The New Teacher Project

Teacher Hiring, Transfer and Assignment in Chicago Public Schools

Executive Summary
July 2007

Background and Methodology

In the winter of 2006-2007, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) engaged in an extensive review of teacher staffing policies and practices in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). TNTP investigated the impact of CPS staffing rules through several avenues, including:

- Review of CPS Teachers contract
- Analysis of Human Resources transaction data
- Surveys of:
  - 464 principals (80% of all principals)
  - 1446 current teachers (29% of random sample)
  - 434 teacher applicants (20% of random sample)
- Interviews with principals and central staff

Feedback from principals, teachers, and applicants, along with Human Resources data has made clear to us that Chicago has many sound human capital policies and practices already in place and has made significant progress in recent years. Nonetheless, we have identified a number of staffing processes that can be improved to better serve all schools, teachers and students.

Summary

1. CPS generates a large, strong applicant pool and is successful at hiring diverse candidates and candidates with core content knowledge. A late hiring timeline, however, is causing CPS to lose quality teachers who want to work in Chicago.
CPS has become increasingly selective in recent years, now hiring just 12 percent of applicants. While the overall applicant pool is large, Chicago lacks a sufficient pool in several high-need subject areas. Additionally, despite the fact that the district collective bargaining agreement permits early hiring, CPS hires disproportionately from the pool of late applicants and misses out on many qualified earlier applicants.

70%
In our survey, 70% of applicants who withdrew from the process reported that the hiring timeline was "important" or "very important" in their decision to withdraw.

78%
78% of teachers are satisfied with the transfer process, including successful voluntary transfers, reassigned teachers AND teachers who failed in their attempt to transfer.

2. Teachers and principals across levels of school poverty are overwhelmingly satisfied with current transfer and reassignment processes.
The foundation and critical component of Chicago's highly functional transfer system is a requirement that all teacher placements receive the mutual consent of both the teacher and principal; no teacher is slotted into a position without freely accepting it. Teachers and principals agree that mutual consent provides a valuable opportunity to consider school fit in teacher placement. This process is quite progressive when compared to other large urban districts and appears to be serving Chicago very well.

3. Current CPS policy requires reassignment to be based on seniority rather than teacher quality or school fit, which leaves top performers vulnerable to being displaced and compromises the efforts of principals to maintain effective instructional teams.

The number of teacher reassignments has decreased in recent years, and the vast majority of reassigned teachers are successful in obtaining new positions after being reassigned. However, according to efficiency ratings, top performers are actually reassigned (and lost to their schools) slightly more often than satisfactory performers. Principals are frustrated with losing top performers to reassignment.

50%
Half of principals reported losing a teacher whom they wanted to keep at their schools to reassignment or layoff.

3 out of 1,000
Only 0.3% of teachers are rated "Unsatisfactory."

88%
88% of CPS schools have not issued a single unsatisfactory rating in the last four years.

4. The current CPS teacher performance evaluation system is ineffective at identifying poor performers and exiting them from Chicago schools.

Nearly all CPS teachers are rated "Superior" or "Excellent," and hardly any teachers are deemed "Unsatisfactory." Many schools have not assigned a single unsatisfactory rating in the recent past. Even when CPS teachers do receive "Unsatisfactory" ratings, they are rarely dismissed. Perhaps most surprisingly, district records show that in failing schools where student test scores are consistently below the district average and have been declining in recent years, the vast majority of teachers are still rated "Superior" or "Excellent." Principals report that they do not have confidence in the evaluation tool, and teachers report that they believe the evaluation process is not meaningful.

Recommendations

Recruitment and Hiring

- CPS should consider offering incentives for principals to make earlier hiring decisions.
- CPS should design and implement a targeted recruitment campaign aimed at increasing the number of candidates available for high-need subjects like special education and should lobby to change state alternative certification rules for special education.
- CPS should identify and evaluate obstacles to earlier hiring, including budget timelines and vacancy notification, then design and implement a plan to move up the hiring timeline.
- Human Resources should have a small number of publicly stated, measurable goals relating to human capital.

Transfer and Hiring Rules

- CPS should continue to require mutual consent of principals and teachers in all placements.
- CPS should develop and implement a consistent, customer-friendly communication and support plan for working with incumbent teachers during the transfer process and with new hires in the initial placement process.
- CPS should invest in a high-quality online tool that unifies the incumbent and new-hire pools of teachers to offer "one-stop shopping" for principals.

Reassignment and Reserve Pool

- CPS should reform its reassignment policy to account for teacher performance. Rather than considering only seniority and subject area when making reassignment decisions, principals should also use efficiency ratings, possibly along the following lines:
    - "Unsatisfactory" teachers would be offered remediation and/or dismissed and therefore should not be eligible for reassignment to another school.

    - "Satisfactory" teachers would be the first to be reassigned (the "Satisfactory" teacher with least seniority first, then proceeding in seniority order within the group of teachers rated "Satisfactory").
    - "Excellent" teachers would only be reassigned if the group of "Satisfactory" teachers had been exhausted, and "Superior" only if "Excellent" had been exhausted.
- We hypothesize that connecting reassignment with performance evaluation would have the following positive outcomes:
    - Increased incentive for strong teacher performance, because it carries the additional benefit of greater position security.
    - Increased incentive for thorough and accurate use of the performance rating tool by principals.

Performance Evaluation and Dismissal

- CPS and the Chicago Teachers Union should partner with an independent, external entity to design and implement a rigorous evaluation system that can be consistently and fairly used by CPS administrators.
- Once a more rigorous evaluation tool is in place, all CPS teachers should be evaluated every year.
- Past evaluations should have no bearing on the present year's evaluation.
- Teachers receiving two U ratings in five years (that are upheld through any applicable grievances) should be dismissed from CPS.
- Teachers who receive one U rating should not receive an annual salary increase for the following year.
- Collection of performance evaluations from principals should happen consistently, and performance evaluation records should be readily available for principals during the hiring process.
- In addition to overhauling the tools and processes for teacher performance evaluation, CPS should provide additional training to principals to ensure they are following protocols appropriately. CPS should also work with principals to emphasize the importance of tenure decisions as they relate to performance. We recommend a more rigorous process of evaluation at the end of the probationary period. Teachers should not be awarded tenure by default, but rather based on thoughtful reflection and assessment of performance.

About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing the number of outstanding individuals who become public school teachers and creating environments for all educators that maximize their impact on student achievement. Since its inception in 1997, TNTP has recruited, prepared and/or certified approximately 23,000 high-quality teachers, worked with over 200 school districts, and established more than 40 programs in 23 states. TNTP has also published two major studies on teacher hiring and school staffing in urban areas: *Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms* (2003) and *Unintended Consequences: The Case for Reforming the Staffing Rules in Urban Teachers Union Contracts* (2005). For more information, please visit www.tntp.org.