



# Teacher Insights for Increasing Deeper Learning Adoption in Schools

**TO:** Neha Gohil, Hewlett Foundation  
**FROM:** Hattaway Communications  
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**RE:** Teacher Insights for Increasing Deeper Learning Adoption in Schools

In January, we facilitated a two-day online discussion group of 40 teachers from across the country, representing a diversity of time in seat, grades taught, geography, race, ethnicity, gender and other demographic and professional factors. The teachers offered their thoughts on the purpose of K-12 education, equity in education and goals for students. Additionally, teachers reflected on draft language used to describe deeper learning, and language for each of the individual competencies. Following the discussion board, we followed up with nine of the most thoughtful participants for in-depth interviews probing further into equity in education, adopting new educational initiatives on campus, the role of philanthropy in supporting student success and the individual competencies.

We've synthesized key takeaways from the discussion boards and interviews to help the Hewlett Foundation team better understand how to gain teachers' trust and to catalyze and accelerate deeper learning adoption in schools using teachers as champions and messengers. We offer teachers' feedback on deeper learning goals and objectives, as well as the competencies themselves, provide insights on what teachers need to successfully lead change on their campuses and illustrate the type of support they look for from philanthropic organizations.

We will combine teachers' feedback on specific competency language with grantees' feedback in a forthcoming memo.

# Insights & Recommendations

## Storytellers can help bring deeper learning to life in classrooms.

Teachers understand the competencies and overwhelmingly agree with their substance and direction. In fact, when asked to articulate their own goals for students, teachers frequently described abilities and attitudes reflected by deeper learning and the six competencies. Teachers said they do not require clarification on what the competencies are or what students should be able to do to succeed in school and in life. Instead, a majority of teachers indicated that they are “very interested” in receiving further information about how to implement practices that support the six core competencies in their schools or classrooms.

Despite all this, teachers need evidence that deeper learning approaches lead to student success. Our research indicates that teachers trust other teachers more than other people or groups when it comes to educating students and managing classrooms, so teacher champions should be recruited and empowered to deliver these stories. Stories told and materials shared about deeper learning in classrooms should include specific activities, strategies and ready-to-use resources. Teachers most frequently search for information related to subject- or content-related activities or materials, classroom management ideas and curricula.

*“All of these descriptions [of the competencies] were clear to me. I don’t have any questions about them, but as a teacher I would need to define examples of each of these to share with my class so it is clear what I expect them to do at my grade level in order to show they have done this.”*

– Discussion Board Response

*“Those competencies look, they look like things that I feel like our school has been working on. Not necessarily like, “These are six competencies and we’re going to hit each one,” but rather like thinking critically, it’s just kind of an understated fact that in order for them to do well or be able to hit the depth of knowledge that we need them to, they need to be able to think critically. There’s this underlying understanding that these things need to be there, but there isn’t anything explicit, like, “This is what we’re working on.””* – Interview Response

*“Teachers love to hear, ‘it worked for my kids, they increased, they progressed, they showed this,’ anything positive. A positive impact, I think that’s all we need to hear in order to trust it.”*

– Interview Response

### Recommendation

Encourage grantees working directly with schools and teachers to empower teachers to share stories about the classrooms they serve that reflect specific, actionable strategies used and illustrate concrete gains and improvements by students. Communicating about the competencies divorced from specific classroom application will likely be a waste of time and resources.

The evidence teachers need to bring deeper learning into the classroom complement grantee’ communications needs: Content and stories to show deeper learning activities and successes in schools. Empower organizations and teachers helping to implement deeper learning in schools to tell stories about that work will satisfy both grantees’ and teachers’ needs.

## Partner with information sources teachers trust.

Teachers overwhelmingly trust other teachers in their schools and professional networks and information from peer-to-peer sources such as Teachers Pay Teachers and even Reddit or Pinterest. Above all, teachers trust the direct classroom experience that informs these sources. Currently, teachers share ideas and collaborate with other teachers in ad hoc ways. They often seek help to address individual student behaviors or specific classroom management challenges, and receive anecdotal solutions in return before testing those in their own classrooms.

