

ADDING THE CRITICAL VOICE:

A Dialogue With Practicing Teachers on Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Hard-to-Staff Schools





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by:

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Executive Summary

The persistent problem of how to staff our nation’s lowest performing schools with the highest quality teachers has policymakers and reformers scrambling for a quick yet sustainable fix. While politicians, pundits, and advocates grapple with a variety of solutions, they often invoke the opinions of teachers without genuinely understanding their views. Moreover, they purport to act in teachers’ best interests, promising to treat them like professionals even though no reliable forum exists for teachers to regularly and reliably transmit their opinions to policymakers. Of course, union leaders present themselves as the legitimate voice of the teachers they represent, but critics suggest they know and understand very little about teachers’ views and opinions developed during everyday practice in the classroom. Who genuinely understands the opinions of the more than 3 million teachers in America’s public schools? Perhaps the teachers themselves are the best resources to supply policymakers and reformers with the facts they need to make informed decisions about how to recruit and retain qualified teachers in the nation’s hardest-to-staff schools.

This issue is particularly important as districts, states, and the federal government consider new strategies to improve low-performing schools and close achievement gaps. Doing so will require policymakers to pay particular attention to recruiting teachers to hard-to-staff schools—schools that have a difficult time attracting and retaining qualified teachers and school leaders. These schools also are likely to serve a high proportion of minority and low-income students, have lagging student achievement and lower high school graduation rates, and are located most often in urban and isolated rural areas.

To find out what teachers themselves say about what it would take to get them to teach in hard-to-staff schools, Learning Point Associates—a nationally focused education nonprofit research, development, and technical assistance organization—conducted a qualitative study with practicing public school teachers to learn their honest opinions about the many controversies sabotaging their profession, especially the ongoing efforts to attract, retain, and support teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

The information provided in this study aims to add the perspectives of teachers to the ongoing discussion and influence policy decisions that support better education for all students. The study’s findings are somewhat surprising yet optimistic. While teachers were open-minded and generated many useful and diverse ideas for policymakers, the focus groups quickly illuminated the fact that few teachers really are aware or understand the ongoing policy debates aiming to alter the way in which they are recruited, retained, supported, and rewarded. More shocking is the fact that very few teachers profess to be actively engaged in discussions about how best to reform the system—or even know where to begin.

Overall, the information gleaned from our conversations with teachers suggests they have wide-ranging ideas about how to best attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. A one-size-fits-all model clearly is not the answer; teachers want different incentives depending upon where they are in their life and career. The most salient findings, which we heard repeatedly, are described in this report.

Key Findings

The findings from the teacher focus groups will be discussed in further detail later in this paper. However, following are summaries of the four key findings.

Finding 1: New recruitment tools are needed to help place high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools and shorten the recruiting timeline.

Most teachers think an online recruitment tool would be practical, convenient, and efficient. Teachers pointed out that teaching in a hard-to-staff school often requires nonnegotiables, and if high-quality teachers currently are teaching, an online tool allows them to easily and honestly express what is required to attract them to a hard-to-staff school. For teachers, setting expectations with administrators early on eliminates the possibility of a failed match down the road. Many teachers said administrators never asked them about their goals or what they wanted out of their teaching jobs when they interviewed for positions in the past. Without a comprehensive approach to screening and recruitment—to ensure teachers truly are a match for a school—the problem of teacher-school mismatches and subsequent turnover will persist unabated.

Finding 2: Focused, supportive, and committed school leadership, coupled with measurable school performance goals, are necessary to attract more high-quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

Focused school leadership and measurable performance goals signal a school's commitment to its improvement initiatives. Many teachers believe that a strong, committed principal is critical to recruiting and retaining the best teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Teachers also seek environments that offer them a decision-making role. The ability to be part of the change process rather than simply taking orders holds strong appeal; many teachers indicated they have little to no voice in the strategic decisions of their school. Most expressed a strong desire to engage in open and honest communication with their principals and an environment that invites such behavior.

Finding 3: Empowerment, extensive mentoring, and useful professional development would encourage teachers to consider teaching in hard-to-staff schools.

The idea of empowerment and leadership appealed to many teachers, along with the ability to work closely with a trained mentor to receive intense and continued professional development. Overall, teachers embraced the idea of schools setting aside a reasonable amount of time for professional development—enabling teachers to share ideas and best practices that facilitate success in hard-to-staff schools. Teachers often are told they need to make changes or amend their approach, but they are not given the tools, time, or resources to do it.

Finding 4: Pay-for-performance remains controversial.

Some teachers want increased financial incentives to teach in hard-to-staff schools. For others, pay-for-performance is agreeable as long as performance is measured in a fair and unbiased manner. Across the board, teachers expressed very little awareness about current pay-for-performance policy initiatives in other states and districts around the nation.

Pay-for-performance policies and initiatives are designed to reform the way teachers are retained and rewarded. While politicians and reformers often invoke the opinions of teachers in policy discussions, it is clear that teachers' opinions often are not sought nor are they genuinely understood. Pay-for-performance was a foreign concept for many teachers, and the concept proved less than popular among the teachers interviewed. Many teachers went so far as to suggest pay-for-performance is antiunion and that such a system will never happen, so why consider it a policy option? What they fail to realize is that pay-for-performance brings a strong political and business focus to hard-to-staff schools that historically lack the necessary structure to ensure that *all* students are provided with a high-quality education.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Improve and enhance recruitment and hiring practices to attract high-quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

At the local level, policymakers should consider developing a consortium approach with other like-minded districts interested in jointly developing an online recruitment system. This system would allow candidates to review not only job openings but local incentive packages, explore district background information, post applications, and receive feedback in a timely manner—all leading to personal interviews with interested school principals.

At the state level, policymakers can seek federal funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Quality Enhancement–recruitment grant program to develop and implement a statewide online recruitment database linked to each school and district in the state and focused specifically on recruiting teachers who are qualified to work in at-risk schools. The statewide database should include access to both programs and tools designed to assist prospective teachers in assessing their aptitude to work in hard-to-staff schools. The goal would be to help teachers identify their areas of expertise before they begin the application process.

