



Teacher Hiring, Assignment, and Transfer in Portland Public Schools

Report from The New Teacher Project | August 2007



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Background

- Providing a quality education for all students is the fundamental purpose and obligation of any public school system.
- In order for schools to fulfill this responsibility, they must be able to find, hire, develop, and retain high-quality teachers.
- For today's urban school districts, teacher hiring and school staffing have become complex efforts. Their success hinges on the interactions of multiple stakeholders.
- In this context, even well-intentioned policies and procedures can have unforeseen consequences – the true extent of which are often invisible or undocumented.
- Our purpose in conducting this analysis was not to lay blame on any single factor or party, but to describe policies and their consequences in Portland Public Schools (PPS).
- We are confident that the challenges we describe can be overcome. However, determining effective solutions will require the cooperation and shared vision of PPS and the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT).
- We strongly urge PPS and the PAT to take action on these issues in a thoughtful and productive way through their upcoming Committee on Hiring, Assignment, and Transfer (HAT).
- Fair and efficient school staffing policies are in the best interest of all involved: teachers, principals, district leaders and, most of all, students.



Summary of Findings

- ▶ PPS is **not competing effectively** with peer districts for the best new teachers.
- ▶ Teachers new to PPS are **significantly disadvantaged** in the school placement and transfer processes. This may, in part, lead to extraordinarily high attrition among these teachers and to long-term costs for PPS.
- ▶ Portland **teachers are forced into positions they do not agree to**, and **schools are forced to hire teachers they do not freely choose** and who may not be the right fit. Teachers and principals share dissatisfaction with current processes, and **principals do not believe that the hiring and transfer processes allow them to build effective instructional teams.**
- ▶ PPS Human Resources can and should take steps in the near term to **alleviate internal, procedural issues identified by principals and teachers as problematic.** Main areas for focus are communication with teachers and applicants; implementing effective, user-friendly technology; and recruitment of diverse applicant pools.



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Background - TNTP

-  The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the number of outstanding individuals who become teachers and to creating environments that allow teachers to maximize student achievement. The majority of our work has been with large urban districts.
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In the fall of 2006, TNTP partnered with Portland Public Schools to analyze the extent to which current PPS staffing rules and processes support effective school staffing. Local funding was provided by PPS through a private grant. To conduct this analysis*, TNTP:

-  Reviewed the PPS Teachers Contract and provided a memorandum, including our analysis of relevant provisions and preliminary hypotheses.
-  Investigated the impact of PPS staffing rules through several avenues, including:
 - Review of Human Resources practices and customer service
 - Analysis of Human Resources transaction data
 - Surveys of principals, current teachers, and teacher applicants
 - Interviews with principals and central staff

TNTP has performed similar analyses in other districts nationwide and published findings from those districts in a 2005 report titled *Unintended Consequences: The Case for Reforming Urban Teachers Union Contracts*.

* For more detailed information about methodology, see Appendix A.



Background – PPS Hiring rounds

1

Round 1

Internal hiring only. Teachers with three years of experience and those returning from leaves of absence can participate.

Timing: March/ April

Time required: 5-6 weeks to prepare and process

2

Round 2

Internal hiring only. Unplaced teachers are slotted into positions with little input from principals.

Timing: April/ May

Time required: 3-4 weeks to prepare and process

3

Round 3

Internal and external hiring, though heavy preference is given to internal candidates.

Timing: Late May-August

Time required: Duration varies depending on start date for Round 1

Note: Timing of hiring rounds is affected by budget timing. Actual dates of rounds for 2005 and 2006 are listed to the right.

Rd 1: 4/18/05 - 4/22/05; 5/10/06 - 5/16/06

Rd 2: 5/12/05 - 5/13/05; 6/7/06

Rd 3: 5/25/05 - 8/19/05; 6/12/06 - 8/18/06



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#1

PPS is not competing effectively with peer districts for the best new teachers.

