

By Jonathan Cetel

Making Teaching Cool Again: How Schools Must Adapt to Recruit Millennial Talent

In my 20s, I never held onto a job longer than two years. I changed careers twice, got laid off once, hustled my way through a series of freelance jobs to weather through periods of unemployment and used my limited entrepreneurial chops to create my own jobs. I loved every second of it.

This zigzagging career path has become the hallmark of my generation. Born out of necessity in the postrecession economy, it's now become the preference for my commitment-phobic peers who are constantly reinventing themselves.

“Annually, 13% of teachers leave the classroom and nearly 50% leave after five years.”



What makes me unusual is that I was certain I would stay in my first job for at least five years. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania, I became a middle school reading and social studies teacher in a traditional public school in North Philadelphia. However, the odds were against me staying. Less than half of teachers remain in the profession after five years. And I ultimately contributed to that tragic figure, leaving after two years.

As an executive director of a nonprofit focused on education policy, I often reflect on my teaching experience, and I am convinced that a major overhaul is needed to recruit and retain great teachers. Fundamentally, the profession is not geared toward meeting the needs of millennial talent.

On the surface, teaching should be a competitive profession for millennials for two reasons:

1. Mission

Millennials are idealists, and few jobs provide such direct opportunities to change lives daily (especially first jobs out of college). As a 22-year-old, when I went to happy hour after a tough week of work, we didn't talk about my friends' days staring at spreadsheets in their junior analyst positions or editing copy for their entry-level PR jobs. They wanted to hear stories about my students.

2. Competitive starting salaries

Teaching has a reputation for being a low-paying profession. The compensation question is complicated, and I will discuss it further in this post, but here are the basic facts: In my hometown of Philadelphia, which is still reeling from recession budget cuts, the first-year teacher salary is \$45,360. In New York City, it's \$54,411. No one is going to get rich from that salary, but remember two things: 1) The median starting salary for a college grad with a liberal arts degree is \$36,237, and 2) Teachers are 10-month employees. A hard-working entrepreneurial teacher can make some real cash over the summer. In addition, my official school day ended at 3:30. As a first year teacher, I pulled in an extra \$5,000 coaching sports and running remedial classes after school.

But despite these facts, the data proves that these aren't strong enough pulls. In a landmark 2010 McKinsey & Co study, we learned that nearly half of all new teachers come from the bottom third of high school graduates (based on SAT scores) and we are losing teachers quickly. Annually, 13% of teachers leave the classroom and nearly 50% leave after five years.

I believe three major problems need to be addressed. Suffice to say, what I'm proposing might sound like common sense, but it would be difficult to swing, politically.

"It's a political challenge but it's worth the fight because until we get serious about radically reorganizing the teaching profession, we are never going to recruit and retain enough teachers to ensure that all students get what they deserve: a caring, loving, and effective adult to guide their learning."

1. Compensation

Yes, starting salaries are good, but it takes forever to make real money because seniority and levels of education determine salaries in most school districts across the country. In Philadelphia, it takes 11 years to get to the top of the salary scale. Performance is irrelevant. There are no bonuses for outstanding results, no way to quickly move up the scale if you are a top performer. Physical education teachers make the same as calculus teachers. Even less understood are pensions. A defined benefit sounds like a great deal, but the problem is most teachers won't last long enough to get the benefit. They'd be way better off in a 401K-style plan. Forbes did a great story on this.

2. Career pipeline

Talented folks are ambitious. Our generation is impatient and eager to take on greater responsibility and assume leadership roles. Most school districts just aren't structured to do that. If a great teacher is eager to take on more responsibility, he or she is usually encouraged to leave the classroom by becoming a principal. And even if we concede that the only way to keep great teachers is to move them out of the classroom, the reality is that many states require at least five years of teaching experience to become a leader. Combine that experience requirement with the cost (both financially and in terms of time) of getting a certification and it's a major barrier to millennial talent.

