National Council on Teacher Quality

October 2011

# Teacher Quality Roadmap

## Improving Policies and Practices in Springfield, Massachusetts

About this study

# This study was undertaken on behalf of the 25,000 children who attend Springfield Public Schools.

## About NCTQ

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a non-partisan research and policy organization committed to restructuring the teaching profession, led by our vision that every child deserves effective teachers.

## Partner and Funders

This study is done in partnership with the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), committed to a high quality public education system that will prepare all students to engage successfully in a global economy and society. MBAE was supported by Springfield Business Leaders for Education whose goal is to improve educational attainment to ensure a skilled workforce and economic opportunity for all in the Springfield community. Additional funding for this study was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

## The NCTQ team for this project

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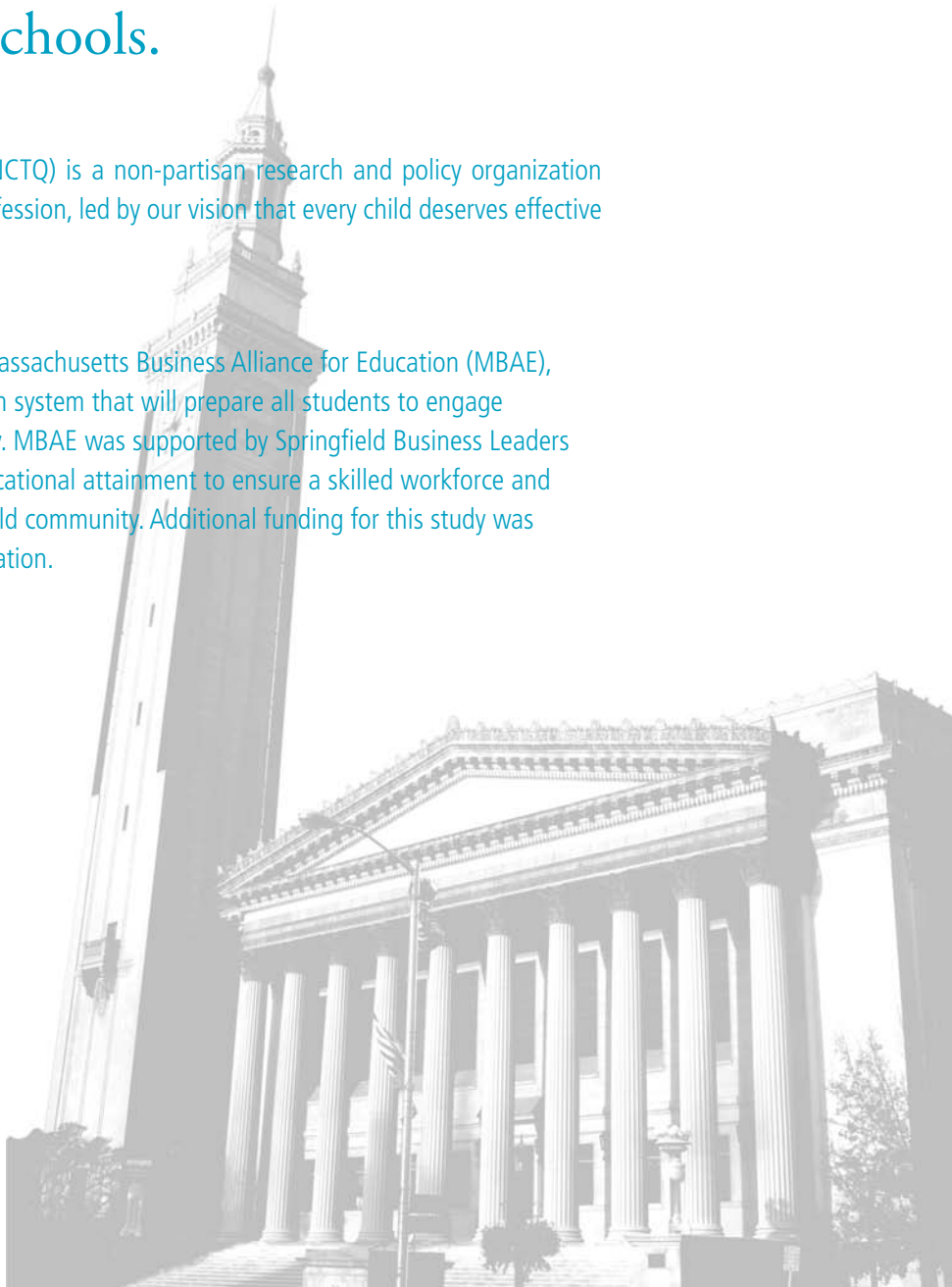

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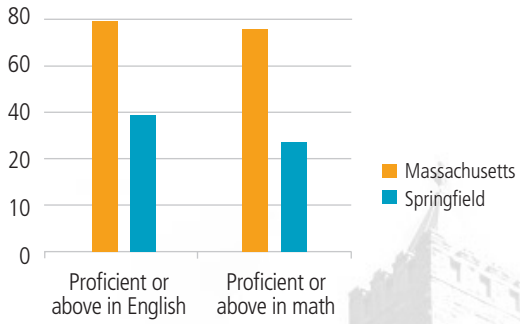
# Introduction

At the request of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, and with additional support from the Springfield Business Leaders for Education, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) undertook this analysis of teacher policies in the Springfield Public Schools.

**Figure 1.** Student performance in Springfield and Massachusetts




*Source: Springfield Strategic Dashboard, Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education*

**Figure 2.** Race and Ethnicity of Springfield student population

| Race/Ethnicity | % Students |
|---|---|
| Hispanic | 56.7 |
| African American | 22.3 |
| White | 14.7 |
| Multiracial | 4.1 |
| Asian | 2.2 |
| Native American | 0.1 |

It is important to consider this examination of teacher policies in the context of Springfield's students. Like many other urban districts in this country, far too many of Springfield's students are underperforming academically. Only 53 percent of Springfield's 9th graders graduate four years later, compared to the Massachusetts average of 82 percent. The gap is just as large between Springfield students reaching proficiency on the state MCAS exam and their peers across the state.

### Snapshot of Springfield school district, 2010-2011

- Approximately 25,000 students
  - 81 percent receive free or reduced lunch
  - 24 percent have a first language other than English
- 2,144 teachers
- 108 principals and assistant principals
- 52 schools
- $410.5 million budget

Springfield has been hard-hit by the economic recession. The district had to craft its fiscal year 2012 budget with an $18.9 million cut from the previous year. We make every effort to adjust our recommendations to the bleak financial picture in the district, avoiding those that will be too expensive for the district to take on at this time.

Superintendent Alan Ingram joined Springfield Public Schools in the summer of 2008 and is presently serving his final year leading the district. He has focused his tenure on organizational change aimed at improving student achievement, specifically academic proficiency, attendance, graduation rates, and school safety. He has continued and built upon the collaborative and inclusive labor management approach between the district and the Springfield Education Association

(SEA). As a consequence, collective bargaining looks different in Springfield than in other districts NCTQ has studied. The dialogue between district and union officials is more open, collaborative and respectful.

## Springfield's "Collaboration for Change"

Springfield leaders are clearly working together to tackle the problems it faces. The district and the teachers union, along with several other community groups and foundations, are currently engaged in the Springfield Collaboration for Change. This collaboration initiative aims to raise academic achievement for all students and eliminate the achievement gap among racial minorities and low-income students by utilizing the following strategies in its pilot schools:

- Professional development in instruction, collaborative leadership, and meeting facilitation
- Professional Learning Communities advised by retired principal and master teacher coaching teams
- Instructional leadership specialists providing coaching in data analysis and classroom management
- Engaging parents through a teacher home visit project.

For the most part, the district is implementing these initiatives over the course of the 2011-2012 school year. Though it is too early in the project to gauge its impact on students, it has helped to develop a healthy working relationship between the district and union. Other community members we spoke to commented on the unique dynamic between the union and district. "You can be in a meeting and hear them pooling their knowledge and speaking up for each other" is an observation we share based on our own experience in the district.

The aims of the Collaboration project are commendable, particularly in the way they seek to activate teachers' "latent leadership potential" to make improvements that should ultimately benefit the profession and Springfield students. Springfield principals' and project leadership's concerns about the beginning stages of the project include whether communication and improvements to management practices are reaching all teachers. They also stressed their hope that the self-reflection in schools done through surveys about organizational health and leadership will result in substantive changes in work culture and academic outcomes.

## What this report seeks to accomplish

While initiatives such as the Collaboration for Change address some of the district's greatest challenges, no initiative will succeed without a qualified workforce. By "workforce" we do not just mean teachers, but administrators, the superintendent, school support staff, and others. However, as teacher quality is our expertise, this report focuses only on the policies that can improve the quality of the teaching force. The omission of other groups from this particular lens is not intended as a commentary on the relevance of all players in the district. On the contrary, we urge the community to undertake similar examinations of its entire workforce.

NCTQ frames this analysis around five standards for improving teacher quality. These standards are supported by a strong research rationale and best practices from the field:

1. **Staffing.** District policies facilitate schools' access to top teacher talent.
2. **Evaluations.** The evaluation of teacher performance plays a critical role in advancing teacher effectiveness.
3. **Tenure.** Tenure is a meaningful milestone in a teacher's career and advances the district's goal of building a corps of effective teachers.
4. **Compensation.** Compensation is strategically targeted to attract and reward high quality teachers, especially teachers in hard-to-staff positions.
5. **Work Schedule.** Work schedule and attendance policies maximize instructional opportunity.

For each standard we make a list of recommendations for Springfield Public Schools but also the state of Massachusetts.

This symbol denotes recommendations that the district's central office can initiate without changes to the collective bargaining agreement.

This symbol denotes recommendations which requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.

This symbol denotes recommendations that require a change in Massachusetts state policy to implement.

## Methodology

In completing this study, a team of NCTQ analysts reviewed Springfield's current collective bargaining agreement with its teachers union along with any relevant school board policies. We also looked at state laws that affect local policy. We compared the laws and policies in Springfield Public Schools and the state of Massachusetts with the 100-plus school districts found in our TR$^3$ database (www.nctq.org/tr3). This exercise allowed us to determine where Springfield falls along the spectrum of teacher quality policies and to identify practices that the district might emulate. Additionally, we also collected data from school districts that surround Springfield, which are its biggest competitors for teacher talent.

We also spoke with teachers, principals, parents, community leaders, district administrators and union leaders to understand how policies play out in practice, and used these conversations to inform a district-wide survey administered to teachers and school leaders: 574 teachers and 51 principals and assistant principals completed our survey.

Lastly, we analyzed a range of teacher personnel data to give us a better understanding of the outcomes of teacher hiring, transfer, evaluation, attendance and compensation policies. As in many districts, Springfield's personnel data is housed in a number of different systems, some of which are presently being upgraded; other data is only tracked manually. As a consequence, the total number of teachers sometimes varies in the data the district provided. The discrepancy may also be due to inclusion of other members of the collective bargaining unit who may not be classroom teachers. Springfield is currently developing a sophisticated data warehouse that should resolve these inconsistencies.

A draft of our analysis was shared with both the school district and the local teachers union to verify its accuracy. Both the district and union provided valuable feedback that was incorporated in the final report. We would like to express our appreciation in particular for the data contributions of Human Resources and the thorough review of our work by the union. Its President, Tim Collins, greatly improved the accuracy of this report.

We wish to thank the community for inviting us to visit Springfield, as well as the many educators, parents, and leaders who contributed their insights and data to this report.

## Standard 1.

# Staffing

## District policies facilitate schools' access to top teacher talent.

Indicators on which this standard is assessed

1.1 Principals and/or school committees select those applicants they wish to interview and have the final say over who is hired.

1.2 When positions must be cut due either to a surplus or layoff, teacher performance is a key factor in deciding who stays or goes.

1.3 The hiring timeline allows the district to fill all vacant teacher positions by the end of the school year; teachers who are retiring and resigning provide notice *before* the transfer season begins.

1.4 The district supports principal hiring by recruiting candidates with the personal and professional characteristics found to correlate with teacher effectiveness.

### 1.1 Principals and/or school committees select those applicants they wish to interview and have the final say over who is hired.

**Finding**: The district limits the important authority principals should have in selecting their own teachers.

Springfield's teacher contract gives the district considerable flexibility to make personnel decisions, stating that final authority for staffing rests with the Superintendent.[1,2] Of particular concern for the district is the degree to which this authority overrides what principals consider to be in the best interest of their schools.

Teachers secure assignments in a Springfield school through one of the following three scenarios:

1. Principals call the HR department and ask for a referral for a teacher qualified to teach a specific subject.
2. Individuals apply directly to vacancies as either a *voluntary* transfer or as a new hire.
3. A committee (made up of the Chief Schools Officer, Deputy Superintendent and the Chief Academic Officer) assigns *involuntarily* transferred teachers who have not found a placement to other schools in the district. This practice, known as "force placing," can result from budget cuts, declining enrollments, or required personnel changes in academically struggling schools.

1 Springfield and SEA Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2007-2011, Article 11.

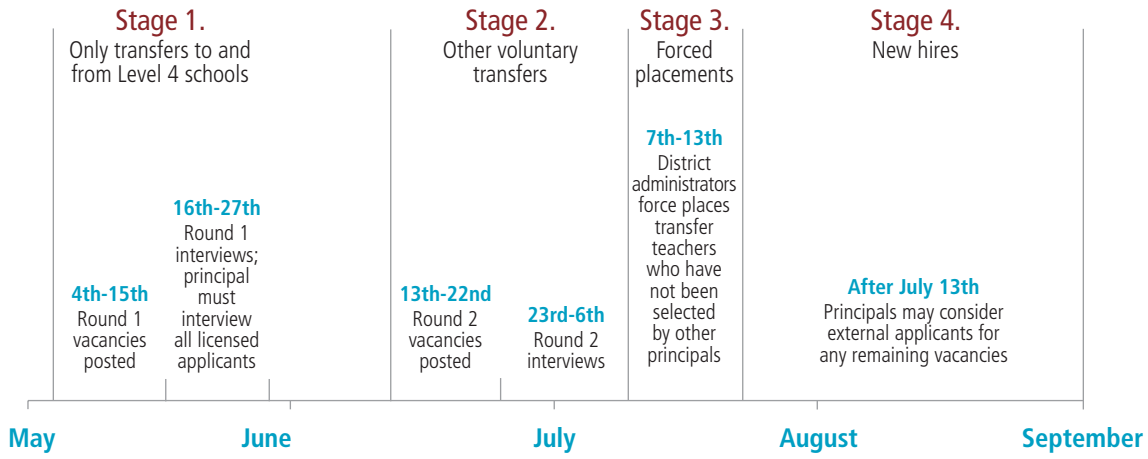
2 This is consistent with Massachusetts state law, M.G.L. Chapter 71, §59B, which provides that principals hire subject to the review of the Superintendent.

In their interviews, district staff, teachers, principals, and parents alike raised the importance of a teacher being a good "fit" in her assignment, suggesting that a poorly performing teacher may simply be at the wrong school, and able to perform better elsewhere. Just as an athlete's performance improves when playing with stronger teammates, a struggling teacher can also improve when transferring to a higher performing school. Research finds that teachers perform better when the quality of their peers improves, and that a quarter of a teacher's effectiveness may be actually attributable to how well a teacher *fits* in a school.[3] In other words, the better a teacher matches the culture of her school, the more effective she may be.

These findings make a strong case for the practice of "mutual consent" hiring in which principals and schools have *full* authority for deciding who teaches in the building. Springfield appears to recognize that such authority is important, but provides it only partially. When teachers lose their assignment in one school but cannot find a principal in another school who is willing to hire them, the district *force places* them anyway. Force placements effectively undermine the principals' authority, but because districts are contractually obligated to teachers–with or without an assignment—they feel compelled to make force placements.

There are essentially four stages to Springfield's hiring process.

**Figure 3.** Springfield's hiring timeline (2011-2012)




*Throughout the spring until mid-summer, Springfield builds in so much time to accommodate the transfers and assignments of its current teachers that the most talented new teacher hires have likely gone elsewhere.*

## Stage 1.

This stage is reserved only for the 10 schools designated by Massachusetts as academically underperforming (called Level 4 schools). These 10 principals can hire any teachers voluntarily transferring to or being transferred from these 10 schools.

There has been tremendous upheaval in the staffs at these Level 4 schools, given federal requirements to transfer out 50 percent of their teachers within the first two years of designation as an academically failing school. This shift occurred in the summers of 2010 and 2011. During the 2010-2011 school year, 52 teachers were involuntarily transferred in accordance with this law.

3 Jackson, Clement Kirabo & Bruegmann, Elias (2009). *Teaching Students and Teaching Each Other: The Importance of Peer Learning for Teachers*. National Bureau of Economic Research.

Additionally, before the second stage of hiring, "excessed" teachers—those who are forced to leave their current positions because of staffing fluctuations—are matched with vacancies in their certification area across the district by the HR department. Principals have no say in accepting these teachers at their schools. If the teacher is dissatisfied with the placement, she may go into the voluntary transfer pool and hope that a more suitable assignment turns up.

### Stage 2.

The second stage of hiring is open to all teachers who wish to *voluntarily* transfer (including excessed teachers placed by HR during Round 1 who did not like their assignment). Principals working in Level 4 schools are provided a great deal of leeway in this round as well, as they are allowed to rehire, recall, and even hire new teachers as long as they also consider internal applicants.

### Stage 3.

Here is where principal authority ceases altogether. In this round, district administrators force place any unselected applicants in remaining vacancies. One principal noted that, "If you're smart, you fill your positions by the end of the second round" or otherwise risk receiving a force placement that may not be the right fit. Another principal said that she closed a position after the second stage then "magically" opened it again after excessed teachers were placed, in an effort to preserve a spot for a promising new teacher.

### Stage 4.

It is only at this stage that new hires can be considered, mid-July at the earliest. Only after all teachers transferring internally are placed are new applicants considered (with the exception of Level 4 principals who are allowed to hire new teachers in Stage 2).

