Coming Together to Build and Sustain an Effective Teacher Workforce in DC: Lessons from the DC Staffing Data Collaborative

Overview

Public schools in the District of Columbia have worked hard over the last two decades to ensure that all students have access to great teaching. Too often, however, these efforts have not yielded equitable gains. While the overall number of effective[1] teachers has increased, schools with a high percentage of students of color or students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch are still disproportionately staffed with teachers who are inexperienced, ineffective, or teaching out of field. Despite improvement, the students most in need of great teaching are still less likely to have access to this resource.

The problems of equity in DC are similar to those seen in other states or districts, but the context is unique. Compared to other urban areas where one school district serves the vast majority of students, students in DC are spread across 68 local education agencies (LEAs), with 47 percent of students attending one of 120 charter schools[3]. Each LEA carries significant autonomy and, as a result, historically there has been little data sharing to better understand the equity and talent challenges across the district— even though all LEAs share the same talent pool. This lack of comprehensive data across the district makes it challenging for LEAs and decision-makers to increase students' access to great teachers.

By the Numbers
91,145[2]
students attend a public school in DC
68
LEAs serve students across the district
47 percent
of students attend one of 120 charter schools

To address this challenge, the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) launched the DC Staffing Data Collaborative (the Collaborative)—a partnership between OSSE, as the state education agency, LEAs who opt to participate, and TNTP, a national non-profit serving as a research partner. The goal of the Collaborative is simple but bold: help LEAs develop effective strategies to attract, develop, and retain great teachers to serve their students through robust analysis of staffing data from across the District.

> The goal of the Collaborative is to help LEAs develop effective strategies to attract, develop, and retain the teachers they need to serve their students through robust analysis of staffing data from across the district.

In exchange for sharing faculty and staff data with TNTP—which LEAs are often already required to collect and share to meet federal requirements—participating LEAs receive regular reports on targeted and timely topics, such as school culture, staffing, performance evaluation, and differential retention[4]. These reports provide LEAs, within the Collaborative, with information about their own schools, as well as districtwide comparison data. The Collaborative then brings LEAs together for convenings where LEA leaders can discuss themes observed in their reports and work together to solve problems around shared challenges. As of the 2017-18 school year, the Collaborative included 51 LEAs serving nearly 90 percent of all public school students in the District.

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[1] Effective teachers are defined as those teachers with a rating of 3 (effective) or 4 (highly effective) on a 4 point evaluation scale.
[2] Auditted public enrollment number as of Oct. 5, 2017. 2017-18 School Year Audit and Verification of Student Enrollment Report, Feb 20, 2018.
[3] Office of the State Superintendent of Education. Quick Stats. https://osse.dc.gov/page/data-and-reports-0#enrollment .
[4] Differential retention refers to the idea that LEAs are retaining more of their effective teachers each year than ineffective teachers

One area of focus for the Collaborative has been the retention of effective teachers; this research takes advantage of data on teacher backgrounds, perceptions of instructional culture, and performance.[5] With three years of data from over 200 schools and 7,500 teachers, the Collaborative has surfaced several key findings concerning factors that affect teacher retention for participating LEAs, the district as a whole, and educators across the country. OSSE and TNTP believe these early findings should fuel conversations among policymakers and educators—and that the Collaborative has potential to serve as a model in DC and beyond for how partners in the public education sector can work together to identify and solve challenges to benefit students.

Retention of High-Performing Teachers in DC

Accurate analysis of teacher retention—especially retention of high performers—requires that LEAs accurately assess teacher effectiveness. For our analysis, TNTP and OSSE assumed that teacher evaluation ratings were comparable across DC's LEAs; however, we acknowledge two challenges with this assumption:

1. **DC does not have a standard evaluation system for all teachers.** Within guidelines provided by OSSE, each LEA establishes its own evaluation model. For this analysis, teacher effectiveness is based on the ratings each LEA assigned to their teachers, then reported to TNTP.

2. **We cannot assert the accuracy of any individual teacher's rating.** We know from local and national research that accurate evaluations require considerable and consistent effort, and DC's schools, like schools nationally, face challenges around rating accuracy and completion.

