

School Staffing and Performance Management in

Newark Public Schools

Late hiring, inadequate communication with applicants, forced placement of teachers and ineffective use of evaluation data prevent Newark schools from building effective instructional teams.

Introduction

In the winter and spring of 2009, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) partnered with Newark Public Schools (NPS) to investigate the impact of the school district's policies and practices on the ability of schools to build and maintain strong instructional teams. TNTP's analysis of policy and practice in NPS, funded by The Prudential Foundation, included the following components:

- Analysis of teacher staffing, transfer, separation and evaluation data from the district
- Online surveys of administrators, teachers and teacher applicants (767 teachers, 125 principals, vice principals, and department chairs, and 795 teacher applicants responded to the surveys, with response rates of 24 percent, 42 percent, and 80 percent, respectively)
- Review of NPS' collective bargaining agreements with the Newark Teachers Union (NTU) and with the City Association of Supervisors and Administrators (CASA)
- Interviews with principals and district administrators

TNTP's analysis reveals that under current NPS policies and practices, schools struggle to build and maintain strong instructional teams.

Findings

1. Barriers to hiring: By failing to respond to applicants and delaying hiring until late summer, NPS hinders its ability to compete for high-quality teacher candidates, particularly in high-need subject areas.

52 percent of teacher applicants in recent years who weren't hired—including many in high-need subject areas—reported that they never received a response from NPS. Although half of applicants apply for jobs in May or earlier, Newark waits until August or September to make the majority of its job offers. This is despite the fact that early applicants are more likely to become more effective teachers: teachers hired before June 1 are more likely to receive a “distinguished” evaluation rating than teachers hired later in the summer. Newark's hiring delays cause these candidates to accept jobs with other districts that hire earlier.

73% of principals have lost a desirable candidate because they could not make a timely offer.

2. Forced placements: Most teachers who change schools are placed in their new school without an opportunity to interview, even though both teachers and administrators strongly prefer the interview process.

Teachers who are force-placed into positions are far less likely to end up with a position they feel is a good fit and are ultimately at higher risk for attrition. NPS administrators are much more satisfied with the quality of teachers placed in their schools as a result of interviews, but more than half of all

85% of principals have had a teacher placed into their school without an interview.

administrators have been forced to accept a less desirable teacher candidate placed by HR. Fortunately, forced placement of teachers is not required under district contracts and could be discontinued by changing HR practice.

3. Useless evaluation data: Although the evaluation process results in some differentiation of teacher performance, this information is not used to reward and retain top performers or address poor teacher performance.

Newark’s evaluation system provides better differentiation of teacher performance than the systems of many other urban districts. However, teachers with “distinguished” scores are not rewarded, and administrators do not use the evaluation process to help teachers with “basic” or “unsatisfactory” scores improve. Rather than providing poorly-performing teachers with support or dismissing them, some principals instead pass them from school to school: more than a quarter of principals report “excessing” a teacher or encouraging a teacher to transfer on the basis of poor performance. As a result, NPS retains its least effective teachers at roughly the same rate it retains its best teachers. Newark’s new “tier” system of remediation for low-rated teachers aims to address poor instruction in a more focused way.

Newark retains its least effective teachers at the same rates as it retains its best teachers.

4. Negative impact on high-need schools: The outcomes of ineffective hiring, staffing, and evaluation practices are most pronounced in Newark’s highest-poverty schools.

Although Newark’s highest-poverty schools have the most pressing need for effective teachers, they face higher rates of attrition and their vacancies are more often filled by internal transfers, including through forced placement. As a result, high-poverty areas have fewer highly-rated teachers.

5. Insufficient administrator pipeline: Many NPS administrators are nearing retirement, but the district may not have a reliable pipeline from which to draw new school leaders.

Over half of Newark’s principals have enough experience to qualify for retirement, but less than half of vice principals – who should be a reliable pool of high-quality aspiring principals – would like to fill their shoes.

Recommendations

To address these challenges and provide all schools with the high-quality teaching force they need, NPS should adopt the following reforms to policy and practice.

- **Improve customer service and communication**, both to new applicants and current NPS teachers.
- **Move up the hiring timeline** and focus especially on early hiring for shortage area candidates and the highest-need schools.
- **Staff all schools and fill all vacancies through a system of full mutual consent** rather than forced placement.
- **Ensure the teacher evaluation process meets its goal** of providing differentiated teacher performance data, as well as useful feedback and support to help teachers improve. Use performance evaluation data to drive staffing and retention strategy.
- **Strategically staff and manage performance** at new schools.
- **Continue to expand administrator training**, induction and mentorship programs.

About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) works to end the injustice of educational inequality by providing excellent teachers to the students who need them most and by advancing policies and practices that ensure effective teaching in every classroom. A national nonprofit organization founded by teachers, TNTP is driven by the knowledge that although great teachers are the best solution to educational inequality, the nation's education systems do not sufficiently prioritize the goal of effective teachers for all. In response, TNTP develops customized programs and policy interventions that enable education leaders to find, develop and keep great teachers and achieve reforms that promote effective teaching in every classroom. Since its inception in 1997, TNTP has recruited or trained approximately 33,000 teachers – mainly through its highly selective Teaching Fellows™ programs – benefiting an estimated 4.8 million students. TNTP has also released a series of acclaimed studies of the policies and practices that affect the quality of the nation's teacher workforce, most recently including *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (2009). Today TNTP is active in more than 25 cities, including Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, New York, and Oakland, among others. For more information, please visit www.tntp.org.