## Finding: Principals have little incentive to communicate clearly with HR about their vacancies because it undermines their ability to select their staff.

Principals interviewed by NCTQ reported that Round 1 of hiring is "very, very confused" and say that listed vacancies are often inaccurate. Several also said it is a gamble to advertise a vacancy early because it is more likely to be filled by district administrators with a force placement in the third stage of teacher assignments. In an effort to preserve their authority to select their own teachers, principals sometimes do not advertise available vacancies, consequently perpetuating inaccurate information for teacher applicants and the HR department. We observe this same practice in districts across the country.

**Figure 4.** Level 4 Schools: Springfield's most challenging schools

| |
|---|
| Brightwood Elementary |
| Brookings Elementary |
| Chestnut Middle School |
| Gerena Elementary |
| Homer Elementary |
| Kennedy Middle School |
| Kiley Middle School |
| The High School of Commerce |
| White Street Elementary |
| Zanetti K-8 |

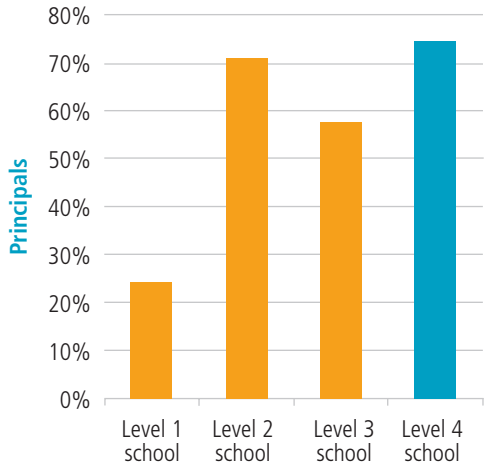
*These are the 10 academically struggling "Level 4" schools in Springfield. In keeping with federal law, each is engaged in turnaround efforts to help improve student achievement.*

**Finding:** Though principals in Level 4 (academically struggling schools) have been granted the most authority over hires, they report that they are unable to hire a teacher of their choosing at a higher rate than their colleagues in other schools.

Principals' recruitment struggles do not appear to all stem from the reluctance of teachers to work in these schools. Rather, principals report that they were most often unable to hire the teacher of their choosing either because HR forced them to first hire from the transfer list, or because the promising candidate was snatched up by another school. Their comments conflict with stated policy that requires these principals to only *consider* internal transfers, and warrants clarification between district administrators and school leaders.

Even if Level 4 schools have more flexibility, they are also required by federal law to transfer more teachers from their schools, creating larger numbers of vacancies to fill. The requirement to turn over so much staff, so fast, may be self-defeating if there is a shortage of qualified candidates to fill the vacancies or the district is unable to provide the right incentives to persuade candidates to teach in these schools.

**Figure 5.** Principals hiring autonomy




*Source: NCTQ Survey of Springfield Principals/ APs, 2011; n = 51*

*Principals at the most challenging Level 4 schools report less success in hiring teachers of their choosing, despite having more staffing flexibility than their colleagues at less troubled, Level 1, 2 and 3 schools.*

"Hiring is a big chess game."

–Springfield principal

### Finding: Many Springfield educators and community members cite disruptions due to relatively frequent principal transfers.

Principals are sometimes given more authority to staff their own schools if they agree to a new assignment. Parents, teachers, and school leaders reported that principals who are reassigned to turn around low-performing schools often take along a number of hand-picked staff, as part of their agreement with the district to take on a school that is particularly struggling. While this turnover may be an advantage to the struggling school, educators and parents are concerned about the leadership vacuum and disruption this creates in the original school. They worry about the capacity of a new or less stellar principal to attract top teaching talent to fill the vacancies. A new principal filling the void at one such Springfield school expressed concerns about her ability to build a cohesive team in the wake of the departure of many strong educators.

## 1.2 When positions must be cut due either to a surplus or layoff, teacher performance is a key factor in deciding who stays or goes.

### Finding: Springfield lays off teachers by seniority and does not consider a teacher's performance.

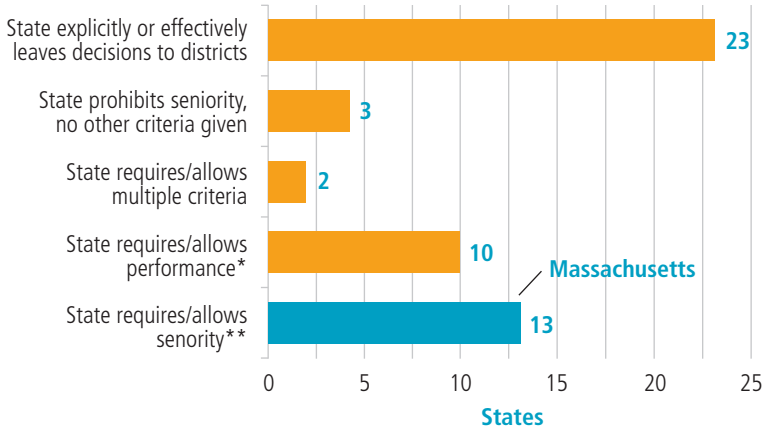
Like 12 other states, Massachusetts state law allows layoffs to be determined by teacher seniority.[4] At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, due to financial reasons, 305 teachers received layoff notices by a May 15 deadline,[5] but almost all of these teachers were later rehired when the budget was finalized for fiscal year 2012. These rehires were due in part to having more funds than the initially conservative estimates, and in part to principals renewing fewer contracts than expected for novice teachers. Besides this group of teachers, an additional 27 teachers were excessed due to budget and enrollment changes, meaning the district was contractually obligated to find them another position. How well these teachers performed was immaterial. Only the number of years they had taught—not the quality of their work—determined their employment status.

Relying on seniority to determine layoffs is common across the 50 largest districts which are included in NCTQ's TR3 database. Increasingly, however, districts are transitioning to making hiring decisions based primarily on performance, largely as a result of changes in state law. Since the beginning of 2010, nine states have moved away from layoffs by seniority, and some now prohibit it.

4 Massachusetts state law, Title XII, Chapter 71, §42.

5 State law allows for a June 15th deadline, but Springfield's teachers' contract requires a May 15th deadline. The significance of this is that sometimes, due to budget uncertainty in May, the district may be required to lay-off more teachers than is ultimately necessary. This number is out of a total of 2,144 teachers.

**Figure 6.** States' policies on layoff decisions




*Source: NCTQ's TR³ database, www.nctq.org/tr3*

* 1 state requires that non-tenured teachers be laid off first but by performance, not seniority.
** 1 state requires that non-tenured be laid off before tenured teachers, but performance is a factor in both sets of decisions; 1 state requires that non-tenured be laid off first, but then that tenured teachers be laid off by performance.

*Massachusetts is one of a shrinking number of states that still permits districts to use seniority to determine which teachers will be laid off. Though 13 states still use seniority to make layoff decisions, just two years ago the number was as high as 22 states.*

In addition, the district adheres to a particularly damaging practice of a seniority-based system that other districts have long abandoned called "bumping rights." The contract stipulates that teachers are allowed to switch certification areas (if they have proper credentials) with the purpose of "bumping" less senior teachers from their positions. Some of the more egregious bumping scenarios are avoided because a Springfield teacher must have experience teaching the subject for at least a semester in the Springfield schools. For example, if a French teacher with six years in the district is about to lose her position, but is also certified in English and has taught an English course in the district, she may take the position of a fellow English teacher with four years of experience.

## Finding: Most school leaders who have been instructed to "excess" some of their teachers resort to "workaround" solutions in order to protect their high-performing teachers.

According to the contract, when positions must be cut at a school, principals must identify those teachers who must be reassigned to another school in the system. Although HR indicated that 2010-2011 was the first time in recent years that they've had to excess teachers, these transfers have become quite commonplace, due to the federal requirement that turnaround schools transfer 50 percent of their staff within a two-year window.

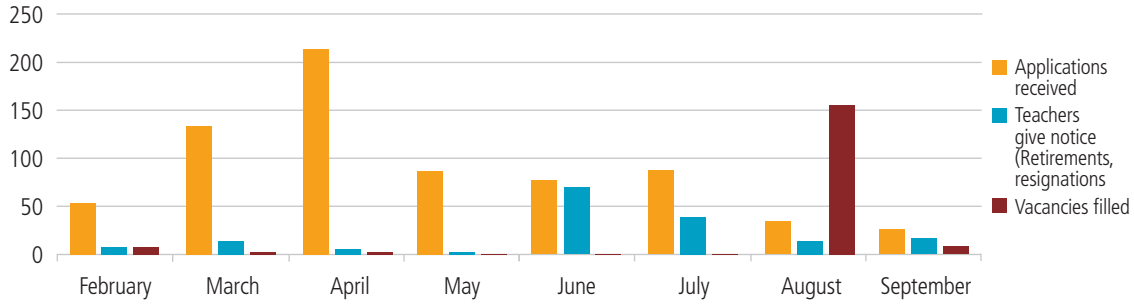
When having to excess teachers, principals are supposed to use seniority to guide decisions about who will be displaced. But over half of Springfield's principals and assistant principals report persuading teachers they perceive as lower-performing to leave their school, or switching teachers' placements to keep teachers perceived as stronger in their classrooms. By doing so, they remove lower-performing teachers from their own schools, but pass them along to other principals in the district. This practice undermines the quality of instruction for students, as lower-performing teachers are neither dismissed nor counseled out, but instead get passed from school to school.

## 1.3 The hiring timeline allows the district to fill all vacant teacher positions by the end of the school year; teachers who are retiring and resigning provide notice before the transfer season begins.

**Finding:** Springfield makes the majority of its teacher assignments very late, mostly right before the start of the school year.

The district filled 162 of 168 vacancies in the final two months before the start of the 2010-2011 school year. By mid-summer, stronger candidates have generally found positions elsewhere, and the newly hired teachers have little time left to prepare.

**Figure 7.** Springfield's lag in filling vacancies (2010)




*Source: Springfield Human Resources*

*Most vacancies are filled right before the start of the new school year, and some are even filled after the school year has started.*

One way to make it possible to hire teachers earlier is to encourage teachers planning to resign or retire to notify the district earlier in the year. The contract only requires 30 days advance notice from resigning teachers and does not set an actual date. In the 2009-2010 school year, only one teacher took advantage of an early retirement notification incentive offered by the district. The district tries to create incentives for teachers to notify early, by awarding them the top rate of pay for their degree status if they notify the district that they will be retiring in a year. However, since very few teachers are below this rate by the time they retire, the incentive is not effective.

Unfortunately, the district does not currently track when retiring and resigning teachers must provide notice to the district of their decision to leave. The first step in solving this problem would be to collect better data. A review of the data that is available, that is, the *effective* dates of these retirements and resignations, indicates that the district is not capitalizing on the opportunity to hire talented teachers earlier in the season and giving teachers and school leaders adequate preparation time for the upcoming school year.

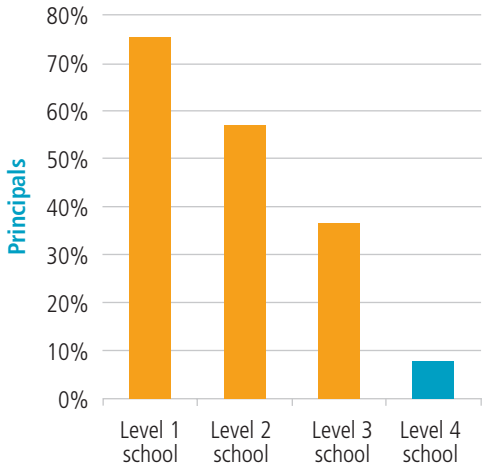
District administrators attribute much of their recruitment problems to the dates for voluntary transfer period as well as the budget being approved too late to allow hires to occur. The school district reports that they have previously been prepared to send commitment letters to new hires in January, based on projections using historical data, but were forced to wait for state and local budget updates, which usually do not arrive until May. The voluntary transfer process adds to this delay, as the district waits for its completion in early July before hiring new teachers.

## 1.4 The district supports principal hiring by recruiting candidates with the personal and professional characteristics found to correlate with teacher effectiveness.

### Finding: Springfield's lowest performing schools struggle to hire talented teachers.

Districts typically experience a shortage of highly qualified applicants in "critical needs" subjects. Springfield's strategy has not been particularly innovative, using recruitment fairs and college campus visits as their primary strategies to recruit these teachers. Five of Springfield's 10 Level 4 schools were required by federal law to turn over half of their staffs in two years; not surprisingly, principals of these schools expressed the most frustration in hiring for these subjects.

**Figure 8.** Finding teachers for high-shortage fields — Principals overall satisfaction with hiring process



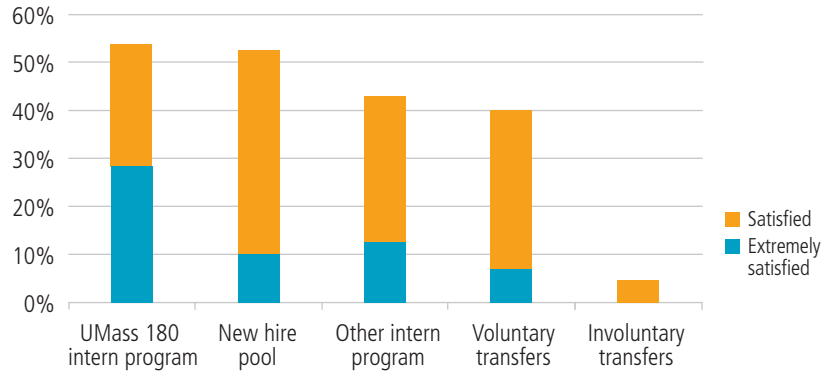

*Source: NCTQ Survey of Springfield Principals/ APs, 2011; n = 51*

*In spite of district efforts to give hiring preference to principals working in the district's most challenging "Level 4" schools, principals in these schools still report having the hardest time finding teachers, especially in some shortage subject areas such as math, science, special education and ESL. Only 8 percent of these principals reported finding the candidates they need, as opposed to principals working in Level 1 schools who report almost no problem.*

### Finding: Of the different teacher candidates available in the hiring pool, principals expressed the most satisfaction with interns from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst's Teach 180 program.

UMass 180 interns are graduate students from the university's School of Education, who are provided a structured student teaching experience in Springfield schools. They elicit relatively higher satisfaction rates from principals than other teacher candidates. Involuntary transfers are commonly perceived as lower-quality candidates, and may not represent the best candidates the district has to offer schools with vacancies.

**Figure 9.** How satisfied are you with the teacher applicants from the following sources?

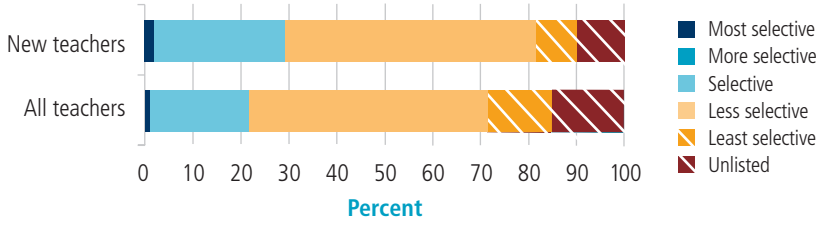



*Source: NCTQ Survey of Springfield Principals/APs, 2011; n=51*

*Principals rank UMass 180 interns the highest quality of any prospective teachers. Notably, not one principal reported being "extremely satisfied" with involuntary transfers or "excessed" teachers as a source of high quality teachers.*

Springfield appears to be making some improved effort to recruit talented teaching candidates. One important, but often ignored, indicator of promising teacher talent is a teacher's academic background. Many studies over the years show that teachers with higher scores on tests of verbal ability, such as the SAT or ACT, or teachers who have graduated from more selective colleges, are more likely to be effective in terms of their impact on student achievement.[6] It is by no means a guarantee of future performance, but a teacher's own academic performance is an attribute that districts are well advised to consider, but often do not.

**Figure 10.** Selectivity of undergraduate institutions of Springfield teachers




*Source: Springfield Human Resources*

For example, a study by the Illinois Education Research Council found the following measures to be linked to a teacher's ability to produce academic gains among students: the selectivity of a teacher's undergraduate institution, a teacher's own SAT or ACT scores (not just the average for the institution) and a teacher's pass rate on state licensure exams.[7] There was a particularly strong correlation between effectiveness and teachers who only had to take their licensing test once.

6 Boyd, D., Lankford, H. Loeb, S., Rockoff, J. & Wyckoff, J. (2007). *The narrowing gap in New York City teacher qualifications and its implications for student achievement in high poverty schools.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

7 White, B. Presley, J. & DeAngelis, K. (2008). Leveling up: Narrowing the teacher academic capital gap in Illinois. *Illinois Education Research Council (IERC)*, 2008-1.

In sum, teachers who were themselves good students tend to be good teachers.

Two organizations whose teacher candidates are ranked quite highly by principals are Teach For America and The New Teacher Project. Both organizations pay a lot of attention to the academic caliber of their recruits; strong GPAs are important. The average GPA of a Teach For America corps member is 3.6; for a teaching fellow in The New Teacher Project, it is 3.3. However, both groups report that they do not have an iron-clad rule for a candidate's GPA or SAT score. Each year, they hire a small percentage of candidates who do not have strong academic records, but who exhibit other overriding strengths. Nevertheless, data showing academic strength of candidates is always collected and academic caliber is always carefully considered. Their recruitment practices are worth emulating, no matter what one's view of the appropriateness of fast-track alternative routes.

We looked for evidence of Springfield's attention to a teacher's academic background. We also reviewed the admissions selectivity of undergraduate institutions for teachers working in the district for the 2010-2011 school year. The district's data on its teachers' academic background is incomplete; it was only able to provide this information for 80 percent of its teachers and 48 percent of its new hires.