Recommendation 2: Provide school leaders with adequate resources and tools to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

Locally, policymakers should review school and district hiring and placement practices and the role of the principal in making hiring decisions to ensure that district shortage areas and the hardest-to-staff schools are being staffed first with the highest quality teachers. It is important to better prepare principals to engage in the interview process in hard-to-staff schools by providing training to help them identify key teacher attributes necessary to succeed in a diverse classroom. Further, school leaders should have the freedom to offer incentive packages to recruit and retain the best teachers to hard-to-staff schools for longer than a year.

States may consider building on the emerging research base stating that principal preparation programs are insufficient to meet the demands of increasingly high-stakes accountability environments in education. One option is to require state accreditation of school administrator programs to provide evidence that they are preparing principals to effectively recruit and motivate new teachers—especially in at-risk schools—as well as evidence of effective teacher evaluation techniques.

Recommendation 3: Increase targeted access to mentors and ongoing professional development for teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

Districts with high percentages of at-risk and hard-to-staff schools should seek out partnerships with local teacher-preparation programs to develop and implement cohort approaches to teacher training and mentoring. In addition, districts might offer financial incentives—subsidizing the costs of the preparation program or the state certification test—to cohorts of teacher candidates in their final two years of a preparation program if they commit to teaching in a particular set of schools. Similarly, in exchange for financial support for their teacher candidates, the teacher-preparation program would commit to providing ongoing mentoring and inservice opportunities for teachers. This combination of financial incentive and access to ongoing support would make committing to an at-risk school more attractive to a newly minted teacher.

Just as states should seize upon the opportunity to build on existing state policies in the three states included in this study, state policymakers are urged to require high-quality induction and mentoring programs for all new teachers, including state-funded stipends for training and mentor programs.

Recommendation 4: Develop flexible compensation packages, including incentives and pay-for-performance measures targeted to teachers in at-risk schools.

Schools should develop state networking groups of local union leaders and two to three national experts in alternative compensation systems and human resources policies. A neutral education organization can facilitate these groups to create models of career advancement tied to pay increases and opportunities for professional growth.

Similar working groups in Cincinnati and Denver, as well as cities in Iowa, have discovered lessons for what to do differently or better—especially with building the knowledge base around alternative compensation and various approaches to linking teacher pay to student performance. One approach to conducting the state networking groups is to develop a menu of financial incentives and pay-for-performance measures that would serve as a common basis for the conversation among groups. The goal would be to increase understanding of various approaches to flexible teacher compensation and to assess the most likely opportunities for change in states and local communities.

The teacher focus groups conducted in the Midwest revealed their financial incentive and pay-for-performance preferences. More importantly, the lack of access to information related to these types of programs and policies indicates a need to build the knowledge base among teachers and their local leaders to broaden their understanding of both the pros and the cons of various approaches to teacher compensation that eventually will strengthen the teaching profession.

Introduction

Although the great debates about education reform continue to unite and divide, few Americans or education policy leaders dispute the need for high-quality teachers in every classroom. Even so, too many children continue to be caught in the crossfire of conflicting policies and practices that fail to provide the lowest performing students with the highest quality teachers. This disparity has received a spate of attention in recent years as policymakers and education leaders search for creative approaches to recruit and retain high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Yet the nation continues to struggle to provide all students with excellent teachers—teachers who at a minimum are experienced and considered highly qualified under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

Overwhelmingly, the teachers in hard-to-staff schools tend to have temporary or emergency certification, teach in fields for which they lack strong subject-matter preparation (out-of-field), or are in the first year or two of their teaching careers. These hard-to-staff schools generally have a difficult time attracting teachers with strong qualifications, especially in core subject areas, and often are unable to keep teachers for more than a few years. Similarly, these schools typically have difficulty attracting and retaining capable and experienced principals and other leaders.

Current reform efforts designed to increase the number of experienced and highly qualified teachers in hard-to-staff schools include online recruiting systems, intense mentoring and induction programs for newer teachers, and improved professional development for all teachers. Some states and districts also are turning to financial incentives and now link teacher pay or bonuses to student performance. For example, Arizona, Florida, Iowa, New Mexico, and North Carolina all link teacher bonuses to student- or school-level achievement while Denver has piloted a pay-for-performance system that rewards teachers with bonuses based partly on standardized test score improvements.

The emphasis on teachers in the school improvement process is bolstered by research demonstrating that teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than any other educational factor. Studies in Tennessee and Texas reveal that teacher effectiveness is the single most important factor affecting student academic gains (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). For example, one study in Dallas in the mid-1990s showed that children assigned to effective teachers for three years in a row scored an average of 49 percentile points higher on a standardized reading assessments than children assigned to ineffective teachers three years in a row (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Further research demonstrates that as teacher effectiveness increases, lower achieving students are the first to benefit. High-quality teachers in every classroom can indeed improve opportunities for all children.

To find out what teachers themselves say about what it would take to get them to teach in hard-to-staff schools, Learning Point Associates—a nationally focused education nonprofit research, development, and technical assistance organization—conducted a qualitative study with practicing public school teachers to learn their honest opinions about the many controversies sabotaging their profession, especially the ongoing efforts to attract, retain, and support teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

While teachers were open-minded and generated many useful and diverse ideas for policymakers, the focus groups quickly illuminated the fact that few teachers really are aware or understand the ongoing policy debates swirling around them—debates aimed at redesigning the ways in which teachers are recruited, retained, supported, and rewarded. Most shocking is the fact that very few teachers profess to be actively engaged in discussions about how best to reform the system—or even know where to begin.

Methodology

In order to gather useful data for this project, Learning Point Associates designed a deliberate process to facilitate the discussion on how to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. First, we convened a panel of experts to help design policy scenarios for the teacher focus groups. We then tested the scenarios on a focus group of currently practicing teachers to refine the scenarios and gauge possible directions for discussion. Finally, we recruited teachers to participate in the various focus groups in rural, suburban, and urban settings in Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin; and we listened to their opinions and perspectives using a semistructured list of questions. The data gleaned from these conversations were analyzed using traditional qualitative-analysis techniques.

As the title suggests, this study adds the critical voice of teachers to the current dialogue on recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools. The study was initiated through a grant awarded by the Joyce Foundation with the primary purpose of ensuring that teacher opinions are included in public policy discussions about attracting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

Brief Review of the Research Literature

School districts with hard-to-staff schools have had minimal success tapping into the pool of high-quality teachers. The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality conducted a series of case studies in the South to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing schools and districts around implementing the NCLB's "highly qualified teacher" provisions. Findings from these studies suggest that the marketplace for teachers meeting the highly qualified standard in a particular state is becoming increasingly competitive, making it consistently more difficult for hard-to-staff schools to recruit and retain teachers. In the same study, a rural superintendent reported hiring two mathematics teachers one year, both of whom had just been released by another school system. According to the superintendent, both teachers "were virtually the only candidates. We hire and keep them for two to three years and then don't renew them. So we [rural districts] are passing around teachers who are not very competent" (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004, p. 2).

