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**Report: Seattle Public Schools should change policies to more effectively attract and retain effective teachers**

*Parents, teachers, school leaders to discuss National Council on Teacher Quality report at Community Forum tonight*

Seattle, Wash. – Today the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) issued a report on the ability of the Seattle Public Schools to attract, develop, retain and evaluate teachers, concluding that many SPS and Washington State teacher policies hinder improved student achievement.

The report was undertaken at the request of the Alliance for Education, an independent nonprofit focused on increasing student achievement and supporting effective programs in Seattle public schools.

“The Alliance for Education is interested in creating a community conversation around policies that foster effective teaching,” noted George Griffin III, Alliance for Education Board Chair. “We hope people will take a close look at the current policies and NCTQ's recommendations to see what works and what doesn't. This will take time; it's a complex issue.”

The report includes the first in-depth look at the new Seattle Education Association/Seattle Public Schools contract, which sets many of the policies that govern teachers' work lives.

To reach its conclusions, NCTQ spent four months analyzing the rules and regulations governing Seattle teachers, including the most recent teacher contracts. It also talked with local stakeholders, examined personnel data and trends, and compared what it found with other public school districts both in the Puget Sound area and in the nation. “Working to staff every classroom with an effective teacher is the most important function of any school district,” said Kate Walsh, NCTQ President. “That means putting in place smart policies that work relentlessly towards that goal.”

The 81-page report only focuses on the four areas governing the profession that can be transformed by better local and state policies, including: 1) compensation; 2) transfer and assignment; 3) the teacher work day and year, and 4) developing effective teachers and exiting ineffective teachers.

Among the primary findings:

- In nearly every respect, Seattle students are shortchanged on learning time, receiving fewer school days this year than state law requires and suffering high teacher absentee rates (an average of 16 days per teacher). Seattle elementary students have the shortest school day in the region and theirs is among the shortest in the nation.
- After a number of significant recent pay raises, Seattle's teacher salaries are now largely competitive with other Puget Sound districts, but only if teachers agree to take a lot more advanced coursework than what is typically required of teachers. In fact Seattle spends 22 percent of its annual teacher payroll to incentivize teachers to take more courses, despite research that requiring teachers to do so does not necessarily improve student learning.
- When teachers receive their annual pay raises, the biggest pay raises are reserved for the longest serving teachers, an inequitable system that works against retention of newer teachers and which is a practice not found in most other large districts in the nation.
- Seattle does better than other districts across the nation in attracting teachers with stronger academic backgrounds but does not do enough to aggressively recruit teachers early enough in the year, especially in shortage areas.
- In spite of a policy that gives principals final say over who can teach in their buildings, principals are often forced to take teachers they have not chosen or approved.
- Seattle is not doing a thorough job evaluating teachers' performance, giving short shrift to teachers' impact on student learning and identifying 99.5 percent of the workforce as satisfactory in the most recent school year.

NCTQ's recommendations for specific action by both the district and Washington State include:

- Guarantee students 180 days of instruction. The state should not waive this requirement absent unforeseen emergency.
- Immediately lengthen the elementary school day for teachers to 7.5 hours and work towards an 8 hour on-site work day for all teachers.
- As other districts are doing, rethink teacher pay by gradually eliminating more pay for any coursework and experimenting with pay outside the traditional salary schedule. The state should abandon its own failed efforts to equalize pay across districts, such as the TRI pay structure.
- Reform teachers' traditional seniority rights so that no school is forced to accept a teacher who may not be a good fit and so the district can factor in teachers' performance when layoffs must occur.
- More closely monitor teacher absentee patterns at each school and hold principals accountable for improving teachers' attendance.
- Make teacher evaluations a meaningful process that requires principals to differentiate the levels of talent in their buildings, rewards the highest performing teachers and generates support and real consequences for under performers. Meaningful evaluation will also require that the Washington State legislature rewrites its burdensome and costly laws on teacher dismissal, and that both the state and district lift existing prohibitions on pay for performance.

“The research is clear: an effective teacher is the most important school-based factor in raising student achievement,” noted Patrick D’Amelio, Alliance for Education President & CEO. “With that knowledge, it is our hope this report creates a community conversation focused on strengthening teaching and increasing student achievement.”

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*The Alliance for Education is an independent, nonprofit organization that brings together members of the community who are dedicated to supporting effective academic programs for children in Seattle Public Schools. The Alliance unites people to explore and solve some of the toughest issues in Seattle schools and ensures that spending goes toward school programs that make a difference. To learn more, visit: [www.alliance4ed.org](http://www.alliance4ed.org)*

*The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and advocacy group dedicated to increasing the number of effective teachers. Much of NCTQ's work focuses on the institutions that have the greatest impact on teacher quality, including states, school districts, teachers' unions and schools of education. To learn more, visit: [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org)*