

A Few of the Issues at Hand

Most recently a number of school districts, with support from growing numbers of philanthropic foundations, have been honing in on the strategic management of human capital (SMHC) — which has been defined as “the acquisition, development, performance management and retention of top talent.”ⁱ Granted, over the last two decades policymakers and researchers of most “stripes” have come to conclude that teachers make the most difference in raising student achievement, and strong principals are key to school improvement. As a result, a wide array of initiatives have been launched to attract non-traditional recruits to education, measure effective teaching and label “highly qualified” teachers, train principals differently, and the like. And no doubt, progress has been made. However, America’s public schools still rest on a relatively dysfunctional system of teacher and principal development.

Although we are approaching the end of the first decade of the 21st century, our nation’s teacher development system still seems to be built on the assumption that talented females, as a captive labor pool, are willing to work for below-market wages. Most universities, while attracting more academically able candidates than in the past,ⁱⁱ still do not prepare teachers for teaching in high-needs schools. School district recruitment and hiring practices rest on mid-20th century organizational assumptions about teaching and learning as well as the career mobility patterns of Baby Boomers — not those of Generation Y.ⁱⁱⁱ

The next generation of educators, like in other sectors, cannot be expected to stay in one job or career over the course of their working years. Indeed, the US Department of Labor expects today’s college graduates to hold up to a dozen jobs by the time they are 38 years old. These next generation educators are learning in new ways — over 35% of them use websites as their primary source of news, over 77% use social networking sites to learn from and connect with each other, and 30% have their own blogs (while almost 50% read them regularly).^{iv} Micro-multinational enterprises, online data gathering, and dynamic decision modeling are redefining how professionals learn and work. Digital tools, from laptops to cell phones, are used by groups of people — smart networks — to “gain new forms of social power, new ways to organize their interactions and exchanges.”^v With its well over 100 million registered users, MySpace, if it were a nation, would be the 11th-largest in the world (positioned somewhere between Japan and Mexico).^{vi}

Today’s outdated school district and union collective bargaining agreements still focus on seniority and security in the face of stark divisions of labor and contentious relationships between administrators and teachers. Tenure rules are designed to protect teachers from administrative abuses and performance evaluations continue to be perfunctory. Archaic teacher and principal certification regimes, deeply embedded in state regulatory codes, tamp down the prospects of recruiting and effectively preparing non-traditional recruits. When colleges of education produce promising new teachers, our nation’s highest need urban and rural districts neither have the resources or capacity to hire them quickly — and therefore, must turn to lesser-prepared teachers to staff empty classrooms. Schools of education and non-profits, like KIPP, High Tech High, and the Big Picture Company, often have different views on the kinds of preparation teachers should

have before they begin to teach — if at all. School community and non-profit training institutes, such as Teacher U (created by Uncommon Schools and KIPP Academy), can differ dramatically on the issue of whether or not teachers need to be prepared broadly or trained to teach to a specific curriculum.

More problems prevail. While a number of school districts, most notably in the Denver metro area, have begun to transform their compensation systems, most teachers and principals are paid in lock-step ways that ensure uniformity and predictability, but do little to advance the spread of good teaching and a tight focus on student learning. While most pay systems stifle creativity, ignore market realities, and isolate teaching expertise, low teacher salaries in urban and rural districts almost guarantee that local policymakers do not have the financial resources to compete in the teacher labor market. At the same time, state school boards and legislators routinely lower hiring standards in order to expediently address teacher shortages — especially for schools serving our nation’s most vulnerable students. New teachers tend to be assigned the most challenging and difficult classes without content-based mentoring from trained experts who have time to support them. Even well-prepared, well-qualified teachers cannot teach effectively when faced with poor working conditions (e.g., inadequate and unsupportive administrators, limited time to learn, too few opportunities to lead, etc.).

The recruitment and support systems for principals are even more underconceptualized and underdeveloped. While notable exceptions have unfolded over the last several years (e.g., New Leaders for New Schools and the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute), most principals are not selected for their teaching expertise and experience. Additionally, their roles often are complex and ambiguous without adequate mentoring or support. Principals work without any coherent development system to frame their careers and retain them as school leaders. Few school districts know how to grow their own talent — especially from the pool of community members who might begin their education careers as teaching assistants, mentors for students, or content experts from the private sector. Granted while progress has been made and most school districts in the Denver metro area can point to innovative and effective approaches to teacher and principal quality, only marginal changes have taken hold.

A Few Questions

Given the aforementioned context, consider your own school district or university setting in answering the following questions:

1. Who is being recruited to teach and serve as principals? Where are they prepared? Do some enter the field better prepared than others? Which ones? Why?
2. What is the role of the private sector and non-profits in the recruitment and preparation of a new generation of teachers and principals? What are the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the private sector/non-profits and more traditional university-based approaches? What is the role of online learning in the development of teachers and principals?
3. What do teachers need to know before they begin to teach — and what can they learn best on the job?
4. What kinds of teacher turnover are you experiencing? Is it good turnover or bad? Where do teachers go? Why? What role does working conditions play in pushing good teachers out of

teaching? Which conditions matter most for both the retention of effective teachers and improvement of student learning?