3. Autonomy and working conditions

Quick quiz: Who makes more money: the teacher at a low-income, underresourced public school or a teacher in an elite private school that charges \$30,000 per year in tuition? Most people get this wrong. Private school teachers make a lot less. And yet, the competition for jobs at the Andovers and Exeters of the world is fierce. So why do so many Ph.D.s and valedictorians compete for lower-paying positions? Two reasons: First, the working conditions are night and day. When I was a teacher, I was given one ream of copy paper per month, the water fountains were unsafe to use because of lead poisoning, the "faculty"

bathrooms rarely worked, and the HVAC system succeeded in keeping the rooms frigid in winter and scorching in late spring. Compare that to my summer experience working at an elite boarding school, where we dined in a hall resembling Hogwarts, played sports in country-club fields, and slept in dorms that could double as 5-star hotels. Facilities matter, but they aren't deal breakers. More important is the concept of autonomy. Great teachers want to teach. They want to design their own lesson plans and innovate new approaches to learning. Thanks to burdensome collective bargaining agreements, restrictive mandates from federal and state governments, and onerous district policies, the public school teaching experience has become focused on compliance. It's rules, rules, rules instead of teach, teach, teach.

The good news is that policymakers are finally catching up to the research and recognizing that teachers are the most important asset in any school. We are starting to see some innovative practices being implemented in districts and states across the country.

The change that has to occur to do any of this is for school leaders to have autonomy to adapt and design their own policies. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to any of this work, which means we need policies that push back against all of those rules that make innovation so difficult.

It's a political challenge but it's worth the fight because until we get serious about radically reorganizing the teaching profession, we are never going to recruit and retain enough teachers to ensure that all students get what they deserve: a caring, loving, and effective adult to guide their learning. ■

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Jonathan Cetel is Founding Executive Director, PennCAN, and 2012 *Forbes* 30 Under 30.



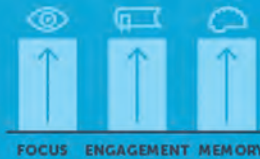
The Science of Classroom Design

Originally published on rossieronline.usc.edu

On average, **U.S. students spend a whopping 11,700 hours of their lives inside school buildings.** Simple changes like a new coat of paint, more natural lighting, and less clutter in the classroom can improve academic performance, reduce disruptive behavior, and keep students on task. Here are 5 surprising ways classroom design can help set up students for success.

WALLS

Removing clutter on the walls and personalizing student spaces are easy ways to **IMPROVE STUDENT FOCUS, ENGAGEMENT AND MEMORIZATION.**



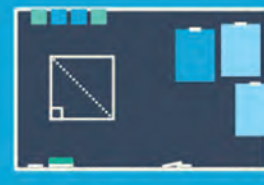
MAKE WELCOMING WALLS



KEEP 20–50% OF WALL SPACE CLEAR to optimize student learning.



NEUTRAL BACKGROUND COLORS such as beige or white help students focus on the lesson, not the walls.



Factors such as **VISUAL CLUTTER AND CROWDING** can distract students.

LIGHT

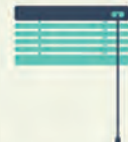
Students who are exposed to more daylight in the classroom score **26% HIGHER ON MATH AND READING TESTS** than those with less exposure to light.



KEEP CLASSROOMS BRIGHT



KEEP WINDOWS CLEAR of displays or furniture.



KEEP BLINDS OPEN unless needed to reduce glare.



USE ELECTRIC LIGHT to supplement natural light.



Use lamps to **CREATE A WARM ATMOSPHERE** in smaller areas like reading nooks.

LAYOUT

Improvements to classroom layout, like creating space for independent work or making a clear pathway to access school supplies, result in a **45% INCREASE IN ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT.**



OPTIMIZE CLASSROOM SPACE

KEY: ■ STUDENT'S DESK ■ TEACHER'S DESK
■ COMPUTER ■ GROUP TABLE ■ TRASH

IDEAL FOR:
Independent work
Tests
Start of the school year



IDEAL FOR:
Group work
Learning stations



IDEAL FOR:
Demonstrations
Group discussions



TIPS FOR TEACHERS

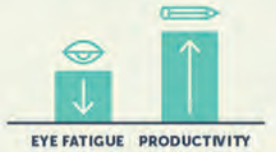
Define learning zones (e.g., reading corner, computer corner, reading or study area).

