

Human Capital Reform in

Cincinnati Public Schools

To reverse a downward trend in student achievement, CPS and CFT must work together to develop and implement a human capital strategy centered on strengthening teacher effectiveness.

Introduction

In late 2008, Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) participated in TNTP's research for a national study, *The Widget Effect*, published in June 2009. In summer 2009, CPS, the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers (CFT) and the Cincinnati Association of Administrators and Supervisors (CAAS) asked TNTP to explore a broader range of topics and identify policies and practices that prevent teachers from maximizing their impact on student learning. The areas TNTP examined included selection, hiring, placement, evaluation, professional development, compensation, retention, dismissal, leadership and working conditions. TNTP's analysis included the following components:

- A review of CPS' collective bargaining agreement with CFT.
- An analysis of human resources data on hiring, transfer, separation, evaluation and demographics at the district and school level.
- Online surveys of teachers and school administrators, in two phases:
 - Teachers*
 - Phase I: 1,044 full-time teachers (81 percent of the 1,287 teachers surveyed)
 - Phase II: 1,000 full-time teachers (78 percent of the 1,176 teachers surveyed)
 - School Administrators*
 - Phase I: 70 administrators (69 percent of the 101 administrators surveyed)
 - Phase II: 72 administrators (74 percent of the 98 administrators surveyed)
- Interviews and focus groups with CPS and CFT leadership, as well as CPS principals and teachers.

Findings

1. Boosting Teacher Effectiveness: The current CPS teacher evaluation system does not differentiate teachers based on their effectiveness in promoting student achievement. Teachers do not receive the feedback they need to improve, and poor performance goes unaddressed. However, relationships between teachers and principals are strong, and are strongest in schools that are helping students the most.

Ninety-five percent of all teachers received one of the top two evaluation ratings in the “Teaching and Learning” domain on their most recent evaluation. In fact, no teacher has received an “Unsatisfactory” rating in this category since the 2004-05 school year – even in schools that are failing their students year after year. Furthermore, CPS doesn’t have processes in place to use evaluation data to make important human capital decisions. CPS can’t identify its strongest teachers, much less reward them. And poor teaching performance goes unaddressed: only 12 teachers have been formally dismissed for poor performance in the last six years, and only 23 have been informally dismissed. CPS teachers agree that the evaluation system is flawed. Only 36 percent believe it helps them improve their performance, and 67 percent believe it isn’t worth the time and effort they put into it. One positive factor contributing to teacher effectiveness in CPS is the presence of strong relationships between teachers and principals. These relationships are strongest in schools that are helping students achieve the best results.

2. Rewarding Excellence: Many teachers in CPS favor a differentiated compensation structure that recognizes and rewards outstanding performance – an important part of any effective human capital system.

Although a majority of teachers are satisfied with the current compensation system, nearly two-thirds favor bonuses based on instructional performance, with a majority supporting individual performance-based bonuses or steeper steps on the salary scale. But under the CPS-CFT collective bargaining agreement, teacher compensation is based almost entirely on seniority and qualifications. This system does little to recognize and help retain the most effective teachers.

3. Distributing Talent Equitably: The transfer and placement processes are preventing schools from assembling the best possible instructional teams. CPS places many teachers into schools without an interview or any assessment of effectiveness, even though both teachers and principals prefer placements through a mutual consent process.

Although majorities of teachers and administrators prefer selection through a mutual consent process – where both the teacher and the principal agree that a placement is a good fit – 26 percent of CPS teachers who changed schools last year were placed in their new school without the opportunity to interview. Teachers who are placed into positions without interviewing are much less satisfied with their placements than teachers placed as a result of an interview. Furthermore, 87 percent of administrators have been forced to hire an internal candidate over a more qualified external candidate as a result of the current placement process. The current process has a particularly devastating impact on redesigned schools: 33 percent of the teachers working in redesigned schools this year taught at the same school last year – before it was redesigned.

4. Hiring the Best New Teachers: Delayed hiring timelines cause CPS to forfeit access to the highest quality teaching candidates.

Although CPS receives most of its teacher applications by the end of May, it doesn't hire most of its new teachers until July or later – including 25 percent in August. Sixty percent of administrators report losing a qualified new teacher candidate as a result of this late hiring timeline. The timeline stems largely from provisions of the CPS-CFT contract that prohibit schools from considering external candidates before transfer processes for internal candidates have finished – processes that extend into June. In addition, although the incentives CPS offers teachers for early notification of resignation or retirement are working, 10 percent of teachers still wait until summer break to notify the district of their plans to leave, creating last-minute vacancies.

