

TARGETING TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION POLICIES FOR AT-RISK SCHOOLS

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“From the moment our children step into a classroom, new evidence shows that the single most important factor in determining their achievement today is not the color of their skin or where they come from; it’s not who their parents are or how much money they have. It’s who their teacher is. It’s the person who will brave some of the most difficult schools, the most challenging children, and accept the most meager compensation simply to give someone else the chance to succeed.”

—U.S. Senator Barack Obama in a presentation at the
Center for American Progress (Obama, 2005, p. 5)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Write policy to directly affect at-risk and hard-to-staff schools.
- Use research and data to facilitate the policymaking process around teaching in at-risk schools.
- Involve teachers and other important constituents in the process.
- Fund and evaluate.
- Recruit from an already-recognized pool of teachers.
- Offer financial incentive packages that are flexible and responsive to the areas relevant for your state.

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ISSUE OVERVIEW

This edition of Policy Issues addresses teacher recruitment and retention policies in play across the country.

We start by proposing a generally accepted definition of at-risk schools and making a case for why it is so important to improve teacher quality in these schools.

We then take the reader through (1) an examination of states’ recruitment and retention policies and the extent to which these policies specifically target at-risk schools, (2) an assessment of the rigor of some states’ recruitment and retention policies that are intended for at-risk schools; and (3) options for how new policies might be framed or current policies improved to ensure that good teachers are available to all of our children—regardless of their socioeconomic status or what language they speak at home.

As states work toward No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provisions¹ calling for a quality teacher in every classroom, they are constructing a variety of policies to address teacher recruitment and retention. Most of these policies simply aim to increase the number of teachers in the teaching profession, while some focus on improving the quality of teacher education programs. However, ensuring only that more teachers are recruited into the profession is not enough if all students are to have access to high-quality teachers throughout their K–12 education. Both the federal government and states are beginning to take steps to rethink the types of policy levers and incentives that will both attract and retain the best and brightest teachers and, more importantly, attract and retain them in the country's highest need schools.

Policy creation is a complicated process involving competing priorities, limited budgets, political arm wrestling, and powerful advocacy groups—all conspiring to provide a solution that most closely advances the collective interest. Education policy is no exception to this dynamic process. In fact, state-level interest in developing effective teacher recruitment and retention policies has soared in the last several years. While states are attempting a variety of solutions, most attempt to address multiple barriers to attracting and retaining teachers, including relatively low salaries, inhospitable and sometimes dangerous work environments, inefficient hiring practices, inadequate advancement opportunities, increased teacher accountability, and little public support. The majority of these policies are designed for the general teaching population and have not been specifically designed to meet the unique challenges faced by at-risk schools. There is little to no evidence that these policies are making a difference for those schools struggling to find and keep highly qualified teachers. Furthermore, there has not been a systematic look at how intended outcomes and unintended consequences may be linked in these same schools.

What Are At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools?

There are many similar definitions for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools, most delineated by their student characteristics. At-risk schools are generally accepted to be schools that serve a high proportion of low-income students, significant numbers of them representative of minority groups, and have poor student achievement. At the high school level, the graduation rates are well below the state average. Such schools are typically found in core urban areas and isolated rural areas.

In general, such schools have a difficult time attracting teachers with strong qualifications, especially in core subject areas, and keeping teachers for more than a few years. Teachers in at-risk schools often tend to have temporary or emergency certification, teach in fields for which they lack strong subject-matter preparation (out-of-field), or are in the first or second year of their teaching careers. For these reasons—the difficulty of hiring teachers and the difficulty of keeping teachers—these at-risk schools are often described as hard to staff.

