

FORGING A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS

**NSDC's Policy Maker
of the Year describes
challenges**



"Every year across this country, thousands of effective teachers leave the profession, many within the first few years," said Sen. Jack Reed.

We are all here because we recognize that well-trained and well-prepared principals, teachers, and educators are the key to improving the academic performance of students, and that improving teacher quality is the single most effective step we can take to increase student achievement and turn around struggling schools.

Studies have found that 40% to 90% of the difference in test scores can be attributed to teacher quality. As all of you know, teaching is a difficult and demanding profession — some would say an art. We too often disparage teachers in general and fail to recognize how much their job has changed and how difficult teaching can be, while at the same time, we treasure the one, two, three, or four teachers in our lives that have made

all the difference to us. Each of us can point to such a teacher.

Unfortunately, every year across this country, thousands of effective teachers leave the profession, many within their first few years. A 2003 study found that one-third of all new teachers quit after three years. That turnover rate increases to nearly half — one out of every two new teachers — by the five-year mark. In high-

poverty schools, these turnover rates are even worse, approximately one-third higher than in other schools. A recent report by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimated that the nationwide cost of replacing these public school teachers is roughly \$7.3 billion annually. Now it doesn't make much sense to me to replace good teachers every year at the cost of \$7.3

At NSDC's 40th Annual Conference in December 2008, former NSDC Board President Karen Dyer and Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh presented the first Policy Maker of the Year Award to Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) in recognition of his dedicated work on behalf of legislation that promotes effective professional development. Here is a transcript of his acceptance remarks.

billion. Let's keep those teachers by supporting them and enhancing their professional development.

There are no quick fixes, but we need a determined strategy. First, we must ensure that teachers are provided top-notch preparation relating to both their pedagogical skills and the subject matter they teach. Second, we must create a professional learning environment throughout struggling, high-poverty schools and build these schools' internal capacity for effective teaching. Every school — not just the most affluent schools, but every school — has to have this capacity.

As such, I recently authored provisions in Title II of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act to reform college teacher preparation programs, where 90% of our teachers are trained. We looked to replicate at the national level the best — the most exemplary, effective — models of teacher preparation from across the country, incorporating a yearlong clinical experience for prospective teachers and establishing a high-quality, comprehensive induction and mentoring program for new teachers in their critical first two years of teaching. Research has shown that offering such mentoring and guidance cuts attrition rates in half and helps those teachers become high-quality professionals who improve student achievement.

I have also sought to bridge the gap and align college teacher preparation programs with the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants in Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to create a professional learning community in every school.

To do this, last year I introduced the School Improvement Through Teacher Quality Act. This bill was supported by a number of my colleagues, including President-Elect Barack Obama and Sens. Patty Murray of Washington and Sherrod Brown of Ohio. This is a new \$500 million fund that will help struggling,

NSDC ADVOCATES VISIT CAPITOL HILL

Teams of affiliate leaders representing 15 states traveled to Capitol Hill during the recent NSDC Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. Their mission was to advocate for NSDC's definition of professional development to be incorporated into the reauthorized legislation for NCLB. For almost everyone, this national level advocacy experience was a first.

These eager advocates participated in laser talk training (see p. 39) with René Islas, NSDC's legislative consultant, so they would be concise and effective in engaging the legislator or legislative aides with whom they would be meeting. Islas had arranged appointments with each legislative office. The affiliate leaders were excited about the success they encountered during their visits. Results of a survey following the advocacy trip indicated that most of the congressional aides offered either strong support for the NSDC definition or seemed supportive but were noncommittal as an official response. None of the legislative offices indicated that they would not support the definition.

An affiliate leader from New Jersey said, "It was not as daunting as I expected. It was actually fun!" And an Ohio affiliate said: "It was painless and exciting. The (legislative) aides were very supportive." All agreed that they would gladly engage in advocacy again.

NSDC hopes that all its members will become advocates nationally and locally and carry the message of quality professional development to policy makers everywhere.

Affiliate coach Dale Hair and policy consultant René Islas facilitate the policy work of NSDC's affiliates. You can contact them at dale@joehair.com and M.Rene.Islas@bakerd.com.

For more information about NSDC's definition of professional development, see www.nsdcofstandfor/definition.cfm.

high-poverty schools implement the key elements of effective multiyear mentoring and induction for beginning teachers and team-based, job-embedded professional development for experienced teachers.

Based on the NSDC model, experienced teachers under this program will receive job-embedded professional development designed to help them work in established teams across grade levels and content area, evaluate and analyze student achievement data, and craft instructional strategies to improve their teaching practice. This bill envisions teacher learning and development as a process of planning, reflection, and self-assessment during the regular workday and on a multi-

ple-times-per-week basis. High-quality preparation and professional development that works is collaborative, ongoing, and data-driven, and that's what we're going to insist upon.

Let me thank you for this great honor, and let me thank you for something else. Each and every day, you go into the classrooms across this country, and, under very difficult circumstances, awaken in children their imagination, their talent, and their hope. You continue the great experiment that is America, giving every child the chance to live up to their potential and to use their skills to help their families and build a strong America. Thank you for what you do. ■