

Attracting, Supporting and Retaining New Teachers in Durham Public Schools

Executive Summary



November 2005

TEACHING MATTERS AND TEACHERS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY

During the last decade, research has helped convince policymakers and business leaders of what parents have always known—teachers make the most difference in helping students learn and achieve. The public, educators and policymakers realize that high quality teachers are essential for children to reach increasingly high standards; however, these teachers remain in short supply, especially in schools serving predominately poor and minority children.

Like many other urban school districts across the country, Durham Public Schools (DPS) face severe staffing challenges, often leaving students in high-poverty schools with the least qualified educators. In 2003-2004, the district's annual turnover rate was 17 percent, which is higher than the North Carolina average—ranking 103rd of 115 school districts in the state. Teacher turnover is even more acute for novice teachers. An astonishing 28 percent of new DPS teachers leave after just the first year of teaching and 42 percent leave after two years. These high turnover rates create considerable costs in terms of both financial impact and overall effect on student learning.

The full version of this brief considers current recruitment and retention initiatives with the potential to address teacher supply problems plaguing DPS—with a particular emphasis on merging investments in new teacher induction. The brief concludes with a series of potential next steps for education stakeholders and community members to consider in a collaborative effort to better recruit, support and retain the teachers DPS students need.

IMPROVING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN DPS

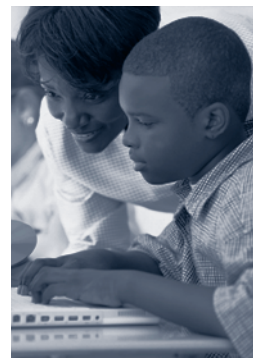
In many ways, Durham is moving in the right direction to address longstanding staffing challenges. But the experiences of districts across the country have proven that this is hard work and there is no single silver bullet for recruiting quality teachers. While salary supplements and other financial incentives are a necessary piece of the puzzle, monetary rewards alone are not sufficient. A broad array of incentives and supports—financial and non-financial—are necessary to attract high quality teachers in DPS. While DPS is generally competitive in terms of financial benefits, the district is right to focus more attention on non-financial efforts to better attract and retain teachers—including improved working conditions and a significantly better mentoring and induction structure.

Of all the investments related to keeping teachers in Durham, mentoring and induction efforts may hold the most promise. Beginning teachers must know how to teach that subject matter to an increasingly diverse set of learners, many of whom have special needs, limited English proficiency, different learning styles, and a wide range of family and community circumstances. It is not enough for teachers to simply know their subject matter. They must be able to translate that subject matter into standards-based curriculum which is developmentally appropriate for each student in their classroom. And new teachers must do all of this while learning school and district policies, figuring out the basics of classroom management, and fitting into the school organization in which they find themselves. In order to meet the challenges of their first years of teaching, novices need structured support from experienced colleagues trained to understand the needs of new teachers.

The term *new teacher induction* refers to a structured process of teacher learning, conducted on-the-job, where novices are prepared in stages over the first few years of teaching. Novices in many other professions complete an induction process, although the terms used are often different: a *residency* in medicine, an *internship* in architecture, and a *clerkship* in law. This is not the case in public education—and it is time for that to change.

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DPS currently has a range of support resources for new teachers, which are implemented in varying degrees depending on individual school sites. At some of larger schools, there are not enough veteran teachers to serve as mentors for the large numbers of novice teachers. The district has no formal requirements for who can serve as a mentor, and formal training for new mentors has been sporadic. And formal mentors provide varying amounts of support to the novices. Governor Easley's 2004 Teacher Working Conditions survey asked teachers to report the extent to which they agreed with the statement that "new teachers have effective mentors." Of the 400 DPS teachers who responded, only 22 percent strongly agreed that "new teachers have effective mentors," compared to 35 percent across North Carolina.

Since June of 2004, the Durham Public Education Network has focused on engaging the community to determine strategies on how to impact practice and policy at the classroom, school, and district level with regard to teacher induction practices, mentoring, and principal training. Following conversations with the Network, DPS is taking bold action to support new teachers. This action makes DPS the first district in North Carolina to fully adopt the comprehensive in every school in the district New Teacher Center model (from the University of California-Santa Cruz) that relies on full-time mentors to support new teachers.

Beginning in 2005-06, the research-based model will create 35 full-release mentors. These DPS veteran teachers can serve in this mentoring capacity for up to three years before returning to their classroom positions. Although this model requires experienced teachers to leave the classroom for several years, students will continue to benefit from their expertise as they pass it on to new teachers.

Mentors should serve no more than fifteen novice teachers each, and all mentors will receive extensive, ongoing training. Initial mentor training will cover four core areas: developing an effective mentoring relationship, identifying new teacher needs, mentoring conversations, and formative assessments for new teachers. Mentors will meet with their novices on a weekly basis to provide guidance around engaging students in learning, managing and organizing the classroom, and planning instruction. Mentors will also meet weekly with other mentors for planning and professional development, in addition to meeting with the principal every six weeks.

NEXT STEPS AND ISSUES TO CONSIDER

While comprehensive induction powerfully affects the development and retention of high quality teachers, it is only one piece of the larger effort to improve Durham Public Schools and close the achievement gap. Research shows that strong leadership from school principals and good working conditions are important factors in teachers' decisions to stay in teaching. The Network has worked diligently over this time to establish a public private partnership to strengthen leadership skills of principals through the Triangle Leadership Academy. This Triangle Leadership Academy will enable the district to utilize the professional development of an established center with shared resources and costs from four other districts and Local Education Funds including the Network. Investing in the New Teacher Center model and its extensive new teacher support, in addition to bolstering school leadership and working conditions, will help to ensure that all Durham children have access to high quality teachers, in every classroom, every day.

To help students achieve at higher levels, meet state standards, as well as meet adequate yearly progress under NCLB, DPS must ensure well prepared and supported teachers are available for all children. To bring and keep these teachers in Durham, the district will need a strategy, which includes new financial incentives, improved working conditions, and better preparation and support. Money alone will not be enough. Teachers need to feel supported, prepared, and justly rewarded, and they need to believe they can succeed with the challenging population of students served by hard-to-staff schools. Durham cannot solve its staffing problem simply by waiting for, or relying on, a greater production of new teachers. Teachers will respond to opportunities for employment based on the local and regional labor market. It must be the goal of every Durham Public School to become the type of place where our nation's very best educators will want to work.

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