Six years ago, the U.S. Department of Education estimated that more than 700,000 new teachers would be needed in the next 10 years in high-poverty urban and rural districts (Riley, 1998). Ingersoll (2001, 2004) and others posit that this shortage is not the result of teacher supply but instead is the result of teachers simply choosing not to teach in these schools or of teacher turnover as many teachers depart after only a short period of time working in these schools (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2001). Results of the National Center for Education Statistics *Teacher Follow-up Survey* indicated the following reasons that public school teachers typically leave their positions: desire for better teaching assignments, dissatisfaction with administrative support, and dissatisfaction with workplace conditions (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). Further, it appears that many teachers leaving the classroom are successful teachers. Results of a North Central Regional Educational Laboratory 1999 survey of superintendents showed that 75 percent to 100 percent of teachers leaving their district were considered “effective” or “highly effective” in the classroom.

Why Is It so Important to Improve Teacher and Teaching Quality in At-Risk Schools?

There is no debate about the fact that teachers can make a real difference in the achievement of their students (Ferguson, 1998; Goldhaber, Brewer, & Anderson, 1999; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). There is debate, however, about the specific characteristics of an effective teacher. Some qualities such as enthusiasm are immeasurable (Goldhaber, 2002), yet there are other measurable qualities of effective teachers, including years of teaching experience and content mastery.

While teaching experience does not guarantee effectiveness, research indicates that teachers with more classroom experience are more effective than those with limited experience. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003), 20 percent of the public school teachers in schools with the highest percentage of low-income students (those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) have three or fewer years of teaching experience. On the other hand, approximately 15 percent of the public school teachers in schools with the lowest percentage of such students have three or fewer years of teaching experience. This has particular implications for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools because they are commonly staffed with new teachers.

Not only do the teachers of students in at-risk schools tend to have significantly less teaching experience, they are also far more likely to be poorly trained in the subject they teach. According to Ingersoll (1999), a significant disparity exists in the content knowledge between teachers in high-poverty schools and teachers in more affluent schools. Specifically, he found that when compared to teachers in more affluent schools, significantly more mathematics, science, English, and social studies teachers in high-poverty schools lack a major or a minor in their teaching field. In mathematics, for example, 43 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools lacked a mathematics major or minor, compared to 27 percent in more affluent schools.

NCLB requirements have put added pressure on meeting teacher-quality expectations, particularly for low-performing schools. Specifically, the NCLB Act (2002) requires (in Section 1112 of Title I) state departments to detail how they will ensure that inexperienced, uncertified, or out-of-field teachers do not disproportionately teach low-income and minority students. Further, NCLB legislation has provided some avenues, such as Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants, whereby states and districts may pursue policies and programs to enhance the number and quality of teachers in these high-need schools.

What Is the Status of Recruitment and Retention in the States?

Few people debate the need to staff high-need schools with quality teachers. However, supporting the concept does not always equate to making it a reality. The best and brightest teachers have choices about where to teach, and they often make those choices based on lifestyle. Currently, there are few incentives for teachers to choose to teach in at-risk schools. Teachers who do make the choice are often discouraged from staying in these schools because of such issues as a lack of support and a lack of parental involvement. At-risk schools often do not provide—or do not have the resources to provide—the appropriate assistance to help these teachers adjust, grow, and develop relationships within these schools as well as with students and families from a variety of backgrounds, often very different from their own. The recent report from the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (2005) notes that the less support a new, struggling teacher receives in some of the country's toughest and neediest schools, the more likely that teacher is to leave.

Sporadically across the country, states are exploring a multitude of policies and programs to recruit and retain high-quality teachers for their schools. The following list includes examples of what some states are implementing, many of which have little or no research base and are yet to be proven successful.

- Policies for rotating teachers between well-staffed, high-achieving schools and hard-to-staff, low-performing schools.
- Pay differentials to attract strong candidates to teaching and to the schools and subjects in which they are most needed.
- Reduced barriers to transfer and pension policies that discourage teacher mobility and further handicap districts that face difficulties attracting job candidates.
- Hiring support (such as signing bonuses, low-interest housing loans, free utility hook-ups, help with moving expenses, and free checking accounts) to low-wealth districts and districts with a large number of hard-to-staff and low-performing schools.
- Statewide programs to help teachers pay off their student loans, especially if they agree to teach in hard-to-staff or low-performing schools.
- Programs, in collaboration with institutions of higher education, to gear teacher preparation specifically toward rural and inner-city schools.
- Reduced class sizes in hard-to-staff and low-performing schools.
- Increased resources available to at-risk schools by using a new approach to calculating school budgets based on individual students and their educational needs rather than on simple average daily attendance.
- Strong community and peer support programs for young teachers who are teaching in inner-city urban schools and isolated rural schools.
- Improved working conditions in at-risk schools by conceptualizing a career-long professional development system for all teachers (and school administrators).
- Coordinated state and local support for mentoring and induction.
- Career and salary incentives for increased student performance.