Even with these caveats, our analysis yielded several important trends regarding retention of high-performing teachers, and actionable headlines that enable DC LEAs to act immediately to keep great teachers in classrooms.

Instructional Culture and Retention

What We Found

Within the District of Columbia, in schools where teachers are more satisfied with instructional culture[6], as defined by clear and consistent expectations for effective teaching and support for their development, effective teachers are more likely to plan to remain in their school and LEAs. Relatedly, schools and LEAs with a strong instructional culture are less likely to experience beginning-of-year vacancies. Finally, TNTP's national research shows that schools with stronger instructional cultures, especially those with improving instructional culture over time, have higher rates of student achievement.[7]

Nationally, where teachers have a strong perception of instructional culture, schools had:

Higher retention rates for effective teachers.

Fewer beginning-of-year vacancies.

Higher student achievement.

What It Means for Schools

Data from spring 2017 to spring 2018 show that in most schools (59 percent), teacher perceptions of instructional culture overall stayed roughly the same year to year.[8]

Meanwhile, about a quarter of schools saw meaningful improvements in instructional culture over this time period.[9] Improving culture takes sustained, focused effort, but growth is possible, and critical if the goal is retaining our best

teachers. Among the 24 percent of "effective" teachers who plan to leave their schools, nearly half cited preventable reasons related to instructional culture. One strategy for improving both instructional culture and retention is a focus on low-cost, high-yield retention strategies.

Nationally, top teachers who experience two or more of these retention strategies plan to keep teaching at their schools for nearly twice as long (2-6 more years)

LOW-COST RETENTION STRATEGIES [10]	
Feedback & Development	1. Provided me with regular, positive feedback 2. Helped me identify areas of development 3. Gave me critical feedback about my performance informally
Recognition	4. Recognized my accomplishments publicly 5. Informed me that I am high-performing
Responsibility & Advancement	6. Identified opportunities or paths for teacher leader roles 7. Put me in charge of something important
Resources	8. Provided me with access to additional resources for my classroom

What It Means for Other Stakeholders

Across schools in the Collaborative, perceptions of instructional culture were significantly correlated with both planned retention (how long teachers expect to stay in their schools) and actual retention. Establishing a strong culture is, fundamentally, something that occurs at the school level. However, LEAs and policymakers can elevate this issue, prioritize resources that support school leaders in addressing cultural concerns, and communicate clearly that a culture that clarifies expectations for teachers and elevates their importance should be a priority.

School Leadership and Retention

What We Found

Teacher effectiveness—and effective teachers' plans to remain—correlated strongly with teachers' perceptions of school leadership. Unfortunately, it is common across the district for teachers to have weak perceptions of school leadership. Only 59 percent of teachers agree or strongly agree with the statement, "My school has effective instructional leadership," and only 60 percent of teachers agree or strongly agree with the statement, "My school leaders articulate a clear overarching vision that drives priorities, goals, and decision making within the school."

Where Collaborative teachers perceive their leadership to be effective, schools are more likely to have:[11]

Higher rates of effective teachers planning to stay two or more years.

More effective teachers.

Better instructional culture.

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[10] *The Irreplaceables*. (2012). Retrieved from https://tntp.org/publications/view/the-irreplaceables-understanding-the-real-retention-crisis

[11] Teacher perceptions of school leadership were measured using the Leadership Domain Score on the Spring 2017 Insight Survey. School level Leadership Domain Scores were significantly correlated with planned retention, the percent of effective teachers at a school, and school Instructional Culture Index Scores.

What It Means for Schools
Effective school leadership—especially in establishing a strong learning environment—should already be a top priority for LEA leaders based on extensive research supporting the connection between such leadership and student outcomes.[12] In identifying the state of instructional leadership, LEA leaders should consider teacher perceptions as a strong indicator. In the roughly 25 percent of schools whose leaders received evaluation ratings lower than "effective", teachers' perceptions of leadership were significantly lower than in schools where leaders received "effective" ratings—suggesting that teachers, as a collective, have valuable insights on school leader performance.

