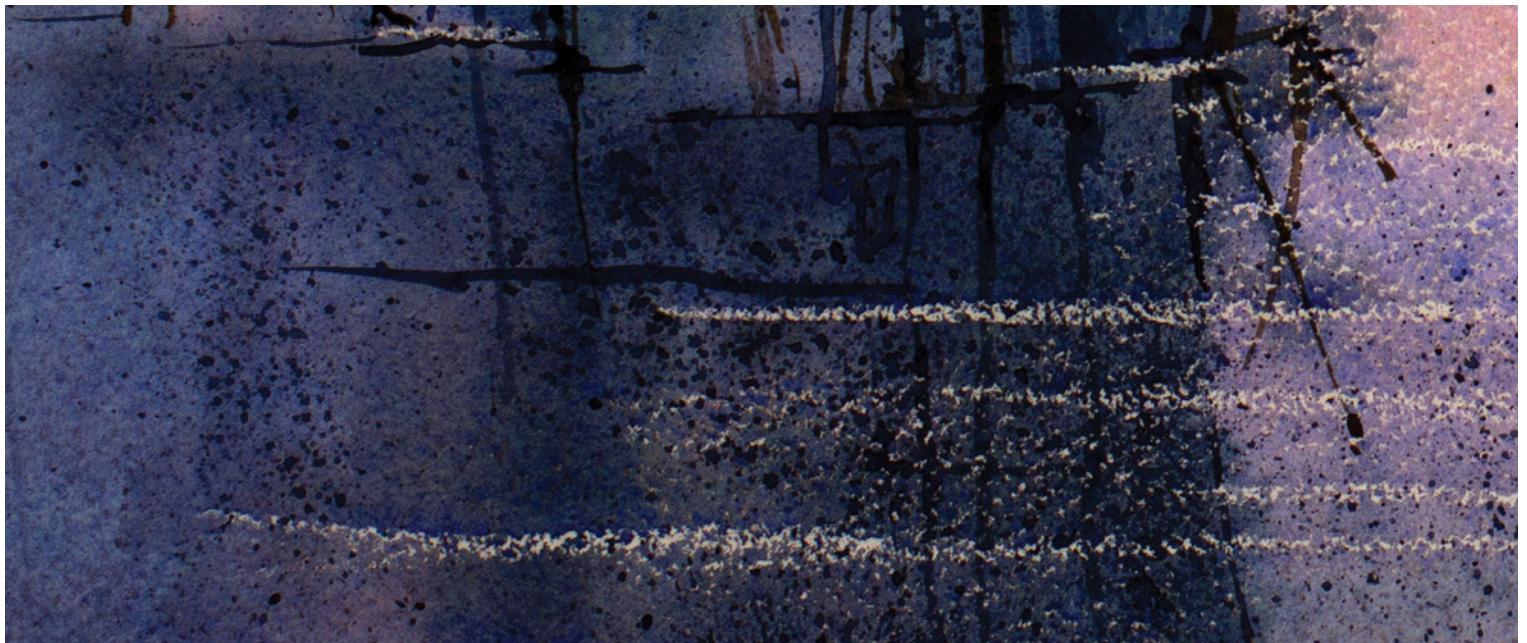


Professional Culture: Resourcing Professional Growth to Reduce Teacher Turnover

Authors: Robin Martin, Susan O'Hara, Joanne Bookmyer, and Renee Newton



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WHAT WE KNOW FROM DECADES OF RESEARCH ON TEACHER TURNOVER

At a macro level, teacher shortage is traditionally attributable to cyclical forces of supply and demand. Further, teacher attrition and turnover contribute to teacher shortages. Research on teacher attrition is strongly correlated with characteristics of teachers (demographics), highlighting cyclical patterns of higher attrition rates among newer, younger teachers and declining attrition rates by mid-career, followed by retirements - all of which exacerbate teacher shortages.

At the micro level, the effects of organizational conditions and school characteristics significantly influence teacher turnover and attrition, even when controlling for teacher characteristics (Ingersoll, 2001). National school and staffing surveys continue to rank dissatisfaction with working conditions among the top five factors influencing teachers' decisions to either enter, remain or leave the teaching profession (Figure 1). The implications of this validated research can help us better understand why teachers leave and what actions, at the organizational level, might mitigate teacher dissatisfaction with working conditions.

As state level policy tends to focus on strengthening pipelines into the profession, it's imperative not to overlook the importance of, and the central role local organizations have in, retaining the teachers we do have.