Based on rankings compiled by *U.S. News & World Report*, only 15 percent of Springfield's teachers graduated from a college or university ranked either "most" or "more" selective. These numbers improve slightly when looking only at the new hires for the 2010-2011 school year.

The U.S. News ratings do not reflect whether a school of education might impose more rigorous admission requirements than the institutions at large. For that reason, NCTQ examined the top 10 producers of Springfield teachers to see if their schools of education were more selective. We assign one of three ratings to reflect whether the school of education is admitting students who are in the top half of their college-attending high school class:

1. All candidates are screened adequately; ✓
2. Some or all candidates are screened inadequately ✗
3. No candidates are screened adequately. ✗✗

Even considering this additional data, Springfield may not be recruiting teachers from sufficiently selective institutions.

**Figure 11.** Selectivity of teacher preparation programs feeding Springfield schools

| College/University | Teachers with a BA from this university | NCTQ selectivity ranking for institution's school of education |
|---|---|---|
| Westfield State College | 514 | ✕ |
| University of Massachusetts, Amherst | 286 | N/A* |
| American International College | 190 | N/A* |
| Elms College | 139 | ✕✕ |
| Springfield College | 70 | ✕ |
| Western New England College | 68 | ✕ |
| Fitchburg State College | 66 | ✕ |
| Bay Path College | 58 | ✕✕ |
| Mount Holyoke College | 43 | ✕✕ |
| Framingham State College | 42 | ✕ |

* NCTQ's selectivity ratings examine undergraduate schools of education. Institution only has a graduate program.

*None of the education schools at the universities producing the most Springfield teachers adequately screen the academic caliber of applicants.*

## **Finding:** School leaders are not using appropriate interview protocols for screening the best teaching candidates.

Another area where district practice could be strengthened is the interview process. Of Springfield teachers who have been working at their current school for five years or less, only **5 percent** reported having had to teach a sample lesson or provide a video of their instruction as part of the interview. Though some principals reported using a rigorous process that includes a teaching demonstration, interview with team of teachers, review of previous evaluations and student data, teachers reported wide variation between schools for such practices, indicating that the district should take a more systematic approach to training principals on strong teacher selection practices.

After considering academic backgrounds of candidates, both Teach For America and The New Teacher Project engage in a far more complex exercise of analyzing the personal characteristics of a candidate, all of which are best judged in the interview process. Teach For America, particularly, uses a very precise rubric to discern a set of attributes in its preferred candidates. Harvard University, in a recent study, found these very attributes to be predictive of student achievement during a teacher's first year of teaching. The study found, for example, that in math, students who had teachers with higher measures of academic achievement, leadership skills, and perseverance did better than their peers.[8]

8 Dobbie, Will. (2011). *Teacher Characteristics and Student Achievement: Evidence from Teach For America.* Harvard University.

## Recommendations for Springfield Public Schools

1. **Use performance as the primary determinant in layoff decisions.** Although Massachusetts law permits the use of seniority in layoff decisions, it does not require it. Springfield should use the flexibility in state law to its advantage to determine layoffs by performance. Research shows that not only is experience a poor predictor of teacher effectiveness after the first few years, it results in more teachers being laid off. Springfield may consider using a weighted system that primarily considers performance, but still incorporates seniority to a degree.

2. **Eliminate forced placement of unselected transfer candidates.** Forced placements undermine the ability of principals to build strong faculties and teachers to find the best fit. In the situation in which a position is simply no longer available at a teacher's school, the teacher should only be placed at a school where the principal is willing to hire her. The district should place a one-year limit on the amount of time an unplaced teacher has to find a new position. This window allows teachers to participate in two full hiring cycles, one during their last year teaching, and one the following year. Following this period, a teacher who principals were unwilling to hire should be dismissed or at least placed on unpaid leave. This dismissal *should not* be interpreted as an alternative to proper evaluation, remediation, and dismissal of a poorly performing teacher. It *should* allow the district to dismiss a teacher for whom a position no longer exists.

**Where it's been done:**

**New York City** was the first of the large urban districts to implement a "mutual consent" approach to staffing in 2005. Since then, a handful of other districts have moved in this direction, including Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. Washington, D.C., and Chicago, however, have made the important distinction of not guaranteeing teachers a position in the system, ending contractual requirements after a year.

Excessed teachers in **Chicago** are given 10 months at full salary to secure a new position. Afterwards, those who have not been hired by a principal are dismissed. A similar policy is part of the teacher contract in **Washington, D.C.** Excessed teachers with an ineffective rating are immediately dismissed. Teachers who have been given a "minimally effective" evaluation rating have two months to find a new position, after which they are dismissed. Teachers with an "effective" or "highly effective" rating are given up to a year to find a new position.

**Colorado**'s new education reform legislation gives excessed teachers two years to secure a new assignment. Those who do not find a new assignment are not dismissed, but placed on unpaid leave. This compromise means that excessed teachers who are without an assignment cannot remain on the payroll indefinitely. While these teachers are not formally dismissed, this compromise solution may be more tenable for states to undertake.



This recommendation requires only a change in practice.

This recommendation requires a requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.

This recommendation requires a change in state law.

3. **Redesign the assignment timeline to remove impediments to hiring talented teachers—whether new or transferring.** The current hiring timeline is too protracted, complex and inflexible, undercutting the goal of placing the most effective teacher possible in every Springfield classroom. New, talented candidates are unlikely to wait around for the district's late hiring season, when they can find jobs elsewhere, and principals are unable to guarantee a space for them. Aside from giving priority to academically struggling schools. The present timeline unnecessarily favors voluntary and even involuntary transfers. These teachers should be evaluated through the same lens as new hires, and should only be placed at a school when selected by the principal.

4. **Improve applicant recruitment and screenings in HR to ensure that candidates sent to schools are high-caliber.** HR needs to do more to increase the caliber of teachers in the recruitment pool, beginning with collecting good data about the academic background of recruits. The district should also conduct a thorough initial screen (that goes beyond simply ensuring that the candidate is certified) before principals interview candidates. This screen should happen in the early spring, so that there is a pool of high-quality, pre-screened applicants in the running prior to the transfer season.

5. **Train principals in rigorous hiring practices, and collect data on applicants and hired candidates to inform future recruitment and screening.** In addition to training principals and assistant principals in strong interview and selection practices, the district should employ its new data systems in tracking the characteristics of incoming teachers against their evaluations and performance in the district, to inform future recruitment, selection, and support of educators.

## Recommendations for Massachusetts

1. **Make it legally permissible to dismiss teachers who are without an assignment after one year (two hiring cycles).** Without such a provision, districts are forced to compromise on their commitment to mutual consent staffing, effectively force placing teachers into schools. If districts are not permitted to terminate unassigned teachers after a certain period of time, they ultimately are left with little choice but to compromise their commitment to mutual consent hiring.

2. **Require performance to be used as a factor in determining which teachers will be laid off.** Massachusetts law presently allows districts to lay teachers off according to seniority. This quality-blind staffing strategy means that Springfield students are likely losing talented teachers simply because they are newer to the district than their colleagues. Teacher effectiveness should be the primary determinant in staffing decisions, including layoffs. Seniority could still be considered, but should not be the deciding factor.

3. **Revise budget timelines, particularly for districts that are heavily dependent on state funds.** Over 69 percent of Springfield's 2011 budget is comprised of state aid.[9] Because such a large proportion of the budget comes of the state, Springfield is more susceptible to the effects of inaccurate or conservative fiscal projections. The state's funding and budgeting timeline has a major impact on school and district timelines, including recruitment and hiring.

9 Springfield Public Schools, *Facts About School Finance Everyone Should Know*

This recommendation requires only a change in practice.

This recommendation requires a requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.

This recommendation requires a change in state law.

## Standard 2.

# Evaluation

### The evaluation of teacher performance plays a critical role in advancing teacher effectiveness.

Indicators on which this standard is assessed

2.1 All teachers receive an annual evaluation rating.

2.2 Objective evidence of student learning is the preponderant criterion on which teachers are evaluated.

2.3 Classroom observations focus on a set of observable standards that gauge student learning.

2.4 Evaluations factor in multiple observations by multiple parties, such as school administrators, department heads, trained exemplary teachers, central office evaluators and content experts. These observers provide regular feedback to teachers on their classroom instruction.

2.5 Evaluations offer multiple ratings to distinguish performance differences among teachers.

2.6 Observations occur early enough in the school year to provide sufficient time for struggling teachers to improve and for administrators to make a final decision about a teacher's continued employment before year's end.

2.7 Decisions to terminate a poorly performing teacher occur swiftly and are made by educational leadership, not a court of law.

**Figure 12.** Springfield's transition to a new evaluation instrument

| School year | Level 4 schools | Level 1, 2 and 3 schools |
|---|---|---|
| 2010-2011 | STEDS | STEDS |
| 2011-2012 | New evaluation | STEDS |
| 2012-2013 | New evaluation | New evaluation |

Springfield is presently developing a new evaluation instrument that must adhere to new Massachusetts evaluation requirements. The 10 academically struggling schools known as Level 4 schools will implement the new evaluation in the 2011-2012 school year and the remaining 35 schools in the district will do so for the 2012-2013 school year. As the vast majority of schools still utilize the current instrument known as STEDS, used since the 2007–2008 school year, both systems will be discussed in this analysis.

The new state regulations will require that teacher evaluations incorporate multiple measures of student academic growth. Massachusetts is requiring that districts count student performance measures as a "significant factor" in their redesigned evaluation systems. This rule reflects not only the growing national acceptance for considering

student learning in the evaluation of teachers, but also the state's implementation of its Race to the Top program. Indeed, in NCTQ's survey of Springfield administrators, their top recommendation for improving teacher evaluations was to incorporate student achievement. This response is consistent with the response we've observed in other districts, perhaps because principals themselves are already held accountable for students' academic achievement.

## 2.1 All teachers receive an annual evaluation rating.

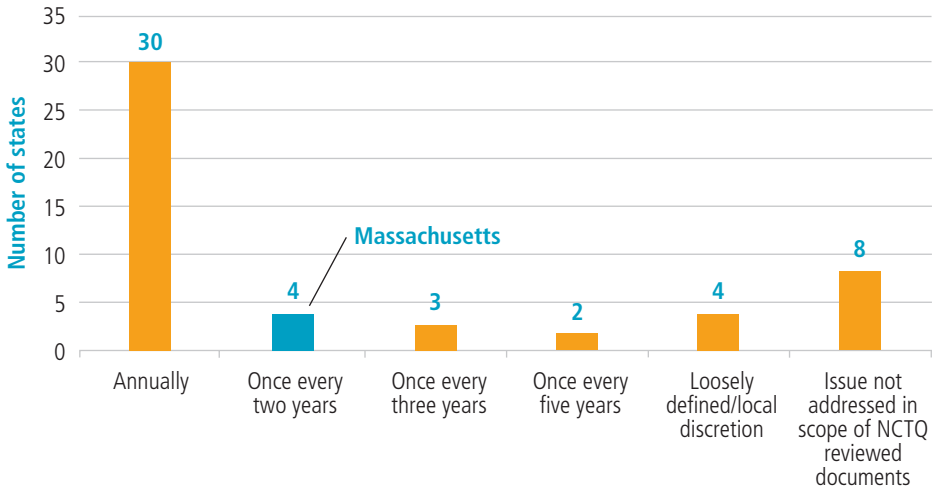
### Finding: In the 2010-2011 school year, only 66 percent of Springfield's teachers received formal evaluations.[10]

Annual evaluations help both the district and principals understand the performance of their staff; most importantly, they provide all teachers, both strong and weak, with essential feedback.

Over half of all states and the District of Columbia require that tenured teachers be evaluated annually. Massachusetts state law requires its school districts to annually evaluate non-tenured teachers (those within their first three years of teaching). Tenured or "professional status" teachers are also evaluated every year, but may have their summative evaluation substituted with a formative one every other year if they earn a proficient or exemplary rating. The teachers contract stipulates that struggling teachers who have been placed on an improvement plan must be observed at least three times a year.

Accordingly, in the 2010-2011 school year, only 73 percent of Springfield's teachers were due for evaluation. Compared to many districts, Springfield does a relatively good job ensuring that these teachers are actually evaluated: 90 percent of the eligible teachers did in fact get evaluated. In other districts we have visited, the discrepancy has been much higher.

**Figure 13.** States' policies on the frequency of teacher evaluations




*Source: NCTQ's TR³ database, www.nctq.org/tr3*

*Most states require teachers to be evaluated annually. From 2009 to 2011 the number of states requiring annual evaluations jumped from 15 to 24—a huge shift. Massachusetts allows tenured teachers with proficient and exemplary ratings to receive a formative evaluation in lieu of a summative one every other year.*

10 Based on a count of 2,144 teachers in the 2010-2011 school year.

## 2.2 Objective evidence of student learning is the preponderant criterion on which teachers are evaluated.

## 2.3 Classroom observations focus on a set of observable standards that gauge student learning.

**Findings:** Complying with state law, Springfield's new evaluation instrument will incorporate objective evidence of student learning.

Very few of the current instrument's indicators have the observer measure student behavior or outcomes as an indicator of teacher effectiveness.

Though the evaluation instrument is about to change, we analyze some aspects of the current instrument so that its weaknesses are not carried over into the new design.

**Figure 14.** Evaluation principles in the STEDS teacher evaluation instrument
(Massachusetts Department of Education's principles of effective teaching)

| |
|---|
| I. Currency in the Curriculum |
| II. Effective Planning and Assessment of Curriculum and Instruction |
| III. Effective Management of Classroom Environment |
| IV. Effective Instruction |
| V. Promotion of High Standards and Expectations for Student Achievement |
| VI. Promotion of Equity and Appreciation of Diversity |
| VII. Fulfillment of Professional Responsibilities |

### Balancing the focus on teachers and students.

To begin, in every area on the current observation instrument, each statement starts with "The teacher." The instrument judges the success of a teacher only by what is observed about the teacher and not what students are doing as a result of the teacher's instruction. For example, under "Effective Instruction" the observer does not look for evidence of students being able to make connections between new concepts and prior experiences, but are only supposed to note whether the teacher is making those connections.

Out of all 43 indicators, only four require evaluators to gauge observable student behaviors to determine whether a teacher's strategies have been effective.[11]

11 They are Indicator #14: "Establishes classroom procedures that maintain a high level of *students' time-on-task and ensure smooth transitions* from one activity to another;" #16: "Demonstrates attitudes of fairness, courtesy and respect that encourage *students' active participation* and commitment to learning; #18: "Identifies confusions and misconceptions as *indicated by student responses*; and #26: "Responds to students' answers and work so as to *keep them thinking, and persevering with challenging tasks*.

> " I've seen many good teachers laid off while teachers with more seniority and horrible teaching practices are kept or moved to different schools. We need a system to fairly evaluate teachers and keep those of quality regardless of seniority."
>
> – Springfield teacher

**Length.**
Many evaluation instruments are overly lengthy checklists; as a result, the observer ends up spending more time looking at the form than the classroom. While the district recently reduced the number of indicators in the instrument by almost half, 43 remain, which is still too many for principals to effectively observe.

**Irrelevant indicators.**
The structure of the instrument could be improved and streamlined by removing the many indicators that will not be observed in the evaluation, but are meant to be reserved for a later conversation. Currently, the first page of the observation form includes a proviso for those indicators considered "non-observable." For those indicators, the evaluator may request evidence from the teacher that she is meeting expectations outside of the observation. These indicators have little bearing on instruction.

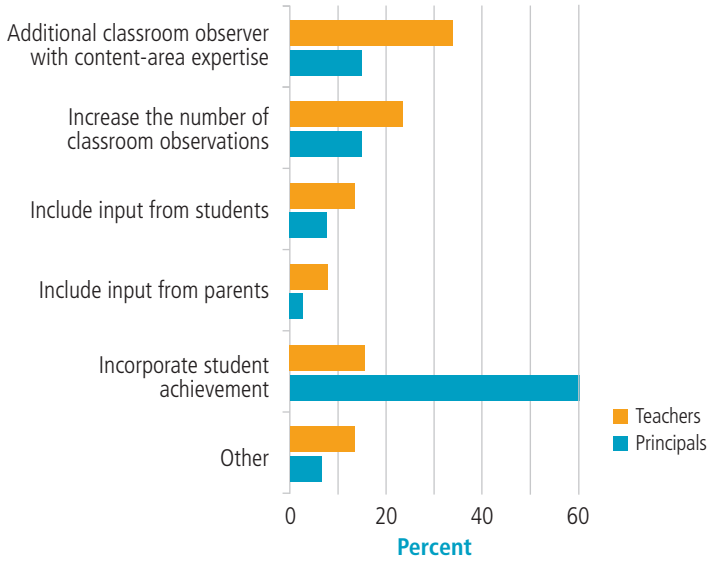
**Better observation rubrics.**
The instrument lacks observation rubrics that assist observers in identifying either the teacher or student behaviors that are worth noting. A rubric provides details and examples to help observers choose the correct rating.

*The appendix provides a comparison between the Springfield's current instrument rubric and a rubric used in D.C. Public Schools. The D.C. rubric highlights the benefit of providing specifics and examples as a guide for observers.*

## 2.4 Evaluations factor in multiple observations by multiple parties, such as a school administrators, senior faculty, central office evaluators and content experts. These observers provide regular feedback to teachers on their classroom instruction.

**Finding:** Springfield requires few formal observations of teachers, and these are usually performed only by principals.

**Figure 15.** What single change would Springfield's administrators and teachers most recommend to improve teacher evaluations?




*Source: NCTQ Survey of Springfield educators, 2011; principals =51; teachers n=574*

*Most Springfield principals recommended incorporating student achievement into teacher evaluations. Teachers want to be observed by individuals who know their subject matter.*

There currently is no formal mechanism in the evaluation process by which teachers receive content-specific feedback on their instruction. While the Springfield evaluation handbook requires that evaluators have training in management and also "expertise in the subject matter and/or area to be evaluated," this expertise is not defined. For example, it is highly unlikely that one school leader at a high school has an expert knowledge in all the secondary subjects taught by the teachers she must evaluate. In NCTQ's survey, Springfield teachers' top recommendation for improving the quality of evaluations was to include an additional observer with content-area expertise.