Many high-quality teachers rarely choose to work in hard-to-staff schools or schools where there is a high percentage of at-risk children, opting instead for schools that have a track record of success and are well resourced. The National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (2005) suggests that hard-to-staff schools generally have few well-qualified teachers. However, the current hiring policies and practices of hard-to-staff schools discourage many qualified candidates from remaining in the recruitment process (Wise, Darling-Hammond, Barnett, Berliner, Haller, & Praskac et al., 1987). A report from the New Teacher Project noted that schools, particularly in urban school districts, lose many high-quality teaching candidates during the initial recruiting process because these candidates do not hear back from the school districts until close to the start of the new academic school year (Levin & Quinn, 2003). In a job market in which candidates must anticipate job security, many receive offers from these school districts only after they have already accepted a teaching position with another one. Considering the cost of recruiting and hiring and the high turnover for new teachers, it could be, as Peterson (2000) states, that "improvement in hiring decisions has the single greatest potential for cost-effective improvement in public education" (p. 269).

Teacher shortage is not necessarily an issue of supply and demand. Richard Ingersoll's (2003) analysis of the *1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS) concludes that teacher shortages, particularly in high-need areas, are not due to a lack of supply or an increasing number of teacher retirements, but because of the "revolving door." Ingersoll found that large numbers of teachers leave because of job dissatisfaction or other job opportunities.

In a complementary multivariate analysis of the 1999–2000 SASS data set, Smith and Ingersoll (2003) found that new teachers who received some form of mentoring or induction were less likely to move or leave after their first year on the job. A large-scale quantitative study of teacher mobility in the Midwest funded by North Central Regional Educational Laboratory[®] (NCREL[®]) in 2001–02, conducted by Theobald and Michael, found similar results. The analysis of data collected on 11,787 teachers who began their careers in four Midwest states during the 1995–96 school year concluded that during a five-year period, the cumulative losses of beginning teachers from the district that hired them was slightly more than 50 percent. Teachers beginning their careers in Illinois in the 1994–95 school year showed the highest attrition rates among the four

states (i.e., Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin) participating in the study. “Cumulative losses of teachers from the Illinois school districts that hired them were 58 percent, consisting of 26 percent of teachers who moved to different districts and 32 percent who left teaching altogether” (NCREL, 2002, p. 2). On the basis of their analysis of the Illinois teacher data set, the study concluded that the number of newly minted teachers leaving was higher than previous national and regional findings by Ingersoll (1995). Findings from these studies are strongly suggestive of the critical role that support from peers and school leaders plays in teacher retention during the first five years of a teacher’s career.

While teachers are not motivated solely by money and do not enter the profession to make high salaries, research shows that salary differentials in neighboring districts are a determining factor on the quality of teachers recruited and retained by various districts. More importantly, research indicates that salary differentials are not necessarily the only financial incentive taken into consideration, but other incentives also are valued highly by teachers. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) examined data on elementary school teachers in Texas for the years 1993–96 and found that teachers move from one district to another or leave the system entirely for reasons other than access to better salaries. The researchers concluded that policymakers working to increase student performance in at-risk schools might want to consider incentive packages that include not only pay increases but also improved working conditions. A study conducted in 2003 explored the pay levels that would be needed to attract teachers with skills in mathematics, science, and technology into the teaching profession (Milanowski, 2003). Using a focus-group approach with noneducation students, the researchers surfaced a number of incentives unrelated to salary, such as interacting with children and flexible scheduling for working parents.

Increasing teachers’ salaries appears to be strongly supported by the general public. According to a national survey by Recruiting New Teachers (Haselkorn & Harris, 1998), the general public believes strongly that raising teachers’ salaries would aid in recruitment. The public also is calling for high-quality teachers for all students. A poll of the public’s attitudes toward the public schools indicates that the public also is willing to pay more for teachers in schools that have been identified as in need of improvement (Rose & Gallup, 2003). Yet research about the impact of salary on teachers’ decisions to enter teaching or take a particular job does not yield clear conclusions.

Of all of the research studies discussed here as well as the exhaustive review of the literature conducted on the topic of teacher recruitment and retention, none include opinions from teachers on what it would take to attract and keep them in hard-to-staff schools.

Study Findings

Profile of Focus-Group Participants and Their Schools

Of the 130 focus-group participants representing 56 schools, 45 teach in urban schools, 35 in suburban schools, and 50 in rural schools. The 129 focus-group participants who self-reported years of classroom experience collectively total 1,549 years of classroom experience, with an average of 12 years each. Individually, years of experience range from less than 1 to 42.

Focus-group participants were predominantly female, as is the K–12 teaching profession. (According to the National Education Association, 21 percent of the nation’s 3 million teachers are men.) Of the 129 teachers for whom gender was reported, 112 are female (87 percent) and 17 are male (13 percent). The distribution of these teachers across the grade spectrum is relatively balanced with slightly more high school teachers participating in the focus groups. Table 1 provides information on the breakdown of teachers who teach at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The 130 teachers who reported the grade(s) they teach fell into the following categories:

Table 1. Teaching Levels

Grade Classification	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
Elementary school (PK–5)	42	32.3%
Elementary school/middle school (PK–8)	5	3.8%
Middle school (6–8)	31	23.8%
Middle school/high school (6–12)	1	0.8%
High school	51	39.2%

An equal number of teachers from both Illinois and Wisconsin (48) participated in the focus groups, while fewer Ohio teachers participated (34). Table 2 shows the distribution of teachers by state and locale.

Table 2. Teacher Focus Group Participants and Where They Teach by State and Locale

Locale	Illinois	Ohio	Wisconsin
Rural	12	13	25
Suburban	14	10	11
Urban	22	11	12
Total	48	34	48

Figure 1 shows that the focus groups attracted more rural teachers (50) than teachers from any other locale. In one rural area, the response was so overwhelming that two focus groups were conducted. Urban teacher participation was similar to rural (45), followed by suburban teacher participation at (35).