Create a space where small groups can work independently and still be connected to the rest of the class.

Try to keep focal points away from the entrance/exit to minimize distractions caused by incoming or hallway traffic.

COLOR

Purposeful use of color in classrooms and schools can **DECREASE EYE FATIGUE AND INCREASE STUDENTS' PRODUCTIVITY.**



USE COLOR STRATEGICALLY



POSITIVE:
Active, strong, passionate, grabs and focuses attention

NEGATIVE:
Aggressive, intense



POSITIVE:
Cheerful, highly visible due to the amount of light reflected

NEGATIVE:
May lead to eye fatigue



POSITIVE:
Relaxing, natural, quiet, grabs attention, increases creativity

NEGATIVE:
Boredom, blandness



POSITIVE:
Comfort, security, grabs attention, increases creativity

NEGATIVE:
Coldness, aloofness

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Schools may not allot budget dollars for you to paint or redesign your classroom, so turn the tasks into a volunteer opportunity for community activists, students and parents.

DIGITAL SPACES

Learning spaces go beyond the classroom walls. **DISPLAY SCREENS AND AUDIO SYSTEMS ARE INTEGRAL** to successful digital learning experiences.



CURATE DIGITAL EXPERIENCES



ELIMINATE EXTRA WORDS, PICTURES AND MEDIA from the screen.



ADD VISUAL CUES like highlighted or bolded text to call out important information.



Create **USER-PACED AND STUDENT-CENTERED LESSONS** that meet different learning styles.



Use a **CONVERSATIONAL AND FRIENDLY TONE.**

7 Critical Reasons Teachers Use AAE Legal Services

Member teachers often indicate AAE's unmatched liability insurance policy to be the most compelling reason for joining AAE. However, many of our legal services are actually unrelated to liability or employment rights, and are instead related to a myriad of other workplace concerns teachers encounter daily.

That's why we put our heads together with our legal team to create this bulleted list of the topics member teachers need assistance with most often that go above and beyond liability and employment rights.

This assistance by the AAE legal team translates into caring, confidential, professional support that blows having a union rep in the building to smithereens.

Contract Questions

- Increased workload
- Resignation vs. retirement
- Questions about pay/stipend
- Questions about time off (leave of absence, sick, vacation, personal, FMLA, etc)
- Failure to pay for time worked
- Duties assigned during prep period

Special Education Questions

- IEP Meetings
- 504 Plans
- Investigations/parental complaints

State Specific Laws

- State education requirements
- Wage and hour
- Sick leave
- Contract hours
- Benefits
- Unemployment
- Worker's compensation

School Policy Questions

- Submitting grievance/complaint
- Lack of student discipline policy
- Bullying policy
- Creating/instituting new policy
- Elections for board and internal positions
- Evaluations (timing/content)
- RIFs
- Intent to renew

Use of Social Media

- Facebook, Twitter, YouTube
- Proper and improper posting best practices

Privacy Rights/Confidentiality

- Right to privacy in application process
- FERPA violation
- Personal information shared without consent
- ADA privacy rights

Hostile Work Environment

- Problems with administration
 - Evaluation dispute
 - Accusation of professional misconduct
 - Accusation of insubordination
 - Bullying/harassment
 - Lack of support
 - Retaliation
 - Discrimination
 - Nepotism
- Problems with a colleague
 - Bullying/harassment
 - Inappropriate comments
 - Sexual harassment
 - Racial discrimination
 - Retaliation
- Problems with a parent
 - Grade dispute
 - Harassment
 - Threats of personal harm
 - Threats of litigation
- Problems with a student
 - Oppositional/defiant
 - Violent/aggressive
 - Requesting removal of student from classroom
 - Fabricated allegations
- Safety Issues
 - Assault/battery
 - Verbal/written threats
 - Campus or school police
 - Lack of security
 - Lack of training



Sharon Nelson is AAE's Director of Legal Services. She has nearly 13 years of experience with employment law. Before forming Nelson Law and working primarily for employees, Ms. Nelson worked for several large law firms defending employment suits.