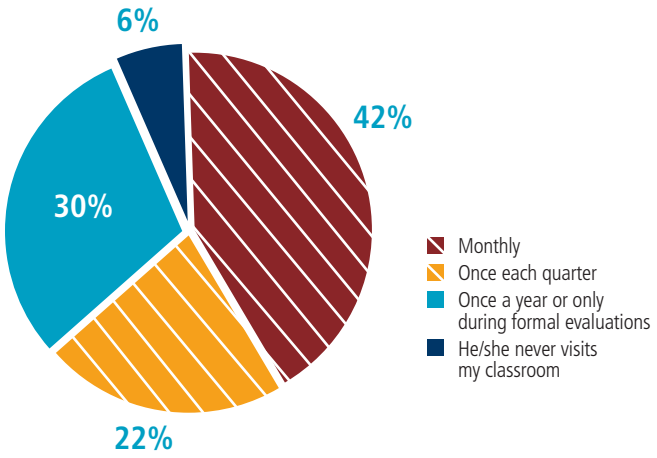
The teachers' contract lays out the general procedures for a teacher observation. Commendably, observers must conference with teachers both before and after the observation, ensuring adequate communication with the teacher. The teacher is assigned a rating in an additional conference scheduled by the observer.

There are inherent problems with the rules around the observation which diminish the integrity of the process:

| Practice | Problem with the practice |
|---|---|
| Observations must be at least 15 minutes long. | Principals find that frequent walkthroughs of five to 10 minutes in teachers' classrooms provides an excellent picture of instruction (see appendix on page 63). |
| Any informal observations conducted by the principal (occasional walkthroughs or unscheduled observations) may not be incorporated into a teacher's final evaluation. | It could well be that eight quicker walkthroughs over the course of a year are better than one 45-minute observation. |
| Observations must be scheduled in advance. | This stipulation unfortunately means that principals are less likely to see a teacher's typical instruction, and less able to provide the most relevant feedback. |

## **Finding:** Almost half of teachers report that principals visit their classrooms monthly.

**Figure 16.** Teachers report how often school administrators observes their classroom

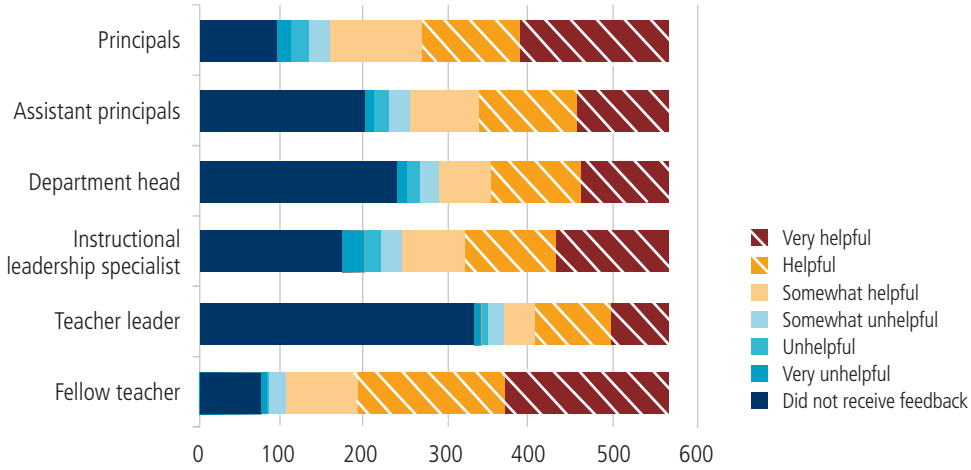



*Source: NCTQ Survey of Springfield Teachers, 2011; n=574*

*Over 60 percent of surveyed teachers reported that administrators observe their teaching at least quarterly.*

Springfield administrators appear to take an active interest in their teachers' instruction, at a level we have not seen elsewhere. Over two-thirds of teachers report that their principal and assistant principals visit their classrooms at least once a quarter. These frequent classroom visits are fortunate, since teachers also rank feedback from their principals as the most helpful among any that they receive from an individual colleague. Teachers also report that fellow teachers provide helpful feedback, and likely due to sheer numbers, these colleagues are able to provide feedback with more frequency.

**Figure 17.** Sources of helpful feedback, according to Springfield teachers




*Source: NCTQ Survey of Springfield Teachers, 2011; n=574*

*We asked teachers to tell us who provides them with the most consistently helpful feedback, with teachers reporting that their principals and fellow teachers provide the most helpful feedback. There seems to be far less enthusiasm for the feedback provided by the teacher leader.*

## 2.5 Evaluations offer multiple rating levels to distinguish performance differences among teachers.

**Finding:** The current evaluation instrument has only three rating levels; principals rarely use the lowest.

**Figure 18.** Evaluation ratings for teachers (2010-2011)

| Areas on which teachers are evaluated | Does not meet expectation (%) | Meets expectation (%) | Exceeds expectation (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Currency in the Curriculum | 0.4 | 58.3 | 41.3 |
| Effective Planning | 0.7 | 57.7 | 41.6 |
| Effective Management | 1.1 | 44.6 | 54.3 |
| Effective Instruction | 1.0 | 53.6 | 45.4 |
| Promotion of High Standards | 0.6 | 56.0 | 43.5 |
| Promotion of Equity | 0.0 | 55.8 | 44.2 |
| Fulfillment of Professional Responsibilities | 0.1 | 48.8 | 51.2 |
| **Total** | **0.6** | **53.6** | **45.7** |

*Source: Springfield Human Resources, n=1420*

*What is rather remarkable about these figures is that so few teachers are found to be unsatisfactory in any category—less than one percent. The message to teachers is that they are doing great and there are few areas for future growth.*

The satisfactory evaluation ratings provided to teachers are not borne out by student outcomes. The four-year cohort graduation rate in Springfield is 53 percent, compared to the statewide average of 82 percent, and there are similarly large gaps in student proficiency as measured by the state's MCAS exam and the state average.

Like many districts across the country, Springfield's current evaluation instrument does not do a good job in distinguishing differences in teachers' performance, which would help to identify truly excellent or struggling teachers. In the 2010-2011 school year almost half (54 percent) of evaluated teachers received "Meets Expectations" with the remaining 46 percent earning "Exceeds Expectations" ratings.

The state's new teacher evaluation guidelines include a requirement that there be four rating levels that teachers may earn. This change will take some adjustment for both observers and teachers to start using and accepting more candid ratings.

## 2.6 Observations occur early enough in the school year to provide sufficient time for struggling teachers to improve and for administrators to make a final decision about a teacher's continued employment before year's end.

**Finding:** The Springfield evaluation timeline provides at least new and struggling ones more feedback.

> “Struggling teachers don't become good until someone steps in; the school needs to give them that support. I have a guidance secretary who was previously canned and moved over to my school. And she was terrible. I sat down with her after one week and said 'You're failing at your job. You need to make students comfortable, smile, and answer the phone with a better tone.' Part of it is just moxie; it's hard to tell someone they are not good at their job."
>
> – Springfield principal

While tenured teachers are only observed once every two years, teachers with less than three years of experience receive two observations each year, with deadlines set for the first evaluation of November 1 and the second April 15. This schedule enables newer teachers to receive immediate feedback on their instruction and areas for improvement, and requires principals to assess newer teachers sooner in the year.

A teacher on an improvement plan receives at least three observations. The plan is meant to identify weaknesses, provide intensive support, and document progress. It lasts at least three months, but may be extended if necessary. Depending on the timing of the initial observation that indicates that a teacher needs improvement, an improvement plan can extend into the following school year. Allowing plans to continue from one year to the next often runs counter to the best interests of students, meaning that not just one but two classrooms are assigned a struggling teacher.

**Finding:** Springfield withholds pay increases for teachers currently on an improvement plan.

When a struggling Springfield teacher is placed on an improvement plan, her next step increase will be withheld until she completes it successfully. Afterwards, the teacher regains mobility on the salary schedule, but does not receive retroactive pay. This temporary salary freeze affected 15 teachers in 2010-2011.

## 2.7 Decisions to terminate a poorly performing teacher occur swiftly and are made by educational leadership, not a court of law.

**Finding:** In the 2010-2011 school year, less than one percent of the Springfield teacher workforce received a low rating; 10 teachers (0.5 percent of the workforce) in total were dismissed for poor performance.

As is true in most school districts nationwide, few Springfield teachers are dismissed for poor performance. Principals can "non-renew" a non-tenured teacher by simply checking a box on their evaluation (though most still put the teacher on a formal improvement plan). Even if they have given a positive rating to the non-tenured teacher on her evaluation, the principal can decide against renewal. Appropriately, they must engage in a more involved process for dismissing a tenured teacher.

District officials note that although only 10 teachers were formally dismissed for performance last year, the number does not include teachers who preemptively

resign prior to being officially non-renewed, dismissed or receiving a poor final evaluation. While that may be true, the district should be collecting data on such resignations so as to gain essential knowledge about the average performance of their teacher recruits. Also, the district was unable to tell us how many of the 10 teachers who were dismissed were tenured. A strong staffing strategy is dependent on knowing what works and does not work.

In some districts, tenure is automatic. Commendably, this is not the case in Springfield, where principals must actively indicate that a teacher qualifies for tenure. In addition to the ratings given teachers on their evaluations, the final evaluation requires principals to indicate three decisions:

a. if a non-tenured teacher is recommended for reappointment
b. if a non-tenured teacher is recommended for tenure
c. if an improvement plan (assigned to struggling teachers) should be continued.

**Figure 19.** Struggling teachers identified from 2009-2011

| YEAR | Number of teachers dismissed | Contracts not renewed for non-tenured teachers | Number of teachers on an improvement plan |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2009-2010 | 20 | 48 | 56 |
| 2010-2011 | 10 (0.5%) | 17 (0.8%) | 15 (0.7%) |

*Source: Springfield Human Resource, n=2144 for 2010-2011; unavailable for 2009-2010*

*Few Springfield teachers have been dismissed or identified for poor performance by their principals.*

## Finding: Springfield's administrators appear daunted by the dismissal process for tenured teachers.

Almost 9 out of 10 school administrators say they routinely seek dismissal for a *poorly performing* non-tenured teacher, but far fewer—5 out of 10—do so for a *poorly performing* tenured teacher. Principals deal with lower-performing tenured teachers usually by transferring them involuntarily or counseling them to transfer or leave the profession.

From beginning to end, most principals consider the dismissal process to be a two-year undertaking. This time period is consistent with most school districts.

Before a teacher can be dismissed, she must first be placed on an improvement plan for a minimum of three months and provided professional support. If the teacher does not improve, she remains on the improvement plan and subsequent deficiencies are documented, through at least three observations throughout the year.

State law allows tenured teachers dismissed for inadequate performance to appeal their terminations. A tenured teacher who is dismissed may file for arbitration, a legal process for settling disputes, within 30 days of notice of dismissal to try and get the decision reversed. A decision by the arbitrator must be issued within one month of such a hearing (without extended time limits).

The arbitrator, an impartial third party who is not required to have any educational expertise or background, reviews the evidence to determine whether the district has "proven grounds for dismissal." State law articulates that the arbitrator must "consider the best interests of the pupils in the district and the need for elevation of performance

standards," but without educational expertise, arbitration is more likely to be a review of due process than evidence of teacher performance.

In our focus groups, we heard mixed views from principals on the dismissal process. Several principals reported that they had been successful dismissing teachers for poor performance, and were not overly daunted by the process. Even these principals admitted that some teachers know how to delay or prolong the process and were willing to do so. One principal explained that she placed a tenured teacher on an improvement plan, but the teacher showed no improvement in the subsequent year. The teacher abused district leave policies by beginning an extended leave of absence on the day of his scheduled conference. The teacher was later placed by HR at another school.

## Recommendations for Springfield Public Schools

**1. Make student performance the preponderant criterion on which teachers are evaluated.**

The impact of Massachusetts' new evaluation guidelines will depend on how districts weight each element of the teacher evaluation, and whether student performance is given due consideration in addition to more a rigorous assessment of classroom instruction. In the absence of stronger guidelines from the state, Springfield can still develop a strong evaluation by using student achievement as the preponderant criterion in rating teachers.

Standardized test results provide one source of evidence that students are learning, but there are other sources districts can and must use, since standardized testing does not occur in all grades and subjects. Alternatives are often more difficult to implement consistently and are less technologically advanced, but can be extremely meaningful. Their application requires more human judgment, which is not necessarily a negative outcome, given many teachers' discomfort with the misinterpretation or misuse of value-added scores.

One option is for Springfield to develop a set of standards for academic growth in specific subject areas. For example, the district might assemble the city's best Spanish teachers to arrive at a metric that describes superlative, acceptable or unacceptable progress for students to make in any given year of Spanish. The metric would be applied during the evaluation process as a tool that provides the evaluator with a yardstick by which to measure growth or mastery.

The evaluator would need to weigh a teacher's performance on the metric with other factors, such as the level of progress students made in the previous year under a different Spanish teacher. For example, the evaluator notes that a teacher only covered three-quarters of the material she should have gotten through for a Spanish II class, but also that students clearly had mastered the material that was covered. Putting these results in context, the evaluator also knows that the Spanish I teacher was extremely weak and that the Spanish II teacher had to spend a good deal of time on catch-up. The Spanish II teacher earns an adequate rating for covering about a year's worth of material. This display of judgment is exactly the sort of process that good principals have engaged in for years, even though it was not part of the official district policy.




This recommendation requires only a change in practice.


This recommendation requires a requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.


This recommendation requires a change in state law.

The hard work of developing these alternatives, course by course, grade by grade, will make for a more robust system that is not overly dependent on standardized test scores.

**Where it's been done:**

**Washington, D.C.**, provides one of the strongest examples of a district requiring that student achievement be the preponderant criterion of evaluations. For teachers in viable grades and subject areas, 50 percent of their rating is determined by value-added data. Those teaching in other grade levels and subjects set goals to capture students' growth or mastery of academic content. It is important to note that the teacher evaluation policies in the District of Columbia are not subject to negotiation with the local union, but are a management right.

In consultation with its teachers union, the **New Haven** public school system recently revamped its evaluation instrument. Almost half of a teacher's rating is determined by student growth goals. Measures of progress include standardized tests, district assessments and student work. The remainder of a teacher's rating is largely determined by classroom observation, which focuses on evidence of student learning rather than on teacher behaviors. Also, when the teacher's rating from the observation does not match the teacher's student growth rating, the mismatch generates an automatic review by the central office, an important check and balance to the system. Teachers who receive either the highest or lowest evaluation rating from their principal are also automatically reviewed by another evaluator.

**2. Develop a team of independent evaluators to validate principal evaluations and provide content-specific feedback on teacher instruction.**

Evaluations that regularly incorporate the views of multiple, trained observers would allow Springfield to accomplish two things. First, they will be able to provide instructional guidance with content-specific expertise. This will supplement the feedback teachers receive from administrators who may not have experience teaching the same subjects. Secondly, independent observers can help gauge the robustness of individual principal ratings.

While **Washington, D.C.** has a corps of content experts observing all teachers, **New Haven** has adopted a more cost-friendly approach of using third-party observers only when there is a discrepancy between the principal's observation and student performance data.

**3. Change observation protocol so that unannounced observations can factor into the evaluation, per new state regulations.**

Springfield teachers presently receive feedback only on instruction and lessons that are likely rehearsed. Principals and other evaluators should observe instruction that represents typical instruction, both for the purposes of providing more useful feedback and obtaining a clearer image of a teacher's routine instructional practice.

4. **Collect and examine student feedback on teacher instruction to align with new state regulations.** Feedback from students can help teachers improve and can give evaluators a better sense of teacher instructional practices. Massachusetts's new state guidelines put it ahead of most states in requiring incorporation of such feedback. Further, research from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation shows that feedback from students, even as young as 4th graders, correlates with a teacher's effectiveness as measured by value-added data. This finding is particularly important as districts are struggling with how to develop objective measures of performance for teachers in non-tested subjects.

**Figure 20.** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Check one box after each question.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. When I work hard in this class, an important reason is that the teacher demands it. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. I don't like asking the teacher in this class for help, even if I need it. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. The teacher in this class calls on me, even if I don't raise my hand. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. I have pushed myself hard to completely understand my lessons in this class. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. If I were confused in this class, I would handle it by myself, not ask for help. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. One of my goals in this class is to keep others from thinking I'm not smart. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

*Source: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

*Students as young as 4th grade completed this survey developed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The results strongly correlated with student test scores.*

5. **Use the new evaluation data to track incoming and outgoing teachers.** In designing a new instrument that will tell the district more about the performance of their teachers, the evaluation data should tell the district which institutions consistently provide the best teachers and what the district is doing to support, counsel out or dimiss its lower performing teachers. This information will help Springfield refine its recruitment and professional development strategies.



This recommendation requires only a change in practice.

This recommendation requires a requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.

This recommendation requires a change in state law.

## Recommendations for Massachusetts

1. **Make student achievement the preponderant criteria of the Massachusetts evaluation system.** New Massachusetts regulations state that "Student performance measures shall be a *significant* factor in the summative evaluation." The strength of this guideline will depend entirely on the definition of "significant." Student outcomes, drawn from multiple indicators, such as value-added and other measures of students' academic progress, should be the most heavily weighted element in teacher evaluations to help districts identify, retain, reward, and develop its instructors to benefit students.

2. **Ensure that every teacher is evaluated every year.** Massachusetts' new regulations require an annual evaluation, but only a *summative* evaluation every other year for proficient and exemplary teachers. All teachers, even good ones, benefit from regular feedback and annual evaluations. Such robust teacher evaluation data is also critical for districts when facing staffing decisions like hiring, layoffs, dismissals, and recruitment strategy.

