loss of young, single, college-educated people—the 25-to-39 age group that accounts for the bulk of new teachers. These young people have been leaving New Hampshire at a much higher rate than they have left either Maine or Massachusetts.¹¹ This exodus also deprives the state economy of tax revenues from highly productive workers who can expect to earn—and spend in taxable consumption—hundreds of thousands of dollars during their careers.¹²

Retaining teachers is getting tougher. Nationally, one out of three teachers is below the age of 40, and attitudes among this group have shifted away from viewing teaching as a career. According to Michelle Rhee, president of The New Teacher Project, "There is a growing realization that [their] mind-set is shifting, that they don't consider teaching to be a lifelong profession."¹³ Poor rates of teacher retention cost public schools both time and money—school districts spend more than \$2.6 billion each year replacing teachers who have left the profession.¹⁴ The financial loss is notable; even more regrettable is the squandering of experience in a profession which relies, for excellence, on a teacher's classroom-tested knowledge of how to reach every kind of learner.

There is intense recruiting competition from other states. New Hampshire is facing considerable competition for teachers from neighboring states. Connecticut, with the highest salaries in the nation, attracts more than one-third of its new teachers from out of state.¹⁵ Massachusetts is also a formidable contender; it actively recruits teachers from other states, using scholarships to court young people. Three years ago Massachusetts officials projected that they must fill more than 35,000 teaching vacancies over the coming decade. There are already signs of success: during this three-year period, the number of out-of-state teachers who earned licenses to teach in Massachusetts grew by 46 percent.¹⁶

Efforts to train and support teachers in New Hampshire are inadequate. When *Education Week's* annual "Quality Counts 2005" report graded states' efforts to strengthen teacher skills, New Hampshire received a D+ and ranked fifth out of the six New England states. Researchers who issued the report card cited New Hampshire's "scant efforts related to the professional support and training of teachers." "Quality Counts" noted that our state "also fails to require and finance mentoring for novices or set aside time for professional development." In 2006, this grade crept up to an unimpressive C-.¹⁷

So what explains the increasing difficulty New Hampshire faces as it attempts to recruit and retain teachers, librarians, counselors and other school professionals? There are many reasons, and nearly all of them can be summed up by one of these two words: *rewards* and *respect*.

III. Rewards: Woefully Inadequate

Recruitment and retention efforts are influenced by a range of factors. Rewards are a critical area that helps to drive people's decisions to enter teaching and, once there, whether to make it their career.

Although teacher salaries in New Hampshire are comparable to those in neighboring Vermont and Maine, higher pay in Massachusetts may be luring New Hampshire educators away. The average teacher's salary in Massachusetts is over \$10,000 more than the average salary in our state. Even after average salaries are adjusted for differences in the cost of living, Massachusetts teachers are still thousands of dollars ahead (\$44,498) of their peers in New Hampshire (\$40,833).¹⁸

In fact, nearby states are magnets to the savvy new teacher who launches a career by "comparative shopping" for starting salaries. A New Hampshire graduate who stayed within the state would start with an average salary of \$27,367. By crossing the state line to Massachusetts (for some, a mere 15-minute commute), that same teacher would start at \$34,041. Just as enticing are starting salaries in Connecticut (\$34,462) and Rhode Island (\$32,906).¹⁹



"Yes, teacher pay must be increased to a competitive level for new and veteran teachers. In addition, state and local school districts must demonstrate a real commitment to mentoring and induction programs if we want to retain new teachers."

**Laura Hainey
President, AFT-NH**

Teaching as Migrant Labor

More than 2,100 teachers leave their homes in New Hampshire every day to drive across the state line to schools – and paychecks – in Massachusetts. Justin Decker, an 8th grade mathematics teacher who works at a middle school in Lowell, Massachusetts, is one of them. Decker has a Masters degree and nine years of teaching experience.

"As a teacher I've moved around the country, and I've learned that every state treats its teachers differently," Decker explains. "I grew up in Manchester, New Hampshire and returned there to raise my own family. Unfortunately I don't teach there. I commute 35 minutes every day to teach in Lowell where my paycheck is almost 30 percent higher than what it would be in Manchester."