Up Close and Personal at the *Friedrichs vs. CTA* U.S. Supreme Court Rally

On January 11th, Rebecca Friedrichs and an army of pro-teacher choice advocates (including AAE members) marched up the stairs of the U.S. Supreme Court as plaintiffs in the *Friedrichs vs. California Teachers Association* case. The mission: to strike down *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*—a 1977 case that sanctioned agency shop rules that permit unions to dock a teacher's pay regardless of whether they want to be a member of a union or be represented in union activities.

It was a cold and blustery day, but hundreds of advocates, AAE members, and supporters from coast to coast representing dozens of schools, nonprofits, and other reform-minded organizations came out to give teachers a true voice.

These pictures tell the story of the day's events...

Read more about Friedrichs at aaeteachers.org.



[Above] AAE member Jade Thompson, a high school Spanish teacher from Ohio, talks to reporters about why forced agency fees don't speak for all teachers. Laws in 23 states require workers who decline to join a union to pay fees anyway.

[Below] Nick Simmons, a charter school vice principal and AAE member from New York, made the 5 hour trek to be a part of this historic day. The issue of teacher freedom of choice is at the heartbeat of AAE's founding, and many AAE members have been instrumental in bringing this issue to light.



[Left] Rebecca et al. stand in solidarity with the hundreds that gathered at the U.S. Supreme Court steps. "We're asking that teachers be able to decide for ourselves, without fear or coercion, whether to join or fund a union. It's that simple," said Friedrichs.



[Left] Crowds chanted loud and proud to make sure their voices were heard upon the ears of the justices. AAE members are in near unanimous (98%) agreement that teachers should be given freedom of association.

[Above] AAE DC staff was out in full force. Alix Freeze, director of communications and advocacy, stood at the podium to discuss the potential this case has to change the face of the teaching profession.

Grow AAE's Family

Are you in need of legal services or do you know a teacher who would be perfect as the newest member of the AAE family? Interested teachers can learn more at aaeteachers.org/membership.



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AAE and Drexel University Are Investing in Your Future

Through collaboration between the AAE and Drexel University, members and their immediate family members have the opportunity to receive a highly respected, top-quality online education at a 10–40% tuition savings.

As a pioneer of online education, Drexel has been at the forefront of taking traditional programs and creating cutting-edge, interactive, engaging online courses. By offering programs entirely online, students can earn their degree while maintaining their careers, their families, and their schedules.

AAE members enjoy the following benefits:

- Access to over 140 online degree and certificate programs
- 10–40% new student partner tuition savings for AAE members and their immediate families
- An online, no-cost application
- Deferred billing options available
- Dedicated support from enrollment to graduation
- Additional benefits for military service members, veterans, and their immediate families

Drexel offers more than 140 online programs in business, education, medicine, nursing, law, engineering, hospitality, sports, art, technology, security, and many more.

Learn more about Partnerships Benefits: online.drexel.edu/aae

Try Online Learning for Free...attend an upcoming Test Drive:
online.drexel.edu/test-drives

Bookmark AAE's PD Calendar



Did you know AAE keeps track of the best professional development opportunities that are open to you? Bookmark our PD Calendar at aaeteachers.org/PDcalendar and check out a compilation of the month's best professional development classes, webinars, and conferences for teachers across the nation!

AAE Teacher Survey of the Month

On average, how many hours of homework do you give your students per night?

1. Less than 1 hour
2. 1 hour
3. 2 hours
4. 3 hours
5. 4+ hours
6. None
7. Other



▶ Take the survey at tinyurl.com/aaeFeb16Survey today and be entered to win an AAE Prize Pack just for letting us know!

You can also scan the QR code to take this survey on your phone!