3. **Make eligibility for dismissal a consequence of ineffective evaluation ratings.** Teachers who receive two consecutive, ineffective ratings or have two ineffective ratings within five years should be formally eligible for dismissal, regardless of whether they have tenure. Massachusetts law specifies that "failure on the part of the teacher to satisfy teacher performance standards" is grounds for dismissal. However, because the state's evaluation regulations are silent on this issue, it is not established that the evaluation system is the mechanism for determining whether teachers meet performance standards or how many ratings constitute failure. More specific state policy would ensure that districts do not feel they lack the legal basis for terminating consistently poor performers.

4. **Ensure that there is only one opportunity to appeal and that appeals are decided by those with educational expertise.** Whether decided in a court of law or by an arbitrator, appeals that are heard by those without educational expertise will necessarily focus on technical issues of due process rather than evidence of classroom ineffectiveness. While tenured teachers should have due process for any termination, Massachusetts should distinguish the process and accompanying due process rights between dismissal for classroom ineffectiveness and dismissal for morality violations, felonies or dereliction of duty. It is important to differentiate between loss of employment and issues with far-reaching consequences that could permanently impact a teacher's right to practice.

This recommendation requires only a change in practice.

This recommendation requires a requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.

This recommendation requires a change in state law.

## Standard 3.

# Tenure

### Tenure is a meaningful milestone in a teacher's career and advances the district's goal of building a corps of effective teachers.

Indicators on which this standard is assessed

3.1 Teachers are eligible for tenure after no fewer than four years in order to factor in three years of meaningful data into tenure decisions.

3.2 Evidence of effectiveness is the preponderant criterion in tenure decisions.

3.3 A panel of reviewers makes a teacher's tenure decisions, having received input and evidence of effectiveness from the teacher's principal.

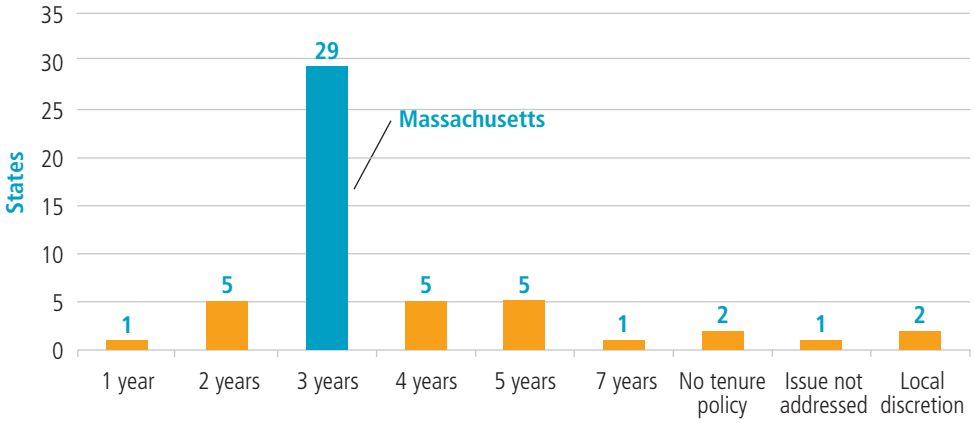
### **Findings:** Massachusetts requires its districts to make a tenure decisions after only three years.

The purpose of awarding tenure (or as Massachusetts terms it, "Professional Teachers Status") to public school pre-school through 12th grade teachers is to provide a guarantee of due process, meaning that a teacher cannot be fired without having some recourse to challenge the decision. It also provides teachers with favored protections.

The decision to award tenure represent a $2 million investment by the district in a teacher, as it will invest about that much money in the teacher over the span of a professional career (considering lifetime earnings, benefits, retirement income and health insurance).

Districts decide whether to award a teacher with tenure, but state law always sets the terms such as how long teachers need to work to qualify for tenure or what criteria they must meet. Earning tenure should be considered a significant milestone for teachers who have consistently demonstrated effectiveness and commitment, and in whom the district wishes to invest and retain. Ideally, districts would examine three years of data on a teacher's performance before awarding tenure, meaning a teacher would have to be in her fourth year of teaching to review that much data. Unfortunately, school districts across the nation have taken a rather relaxed approach to the process, awarding it almost automatically in most cases.

**Figure 21.** Minimum number of years of experience that states require for a teacher to earn tenure




*Source: NCTQ's TR³ database, www.nctq.org/tr3*

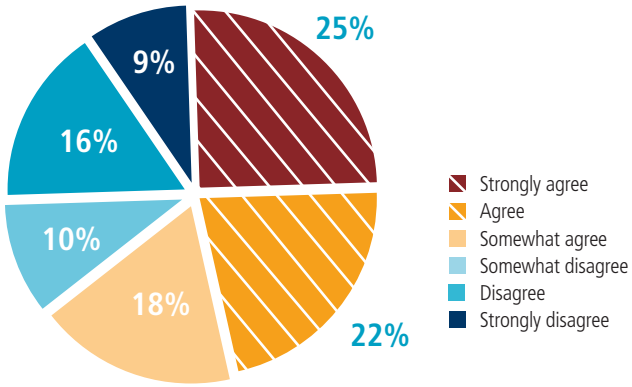
*Massachusetts law requires districts to award teachers tenure after three years. Recently states have been rethinking their tenure provisions, and 18 of them made changes to their tenure laws in the last year alone. It's worth noting that, unlike 12 other states, Massachusetts has no provision allowing districts to delay the tenure decision another year if there is some uncertainty about a teacher.*

Economists studying the standard distribution of performance among large sets of teachers recommend that districts routinely deny tenure to approximately the lowest performing 20 percent of any given cohort of teachers. In other words, approximately one in five teachers a district hires are likely to turn out to be relatively weak; so weak that the odds of replacing them with a better recruit, even in a district that has a hard time recruiting new teachers, yields payoffs in terms of teacher quality and student achievement.[12]

Springfield does not appear to approach that recommended level of 20 percent. In the most recent cohort for 2010-2011, there were 248 teachers eligible for tenure, all just having completed their third year of teaching. The district awarded tenure to 95 percent of these teachers. It may be that large numbers of the weaker teachers in this cohort had already left in the previous two years, leaving 248 relatively strong teachers, but the district does not track this important trend. In this case we do know that the district chose not to renew the contract of only 48 teachers in the previous year (2009-2010) and also that 59 teachers resigned. However, that sum (48 + 59) would have included three cohorts of teachers, that is, teachers in their first, second, and third year of teaching. Either Springfield is much more effective than other districts at recruiting great teachers or it is awarding too many teachers with tenure.

12 Goldhaber, D., & Hansen , M. (2009). *Assessing the potential of using value-added estimates of teacher job performance for making tenure*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

**Figure 22.** Teacher sentiment on dismissal




*Source: NCTQ Survey of Springfield Teachers, 2011, n=571*

*47 percent of teachers either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the proposition that some of their tenured colleagues should be dismissed.*

## 3.2 Evidence of effectiveness is the preponderant criterion in tenure decisions.

### Finding: A teacher's effectiveness matters only nominally in Springfield's tenure decisions.

New state regulations require that professional teacher status should only be granted to educators who have achieved either "proficient" or "exemplary" ratings on each element of their evaluation. This language appears appropriately rigorous, but it remains to be seen if the new evaluation system will be able to dramatically alter the current culture of dysfunctional evaluation systems, not just in Springfield but in the entire state. Currently, a tiny fraction of teachers in the district, less than one percent, fail to earn a satisfactory rating.

### Finding: Springfield has the right sort of procedures in place for providing non-tenured teachers with the additional feedback and evaluation they need.

It is essential to provide new teachers with considerable support, feedback and observation if they are to make the progress needed to earn real tenure.

Springfield does evaluate non-tenured teachers annually, twice as often as those with tenured, or professional, status. Each year they receive two observations and have three conferences with their evaluator. Two of the conferences serve as post-observation discussion and one is a summative conference at the end of the year. By the time a non-tenured teacher reaches the end of his third year, he should have had at least six formal evaluations, and nine conferences with his principal. To add to these existing structures, new state regulations on evaluation will require districts to place non-tenured teachers on a support plan designed specifically for less experience educators.

The district reports that they are currently collaborating with the union to develop a new induction and mentoring program. As part of the new evaluation system, non-tenured teachers are automatically placed on "developing educator" plans that provide greater professional development oversight from their evaluator than tenured teachers receive.

## 3.3. A panel of reviewers makes a teacher's tenure decision, having received input and evidence of effectiveness from the teacher's principal.

**Finding:** Springfield principals make tenure decisions largely alone, without having to defend their reasoning.

Experts with knowledge of not just pedagogy but teacher's individual content area should be part of a team reviewing a teacher's candidacy for tenure. Presently, Springfield principals make this decision on their own, indicating their decision on an evaluation form. If the teacher and principal disagree on a content-related issue, a content expert is consulted. In tight financial times this additional measure is a good, but far less than ideal, alternative to the district being more formally involved in all aspects of this critical decision. Districts need to insist that principals and the eligible teachers submit concrete evidence of their instructional effectiveness.

Most problematic for the tenure decision is its weak evaluation system. In trusting the evaluation ratings in tenure decisions, it is imperative that the evaluation elicit detailed evidence on student outcomes and teacher progress.

## Recommendations for Springfield Public Schools

1. **Make performance the primary factor on which to base the tenure decision.** Sound tenure decisions depend on a robust and informative evaluation instrument which Springfield does not yet have. The ability to know the areas in which a teacher excels and struggles and how her performance compares to other teachers should be the crux of any evaluation or tenure decision.

2. **Reward teachers who earn tenure with a significant pay increase.** A meaningful tenure process should be accompanied by a salary structure that recognizes the teacher's accomplishments. The next section of this report dealing with compensation provides more ideas on how Springfield's salary schedule could work toward attracting, retaining and rewarding effective teachers, including providing a teacher her biggest pay increase the year after earning tenure.

3. **Do not put too much stock in the ability of traditional mentoring programs alone and seek alternative strategies to provide new teachers the support they need and deserve.** As the district ponders the design of its induction program, it may be more effective for the district to invest in alternative strategies to support new teachers than to rely on traditional mentoring arrangements which often disappoint teachers. Other features can be quite effective such as:
   - having content experts frequently observe the teacher;
   - organizing grade or subject level seminars for new teachers;
   - videotaping lessons for reflection and critique; and
   - providing release time to observe master teachers.



This recommendation requires only a change in practice.

This recommendation requires a requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.

This recommendation requires a change in state law.

## Recommendations for Massachusetts

1. **Extend the probationary period for teacher to earn tenure from three to four years or give principals the right to delay tenure for a year.** This time period would allow a school district to factor in three full years of data to make this critically important decision. At the very least, Massachusetts should permit principals to extend the probationary period when necessary. Almost a quarter of states give administrators this management right.

## Standard 4.

# Compensation

## Compensation is strategically targeted to attract and retain high-quality teachers, especially teachers in hard-to-staff positions.

Indicators on which this standard is assessed

4.1 Raises are tied to a teacher's impact on student learning, not advanced degrees or years in the classroom.

4.2 The district's salaries are competitive with other school districts in the area.

4.3 The district offers financial incentives to employ and retain effective teachers in high-need schools and critical shortage content areas.

4.4 Teachers receive a significant pay increase after earning tenure.

### 4.1 Raises are tied to a teacher's impact on student learning, not advanced degrees or years in the classroom.

**Finding:** Though Springfield has made some progress on compensation reform, it still determines teacher pay solely on the basis of the degrees that teachers hold and the number of years they have worked.

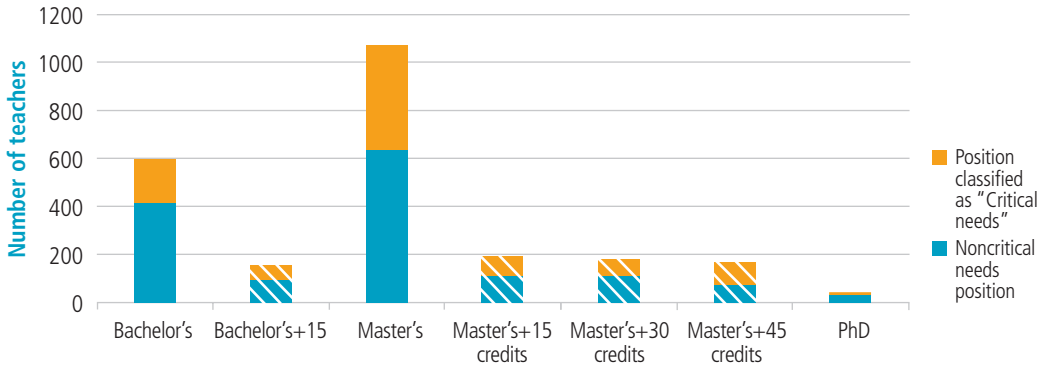
With some recent modifications, Springfield's compensation structure for teachers mirrors the traditional salary schedule found in all but a few American school districts, awarding teachers with lockstep raises for years of experience and advanced degrees. Commendably, Springfield has eliminated some of the salary lanes rewarding teachers for taking course credits—a practice still followed in most other districts. As of 2009, the district no longer recognizes graduate coursework, or other activities such as "travel" or "private study" as a means to salary advancement.

The district has made additional headway towards compensation reform by incorporating a "career ladder" that provides somewhat higher salaries to selected teachers who meet some threshold for student achievement gains, along with another effort to award higher salaries to teachers qualified to teach certain hard-to-staff subject areas.

A statement on the salary schedule underscores Springfield's approach: its claim is that the schedule "embodies the principle of equal pay for equal qualifications and equal service." But because raises are tied to years of experience, service is determined by time in the district and not quality of work.

States often encourage teachers to pursue an advanced degree by requiring teachers to obtain a degree in order to keep their license in good standing. Massachusetts instead provides teachers four options from which to choose to keep a license in good standing, only one of which is to earn a master's degree.[13] Because Springfield bases its salary lanes on a combination of years of service and completion of additional degrees, most teachers make the logical choice to acquire a master's degree. A high number of Springfield teachers (68 percent) hold either a traditional master's degree or have earned National Board certification, which the district treats as equivalent.[14]

**Figure 23.** Teachers distribution in Springfield's salary lane (2010-2011)




*Source: Springfield Human Resources*

*Of Springfield's 2,400 teachers, 68 percent appear to have earned at least the equivalent of a master's degree. No teachers have been placed on the striped salary lanes since 2009, when the district eliminated those lanes.*

## Finding: Compared with other districts, Springfield provides a relatively modest salary increase to teachers for earning a master's degree.

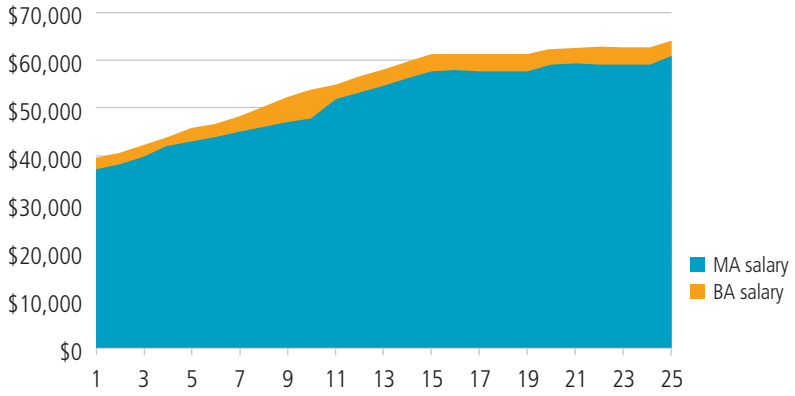
Many districts nationwide compensate teachers heavily for master's degrees or post-baccalaureate work, despite research concluding that a master's degrees does not make a teacher more effective.[15] Springfield does as well, but the differential is not nearly as great as it is in some districts. Over the course of a 25-year career, a teacher who has a master's would earn $87,890 (in current dollars) more than a teacher who had a bachelor's degree.

13 Massachusetts Regulations 603 CMR 7.04(2)(c)5; Although common perception is that Massachusetts teachers must earn a master's for their professional license, this is one of several options available to teachers. They may instead opt to participate in (a) an "approved district program; (b) an "approved 12-credit program;" (c) master teacher status as determined by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and other approved programs; or (d) a state performance assessment program.