"Of course, I'd rather teach in the community where I live," Decker adds, "but financially it's not worth it. Even after I pay the Massachusetts income tax, plus gasoline and wear on the car, my



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After assessing opportunities nationwide, a starting teacher would find that she could do better in Mississippi (\$28,106) and Nevada (\$27,942) than in her home state of New Hampshire (\$27,367). If she were looking for a city comparably sized to Manchester where the starting salary is \$28,542, she would find much higher salaries in Joliet, Ill. (\$32,550) and McAllen, Tex. (\$34,000).²⁰

These are only starting salaries. After many years of teaching, the disparity grows ever larger and continues on through retirement when monthly pension benefits are determined by a school employee's final salary average.

These starting salary gaps may seem small to others, but they can be a deal-breaker for a young adult who is saddled with college loan debt and other expenses. A 2002 national study revealed, "New teachers who are single often report that they manage to live on their salaries, but anticipate that in the future such pay will not allow them to support families."²¹

School Support Staff: Life on the Low Rung

The question of salaries takes on even more gravity when considering the poverty wages earned by school support staff. These employees—classroom paraprofessionals, bus drivers, secretaries, food service workers and more—seem invisible to school outsiders while providing the services and "the glue" that keep a school functioning—all for a paycheck below the living wage.²²

In Nashua, for example, a paraprofessional at the top of the pay scale makes \$395 a week, or \$15,010 for a 38-week year. Most school support staff possess an extra skill: they are adept at cobbling together other jobs for weekends and summers so that they can continue to work with children during the school year. But even the most clever multi-job worker will have to struggle to reach \$35,724, the living wage for a basic family budget (one parent and one child) in Nashua.²³

Such low wages are a disincentive for paraprofessionals who, ironically, are now required under the federal No Child Left Behind law to meet higher qualifications, including a two-year college associate's degree or other

Lowell paycheck brings in thousands more. I can do a lot for my family with that money. Over the years, it really adds up."

Decker has experienced the tug of salary differences in two far-flung regions. He taught in New Mexico from 1998 to 2001. The year after he left, New Mexico voters elected a new governor, Bill Richardson, who had campaigned on the promise to put more money into the classroom. Richardson kept his promise by signing a law that established minimum salaries based on licensure levels and years of experience. He also worked to pass a successful constitutional amendment that secures funding for the new system. "If I'd stayed," Decker notes, "I'd be making almost twice what I earned a few years ago."

"New Hampshire is behind," Decker concludes, "and it's pretty sad."



Justin Decker lives in Manchester, NH and teaches 8th grade math in Lowell, Mass.

methods. While paraprofessionals work to meet these requirements by June 2006, some school districts have done little as the deadline approaches to help their support staffs obtain “highly qualified” status.

These low-wage employees are a tempting target to school boards that try to exploit the system. A current management practice works like this: When full-time paraprofessionals retire from their 35-hour per week position, administrators replace them with part-time paras whose work day is 27.5 hours long. These new employees will either miss the beginning or the end of the school day—hours when teachers and children need them most. They will not have a paid lunch period. In many districts they will be ineligible for health care; in those few districts where health care is offered, they will find the premiums (up to 75 percent of the paycheck) and other out-of-pocket costs unaffordable. (See “The 33-cent paycheck” on page 10.)

The practice of trimming para hours leads to high turnover which is destabilizing in institutions that serve children. It is particularly destructive for paras who work one-on-one with a single student all day. High turnover, for example, undermines the ability of a school to deliver a customized IEP, or Individualized Education Program, to comply with the requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

“I wish someone would tell us, what the heck is a ‘three-quarter para?’” asks Kelly D’Errico, president of the Hillsboro-Deering Support Staff, AFT. “Our part-time paras often come in early to make sure our kids are safe on the playground. Then they stay late to put them safely on the bus, all for no extra pay.”