This brief presents a research-based approach that encourages local, school and district, solutions to teacher shortages through better resourcing teacher professional development and support. We also share an example of local solutions in practice, as demonstrated by one of our research practice partnerships. Both examples illustrate the critical importance of establishing a professional culture among educators and creating organizational conditions that sustain and advance that culture. We offer these research and practice-based solutions as examples of how local organizational conditions that

TOP FIVE FACTORS	
1.	Salaries and Compensation
2.	Preparation and Costs of Entry
3.	Hiring and Personnel Management
4.	Induction and Support for New Teachers
5.	Working Conditions <i>(school leadership, professional collaboration and shared decision-making, accountability systems, and resources for teaching)</i>

Learning Policy Institute, Solving the Teacher Shortage Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2016

Fig. 1

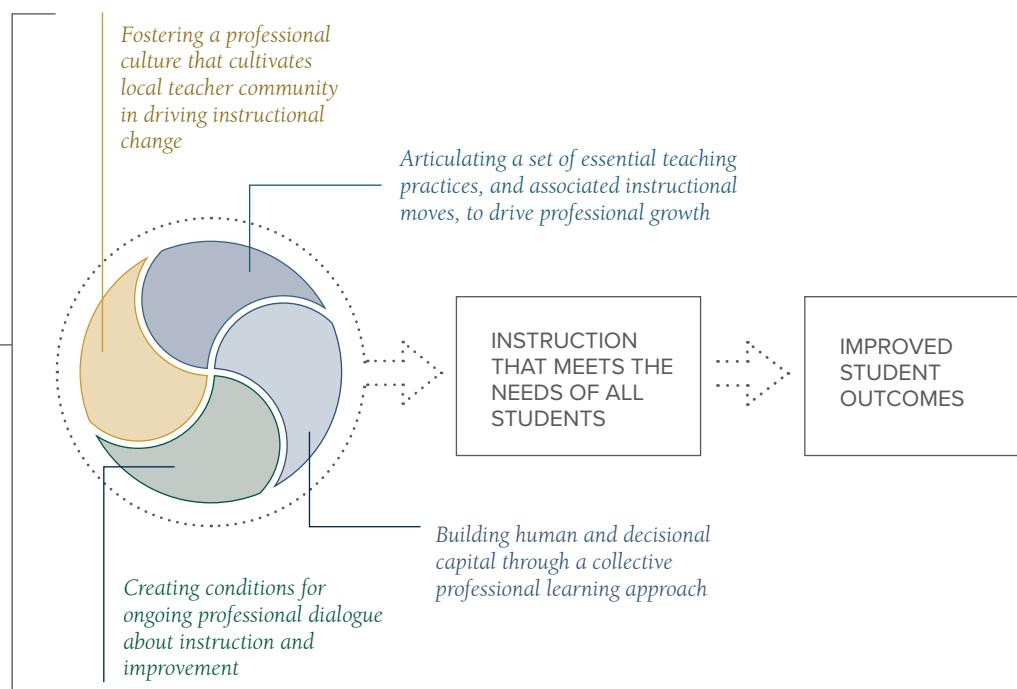
foster cultures of collaborative professionalism hold potential to mitigate the impact of teacher turnover, thereby improving retention, organizational stability and performance.

WHY ORGANIZATIONAL-SUPPORTED PROFESSIONAL CULTURE MATTERS

Schools, as interactive communities, are dependent upon the commitment and cohesion of their members. Research on professional learning communities suggests the importance of collegial interchange and experimentation, shared decision-making, and sense-making in learning opportunities for teachers aimed at instructional change (Kazemi & Franke, 2004; Little, 1982; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Research further indicates that teacher collaboration around teaching and learning and the sharing of expertise gives rise to greater overall achievement than is accomplished by focusing on goals pursued by individuals separately and on different components (Gronn, 2002). These principles of teacher-driven reform guide the development of our approach, in which teachers decide how to focus professional development and work together as a collective to improve practice. What then, are the drivers of change to enact teacher professional growth-centered practices?