Despite this list, most of the policies and practices that states are implementing do not focus on recruitment and retention specifically for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools. The two most common

recruitment and retention strategies in state policy are financial incentives and induction/mentoring programs. Our analysis shows that approximately 30 states currently have some type of financial incentive policy in place. These include policies for loan forgiveness, scholarships, salary increases, tuition assistance, and housing subsidies (Johnson, 2005). Unfortunately, most of these policies are too generic to meet the specific challenges of at-risk schools. Idaho's revised loan forgiveness program is an example.

Idaho. In order to encourage those who wish to pursue a teaching career, Idaho's House Bill 18 offers loan forgiveness for payment of all undergraduate fees at any Idaho institution of higher learning (Legislature of the State of Idaho, 2005). Students must maintain a certain grade-point average, maintain a program of study that results in an Idaho teaching certificate, and teach in Idaho for at least two years.

The support teachers receive during their first years is often what most facilitates whether they remain in the teaching force. Induction and mentoring are increasingly necessary components for teaching, particularly for teaching in at-risk schools where the newest, most inexperienced teachers are often placed. Induction is a systematic process that includes mentoring, collaborative work, professional development, observations of teaching, and formative assessment, among other things. Mentoring is part of a successful induction system. Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship between a new teacher and a more experienced one. Our analysis shows that 44 states have some form of induction and mentoring policy in place. Some of these programs are not fully financed and/or are not required for all new teachers. Furthermore, according to Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, and Donaldson (2004), new teachers in low-income schools are less likely than their counterparts in higher income schools to receive mentoring and support from an experienced colleague. The authors conclude that when the lack of access to mentoring and support is combined with inefficient hiring practices, the schools that demonstrate the greatest need for high-quality teachers are the least likely to succeed in attracting and retaining them.

Related to at-risk schools, Shapiro and Laine (2005) show that financial incentives are useful but may not be enough. Furthermore, while induction and mentoring are imperative for the support needed to retain teachers, states also should consider expanding recruitment and retention strategies for at-risk schools to include other important, relevant issues such as hiring practices and school leadership. There is no silver bullet to developing and implementing the correct recruitment and retention state policies; each state must work to tailor policy that fits some of the uniqueness of particularly challenging situations.

To What Extent Do State Recruitment and Retention Policies Specifically Target At-Risk Schools?

To reiterate, state policies for recruitment and retention are plentiful, but the question is about quality and focus. In this case, quality and focus that specifically target at-risk schools. For example, North Carolina's policies and programs that support the recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of high-quality teachers often serve as models for the rest of the country. However, a study by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) (at the request of the state superintendent) examined whether the state's policies and programs were adequately benefiting the state's low-performing and hard-to-staff schools—those in which the shortage of qualified teachers has the highest impact. ECS found, all too frequently, that the policies North Carolina had adopted to improve the overall quality and supply of its teacher workforce have done little to improve the plight of hard-to-staff and low-performing schools (Hill & Coble, 2003). The lessons from this review and the recommendations made in the report are useful resources for others seeking to develop state and local policies to improve teaching and leadership in at-risk schools.

Learning Point Associates investigated how well states focus some of their recruitment and retention policies specifically on getting qualified

teachers in at-risk schools. The analyses of state teacher recruitment and retention policies, beginning with a review of the comprehensive collection of state policies found on the *TQ Source*² website, resulted in two primary observations.

