



The Charleston Teacher Alliance recently surveyed nearly 600 teachers to get their views on current issues within CCSD. Below is a summary report of the survey results with the CTA's recommendations and the district's responses.

Teacher Morale

Only 29.5% of CCSD teachers say that morale is improving while 44.9% disagree.

Based on comments from teachers, the most critical factor in morale is principal leadership. Teachers are most satisfied in their position when their leadership is supporting them and they are treated like respected professionals. The CTA annual leadership survey, taken in May, will provide insight into which school principals are providing their faculty the support they need to succeed. We recommend that the "Honor Roll" principals from our survey provide targeted input that could be shared with principals at schools where morale is low.

Another factor for low morale that teachers raised repeatedly is class size. There are wide inequities in class size from school to school. The Teacher Cabinet has raised this as an issue in its meetings this year and a task force was assembled to address it, but it has so far yielded no solutions. The CTA recommends that 1) district staff take a more critical eye toward equity in class size, 2) teacher input be considered in devising solutions, and 3) the district commit to lower class sizes as a key financial priority.

Many teachers also mentioned the lack of support they are given for behavior problems, including lack of parent accountability. The CTA recommends that the district commit to support struggling teachers by removing disruptive students from the classroom setting.

The superintendent and key staff members maintain that a critical task going forward will be supporting teachers who are struggling with discipline in the classroom. The superintendent says she will examine the results of the CTA's Leadership Survey closely and use them to help inform decisions regarding school administrative leadership.

Issues from 2018 Survey

A number of issues were brought to light in last year's CTA survey. Some of those issues linger and have become larger problems for teachers to manage.

1) Teacher Breaks

Last year's survey revealed that 33.8% of teachers do not even receive a 20 minute break from supervising students to eat lunch or rest. Teachers can better serve their students when they have been given a short opportunity during the day to collect themselves, go to the restroom, have lunch, make a phone call, or simply have some quiet time. The failure to have such a break leads to fatigue, frayed nerves, and a degrading of abilities. The CTA recommended that the board employ a policy that every teacher is permitted a 20 minute break during the day to eat or rest. Several members running for election last year publicly supported this policy. So far, neither this nor any other solution has been implemented. The CTA renews its recommendation that the board make it districtwide policy.

The superintendent asserts her support for such teacher breaks and plans to have the problem fixed by next year if possible.

2) The 25 Year Cap

Based on reports from the General Assembly, it seems that, as in the past, first and second year teachers may receive a higher percentage of salary increase over experienced teachers. At the same time, teachers with 25 years or more of experience will not receive any pay increases other than cost of living.

82% of teachers disagree that pay increases should primarily go to first and second year teachers. Many board members have pledged to raise the arbitrary 25 year cap. The CTA recommends that the board follow through on these pledges and reward loyalty. Raises should be given to all teachers that have earned them.

As a possible alternative, we recommend a "longevity bonus" that could be issued at certain milestones in a teacher's career to both reward and incentivize continued employment.

The superintendent affirms that the district supports changing the cap, but at this juncture there is not enough funding. Some schools, however, may have a 26-year cap for 2019-2020 based on critical needs.

3) Testing Fatigue

Most ELA, math, and elementary teachers (58%) focus on state standards in planning and delivering instruction. Only 14% focus on MAP, yet MAP costs the district millions of dollars that could be spent on actual teachers, consumes three lengthy periods of yearly instruction to deliver, and takes hundreds of hours across the district to analyze. After all this, its impact on student achievement has been minimal. However, many teachers do rely on certain aspects of MAP testing (such as Lexile scores) to help deliver differentiated instruction.

Last year the CTA recommended reducing the number of times students take MAP tests from three times annually to two. We also recommended continuing to critically evaluate the efficacy

of MAP testing in its impact on student achievement, and modify, eliminate, or replace it as needed.

This issue was brought forward in 2018-19 by CCSD's Teacher Cabinet and a task force as assigned to critically examine the issue. However, no changes have occurred.

The CTA recommends that the district either stop stonewalling teachers and engage in constructive debate, or make a declaration that the issue will not be changing so that teachers can focus their attention on other problem areas.

The superintendent says that the board prefers nationally-normed tests over annual state testing to use as a "progress-monitoring" system. They prefer MAP due to its ability to deliver quantile and lexile levels. Therefore, at this time, the delivery of MAP in its current form is non-negotiable until a better system can be found. The district has scaled back its use in kindergarten and first grade but is preparing for its possible use in 9th and 10th grade.

4) Cell phones

Last year teachers made it clear that cell phones were making our jobs more difficult. 60.9% of middle and high school teachers thought the district's cell phone policy did not benefit students. 67.6% said it caused distractions that make their tasks more difficult. These issues have not changed. This year, over 75% teachers report that limiting student access to cell phones would have a positive impact on their learning and achievement.

The CTA reiterates its recommendation to repeal the cell phone policy and permit schools to ban student cell phone access during instructional periods. The superintendent says that schools have the autonomy on this issue to choose what works best for their students. She recommends that the issue be taken up by individual School Improvement Councils (SIC) to devise a plan that works for each school.

