PACE 2014 Education Policy Membership Survey

The Professional Association of Colorado Educators (PACE) believes that the voices of classroom teachers are the most valuable to consider when discussing education reform policies in Colorado. Too often policy makers rely on advocacy groups or union leaders when making decisions instead of asking those on the front lines. PACE is committed to improving schools and student achievement through direct feedback from our members.
If we want our teachers to be held accountable for student achievement, we must also amend policies to ensure flexibility in the classroom. When asked about two possible changes, teachers responded emphatically that they want to be empowered with more autonomy.

Seventy-seven percent\(^1\) of surveyed teachers agree with a policy that would require the deposit of a percentage of each student’s per-pupil-funding into a classroom account to be used by the teacher for class-related supplies and projects. Surveyed teachers agree this would ensure that money is making it into the classrooms.

Additionally, when asked about the possibility of individual “innovation classrooms” that receive waivers from district and state mandates including the use of specific curriculum, pacing guides, seat time, or other overly prescriptive demands, 81%\(^2\) of teachers support creating such a process.

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### Teacher Empowerment

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“One size does not fit all and the people making decisions for students should be the professionals closest to the students. It is imperative that teachers be given more flexibility.”

Monika Troutman, Teacher in Jefferson County Public Schools

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Melissa Nicklas, Teacher in Colorado Springs School District

1. Would you support a policy that requires the deposit of a percentage of each student’s per-pupil-funding from the state into a classroom account to be used by the teacher at the classroom level? The funding would follow each student and could be used at the discretion of the teacher for field trips, new technology, projects, or other class needs. Proper oversight would be in place to ensure the funds are only used for school activities.

2. Would you support a policy that gives teachers more flexibility in the classroom by creating a process through which they can apply for waivers from certain local, state, and federal mandates? These waivers could include, but are not limited to, the required use of specific curriculum, pacing guides, minimum or maximum seat time, or other mandates that you think limit your ability to teach.

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The majority of teachers agree that the current process in Colorado for licensing teachers is not designed to ensure quality in the classroom or elevate the profession.

Teachers support a less complicated route to the classroom at the initial stage of licensing, as 72% support requiring only a clean background check, a bachelor’s degree, and a passing score on a content-area examination to be issued a temporary, apprentice-style license. However, to be issued a professional license to teach on your own, 68% of teachers support the idea of requiring the successful completion of a rigorous, 1-3 year apprenticeship program under the daily mentorship of a proven educator.

A system designed in this way will meet the dual goals of opening the profession up to many more potentially excellent teachers, while also raising the bar higher for receiving a professional accreditation and being given the ability to teach a classroom on your own.

"Research has shown that if we properly prepare and mentor teachers at the beginning of their career then they will stay longer. Lower teacher turnover will reduce costs, but most importantly it is what is best for kids!"
Alicia Herrera, Teacher in Pueblo School District

"Colleges don’t do a very good job of teaching things like classroom management. New teachers need to gain experience in a classroom with the help of an experienced mentor until they are prepared to teach on their own."
Robert Morris, Teacher in Colorado Springs School District

"I completed a one-year alternative licensure program, during which I spent a full year co-teaching with a mentor teacher. I felt very well prepared to have my own classroom after that year."
Deborah Thorne, Teacher in Colorado Springs School District

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3. Would you support creating a clearer pathway into the teaching profession by granting an initial license, renewable based on performance, to teacher candidates that are able to pass a background check and have three things: a bachelor’s degree, a principal willing to hire them, and a passing score on their content area exam?

4. Would you support a policy that requires the satisfactory completion by all new teachers of a rigorous, 1-3 year residency or apprenticeship program under the memberships of a proven educator before they are issued a professional license to teach a class by themselves?
Teacher Mobility

“Current policy essentially requires educators to choose the district in which they plan to spend their entire career within their first few years as a teacher. What other profession has this sort of constraint?”

Nathan Chisholm, Teacher in Academy School District

“I have always supported job portability for teachers. Many teachers get stuck in a district until they retire or die.”

Jill Cullis, Teacher in Aurora Public Schools

“It is sad that in a career already hindered by limited pathways for advancement, good teachers can be essentially punished both financially and professionally if they choose to move to another school district or have to move for a personal reason.”

Sarah Lindholm, Teacher in Colorado

“Teachers were allowed to take their years of service from district to district when I taught in Washington. It encouraged teachers to find the school and district that was the best fit for them and their philosophy.”

Kevin Crosby, Teacher in Trinidad School District

Outdated policies from an era of lower mobility have been stubborn to change in the teaching profession. If a teacher moves from one school district to another it can have a major impact on their salary, or if they move out of state it can devastate their retirement outlook. Teachers support changes to these policies.

When asked about a policy that would require school districts to credit all of the prior years of service to transferring teachers hired into a school district, 89% of teachers expressed support for such a policy. In addition to supporting teacher mobility from district to district, 89% of teachers support offering teachers a portable, 401(k)-style option for their retirement that they can take with them if they leave the state or the teaching profession.

5. Would you support a policy that requires school districts to credit all of the prior years of service to transferring teachers hired into a school district?

6. Do you agree with giving teachers a portable pension option, which allows teachers to invest their district/employer contribution into a personal 401(k) that can be used upon retirement, or taken with them to another job—in or out of state?

This report represents the results of surveys sent to PACE members throughout Colorado that generated over 300 responses. The teachers surveyed represent a diverse cross section of the state from rural, suburban, and urban school districts, as well as a combination of new and veteran teachers.