

The Impact of State and Local Human Capital Policies on Chicago Public Schools

In the spring of 2009, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) partnered with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to analyze the impact of state and local policies and practices on the teacher workforce and to make recommendations to increase the concentration of highly effective teachers in CPS.

The research was part of a national, multi-year study of teacher evaluation and dismissal. TNTP published its national findings in its June 2009 report, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (www.widgeteffect.org).

Findings

1. CPS teacher evaluations fail to reflect differences in teacher effectiveness and identify almost all tenured teachers as “Superior” or “Excellent”: Between the 2003-04 and 2007-08 school years, 94 percent of tenured teachers received one of the two highest performance ratings on their performance evaluation (“Superior” or “Excellent”). Over the same period, 87 percent of probationary teachers received one of the two highest ratings. In most cases, these ratings were based on only a few short classroom observations. Sixty-seven percent of teachers report being observed fewer than three times for their most recent evaluation. Fifty-nine percent had observations that lasted 30 minutes or less.

2. The evaluation process fails to provide teachers with the feedback they need to improve their instruction or to address poor performance: Just 39 percent of CPS teachers report having areas of performance identified as “Unsatisfactory” or “In Need of Improvement” on their most recent evaluation. Of those teachers, 43 percent could not recall what areas they needed to improve. In addition, ineffective teaching goes unaddressed. Fifty-six percent of teachers and 77 percent of administrators say there are ineffective tenured teachers in their schools, and, on average, teachers believe that 7.5 percent of tenured teachers in their school are performing poorly which would equate to approximately 1,200 tenured teachers. But since the 2004-05 school year, CPS has formally dismissed only 9 tenured teachers for poor performance – .01% of the tenured teacher workforce.

3. Layoff decisions are based exclusively on seniority, even though teachers and administrators think other factors – including many related to teacher effectiveness – should be considered: The agreement between CPS and the Chicago Teachers Union requires that layoff decisions be based entirely on seniority. However, 77 percent of teachers and 94 percent of administrators believe that additional factors should be considered when layoffs are necessary. A majority of teachers at every experience level support considering factors other than seniority. The factors with the greatest support among teachers include classroom management, attendance and instructional performance as measured by evaluation ratings.

4. Confusing state certification rules hamper the district's efforts to fill vacancies in its hardest to staff subject areas, and teachers report a lack of support from CPS in navigating the certification renewal process. Forty-eight percent of school administrators report having trouble filling vacancies because of Illinois' certification requirements, especially in hard to staff subject areas such as Special Education and Math. Roughly the same number of administrators report losing desirable candidates because candidates were unable to meet the state's requirements. In addition, Illinois has made changes to its certification renewal process over the past ten years which has led to confusion among both teachers and administrators. Forty percent of CPS administrators who have had a teacher fail to keep his/her certification up-to-date cite "confusing certification requirements" as a contributing factor. In addition, 41 percent of teachers with one to four years of experience teaching in Illinois do not believe that CPS gives them the support they need to navigate the certification renewal process.

5. Although many teachers are satisfied with CPS's mentoring programs, they have limited access to the mentoring services they value the most. Fifty-two percent of teachers who have participated in a CPS mentoring program report being "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the program, and 57 percent of teachers believe CPS mentoring programs helped them improve their instruction. However, 65 percent of teachers report "observing an experienced teacher and discussing aspects of their teaching practice with them" three times or less during their first year of teaching, even though both teachers and administrators say this is the most effective mentoring activity.

Recommendations

To ensure that each classroom is led by a highly-effective teacher who receives the support he or she needs to be successful, the report advises CPS to:

1. Design and implement a fair, credible and rigorous teacher evaluation process that accurately reflects differences in the effectiveness of individual teachers in promoting student learning and provides teachers with continuous feedback and support to help them improve their instruction.
2. Hold administrators accountable for implementing the evaluation process with fidelity.
3. Change the district's layoff policy to reflect the opinions of teachers and administrators so that schools can better retain their best performers in layoff situations.
4. Provide better support to teachers—especially new teachers—as they renew their teaching certificates, and develop strategies to increase the number of candidates in high-need subject areas.
5. Ensure that new teachers have greater access to mentoring activities they find most helpful in improving their instruction, and evaluate the mentor program by tracking its impact on teacher performance.

Methodology

TNTP's analysis of Chicago Public Schools included the following components:

- A review of current Illinois state laws, Illinois State Board of Education regulations, CPS procedures, the agreement between CPS and the Chicago Teachers Union, and other relevant documents;
- Interviews with key stakeholders, including CPS teachers, administrators, Human Resources staff members, and district administrators;
- Results of online surveys completed by 7,602 CPS teachers and 977 CPS administrators (response rates of 34 percent and 77 percent, respectively); and
- A review of teacher performance management data from the 2003-04 through 2008-09 school years.

To view the entire report, including more detailed data and a full description of the recommendations, please visit <http://widgeteffect.org/district-reports/chicago/>.

About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) helps school districts and states fulfill the promise of public education by ensuring that all students—especially those from high-need communities—get excellent teachers. A national nonprofit organization founded by teachers, TNTP is driven by the knowledge that although great teachers are the best solution to educational inequality, the nation's education systems do not sufficiently prioritize the goal of effective teachers for all. In response, TNTP develops customized programs and policy interventions that enable education leaders to find, develop and keep great teachers and achieve reforms that promote effective teaching in every classroom. Since its inception in 1997, TNTP has recruited or trained approximately 33,000 teachers—mainly through its highly selective Teaching Fellows™ programs—benefiting an estimated 4.8 million students. TNTP has also released a series of acclaimed studies of the policies and practices that affect the quality of the nation's teacher workforce, most recently including *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (2009). Today TNTP is active in more than 25 cities, including Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, New York, and Oakland, among others. For more information, please visit www.tntp.org.