14 The total number of teachers represented in Springfield data in the Compensation section of this report is 2,391.

15 The only area where master's degrees have been found to have any impact on teacher effectiveness is high school math.

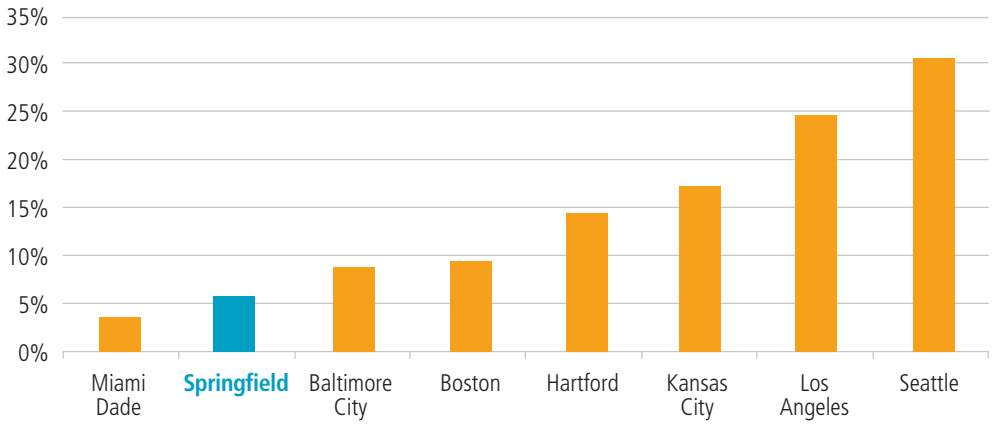
**Figure 24.** Salary differential over 25 year career for obtaining an advanced degree




*Source: Springfield Teachers CBA*

*Over a 25-year career, a teacher with a master's degree earns $88k more than a teacher with a bachelor's degree, much less than the differential we find in other districts.*

**Figure 25.** District expenditures spent on salary differentials for advanced degrees




*Source: NCTQ District Studies, Springfield Human Resources*

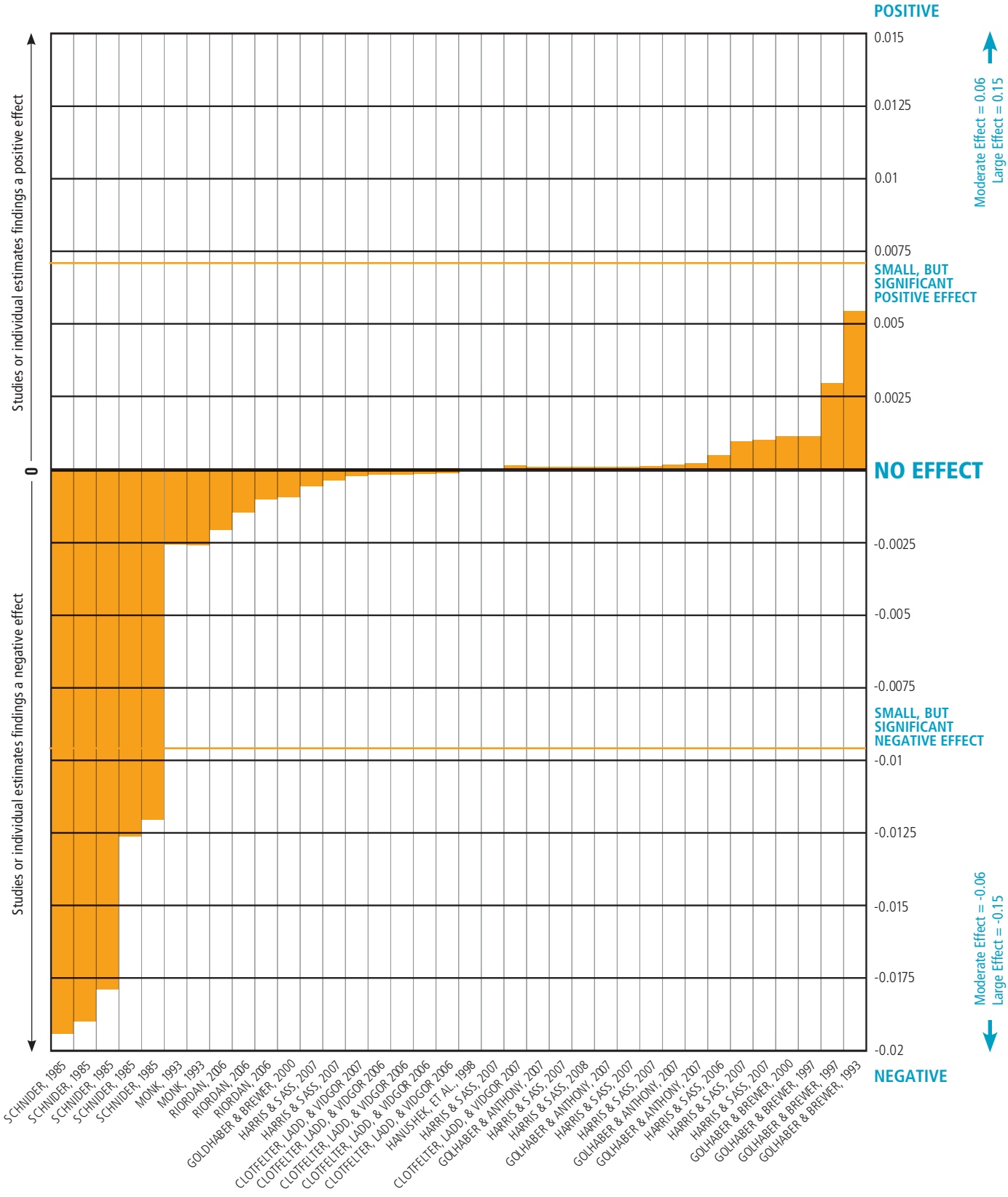
*Springfield, proportionally, spends less on salary differentials than all other districts NCTQ has studied except for Miami.*

## **Finding:** Springfield educators and community members feel that the compensation structure encourages mediocrity.

School volunteer, parent, and teacher focus group participants expressed the sentiment that the better teachers in Springfield are underpaid and that weaker teachers are overpaid. One teacher observed that "Automatic raises seem to weed out some high-achievers. [They] don't want to be rewarded in the same way as others who aren't trying."

Springfield presently spends $127 million on teacher salaries, over $7 million of which go directly to awarding higher salaries to teachers who have taken advanced coursework. Even though the district spends less, proportionally, than many other districts on advanced degrees, it could still redirect the funds presently used to reward teachers for these degrees to instead increase the earnings of high-performing teachers.

**Figure 26.** The impact of teachers' advanced degrees on student learning



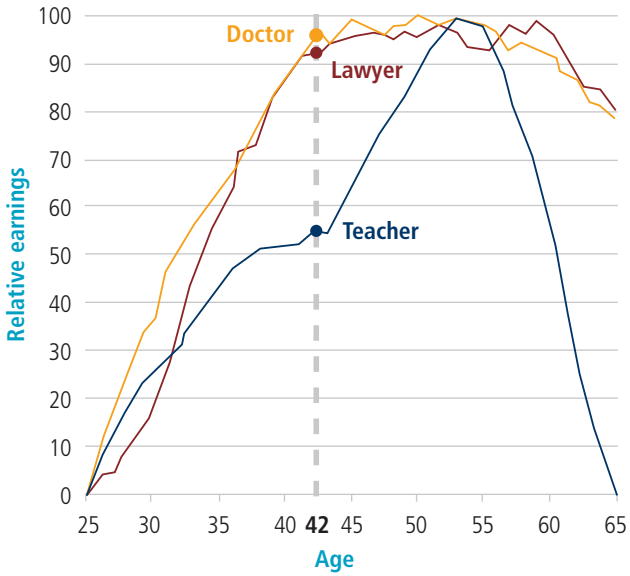

*In this meta-analysis from UMBC Maryland, researchers show the poor correlation between teachers holding master's degrees and their ability to improve student achievement. Out of 102 statistical tests examined over the past 30 years, approximately 90 percent showed that advanced degrees had either no impact at all or, in some cases, a negative impact on student achievement. Of the 10 percent that had a positive impact, none reached a level of statistical significance. In fact, a good number of the studies found a significant negative correlation between teachers' degree status and student achievement. The few studies that have shown a positive correlation between a teacher's degree status and student achievement are when teachers complete a degree in the subject they teach, at least for high school mathematics teachers. Other subject areas have not been studied.*

## Finding: Wisely, Springfield structures its pay by having teachers reach their peak salary in 14 years.

Previous to 2007, it took Springfield teachers 25 years to reach their full salary. While this trajectory is not uncommon in school districts or even other civil service jobs, it compares quite unfavorably to the shorter trajectory found in other professions such as medicine or law. A shorter trajectory works to teachers' advantages, as it means higher lifetime earnings.

Commendably, Springfield shortened its salary schedule in 2007, allowing teachers to reach peak salary earlier in their careers. The salary schedule also focuses less on advanced course credits since the district ended placement on several lanes for additional course credits in 2009.

**Figure 27.** Teaching: A slower climb to peak salary




*Source: Vigdor, Jacob. Scrap the Sacrosanct Salary Schedule,* Education Next. *Fall 2008, Vol. 8, No. 4*

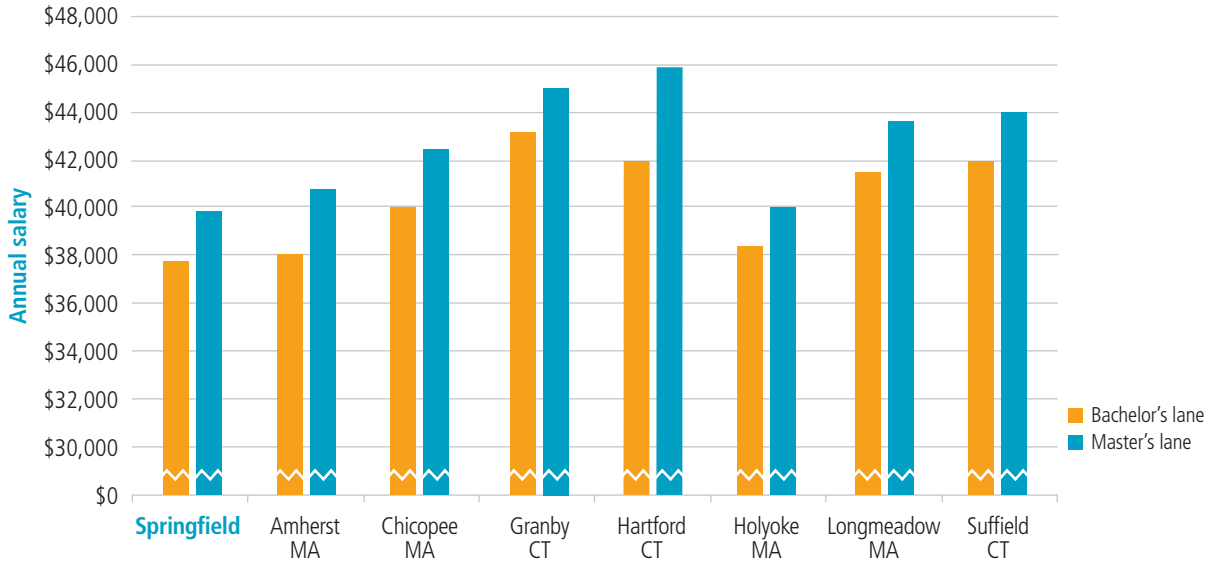
*Usually, the typical teacher's salary trajectory compares unfavorably with other professions such as medicine or law. Salary schedules that allow a teacher to reach the maximum pay—or relatively close to the maximum pay—at an earlier point are more competitive with other professions. Springfield however peaks at 14 years.*

## 4.2 The district's salaries are competitive with other school districts in the area.

## Finding: Springfield teachers earn less than their peers in surrounding districts.

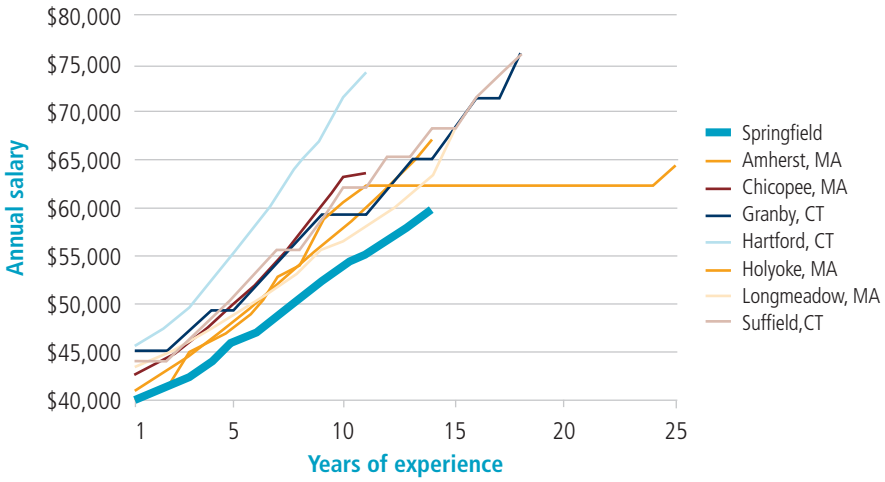
The disparity between Springfield teachers' salaries and their nearby colleagues begins with Springfield's starting salary of $37,370 (for a teacher with a bachelor's degree), the lowest starting salary of seven neighboring districts. This disparity continues throughout the career of Springfield teachers.

**Figure 28.** Comparison of starting salaries with neighboring districts



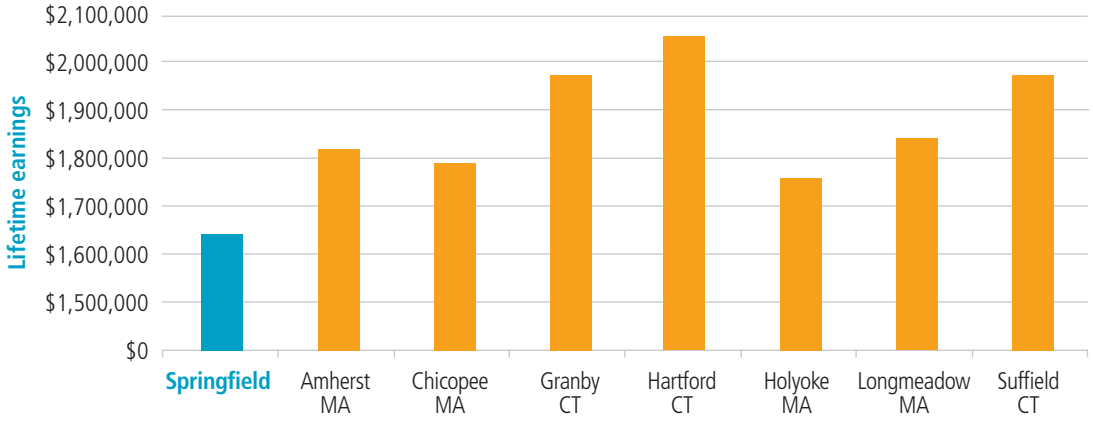

*Springfield teachers receive the lowest starting salary compared to surrounding districts, at $37,370 for a teacher with a bachelor's and $39,643 for a teacher with a master's. Granby, Connecticut offers the most competitive starting salary for teachers with a bachelor's degree at $43,268, while Hartford, Connecticut offers the most competitive salary for teachers with a master's degree at $45,831.*

**Figure 29.** Comparison of starting salaries with neighboring districts




*Springfield's salary schedule, commendable for only taking 14 years to reach the peak salary, still does not compete with other districts. A Springfield teacher peaks at $59,804 whereas in nearby Amherst and Hartford, teachers peak at $67,041 and $74,129 respectively.*

**Figure 30.** Comparison of earnings over a 30-year career (on the master's lane) with neighboring districts




*Despite a quicker trajectory to the peak salary than other nearby districts, the fact that Springfield's salaries are considerably lower from start to finish hurts Springfield teachers' lifetime earnings, which are considerably below their neighboring peers.*

## 4.3 The district offers financial incentives to employ and retain effective teachers in high-need schools and critical shortage content areas.

### Finding: Springfield offers a relatively small annual bonus to teachers who can teach hard-to-staff subjects and has made some overtures to performance pay.

Districts across the country have difficulty recruiting teachers with expertise in certain subjects. In order to attract qualified candidates, districts must increase their incentives and prioritize hiring in these areas. Unfortunately, this practical notion has not gained much traction in most American school districts. While only 41 percent of TR3 districts provide some kind of bonus for "hard to staff" subjects, most are small, annual bonuses and not a substantive increase to base pay. Of all the different compensation reforms, districts appear most reluctant to pay higher salaries to teachers qualified to teach hard-to-staff subject areas.

To its credit, Springfield is an exception, offering a separate salary schedule that amounts to a pay bump of $2,000 each year to teachers who have credentials in such subjects as mathematics, science, special education, or English as a second language. Despite this bonus, many schools are still reporting difficulty in finding qualified applicants in these subjects. Based on other studies of similar efforts, the amount is likely too small to have a serious impact on recruitment and retention of such teachers.[16]

Some districts, including Springfield, have developed a career ladder in schools that allows qualified teachers to receive increased compensation for increased responsibility and leadership. Rewarding teachers in this way is often an easier route to differentiated compensation for districts than articulating rewards for individual performance.

16 Springer, M.G., Ballou, D., Hamilton, L.,et al. (2010.) *Teacher Pay for Performance: Experimental Evidence from the Project on Incentives in Teaching*. Nashville, TN: National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University.

Along these lines, Springfield developed two school-based positions that are designed to allow classroom teachers to remain in the classroom but assume some leadership responsibilities: the **Teacher Leader**, paying 4 percent more than what a teacher would otherwise earn, and the **Instructional Leadership Specialist**, paying 7 percent more. Teacher Leaders have a regular teaching load, but Instructional Leadership Specialists teach only one class a day. Both positions require teachers to have a master's degree, a professional license, and student achievement data demonstrating greater than a year's worth of academic gains within a single school year.

The district also imposed a relatively burdensome criterion for the experience a teacher must have to qualify for either of these two positions. Teacher Leaders are required to have at least seven years of experience, and Instructional Leadership Specialists are required to have eight years. Principals found, following four years without raises for teachers and the ensuing departure of many teachers to other districts, that the candidate pool was significantly reduced. Some principals reported in NCTQ focus groups that the experience requirement did not add value to their screening process for these positions.

The bottom line is that for the most part, classroom teachers who are simply excellent instructors but who have not been conferred with an additional title such as Teacher Leader remain ineligible either for a higher salary or a sizeable bonus.

### Finding: The district offers a school-level performance award for teachers and other staff in its struggling Level 4 schools.

Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, teachers and other staff working in academically struggling Level 4 schools are now eligible for a bonus of five percent of their salary if the school meets their annual goals which include performance in math and English, 4-year graduation rates, student attendance, teacher attendance and suspensions.