The Allure of Industry

Comparing teacher salaries to private-sector earnings is most revealing. After all, many young people are weighing a career in teaching against a wide range of jobs in the private sector. Here again, New Hampshire fares poorly. When average teacher salaries were compared to annual earnings in the private sector, New Hampshire fell from 44th in 2001-2002 to 47th in 2003-2004. By this comparison, our state ranks below Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont.²⁴

In some cases, the pay gap between teachers and private-sector jobs is huge. In one large Northeastern city, the salary gap in 1970 between a first-year lawyer who joined a law firm and a first-year teacher who entered a classroom was only about \$2,000. By 2003, counting salaries and bonuses, this pay gap had grown to about \$105,000.²⁵ Elected officials and other leaders in our state often say they want to encourage the best and brightest young people to enter teaching. But when these young people can earn tens of thousands of dollars more than teachers *each year* by holding a job in the private sector, is it any wonder why they choose not to enter the teaching profession?

A number of states have special programs that seek to attract professionals from non-education fields to the teaching professions. Charlie Reynolds, a



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***Charlie Reynolds
Vice President
AFT-NH***

The 4 R's Agenda

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special education teacher in Nashua, is the kind of professional whom other school districts and states would like to attract.

Reynolds began his professional life at Honeywell International, Inc. He left in 1988 for a career in teaching. Today, 17 years later, he is still not earning a salary as high as the one he received at Honeywell.

“I knew I’d be making less money in teaching, and I don’t regret the decision,” Reynolds says. “But many people are not in a position to make that kind of sacrifice.”

Even if they’ll accept a decrease in salary, he says, “The business world has modernized and changed its ways. Today’s professionals are team-oriented, and they may not tolerate the kind of working conditions and top-down management style that still exists in so many schools.”

Other data also reflects poorly on New Hampshire teacher salaries. Between the school years of 1991-92 and 2001-02, New Hampshire was one of only eight states that saw average teacher salaries, indexed to inflation, decline by more than 5 percent.²⁶ In other words, teacher pay did not even keep up with the cost of living. So despite the good-faith efforts of teacher unions and many local governments to lift the boats of school employees, these boats are just staying afloat.

Can state leaders do more? Absolutely. State-initiated improvements in teacher pay have made a real difference in recruitment and retention. Linda Darling-Hammond, a renowned professor of education at Stanford University, has pointed to Connecticut as an example:

In 1986, the state...[created] a minimum beginning teacher salary level and offer[ed] state funds to districts to reach that target. The funds to districts were offered only for qualified teachers and were allocated so that poorer districts received more than wealthier districts. These actions both raised and equalized salaries, sending a signal that Connecticut valued its teachers and promoted equity. At the same time, scholarships helped train teachers in high-need fields ...The state also launched an ambitious professional development program.

Within the first three years, Connecticut eliminated the teacher shortage in its cities. Improving the quality of its teaching force had another dramatic effect: By 1998, Connecticut’s student achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) rose to the top of the distribution in the United States in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. This achievement occurred while the state’s substantial minority population grew, while the numbers of new English-language learners increased, and while the state’s per-capita wealth declined.²⁷

Salaries are only one of the financial rewards that matter greatly to teachers and other education professionals. Health insurance is a critical benefit—indeed, most Americans believe access to health care should be a right.²⁸ But, unfortunately, the health insurance plans provided for New Hampshire public school employees are increasingly requiring teachers and other staff to

shoulder more of the costs. Sometimes as premiums and deductibles rise, the meager raises that teachers receive are nearly or completely wiped out by rising out-of-pocket health care costs, and the problem is getting worse.

Many younger teachers and support employees earn relatively small salaries and are saddled with college loan debt, undermining their ability to pay insurance premiums.

Many school support staff are initially attracted by health benefits that quickly prove unaffordable. In Nashua, for example, a full-time teacher's aide starting out at \$10.38 an hour for a 30-hour week makes \$1246 a month before taxes; the Blue Cross Blue Shield HMO fee for her family would cost \$984. After paying for health insurance, a teacher aide cannot begin to pay mortgage or rent, food, gasoline, car payment and more on \$262, or \$66 a week, before taxes.

Retirement benefits are another important financial reward. Traditionally, states have felt an obligation to provide retirement benefits to teachers and others who have devoted their lives to public service. In fact, a good retirement is one of the reliable benefits that a state traditionally offers to retain its comparatively low-paid professional workforce. But in New Hampshire, that retirement security is at risk. In 2008, the law that directs the state to contribute to retiree's health care will expire.

