
America's Challenge: Effective Teachers for At-Risk Schools and Students

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Contents

Introduction by Carol A. Dwyer, Ph.D.	1
Chapter 1. Linking Teacher Quality and Student Outcomes by Laura Goe, Ph.D.	7
Chapter 2. Innovation Configurations to Improve Teacher Preparation in Reading, Classroom Behavior Management, and Inclusive Practices by Daniel J. Reschly, Ph.D., Susan M. Smartt, Ph.D., and Regina M. Oliver	25
Chapter 3. The Teacher Preparation → Teacher Practices → Student Outcomes Relationship in Special Education by Laura Goe, Ph.D.	45
Chapter 4. Implementing NCLB: State Plans to Address the Challenge of Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers by Tricia Coulter, Ph.D.	55
Chapter 5. Emerging Strategies and Practices to Improve Teacher Quality in At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subject Areas by Cortney Rowland and Michael Allen, Ph.D. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How the Fifth Largest County in the Country Recruits and Retains Teachers: A Case Summary of the Clark County School District• Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Shaw, Mississippi: How a Small, Rural District Staffs Its Classrooms	71
Chapter 6. Getting Started: A Survey of New Public School Teachers on Their Training and First Months on the Job by Jonathan Rochkind, John Immerwahr, Ph.D., Amber Ott, and Jean Johnson	89
Chapter 7. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality: A Resource for Systemic Improvement in the Equitable Distribution of Teachers by Carol A. Dwyer, Ph.D., and Amy Jackson	105
Glossary	109

CHAPTER 5



*Emerging Strategies and Practices to
Improve Teacher Quality in At-Risk and
Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subject Areas*

Chapter 5

Emerging Strategies and Practices to Improve Teacher Quality in At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subject Areas

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Introduction

Two things are clear: (1) research shows that having a high-quality teacher matters for student growth and learning and (2) every state has young people who do not have access to a high-quality teacher. Unfortunately, this situation is not simply happenstance; low-income and minority students in at-risk and hard-to-staff schools consistently are far more likely to have teachers with less experience or more marginal qualifications. With data from North Carolina, Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, and Wheeler (2007) recently confirmed that this point holds true for principals as well; good principals move away from high-poverty schools. Furthermore, in most states and districts, the subject areas of mathematics, science, and special education suffer from consistent teacher shortages and high teacher turnover, thus perpetuating the presence of less effective teachers in these classrooms. Most likely in part because of pressure from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, but also on their own initiative as the seriousness of this problem becomes apparent, states and districts are increasingly attempting to identify the dimensions of the inequitable distribution of quality teachers more precisely and to develop appropriate strategies to resolve the problem (see “Overarching Strategy to Improve Teacher Quality in At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools” on page 87).

This chapter describes a variety of emerging strategies and practices employed by districts and states across the country to address issues related to the availability, recruitment, and retention of teachers for at-risk and hard-to-

staff schools. The work of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) hinges on the notion that for schools to impact student learning, especially that of students in at-risk schools, education as a whole needs to do a better job of recruiting people into the teaching profession, especially for mathematics and science; producing more high-quality teachers; tapping into pools of teachers and individuals who would be willing to be teachers and then distributing them equitably; recruiting current teachers to specific schools, areas, or classrooms that are in need of their experience and skills; and using resources wisely to retain teachers. By studying emerging strategies and practices related to the availability, recruitment, and retention of quality teachers in a variety of district and state contexts, policymakers and administrators with similar needs can learn from the experiences of others.

Low-income and minority students in at-risk and hard-to-staff schools consistently are far more likely to have teachers with less experience or more marginal qualifications.

This chapter includes primary sections on teacher availability and recruitment and retention. The section pertaining to teacher availability focuses on increasing the overall pool of teachers. The section on teacher recruitment and retention addresses strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers in at-risk and hard-to-staff schools and subject areas. Each section details the importance of the theme and provides several state- and district-level strategies that reflect policy and practice.

Teacher Availability for Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subject Areas

In developing strategies to address issues of inequitable teacher distribution, a fundamental question is, “Are there enough good teachers available to make any solutions successful?” For example, each year more than 13 percent of special educators leave the profession or transfer to general education; every four years, half of all special education teachers have departed (McLeskley, Tyler, & Flippin, 2003). Although it would be tempting to determine availability and appropriate solutions based on some assessment of the entire pool of teachers, both those who are teaching and those in the so-called “reserve pool” who are not currently working in school (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003), the situation is much more complex.

National factors contribute to the difficulty of finding good teachers for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools (e.g., the underproduction of special education and high school physics teachers in our nation’s teacher preparation programs). Ultimately, however, the problem is local and must be addressed based on local realities and locally appropriate solutions. One district may have a shortage of middle school science teachers, while a neighboring district may have a shortage of high school music teachers. Even within the same district, one school may have a full complement of effective and well-qualified mathematics teachers, while other schools in the district struggle to find any well-qualified teachers to teach mathematics.