Fig. 2

INTEGRATED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SYSTEMS THEORY OF CHANGE



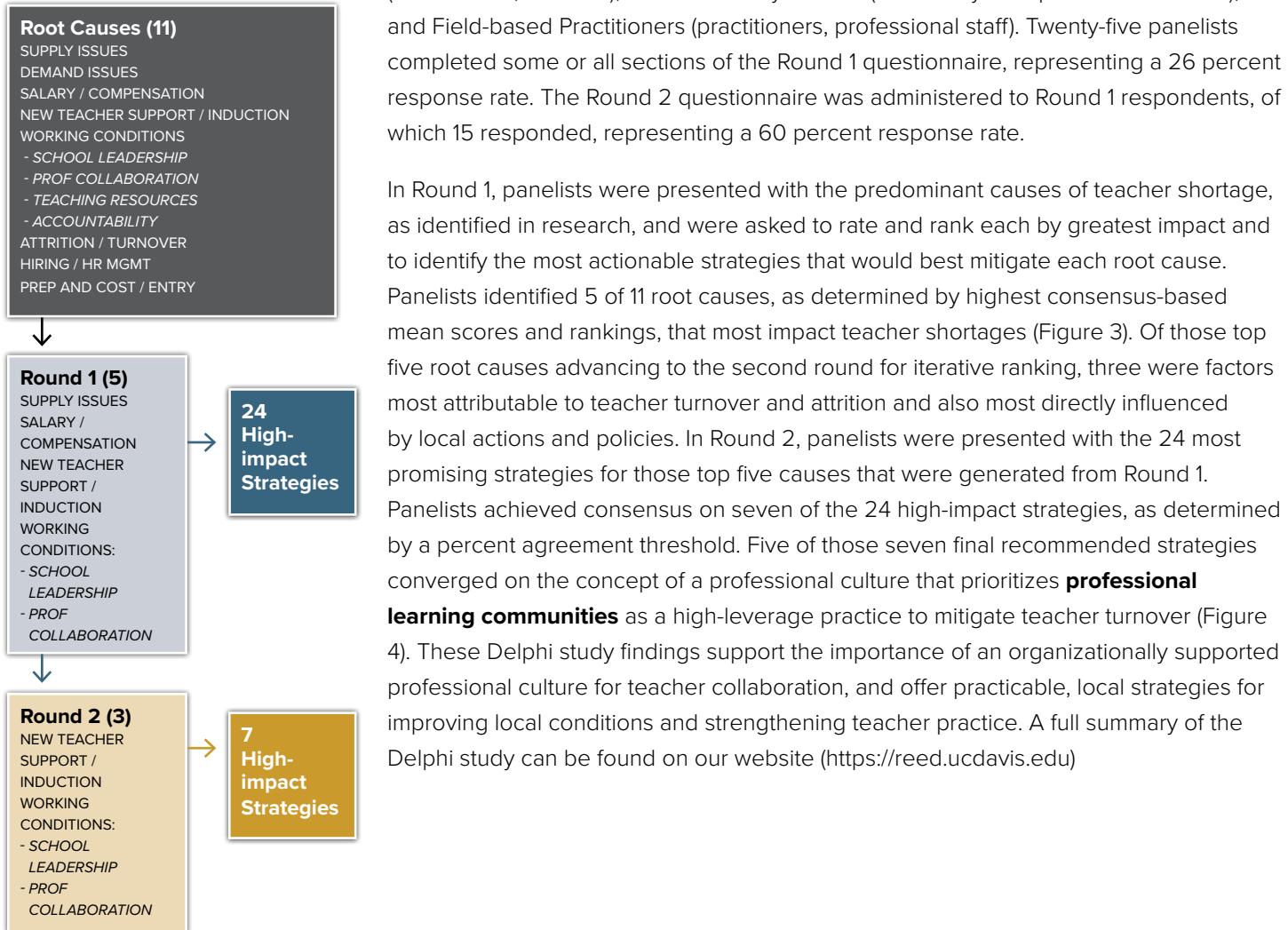
Our research seeks to answer this question through research practice partnerships intended to promote a systemic approach for continuous improvement in teaching and student learning. Our most significant finding is that school districts need a model of teacher professional growth that prioritizes teaching and support for enacting instructional shifts in practice. Through our research and supported practice with districts, we have found four conditions (we call them high-leverage drivers) that are essential to a professional growth-centered model, illustrated in Figure 2. Central to this model is a supported culture of collective learning.

RESEARCH-BASED APPROACH SUPPORTING LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR MITIGATING TEACHER TURNOVER

In June 2017, in partnership with the California Department of Education's Higher Education Workgroup, we conducted a modified-Delphi study to investigate the enabling conditions of the root causes for California's teacher shortages and to establish consensus among a panel of leading scholars, district leaders and policy makers, and practitioners on promising strategies for improving those conditions. A Delphi panel is an empirical study that leverages professional expertise around complex issues, such as this, by harnessing a collective opinion among diversely experienced views through iterative rounds of survey feedback. As part of a state-supported approach to supporting local agency, the findings from this study were intended to provide local educational change leaders with actionable and research-based strategies that address the underlying conditions of the root causes of teacher shortages.

