

Recruitment and Retention of New Teachers at Low Performing Urban Schools

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What can School Districts do to Retain and Help New Teachers Feel Prepared, Supported and Empowered

Rationale

A Capital Commitment is the District of Columbia Public School's five year strategic plan to increase student outcomes, improve the perception and the enrollment in Washington, D.C.'s public schools. Launched in 2012, one of the five goals of the plan, calls for improving the test scores of the 40 lowest performing schools by 40 percent by recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers. In July of last year, President Obama's administration issued a directive to states and the District of Columbia to come up with plans on how to get and keep the best teachers in high poverty classrooms. The Department of Education has reported that low-income students tend to have teachers who have less experience and fewer credentials. Research has shown that effective educators are the single most important factor in improving and advancing student achievement. In an effort toward more transparency and finding solutions to keep effective teachers in low performing schools, the federal government has asked the District and other states to submit an "educator equity plan" by June. My research study will examine and compare how the nation's capital recruits and retains new teachers in three of the poorest and three of the most affluent neighborhoods in the city. Through personal surveys and interviews, this study will seek to find out what urban school districts can do to effectively provide professional development and create a culture that will retain and help new teachers in low performing schools feel prepared, supported and empowered.

Literature Review

Dr. Richard M. Ingersoll, a professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania has done extensive research on teacher retention and turnover. Dr. Linda Darling Hammond, a professor at the School of Education at Stanford University and Dr. Christopher Edley Jr., a professor at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law have both done extensive work on the effects of high poverty on student outcomes and equity issues in education. Dr. Ingersoll believes that more comprehensive induction programs for new teachers would decrease the high turnover rate for teachers who work in high poverty areas. Dr. Ingersoll's research was highlighted by the Alliance for Excellent Education. He states that comprehensive induction combines the following components:

1. High-quality mentoring with rigorous mentor selection
2. Common planning time for regular scheduled interactions with other teachers

3. Participation in seminars and intense professional development
4. Ongoing communication and support from school leaders

Data/Tools/Process

I targeted three low performing schools and three high performing schools in order to collect data on the retention of new teachers. My school is a low performing school and it was also a part of the survey. To learn about the experiences of the new teachers, I created a survey by using a many of the questions found on the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS). Both of these surveys are administered yearly by the National Center for Education Statistics. My survey contained twenty-two questions. I also created a second survey for new teachers who have already made the decision not to return to the District of Columbia Public Schools for the 2015/2016 school year. This survey contained thirteen questions. I collected data from educators who have worked for the three years or less with D.C. Public Schools.

To distribute the surveys to the new teachers at each of the schools targeted, I enlisted the help of the WTU Building Representatives. I chose not to do an electronic survey because I thought teachers would be more forthcoming and comfortable with a hard copy of the questionnaire. The teachers were informed that the surveys were completely anonymous and moreover the names of their schools would not be used once the data was collected and shared. Twenty-six teachers responded to my questionnaire. Seventeen of the teachers were from low performing schools in areas of the city with high poverty and nine teachers were from high performing schools from more affluent areas of the city.

Data Analysis

Many of the responses, the educators gave about their experiences of working in high poverty schools mirror the responses given by their colleagues working in high poverty schools around the country. Over Eighty-five percent of teachers surveyed, strongly believed that student misbehavior interferes with their ability to teach. Only twenty percent of teachers in affluent areas felt like student behavior interfered with their teaching. While only ten percent of teachers in affluent areas somewhat agreed that routine duties and paperwork interfered with their teaching, fifty percent of teachers in high poverty schools strongly agreed with this question.

To my surprise, there were many areas of the survey where new teachers in both the affluent and high poverty areas of the city shared the same responses. When asked if they felt their school administrator's behavior was supportive and encouraging toward the staff, over forty percent of teachers in high poverty areas strongly agreed and forty percent of teachers in affluent areas somewhat agreed. It was great to see that when asked if teaching can be an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others, most new teachers surveyed strongly agreed with

this statement. Moreover, when asked if teaching gave them a sense of accomplishment, sixty percent of teachers in high poverty areas strongly agreed and all the teachers in the affluent areas agreed.

Seven of the teachers who were surveyed on my final questionnaire have already made the decision not to return to their teaching positions with District next year. Only one of the teachers in the affluent area of the city is leaving a teaching position. This teacher noted that she was leaving her current position in the school only because she wants to move from general education into a special education position. Of the seventeen new teachers, I surveyed in the high poverty schools, six will not be returning to their schools next year. In the survey over sixty percent said that inadequate administrative support played an extremely important part in their decision not to return.

Recommendations

High teacher turnover has had a profound effect on my school this year. I teach kindergarten and two of my grade level colleagues resigned from their teaching positions by the end of October. Both of these women resigned for the very same reasons that most new teachers resign in high poverty schools. One of the teachers felt overwhelmed by the amount of new curriculum she was expected to simultaneously learn and teach. The other teacher felt she could not effectively manage the behaviors in her class. I thought both teachers had the potential to become very effective teachers. Their sudden resignations created a great deal of instability and chaos in the academic lives of their young students. I believe comprehensive induction and mentoring of new teachers would significantly reduce the high turnover in high poverty schools.

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