Many different factors might account for such disparities, and thus different courses of action may be needed to address them. A state might have difficulty producing enough teachers in specific areas and also may not be successful in luring enough teachers from elsewhere to fill the need. One state may set a relatively low bar for teacher certification, thus ensuring supply. Another state’s relatively high bar may help ensure teacher quality but reduce the potential teacher supply. A significant science-related industry in one part of a state may

lure prospective science teachers away from teaching in the area because of the opportunity to earn much higher salaries elsewhere. These realities demonstrate the importance of the following points:

- Whether there is a sufficient number of well-qualified teachers available to address inequities in the distribution of teachers in a particular district depends on an array of factors; some are national or regional and some are statewide, but many are associated with policies and conditions in individual districts and schools.
- States and districts ultimately need to consider all factors that contribute to the problem and all strategies that could facilitate a solution. They should begin, however, by addressing the more localized factors over which they have specific jurisdiction and greater control and chances of success in resolving the problem.

Increasing the Pool of High-Quality Teachers in At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools

State-Level Strategies to Increase the Pool of High-Quality Teachers in At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools

- **Allow retired teachers to return to the classroom as part-time, salaried teachers while continuing to draw full retirement benefits exempt from any earnings cap.** Maryland, Missouri, and North Carolina are among a number of states that have implemented this policy, at least for districts with a documented teacher shortage.
- **Make it easier for well-qualified teachers coming from other states to obtain a teaching license.** In the Mid-Atlantic region, Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia have implemented a jointly recognized “meritorious new teacher” designation that grants full reciprocity to qualifying teachers moving from one of these states to another.

- **Significantly increase the number of teachers that state universities prepare in subjects for which there are general teacher shortages.** The Texas A&M University system attempts to adjust the number of teachers it prepares in different subjects in response to projections of state needs. Both the University of California system and the California State University system have large initiatives to increase their production of mathematics and science teachers.
- **Tap the potential of community colleges to increase the number of teachers in the pipeline.** Community colleges, with their diverse student populations, are playing an increasingly important role in postsecondary education. States like Maryland and Georgia have attempted to integrate community colleges into their overall teacher preparation strategy, not only by making it easier for community college credits to transfer to four-year institutions but also by providing special support at the community college level to students who express an interest in teaching careers.
- **Create teacher preparation programs specifically designed for rural districts.** Rural districts lack the resources and critical numbers necessary to create their own programs, but several states, including Mississippi and Colorado, have created or approved programs aimed at the preparation of rural teachers. These programs often involve community colleges and include incentives to attract prospective candidates and ensure that they will work in the intended districts.
- **Create high-quality alternative routes to certification.** Alternative routes to certification can provide a path to move certified teachers, career changers, and other nontraditional prospective teachers into the classroom. This may be especially helpful for hard-to-staff subject areas. One example is North Carolina’s NC TEACH II program. Funded by a Transition to Teaching grant, NC TEACH II will work with four

universities to recruit and prepare lateral-entry teachers of high-need subject areas who are committed to remaining in a teaching position in a high-need school for a minimum of three years.

District-Level Strategies to Increase the Pool of High-Quality Teachers in At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools

- **Create teacher preparation programs that prepare teachers for specific assignments in hard-to-staff schools.** A number of urban districts in partnership with local colleges and universities have created alternate route programs specifically to address the needs of hard-to-staff schools. Examples include the New York City Teaching Fellows, the Boston Teacher Residency, and Houston’s Alternative Certification programs. Many of these programs focus on “home-grown” teacher candidates, who are more likely to remain in local classrooms.
- **Encourage and support paraprofessionals to become full-time teachers.** Teacher aides and assistant teachers often have the dedication to be effective in hard-to-staff schools and have valuable real-world experience as well. Supporting these teachers’ efforts to pursue a degree program and a full teaching certificate with the promise of a full-time teaching job makes good sense and takes advantage of a prime pool of candidates.
- **Create greater interest in the teaching profession.** It may not “take a village,” but a concerted effort, particularly on the local level, to push the teaching profession as a fulfilling and important career alternative might have some impact. Local business, political, and community leaders could all be influential and help to create financial support for incentives. Although more money for schools is not always the answer, communities that demonstrate a strong commitment to their schools systems—financial or otherwise—are likely to create greater general interest in teaching in those systems.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention for Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subject Areas

In addition to the complicated notion that there are not always enough good teachers to address state and district problems related to inequitable teacher distribution, there is also the issue of actually being able to recruit and retain available teachers into specific schools for particular subject areas. These schools are often at-risk and located in places where teachers do not necessarily want to work. The subject areas are often those in which a teacher could make a higher salary in a related, nonteaching position.

Certainly, there is much research on which kinds of schools most good teachers gravitate to and what it will take to get them to work in an at-risk school or subject area instead. Like teacher-availability issues, recruitment and retention issues must be addressed with an understanding of the local context. For example, some districts have problems with hiring late in the academic cycle. Jessica Levin and Meredith Quinn (2003) noted that because of hiring delays (e.g., not offering positions until July or August), urban districts often lose stronger applicants because those applicants have an earlier opportunity to accept positions in schools that are not hard to staff, commonly in suburban districts.

On the other hand, some districts may have a particularly effective human resources department with stellar recruitment and hiring practices that give them an important edge over neighboring districts. Teachers may be attracted to some schools in a district and avoid others, based on the reputations of the schools' leadership or learning environments. In Eric Hirsch's report (2006) on recruiting and retaining teachers in Alabama, survey responses from teachers showed school leadership to be one of the most important factors in whether or not a teacher remains in a school. A collective bargaining agreement in a particular district may make it difficult for the superintendent to reassign teachers in order to balance the quality

of the teaching staff among the district's schools, or such an attempted reassignment might risk a backlash from parents whose children currently enjoy a large share of the best teachers. Furthermore, forced reassignment may result in some teachers leaving the profession. Finally, teacher compensation in one district may be substantially lower than compensation in neighboring districts, making it difficult for the district with lower pay to attract and retain good teachers.