Figure 1. Percentage of Teacher Focus-Group Participants by Teaching Locale

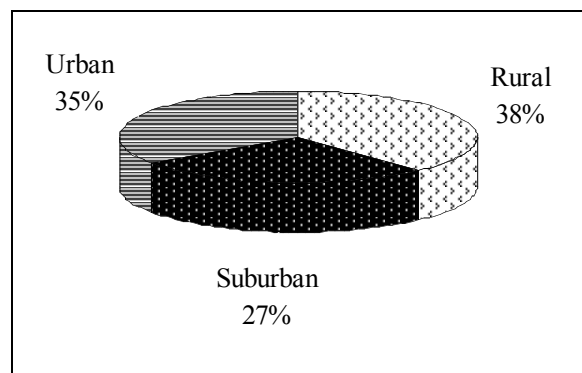


Table 3 provides information on teacher characteristics for schools in which the focus-group participants teach. After reviewing the data, it is clear that the sample of urban schools have a higher percentage of teachers who are not highly qualified, teachers who teach with a temporary teaching certificate, and teachers who teach out-of-field.

Table 3. Teacher Characteristics for Schools Where Participants Teach

	Illinois			Ohio			Wisconsin		
	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Number of Schools	5	4	11	5	4	7	9	3	8
Percent of Teachers Who Are Not Highly Qualified	0%	0%	0 to 17.5%	4 to 13.9%	0 to 17.5%	0 to 29.8%	0 to 5%	0 to 3%	0 to 9%
Percent of Teachers With a Temporary Teaching Certificate	0%	0%	0 to 1.2%	0 to 11%	0%	0 to 1.5%	0 to 10%	0%	0 to 3%
Percent of Teachers Teaching Out-of-Field	N/A	N/A	N/A	0 to 7%	0 to 1.6%	0 to 10.4%	0 to 5%	0 to 3%	0 to 10%

Sources: Northern Illinois University (2004); Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) (2003b); Ohio Department of Education (n.d.); and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (n.d.)

Table 4 offers information on the types of students who attend the schools where the teachers in this sample teach. Not surprisingly, suburban teachers teach the lowest percentages of low-income students when compared to the other two locales, with the exception of one Ohio suburban school that reported 100 percent low-income students.

Table 4. Profile of Schools in Which Participants Teach

	Illinois			Ohio			Wisconsin		
	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Number of Schools	5	4	11	5	4	7	9	3	8
Percent Low-Income	19 to 83.8%	3.8 to 1.3%	70 to 99.2%	46.4 to 65.4%	10.9 to 100%	19.1 to 100%	14.7 to 54%	5.3 to 8.4%	42.7 to 98.1%
Percent African-American	0 to 0.6%	4.2 to 41.3%	6.6 to 99.4%	N/A	44 to 61.4%	25.5 to 97.8%	0.5 to 5.5%	3.6 to 4.4%	24.3 to 87.5%
Percent Hispanic	0 to 1.8%	4.3 to 9%	0.4 to 91.8%	N/A	1.1 to 19.4%	11.2 to 18.6%	9.3 to 43.7%	1.5 to 2.1%	0.4 to 52.2%
Percent Caucasian	97.6 to 99.3%	48 to 83.9%	0.1 to 13.9%	97 to 99.5%	31.6 to 42.7%	37.9 to 51.7%	53.3 to 88.9%	87.7 to 89.2%	5.1 to 34.9%
Percent Asian/Pacific Islander	0 to 1.2%	2.1 to 10.7%	0 to 19%	N/A	2.2 to 2.8%	1.5 to 4%	0 to 2.8%	5.1 to 6.5%	0 to 23.3%
Percent Multiracial	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.6 to 4.4%	1.4 to 7.2%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Percent Native American	0 to 0.8%	0.1 to 0.4%	0 to 2.7%	N/A	N/A	N/A	0 to 1.4%	0 to 0.2%	0.3 to 1.3%

Sources: Northern Illinois University (2004); Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) (2003b); Ohio Department of Education (n.d.); and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (n.d.)

Findings Based on Policy Scenarios

Teachers were asked to read four different policy scenarios in a predetermined order so the researchers could gather information on teachers' opinions of what policies may or may not attract them to hard-to-staff schools. The scenarios were distributed, questions were answered, and then each scenario was discussed through a semistructured discussion based on predetermined questions. This method was repeated for each of the four scenarios, although the second and third were considered simultaneously to provide participants with a chance to compare and contrast. The policy scenarios (found in detail in Appendix B) focused on the following:

1. An online tool designed to alter the hiring process by matching candidates with open positions and providing real-time feedback to candidates about the status of their applications
2. A hard-to-staff school designed to recruit cohorts of highly qualified teachers and retain them through intensive professional development and mentoring
3. A “turnaround school” aiming to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) using a structured environment and measurable goals
4. Various financial incentives intended to attract teachers to and retain them in hard-to-staff schools

Finding 1: New recruitment tools are needed to help place high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools and shorten the recruiting timeline.

Each focus group began with a policy scenario designed to elicit teacher responses to an online recruitment tool. The hypothetical online tool is meant to match candidates carefully with open teaching positions in an array of hard-to-staff schools. The tool further intends to help teachers think about their personal and professional requirements for teaching in hard-to-staff schools, to condense the timeline associated with teacher recruitment, to improve communication between candidates and prospective schools and districts, and to upgrade the overall recruitment process. Because it is comprehensive, it asks teachers not only to provide standard information about their professional qualifications but also express their educational philosophies, areas of expertise, and preferred teaching environment.

Overall, teachers reported that they would like to see changes to existing recruitment processes, and most agreed an online tool such as the one tested in the focus groups would be efficient and effective in facilitating the application process associated with finding a new teaching position in a hard-to-staff school. Others cautioned the pitfalls of such a tool.

What Teachers Like About Online Recruiting. Most focus groups thought the online recruitment tool was practical, convenient, and efficient, providing applicants with the freedom to think through their requirements and responses in a safe environment without time restrictions. Teachers pointed out that teaching in a hard-to-staff school often requires nonnegotiables, and the tool allows them to easily and honestly express what is required to attract them to a hard-to-staff school. The tool also eliminates the laborious hiring process for many teachers by eliminating what some focus groups categorize as “weak infrastructure” or

processes that require them to submit multiple, sometimes handwritten, applications for a single district. Teachers also agree the online tool would result in a better match between a teacher and a school. Moreover, one focus group indicated they would be encouraged to *continue* teaching in a hard-to-staff school if they knew the school was using such a thorough recruiting tool; they indicated they would be “optimistic about its ability to improve the school’s teaching quality by knowing there are standards.”