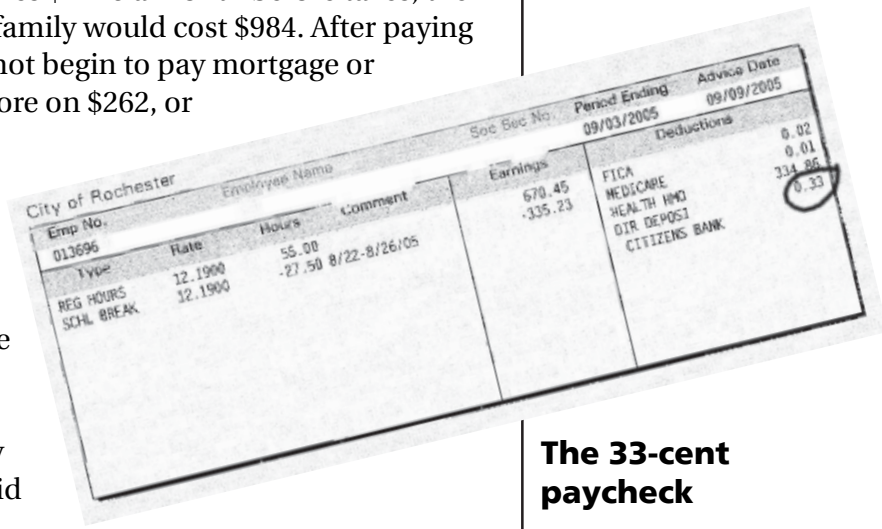
Allowing this retirement benefit to expire would send a dire message to current employees and potential recruits, while also betraying a decades-old trust with our retirees who will be set adrift to cover their own health insurance.

IV. The Respect Deficit

Respect is something that Aretha Franklin sang about, and it's a word that public officials occasionally use when they express gratitude for the efforts of teachers. But, when it comes to truly respecting teachers and other school employees, there's a big gap between rhetoric and reality.

In a national survey five years ago, hundreds of state-level winners of the prestigious Teacher-of-the-Year award were asked what could be done to encourage teachers to stay in the profession. Increasing respect for teachers was their most common answer.²⁹ In the survey, a geography teacher wrote, "My best students openly admit they don't want to be teachers because they see a lack of respect for teachers."³⁰

While teachers face a "respect deficit," their fellow employees—counselors, secretaries and office clerks, food service employees, and other staff—often feel invisible. Sadly, the important contributions they make are not on the public's radar screen, and too many superintendents overlook their efforts.



| City of Rochester | | Employee Name | Earnings | Deductions | Advice Date |
|-------------------|------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| Emp No. | 013696 | | 670.45 | | 09/09/2005 |
| Type | REG HOURS | Rate | -335.23 | FICA | 0.02 |
| | SCH. BREAK | Hours | | MEDICARE | 0.01 |
| | | 55.00 | | HEALTH HMO | 334.86 |
| | | -27.50 | 8/22-8/26/05 | DIR DEPOSIT | 0.33 |
| | | | | CITIZENS BANK | |

The 33-cent paycheck
After health insurance premiums were deducted from the pay of a part-time instructional aide in Rochester, her paycheck was \$.33.
In some cases school employees' health insurance premiums are so high that paraprofessionals actually owe money to their school districts.



Not Just About Dollars

Truly respecting those who work in New Hampshire's public schools will require action on many fronts. First and foremost, it means giving teachers a genuine voice in the decisions that affect their classrooms and their teaching. Researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that the major factor that teachers considered in deciding whether to leave their school or leave teaching altogether is "whether they could be effective with their students."³¹

In other words, working conditions in a school—swelling class sizes, the breakdown of school discipline, a lack of administrative and parent support, and other factors—matter greatly to teachers. In fact, a Massachusetts study concluded that "even increased salaries will not have that great an impact on retention if workplace conditions for teachers are not addressed."³²

Six years ago, the Education Commission of the States warned: "Few strategies to recruit and retain good teachers can overcome a dysfunctional school environment; teachers are unlikely to remain in a stressful job that lacks personal satisfaction."³³

Yet too many school districts in New Hampshire frustrate efforts by teachers to have a meaningful role in shaping school policies that relate to these working conditions. Almost any teacher can point to occasions, big or small, in which teacher input was disregarded. Unfortunately, the bureaucratic tendency to rule from above is driving away teachers who expect a more professional and collegial environment.