Many current state and district efforts aim to address the inequitable distribution of teachers by recruiting and retaining them for specific schools and subject areas without compromising teacher quality. Efforts like those discussed in the next section are intended to increase the likelihood that high-quality teachers from the currently available pool will teach in at-risk and hard-to-staff schools.

State-Level Strategies to Recruit and Retain High-Quality Teachers for Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subject Areas

- **Develop and fund pay-for-performance programs to attract, retain, motivate, and reward teachers.** Although these are still relatively new efforts with a minimal research base, many schools, districts, and states have developed performance-based pay programs to address teacher availability, recruitment, and retention. Performance-based pay systems have the potential to improve retention of effective teachers; draw accomplished teachers to at-risk and hard-to-staff schools; and motivate teachers, administrators, and other staff through recognition for supporting student success. States such as Texas and Mississippi have performance-based pay programs with components that target hard-to-staff, low-performing, low-income, or urban schools.
- **Develop and implement a coordinated state recruitment and retention effort.** Many states are using an assortment of technologies and strategies to launch statewide recruitment and retention

campaigns. Virginia has a statewide recruitment and retention effort that includes teacher incentives and teacher mentoring. Coordinated recruitment efforts in some states focus on a specific subject area of need, such as Tennessee's Become a Special Educator in Tennessee Teaching Program (BASE-TN).

- **Support new teachers through induction and mentoring.** Induction, mentoring, and support for new teachers continues to be one of the strongest ways to improve teacher quality in at-risk and hard-to-staff schools by increasing the level of teacher retention, accelerating the professional learning of new teachers, and creating learning communities of experienced and novice teachers. Several states, including California, Connecticut, and Louisiana, have mandatory new-teacher support programs, although the levels of state funding provided for these programs vary; California funds two years of participation, while Connecticut funds only the first year.

District-Level Strategies to Recruit and Retain High-Quality Teachers for Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subject Areas

- **Provide incentives and policies to redistribute the teacher workforce.** The “best” teachers rarely list pay as the reason for entering the teaching profession, yet given equal pay across assignments, most will choose to work in better resourced systems with higher performing students. Teacher pay and incentives should be structured to encourage the distribution of high-quality teachers across districts, schools, and content areas by combining pay with improved working conditions, cohort assignments, or a focus on a particular geographic or subject area. Sixty-nine low-performing middle schools in Virginia can hire qualified mathematics teachers from the Middle School Mathematics Teacher Corps. Teachers apply to enter the state-approved pool and receive extra pay for teaching in those schools. If hired from outside the district, teachers receive an extra \$10,000 per year for three years. Teachers from inside the district who enter the pool and take assignments in designated schools earn an extra \$5,000 per year for three years.
- **Improve working conditions.** Improving the working environment of teachers helps at-risk and hard-to-staff schools retain new teachers as well as reduce turnover for all teachers. Most teachers want to work in a school that is safe, provides necessary resources, and has supportive administrators. The Center for Teaching Quality currently has teacher working conditions initiatives with seven states or districts within states: Arizona, Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, and South Carolina. These working conditions initiatives survey teachers and then use the data to make connections between working conditions, student achievement, and teacher retention. Schools and districts are also provided with customized reports on the status of their working conditions.
- **Build the capacity of school leaders to support teachers.** Teacher retention depends on support and guidance from leaders. Miami-Dade County Public Schools' program, the Superintendent's Urban Principal Initiative, develops leadership skills in high school and middle school administrators (e.g., assistant principals and district central office administrators) to prepare them for principalship in the district's highest need secondary schools. The program also provides professional development.
- **Improve district recruitment and hiring practices.** Many districts lack the staff and systems, and sometimes the knowledge, to make teacher recruitment and hiring as successful as it could be. One organization that has expertise in this area is the New Teacher Project, which has researched the issue and helped a number of districts to improve human resources processes and advance teacher hiring timelines.

Conclusion

States and districts across the country are developing and implementing strategies to address the inequitable distribution of teachers. Many of these strategies focus on the availability, recruitment, and retention of high-quality teachers for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools.

Teacher availability refers to whether or not there are enough good teachers available to facilitate the success of teacher-quality efforts. Teacher recruitment and retention indicates the difficulty of being able to lure teachers into specific schools to teach in specific subject areas. To a certain extent, there are national trends that can be identified in teacher availability and recruitment and retention, but these issues are specific to certain states and districts and must be addressed with solutions that are contextually appropriate as indicated through the examples in this chapter.

It is difficult to isolate factors that facilitate the relative success of many of these strategies. The *TQ Source* Tips and Tools resource on the *TQ Source* website (see www.tqsource.org/strategies/index.asp) provides tips and cautions to keep in mind before embarking on many different strategies related to the availability, recruitment, and retention of teachers for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools. The most notable and far-reaching recommendation is that strategies be data-driven and focused on contextually identified issues of inequitable teacher distribution. Barriers to the success of these strategies often include a lack of funding allocations, political will to implement programs, buy-in from all stakeholders, and political and economic sustainability.