Teachers expressed satisfaction with what they deemed the “applicable and relevant nature” of the proposed questions the online tool would employ. They indicated that the questions offered a healthy self-selection process by allowing both themselves and school leaders to really understand what is and is not negotiable before either party invests too much time in the hiring process. Several focus groups agreed that the questions allow teachers to share information that usually is not asked during the hiring process but is nonetheless informative and useful to both parties in making an informed decision. These include questions about pedagogy, educational philosophies, and preferred teaching environment. One question, for example, asks, “What does a teacher think is the most important factor in determining whether students learn?” Another asks, “How does [a teacher] monitor whether students have mastered important knowledge or skills?” While these questions provide the hiring authority with information on a teacher, that teacher also can ask similar questions to understand if the school’s responses align with his or her professional needs and expectations.

For teachers, setting expectations with administrators early on eliminates the possibility of a failed match over time. Both parties have an understanding of each other’s needs and expectations. Many teachers said administrators never asked them about their goals or what they wanted out of their teaching jobs when they interviewed for positions in the past. Without a comprehensive approach to screening and recruitment—to ensure that teachers truly are a match for a school—the problem of teacher-school mismatches and subsequent teacher turnover will persist unabated.

Another appealing aspect of the online recruitment tool tested in the focus groups is its projected influence on the time it would take a district or school to hire a teacher. Most teachers predicted the online tool would eliminate the lengthy hiring timeline that is characteristic of some schools and districts. Several focus groups, both urban and rural, told stories of their district’s recruitment processes that start in middle to late summer, resulting in last-minute job offers just before the new school year begins. Delaying the recruitment process until middle to late summer translates to fewer of the best and brightest teachers in the candidate pool. A study conducted by the New Teacher Project revealed that hard-to-staff districts received five to seven times as many applications as they had positions to fill. Unfortunately, these schools failed to make job offers in a timely manner, thereby forcing them to hire a high percentage of unqualified or uncertified teachers (Levin & Quinn, 2003). Even more troubling is that many of the best candidates abandoned the possibility of working in one of these hard-to-staff districts due to hiring delays.

Finally, the focus groups revealed they were very attracted to the prospect of constant feedback about their application’s status. They indicated that the lack of feedback and inconsistent communication with schools and districts was often a deterrent to finding a new teaching position. One teacher focus group saw a school or district’s hiring process as indicative of its

internal operations: “If they can’t get it right during the recruitment process, I would hate to experience their day-to-day environment.”

It should be noted that some states and districts already are paying attention to the pitfalls of the archaic processes and practices used to recruit high-quality teachers into hard-to-staff schools. Some have adopted Web-based application systems that make it easier for teaching candidates to submit their applications. To date, however, few evaluations about the benefits and pitfalls of such a system exist.

Overall, it is clear that schools and districts must consider comprehensive hiring reforms consisting of defined recruitment and communication plans to ensure that the best and brightest teachers are not discouraged from pursuing teaching positions in hard-to-staff schools. Without such reforms and a commitment to effective implementation, hard-to-staff schools will find it difficult to break the cycle and finally attract the teachers they need the most.

Pitfalls of an Online Recruitment Tool. Teachers did not uniformly support the value of an online recruiting tool as a strategy for attracting high-quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Some participants expressed skepticism about the online tool because it seemed too “impersonal and unrealistic and failed to gauge an individual’s disposition.” They further indicated the online tool would eliminate the initial face-to-face contact some teachers think is one, if not the most important, step to landing a teaching job. It may be true that an individual’s disposition is an important characteristic to consider; however, it is certainly not the only measure of one’s ability to succeed in the classroom. Research by the Teaching Commission (2004) shows that an individual’s verbal and cognitive abilities have the greatest impact on student learning. If, as teachers report, schools really are using disposition as a litmus test for who should and should not teach, policymakers and education leaders have an opportunity to help structure research-based processes that get at the full depth and breadth of a candidate’s qualifications.

Almost all focus groups initially mistook the online tool as a complete replacement for the face-to-face interview component of the recruitment process. This was a widespread theme and may be indicative of the common perception that any particular step in the process is more determinative than intended. Facilitators reminded each focus group that the online tool is not the first and final step in what always will be a multistep recruitment process. Some teachers noted that a few districts currently employ Web-based tools as the first step in the interview process, but few had firsthand experience with such a tool.

Urban teachers expressed concerns about some of the tool’s questions, indicating they failed to focus on the real conditions in hard-to-staff schools—unruly classrooms, shortages of books and materials, and weak parent and community involvement. To these teachers, a good tool would include questions that convey a teacher’s approach to dealing with severe absenteeism, inadequate supplies, and classroom management. In essence, they did not think the tool provided teachers with an accurate picture of the types of challenges faced in hard-to-staff, urban schools.

Most focus groups reported concerns about the efficacy of the tool for new-teacher recruitment. They indicated that new teachers may not have enough experience to provide genuine responses on educational philosophies and the kind of environment they would like to work in. They

thought new teachers should be asked very different questions than veteran teachers in order to ensure a good match between teacher and school. A few focus groups went so far as to mention that new and veteran teachers would have very different motivations in their employment search, which would require a different set of questions. However, new teachers were overwhelmingly more enthusiastic than veteran teachers about using the tool to help match them with a hard-to-staff school in the future.

Some teachers believed that qualified applicants would be eliminated prior to a face-to-face interview because they would not know “how” to answer questions about educational philosophy and pedagogy. Furthermore, some teachers thought applicants could manipulate the process by offering what they perceive to be desirable or politically correct answers, regardless of whether these answers accurately reflect their views. Some teachers also worried that schools would be similarly misleading by offering incentives to lure highly qualified teachers to their schools without the ability to deliver the incentives once the teacher signed on. All around, school leaders stand a chance of losing some aspect of a candidate’s potential through the use of a Web-based recruitment tool, but they also stand to gain much more—hiring highly qualified candidates based on demonstrated skills and abilities instead of just disposition.