In at least one school district, the lack of respect made newspaper headlines. In December 2004, the *Exeter News-Letter* reported that the former communications director of the local school district "went public with his concerns about lack of communication and lack of respect for teachers at Exeter High School ... (saying) his findings were largely ignored by the administration."³⁴

A fair and effective evaluation process

Educators and administrators need not hold each other at arms-length. In the Hillsboro-Deering district, a labor-management committee has pioneered a breakthrough evaluation plan that also offers a model of communication—and respect. The new system of teacher evaluation, called the Professional Evaluation Plan (PEP), comes with built-in opportunities for training and professional development. In other words, it has something for everyone.

The plan lays out a three-tier evaluation plan based on expectations of teacher performance throughout a teacher's career. These expectations were determined by the district and the union, and are part of the contract. For new teachers, the plan includes a rich dose of mentoring along with at least 45 hours of training.

Too many New Hampshire districts frustrate efforts by teachers to have a meaningful role in shaping school policies that relate to their working conditions.

Mid-career teachers continue to receive professional development. In fact, PEP ties each teacher's ongoing professional development to the goals of his or her individual school. PEP also provides tools for administrators to address any emerging concerns about a mid-career teacher's performance.

"Through PEP, we now have a common language for evaluating teachers along with a fair process when there are problems, and real resources to solve those problems," says Laura Hainey, AFT-NH president. This means that school administrators, after the hard work and financial investment of recruiting and training teachers, will have the best tools to keep and strengthen that teaching staff.

To create PEP, AFT-NH won a \$47,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The labor-management committee that wrote the plan included a retired school superintendent, school administrators, an attorney, and representatives of the teacher and paraprofessional unions.

"The real winners," says Hainey, "are our students who are surrounded by truly well-trained educators in the classroom."

Other districts might also benefit from a cooperative labor-management approach to evaluations. State officials could encourage this by providing grants.

V. It Takes a Team of School Employees

Respecting teachers also means respecting the school employees who support teachers' efforts and make other important contributions to keep schools functioning in a healthy and efficient manner. Unfortunately, many New Hampshire school districts operate in a penny-wise, pound-foolish manner by reducing or not filling vacant positions for classroom paraprofessionals, librarians, school nurses, counselors, secretaries and office staff, custodians and other school employees.

Those missing employees are important to students. Classroom paraprofessionals provide extra attention to students who need it. In fact, in our new age of increased testing, these staff members are often the safety net for students who will not progress tomorrow if they did not comprehend a lesson today. The school secretary is often the "traffic cop" who monitors day-to-day school operations, and connects parents to children and their children's teachers during school hours. Clerical employees maintain financial reports and update student records in an environment in which even minor errors can dramatically affect a student's advancement. Bus drivers, health aides, food service workers—all assist with the safety and well-being of children.

Eliminating or artificially capping these and other employee positions punishes schools and the children they serve. Eventually, passing the buck in this manner undermines teachers' efforts by forcing them to take on additional paperwork and other chores—tasks that cut into the time a teacher

Many New Hampshire school districts operate in a penny-wise, pound-foolish manner by reducing or not filling vacant positions for non-teaching staff.



would normally use to work one-on-one with a struggling student, grade students' papers, or plan lessons.

In schools where students have no access to a nurse, for example, teachers and other personnel are often asked to administer medications to students, observe these students afterward, or assume other health care-related duties for which they are not trained. Ensuring that every school is staffed by a full-time nurse not only eases the burden on teachers and other staff, but research shows that students who attend schools with a nurse perform better academically.³⁵

Showing respect for teachers also means providing them with the books, instructional materials and other school supplies they need to perform their jobs effectively. Last summer, a survey by the National School Supplies and Equipment Association revealed that teachers are spending an average of \$458 of their own money each year to buy school supplies.³⁶ Although there is no known survey of recent out-of-pocket expenses incurred by New Hampshire teachers, anecdotal evidence suggests that school employees in our state are spending significant amounts of their own money on materials that their districts should be providing.