- **Observation 1:** Many state policies that could provide specific support for at-risk schools are too general and not written explicitly to benefit schools that are hard to staff because of their geographical location, low-performing status, or high rates of teacher turnover.

State policies on teacher recruitment infrequently specify geographic location or school performance—generally accepted measures that are used to identify hard-to-staff schools. For example, many policies to attract high-quality teachers include financial incentives that are available to anyone willing to teach in a public school regardless of the wealth of the local district or the performance of the schools. In many instances, states do not have an agreed-upon definition for at-risk or hard-to-staff schools, making it difficult to develop policies targeted to schools and districts with those characteristics. Some states, such as Colorado and Louisiana, have definitions, but again there is little or no consistency across these states.

Colorado. Through Senate Bill 191, Colorado defines the terms *high-poverty school* and *rural school district*. The bill requires the department to annually identify high-poverty elementary schools in the defined rural districts. A high-poverty school is one in which the number of pupils enrolled who are eligible for free lunch is at least equal to or greater than 28 percent of the school's student enrollment (General Assembly of the State of Colorado, 2005).

Louisiana. Senate Bill 264 allows an advisory panel to define *disadvantaged geographical area*. The legislation specifically identifies but does not limit it to the following areas of the state: Acadiana, East Coast, Florida, and North Central parishes, and the Louisiana Delta region (Legislature of Louisiana, 2005).

- **Observation 2:** Many policies focus solely on recruiting teachers for identified shortages in critical subject areas, such as mathematics and science.

State policies often are created to recruit teachers for specific subject areas with existing or predicted shortages. While recruiting teachers for mathematics, science, and special education is vitally important, much of the time state policies do not go the extra step to facilitate the movement of many newly prepared and recruited teachers in these disciplines to the highest need schools. In fact, hard-to-staff and at-risk schools often are used in conjunction with shortage subject areas in state policies, but they have different meanings. For example, the terms *hard-to-staff* and *at-risk* refer to schools that are low performing and most often located in particular geographical areas such as inner-city or rural communities. *Critical shortage subject areas* refer to particular content expertise, usually in mathematics, science, and special education. At-risk schools usually struggle the most with getting and keeping quality teachers in the shortage subject areas. However, because of their perceived undesirable location by some, as well as their persistent low performance and resultant low morale, at-risk schools simply struggle to attract and retain quality teachers in all content areas.

The ongoing challenge for states is to identify those teacher recruitment and retention policies they can afford and those likely to provide the greatest benefit to needy students in the short run and lead to social and economic success in the long run. This process will likely look different across states. As one of its five key strategies for improving the quality of teachers, ECS (2000) emphasized that policymakers “ensure that teacher recruitment and retention policies target the areas of greatest need and the teachers most likely to staff them successfully in the long term” (p. 13).

Are There Specific Examples of Policies That Target Recruiting and Retaining Quality Teachers in At-Risk Schools?

Our investigation discovered 33 states have in place at least one policy that focuses on teacher recruitment and retention for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools. Most policies in these 33 states are financial incentives targeted to students in teacher education programs or to currently employed educational professionals. Listed here are three approaches to state policies directed explicitly to teaching in at-risk schools.

Kansas. House Bill 2014 adds “geographic area of the state in which there is a critical shortage of teachers” to its professional service scholarships program (Legislature of the State of Kansas, 2001).

Georgia. House Bill 210 provides local school systems the option to employ a retired teacher as a full-time classroom teacher in a qualified school. Georgia is explicit that qualifying schools are as follows:

- Schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress under Title I guidelines.
- Schools having 50 percent or more of their students failing to meet the standard that should be achieved by students in any subject area at any grade level, as identified by the Office of Education Accountability.
- Schools that have received a grade of D or F on student performance for the absolute achievement standard or on progress on improved student achievement as identified by the Office of Education Accountability (Georgia Department of Education, 2004).

Virginia. One of the specific purposes of this state’s Teachers for Tomorrow program is to attract students to teach in critical-shortage and high-need areas of the state (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

Some state policies go beyond incentives for teachers and attempt to create an environment in which teachers can flourish. However, there are few policies aimed at tackling the real reasons teachers leave at-risk schools, such as working conditions (including available resources and safety) and leadership issues.