Fig. 3

THE DELPHI PROCESS

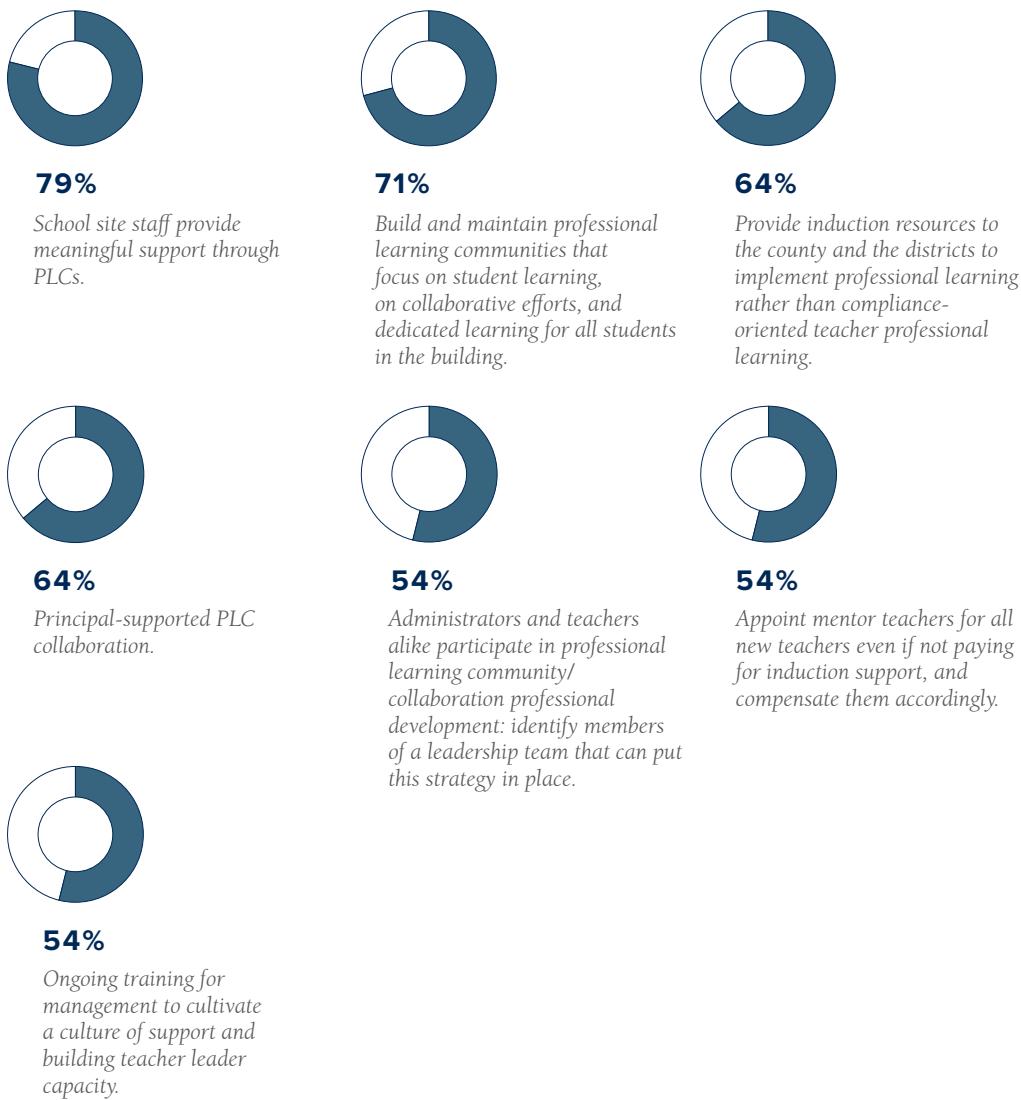


Ninety-five qualified panelists were nominated by the Higher Education Workgroup across three categories for an iterative two-round, modified-Delphi: Recognized Experts (researchers, scholars), Decision/Policy-Makers (most likely to implement outcomes), and Field-based Practitioners (practitioners, professional staff). Twenty-five panelists completed some or all sections of the Round 1 questionnaire, representing a 26 percent response rate. The Round 2 questionnaire was administered to Round 1 respondents, of which 15 responded, representing a 60 percent response rate.