New teacher hiring is considerably delayed due to the internal hiring process.

The hiring process extends significant preference to internal candidates at almost every phase.



Internal-only posting requirements significantly delay external hiring. Many candidates have already exited the application process by the time Portland begins to consider new hires.

- Current policy prevents new hires from being selected until Round 3, which usually begins in June.
- A survey of PPS applicants suggests that of those who eventually withdrew from the process, 50% had withdrawn or been hired elsewhere before Round 3 even began. TNTP's past research has shown that the strongest applicants – including many interested in teaching in urban districts – are hired by other districts earlier in the hiring season.
- Portland typically hires candidates who apply late in the application process – after other districts have already completed hiring.

The human cost of delayed hiring



In February a candidate with a BA in Mathematics from Santa Clara and a 3.7 GPA applied to PPS. This candidate was **not hired**.



But in the same year, an August applicant with a BS in Criminology from Cal State-Fresno and a 2.5 GPA was **hired**. The teacher is now teaching sixth grade math.

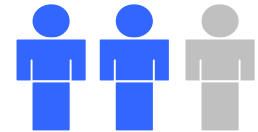
Source: TNTP survey conducted in January 2007 of 246 Portland Public Schools teacher applicants, 119 of whom were withdrawers.



Survey results confirm that the hiring timeline is causing Portland to lose teaching candidates – including its own student teachers.

Hiring Delays Result in Teacher Candidate Attrition

- 77% of applicants surveyed said the timeline was an important or very important factor in applicant withdrawal.
- Two-thirds (67%) of withdrawers said that receiving another job offer was a factor in their decision to leave the PPS hiring process.



- Based on self-reported information in the application database, there were 185 student teachers in PPS in the last two school years who applied for positions with the district. **Of those 185, just 47 were hired (25%).** During this time, PPS hired 572 new teachers.
- Interestingly, surveyed withdrawers who completed student teaching in PPS reported very high satisfaction with their student teaching experience.

72% 72% of student teachers not hired by PPS report that they are teaching elsewhere, suggesting that they are viable candidates.

Source: TNTP survey conducted in January 2007 of 246 Portland Public Schools teacher applicants, 119 of whom were withdrawers.

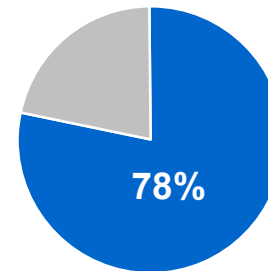


Most applicants not hired by PPS leave with a negative impression of the school system – partly due to the hiring timeline.

- 77% of application process withdrawers reported they were unsatisfied with the hiring process.
- Despite this negative perception, 75% of these applicants say they would definitely, probably or maybe have accepted a **timely** job offer from PPS.

46%

46% of withdrawers reported that “Frustration with the PPS hiring process” was a factor in their decision not to teach in PPS.



78% of withdrawers reported that they decided to teach elsewhere, with the most common districts being:

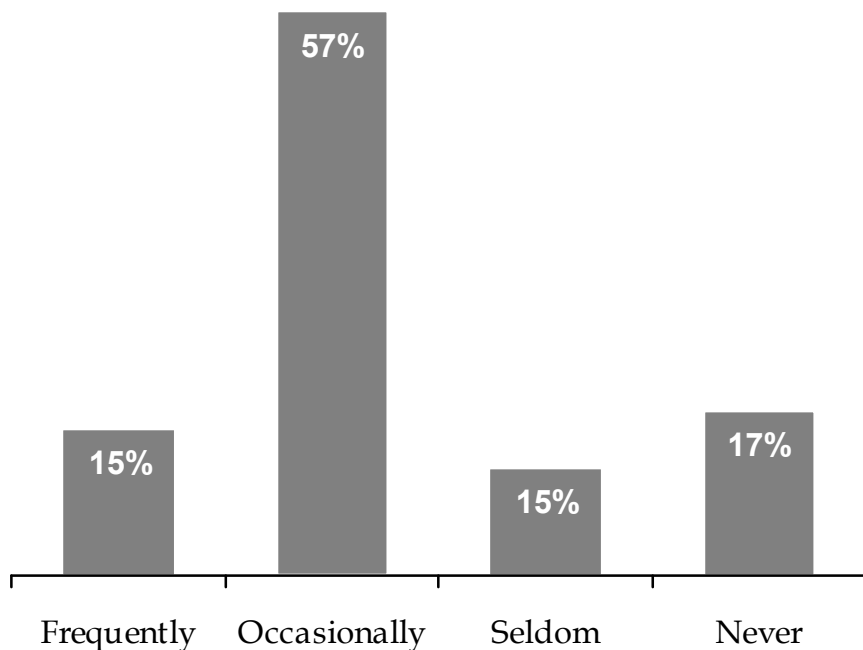
Beaverton (7 respondents); Hillsboro (4); North Clackamas (4); Reynolds (4).

Source: TNTP survey conducted in January 2007 of 246 Portland Public Schools teacher applicants, 119 of whom were withdrawers.



Restrictions on selecting new hires can leave Portland principals feeling their hands are unnecessarily tied when it comes to making staffing decisions.

Have you every had to **hire an internal candidate** over an external candidate for a position, even though you felt **the external candidates was more desirable**?



Source: TNTP survey conducted in December 2006 of 60 Portland Public Schools principals



Open-ended principal survey responses

“I don’t feel that internal candidates should have priority in Round 3. Internal candidates are given this in Round 1.”

“I understand there are contractual requirements but I [would] like more flexibility in hiring the best candidate for the position and not forced to select among the most senior unit member just because they have applied for the job.”

“Would just like to be able to hire the best possible person.”



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Those candidates who do manage to get hired face a new series of challenges...



#2

Teachers new to PPS are at a significant disadvantage during the hiring, assignment, and transfer processes. Lack of job security for these teachers contributes to an exceptionally high attrition rate for new hires and long-term costs for PPS.



Two staffing policies in particular have a disproportionately negative impact on teachers new to the district.

“Temporary” designation

- When a teacher is hired to fill a vacancy which occurs after the start of school, **it is considered a “temporary” assignment.**
- Temporary teachers are regularly **displaced** from their positions and replaced by other PPS teachers due to a requirement that their jobs be treated as vacancies at the end of the year – even if the teacher has become a valued member of the school community.
- Temporary teachers are actually **ineligible** to apply for jobs during Rounds 1 and 2.
- Temporary teachers can regain their original positions only by waiting until Round 3 and reapplying, assuming the position has not already been filled.

*Article 10.D-11

Unassignment

- When a school must release (or “unassign”) a teacher for budgetary reasons, the contract stipulates that the least senior teacher in the area requiring reduction is unassigned, **regardless of performance.**
- Unassigned teachers with less than 3 years of experience may not participate in Round 1. Instead, they are forced into positions during Round 2 without the opportunity to interview.

*Article 10.E



Lack of job security for new hires contributes to an exceptionally high attrition rate for new hires and long-term costs for PPS.

- Of teachers who were hired in the fall of 2004,

37%

had left by the fall of 2006. Another district that does have “temporary” teachers experienced 23% attrition during the same time period

- Nearly half of teachers hired in 2004 who left PPS after one year were temporary teachers displaced from their positions.

- High-quality applicants are less likely to consider applying to Portland. As one withdrawer who took a position in Rainier put it: “Every single young teacher I know in PPS right now is sad, desperate, and ready to quit the profession altogether. They have zero job security...”
- Portland will incur recruitment and mentoring costs year after year to replace teachers who would likely have remained in the system had they not been displaced.
- School instructional teams suffer long-term instability.