Recommendations

To strengthen teacher effectiveness and improve student learning outcomes, CPS and CFT should work quickly to achieve five key goals. Responsibility for this effort should reside with the Office of Innovation and be led by the superintendent with strategic oversight and assistance from another reform-oriented leader.

Goal 1: Strengthen teacher effectiveness by revamping the Teacher Evaluation System so that all teachers receive a fair, rigorous evaluation each year based on their ability to positively impact student learning, and also receive individualized support to help them improve their instructional performance.

Recommended actions for the district:

- Design and implement a comprehensive teacher evaluation system that differentiates teachers based on student learning outcomes.
- Empower school administrators to lead all aspects of the teacher evaluation process and hold them accountable for implementing the system correctly.
- Provide teachers with targeted professional development based on their individual strengths and weaknesses.
- Use performance data as assessed by the evaluation system to make key human capital decisions.

Recommended changes to the collective bargaining agreement:

- Eliminate the comprehensive evaluation and require all teachers to be rigorously evaluated each year.
- Adopt a 4-point summative rating scale for the evaluation system.
- Allow principals to participate in the evaluation process for novice teachers.
- Establish a joint committee to make recommendations to the board for the design of the new teacher evaluation system with the four summative rating categories and with impact on student learning the predominant factor.
- Allow principals to participate in the evaluation process for new hires and determine which teachers are non-renewed.
- Eliminate the comprehensive evaluation process.
- Include a formula for surplussing and reduction-in-force priority based on evaluation ratings, with seniority as the tiebreaker when ratings are equal.
- Base contract status decisions on performance as reflected in annual evaluations.

Goal 2: Retain and leverage the most effective teachers by implementing a performance-based compensation program and creating opportunities for effective teachers to share their knowledge and skills across the district.

Recommended actions for the district:

- Adopt a performance-based pay program centered on objective measures of teacher effectiveness.
- Leverage the knowledge and skills of highly effective teachers (as measured by the new evaluation system).

Suggested changes to the collective bargaining agreement:

- Permit highly effective teachers to skip steps on the salary scale.
- Establish a joint committee to make recommendations to the board for the design of the new performance-based compensation program.
- Eliminate the current lead teacher status as specified in the current collective bargaining agreement and replace it with leadership opportunities for all highly effective teachers.

Goal 3: Swiftly turn around chronically low-performing schools by adopting strategies to increase the concentration of highly effective teachers in those schools.

Recommended actions for the district:

- Identify and adopt strategies to swiftly turn around chronically low-performing schools.
- Streamline the transfer process and allow schools to fill all open positions with the most qualified internal or external candidates.

Suggested changes to the collective bargaining agreement:

- Allow the district to set new terms for turnaround schools regarding scheduling, hours, bonus compensation and other matters, whereby teachers have to apply voluntarily to work in these schools, and teachers can approve changes to terms by a majority vote.
- Reduce the transfer process from two rounds over ten weeks to one round over two weeks. Start the process in mid February and complete it by early March.
- Allow schools to consider internal and external candidates for all vacancies—even during the transfer process.
- Eliminate the placement of teachers into schools without interviews and require that all placements be made by mutual consent between the principal and the teacher.
- Provide surplus teachers with higher evaluation ratings (the top 2 ratings on a 4-point scale) one school year to secure a regular teaching position before being placed on unpaid leave. Place surplus teachers with lower ratings on unpaid leave, and provide them with one school year to secure a position before being terminated.
- Strike the contract provision that allows a teacher to file a grievance if they do not receive a position through the transfer process.
- Protect health benefits through the summer for teachers who notify the district of their intent to resign or retire prior to February 1.

Goal 4: Improve or exit persistently less effective teachers using a variety of low-stakes strategies and a streamlined dismissal process.

Recommended actions for the district:

- Provide struggling teachers with the support they need to improve.
- Exit persistently low-performing teachers respectfully.

Suggested changes to the collective bargaining agreement:

- Allow school administrators to make the final decision about placing a teacher on intervention, while simultaneously considering observation data supplied through the peer review program.
- Grant school administrators the authority to determine whether a teacher has satisfactorily completed the intervention process at the end of the intervention period.
- Permit salary freezes for teachers who receive the second-lowest or lowest evaluation rating.
- Grant low performing teachers a one-day expedited hearing to determine if dismissal is warranted based on their performance history.

Goal 5: Optimize the new teacher supply by hiring early and from programs with a proven record of producing effective teachers.

Recommended District Strategy:

- Move up the teacher hiring timeline to give schools access to the highest-quality new candidates.

Suggested change to the collective bargaining agreement:

- Allow schools to consider internal and external candidates for all vacancies – even during the transfer process.

About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) works to end the injustice of educational inequality by providing excellent teachers to the students who need them most and by advancing policies and practices that ensure effective teaching in every classroom. 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.