So far, little data has been collected on these programs, so a full understanding of what has worked and what has not worked is not yet possible. As states and districts come to understand the nuances of how teachers are distributed in their particular locales and look to develop and implement effective strategies, more data will become available. For example, Virginia is documenting the influence of a

pilot incentive program launched in 2004 that awarded bonuses to high-quality teachers who went to work in high-needs areas.

Many of the problems surrounding teacher availability, recruitment, and retention are functions of the teacher labor market—teachers most often want to teach in schools with a combination of better working conditions and better pay. Equal access to quality teachers for all students is a serious issue. Policies must be developed to address these tendencies and help make at-risk schools places that are not hard to staff because they pay competitively and tie pay to teacher retention, they are safe, and they reflect communities of learning where teachers can make a real difference.

See the Helpful Resources section for more information about additional resources that provide easily accessible research, data, strategies, and examples on many different teacher quality issues. Several of these resources were mentioned throughout the chapter.

Helpful Resources

- **Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ)**
www.teachingquality.org
CTQ engages in a wide variety of policy and research initiatives, including developing teacher leadership, assessing the impact of the NCLB teacher quality requirements, and analyzing what it takes to recruit and retain quality teachers for at-risk schools. The website offers an array of tools and publications.
- **Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education (COPSSE)**
www.coe.ufl.edu/copsse/
COPSSE is a partnership between the University of Florida and Johns Hopkins University. It provides reliable information to policymakers, practitioners, parents, and the general public regarding special education personnel issues.

- **Data Quality Campaign (DQC)**
www.dataqualitycampaign.org/
 The DQC is a national, collaborative effort to improve the collection, use, and reporting of quality education data and to encourage the implementation of state longitudinal data systems to improve student achievement. The website provides a variety of tools and resources related to the improvement of data quality, including teacher data.
- **Education Commission of the States (ECS)**
www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issue.asp?issueID=129
 An NCCTQ partner, ECS's Teaching Quality page provides policymakers and other education leaders a variety of resources, including research, policy information, and examples of what other states are doing to improve teacher quality.
- **Mid-Atlantic Regional Teachers Project (MARTP)**
www.aacte.org/programs/martp/aboutmartp.cfm
 MARTP is a collaboration of six Mid-Atlantic states to improve regional teacher reciprocity in order to address such factors as rural/urban challenges, subject area needs, and equitable hiring practices.
- **National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC)**
www.nasdtec.org/
 NASDTEC represents professional standards boards, commissions, and state departments across the country. It promotes high standards for educators, teacher mobility across states, personnel screening, and a clearinghouse on teacher discipline.
- **National Center for Alternative Certification**
www.teach-now.org/
 The National Center for Alternative Certification's site is a comprehensive place to find information about alternative routes to certification, including state-by-state policy information as well as research.
- **National Center for Special Education Personnel and Related Service Providers (The Personnel Center)**
www.personnelcenter.org/
 The Personnel Center seeks to recruit and retain special education teachers and other personnel by offering information on such things as careers, preparation programs, and certification and licensure requirements as well as by working to increase the capacity of states, districts, and other special education programs to recruit, prepare, and retain high-quality special educators.
- **Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants**
www.ed.gov/programs/heatqp/index.html
 Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants are competitive, discretionary grants that seek to improve states' capacity around teacher recruitment, preparation, licensing, and support, particularly to increase the number of qualified teachers in high-needs schools.
- **Teaching Quality (TQ) Source**
www.tqsource.org
 This website, made available by NCCTQ, is designed to help policymakers and educators make informed decisions on teaching quality by identifying policies and initiatives that impact fundamental issues of teaching quality, including teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention. The website also has an extensive library of research on teacher quality issues. One resource that can be found on the website is the *TQ Source* Tips and Tools page (www.tqsource.org/strategies/index.asp), which provides practical strategies and resources to assist policymakers and practitioners to improve teacher quality.
- **The New Teacher Project**
www.tntp.org/
 The New Teacher Project partners with school districts, state education agencies, colleges and universities, and other educational entities to help prepare, recruit, and certify high-quality teachers for public schools. The website offers, among other things, research and information about an array of programs.

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Shaw, Mississippi: How a Small, Rural District Staffs Its Classrooms

The Socioeconomic and Academic Achievement Context

Shaw, Mississippi, is a small, rural settlement in Bolivar County, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, about 95 miles north of Vicksburg and 115 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee. In 2000, Shaw was home to just over 2,300 residents, 92 percent of whom are African American. It is an economically poor community, with a median household income of just under \$19,000, compared with the state median income of \$31,300, and a poverty rate of roughly 42 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

Two public schools serve the town. McEvans School, which had a population of 436 students in 2005-06, is a K-7 elementary/middle school originally built in the 1950s as the town's high school for black students. The present high school, Shaw High School, covers Grades 8-12 and had a population of 282 students in 2005-06. It occupies an aging building in the middle of the town that was constructed in 1923 "for the education of white children and white children only." There are, however, virtually no white students these days in the Shaw school district; some 99 percent of the students are black. Of the students in the Shaw district, 96 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, well above the state average of 64 percent. They come from homes in which roughly half of the adults aged 25 or older have earned a high school diploma.

Shaw's small, relatively poor population and the correspondingly low property values in the district mean that the district has difficulty raising the revenue it needs to support the schools. Moreover, Shaw is facing a declining student population, lowering revenues even more. The 2005-06 total of 718 enrolled students in the Shaw district was down 24 percent from the 949 students enrolled in 1995-96. (2006-07 figures from the district superintendent's office indicate a total current enrollment of only 665 students.)