Daniel Jenkins Academy

The CTA has fielded multiple concerns from teachers at DJA. Teachers there say they are lacking safety and support. We spoke to teachers there, and their concerns include the following:

- *Unresolved discipline.* With no consistent consequences for misbehavior, there is a sense that the students run the school. Teachers are told that Special Education students cannot be disciplined because they are limited to a certain number of OSS days; however, alternative disciplinary options are unutilized.
- *ISS misuse.* Students are only sent there for a short time and then return to class, even if they were sent there for arguing with or threatening a teacher. Teachers believe students who are sent to ISS should remain there, at least for the remainder of that class period. They also state that ISS is a place some students seek rather than try to avoid.

- *Weak structure and low expectations.* There are few real guidelines or rules for students to follow, and those that exist are not stressed enough. Some teachers cite a lack of strong leadership. The lack of structure has led teachers to feel unsupported and unsafe.

The CTA recommends that district officials meet with the faculty of DJA to hear their concerns directly. The faculty there are aware of surveys that have been issued regarding school leadership, but few changes have resulted. We hope the district will use the CTA's leadership survey as one factor in making decisions that will positively impact the students and faculty of DJA.

In addition, we recommend that ISS be used as more than a short "break" room, but as a room where more time can be spent 1) away from teachers and students with whom the student has had conflict, and 2) in genuine reflection on what the student needs to do to part of a classroom community.

The district's Department of Alternative Programs is trying after school and home-based systems to help students who are a distraction to others. DAP plans to investigate the use of ISS at the school and make changes if necessary. The DAP director plans to meet again with the DJU faculty to hear their insight into how to improve conditions.

Workdays

The CTA has long fielded complaints from teachers about their designated "workdays" being used instead for meetings, professional development, or other encumbrances. The survey indicated that at the following schools, teacher workdays were often misused in this way:

Angel Oak
Baptist Hill
Camp Road Middle
Deer Park
James Island High
Memminger
North Charleston Creative Arts
North Charleston Elementary
Wando
West Ashley High
West Ashley Middle
Buist
Drayton Hall
Springfield

The CTA recommends that days designated by the district as "workdays" be off limits for other encumbrances to permit teachers an opportunity to do what they need to do to prepare their lessons or finalize grades. The superintendent affirms that this is a concern and will direct principals to adhere to the workday schedule.

Faculty Meetings

Teachers at SOA indicated that they are required to dock themselves personal leave if they have to miss a faculty meeting. No other schools in the district adhere to this policy and are able to manage their teacher attendance at such meetings. The CTA recommends that whatever policies are in place at other district schools be used for SOA. The superintendent agrees and will rectify this problem.

Positive impacts on student learning

As part of the survey, teachers evaluated the impact of various district policies on student learning. Over 75% of teachers indicated that the following policies would have a strong or maximum positive impact on student learning. The CTA recommends that the district focus on implementing or continuing them. The district's response to each are provided:

- *Small group interventions*: The district is providing sample schedules of schoolwide flex periods to schools with large numbers of struggling students, possibly enabling them to initiate or expand small group interventions.
- *Higher teacher pay*: The district has committed to a 4% teacher salary increase and a 1.9% COLA.
- *Improved principal leadership*: The district continues to try to improve leadership at all schools and takes the CTA Leadership Survey information into consideration.
- *Parental accountability*: The board is looking into creating and utilizing a “parent contract” to help ensure parental support of their children.
- *Limiting student cell phone use*: SICs may adjust the cell phone policy to fit the needs of their schools.
- *Improved disciplinary consequences for misbehaving students*: Teachers can make specific recommendations for improving the PDP by emailing the CTA (CharlestonTeacherAlliance@gmail.com) or contacting the Department of Alternative Placement (Jennifer_Coker@charleston.k12.sc.us).
- *More planning and break time during the day*: The superintendent plans to improve the problem by next year if possible.
- *Improved teacher morale*: The superintendent hopes that by taking teacher concerns seriously and improving classroom conditions, morale will rise.

These two items had the most support from teachers and should be given maximum attention:

- *reduced class sizes*
- *removing disruptive students from the classroom*

The following had over 50% support from teachers. They should also be given special consideration:

- *Increasing academic rigor*
- *Improved school counselors*
- *Schoolwide reading programs*
- *Summer school for students who fail*
- *More athletic opportunities*
- *More arts programs*
- *Assistant teachers*
- *Special classes for gifted students*
- *Improved or more relevant PD opportunities for teachers*
- *More student access to different kinds of courses*

Least impact on learning

Three issues were singled out by teachers for having the least positive impact on learning:

- *extended school day*
- *more instructional coaches*

The following issue had the least support from teachers:

- *Fewer suspensions for disruptive students*

It is clear that removing disruptive students from the classroom is an important issue for teachers. The CTA recommends that the district focus on disciplinary issues that impact all students rather than making decisions that focus only on those who disrupt others. The superintendent maintains her support for teachers who are struggling with classroom discipline. In response, the district's progressive discipline plan continues to be modified and improved.