Demonstrating respect for teachers isn't simply a teacher issue; it is also a children's issue.

Calling All Mentors

Respecting teachers means providing effective professional development, mentoring and other forms of support. In many school districts, administrators work cooperatively with educational unions in designing professional development and mentoring programs that meet the needs of teachers and other staff. In other districts, this kind of cooperation is missing, and the result frequently is a sink-or-swim environment that leaves young educators feeling isolated and forgotten.

This helps to explain why so many teachers leave the profession after only a few years in the classroom. As the Alliance for Excellent Education observed a few years ago, "New teachers are being recruited in the hundreds and thousands by the many school districts that are facing rising enrollments, but few if any support systems are being put in place to allow their successful transition into the classroom."³⁷

The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers conducted lengthy interviews, two years apart, with the same group of young New England teachers. The Project's findings mirrored those of the Alliance. The Project noted that younger teachers need to be able to "rely on knowledgeable colleagues and professional communities for ideas and advice about how to teach," but the Project found that "there is no certainty that their schools will provide such support."³⁸

Fair Process for Teachers, Too

Giving teachers and other staff the respect they deserve means that they should be treated fairly and professionally. Unfortunately, at times the New Hampshire legislature has embraced positions that undermine the principles of fairness and professionalism.

Senate Bill 76, passed in 2003, is a case in point. The bill eliminates the right of a teacher who has not been renewed to appeal the case to a neutral and impartial arbitrator. The bill eliminated the ability to have an arbitration clause and “just cause” standard for non-renewed teachers in a collective bargaining agreement.

These arbitration provisions had helped to build fairness and due process into teacher hiring and renewal procedures. In order to negotiate these provisions into contract language, teachers often had to make significant concessions to local school boards.

In fact, SB 76 singles out — some would say it targets — teachers by stripping away arbitration rights which all other public employees either possess or can achieve through bargaining. In the wake of SB 76’s passage, a teacher can appeal to the State Board of Education but such an appeal is limited entirely to procedural grounds. The Board can only overturn a local school board’s decision if it is “clearly erroneous.” Thus, for all intents and purposes, teachers have no right to appeal.

Why does this matter? Public education, as any reader of a local newspaper can attest, is a volatile mix of community opinion, political agendas, colorful personalities and more. Teachers without appeal rights are vulnerable to personal or political retaliation if their views on curriculum or other school policies anger an administrator.

The very absence of arbitration sends a hostile message to teachers, signaling that they are somehow a suspect group which does not merit the American promise of due process.

When elected officials isolate and stigmatize teachers in these ways, is it any wonder why a Harvard Graduate School of Education report cites “subordinate status” as one of the concerns that weighs on the minds of prospective teachers?³⁹

Demonstrating respect for teachers isn’t simply a teacher issue; it is also a *children’s* issue. After all, if the powers-that-be genuinely want to do right by New Hampshire students, they must first do right by the men and women who help them learn.

VI. AFT-NH’s 4 R’s Agenda: Recruit & Retain Through Rewards & Respect

AFT-NH believes our state can recruit and retain a high-quality teaching force, but state officials must assume greater responsibility and assist local school districts as we confront this challenge. Good intentions alone will not recruit and retain the teachers and other professionals our schools will need over the coming years. Our intentions must be backed by additional resources—a genuine commitment to provide the rewards and respect needed to attract and retain quality teachers.

Throughout this year, AFT-NH will meet with legislators and the governor, school boards and administrators, civic leaders, parents and other stakeholders as we advance the following 4-R’s Agenda:

The very absence of arbitration sends a hostile message to teachers, signaling that they are somehow a suspect group which does not merit the American promise of due process.



NCLB is costing New Hampshire taxpayers \$10 for every \$1 in federal funds.

Unfunded mandates have never been popular with New Hampshire taxpayers, and this one is draining state and local funds.