In spite of limited resources, under the leadership of Superintendent Charles Barron the district has been able to participate in a number of statewide and national programs, such as the Algebra Project and the Mississippi Writing and Thinking Institute. These efforts seem to have had a generally positive impact on student performance in Shaw, but the level of student achievement in the district is still far from ideal.

The performance of Shaw's second and third graders ranks in the top 20 percent to 30 percent in Mississippi, but Shaw students' showing on the Mississippi Curriculum Test begins to fall off in the fourth grade. By the time Shaw students get to high school, the indicators of academic success are decidedly mixed. Attendance and graduation rates have increased over the last few years, and 70 percent of graduates go on to pursue some sort of post-secondary education or vocational training.

Achievement as measured by various test scores is mediocre and generally below state averages, however, Shaw students generally score near or slightly above the average for students in the state's other high-poverty districts. On the ACT college entrance examination, the mean scale score of Shaw high school graduates in 2006 was 15.2 compared to the statewide average of 18.7, figures that have not varied much over a number of years. Ultimately, the weak academic performance of students in Shaw reflects the larger challenge for a state whose fourth- and eighth-grade students scored next to the lowest in reading and mathematics among all states on the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Teaching in Shaw

In spite of lackluster student performance, it is hard to escape the perception that, for most teachers, the positives of teaching in Shaw significantly outweigh the negatives. Teachers and administrators complain about student motivation and parental support, and the absence of resources like the Internet and good libraries in students' homes is certainly a handicap. With only 27 full-time teachers at the K-7 McEvans School (2005-06 figures) and only 26 at Shaw High School, however, student-to-teacher ratios are small, and teaching in Shaw is a much more intimate experience than is the case in many larger districts. Like many of the professionals who remain in the Mississippi Delta, many of the teachers in the Shaw schools were themselves raised in Shaw or the surrounding area and are committed to helping students improve their lives and the future of their community.

Moreover, in view of the limited economic opportunities in the area, teaching is a relatively well-paid occupation; the average Shaw district teacher salary in 2001-02 was just under \$34,000, far above the town's \$19,000 median household income (Mississippi Department of Education, 2003). Many teachers are also the first in their families to have attended college, and their salaries and professional prestige are much greater than those of their parents and other family members. Given the positives of teaching in Shaw, the closeness among teachers and administrators, and the absence of collective bargaining, the teachers association in the district is not very active and is not seen as particularly important, especially by most of the younger teachers.

Shaw's Teacher Recruitment and Retention Challenge

Nevertheless, Shaw faces a steep challenge in recruiting and retaining teachers, a challenge it shares with many other small, high-poverty districts. There is a general shortage of teachers in the state, although it does not impact all regions as negatively as it does the delta. The situation in Shaw has historically been particularly severe, and the district is one of 47 districts officially designated as a "Critical Teacher Shortage Area" by the Mississippi Department of Education.

Passed in 1998, the state's Critical Teacher Shortage Act is a vital piece of legislation for Mississippi's hard-to-staff schools and districts. The act provides scholarships, loan forgiveness, housing allowances, and other benefits directly to teacher candidates, new teachers, and veteran teachers who agree to teach in identified schools. It supports a number of alternate route teacher preparation programs and master's degree programs throughout the state. It also increases support for the efforts of the Mississippi Teacher Center to recruit teachers for critical shortage schools and provide them with ongoing training and instructional support. Shaw's designation as a Critical Teacher Shortage Area has been of enormous benefit, and indeed several of the younger teachers in the district have taken advantage of the incentives the program offers, without which it is doubtful they would have been able to complete their college degrees.

Of the students in the Shaw district, 96 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, well above the state average of 64 percent.

At present, the teacher corps in Shaw is remarkably stable, with an annual turnover rate of only 3 percent. That figure betrays the reality, however, that there are simply not very many teachers interested in teaching in Shaw. On average, teachers in Shaw have 25 years of experience—a very high figure that reflects the commitment of many teachers to the profession and the district but also raises a concern that an insufficient number of younger teachers are replenishing and reinvigorating the district's teaching pool. In 2003-04, only 29.3 percent of Shaw teachers had advanced degrees compared with a state average of 38.3 percent, which increases the likelihood that the district's aging teacher workforce may not be as skilled or knowledgeable as their long tenure might indicate. In addition, there are few options for replacing teachers who might be minimally effective, and the district has particular difficulty staffing middle school mathematics and language arts positions.

Meeting the Recruitment and Retention Challenge

In the end, the strategy the district has identified as most successful—even if it limits the district's recruitment focus to a smaller number of candidates—is a "grow-your-own" strategy that seeks to encourage Shaw residents or residents of nearby towns to pursue the education and credentials necessary to teach in the district. This is because, in the view of the superintendent and others in the district, the real problem is less one of recruitment than it is one of retention. Shaw occasionally has been able to attract first-time teachers willing to give teaching in the district a try, but they too often leave within a few years if they are not originally from the Shaw area or a similar location. Low salaries compared to those in other Mississippi districts, even districts in the surrounding area, also play a role in discouraging teachers from remaining in the district. There do not appear to be any long-term incentives available (e.g., significant salary bonuses) to encourage teachers to remain longer in hard-to-staff schools like those in Shaw, and the idealism of younger teachers fades as they are confronted with the realities of a high-poverty, geographically and culturally isolated district.