5. How do principals come to lead schools effectively? What role do teacher leaders play vis-à-vis their principals? How do school districts grow both principal and teacher leaders? How do the organizational structures of school districts and universities promote or impede the development of teacher and principal leaders? What role can intermediaries play in transforming the system of human capital? What is the role of the teacher unions?

A Look At Gen Y

Several recent opinion polls indicate that the new generation of teachers is more open to major changes in their profession and the “strategic management of human capital.” However, the responses seem to be all over the map – suggesting there is a lot more to learn about what new teachers believe they need to be effective and how they differ or not with their more veteran counterparts. Below are several highlights from 5 recent reports:

1. 65% of new teachers are interested in creating and leading their own schools.^{vii}
2. New teachers are more favorable toward performance pay systems.^{viii}
3. Only 4 percent of new teachers and 10 percent of veterans think unions pay more attention to new teachers’ needs than the needs of veterans.^{ix}
4. Newcomers (83%) and veterans (85%) believe that the best way to attract good teachers to high-needs schools is by giving them more time to plan and prepare for their classes.^x
5. Newcomers (65%) more so than veterans (37%) believe that the best way to attract good teachers to high-needs schools is by giving them signing bonuses.^{xi}
6. Only 48% of the newcomers and 45% of the veterans believe that the best way to attract good teachers to high-needs schools is by easing state certification requirements while intensifying in-class supervision, mentoring, etc.^{xii}
7. While most new teachers had some preparation in teaching ethnically diverse students, only 39% reported that their training helped them “a lot” in the classroom.^{xiii}
8. Newly minted teachers from alternative certification programs, compared to those who have been traditionally prepared, are **more likely** to:
 - a. Give fair or poor ratings to their administrators;
 - b. Give fair or poor ratings to colleagues and mentors for giving them support and good advice; and
 - c. To leave the profession within the next year or two.^{xiv}

...And those who were alternatively prepared are **less likely** to:

- a. Believe they were prepared to manage classrooms (60% v. 84%), help struggling students (38% v. 71%), and provide individualized instruction to students (49% v. 77%);
 - b. Give high marks to their cooperating teacher; and
 - c. Report they had enough time working with a real teacher before having their own classroom.^{xv}
9. New teachers (with less than 5 years teaching), compared to their more experienced counterparts, were:
- a. Slightly less concerned that unions were “absolutely essential” (51% v. 60%);
 - b. More likely to support more pay for NBCTs (75% v. 56%) and those who receive outstanding evaluations from their principals (68% v. 52%); and
 - c. More likely to support financial incentives for “teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests” (40% v. 28%).^{xvi}

A Few More Questions

Given the aforementioned survey data and considering your own school district or university context, how would you answer the following questions:

1. Do the new teachers you are preparing or hiring fit the profile as suggested by the data? What is most important to them — in terms of their needs to be successful and their career aspirations?
2. How long do you believe you can keep Gen Yers in the classroom? What will keep them there?
3. Who is most likely to give the support that new teachers need? How? What role does virtual networking play — if at all?
4. What kind of human capital system would Gen Y teachers create for them and their profession? How could find out?

ⁱ Odden, A. & Kelly, J. (2008). *Strategic management of human capital in public education*. Madison, WI: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

ⁱⁱ See Drew Gitomer’s recent analyses of the improved academic ability of teacher education candidates and graduates found at http://www.ets.org/Media/Education_Topics/pdf/TQ_full_report.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ The New Teacher Project and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform have forged considerable progress of late in helping urban school districts create more effective human resource systems.

^{iv} Junco, R. & Mastrodicasa, J. (2007). *Connecting to the Net.Generation: What higher education professionals need to know about today’s students*. Washington, DC: NASPA.

^v Rheingold, H. (2002). *Smart mobs: The next social revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

^{vi} See http://scottmcLeod.typepad.com/dangerouslyirrelevant/2007/01/gone_fischin.html for Karl Fisch’s PowerPoint presentation, *Did you know?*

^{vii} Farkas, S., Johnson, J. & Duffett, A. with L. Moye & J. Vine (2003). *Stand by me: What teachers really think about unions, merit pay and other professional matters*. Washington, DC: Public Agenda.

viii Ibid.

ix Duffett, A., Farkas, S., Rotherham, A. J. & Silva, E. (2008). *Waiting to be won over: Teachers speak on the profession, unions, and reform*. Washington, DC: Education Sector.

x Ibid.

xi Ibid.

xii Ibid.

xiii National Comprehensive Center for Teaching Quality & Public Agenda (2008). *Teaching in changing times*. Washington, DC: Authors.

xiv National Comprehensive Center for Teaching Quality & Public Agenda (2008). *Working without a net: How new teachers from three prominent alternative route programs describe their first year on the job*. Washington, DC: Authors.

xv Ibid.

xvi Duffett, A., Farkas, S., Rotherham, A. J. & Silva, E. (2008). *Waiting to be won over: Teachers speak on the profession, unions, and reform*. Washington, DC: Education Sector.