States are finding that policies designed to improve the staffing difficulties of at-risk schools have significant fiscal implications, and certainly some are more expensive to implement than others. However, these same states are willing to make the investment when compared to the costs of continuously replacing teachers as well the high cost to students affected by the lack of access to quality teachers. A report from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) states that a conservative national estimate for the price to replace public school teachers is \$2.2 billion annually.

How Rigorous Are State Teacher Recruitment and Retention Policies That Are Geared Toward At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools?

Many teacher recruitment and retention policies are not mobilized to impact at-risk and hard-to-staff schools because the specific language needed to provide that direction is simply not written into the policy. It also is possible, however, that state policies which *do* have language targeted for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools are in some cases simply too weak to have a serious impact on the number of quality teachers in these schools. In this section, we examine the rigor of some states' recruitment and retention policies intended for at-risk schools.

Using the 33 identified states with at least one policy in place that is specifically targeted toward recruiting and/or retaining teachers for at-risk schools, we created regional clusters to facilitate a review of the extent to which their policies have the potential to actually affect at-risk schools. A coding tool was developed to analyze the presence and rigor of certain policy language (see Table 2). The rigor of state policies was judged on the following factors:

- The extent to which the policy includes language that may speak to an isolated audience, both in the teachers to recruit and retain as well as in the specific schools they may serve.
- A component articulating a responsible agent for the policy's implementation.
- Implementation features such as time, funding, and evaluation.

To be clear, state policies were coded only on the inclusion and rigor of their specific language and not on the extent to which the policy was successfully implemented. As a result, this analysis is not able to address the degree to which state policies resulted in any unintended consequences. Evaluation outcomes of programs implemented as a result of introducing a particular teacher recruitment and retention policy in a state also are not assessed here.

The 33 states were divided into four regions: Midwestern, Northeastern, Southern, and Western³. To conduct this analysis, we purposefully selected three states from each region. Table 1 lists the 12 states whose policies were selected for analysis.

TABLE 1. REGIONS AND STATES WHOSE POLICIES WERE SELECTED FOR ANALYSIS

Region	States
Midwestern	Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin
Northeastern	Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York
Southern	Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi
Western	California, Oregon, Washington

Among the 12 states, a total of 27 different policies included language specific to teaching in at-risk schools, and they were subsequently reviewed against the criteria in the coding tool.

Table 2 shows the nine criteria on which each policy was coded as well as a breakdown of how many policies fell into each criterion.

TABLE 2. RIGOR OF LANGUAGE IN STATE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION POLICIES FOR AT-RISK SCHOOLS

<i>Criterion for Judging Policy</i>	<i>Criterion Categories</i>	<i>Percent of Policies in Each Category</i>
Is the component of the policy regarding teacher recruitment and retention written specifically for teachers to go to at-risk schools, or is it open for teachers to go to other schools with an indication of "especially" for at-risk schools or for at-risk schools only under certain circumstances?	Yes, policy written for at-risk schools only.	92.6%
	No, policy open for other schools in addition to at-risk schools.	7.4%
Is there a definition of what the at-risk school or area entails?	Yes	92.6%
	No	7.4%
Is there a specific goal written into the component of the policy regarding teacher recruitment and retention for at-risk schools?	Yes	96.3%
	No	3.7%
Is funding set aside to the component of the policy regarding teacher recruitment and retention for at-risk schools, or is the policy active only on available funding?	Set aside	22.2%
	Contingent on available funding	77.8%
Is there an accountability mechanism written into the component of the policy regarding teacher recruitment and retention for at-risk schools (i.e., is a specific person or group detailed as responsible for monitoring development and implementation)?	Yes	88.9%
	No	11.1%
Is there a policy/program evaluation mechanism written into the component of the policy regarding teacher recruitment and retention for at-risk schools?	Yes	25.9%
	No	74.1%
For how many years is the component of the policy regarding teacher recruitment and retention for at-risk schools in effect?	More than 5 years	7.4%
	More than 3 years and up to 5 years	0
	More than 1 year and up to 3 years	3.7%
	One year or less	0
	No time mentioned	88.9%
Does the component of the policy regarding teacher recruitment and retention for at-risk schools call for a certified ⁴ or qualified ⁵ teacher?	Yes	81.5%
	No	18.5%
Is the component of the policy regarding teacher recruitment and retention for at-risk schools a directive or a suggestion/encouragement?	Directive	88.9%
	Suggestion or encouragement	11.1%

