

Strengthening School Staffing in

Minneapolis Public Schools

A precipitous decline in student enrollment, coupled with counterproductive staffing policies and practices, is destabilizing MPS' teacher and administrator workforce to an alarming degree. The scale of this problem threatens the long-term viability of the school district and calls for significant and immediate intervention.

Introduction

In the fall of 2008, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) partnered with the Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi Foundation for Children, Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) to explore the impact of district policies and practices on the ability of schools to build and maintain strong instructional teams. TNTP's analysis of policy and practice in MPS included the following components:

- Interviews with a broad range of district stakeholders, including central leadership, union leadership, principals and teachers
- Analysis of district teacher and administrator transaction and evaluation data
- Online surveys of principals and teachers (2,409 teachers and 99 principals and assistant principals responded to the survey at rates of 75 percent and 93 percent, respectively).

TNTP's analysis suggests that under current MPS policies and practices, teachers are caught in a volatile cycle of movement throughout the district, preventing schools from maintaining cohesive groups of teachers over time. Analysis of teacher and principal surveys and human resources data points to four specific areas of concern.

Findings

A sharp decline in student enrollment is destabilizing MPS' teacher workforce, which has shrunk by 15 percent over the last four years. District staffing decisions exacerbate this instability.

MPS teachers face an extraordinarily high probability of layoff, excess, and/or transfer. Teachers in MPS are fifteen times as likely to be excessed - or displaced from their school position - as teachers in Chicago, and ten times as likely as teachers in New York City. In fact, over the last three years, on average, over a fifth of each school's staff has turned over each year. MPS also appears to lay off more teachers

Almost 40 percent of MPS teachers in the last four years have changed schools at least once.

each year than necessary - 49 percent of all teachers who are released are rehired that same year. Unfortunately, over half of rehired teachers end up at a different school from the one they were released. School administrators also face a high rate of instability - up to 80 percent of principals and assistant principals are new to their schools, having been at their current schools for less than three years.

Teachers and principals agree that this instability has a negative impact on students, their schools, and their ability to be as effective as possible.

District rules that do not consider instructional effectiveness when making staffing decisions prevent MPS schools from retaining the best possible teachers.

MPS is losing significant numbers of quality teachers because of staffing policies that do not factor instructional performance into its decisions. Half of all MPS teachers report knowing five or more teachers who have left the district as a result of layoff; 72 percent of these teachers believe that the teachers lost to layoff were integral to the effectiveness of the school's teaching team. In addition, 98 percent of MPS principals report they have lost a teacher to layoff whom they wanted to keep, almost double the rate in other urban school districts. Ultimately, schools cannot build and maintain strong instructional teams, with 89 percent of principals acknowledging that they are unable to do so during the layoff process.

Furthermore, MPS is currently unable to use instructional performance to inform critical decisions because the current system fails to help schools manage instructional quality consistently.

MPS currently employs a variety of teacher evaluation and development tools across school sites, and there is little consistency in the implementation of these processes throughout the district. Overall, only 39 percent of MPS teachers and 29 percent of principals are satisfied with the evaluation system used at their school. There are also significant gaps in perception between teachers and principals on principal ability to effectively assess instructional performance. As a result, limited credible information exists to inform the important decisions that arise from enrollment declines and school instability.

In such a challenging context, staffing policies are critically important. Mutual consent practices in staffing schools are heavily favored by teachers and principals alike and will ensure the best matches between teachers and schools.

Teachers want to have a choice in where they teach, and principals and their staffs want to have a choice in who comes to teach at their schools. 93 percent of all transferring MPS teachers say it is important that the administrator wanted them to come to their school. Additionally, 100 percent of all MPS principals and 94 percent of non-transferring teachers agree that the ability to choose their colleagues is important for creating the best possible instructional team for their school. Teachers who were displaced from their schools and involuntarily placed into new schools without choice are four times more likely to plan on transferring again at the end of school year, compared to those teachers who were given discretion in choosing their new assignment.

Recommendations

TNTP's specific recommendations address two primary objectives for MPS:

1. Increase school stability by rethinking elements of both district practice and contract rules
2. Create an environment where quality teaching and learning is a central component of all staffing decisions

These specific recommendations include modified layoff projection practices and re-negotiated staffing rules to protect instructional team stability, the creation of school-based HR teams to facilitate mutual consent hiring, increased investment in the training and support of school leaders, and focus on the design and adoption of a consistently implemented, credible teacher assessment system.

To view the report in its entirety, including more detailed data and a full description of the recommendations, please visit www.tntp.org/publications/other_publications.html and click on the “Minneapolis” link.

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.