Maintain high standards of new teacher preparation. State officials and local districts must resist approaches that water down the integrity of the teacher preparation and certification process. According to the founding director of the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, "students of teachers with little or no preparation for teaching learn less than students who have fully prepared teachers."⁴⁰ Although alternative certification programs can be an appropriate tool for recruiting new teachers, the quality of these programs can vary significantly. Several years ago, a study of teacher candidates who had completed an alternative certification program in New Hampshire found that principals rated these candidates' instructional skills much lower than those of teachers who went through a more traditional, university-based preparation program.⁴¹

Improve financial rewards for teachers and other education staff. The Connecticut example cited earlier in this report demonstrates that state-initiated efforts to raise salaries can make a real difference in recruitment and retention. New Hampshire should pursue similar policies, as well as helping to ease the squeeze that rising health care costs are placing on school employees' salaries.

Develop a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy for our state and offer an annual assessment from the state education commissioner on its progress. This strategy should be guided by our own experiences, as well as those of other states. This annual report by the Department of Education would track both successes and shortfalls in the state's recruitment and retention, and explain the approaches being used to attract teachers and other school employees. Department officials may need to improve their data collection in order to learn more about what works and what doesn't.

Join teachers and other organizations in urging Congress to fully fund the federal "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) Act. While much of NCLB meets with our approval, we are deeply concerned about the impact of certain provisions. But no matter where our elected officials stand on NCLB, they cannot argue with the financial burden it imposes. As a 2004 study revealed, NCLB is costing New Hampshire taxpayers \$10 for every \$1 in federal funds.⁴² Unfunded mandates have never been popular with New Hampshire taxpayers, and this one is draining state and local funds at a very critical time. Our elected officials in both parties must unite in calling on Congress and the president to support full, federal funding for NCLB.

Provide incentives for experienced teachers to seek the highest standards. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) grants certification to highly accomplished teachers—certification that has been called "the gold standard of teaching credentials."⁴³ Studies show that the students of NBPTS-certified teachers achieve at higher levels.⁴⁴ For experienced teachers, simply going through the NBPTS certification process helps to strengthen the quality of their teaching. New Hampshire does almost nothing to encourage teachers to pursue NBPTS certification. Thus

New Hampshire ranks dead last out of all 50 states in the number of NBPTS-certified teachers. Vermont and Maine each have roughly five times as many NBPTS-certified teachers as our state.⁴⁵ A number of states offer NBPTS-certified teachers subsidies, stipends, salary bonuses and opportunities for loan forgiveness. New Hampshire could do the same and more by thinking creatively.

Strengthen support and training for paraprofessionals. Educating young people requires a team of professionals, and everyone on this team makes a unique contribution. Research by the National School Boards Association and other organizations confirms that when classroom paraprofessionals have adequate preparation and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, they enhance students' chances for success. Unfortunately, some school districts have not provided appropriate training for paraprofessionals. Even worse, some administrators in Title I and other schools are misassigning paraprofessionals to clerical work or other tasks—undermining the needs of students.

With the active involvement of paraprofessionals, the state Department of Education should establish standards and offer guidance to local districts that clearly defines the appropriate roles and responsibilities, as well as the employment and training requirements, for classroom paraprofessionals. Such standards can help to maximize the use of paraprofessionals' skills and improve districts' ability to properly manage and evaluate these employees.

Close the “benefit gap” for paraprofessionals. Very few school districts in New Hampshire offer health insurance benefits that are truly affordable to paraprofessionals. Additionally, the state of New Hampshire should create a viable retirement plan for paraprofessionals. All school employees, including part-time workers, should be eligible for some kind of retirement plan.

VII. AFT-NH Stands Ready

Immediately and without budgetary upheaval, education stakeholders can address the need to strengthen our public schools. Legislators and administrators can focus on issues of respect, take advantage of existing programs like NBPTS certification, reach out to parents and involve communities in school improvement, even as they work to find extra funding and greater rewards for school employees. With so much at stake for our students, our school employees and our future, ready as a committed partner in this important enterprise.

Dear AFT-NH,
I decided to become a paraprofessional because I have a son with autism and know the hardships that come with trying to adapt and learn in a school environment.

Like me, most paraprofessionals work one-on-one with a student. Because most of our special students are not on grade level, we modify their assignments and make up work for them. I cringe when I look at my paycheck. Yes, I want to see that all children have an opportunity for the best education. I really love my job, and my experience has made me very good at it. But when I see the pay we receive for the work we have to do, I realize I have to look for another job.

Kathleen Stone

Endnotes

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