In addition to the general opportunities the Critical Teacher Shortage Act makes possible, several specific programs have been particularly central to Shaw's grow-your-own strategy. Coahoma Community College offers evening classes and an education track that can provide paraprofessional certification, and its low tuition and the automatic transferability of its courses to four-year institutions in the state make it an important option for a poor region like the Mississippi Delta. Several young teachers in Shaw have used the Coahoma program as a stepping stone to a teaching career.

Another valuable part of the pipeline for Shaw is the America Reads program, a partnership among Americorps, the Shaw District, and Delta State University to train tutors for afterschool programs. Tutors, virtually all of whom are from Shaw or the surrounding area, also receive a small monthly stipend and a tuition credit once they complete their term of service. The program not only provides an opportunity for individuals to gain first-hand experience in the schools but also for school administrators to identify individuals who show promise as future teachers and support them in continuing on to the university and obtaining their teaching certificate.

Another effort in Shaw to further its grow-your-own strategy is its Future Educators Association. Funded by the Mississippi Teacher Center, the program enrolls 19 out of the 282 students at Shaw High School. A lack of resources limits what the program can provide, however. Field trips to college campuses, for example, are rare.

Finally, the district tries to provide ongoing career development opportunities. For teachers who do begin their careers in Shaw, the district ensures they have a mentor. Professional

The district continues to work to grow their own teachers to ultimately staff all of their classrooms, as it faces decreasing student enrollments and impoverished conditions.

development is also offered through the state department of education, Delta State, or other providers. Delta State also has a tuition-paid master's degree program specifically for individuals who already have teaching certificates and who agree to teach (or to continue to teach) in the state's critical shortage districts for at least

three years. Financial and logistical difficulties, however, such as simply finding substitute teachers, make it difficult for interested teachers to take advantage of these options.

What Else Can Be Done?

One important barrier to certification among Shaw teachers seems to be the difficulty they have passing the Praxis I and II examinations required for entry into teacher preparation and licensure. Several teachers interviewed expressed a belief that the fear of the examinations leads potential teachers to choose other occupations. The district is attempting to address this problem head-on. For teachers hired on a provisional basis and working toward licensure, once they have passed the Praxis II exam, the district reimburses them for the costs of test preparation classes and the examination itself. Also under consideration is administering the Praxis I to interested individuals right out of high school so that the basic knowledge this examination assesses will be fresher in their minds.

Institutions that prepare teachers also can be more helpful to Shaw and districts like it. New Shaw teachers often have weak classroom management and presentation skills, as well as deficits in reading comprehension and writing. Postsecondary institutions must address these deficits by providing adequate remediation for students entering college or teacher preparation and, at the same time, maintain a high standard for graduation and program completion. Shaw and similar districts also need to be more visible partners in the teacher preparation programs of larger institutions like Delta State University. Having more student teachers assigned to the district, for example, might increase their level of comfort with teaching in Shaw and thus increase likelihood that they will want to teach there and to succeed once they graduate.

Ultimately, any efforts that Shaw and similar economically impoverished districts might make to grow teachers from within must confront the fact that teaching is simply not a highly sought-after occupation, even for students with limited occupational opportunities and whose family and friends have jobs that are far less lucrative and respected. Shaw's reliance on the grow-your-own strategy to recruit teachers into the district for long-term retention has resulted in a more stable corps of teachers for the district than it might otherwise have had, but always with a seriously restricted pool of candidates. Additional economic support for career development might be of some help in retaining teachers and improving their effectiveness. Long-term compensation incentives, such as significant rewards for teachers who are successful teaching in high-poverty districts like Shaw, might help extend the time that teachers from outside the area are willing to stay and might provide additional motivation for all teachers in the districts to improve their knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

Shaw, Mississippi, confronts specific local issues while trying to recruit and retain teachers for its, primarily, at-risk schools and students. The district continues to work to grow their own teachers to ultimately staff all of their classrooms, as it faces decreasing student enrollments and impoverished conditions. The district has collaborated with area teacher preparation institutions, but continued efforts are needed in order to ensure targeted preparation for specific district needs as well as potentially to secure a pipeline of prospective teachers to fill their classrooms.

How the Fifth Largest County in the Country Recruits and Retains Teachers: A Case Summary of the Clark County School District

The Socioeconomic and Academic Achievement Context

Although most people are probably familiar with Las Vegas, what they may not know is that the city sits within larger county boundaries that encompass well over 7,000 square miles. Clark County has a booming population of nearly 2 million people and is one of the fastest growing counties in the country—nearly 5,000 people move there each month. Over half of the population of Clark County is white, but in the past several years alone, there has been a growing Hispanic population—Hispanics now make up a little more than 25 percent of the Clark County population (Clark County, Nevada, 2006). The casino and gaming sector and the leisure and hospitality sector employ most Clark County residents (Clark County, Nevada, 2006).

Clark County is also home to the Clark County School District (CCSD), the fifth largest school district in the country, with approximately 300,000 students in 326 schools. The district opens 12 to 14 new schools per year. CCSD is organized into five regions, each of which has its own administrative staff, including a regional superintendent, and is charged with developing an improvement plan along with strategies and practices to meet the goals of that plan. Clark County is able to keep up with growth, in part, through the issuance of bonds. For example, the district has one of the largest construction and school modernization programs in the nation.

