

Teacher Hiring, Transfer and Evaluation in

Pueblo City Schools, CO

Applicant shortages and needlessly rigid school staffing policies keep Pueblo City Schools from building effective instructional teams.

Introduction

In the winter and spring of 2008, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) partnered with Pueblo City Schools (PCS) in Pueblo, Colorado to assess the impact of the district's policies and practices on the ability of schools to build and maintain strong instructional teams. TNTP's analysis included the following components:

- Interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders, including central leadership, union leadership, principals and teachers
- Analysis of district teacher hiring and evaluation data
- Online surveys of principals and teachers (565 teachers and 34 principals responded to the survey, for response rates of 51 percent and 103 percent¹, respectively)

TNTP's analysis reveals that under current PCS policies and practices, schools struggle to build and maintain strong instructional teams. These challenges arise from four specific areas of significant concern.

Findings

Hiring: Subject-specific applicant shortages and a late hiring timeline lead schools to fill vacancies with lower quality candidates, or not at all.

A majority of principals report that, in the last three years, they have had one or more vacancies a year for which the applicant pool was inadequate in quality and/or quantity. Principals experience the most frequent shortages in special education and mathematics. A late start to new hiring compounds the problem of a weak applicant pool: two out of three principals (66 percent)

report losing a high-quality applicant because they could not offer the candidate a job in a timely manner. Challenged to staff their schools under these restrictions, 64 percent of principals have hired a weaker candidate than they would have preferred and nearly one quarter (24 percent) have opened school with an unfilled vacancy.

Only 29% of PCS principals agree that current hiring and transfer processes allow them to build the best possible instructional teams.

¹ PCS distributed an email survey invitation to 33 principals; 34 complete responses were received. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, TNTP and PCS were unable to determine the source of the additional response.

Reduction in Building Staff: Contractual provisions governing position cuts cause schools to lose teachers they want to keep and create significant job insecurity for novice teachers.

The current PCS teachers contract requires that when a school must cut a teacher due to decreased budget or enrollment, the least senior teacher in the affected subject area must be selected. While this provision may be well intentioned to provide job security to teachers who have the most experience in the district, it has two negative consequences: Schools cannot protect the teachers they wish to keep, and novice teachers face considerable job insecurity, no matter how effective they are in raising student achievement. Through an annual process known as “pink-slipping,” an average of 77 percent of probationary teachers were non-renewed each year between 2004 and 2007; surprisingly, extreme job insecurity extends even to probationary teachers assigned to shortage-area subjects such as math and special education. PCS has limited success in hiring these teachers back and may well lose the most desirable teachers to other districts.

71% of principals have lost a teacher whom they wanted to keep when instructional cuts were required.

Transfers: The current transfer process deprives some teachers of the ability to find satisfactory new placements, and also deprives schools of choice in filling vacancies.

PCS utilizes two processes for placing transfers: interviews with school committees, in which placement decisions must have the mutual consent of the transferring teacher and the school, and central assignments, in which transferring teachers are placed directly into schools without interviews. Transferring teachers who receive new placements through school interviews are more satisfied with the school to which they transfer than those who are centrally assigned. Further, absent full mutual consent, a large majority of PCS principals are dissatisfied with their level of choice in the transfer process (a full 60 percent report that, in the last three years, they have had a transferring teacher placed at their school whom they did not want). This data is consistent with trends that TNTP has documented in other districts, where mutual consent staffing policies have consistently proven to best support the interests of teachers and of schools.

Evaluation: The evaluation process does not effectively differentiate teacher performance or provide teachers with adequate feedback to improve.

TNTP’s extensive review of evaluation records from the last three years reveals that the current evaluation system provides a near uniform assessment of the district’s teaching force and fails to distinguish strong or weak performers. Despite declining student achievement and principal reports of quality problems in the transfer pool, only 1 percent of evaluations from 2005-2008 resulted in ratings of “Unsatisfactory,” suggesting that poor performers are not identified by the evaluation process. Moreover, only 29 percent of teachers report that they have had development areas identified in their last three evaluations. In other words, the evaluation system fails to provide adequate performers with the feedback they need to grow and excel as professionals. Contributing factors to the ineffectiveness of the current evaluation system may include a lack of principal training in evaluation, as well as infrequent evaluations and inadequate observations.

99% of teacher evaluations from 2005-08 resulted in ratings of “Satisfactory.”

Recommendations

To address these challenges and provide all schools with the high-quality teachers they need, TNTP recommends that PCS adopt the following set of reforms to policy and practice:

- **Hiring:** Implement a workforce development initiative to increase the number of high-quality candidates in shortage areas. Implement a board mandate to finalize school staffing allocations and begin posting vacancies by April 1.
- **Reduction in Building Staff:** Allow schools to consider quality, in addition to seniority, when identifying teachers for position cuts.
- **Transfers:** End the process of centrally assigning transfers. Require all transfers to find new placements through the school interview process.
- **Evaluation:** Invest in the development of a new evaluation process that effectively distinguishes strong and weak performance. Ensure that evaluators have the time and training necessary to evaluate all teachers rigorously and regularly.

About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a national nonprofit dedicated to closing the achievement gap by ensuring that poor and minority students get outstanding teachers. Founded by teachers in 1997, TNTP partners with school districts and states to implement scalable responses to their most acute teacher quality challenges. TNTP recruits and trains thousands of exceptional new teachers annually, supports school principals in staffing their classrooms, provides teacher certification in high-need subjects, and documents the policy barriers that keep students from getting the teachers they need. Since its inception, TNTP has trained or hired approximately 33,000 teachers, benefiting an estimated 4.8 million students nationwide. It has established more than 70 programs and initiatives in 28 states and published three seminal studies on urban teacher hiring and school staffing. This year, its clients include school districts in 26 cities, including Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Memphis, St. Paul, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, San Antonio, and Washington, DC, among others. For more information, please visit www.tntp.org.