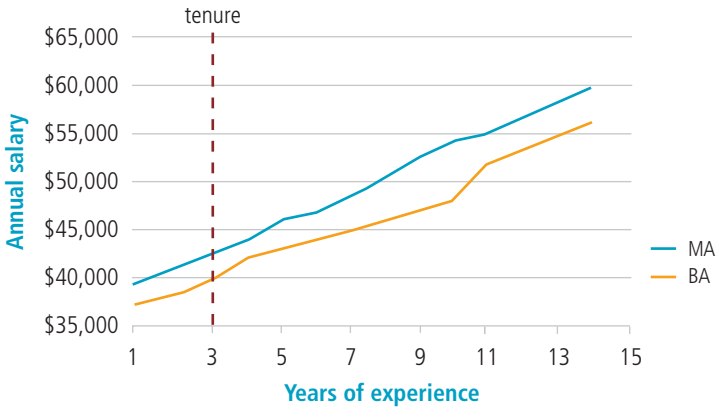
Presently an individual Springfield teacher's salary may be withheld if she is on a formal improvement plan, but may not be increased for strong performance. Through its concerted push to both sharpen the evaluation instrument and change compensation structures, the district should ensure that it recognizes its excellent teachers and compensates them accordingly, both as a means of recognition and to help retain top performers in its schools.

## 4.4 Teachers receive a significant pay increase after earning tenure.

### Finding: Earning tenure or "Professional Teacher Status" is not considered a major milestone in a teacher's career, nor is it accompanied by a significant raise in salary.

Currently, the decision to award a Springfield teacher with tenure after three years is treated largely as an automatic decision, as it is in most U.S. school districts (see Standard 3). Reflecting its relative unimportance, tenure does not bring a greater increase in pay than any other year's raise on the Springfield salary schedule. This structure is dissimilar from higher education, where a professor is recognized both professionally and monetarily for his or her professional achievements at the tenure juncture. A pay increase at the tenure mark would also help front-load pay increases into the salary schedule, ultimately increasing lifetime earnings.

**Figure 31.** Salary growth and the tenure decision




*Instead of the tenure decision depicting a pivotal moment in a teacher's career, denoted by a big jump in salary, the Springfield salary schedule follows a straight line.*

## Recommendations for Springfield Public Schools

1. **Offer significantly higher salaries, rather than bonuses, to the best teachers who *consistently* produce the greatest learning gains.**

Performance pay should not be viewed as a means to change teacher behavior, which several studies have already proven is a miscalculation.[17] Performance pay needs to serve two very important purposes: 1) it should be a signal to potential teachers that teaching is a career that rewards talent and hard work; and 2) it should provide exemplary teachers with salaries that are competitive with other professions, making it more likely they will stay.

*Bonus systems that come and go do not serve these two purposes.* While there is no harm in providing many or all of the teachers in a building with a nice bonus for a job particularly well done one year, districts still need to find a way to compensate their star teachers (e.g. the top 5 to 15 percent depending on available resources) at a higher permanent or semi-permanent salary level.

The following hypothetical salary trajectories suggest an alternative method to compensating teachers that accomplishes the following:

- The basic structure significantly raises starting salaries to be competitive with surrounding districts.
- Small raises are awarded after the first and second year but salaries remain competitive with other districts to prevent attrition during the first few years of a teacher's career.
- The first significant raise occurs after three years, when teachers earn tenure.

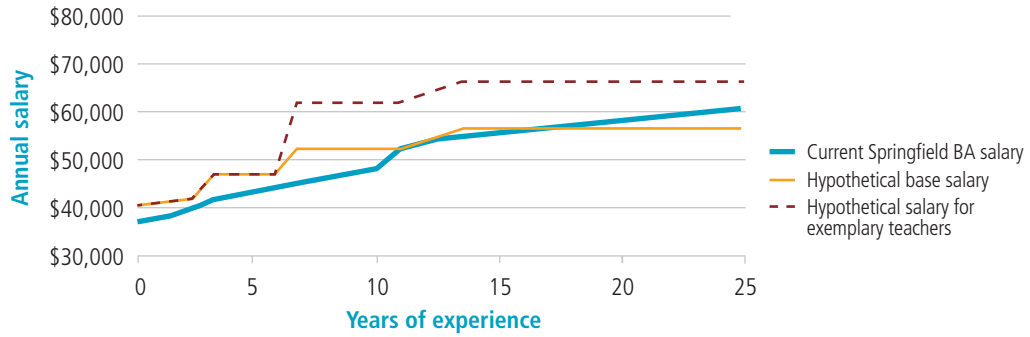
17 Springer, M.G., Ballou, D., Hamilton, L.,et al. (2010.) *Teacher Pay for Performance: Experimental Evidence from the Project on Incentives in Teaching.* Nashville, TN: National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt. University.

This recommendation requires only a change in practice.

This recommendation requires a requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.

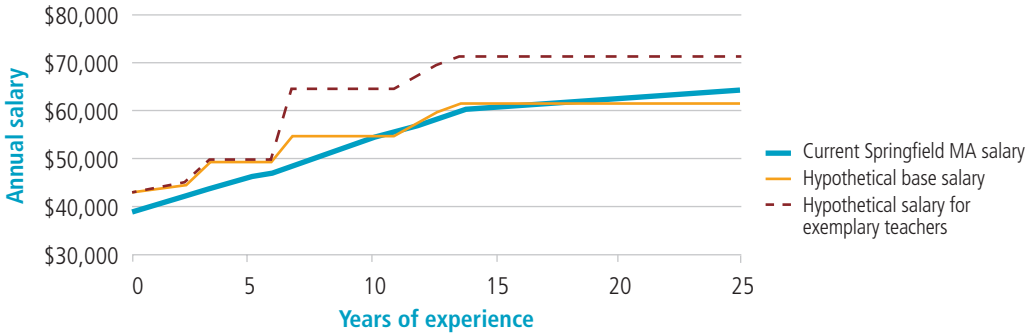
This recommendation requires a change in state law.

**Figure 32.** Bachelor's lane trajectory




*An alternative salary for bachelor's lane would reward the top 5 percent "exemplary" teachers and make starting salaries more competitive with surrounding districts by redistributing funds previously used to reward years of experience.*[18]

**Figure 33.** Master's lane trajectory




*An alternative salary for the master's lane would reward the top 5 percent "exemplary" teachers and make starting salaries more competitive with surrounding districts by redistributing funds previously used to reward years of experience.*[19]

These alternative salary structures were created by using the current payroll expenditures. It would cost the district an additional $3.25 million a year, which is 2.6 percent of its current payroll. If the district shifted entirely from compensating teachers for master's degrees to compensating them for performance, this would be even more affordable.

Across the board, beginning teachers fare significantly better under this hypothetical model.

- Although maximum salaries would be slightly lower for teachers on the hypothetical base salary, the increased earnings at the beginning of the career make up for the later decrease. Lifetime earnings would be slightly higher for teachers with a bachelor's and master's under this design versus Springfield's current schedule.

18 The "Current BA salary" line reflects current payroll figures in which some Springfield teachers were grandfathered in to salary steps that were recently eliminated (years 15, 20, and 25).

19 The "Current MA salary" line reflects current payroll figures in which some Springfield teachers were grandfathered in to salary steps that were recently eliminated (years 15, 20, and 25).

- Each individual salary on each step of both lanes would be higher than on Springfield's current schedule.
- Lifetime earnings for the top 5 percent highly effective teachers would be significantly higher than under the current schedule.
- The proposed structure would not benefit teachers with more experience and more course credits. Those funds would be diverted from rewarding these characteristics to rewarding performance instead.

2. **Eliminate salary differentials for earning advanced degrees.** This policy can be automatic for incoming Springfield teachers and optional for veteran instructors. Redirect "savings" to award teachers substantive bonuses for their effectiveness as determined through evaluations.

**Where it's been done:**
**Baltimore City**'s new contract with the local teachers union created a new and innovative pay structure for teachers that eliminates automatic raises for experience and reconsiders the weight given to coursework completion. It allows teachers who want to assume greater responsibilities and leadership positions in their school to earn higher salaries without leaving the classroom, as Springfield has been doing.

3. **Restructure the salary schedule so that substantive annual raises for longevity happen early and increase Springfield teachers' lifetime earnings.** The tenure mark is one place where a sizeable pay increase should occur in order to transform that point into a real milestone in a teacher's career and bolster lifetime earnings.

## Standard 5.

# Work Schedule

## Work schedule and attendance policies maximize instructional opportunity.

Indicators on which this standard is assessed

5.1 Teachers' on-site work schedule is eight hours to allow substantial time beyond the instructional hours for both individual and common planning.

5.2 Teacher's leave package is commensurate with the number of months a teacher works per year (e.g., 10-month contract provides 10 days of leave).

5.3 The district works to monitor attendance and enable principals to prevent leave abuse.

Fostering a professional and collaborative culture goes well beyond what policy can mandate and is largely dependent on strong leadership. Still, good policies set the tone that student learning should be the district's top focus, paramount over other interests.

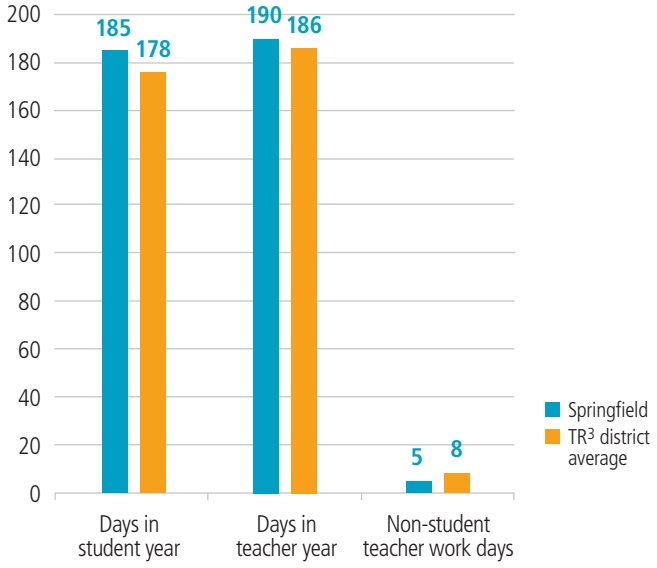
### 5.1 Teachers' on-site work schedule is eight hours to allow substantial time beyond the instructional hours for both individual and common planning.

**Finding:** Springfield schedules time each day for teachers to collaborate and engage in common planning.

Springfield stands out for recognizing the importance of scheduling regular time for teachers to work together. Once a week, the district blocks out times for teachers to meet in an extended day schedule. Four days a week, the teacher contractual workday is 7 hours; on the fifth day, it is 8 hours and 15 minutes. Each school decides when to schedule their weekly extended day. This time may be used for meetings, individual or collaborative planning, professional development or other activities that encourage a collaborative atmosphere.

Most of TR$^3$ districts (70 percent) have no policy providing teachers with collaborative work time; only 15 percent of the 100 plus districts in TR$^3$ provide collaborative time beyond a teacher's individual planning period as Springfield does.

**Figure 34.** Springfield's calendar compared to other districts in the nation




*Source: NCTQ's TR³ database, www.nctq.org/tr3*

*Springfield teachers have a longer work year than their peers in NCTQ's TR³ database.*

Springfield teachers also receive one 40-minute planning period each day, about the same amount as what most large districts in the country provide. The district has a rather unusual provision that allows teachers to use this daily planning period to attend to personal business off campus. Depending upon the individual school culture and the strength of school leadership, this policy may or may not be of benefit. It either serves as a strong example of flexibility, one which displays the district's trust of teachers for managing their own time well, or it may stand in the way of schools being able to organize team meetings during the day.

## **Finding:** Springfield teachers have a slightly shorter work day on average than their peers in other U.S. districts, but the school year is considerably longer.

Contractually, teachers in Springfield average a 7-hour, 15-minute work day, whereas the national average of the 100-plus districts in NCTQ's TR³ database is 7 hours and 28 minutes.

According to the teacher contract, teachers must be available for duty for 15 minutes after the student instructional day, though the contract allows for "occasional instances" when teachers may be needed for longer. In any case, most Springfield teachers and principals with whom we spoke report that teachers put in more time at school than the contract stipulates.

Even seemingly slight adjustments to the length of the school day can add educational value if structured properly. Based on a standard 180-day work year, teachers in a school district with a 7-hour, 45-minute work day, versus a district that has a 7-hour, 15-minute day, work the equivalent of 11 more days each year. Small adjustments in the number of days in the school year compound the disparity. For example, in 2005, we compared the length of the student school days in New York and Chicago. At the time, New York had a 6-hour, 50-minute school day and a school year of 186 days. Chicago had a 5-hour, 45-minute school day and a school year of 174 school days, 12 days shorter. Accordingly, children in Chicago were receiving the equivalent of 9 weeks less instruction than children in New York.

## **Finding:** Springfield teachers have fewer non-student work days (professional development days) than their peers average, nationally.

Teacher work days are not only a reprieve from the more frenetic days when students are in attendance, but more importantly they provide critical time when teachers can plan, prepare and learn.

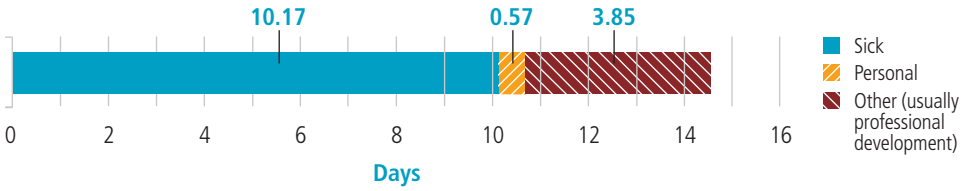
While the length of the school year in Springfield is longer relative to many districts in the nation, the district schedules relatively few days for teachers to work without students present. There are five days scheduled throughout the year, while the average number of work days for TR3 districts is eight.

All of the teacher non-student work days occur before the start of the student school year, which may not serve as the optimum time for the district to provide all of its formal professional development. Firstly, it is a time that teachers are likely distracted, anxious to set up their own classrooms. Secondly, "one-shot" professional development has not been found to be all that helpful because teachers are not brought back to troubleshoot subsequent problems or share insights from actual classroom experience.

The benefits of dispersing professional development days include the ability to space out the content and implementation of different professional development, and the ability to use knowledge of that year's students to drive professional support. For these reasons, many districts commonly distribute some work days throughout the school year.

Springfield may want to increase and better distribute non-student work days if only to reduce the high number of teacher absences (relative to other districts we have studied) who leave their students to participate in professional development. Districts need to ensure that teachers are absent from their classrooms as seldom as possible during instructional days, no matter how valuable the reason.

**Figure 35.** Absences of Springfield teachers by leave classification*




*Source: Springfield Human Resources*

* The total number of teachers represented in Springfield attendance data in this section of the report is 2,407.

*Springfield teachers have an absentee rate of 8 percent, an average of 15 days a year, approximately 1 day every 2 and 1/2 weeks of the school year.*

Improving teacher collaboration is one of the key goals of the district and union partnership addressing leadership and work culture among Springfield teachers. Union leadership and district teachers report that the Meline Kasparian Professional Development Center, in its heyday, was an excellent resource for teachers to get assistance with their lesson plans from accomplished, master teachers. When the district was in a tight financial position, the building had to be converted into a school, and the services available to teachers have been scaled back. Since then, professional development has become more campus-based, informed by teachers' needs and directed by campus instructional leaders.

## 5.2 Teacher's leave package is commensurate with the number of months a teacher works per year (e.g., 10-month contract provides 10 days of leave).

**Finding:** With a basic leave package of 15 days, Springfield provides teachers with more leave than most TR[3] districts, which average closer to 13 days.

The median amount of leave provided by the 100+ districts in NCTQ's TR[3] database is 12 days, with a range of nine to 25 days. Springfield provides more leave than 75 percent of these districts. Most of Springfield's leave is considered "sick" leave with the exception of two personal days that can be used for any purpose.

The actual number of days teachers are granted leave can be a bit hard to pin down, as many contracts have established a number of additional categories of leave beyond either sick or personal. Springfield is no exception, adding another 4.4 days for other purposes, including:

- professional (one day)
- religious (three days)
- four hours for cancer screening

With the addition of these days, the leave package is actually closer to 19 days. Other notable facts about Springfield's leave policies:

- At retirement, educators are eligible for severance pay of 15 percent of all unused, accumulated sick leave, paid out at the same rate of daily pay they were earning at retirement. A Springfield teacher (with a master's degree) who used no days over 30 years, would be eligible for $23,000 in severance pay.
- In the 2009-2010 school year, Springfield spent $545,274 on reimbursing teachers for unused leave. These payments averaged $10,288 to each of the 53 retiring teachers. Payments ranged from $496 to $22,068. Four teachers received over $20,000.

**Food for thought:**

The typical American public school day model differs radically from those in high-performing nations, such as Singapore and Japan. For example, teachers in Japan are with students only 60 percent of the day; the remaining time is spent planning lessons, collaborating with other teachers and meeting with students.[20] Springfield teachers are with students 84 percent of the day.

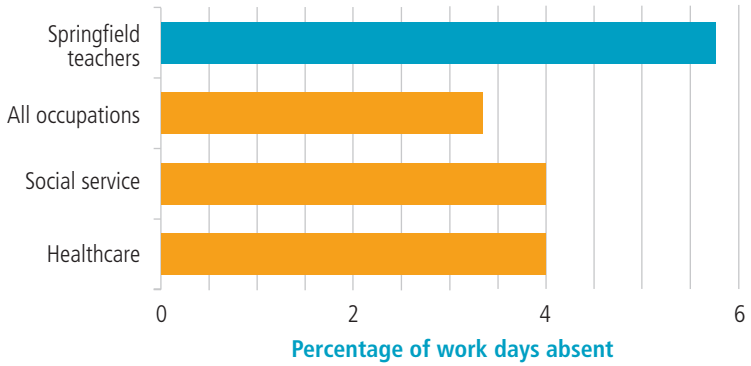
20 Stevenson, H., & J. Stigler. (1992). The Learning gap: Why our schools are failing and what we can learn from Japanese and Chinese education. New York: Touchstone.

Commendably, Massachusetts has left leave policies up to local decision makers, unlike 29 other states that have passed legislation related to leave allotments.

## 5.3 The district works to monitor attendance and enable principals to prevent leave abuse.

**Finding:** Springfield teachers use, on average, over two-thirds of their allotted leave each year, and are consequently absent one out of every 13 school days. They have a higher absence rate than professionals in comparable occupations.

