Investing in What it Takes to Move From Good to Great

Exemplary Educators Identify Their Most Important Learning Experiences

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Executive Summary

For the last 4 years, 10 leading education organizations have collaborated on a study series that includes teacher voice in conversations and research about educator effectiveness. Initially conceptualized by teacher leaders from the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) and with their continued input, the From Good to Great study series has asked exemplary teachers to share which professional supports and experiences helped them to increase their effectiveness as educators as they progressed through the various stages of their careers. There are multiple reasons why exemplary teachers’ perspectives provide key insights for researchers and policy makers, including:

▪ **The need for smart investments in teacher development:** Schools, districts, and states allocate and distribute substantial funding to professional development for teachers and school improvement efforts every year, yet teachers often report that these funds could be better spent on professional learning that moves the needle on their effectiveness. By identifying the supports and experiences that exemplary teachers believe are most important for teacher development and effectiveness, leaders and policy makers can make smart investments that may be more likely to improve teaching and learning over time.

▪ **The need for teacher voice in policy:** There are countless examples of well-intended policies that failed to lead to improved teaching and learning; in many cases, these policies may have been better refined or implemented had exemplary teachers been included in the process. By sharing teacher perspectives and working directly with teacher researchers throughout the study series, we aim to highlight how teacher voice can provide meaningful insights into policy and teacher support structures.

As states and districts make decisions about how best to invest their professional development resources, including those made available under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), this report offers timely information to ensure scarce resources are used most wisely across the teacher career continuum to help teachers go from good to great.

This report (the third in the study series) summarizes the findings from a 2016 survey of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and builds on the results of a similar survey of State and National Teachers of the Year in 2013–2014. What we found largely confirmed the findings across the career continuum in the earlier, smaller-scale survey. Namely,

▪ **At the preservice stage,** we once again saw respondents ranking a high-quality final clinical practicum, or student teaching, as by far the most important experience. What makes the final clinical practicum so useful was also the same across these two surveys: a cooperating teacher that was effective both with students and effective as an adult mentor.
• For **novice** teachers, this study again confirmed what we learned from State Teachers of the Year (STOYs): that an effective school principal and mentors (both assigned and informal) rose to the top of the list, with appropriate school placements and common planning time following close behind.

• The **career** stage teacher findings also mirrored what we saw in the earlier iteration of this work. National Board Certification and other ongoing formal education (such as graduate coursework) were seen as the most important experiences, followed by self-chosen professional development outside of the school district and collaboration with peers.

• At the **teacher leader** stage, as with the 2013–14 survey, the NBCTs surveyed thought serving as a mentor or coach was most important for helping them continue to improve their practice, even after they had already been established as effective teachers.

These findings call attention to the need for applied learning opportunities for early-career teachers, opportunities for collaboration across the career continuum, and teacher leadership. Other themes that emerged from this survey included the importance of a full-year final clinical practicum and teacher choice in ongoing professional development options, including teacher leadership roles.