Veteran teachers in one urban focus group opposed the online tool simply because they feared the data would be misused—such as automatically eliminating teachers whose salary requirements are too high—before their profiles can be reviewed by hiring principals. This fear may be related to the fact that their years of experience and level of education require higher salaries than can be offered by some of the district’s hard-to-staff schools with potentially tight budgets. These teachers claim that hard-to-staff schools automatically will select a less experienced teacher whose salary requirements are lower—making a tradeoff between salary and experience. Although this fear may be predicated on experience, it runs counter to what hard-to-staff schools really need—high-quality, experienced teachers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 20 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools have three or fewer years of teaching experience, compared with 11 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools (Mayer, Mullens, & Moore, 2000).

Some teachers viewed the online tool as a weeding-out process for schools instead of a matching process. They were skeptical about whether the schools actually would answer questions and principals actually would read the responses, and they assumed the e-mail status updates would be generic, computer-generated feedback with no useful information about their candidacy. Some teachers also indicated they would seek additional information about the individual schools and their open positions before being willing to initiate the process.

Technology as a tool caused anxiety among some teachers. Veteran teachers specifically expressed mistrust regarding the use of a computer to replace something they deemed to be a human process. In their eyes, computers make mistakes and data can be lost, or something that may seem obvious to a more savvy computer user may not be so obvious to them.

For some teachers, the skepticism expressed during the focus groups indicates a gross distrust of school leaders. This lack of trust affected some teachers’ confidence in proposed remedies or incentives for the recruitment-process challenges faced by hard-to-staff schools. Not until

schools and districts begin to demonstrate the fidelity of their intentions will teachers fully buy into the use of online recruiting tools. Teachers need to know the process is transparent and their skills are being considered impartially by school and district leaders. Teachers also need reassurance that schools and districts are committed to hiring them in a timely fashion—by seriously considering their candidacy and responding to them before the start of the school year.

Furthermore, teachers both favorably and unfavorably disposed to the online recruitment tool agreed that word-of-mouth and personal recommendations from teacher friends are more effective job-search strategies and are important in the hiring process for schools.

Until some teachers begin to experience positive interactions and successful outcomes with online recruiting systems, the benefits of using technology as the first step in the process will be slow to materialize.

Finding 2: Focused, supportive, and committed school leadership, coupled with measurable school performance goals, are necessary to attract more high-quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

Teachers were asked to comment on a policy scenario that detailed a structured school environment focused on reform. The model school included a “turnaround” principal with demonstrated experience in transforming low-performing schools into high-performing ones. The principal is presented as someone who ensures that appropriate and adequate instructional materials are present, treats teachers as professionals, and nurtures a community of learners. Successful teacher recruiting and retention are a major component of the principal’s own evaluation. In addition, teachers in this school are key decision makers and members of the school’s leadership team.

Most teachers responded favorably to this type of structure, indicating that the focused nature of the school’s leadership and measurable performance goals are signs of the school’s commitment to its initiatives. Many teachers believed that a strong, committed principal is critical to recruiting and retaining the best teachers in hard-to-staff schools. One teacher offered her view, suggesting, “A good principal can set a tone of commitment and change with staff, parents, and students.” It is not surprising that significant numbers of teachers expressed a desire for high-quality school leadership—something their current schools reportedly do not have. Many teachers also liked the idea of working in a very structured school where the principal’s initiatives include successful teacher recruitment and retention.

Not surprisingly, the focus groups revealed that teachers seek work environments that offer them a decision-making role. Participants believed that a highly structured and goal-oriented school, such as the one modeled in this policy scenario, would create collegiality and collaboration among peers. The ability to be part of the change process rather than simply taking orders held strong appeal; many teachers indicated they have little to no voice in the strategic decisions of their school. Most expressed a strong desire to engage in open and honest communication with their principals and be in an environment that invites such behavior.

Conversely, a few teachers viewed this policy scenario as too rigid and aggressive—an approach that does nothing but alienate teachers, which in turn adversely affects students. They viewed a highly structured school environment to be less focused on students and more focused on operations, arguing that a school is not a business and should not be run as one.

Research shows that an important element in the decision to work in a particular school is a teacher’s confidence in the principal and other leaders (Ingersoll, 2001). It is a well-known fact that better teachers often self-select into higher achieving schools and leave their less qualified peers to teach in the lowest performing schools. Higher achieving schools most often are led by effective school leaders, naturally, causing more highly qualified teachers to gravitate toward those schools. This does not imply that all low-performing schools are led by weak school leaders, just that the incidence of weaker school leaders tends to be higher in low-performing schools. A Public Agenda report found that 29 percent of superintendents believed the quality of principals had declined measurably in recent years (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Foley, 2001).

If teachers cannot be reassured that their principals and school leaders will provide them with the support necessary to voice and initiate change, recruiting and retaining the best and brightest teachers in the hardest-to-staff schools may never be realized fully.

Finding 3: Empowerment, extensive mentoring, and useful professional development would encourage teachers to consider teaching in hard-to-staff schools.

One of the policy scenarios asks teachers to comment on a situation in which they are invited to join the faculty at a low-performing high school. In return for a three-year commitment, teachers receive intense professional development and mentoring to prepare them to deal effectively with the challenges inherent in low-performing schools.

Several aspects of this policy scenario appealed to participants, including the idea of empowerment and leadership along with the ability to work closely with a trained mentor to receive intense and continued professional development. Some teachers thought the school environment would be very nurturing, especially for novice teachers. While some teachers were excited by the professional development aspects outlined in the scenario, others disagreed with the three-week intensive summer training program, citing limited time away from school as the only respite from their otherwise hectic jobs.

Overall, these teachers embraced the idea of schools setting aside a reasonable amount of time for professional development—enabling teachers to share ideas and best practices that facilitate success in hard-to-staff schools. Several focus groups indicated that this incentive, in partnership with focused and supportive school leadership, would attract them to teach in a hard-to-staff school. Teachers often are told that they need to make changes or amend their approach but are not given the tools, time, or resources to do it. One teacher said, “We are educators; we teach. Of course we want to learn, too.”

It should be noted that of the seven teacher characteristics the U.S. Department of Education identified as contributing to improved student achievement, professional development focused

on academic content and curriculum was second only to a teacher's cognitive abilities (Whitehurst, 2002). Thus, a teacher's interest in intense professional development and mentoring that prepares them to teach successfully in hard-to-staff schools is a realistic request and one that presents policymakers and education leaders with tremendous opportunities.

Finding 4: Pay-for-performance remains controversial.

