

## Teacher Performance Management and Staffing in Springdale Public Schools

Springdale Public Schools (SPS) consistently attracts a large teacher applicant pool, but to meet its commitment to help all students make academic gains, SPS must improve a teacher evaluation system that is not tied to student learning, does not give all teachers the regular, constructive feedback they need to improve, and allows poor performance to go unaddressed.

### Introduction

In the fall of 2008, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) partnered with Springdale Public Schools (SPS) in Arkansas to assess the impact of the district's policies and practices on the ability of schools to hire, develop and keep effective teachers. SPS was also one of 12 school districts nationwide that participated in TNTP's study of teacher evaluation policies, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* which published in June 2009. TNTP conducted its analysis of SPS using the following data:

- Interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders, including district leadership, principals and teachers;
- Analysis of the district's data on teacher recruitment, hiring, transfer, evaluation, non-renewal and dismissal; and
- Online surveys of teachers and administrators (763 teachers and 55 principals and assistant principals responded to the survey, response rates of 75 percent and 92 percent, respectively).

TNTP's analysis reveals that the "widget effect" – the tendency of the nation's public school systems to ignore differences in teacher effectiveness – plays out in SPS through an evaluation process that is inconsistently implemented and fails to give teachers the constructive feedback they need in order to do their best work. This undermines the district's commitment to helping all students make academic gains.

### Findings

**The current evaluation process fails to provide all teachers with the feedback and support they need to improve their instructional practice.**

Only about half of SPS teachers and administrators are satisfied with the current evaluation process. Administrators report weaknesses in both the clinical and professional models of teacher evaluation, particularly when it comes to identifying areas of improvement for teachers. And although nearly all teachers who receive constructive feedback from their evaluation believe it helped them improve, too many teachers don't receive this feedback on a regular basis. More than a third of SPS teachers say they have never had an informal conversation with their principal or evaluator about aspects of their

31 percent of SPS teachers report that they have never received feedback from their principal or assistant principal.

instruction that could be improved, and more than a quarter of teachers say they received their last formal evaluation more than three years ago. Some say they have never received a formal evaluation.

**The evaluation process fails to differentiate teachers based on their performance in the classroom and give principals information that helps them address poor instructional performance.**

Most SPS teachers do not receive a rating for their instructional performance, because the professional growth evaluation model—which applies to more than two-third of SPS teachers—does not provide ratings that actually measure teacher performance. Only 13 percent of teachers on the professional growth model have a rating on record that indicates their progress toward their professional goals. Given these shortcomings, it is no surprise that poor instructional performance goes unaddressed in SPS. Although 64 percent of teachers and 46 percent of administrators report that there are teachers in their school who deliver poor instruction, only half of SPS administrators have placed one of their teachers on a formal remediation plan in the last five years, and only one in five has ever sought dismissal of a non-probationary teacher for poor instructional performance. Instead of attempting to dismiss low-performing teachers, many principals simply encourage them to transfer to another school or reassign them to another position—options that allow poor performers to remain in the district.

**SPS attracts a strong teacher applicant pool, but delayed hiring timelines prevent schools from consistently hiring the highest quality candidates.**

Nearly all SPS administrators are satisfied with the quantity and quality of new teacher candidates (96 percent and 89 percent, respectively), although only 30 percent believe the applicant pool adequately reflects the racial diversity of the district’s student population. Administrators also indicate the need for more qualified applicants in high-need subject areas such as elementary special education and ESL. And while administrators are extremely satisfied with the process for hiring new teachers, only 54 percent believe the district’s hiring timeline allows them to recruit the best possible candidates. In fact, more than half of SPS administrators say they have lost a new teacher they wanted to hire because they were unable to make a job offer in a timely fashion. The district’s late hiring timeline means that nearly three-quarters of the job offers to new hires occur in late summer, even though most candidates submit their applications before May.

## Recommendations

In order to improve teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes, Springdale Public Schools should adopt a comprehensive approach to teacher evaluation and support based on the following strategies:

1. Annual teacher evaluations for all teachers that are based primarily on objective measures of student learning outcomes;
2. Accountability for school administrators for accurately differentiating and improving teacher effectiveness;
3. Training that provides school administrators with the necessary tools and resources to effectively evaluate and support teachers; and
4. Strategic use of existing teacher performance data to make key development, staffing and personnel decisions.

Specific recommendations include:

- Adopt and faithfully implement a fair, accurate and comprehensive teacher evaluation system with rigorous and transparent performance standards. This system should include multiple rating categories, provide frequent, actionable feedback to teachers, and help remove poor performers where appropriate.
- Use the school administrator evaluation process to hold administrators accountable for evaluating teachers and helping them improve in the classroom.
- Dedicate a full-time central office staff person to provide targeted support and professional development to every school administrator.
- Create a centrally-maintained electronic database for key longitudinal data, including employee information, teacher performance, applicant information, and student performance.

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

## 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 37,000 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 40 cities, including Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, New York, and Oakland, among others. For more information, please visit [www.tntp.org](http://www.tntp.org).