**Declining enrollment and layoffs do not necessitate loss of newer teachers. In 2005, PPS laid off 68 teachers but 54 were eventually called back. The district hired 145 new teachers.*

Source: PPS hiring and payroll data



Portland's restrictive staffing rules are especially challenging to the district because competitor districts do not share many of them.



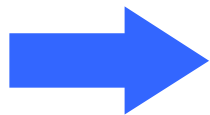
In Beaverton, which appears to hire more Portland applicants than any other district, principals can protect any temporary teacher from having his/her position posted.



In Reynolds, which also hires some of Portland's applicants, a principal must interview all internal candidates for a position, but he/she can choose to either hire an internal candidate or open up the posting to external candidates.



Surrounding districts often allow principals to unassign any teacher from the subject area that requires reduction as long as the principal is willing to meet with the teacher to provide an explanation.



Impact

- Competitor districts are more attractive to newer teachers concerned about job security.
- Principals in competitor districts are able to form and protect high-performing instructional teams without having mutual consent placements (those teachers hired with the consent of the applicant and the principal) contractually dissolved.



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#3

Portland schools are forced to hire teachers they do not freely choose and who may not be a good fit for the job. Teachers are forced into positions to which they do not agree.



Overview: Round 2 and Forced Placements

- The contract stipulates that at the end of Round 1, HR creates a new vacancy list which accounts for Round 1 transfers and any new vacancies that have been identified.
- HR then places unassigned teachers and teachers returning from leaves of absence into schools without an interview process and with minimal principal input.



- The Round 2 process for PPS does not ensure that teachers are placed into positions that are agreeable for both the teacher and the school's administrator.
- Teachers receive minimal information about the placement process as it happens, leading to frustration.
- Forced placements offer little opportunity for principals or teachers to consider school fit.
- Schools which receive no transfer applicants are most affected, as they do not hire in Round 1 and must accept teachers in Round 2.

*Article 10.E



Though it is unpopular with teachers and principals alike, Round 2 transfers outnumber transfers in Rounds 1 and 3 combined.

Round 2 Transfers

- Teachers with less than three years of experience in PPS are contractually prohibited from applying for Round 1 positions. These probationary teachers are most often placed in Round 2 if unassigned.
- For the 2004-2006 period, Round 2 transfers were the **most common type of transfer** for *both* probationary and contract teachers.
- Teachers placed through Round 2 are significantly more likely than teachers placed in Rounds 1 or 3 to **transfer again the following year** or to **leave PPS within one year**.
- 36% of unassigned teachers and 18% of all other teachers plan or **expect to transfer** this coming summer, according to survey data from the 2006 Round 2 transfer teachers.

Interview Process

98%

98% of PPS teachers who participated in the voluntary transfer process (Rounds 1 and 3) reported being satisfied with the interview process.



In another urban district, teachers are highly satisfied with a mutual consent placement process.

In a mutual consent urban district*:

78%

78% of teachers reported they **were satisfied with the transfer process**, including reassigned teachers and those who failed in their attempt to transfer.

90%

90% of incumbent teachers who participated in the placement process **said principals evaluated their candidacy fairly**.

81%

81% of transfer candidates **reported receiving at least one job offer from a school in the district**.

*Source: TNTP survey of teachers in another large urban district.



PPS principals are deeply dissatisfied with Round 2, largely because it causes nearly half of them to receive unwanted teachers.

65% of principals reported they were satisfied with the internal hiring process during Rounds 1 and 3.



For Round 2, that number dropped to 42%.

28% of principals said they had received a teacher they did not want during Rounds 1 and 3.



For Round 2, the percentage jumped to 47%.



“The process for Round 2 was awful. It pitted colleagues against one another and clusters against one another as well...”

“The Round 2 process is not designed to match the best person to vacant positions.”