Focus group participants were asked to comment on a financial-incentives policy scenario centered on the possibility of increased compensation and additional incentives to attract or retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Some of the compensation options were tied to a pay-for-performance structure, while others were not.

The focus-group participants were asked specifically to describe which incentive was most attractive to them, based on the following options:

- Increase in base pay
- Signing bonus
- Pay-for-performance
- Pay for additional responsibilities
- Other incentives

Some of the most popular items in the "other incentives" category included free tuition for graduate education, student-loan forgiveness, increased pension contributions plus immediate vesting, housing subsidies or forgivable loans, relocation assistance, child-care subsidies, and reduced tuition for one's children at state colleges and universities. In almost every focus group, this policy scenario sparked a lively dialogue among participants.

Overwhelmingly, teachers were unaware that current pay-for-performance policies and initiatives, designed to reform the way teachers are retained and rewarded, operate in schools and districts around the county. While politicians and reformers often invoke the opinions of teachers in policy discussions, it became clear that teachers' opinions often are not sought nor genuinely understood. Pay-for-performance was a foreign concept for most teachers, and the concept proved less than popular among the teachers in the sample. Many teachers went so far as to suggest pay-for-performance is antiunion and such a system will never happen, so why consider it a policy option? What they fail to realize is that pay-for-performance brings a strong political and operational focus to hard-to-staff schools that historically lack the necessary structure to ensure that all students are provided with a high-quality education.

Existing pay-for-performance models and emerging career options for teachers, such as the Teacher Advancement Program or Denver's ProComp System, were unfamiliar to teachers. The policy scenario used to discuss financial incentives to attract or retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools included an example of the pay-for-performance initiative used in Chattanooga, Tennessee. When teachers read the scenario, they were surprised to learn that the school in Chattanooga actually exists, using financial incentives to draw high-performing teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Teachers were baffled to learn that a school district really does offer an annual

bonus, free tuition toward a master’s degree, a forgivable home loan if teachers live near a struggling school, or a reward for helping a school boost its test scores.

Most Don’t Want to Link Pay With Performance. Many teachers, regardless of locale, disagreed with the idea of pay-for-performance and opted instead for an overall percentage increase in base pay. Teachers repeatedly expressed concern about being unfairly penalized under such a system because of variables beyond their control, such as a lack of student interest and ability, varying student preparation and readiness, student mobility, and inconsistent curriculum coverage across schools.

As a practical matter, disagreement with pay-for-performance clearly was rooted in the distrust many teachers have for school leaders and evaluators. Teachers overwhelmingly rejected the idea of school leaders basing salary increases on classroom performance or the opinions of outside evaluators, arguing the process would be too subjective. Some teachers agreed that school leaders do come to their classrooms periodically to observe their teaching, but the observations do not usually factor into merit increases. Teachers fear the observations would be biased against those who have strained relationships with their school leaders. They also fear the observations would fail to consider the dynamics of their classrooms and the inherent challenges of teaching low-performing students.

Teachers also were concerned about the fairness of an incentive plan linked to standardized tests. One rural focus group suggested that pay-for-performance in a hard-to-staff school would create a competitive environment among teachers angling for the best students. Teachers only would want classes of students who performed well on standardized tests. In other words, those who were familiar with the school could work the system to their advantage while new teachers with less experience would be stuck with the lowest performing students; therefore, compounding the problem. Other focus groups pointed out that pay-for-performance would breed cheating or manipulation of student test scores. Research conducted by the Denver Public Schools and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association suggests that pay-for-performance will work only if the school culture is aligned with the goals of the initiative—goals that require teaching and learning to be at the center of thinking for all staff (Jupp, 2005).

To ensure that facilitators were not inadvertently using language that would elicit an incomplete reaction from the teachers with respect to pay-for-performance, we approached this issue using a variety of probes with the focus groups. These probes suggested that pay-for-performance is imminent and asked teachers how they will respond to the idea of measuring performance using criteria they define for themselves. Regardless of the techniques used to introduce pay-for-performance, very few teacher focus groups agreed it is a good idea as a stand-alone strategy to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

When asked if they would accept pay-for-performance versus no pay increases, teachers balked with comments such as “the union won’t buy it” and “it will never happen.” Others, as detailed in the following section, can understand the logic embedded in the concept and think it is not such a bad idea after all—if it is done right.

Fair Measures of Pay-For-Performance. Some teachers were not entirely dismissive of the pay-for-performance concept, suggesting it could work if handled properly. The prevailing concerns voiced by supporters of pay-for-performance are the methods used to measure performance; standardized student test scores should not be the primary basis of measurement. The most common theme among teachers who support pay-for-performance suggested performance should be measured using progress scores rather than standardized test scores; in essence, teachers would prefer pay-for-progress.

One focus group indicated that it would be best to distribute pay-for-performance funds equally among school staff, suggesting that the entire school, not individual teachers, should be accountable for student progress. Some felt that if the school did receive performance-based funds, the money should be used either to improve the resources available at the school or distributed evenly among the staff.

Suburban teachers would consider teaching in hard-to-staff schools if they were offered significantly more money and no specific expectations for student performance beyond demonstrating student progress.

One rural focus group expressed an interest in pay-for-performance as long as each teacher is observed and evaluated by a group of peers and the principal. Although some expressed distrust in their principals, they think their peers' fair and unbiased feedback would compensate for the principal's biases. Moreover, this group agreed the observations should focus on the teacher's individual goals set at the beginning of the year and should be conducted regularly by peers and the principal.

This same group also indicated pay-for-performance was most likely imminent because they perceived it as something school administrators and policymakers want. They also indicated that money should not be used as a motivator for performance and "if teachers are improving professionally only for additional pay, we are motivating them the wrong way."

Additional Incentives and the Teaching Profession. Overall, teachers complained about their pay, suggesting they are paid poorly for the work they do. Most teachers would like an increase in base pay as well as a bonus for their contributions to their students and schools.

Many teachers do not think they are classified as professionals by those outside the teaching realm. In almost every focus group, teachers brought up the concept of professionalism with no prompting from facilitators. When pushed to provide more detail, it became clear that professionalism is synonymous with higher income in the minds of some teachers. This thinking most likely is influenced by the concept of a free market in which society pays more to the individuals it values most. In essence, teachers feel as though they are battling the perception that their work is simple and does not require the skills of a trained professional.