According to student achievement results from state tests, K-8 reading, mathematics, and science suffer from the highest percentage of students performing in the two lowest (out of four) ranges of achievement (Nevada Department of Education, 2006). While there has been some improvement in K-8 mathematics, reading and science have been relatively stagnant over the past few years. In 2005-06, nearly 56 percent of K-8 students were either in the lowest range of achievement or were in the “Approaches Standards” range of achievement. Fifty percent of students scored in these ranges for mathematics and 52 percent for science. Assessment information for Grades 9-12, however, has shown steady improvement over the past three years (Nevada Department of Education, 2006). The average daily attendance is around 93 percent and mirrors that of the state. In 2005, the district had a graduation rate of about 60 percent, which was almost 5 percentage points lower than the state’s overall graduation rate (CCSD, 2006). Although enrollment in postsecondary institutions has grown, the state of Nevada, including CCSD, continues to show low numbers of students who go on to college after high school.

Teaching in the Clark County School District

All of this district growth also means a lot of teachers—more than 17,000 full- and part-time teachers to be exact. CCSD hires approximately 1,500 to 2,000 new teachers per year (McRobbie & Makkonen, 2005). The district primarily imports teachers from other districts and states; its two main teacher preparation institutions, University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) and Nevada State College, cannot possibly turn out enough teachers to fill the ever-growing shortages in CCSD’s classrooms. Approximately 75 percent of CCSD’s teachers are from out of state. Many teachers report that they come to teach in Clark County because of the offerings of the district, the attributes of the area including the weather, and the cultural diversity represented in Clark County.

In an agreement with the teachers’ association, Clark County Education Association, the district started new teachers last year at Step 3 of the salary schedule, bringing their beginning salary to approximately \$33,000. The context in which they are receiving that salary has been changing, however. Housing costs in Clark County have steadily risen—the average median price of a new home in 2006 was \$330,094, which was up from \$309,990 in 2005 (Southern Nevada Home Builders Association, 2007).

District officials note that despite some of their very best efforts, and due to a variety of reasons including capacity issues, sometimes they have to place a teacher in a classroom who is not highly qualified. According to the CCSD Accountability Reports 2005-2006, the content areas with the highest percentages of classes not taught by highly qualified teachers were English (31.4 percent), mathematics (27.1 percent), and science (26.5 percent).

Clark County School District's Teacher Recruitment and Retention Challenge

When district officials are asked how they identify their teacher shortage needs, the response is usually something along the lines of, "It's more about what we don't need!" The district is not in search of social studies teachers and boys' secondary physical education teachers. Otherwise, there are shortages across the district in all other areas. The major focus, however, reflects national needs; Clark County has a dearth of mathematics, science, and special education teachers. With the growing Hispanic population as well as other students whose first language is not English, there is a burgeoning need for ELL teachers.

The call for recruiting teachers for area shortages is mostly a function of the growth of the district. Teacher distribution issues are somewhat a result of what one district staff member characterized as follows: "the shortage has created picky teachers." District officials, however, are able to isolate some of the primary problem areas. For example, Nevada has high entrance requirements for teachers coming from other states, which often stifles interstate mobility. Furthermore, as is common in many other states and districts, collaboration with area universities needs to be improved. District officials note that teacher candidates need more on-the-job

training than they are currently getting, and training needs to be tailored to specific district needs. Additionally, many in the district will indicate that the problem of teacher shortages and teacher distribution is not necessarily one of teacher recruitment but one of retention, which cannot happen in the human resources office. According to

In 2005, the district had a graduation rate of about 60 percent, which was almost 5 percentage points lower than the state's overall graduation rate (CCSD, 2006).

2005 data from the CCSD Human Resources Division, approximately 22 percent of teachers who were hired between 2000 and 2005 have since resigned from the district. Many issues may contribute to this, two of which were noted by teachers surveyed for the Working Conditions Survey: leadership and working conditions. A large majority of principals in CCSD's schools are new and had to move into administration positions quickly in order to accommodate district growth. New principals tend to lack the essential experience to foster a community of learning necessary for teacher satisfaction and student growth.

Meeting the Recruitment and Retention Challenge

In the past several years and under the vision and leadership of Dr. George Ann Rice, former associate superintendent of the Human Resources Division, CCSD has exerted a tremendous recruitment and retention effort. Through technology and targeted recruitment and retention efforts, particularly for hard-to-staff schools, the district has been able to address many of the teacher shortage and distribution issues. There is still much more to be done, however, as student enrollment continues to grow, particularly for special populations.

Potential and existing teachers learn about CCSD teaching opportunities in a variety of ways (e.g., online, traveling job fairs, teacher fairs, principal recruitment trips, and campus visits). The district currently has an advertising campaign, "We Teach It," which includes a video available on the district's website that is often shown at fairs and recruiting events. The district has tried to maximize the use of technology not only to share district opportunities but also to make the most of recruitment and hiring strategies. Teachers can go online, fill out an interest form, and manage their own application. The internal application process is unusually efficient—once the application is filled out and uploaded, it is disseminated to one of two recruitment specialists in the Human Resources Division. The recruitment specialists assign the candidate a rating and ensure that the candidate's file is complete. The candidate's file is then moved to the certification and licensure office where he or she may get an early offer. These files become the infrastructure of the recruiting system.

