

When I read *The Post and Courier* editorial “Stemming Teacher Shortage Starts with Expanding Talk Beyond Money,” I was very encouraged. My team and I have been working on a set of strategies to address our local teacher shortage since my first day in the Superintendent’s chair. I’ve delayed taking a proposal to the school board because I want to include the results of the survey I will soon send to all CCSD teachers. I want to hear from the people who directly work in our classrooms every day, and I want to be able to assure our school board that the set of strategies we ask them to support encompasses things that will have a positive professional and personal impact on our most valuable employees—our teachers. I want to know what matters to educators and what we can do to keep them in our district.

For many years, there has been a shortage of highly qualified teachers in specific academic content areas and in specific sets of schools. The editorial and, presumably, the State’s task force recognize that “salary increases are necessary but insufficient.” Clearly, any new plan to chip away at the teacher shortage must have, as its foundation, improved compensation. Yet, as we have observed during the past two years, there are factors that impact one’s job satisfaction that are only tangentially connected to salary and benefits.

Better salaries for public school teachers will help open the door to a new future for the teaching profession. However, to truly transform the quality of education we provide to students, we need to think more broadly about what our organization can do to improve a teacher’s *quality of life* and help each teacher become the *peak performer* he/she aspires to be when one first graduates from college. This is why teacher input is so important.

We’ve assembled a list of promising practices. Our Teacher Compensation Task Force generated some of them, and we borrowed others from other districts and other professions. Through our survey, we will ask teachers to react to these ideas or offer their own new and original thoughts.

The teacher shortage is a serious and complex national issue. Yet, the solution must come at the local level. The challenges we face in Charleston are similar to the issues faced in other communities, but no other district has the same exact set of challenges, nor do they have the same combination of *resources and resolve* that are needed to overcome our current obstacles.

Teacher needs and life circumstances vary. That is why our plan must be creative enough to offer multiple strategies to meet varying needs. Top priorities for some teachers may be on-the-job child care; more late starts/early outs; release time to plan during the day; job sharing; part-time positions; ability to earn extra pay through extra duty; graduate school scholarships; more professional support; etc.

We won’t know what’s important until we start listening.

To get the results we want and our children deserve, teachers must shape the plan we adopt in Charleston.