How Do Educational Leaders Respond?

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission released a troubling statistic that 44% of public school teachers in the state leave within the first five years of employment. Seeking to understand, the commission surveyed 53,000 educators with two questions:

If you had a student about to graduate from high school, how likely would you be to encourage teaching as a profession?

Rank eight often-cited reasons for teachers leaving education in Georgia with 1 being the "most predominant" and 8 being the "least predominant" reason:

Number and emphasis of mandated tests
Teacher evaluation method
Level of teacher participation in decisions related to the profession
Non-teaching school responsibilities/duties
Level of benefits/compensation
Level/quality of support, resources and professional learning
School level/District level leadership
Level of preparation when entering the profession

Concerning the question about how likely would you be to encourage teaching as a profession to a student?

2.7 % responded very likely
12.2% responded likely
18.2% responded neither likely nor unlikely
66.9% responded either unlikely or very unlikely

Here is how respondents rated the 8 options for why teachers leave from most to least dominate:

Number and emphasis of mandated tests 3.13
Teacher evaluation method 3.65
Level of teacher participation in decisions related to profession 4.20
Non-teaching school responsibilities/duties 4.22
Level of benefits/compensation 4.50
Level/quality of support, resources and professional learning 5.00
School level/District level leadership 5.01
Level of preparation when entering the profession 6.29

I'd encourage you to read the summary of the report as it contains additional findings regarding differences associated to grade level, number of years teaching, and rural, suburban or urban settings. An open-ended option at the end of the survey collected reasons beyond the eight offered and 95% of the respondents, added information. The summary included this statement:

"Respondents painted a dismal picture of disillusionment and powerlessness within education in the state of Georgia. "

While the survey's purpose was focused on policy in Georgia, I believe it raises issues that need to be addressed by school administrators, instructional coaches and teacher leaders in most settings. Consider this statement in the report;

"Several respondents wrote that instead of as a cause for attrition, strong school leadership could and does insulate classroom teachers from many of these other potential stressors becoming too burdensome."

As I read the report two thoughts arose, **empowerment** and **team**. Teachers need to feel empowered in order to believe that their students will be empowered as learners. I think that teachers as members of teams are more likely to develop that critical empowerment in belief and action.

Recently I worked with a school (not in Georgia) that is focused on gaining a major increase in student achievement. Many of the students are English Language Learners and low socioeconomic. Before working with the staff I reviewed the results of a school climate survey conducted with students, staff, and parents.

Given the statement…*Some students just can't be motivated to do the work.*

Teachers responded thusly….

Strongly Agree 8
Agree 18
Neutral 12
Disagree 17
Strongly Disagree 4

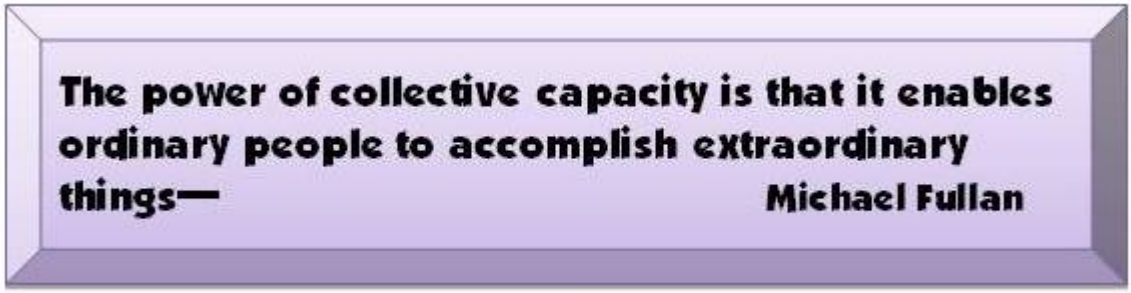
How do you imagine the leadership of a school should respond to this information? What actions would you take? How critical

do you believe changing these teacher beliefs is to positively impacting student success?

Sara Truebridge, in an article, **Resilience: It Begins With Beliefs**,* describes the power of collective efficacy (when a system maintains high expectations of levels of attainment). She cites findings that illustrate that, *"The effect of teachers' beliefs as part of collective efficacy has been recognized in the research to mitigate negative student outcomes that are often attributed to students' socioeconomic status and poor academic achievement."*

My recommended leadership strategies with these findings on teacher beliefs would be to build individual teacher and student efficacy by building collective efficacy among the staff and their relationships with students, parents, and the community. I believe the starting place is teachers in professional learning communities setting team goals to advance student success. Then working as learning partners to make those successes happen, celebrating when they do and striving for ever higher attainment both for their students and themselves.

While much can be done at district and state policy levels to better support teachers in the important work they do, I believe we can't wait. Building level teacher and administrative leaders must create collaborative efficacy. This should be high on instructional coaches' list of goals.



* Truebridge, Sara, **Resilience: It Begins With Beliefs**, **Record**, Kappa Delta Pi, Vol.52,No.1(Jan-Mar 2016) pg.25.