**Figure 36.** National statistics for absences due to sick leave, by occupation




*Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Labor force statistics from the current population surveys 2003-2008, Table 4; 2010-2011 Springfield Human Resources data.*

*Springfield teachers have a higher absence rate than professionals in comparable occupations. Springfield teachers are absent 5.7 percent of their work days, whereas social service and healthcare professionals are absent 4 percent of their work days. Union leadership in Springfield reported that the problems of teacher absenteeism are compounded by principals at most schools who encourage teachers to take a full day off, rather than part of the day, when teachers must be absent for a doctor's appointment.*

While teachers should have leave hours available for legitimate use, they should be used sparingly given the impact a teacher's absence has on student performance, school culture and district finances. For example, one study found that a teacher who is absent 10 days dramatically lowers mathematics achievement by a margin equivalent to the learning loss experienced by students who are assigned a novice teacher as opposed to an experienced teacher.[21]

21 Marcotte, D.E. & Hemelt, S.W. (2007). *Unscheduled school closings and student performance*. Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor.

Another study suggested that teachers' absence patterns tend to reflect those of their colleagues.[22] When teachers transfer schools with differing attendance rates for teachers, teachers' own behavior adjusts. In other words, teachers are more likely to be absent when the schools in which they are working have a high tolerance for teacher absenteeism.

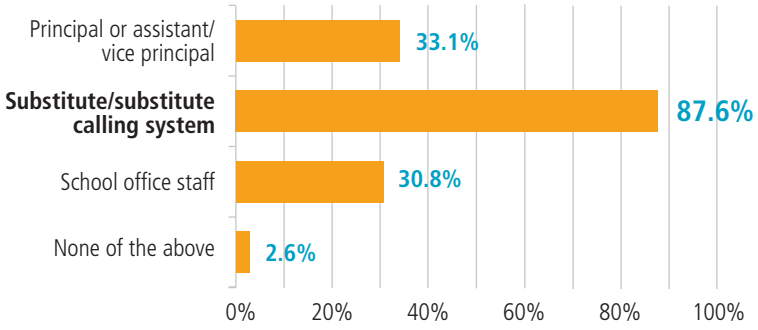
**Finding:** Springfield recently implemented an attendance tool that will improve principal monitoring of staff attendance, but has yet to factor teacher attendance into the evaluation instrument, which is likely the most effective strategy to reduce unnecessary absenteeism.

Oddly, principals are held accountable for teachers' attendance in their own evaluations, but teachers themselves are not. Neither the current evaluation system, nor the guidelines proposed by the state for the new evaluation instrument facts attendance. Springfield would do well to incorporate this measure into its new instrument.

Principals can also mitigate absences through school-level expectations. Although principals directly manage many more people than a manager in a typical office environment, it is still important that teachers notify a supervisor of their absence. Research points to such simple strategies as the first line of defense against attendance problems. School leaders can make this responsibility more manageable by designating assistant principals or other school leaders as contacts for teachers. Since expectations for attendance are not set by substitute-calling systems or office assistants, neither is likely to give a teacher pause before making an absence decision. Most Springfield teachers do not speak with their supervisors; schools with attendance problems may want to change this practice.

Springfield is presently expanding its data capabilities to allow principals to track staff attendance.

**Figure 37.** Who do Springfield teachers notify of their absence?




*Source: NCTQ Survey of Springfield Teachers, 2011, n=571*

*Two-thirds of Springfield's teachers do not speak with a supervisor when they will be absent, though doing so can reduce teacher absenteeism. Many teachers report their absence in multiple ways.*

22 Bradley, S., Green, C., & Leeves, G. (2007). Worker absence and shirking: Evidence from matched teacher-school data. Labour Economics, 14(3), 319-334.

Some principals told us that they try to motivate teachers with incentives for good attendance at the campus level, such as hosting meals or rewarding teachers with gift cards. The practice, however well-meaning, perpetuates an image of teachers as less than professional. We can find no example of another profession that feels it necessary to offer their employees rewards for showing up to work.

## Finding: Springfield could save over $1.3 million by reducing teacher absences by 25 percent.

In addition to costs to student learning, teacher absences cost the district money. By reducing absences by one-quarter, the district could generate substantive savings.

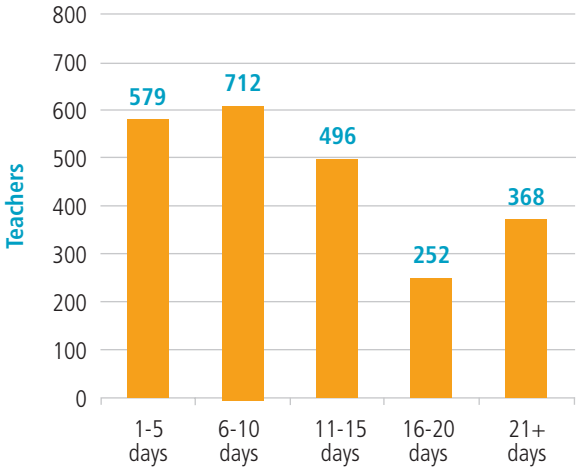
**Figure 38.** The cost of teacher absences

| | Results of current leave policies | Results with 25 percent reduction |
|---|---|---|
| Leave days taken per teacher | 14.59 | 10.94 |
| **District's total substitute cost (2,407 teachers)** | **$5,332,659** | **$3,999,495** |

## Finding: Nearly half of Springfield teachers are absent more than 10 days a year.

A large number of teachers are frequently absent. About one-quarter of teachers have an attendance record that is *worse than the average student attendance* rate of 90 percent for the district.

**Figure 39.** Distribution of teacher absences, 2010-2011




*Source: Springfield Human Resources*

*Over a quarter of Springfield teachers were absent for 16 days or more last year. That translates into 620 classrooms in the district where the teacher was absent at least one out of every 12 days.*

### **Finding:** Springfield improved teacher attendance in 2010-2011 at all but three of its 50 schools.[23]

After excluding absences that lasted more than two weeks in duration (due to long-term illness or family leave), Springfield teachers' attendance rates improved marginally, from 95 percent to 96 percent.

In the school with the lowest teacher attendance rates, each teacher missed—on average—one out of every 15 days of work.

In the school with the highest teacher attendance rates, teachers averaged one absence out of every 50 days of work.

Teacher attendance in the academically challenging Level 4 schools is better than other schools in Springfield. All but one Level 4 school had teacher attendance above 95 percent.

## Recommendations for Springfield Public Schools

1. **Require teachers to work an 8-hour day onsite.** Having teachers on campus eight hours a day ready to work with other teachers and individually with students has become a necessity. It makes teachers available for helping students individually and communicating with parents. Though many dedicated teachers already devote this time to their schools and students, an 8-hour day should be a professional expectation.

2. **Incorporate attendance into the new teacher evaluation, under the "Professional Culture" standard.** Other professions routinely hold employees accountable for their attendance. The teaching profession should do the same. Teachers must be present in classrooms for students to benefit from instruction, and excessive leave should not be tolerated.

3. **Teachers working in schools with below-average attendance should have to notify a school-level administrator of an absence.** Principals can share this responsibility with assistant principals and other school-based leaders to ensure that teachers speak with a supervisor when reporting absences.

4. **Give teachers more non-student work days so that professional development can be scheduled when school is not in session and distributed throughout the year.** Springfield teachers spend a significant amount of time absent for professional development. Increasing the number of work days and distributing them through the school year will allow for needed professional growth, without costing students instruction.

5. **Explore the degree to which teachers use their daily planning period to attend to personal business off campus.** The flexibility afforded teachers in using their planning period should be examined to ensure that off-site travel does not interfere with necessary planning and collaboration between teachers.

23 Springfield provided additional attendance data that excludes absence longer than two weeks in duration for reasons of illness, maternity leave, or workers compensation for 50 of its schools.



This recommendation requires only a change in practice.

This recommendation requires a requires formal negotiation between the district and the teachers union.

This recommendation requires a change in state law.

6. **Streamline the leave package to incorporate all types of leave granted to teachers.** Springfield's leave package is described as 15 days in the labor contract, but actually includes four and a half additional days. Providing a single sum of available leave days, along with rules for using them, will aid principals and the district in monitoring all absences and teachers in planning their personal obligations.

# Appendices

## Appendix A

*The appendix provides a comparison between the Springfield's current instrument rubric and a rubric used in D.C. Public Schools. The D.C. rubric highlights the benefit of providing specifics and examples as a guide for observers.*

| DCPS IMPACT Evaluation | Springfield STEDS Evaluation |
|---|---|
| Rubric with a description and examples for each of the four ratings a teacher can receive. | List of indicators with a description that presumably articulates the standard for "Meets Expectations." |
| **Component:** Teaching and Learning Framework<br>**Standard:** "Develop higher-level understanding through effective questioning." | **Principle:** Effective Instruction<br>**Indicator:** "Uses a variety of questioning techniques, including those which encourage and guide critical and independent thinking and the development of ideas." |
| *Teacher is assigned a numerical score of 1 to 4 for the standard and supporting comments, based on the description provided for each level.*<br><br>**Level 4: Teacher is highly effective at developing higher-level understanding through effective questioning.**<br>*For Level 4, nearly all of the evidence listed under Level 3 is present, as well as some of the following:*<br>■ The teacher asks higher-level questions at multiple levels of Bloom's taxonomy, if appropriate to the lesson.<br>■ Students are able to answer higher-level questions with meaningful responses, showing that they are accustomed to being asked these kinds of questions.<br>■ Students pose higher-level questions to the teacher and to each other, showing that they are accustomed to asking these questions. | *Teacher is assigned one of three ratings, with the presence of all of the following presumably being evidence of the highest*<br><br>**Exceeds Expectations**<br>*Teacher uses a variety of questions that encourage and guide critical and independent thinking in the development of ideas.*<br>*Teacher consistently encourages students to assess the accuracy of information presented.*<br>*Teacher provides opportunities for students to construct questions during unit work and provides time for students to reflect upon how questioning stimulates critical and independent thinking.* |

**Level 3: Teacher is effective at developing higher-level understanding through effective questioning.**

*The following best describes what is observed:*

- The teacher frequently develops higher-level understanding through effective questioning.
- Nearly all of the questions used are effective in developing higher-level understanding.
- The teacher uses a variety of questions.

**Notes:**

1. A teacher may ask higher-level questions in response to students' correct answers, as part of the delivery of content, or in another context. All of these uses of questioning should be included in the assessment of this standard.
2. A teacher should receive credit for developing higher-level understanding by posing a more difficult problem or setting up a more challenging task, even if these are not necessarily phrased as questions.
3. At some points in a lesson, it is not appropriate to immediately ask questions to develop higher-level understanding (for example, if students are rehearsing a basic skill). A teacher should not be penalized for failing to probe for higher-level understanding in these cases. However, over the course of a 30-minute observation, there should be some opportunities to probe for higher-level understanding. As a result, this category cannot be scored as "Not Applicable."
4. The frequency with which a teacher should use questions to develop higher-level understanding will vary depending on the topic and type of lesson. For example, in a high school history lesson on the Industrial Revolution, a teacher should be asking questions to develop higher-level understanding much of the time. In contrast, in a part of a lesson on the appropriate use of punctuation, a teacher might not do so quite as frequently. Still, questioning to promote higher-level understanding should be present in every lesson.
5. All of the techniques in the list of examples to the right can be effective types of questions to develop higher-level understanding if they are well-executed and appropriate to the lesson objective. However, each of these techniques can also be used ineffectively. A teacher should not receive credit simply for using a technique on the list. In order to be credited as effective, the question must be well-executed and appropriate to the objective and thus succeed in developing higher-level understanding."

**Meets Expectations**

*Teacher uses a variety of questions that encourage and guide critical and independent thinking in the development of ideas.*

*Teacher encourages students to assess the accuracy of information presented.*

**Does Not Meet Expectations**

*Teacher rarely uses questioning techniques.*

# Appendix B

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Published in Print: February 4, 2009, as 'Mini-Observations'
COMMENTARY

## 'Mini-Observations' Seven Decision Points for the Principal

By Kim Marshall

Short, unannounced classroom visits are the best way for principals to see representative slices of teaching (not the dog-and-pony show), give credible feedback to teachers, and be players in improving teaching and learning. But for principals to make effective use of mini-observations (a term I prefer to "walk-throughs," which has the connotation of walking through a classroom rather than pausing and observing thoughtfully, and is often confused with the "learning walk," a tour of an entire school with general feedback to the staff), they need to make good choices on seven key questions:

**How long to stay in each classroom.** When I first started doing mini-observations as a Boston principal, I found that if I stayed less than five minutes, my impressions were superficial, but if I stayed 10 or 15 minutes, I wasn't able to fit in as many visits. Five minutes yielded surprisingly rich information on each classroom, so that became my default. "What can you possibly see in five minutes?" people huff, but I've convinced hundreds of skeptics by playing a five-minute videotape of a classroom in action; almost invariably, they say that it seemed like a lot longer than five minutes and that it provided plenty to comment on afterward.

Some teachers do object to such short visits: "Hey, stick around! Watch my lesson from beginning to end." They're right—someone should observe a whole class occasionally and give detailed feedback on how instruction unfolds and how students respond, minute by minute. But that's a job best done by instructional coaches and peer observers, or by videotaping the lesson and watching it with a critical friend. The principal's highest priority is getting a whole-school perspective on teaching and learning, and this is incompatible with doing a significant number of full-lesson observations. Those should be reserved for unsatisfactory teachers, who need a detailed diagnosis and prescription from the boss.

**How to keep up the pace.** With all the other demands on principals' time, getting into classrooms is a constant struggle. A fuzzy goal—I'm going to get into more classrooms this year—won't work. The key is setting a numerical target for the number of visits a day and pushing relentlessly to meet it. When I was a principal, I supervised 42 teachers and settled on a target of five mini-observations a day. On full-moon days, I did zero; on quiet days, I did five; and with a lot of tenacity, I saw each teacher every two to three weeks, which added up to about 450 mini-observations a year. In a smaller school, the principal's target might be different. But the key is to have one.

**What to look for.** During mini-observations, the principal needs to slow down, breathe, observe the kids, look at their work, and listen carefully to the teacher. Elaborate checklists and rubrics distract the principal from being a thoughtful observer. What's needed is a short mental checklist of the irreducible elements of good teaching. My

nominee is the acronym SOTEL: safety, objectives, teaching, engagement, and learning. These provide good hooks for feedback to the teacher, and each can range from basic to advanced:

- Safety—physical safety -> psychological safety -> a climate that's conducive to intellectual risk-taking;
- Objectives—the lesson has a clear purpose -> it's part of an aligned curriculum unit;
- Teaching—learning is being skillfully orchestrated -> and it's artfully differentiated;
- Engagement—students are paying attention -> there is active, minds-on involvement;
- Learning—on-the-spot assessments are used to fine-tune teaching -> interim assessment data are used, too.

When principals are actively working with teacher teams to develop unit plans and look at interim assessment data, they have 3-D glasses when it comes to observing objectives and learning.

**Whether to take notes during visits.** Principals worry they'll forget what happens during classroom visits, so there's an urge to jot notes. But a teacher's blood pressure goes up when a principal takes out a pen or opens a laptop; many, however irrationally, believe their jobs are on the line when they see the boss write things down.

In my mini-observations, I didn't write notes, but later in the day I used a one-page staff list to jot the day, date, and most salient points from each visit (later still, I added a checkmark when I gave feedback to the teacher). There are other ways to capture information; the important thing is to maintain a nonbureaucratic, low-stakes atmosphere while in the classroom.

**How to deliver feedback.** After a visit, the principal almost always has two or three "teaching points." But what's the best way to communicate them? Post-it notes, checklists, handwritten comments, programmed PalmPilots or iPhones, e-mail—these all convey feedback to the teacher. But my concern is that written and electronic communication limits the amount that's said, raises the stakes, and is almost always a one-way street: The teacher rarely responds. Without dialogue, professional growth is unlikely.

Face-to-face feedback works much better. In brief conversations (mine were almost always informal, stand-up chats in classrooms, hallways, and the parking lot), it's possible to convey a lot of feedback. Teachers are more likely to be open to it, and the principal can scope out whether the teacher can handle critical comments. The teacher also can supply additional information about the lesson or unit, and can push back if the principal misunderstood something. The conversation can segue into a more general assessment of how the year is going and ideas for the future, and finally, there's no paperwork. Those are powerful advantages.

**Whether to give feedback to every teacher.** All teachers, including superstars, are hungry for feedback. They spend most of their working days with students and are intensely curious about what other adults think—especially the boss. As a principal, I made it my business to track down every teacher I observed (the master schedule was in my pocket to help me target their free periods) and give personal feedback within 24 hours. Sometimes I missed my self-imposed deadline, but not by much. It's a question of priorities. What's more important than conversations about teaching and learning?

**Whether to use data from mini-observations in year-end teacher evaluations.** The school where I was principal had tough, no-nonsense union leadership, but very quickly we agreed that I could aggregate my impressions

from mini-observations into the official year-end evaluation. In other words, we dispensed with the dog-and-pony show. This happened because there was plenty of honest feedback during the year—and trust. To pull this off, an explicit union agreement is needed, including an understanding that when a teacher shows signs of being unsatisfactory, the principal needs to shift gears and embark on a more formal process.

Like any good idea, mini-observations can be mishandled. Thoughtlessly implemented, they can be unfair to teachers and even harm instruction. But if principals do mini-observations right—if they systematically visit four or five teachers a day, keep SOTEL-like criteria in mind, develop an inconspicuous way of capturing impressions, have prompt and thoughtful follow-up conversations, and negotiate a way of summing up their impressions for final evaluations—they can transform supervision and evaluation into a powerful tool for improving teaching and learning for all students.

*Kim Marshall was a Boston teacher and school administrator for 32 years. He now coaches new principals and writes the Marshall Memo, a weekly newsletter summarizing educational research and ideas.*

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