*“My top source for seeking information about education and educational resources is Teachers Pay Teachers....I like how the resources can be filtered by topic, grade, subject, language, and so many others....I trust these resources because they are created by other teachers which really matters to me. This means they are able to relate to the types of projects/activities we are doing in the classroom because they are in the classroom as well.”* – Discussion Board Response

*“For me the top source of information about education I trust is my co-workers, the people that live it day in and day out with me, with the same student population I work with so they know what things work and what doesn’t.”* – Discussion Board Response

*“If I do research online, I go to blogs created by teachers for specific resources. I trust them after I’ve read about their methods and why they created the resources they did.”*  
– Discussion Board Response

*“When we find something that works in the class, we don’t hide it, we share it. We’re always sharing, we look for free resources all the time, ‘cause that’s what we do.”* – Interview Response

### Recommendation

To facilitate deeper learning adoption in schools, provide teachers—through champions and trusted publications—with ready-to-use classroom activities, pedagogical approaches, classroom management techniques and curricula that help students develop each of the six competencies. By offering vetted resources through a centralized hub or trusted partner site directly to teachers, Hewlett and its grantees could build trust with teachers, save teachers time and effort seeking materials and ideas, and facilitate deeper learning adoption with activities and lessons that promote competency development.

Please see the appendix on page 7 of this memo for a list of all of the trustworthy sources cited by teachers during the online discussion forum and interviews.

## Acknowledge that the competencies are not all-encompassing.

Teachers working with students in lower grades, and those serving students with learning disabilities, pointed out that some of the competency language does not reflect their experiences or realistic goals for their students. Additionally, some teachers noted the absence of character building and personal development reflected in the competencies, such as citizenship and civic development or teaching students to be good people.

*“I think when teaching special education it is a bit different, but the overall goal of developing competency is the same. We provide additional supports and interventions that facilitate the process, but given the level of delay or disability success is not always achievable to the fullest extent. Encouragement and support and feeling comfortable in making mistakes go a long way in supporting competencies by not being afraid to make mistakes.” – Discussion Board Response*

*“I agree with these [competencies] for the most part, however they do not directly address who the student is as a person. Yes, most of those skills are necessary to be successful in any career, but none of them support students being good people. The philosophy in our building is to educate the whole child, one I have come to feel strongly about. I believe these competencies fail to address developing the whole child.” – Discussion Board Response*

*“I definitely see personality as a little obstacle [for building an academic mindset], just because I think some kids have different temperaments and not everyone has the, just the social skills to really reach out and get the questions answered that they want to because not everyone wants to participate in class, some people really don't want to.” – Interview Response*

### Recommendation

When communicating with teachers about deeper learning, recognize that they are often responsible for developing their students' personal as well as intellectual and academic abilities, and acknowledge that the competencies do not represent every quality or characteristic that students require to be prepared for success in school and in life. Avoid positioning deeper learning or the competencies as the only way to achieve student success.

## Frame the competencies as complementary to extra-educational barriers to equity.

Almost all teachers recognized that students require individualized support, and that success will look different for every student based on their goals and capabilities, though most teachers initially defined equity in education as equality of access to educational opportunities. Teachers offered that students should receive support according to their learning styles, understand the unique value in other students, be treated fairly and feel important.

Some teachers focused on the need to provide every student with a quality educational experience, which looks different for different students in terms of pedagogical approach and expectations. Nonetheless, teachers did continue to emphasize foundational principles: students receiving support according to their needs; being treated with respect; coming to school healthy and ready to learn; having access to tools, resources and support to do their studies; having access to classroom teaching, technology, mentoring and out of school programs; and having a safe and supportive place to go home to get a good night's sleep.

Teachers are quick to point out that the competencies, while necessary to ensure student success, are not enough to ensure that every student succeeds. When asked whether the competencies help advance equity for all students, some teachers noted that they would need to better understand the role of schools, administrators and others play in supporting students. Some feel the competencies as they are written now describe what students should be able to do and, to an extent, what teachers need to do for those students, but don't address the wider school and district and community contexts that are vital to ensuring equity in education for all students.

*“I do believe that the core competencies we read about yesterday do support students’ development and promote equity in education to some extent. Even though we may instill things like critical thinking and working collaboratively, there still may be some obstacles students are facing in their personal life. At my school, it’s common for students to come from abusive homes, be homeless, live with foster parents, have behavior issues, struggle academically, come from single-family homes, and several others. These types of issues/challenges make it difficult for a student to develop the core competencies even if I taught it to them.”* – Discussion Board Response

*“I don’t think that [the competencies] promote equity in education. Just because they have mastered something in the classroom doesn’t mean that they feel as if they are a part of the school.”* – Discussion Board Response

*“They support equity, but I don’t think the competencies lay a framework for dealing with inequities.”* – Discussion Board Response

*“However equality and the equity are not the same in education. Students who are furthest behind—most often low income students and students of color—require more of the resources to catch up, succeed, and eventually, close the achievement gap. This is equity. Equality just gives kids the same access, but not the resources needed to be ‘equal’.”* – Interview Response

## Recommendation

Acknowledge the challenges faced by students who lack access to nutritional food, safe and supportive home environments, physical and mental health care and other foundational needs. These create barriers to equity in education that the competencies alone cannot fix, and which community members, civil rights leaders and social justice organizations recognize as vital to advancing equity for those furthest from opportunity. In the spirit of “broadening the tent” of Deeper Learning, consider investing in grantees that work to meet these needs for students, engage with their teachers and share stories to the rest of the field to increase understanding of how these issues connect to deeper learning.