FINDINGS

At-Risk Schools Only?

Some teacher recruitment policies do not target at-risk schools at all. Other teacher recruitment policies that are intended for at-risk schools address the issue in a variety of ways. We analyzed 27 state policies intended for at-risk schools to see if the policy was written to recruit teachers (1) for only at-risk schools, (2) for all schools but “especially” for at-risk schools, or (3) for at-risk schools only under certain circumstances. Of the 27 policies analyzed against the criteria in the coding tool, most had language targeted to improving teacher recruitment and retention in at-risk or hard-to-staff schools and did not include provisional language that may be open to including other schools in addition to those that are at risk. When policies include language that is directed toward at-risk schools as well as other types of schools—or if the language does not require but only suggests recruitment for an at-risk school—at-risk schools will likely not see benefits. For example, consider the specific policy language in the Illinois Future Teacher Corps Program and the use of the term *especially*: “The Illinois Future Teacher Corps (IFTC) Program encourages academically talented Illinois students, especially minority students, to pursue teaching careers, especially in teacher shortage disciplines or at hard-to-staff schools” (Illinois General Assembly, 2004).

Recruiting Quality Teachers?

One concern emerging from the analysis was that nearly 20 percent of the state policies reviewed did not specify that a certified⁴ or qualified⁵ teacher was a requirement and did not provide any guidance on how to determine qualified status. State recruitment and retention policies that bring more unqualified teachers into the profession, and specifically into at-risk schools, will do more harm than good as these schools already struggle with an overabundance of out-of-field teachers or teachers on emergency certificates.

Evaluation, Funding, and Time Goals?

Most policies did not include an evaluation component. It may be the case that evaluations of these policies are assigned under different language or are sponsored in a different way. But for policymakers to know if the policies are successful or if they need further refinement, an evaluation component is vital. Evaluations function to facilitate new or renewed funding, measure progress and outcomes, and recognize high-quality policies and programs. Not surprisingly, most policies mentioned that the implementation of the program in question would be possible only on the contingency of available funds. Also,

there are frequently no specific time goals written into many of these policies. Policies developed without funding, a time allocation, or an evaluation component face a precarious future at best, and worse, may have no positive effect on the problem.

Directive or Suggestion?

Although nearly 90 percent of the analyzed recruitment and retention policies for at-risk schools were directives, a small portion of them included *suggested* or *encouraged* language. Policies that are written as directives employ commanding language for required action. On the other hand, policies that are simply suggestions or encouragements are not read as requirements, but only as something that is proposed.

HOW MIGHT NEW AND CURRENT POLICIES BE IMPROVED?

Based on our assessment of the extent to which states have (or do not have) recruitment and retention policies directed toward at-risk schools, examples of some of the policies they do have, and the rigor of some states’ recruitment and retention policies for at-risk schools, it is clear that states need to do much more. Policymakers should think not only about implementing policies that have language focused specifically on at-risk schools, but also about policies that seek to address the reasons that good teachers are leaving, such as working conditions and leadership issues. For current and future policies, care should be taken in how the policies are approached and written so that they may be targeted toward at-risk schools and actually be effective in getting and keeping quality teachers in classrooms with students who desperately need them. We recommend the following:

- **Write policy to directly affect at-risk and hard-to-staff schools.** All states have at-risk and hard-to-staff schools, so all states should have state policy mechanisms focused on recruiting and retaining qualified teachers for these schools. Policies with the intention of attracting quality teachers to specific schools and districts should be as unambiguous as possible, such as addressing geographic factors (urban or rural), student performance issues, or high teacher turnover.
- **Use research and data to facilitate the policymaking process around teaching in at-risk schools.** Reliable data should be the foundation of any policy design. It is important to have accurate school information about the numbers and types of schools and their

geographic locations. Teacher data also are crucial—who teaches in these schools, how long they have taught there, what are they teaching, from where are they most often recruited, and from where do they usually graduate.