Without changes to ineffective leadership, schools and LEAs risk losing effective teachers—not only from their buildings, but more troublingly, from the district overall.[13] More broadly, schools and LEAs should look at school leader performance with a more critical eye, using teacher feedback to inform areas of improvement for school leadership teams. Schools should prioritize the retention of effective instructional leaders with the same urgency as they do effective teachers. Conversely, schools should take steps to improve performance of weak school leaders and, where warranted, change leaders where school culture and student outcomes lag.

What It Means for Other Stakeholders
The need for strong school leaders is not a new challenge, nor is it unique to DC. That makes a districtwide investment in the development and retention of effective school leaders just as critical as efforts to develop and keep great teachers. Already, outside organizations invest heavily in training leaders new to their roles and, more recently, in the development and strengthening of leadership practices. Evaluation of these investments, and continued iterations to find new ways to help principals thrive, will be critical.

Other Talent Management Practices and Retention

While instructional culture and perceptions of leadership had the strongest relationship with overall teacher effectiveness and retention of effective teachers, our analysis surfaced that other talent management areas, such as professional development and compensation, show only weak relationships with school and LEA efforts to build and sustain effective teaching forces.

Professional Development
LEAs across the district spend significant time and money on professional development (PD) for teachers, but similar to what TNTP has found in other public schools[14], on average, teachers aren't improving overall, as measured by changes in evaluation ratings year over year. During the 2016-17 school year when data was last collected on PD, the average teacher in a school in our dataset spent more than 16 hours in extended professional development programs, more than 21 hours completing university-level coursework, and more than 29 hours in one-off professional development meetings, among other professional development activities.[15] Yet, only two

TEACHER EVALUATION RATING CHANGE FROM 2016 TO 2017

19% improved one or more ratings since last year.

61% stayed the same.

20% declined one or more ratings.

teachers in ten saw an improvement in their evaluation rating, and approximately the same percentage dropped at least one evaluation rating.[16] Moreover, we do not find that teachers' participation in or satisfaction with professional development is significantly related to improvement in their effectiveness, or that participation in professional development is significantly related to their plans to remain in their current school, LEA, or the profession. This is not meant to suggest that teacher development is not critically important, but rather that current professional

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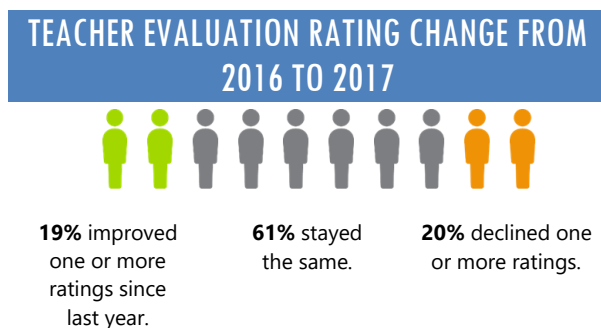
[12] See, for example, Sebastian, J. & Allensworth, E. (2012). The influence of principal leadership on classroom instruction and student learning: A study of mediated pathways to learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48*(4)*, 626-663.
[13] There is a correlation between teacher perceptions of school leadership on the Insight survey and teacher-reported plans to leave the region.
[14] *The Mirage.* (2015). Retrieved from https://tntp.org/publications/view/the-mirage-confronting-the-truth-about-our-quest-for-teacher-development
[15] 799 teachers at DC charter schools responded to survey items about time spent on several types of professional development activities.
[16] Two years of evaluation data was available for 4,075 teachers across Collaborative LEAs. Effectiveness ratings were assigned by LEAs. The improvement trend cited in this report changed slightly, and in a positive direction, between 2017 and 2018: 22% of teachers improved, while only 14% of teachers declined one or more ratings. The updated data were not included in this report because PD activities were not tracked in the following year, so could not be examined in conjunction with evaluation trends.

development efforts are not effective. Insuring professional development topics which target aspects of teaching known to correlate with improved teacher practice and student outcomes might make the sessions more effective in increasing the number of students who are exposed to high quality teaching. Additionally, careful data collection and measurement around professional development and teacher practice can highlight PD topics and sessions which are most valuable.

