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July 29, 2009, 12:01 am

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## **Pueblo City Schools Rates 99 Percent of Teachers as “Satisfactory”**

### **Study Advises District to Address Inadequate Evaluation System and Counterproductive Staffing Practices that Create Local “Widget Effect”**

PUEBLO, CO – According to a new study, teachers in Pueblo City Schools are underserved by an evaluation system that rates 99 percent of them as “Satisfactory.” This system fails to identify differences in teacher performance, support individual teacher development or address persistently poor performance. These shortcomings have a negative impact on the quality of instruction and contribute to a climate of teacher mistrust.

The study was conducted by The New Teacher Project (TNTP), a nonprofit dedicated to improving teacher quality, in collaboration with Pueblo City Schools (PCS) and the Pueblo Education Association (PEA). The research was part of a national, multi-year study of teacher evaluation and dismissal, spanning 12 districts in four states. TNTP published its national findings in the June 1 report, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act Upon Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* ([www.widgeteffect.org](http://www.widgeteffect.org)).

Since its release, *The Widget Effect* has received national acclaim, including praise from the presidents of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Association (NEA), and the Colorado Education Association; Colorado governor Bill Ritter; and US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Patricia Gonzalez, PCS Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, and Pamela Constable, PEA representative and teacher at Risley Middle School, contributed valuable insights as part of the study’s Colorado advisory panel, a group of state, district, and union representatives that provided feedback on the study design, hypotheses, and recommendations.

TNTP presented its PCS analysis to the Board of Education at last night’s public meeting. TNTP researchers conducted detailed surveys of nearly 600 PCS teachers and administrators; interviewed central administrators, school principals, teachers and PEA leadership; and analyzed district evaluation, non-renewal and dismissal data. The organization’s final analysis shows that:

- 1. The PCS evaluation process does not differentiate teachers according to their performance or provide adequate feedback for teachers to improve.** Fully 99 percent of teachers are rated “Satisfactory,” and only 29 percent had areas of improvement identified on their most recent evaluation. This practice denies teachers the constructive feedback they need to improve their own instruction and better promote student learning.
- 2. PCS staffing policies severely disadvantage probationary teachers and drive away new talent.** Novice teachers, like their more senior colleagues, receive almost uniformly positive evaluations. Yet these probationary teachers are the first to be eliminated in response to district budget deficits.

Between 2005 and 2008, an average of 77 percent of new hires were “non-renewed” at the end of their first year. Just 17 percent were subsequently re-hired, likely resulting in a significant loss of talent.

- 3. Poor performers have traditionally been transferred from school to school instead of being held accountable through formal means, negatively affecting instructional quality and undermining teacher trust.** Principals do not always pursue dismissal when warranted because doing so is difficult and unlikely to be successful. As a result, 34 percent of teachers and 46 percent of principals report having a non-probationary teacher in their school who they believe should be dismissed for poor performance but has not been. In the absence of a fair and efficient dismissal process, poorly performing teachers are instead transferred from school to school. Teachers view these illegitimate transfers as abusive and are far more likely than their colleagues in other districts to feel that non-probationary teachers need protections to shield them from unfair treatment.

To address these issues, TNTP recommends that PCS and PEA undertake a series of short- and long-term reforms. In the near term, PCS should publicly abolish longstanding district practices, such as blanket non-renewals and involuntary transfers of poor performers, that undermine teacher effectiveness and breed mistrust. PCS must develop clear district teaching standards, align evaluation and professional development with those standards and invest in high-quality training for evaluators.

In the long term, PCS should track teacher evaluation data and apply it to key human capital decisions, such as identifying teacher leaders, evaluating teacher recruitment efforts and professional development offerings, compensating teachers appropriately, and protecting high-performing teachers from layoffs, regardless of seniority. In addition, PCS should implement low-stakes alternatives to formal dismissal and lobby the state of Colorado to significantly streamline the current dismissal process.

“We commend Pueblo City Schools and the Pueblo Education Association for their willingness to examine these difficult issues,” said Daniel Weisberg, TNTP’s Vice President of Policy and General Counsel. “Now comes the hard work of tackling the necessary reforms. Pueblo’s educators deserve meaningful feedback, a culture of trust, and a fair and transparent dismissal process. Teachers and students both stand to benefit from an honest evaluation system and effective staffing rules that treat teachers like individual professionals, not interchangeable parts.”

Weisberg noted that recently released draft federal guidelines for state applications to receive a portion of the \$4.3 billion federal Race to the Top funding call specifically for states to develop systems that accurately measure teacher effectiveness and utilizing teacher effectiveness data for multiple purposes, including teacher professional development, compensation, and retention efforts. Race to the Top represents an unprecedented allocation of federal funds to education reform and will be awarded through a highly competitive process. “Colorado state leaders have already expressed a strong commitment to implementing reforms that meet and exceed the Race to the Top guidelines,” said Weisberg. “They will prioritize districts that demonstrate a similar commitment to abolishing the Widget Effect. It is up to the leadership of PCS and PEA and the Pueblo community to join this historic move forward or to lag behind their peer districts by continuing to accept the status quo.”

The New Teacher Project’s full analysis and an executive summary are available on the organization’s website, at [www.widgeteffect.org](http://www.widgeteffect.org).

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### **About The New Teacher Project**

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a national nonprofit dedicated to closing the achievement gap by ensuring that poor and minority students get outstanding teachers. Founded by teachers in 1997, TNTP partners with school districts and states to implement scalable responses to their most acute teacher quality challenges. TNTP recruits and trains thousands of exceptional new teachers annually, supports school principals in staffing their classrooms, provides teacher certification in high-need subjects, and documents the policy barriers that keep students from getting the teachers they need. Since its inception, TNTP has trained or hired approximately 33,000 teachers, benefiting an estimated 4.8 million students nationwide. It has established more than 70 programs and initiatives in 28 states and released a series of seminal studies of the policies and practices that affect the quality of the nation's teachers. This year, its clients include school districts in 26 cities, including Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Memphis, St. Paul, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, San Antonio, and Washington, DC, among others. For more information, please visit [www.tntp.org](http://www.tntp.org).