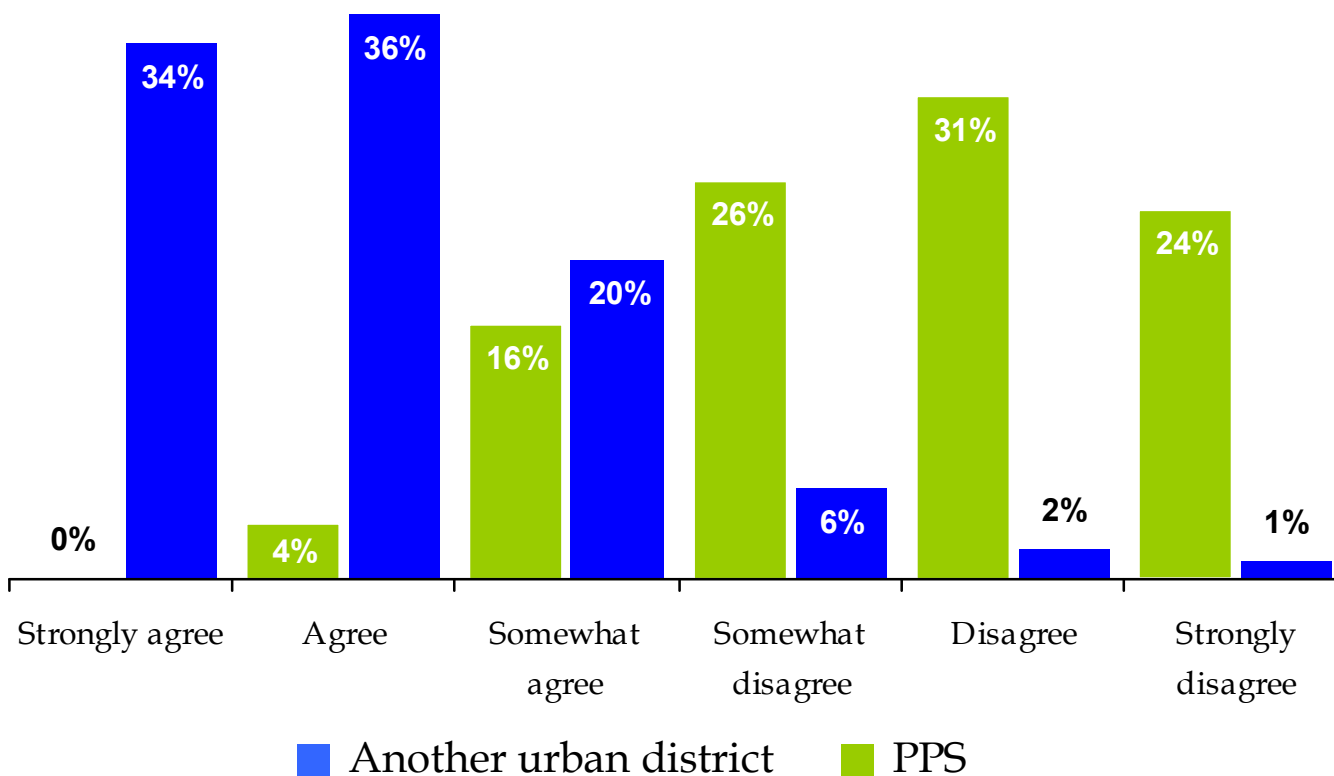
“Round 2 process is difficult. If a school has a vacancy, they will more than likely end up with an employee they would not have hired given a choice.”

Source: TNTP survey conducted in December 2006 of 60 Portland Public Schools principals



PPS principals feel that the transfer process is an impediment to building strong instructional teams; their dissatisfaction contrasts with results from another urban district that requires mutual consent placements.

“The transfer process allows me to hire the teachers that create the best possible instructional team for my school.”





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PPS Human Resources can and should take steps in the near term to alleviate internal procedural problems.