In Round 1, panelists were presented with the predominant causes of teacher shortage, as identified in research, and were asked to rate and rank each by greatest impact and to identify the most actionable strategies that would best mitigate each root cause. Panelists identified 5 of 11 root causes, as determined by highest consensus-based mean scores and rankings, that most impact teacher shortages (Figure 3). Of those top five root causes advancing to the second round for iterative ranking, three were factors most attributable to teacher turnover and attrition and also most directly influenced by local actions and policies. In Round 2, panelists were presented with the 24 most promising strategies for those top five causes that were generated from Round 1. Panelists achieved consensus on seven of the 24 high-impact strategies, as determined by a percent agreement threshold. Five of those seven final recommended strategies converged on the concept of a professional culture that prioritizes **professional learning communities** as a high-leverage practice to mitigate teacher turnover (Figure 4). These Delphi study findings support the importance of an organizationally supported professional culture for teacher collaboration, and offer practicable, local strategies for improving local conditions and strengthening teacher practice. A full summary of the Delphi study can be found on our website (<https://reed.ucdavis.edu>)

Fig. 4

**SEVEN HIGH-IMPACT
STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE
ROOT CAUSES OF TEACHER
TURNOVER**



ORGANIZATIONAL-SUPPORTED PROFESSIONAL CULTURE IN PRACTICE

Building on these Delphi findings and our premise that a model of teacher professional growth which prioritizes teaching and support for instructional shifts is an actionable strategy for retaining teachers, how might an LEA put high-leverage drivers in place to build this capacity? For one of our district partners, a first step was to begin building local organizational conditions that foster cultures of professional collaboration. A brief synopsis of local enactment of this practice is illustrated below, however a full narrative can be found in our Integrated Professional Learning Systems (IPLS) report on our website.

Reflections by a Small Urban-suburban District on Professional Culture

"We're very much aware that we're trying to build this community of trust. If you're going to have teachers working with teachers to help them improve, then you want this atmosphere of complete trust. The hardest thing to do is develop very open, transparent, ongoing communication, build trust, and engender respect among your colleagues"

— Design Team Member

CONCERN: The existing teacher evaluation tools and processes were not facilitating desired improvements in teachers' practices.

GOAL: By 2016, all district evaluators will have the capacity to observe and provide feedback for professional growth around a shared set of targeted, high-impact instructional practices (SOAR Teaching Frames®).

ACTIONS: The district design team, composed of key stakeholders, quickly realized that open and regular communication was key to the success of the professional growth process, and set about **fostering a professional culture that cultivates local teacher community in driving instructional change**. The team focused on regular communication and building a community of trust and strengthening relationships between and among teachers, administrators, management and labor. Key strategy; facilitated buy-in and involvement of the union.

A number of new structures were also established to facilitate ongoing professional dialogue about instruction and improvement. For example, Professional Learning Support Teacher (PSLTs) positions were created to provide facilitation and support to school-based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), with enrichment classroom teachers utilized to **facilitate teacher release for collaboration**. Key strategy: weekly PLCs were put into place to foster peer-to-peer collaboration on the enactment of SOAR instructional practices.

SHIFTS: As a result of the district's focus on organizationally supported professional culture focused on shared instructional practice, structures are now in place to support the pilot of a multiple measures-based Teacher Growth and Professional Review System (TGPRS). The TGPRS is a formal educator review system designed around the district's adapted, mentor-based professional learning model intended to grow instructional capacity.

In this example, our district partner made a local investment in human and decisional capital to formalize teacher leader roles responsible for developing and supporting a professional culture focused on collective instructional improvement.

RESOURCING CAPACITY BUILDING

Our ongoing research continues to explore the local organizational complexities of creating and maintaining an integrated, highly collaborative school culture that values and develops all teachers' professional knowledge and provides practiced solutions for how key stakeholders can engage all teachers and leaders in the development of that culture. Through the uptake of collaborative effective instructional practices, LEAs can develop and sustain professional cultures focused on teaching and learning, and increase the likelihood that teachers will persist and grow in their profession. As a university-based intermediary, REEd is able to resource organizational change efforts through our expanding knowledge base on the expertise and practices needed to support teachers' enactment of effective instructional practices. Both examples in this brief also demonstrate how an intermediary can engage in continuous knowledge building processes than can extend state and local capacity for implementation and innovation with research-based practices that promote improvement of teaching and learning.



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The Resourcing Educational Excellence (REEd) Center at the UC Davis School of Education is a university-based intermediary that is focused on moving research findings into practice, and building the capacity of education systems to improve teaching and learning.

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