- **Involve teachers and other important constituents in the process.** An important voice in defining the challenge as well as the solution is that of the teachers. Ask them in structured conversations what they need in order to accept teaching positions in challenging sites. Then act on their suggestions, always focusing on how the changes will positively impact the students as well as the community.
- **Fund and evaluate.** Include an accountability and evaluation component in an effort to distinguish best practices. Ensure that the resulting programs remain intact if evaluation findings show strong, positive results and that other programs are refined if the results are less positive.
- **Recruit from an already-recognized pool of teachers.** Create incentives for the most qualified teachers to move to at-risk schools. States should consider offering sufficient incentives to Nationally Board Certified teachers and veteran or retired teachers who have specific content expertise and have shown evidence of success in working with at-risk students. Some research shows that these teachers, in fact, help students perform at higher levels than other teachers (Southern Regional Education Board, 2004). Caution must be exercised, however, as financial incentives alone may not suffice for the recruitment of many of these teachers to at-risk and hard-to-staff schools. Efforts to recruit Nationally Board Certified teachers or other accomplished teachers should be part of a larger plan of recruitment and retention, and not a stand-alone policy or forced assignment (Berry & King, 2004).
- **Offer financial incentive packages that are flexible and responsive to the areas relevant for your state.** Teachers will choose to teach in different areas of the state for distinctive reasons, so having a package of financial incentives from which to choose would be a highly responsive way to recruit and retain teachers for diverse schools or districts that are low performing. For example, a state might offer a variety of financial incentives that include mortgage assistance or several months of rent payments as a signing bonus, tuition assistance, or compensated day care. Furthermore, as a retention incentive, states can incorporate incremental bumps that provide incentives to teachers at the critical departure times: Years 3, 5, and 10.

CONCLUSION

An unprecedented opportunity exists for policymakers to develop state policies that can strengthen the teaching profession and, more importantly, improve public education by equalizing educational opportunities for all students as well as reaching the NCLB goal of a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. It is one thing to realize and accept that unless the quality of teaching in high-need schools is improved, the students in those schools will remain at a devastating disadvantage. It is quite another to generate the necessary policy changes—and support their implementation—to turn things around. States may disagree which efforts are the best, and policies will frequently differ across states depending on needs and resources. However, better informed and targeted policies to recruit and retain high-quality teachers have the potential to significantly change educational outcomes for students in high-need schools. States should utilize research and employ evaluation methods in order to reconcile disagreements about best practices. Ultimately, state policies must work in conjunction with the NCLB Act and local education agencies to recruit and retain quality teachers for the schools and classrooms that need them the most.

ENDNOTES

¹The NCLB Act identifies a highly qualified teacher as one who has a bachelor's degree, is certified, and has displayed content mastery.

²The *TQ Source* (www.tqsource.org) is an electronic clearinghouse of research, data, state policies, and initiatives developed at Learning Point Associates under its contract for the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory and in collaboration with the Education Commission of the States.

³Regions reflect those used by the National Center for Education Statistics as well as data available on the *TQ Source*.

⁴Certified is defined as a teacher with a state teaching certificate or license.

⁵Using the term *quality* and providing a definition for the term in the provisional language. Definitions should suggest a certified/licensed teacher or a teacher with qualifications to work in an at-risk school.

IN MEMORIAM

The Teaching Quality Team at Learning Point Associates dedicates this Policy Issues to the memory of Gaynor McCown, former executive director of The Teaching Commission. Her life work was dedicated to improving the quality of teachers for all students, and especially for students with the greatest needs in the most at-risk schools.

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