Recommendations for Human Resources Improvements



Communication: Incumbent teachers and prospective teachers

- Provide one central website that includes regularly updated information about the transfer process and timeline for participating teachers.
- Educate current teachers about the entire transfer process so that they are well-informed. Draft and implement a strategic communications plan for this purpose.
- Draft a cultivation plan designed to engage prospective teachers throughout the hiring season and decrease early applicant attrition.
- Create a targeted recruitment and cultivation plan for student teachers.



Online application

- Consider using a commercial application system, or another streamlined and easy-to-navigate online application.



Online staffing management tool

- Continue efforts to improve the staffing management tool.



Applicant pool diversity

- Focus on increasing the diversity of candidates who apply to PPS by creating a strategic recruitment plan.



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Appendix A: Methodology

TNTP divided its work into the following two phases:

Phase 1: Off-Site Contract Analysis

TNTP gained a basic understanding of PPS contractual staffing rules and provided the district with a high-level overview. To achieve this, TNTP:

- o Analyzed the staffing rules in the PPS collective bargaining agreement, with a focus on the provisions governing voluntary transfers, involuntary transfers (excessed teachers), new teacher hiring timelines, evaluation, and teacher dismissal.
- o Talked with the district staff member(s) who could elaborate on how these rules work and answer our questions.
- o Provided a memorandum that included our contractual analysis and preliminary hypotheses, questions, and recommendations.

Phase 2: On-Site Data-Gathering

TNTP gathered the qualitative and quantitative data needed to understand the impact of PPS staffing rules and to build a strong, fact-driven case for change. To achieve this, TNTP:

- o Gathered data from existing district tracking systems on hiring timelines, the movement of voluntary transfers and excessed teachers, and evaluation/terminations. We focused on the following questions: Do staffing rules result in the forcing of incumbent teachers onto other schools that may not want them? The passing around of poor performers? Late new-teacher hiring and the loss of the best applicants? Do the rules systematically disadvantage newer teachers, even the best?
- o Interviewed district staff and principals
- o Conducted surveys
- o Evaluated the impact of the contractual staffing rules
- o Delivered final report/presentation including TNTP's findings, analysis and recommendations



Appendix A: Methodology (Cont.)

To further explain each part of our Phase 2 data gathering and analyses, which are reflected in this report, the following is a summary of each type of methodology we employed:

Analysis of HR Data

TNTP worked with staff members from PPS to collect key data points to examine in relation to our hypotheses. The main data sets we requested were:

- o Snapshot data showing all placements of teachers at the beginning of each school year
- o Transaction data showing all teacher movement, with reasons
- o Vacancy posting data showing the school posted, all applicants, and the teacher hired for the position
- o Separation data showing all teachers who exited the system, with reasons
- o Application data showing all applicants to the system, their education experience, and whether they were hired
- o School demographic data

All data sets showed the 2004-2005 school year through the present. We used Microsoft Access and Excel to explore the data and determine basic descriptive statistics.

Surveys

TNTP drafted three surveys for distribution to the following groups:

- o PPS principals
- o PPS applicants who withdrew from the process or were not hired
- o Current PPS teachers who switched schools in either of the last two staffing seasons

PPS HR staff reviewed and had the opportunity to edit all surveys prior to survey administration. PAT leadership reviewed and had the opportunity to edit the teacher survey. Surveys were distributed and tabulated electronically through SurveyMonkey.com. On the principal survey, we had a 71% response rate (60 out of 85). On the withdrawer survey, we received 119 responses. The exact total number of applicant withdrawers could not be ascertained based on PPS data, so the responses we received constituted a sample of the larger population of withdrawers, though we cannot definitively say it is a representative sample. On the teacher transfer survey, we had a 40% response rate (190 out of 474).

Case Studies/Interviews

TNTP interviewed the current principals of three schools (including one elementary, one middle, and one high school), as well as a group of 4 retired principals. We asked the principals a set of questions about Portland's transfer and hiring processes to get a sense of their perspectives.