

# From Good to Great

## Exemplary Teachers Share Perspectives on Increasing Teacher Effectiveness Across the Career Continuum



APRIL 2014

**Purpose of the Study.** Recognizing that teachers are the single most important school-level factor influencing student achievement, policy leaders have invested tremendous public resources in new systems to both assess and address teacher effectiveness. Yet the research that informs teacher effectiveness policy leaves many important questions unanswered. These questions relate to the professional experiences and supports that effective teachers themselves view as critical for equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to help their students succeed.

*From Good to Great: Exemplary Teachers Share Perspectives on Increasing Teacher Effectiveness Across the Career Continuum* helps to fill these gaps through a first-of-its-kind exploratory survey of National and State Teachers of the Year. These teachers are chosen by their states as among the best, and one teacher each year is selected as among the best in the nation. The report provides insight into the professional experiences and supports that these effective teachers believe most contributed to their growth and eventual excellence as a teacher. Reflecting back on their careers, from preparation through mastery and even into retirement, the National and State Teachers of the Year surveyed in this study provide education leaders and policymakers with needed information about the professional experiences that help teachers move from good to great.

**Teacher Career Continuum.** The report discusses the teachers' responses to survey questions relevant to four stages of the teacher career continuum:

- **Preservice Stage:** The period of teachers' careers when they were preparing to teach
- **Novice Stage:** Years 1–5 as teachers of record
- **Career Stage:** Year 6 and on, having reached a certain level of mastery but before taking on significant leadership roles
- **Teacher Leader Stage:** The point after which teachers became a State Teacher of the Year and/or assumed other teacher leadership responsibilities

Their survey responses shed light on the professional experiences and supports that most contributed to their effectiveness as a teacher.

**Collaborative Effort.** The report is the result of a yearlong collaboration among seven leading organizations working to advance teaching and elevate the profession. Proposed by the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) and led by the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center) at American Institutes for Research, the study involved the following partner organizations, which collaborated extensively on this study, contributing to the development of the survey questions, data analysis, and drafting of the report:

- American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education
- Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- GTL Center
- National Council on Teacher Quality
- National Education Association
- NNSTOY

The survey was a true collaboration of these partner organizations, which participated in all aspects of the study—from design to dissemination. It also was fundamentally informed by teachers, including teacher focus groups that contributed to the survey instrument, and several teacher researchers who served as core study partners. The study contributes to the current body of teacher effectiveness research both by asking effective teachers about their own views on the factors influencing teacher effectiveness and by heavily incorporating teacher voice and leadership in all aspects of the study.

**Research Findings.** The overriding research question that the survey set out to address was *What experiences and supports led these exemplary teachers to become so effective?* The findings both surprise us and confirm much of what we knew about how teachers evolve from good to great. The surveyed teachers indicated that

numerous experiences and supports are important for helping teachers get from good to great as they move across the career continuum. Nearly every support or experience was rated as “somewhat important” or “very important” for developing the effectiveness of these exemplary teachers. But those that stood out as the most important were:

- High-quality preservice clinical experiences with effective cooperating teachers
- Preservice coursework in their content area
- Access to mentors and supportive principals
- Appropriate placements that match their training
- Opportunities for collaboration and reflection
- Opportunities for teacher leaders to help less effective teachers improve

Perhaps the greatest contribution to the existing research that we found was the dual importance to

new teachers and experienced teachers alike of creating opportunities for currently or recently practicing teachers to teach, mentor, and coach those new to the profession. Survey respondents emphasized the importance at the Preservice and Novice stages, and at the Career Stage to a lesser extent, of having access to effective *recently practicing* or *currently practicing* teachers to guide them; meanwhile among the most important benefits to the ongoing growth of teachers at the Teacher Leader Stage was the opportunity to provide just this guidance as mentors, supervisors, instructors, or coaches.

**Continuing the Discussion.** The survey findings provide guidance to education and policy leaders about the experiences and supports that matter for effective teachers. To spur more context-specific dialogue and inform more smart policy, the report is accompanied by a companion *Discussion Starter Tool* (available online at <http://www.gtlcenter.org/products-resources/study-teacher-perspectives-factors-influencing-effectiveness>).

## Study Materials

In addition to this Executive Summary, the following study materials are available online:

- Full report
- Survey instrument
- Survey results
- Discussion starter tool

All these materials are available for download on the GTL Center's *From Good to Great* webpage at <http://www.gtlcenter.org/products-resources/study-teacher-perspectives-factors-influencing-effectiveness>.



**National Network of State Teachers of the Year**  
1201 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20036  
609.992.5532  
[www.nnstoy.org](http://www.nnstoy.org)

## Center on GREAT TEACHERS & LEADERS

at American Institutes for Research ■

1000 Thomas Jefferson Street NW  
Washington, DC 20007-3835  
877.322.8700  
[www.gtlcenter.org](http://www.gtlcenter.org)



[www.air.org](http://www.air.org)

Copyright © 2014 American Institutes for Research. All rights reserved.

This work was originally produced in whole or in part by the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders with funds from the U.S. Department of Education under cooperative agreement number S283B120021. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Education, nor does mention or visual representation of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.

The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders is administered by American Institutes for Research and its partners: the Council of Chief State School Officers and Public Impact.

1316\_04/14