The district's recruitment efforts also hinge on a great deal of site-based management. Principals have a fair amount of control over recruiting and hiring at their schools. Once teacher candidate files are complete, they are uploaded into an online system used by principals to search for candidates to fill available positions in their school. Schools with openings or shortages are given a code that allows them to search the system; they can even put a hold on someone in the system for an open position. The district sends out principal recruiting teams to various cities and campuses. Principals are able to offer contracts on the spot during recruiting events if they consider teacher candidates promising and do not want them to lose interest. At the beginning of each year, hard-to-staff schools have the option of choosing teachers before their counterparts from schools that are not hard to staff. Another effort put in place by the district is one in which teachers are required, as part of their hiring contract, to remain teaching in a school for two years unless they want to transfer to a high-needs school, which they can do at any time.

One important component of the CCSD recruitment and retention efforts is the strong relationship between the district administration and the Clark County Education Association. Union officials note two major factors that have helped develop and sustain the relationship:

CCSD's growing population and high cost of living as well as the increasing minority population have greatly challenged the district to fill its classrooms with high-quality teachers who can meet all of the students' needs

(1) interest-based bargaining and (2) consistency of leadership. In 2003, union executives and district officials attended training sessions for interest-based bargaining in order to alter the course of years of arbitration to settle contracts. After interest-based bargaining, they settled two contracts in a row and just recently ratified three 4-year contracts.

The comprehensive package of recruitment and retention programs and initiatives in CCSD is impressive. Getting "buy-in" for these programs is half the battle, and one early effort to achieve this buy-in is that personal letters are often sent to candidates from Dr. Rice. Some of the district's recruitment and retention programs and initiatives are described below:

- *Multilingual Individuals Training to become Teachers (MITT)*. MITT is a program that puts teacher candidates into the Rosetta Stone Language Acquisition Program through Nevada State College. These candidates, who have poor English language skills, have expressed the desire to become teachers through one of the district's Alternative Route to Licensure (ARL) Programs. They perfect their language skills online, and once they demonstrate their proficiency in English through an exam, they have the opportunity to participate in an ARL program. The funding for the MITT program is from a Transition to Teaching grant, and the main goal is that candidates fill high-shortage areas such as mathematics and science positions. At this point, district officials note that they have not had a great deal of success increasing minority recruitment through MITT.
- *Student to Teacher Enlistment Project Undergraduate Program (STEP UP)*. STEP UP focuses on recruitment for low-performing schools. High school students who are interested in teaching have the opportunity to earn dual credit while in high school, earn an associate degree at Community College of Southern Nevada (CCSN), and subsequently enroll at Nevada State College to finish an education degree. The program is completely funded by the district and the teachers association.
- *Incentives for Retirees*. Retirees who meet certain qualifications and want to return to the classroom can apply to come back to work and receive full wages and their full pension. They may be a mentor or a teacher and must be highly qualified in the subject area in which they will teach.
- *"We Care."* The "We Care" program was founded by the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce and the CCSD and is designed to help district recruitment efforts by sharing information about the community and offering assistance in finding housing and in helping spouses and older children find employment in the community.

- *Alternative Routes to Licensure (ARL)*. In an effort to increase the number of teachers in critical shortage areas, CCSD developed and now runs several different ARL programs. About 10 percent to 15 percent of teachers new to CCSD come through various ARL programs. Of particular interest is the ARL program geared to assist with special education teacher shortages. ARL seeks to address one of CCSD's primary shortage areas. The program is in partnership with UNLV. In 2005, an in-depth report completed by an external evaluator examined the efficacy of CCSD's ARL programs and concluded that based on relatively high retention rates, the ARL programs have been successful for the district.
- *Teaching and Learning Conditions (TLC) Team*. With the help of the Center for Teaching Quality, the district issued a working conditions survey in January 2007 and is collecting data on round two of the survey in April 2007. Results from these surveys provide the newly created Teaching and Learning Conditions (TLC) Team with the information they need to identify problem areas and evaluate their efforts to improve the working conditions in some schools. The team worked with 15 schools in 2006.
- *New Teacher Induction Program*. The district has a concerted focus on new teacher induction and mentoring as well as professional development. Title II funding as well as some district funding provide support for induction efforts, which include new teacher orientation, post-hire new teacher orientation, training opportunities, and new teacher conferences.

Conclusion

CCSD faces specific local issues while trying to recruit and retain teachers for their, primarily, at-risk schools. CCSD's growing population and high cost of living as well as the increasing minority population have greatly challenged the district to fill its classrooms with high-quality teachers who can meet all of the students' needs. The district has collaborated with area teacher preparation institutions, but more needs to be done in order to ensure targeted preparation for specific district needs as well as secure a pipeline of prospective teachers to fill classrooms.

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Overarching Strategy to Improve Teacher Quality in At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools

Know Your Data; Know Your Needs

To develop and implement strategies that will increase the pool of available teachers as well as to recruit and retain teachers for specific geographic and subject areas of need, states and districts need to take stock of available teacher data across departments, think about how these data sources can be used to create a picture of teacher supply and demand over time, and make plans to continually reevaluate the data.

Example

In California, recent legislation (Senate Bill 1614) created the California Longitudinal Teacher Integrated Data System (TDS) to streamline data that are collected across education agencies in the state and use those data to understand how many teachers are needed and where. It is, potentially, a much improved system for tracking teacher supply and demand in the state.

