



CTA Spring Report

The results of the Charleston Teacher Alliance's spring survey of 720 teachers show that many things in our district are headed in the right direction. There are, however, areas where improvement is still needed.

School Culture

When it comes to school culture, the news is mostly positive. Large majorities of our teachers say that the students at their schools are focused on academics; their students listen to and obey them; student conduct in their school is safe, orderly, and respectful; administrators and parents have respect for them; and the teachers at their school take their responsibilities seriously.

This is not the case, unfortunately, at every school, with some schools reporting significant issues. At some schools, more than 50% of teachers said their school was not focused on learning and academics (Haut Gap, Garrett, North Charleston Elementary, North Charleston High, Ellington, and Sanders Clyde); students in their school did not listen to and obey their teachers (Burns, West Ashley Middle, Corcoran, Ellington, Garrett, Lambs, Morningside Girls Academy, North Charleston Elementary, St. John's High, and Sanders Clyde); student conduct is not safe, orderly, and respectful (North Charleston High, Garrett, North Charleston Elementary, West Ashley Middle, Haut Gap, Morningside Girls Academy, Sanders Clyde, Ellington, Clark, Daniel Jenkins, and Burns); their administrators do not have respect for teachers (Springfield, James Island Elementary, Hunley Park, and Ellington); parents do not have respect for teachers (Ellington and Lambs); and their principals do not support their decisions (Mary Ford, Hunley Park, and Springfield). The CTA will push for district intervention at these schools. It is imperative that teachers work in an environment that gives them and their students the best chance to succeed, and clearly the cultures at these schools are not what they need to be in order for students to thrive.

School Issues

Concerning lesson plans, 72% say they have the freedom to write their lesson plans in a way that best helps them as a teacher. 28%, however, (with 12 schools making up most of this percentage) say they must write them in a format required by their supervisor. The CTA believes that all experienced teachers should have the freedom to write their lesson plans in a way that best serves their needs, not in a way that serves the needs of a supervisor who is removed from the planning and teaching of students. We believe the district should reinforce this principal to school administrators.

At two schools (Jennie Moore and Hunley Park), teachers say that duty assignments are given unfairly. The district should direct the administrator at these schools to work with their faculty to come up with a fair and equitable duty schedule.

Remediation, Progress, and Grading

Nearly 20% of teachers reported that their students do not need to pass their courses in order to be promoted to the next grade level. A troubling 51% reported that they have had to modify their curriculum, assignments, and tests so that some students will pass. It is important for the district to take measure to ensure that the integrity of the curriculum is upheld, that standards and grading requirements are applied equitably, that work and grades are not “watered down” to artificially inflate passing numbers, and that teachers aren’t pressured to lower standards in order for some students to pass. It is important for students to meet the standards and be promoted to the next level, but this should be accomplished through remediation and the promotion of a strong student work ethic, not by diminishing academic rigor.

The survey also showed that 93% of teachers believe that students who fail certain courses should be required to attend summer school. The CTA advocates that the district A) critically examine promotion standards to ensure academic integrity across the board, and B) reinstate summer school for certain core academic courses.

75% of teachers believe that the remediation courses and programs at their schools successfully help lower-achieving students to improve. Among the programs highlighted for success were Reading Recovery and PGA. However, teachers reported concerns at certain schools about special area teachers being used to teach remediation; they believe these teachers best serve in their special area capacity. Teachers also pointed to Edgenuity as a program that is ineffective.

Racial Disparities

A piece of good news highlighted by the survey is that 96% of respondents reported that the teachers at their school teach all students the same regardless of race. Teachers also said that 88% of administrators treat and discipline students the same regardless of race.

New Superintendent

Teachers are split on whether they trust the school board to find the best person for the position of superintendent. 50% agree and 50% disagree. It should be noted that this survey was taken before the allegations of secret meetings and before the three finalists were announced.

Teacher Discipline

When asked if they trust their associate superintendent to issue teacher discipline fairly, appropriately, and impartially, teachers’ opinions differ depending on who their associate superintendent is. Of those who hold an opinion, 65% of elementary teachers trust their associate superintendent. However, only 46% of middle and high teachers trust the associate superintendent; 54% do not. The CTA is advocating for a change in the way the district deals with teacher discipline so that teachers can be treated fairly. The district is resisting these efforts, so the CTA continues to explore all possible avenues to ensure labor fairness in our district.

Smaller Learning Communities

One critical point to come from the survey is that, in general, teachers believe smaller is better in terms of class size, school size, and district size. When asked how these would affect student learning, a majority said smaller district size (63%), smaller schools (74%), and smaller class sizes (97%) would have a positive impact. Research supports all of these conclusions.

The issue of smaller district size raises the question of deconsolidating the second largest school district in South Carolina. And with such an overwhelming number of teachers in support of reducing class sizes, it is clear that the district—with all of the public funds spent on experimental programs and high-priced initiatives that garner no gains in student achievement—should invest its resources in this simple strategy that has been proven to work.

Educational Spending

When it comes to spending of public funds, an overwhelming majority, 91%, believe that reducing class size and increasing teacher pay is a good use of funds. The same is not true of other district initiatives: teachers believe that hiring more teacher consultants (53% not good), hiring a district diversity consultant (69% not good), and MAP testing (49% not good vs. 45% good) are not good uses of public funds. The district should jettison these expenditures and use the savings to increase teacher pay and reduce class size.

Homebound Students

Teachers brought forward concerns about the way long-term homebound students are taught. Of teachers who taught these students, only 8% said the system works fine as it is. 28% said it needs just a few adjustments, 35% said it needs a major overhaul, and 29% said that long-term homebound students should take computerized work. The CTA will ask the district to work with us to come up with a new plan for homebound students that works for both students and teachers.

Student Discipline

On the issue of student behavior, teachers generally agree that several methods of discipline are effective, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, parent contact, detention, and positive reinforcement. The lowest marks were for Behavior Improvement Rooms, PBIS, and after-school detention. These methods should be examined carefully by the faculty senates at individual schools.