## Invest in direct services that support teachers and students.

Every teacher was supportive of philanthropic and nonprofit organizations working in education, and cited direct services as the most helpful things these organizations could provide. Numerous teachers offered examples of tutors coming in to work with their students, or facilitators bringing ready-made lesson plans and organizing activities for students. In every case, such engagements did not create extra work for them. Teachers also value the access to policymakers that philanthropic organizations have as a result of their high profiles and financial positions.

*“A huge thing was that they did the bulk of the work, because being a teacher, especially in fourth and fifth grade where we’ve got more than reading and writing to teach our kids, it’s nice when programs come in and they are just ready to go or they’ve got just ready to teach lessons for us and it’s not a lot on me.” – Interview Response*

*“I think one of the ways that [teachers] would really enjoy is if [philanthropic organizations] created materials that people could use. So I see a lot of that is becoming very popular with Teachers Pay Teachers and all sort of other different types.” – Interview Response*

## Recommendation

Invest in organizations that help to bring Deeper Learning into schools with ready-made activities that do not require additional teacher support. This will ensure that such activities reach students, and also build goodwill among teachers. Additionally, teachers want to see philanthropic organizations advocate to policymakers for their needs, and provide a voice for them. Put the voices and experiences of students and teachers front and center when communicating to policymakers for legislative change.

# Appendix A: Research Participant Demographics

Our online discussion forum included 39 active participants over two days. We were able to follow up with nine of those participants for in-depth interviews. We have included participants' demographic information below, and can provide anonymized individual data on request.

## Gender

Male	46%
Female	54%

## Age

Median Age	38 years old
Oldest	64 years old
Youngest	22 years old

## Years of Teaching Experience

1	5%
2-3	26%
4-6	21%
7-10	10%
10-15	15%
15-20	15%
20-30	5%
30+	3%

## States Represented

CA, CO, FL, GA, IA, IL, KY, NJ, NY, OH, OK, PA, TX, VA, VT, WI

## Type of School

Public	46%
Private	28%
Public charter	26%

## Geography

Rural	15%
Suburban	33%
Urban	51%

## Race/Ethnicity

Asian	21%
Black/African American	28%
White/Caucasian	33%
Other	18%

## Hispanic Heritage

Yes	23%
No	77%

## Percentage of School Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch

0-25	18%
25-50	21%
50-75	26%
75-100	36%

## Grades Taught\*

K-5	38%
K-6	5%
K-8	5%
6	8%
7	5%
6-8	5%
7-8	5%
6-11	3%
9-10	3%
9-11	3%
9-12	15%
10	3%
10-12	3%

\*Teachers self-reported the categories included here.

# Appendix B: Sources Trusted By Teachers

During the online discussion forum and in-depth interviews, we asked teachers what sources of information they trust the most. While teachers primarily cited their colleagues and peers, they also identified a number of general and subject-specific resources. Common elements that make a resource trustworthy and useful to teachers include: other teachers developing and sharing material, resources including ready-to-use lesson plans and activities, and content aligning with federal and state education standards.

## General Sources Cited by Teachers as Trustworthy:

- County, state and federal education department websites
- Teachers Pay Teachers
- Share My Lesson
- TeacherVision
- Edutopia
- Newsela
- Discovery Education
- Scholastic
- Khan Academy
- Visible Learning
- Goalbook
- Education Research Information Center
- Chronicle of Higher Education
- New York Times education reporting
- National Association for College Admission Counseling listserv
- KQED Education Blog
- Socrative
- Reddit
- Pinterest

## Subject-specific Sources Cited by Teachers as Trustworthy:

- Field-specific professional associations (e.g., Educational Theatre Association)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
- Friends Council on Education
- EdSurge
- Common Sense Media
- EduCause
- Starfall
- Autism Helper
- Math Antics
- Mathseeds
- Instrumental Music Education
- Crayola.com





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