Compensation

Compensation and career pathways are often considered key components of a robust retention plan. Across the Collaborative, teachers report that compensation does matter, but effective teachers are substantially more likely to leave their schools and LEAs for reasons related to instructional culture. As measured by the end of year Insight survey in 2017-18, only four percent of teachers who plan to leave their school within the next two years claim that it is because they are dissatisfied with compensation, and only three percent because they have insufficient opportunities to earn a promotion.

> Effective teachers are substantially more likely to leave their school for reasons related to instructional culture than to compensation.

Next Steps

In the next year, OSSE and its partners hope to push the Collaborative further by identifying additional areas for research and expanding our reach to ensure key policy and decision-makers across the district have access to actionable data and recommendations.

Investigate Educator Preparation, Recruitment, and Staffing

Over 50 percent of Collaborative LEAs had vacancies at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year (totaling 145 districtwide vacancies). A number of factors may be inhibiting LEAs from opening fully staffed, including a shortage of applicants from teacher preparation programs, high rates of teacher attrition, or delayed hiring timelines.

Going forward, the Collaborative plans to engage preparation programs to improve understanding of teacher pipeline challenges and effectiveness of new teachers in participating schools. More broadly, the Collaborative hopes to work with both educator preparation programs and partner LEAs to understand how DC can ensure it attracts, prepares, hires, and retains the effective teachers all students need.

Increase Districtwide Collaboration Around Talent

If the goal of the Collaborative is to make sure that every student in DC has access to an effective teacher, we need to do more to bring all stakeholders in the district together around solving our talent challenges. There is a wealth of organizations across the district dedicated to fighting the inequities in our schools, but currently, not enough collaboration around the data on our current talent challenges to drive targeted interventions and strategies. The Collaborative hopes to expand our focus beyond just serving our partner LEAs to thinking about how we can bring together individuals and organizations to better understand the district's talent challenges so that we can all work together to better serve DC's students.

ABOUT THE DC STAFFING DATA COLLABORATIVE

The DC Staffing Data Collaborative is an ongoing research project.

TNTP, a national nonprofit founded by teachers, helps school systems end educational inequality and achieve their goals for students. We work at every level of the public education system to attract and train talented teachers and school leaders, ensure rigorous and engaging classrooms, and create environments that prioritize great teaching and accelerate student learning. Visit tntp.org for more information.

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is the state education agency for the District of Columbia, charged with raising the quality of education for all DC residents. OSSE serves as the District's liaison to the U.S. Department of Education and works closely with the District's public and public charter schools. Visit osse.dc.gov for more information.

Participating local education agencies (LEAs) for the 2017-18 School Year—whose data contributed to this districtwide analysis—include:

- Academy of Hope PCS
- Achievement Preparatory Academy PCS
- AppleTree Early Learning PCS
- Breakthrough Montessori PCS
- Bridges PCS
- Bright Beginnings Inc
- Cedar Tree Academy PCS
- Center City PCS
- Cesar Chavez PCS
- City Arts & Prep PCS
- Creative Minds International PCS
- DC Bilingual PCS
- DC Preparatory Academy PCS
- DC Scholars PCS
- Democracy Prep PCS Congress Heights
- District of Columbia International School
- District of Columbia Public Schools
- Eagle Academy PCS
- EL Haynes PCS
- Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom PCS
- Excel Academy PCS
- Friendship PCS
- Goodwill Excel Center PCS
- Hope Community Academy PCS
- Howard University Middle School of Math and Science PCS

- IDEA PCS
- Ingenuity Prep PCS
- Inspired Teaching Demonstration PCS
- Kingsman Academy PCS
- KIPP DC PCS
- LAYC Career Academy PCS
- Lee Montessori PCS
- Maya Angelou PCS
- Meridian
- Monument Academy PCS
- Mundo Verde Billingual PCS
- National Collegiate Preparatory PCS
- Paul PCS
- Richard Wright PCS for Journalism and Media Arts
- Roots PCS
- Sela PCS
- Shining Stars Montessori PCS
- Sustainable Futures PCS
- The Next Step PCS
- Thurgood Marshall Academy PCS
- Two Rivers PCS
- Washington Global PCS
- Washington Latin PCS
- Washington Leadership Academy PCS
- Washington Yu Ying PCS
- YouthBuild PCS