We found an interesting geographical divergence. While almost all urban teachers serve in hard-to-staff schools and currently do it without additional pay or incentives, some rural and suburban teachers indicated they would not think of teaching in hard-to-staff schools without more money or incentives for such service. For these urban teachers, teaching in hard-to-staff schools is about

the mission, creating and managing change in the lives of children. It is about the opportunity to make a difference. One veteran teacher indicated she would teach in an underperforming school if she had an opportunity to improve it and the lives of the students. An urban teacher summed it up best when she said, “I knew going into teaching that I would not get a \$150,000 a year. I get more benefits knowing that one kid’s life has been affected.”

Contrary to recent research and focus-group responses, some teachers are attracted to teach in hard-to-staff schools by monetary incentives. For these teachers, free tuition for graduate education, student-loan forgiveness, increased pension contributions plus immediate vesting, relocation assistance, and reduced tuition for one’s children at state colleges and universities would make the opportunity a lot more attractive. Furthermore, teachers like the idea of affordable health care (not included in the scenario as an incentive option but an issue that was raised frequently), and some urban teachers like the idea of housing subsidies (housing location often is a requirement for their jobs) so they can live in safe and desirable neighborhoods.

Generally, most focus groups thought effective financial incentives depend on an individual’s stage of life and personal circumstances. They indicated that new teachers would select very different incentives than veteran teachers because of personal circumstances and classroom experience.

Personal safety was a substantial concern of many participants. Some teachers indicated they would teach at a hard-to-staff school if their personal safety were guaranteed while others said this was a prerequisite for other incentives or programs to attract them.

Student characteristics also were a common theme. One teacher said she would teach in a low-performing school if she knew she would be working with children who wanted to learn, regardless of their abilities. Motivated students would attract this teacher without additional pay and the guarantees inherent in a well-resourced school.

A few teachers indicated that a sign-on bonus would be attractive while being aware that these types of bonuses are controversial. One focus group suggested sign-on bonuses are a nice tool to attract teachers, but they do nothing to keep them, saying, “In fact, they may motivate teachers to move to hard-to-staff schools for the wrong reasons.”

Overall, pay-for-performance is becoming increasingly common and more widely accepted among teachers. This includes increased pay and incentives for teachers who earn National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification or demonstrate significant gains in student achievement. A study by the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (2005) states that these performance-based incentives often have the additional benefit of motivating teachers to immerse themselves in professional development, pursue career-advancement opportunities within education, and regard teaching as a more long-term profession.

Location Similarities and Differences

We analyzed the focus group responses to better understand the similarities and differences between the views of teachers from urban, suburban, and rural schools.

Urban

Urban teachers generally reported that the online recruitment tool failed to capture a teacher's disposition and motivation to teach in hard-to-staff schools—two very critical characteristics used to identify a successful teacher. Teachers also think the online tool ignores urban issues in its questions, including a teacher's experience, opinions on student mobility, and classroom management.

Urban teachers favor the turnaround school as the ideal policy scenario to attract or retain them in hard-to-staff schools; they like the structure, defined approach to improvement, strong leadership, and focus on parent involvement. Overall, urban teachers want more structure and involvement in school operations and decision making. Two urban focus groups quickly dismissed pay-for-performance. Another accepted the idea as long as performance is measured in a fair and unbiased manner.

Suburban

For most suburban teachers included in the study, salary is nonnegotiable if they are to consider teaching in a hard-to-staff school. Salaries are generally higher in suburban school districts, so perhaps this influenced teachers' responses. It also was reported in several of our suburban focus groups that teachers prefer the comforts often associated with suburban schools—a more stable school environment, well-stocked supply rooms, state-of-the-art computers, a less mobile student body, and greater parent involvement. Some of the suburban participants reported that they began their careers in urban schools and often were frustrated by the lack of resources for both themselves and the students. One suburban art teacher reportedly left an urban school because she grew tired of never having enough supplies for her lessons. Other suburban teachers were unwilling to sacrifice job satisfaction; some stating that it did not matter how much money they made if they did not enjoy their work or work environment.

Sign-on bonuses were popular with suburban focus groups—more so than other teachers included in the study. Teachers reported the need for some sort of instant gratification or incentive if they were to teach in hard-to-staff schools. Conversely, some suburban teachers suggested sign-on bonuses would attract the wrong kind of candidates to hard-to-staff schools—teachers who are interested only in the money.

Rural

Rural teachers expressed the most interest in teaching in hard-to-staff schools that offer intensive professional development. Without additional training and support, rural teachers are not confident they can succeed in hard-to-staff environments. Interestingly, most rural teachers associated hard-to-staff schools with unsafe urban schools. Some rural teachers reportedly would teach in hard-to-staff schools if the schools could guarantee their safety.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Policy Scenarios

The four policy scenarios designed for this project were intended to facilitate teachers' feedback that would help guide policymakers and education leaders to develop reasonable solutions to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Without directly asking teachers which policy option most appealed to them, it was clear that most teachers would choose the turnaround school.

The one component missing from the turnaround school that many teachers favored during the discussion is the intense professional development and mentoring present in the Teaching Fellows policy scenario, which will be discussed later in this paper. Overall, the research conducted for this report tells us that financial incentives alone are not the answer. Money is a poor substitute if a school does not offer a focused and structured work environment led by strong school leaders who encourage teachers to make their own decisions.

The Role of Current Policy in Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin

It is important for policymakers and education leaders to understand the current policy initiatives in their states in order to identify areas of opportunity as well as efforts to address recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools. This section of the report provides details on the current policy initiatives in each of the states included in this study.

The current state policy initiatives are organized in tables that visually capture whether each policy is a mechanism to improve:

- Recruitment—to attract individuals possessing or willingly capable of attaining the content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and social disposition necessary to pursue the teaching profession with a special interest to serve in hard-to-staff schools.
- Retention—to attract teachers to persist in the teaching profession, especially teaching in hard-to-staff schools.

The tables further categorize current state policy initiatives to denote if the mechanisms are facilitating improvements in one of the following areas:

- Human Resource Preparation, Access, and Process. Changes to preservice licensure-test requirements; teacher-preparation curricula; clinical experiences or student-teaching requirements; recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers into hard-to-staff schools; access to information on job openings; and information about the school's staff, culture, goals, teaching philosophy, support, or leadership style—process refers to the hiring experience in terms of length of hiring process, time of hire, communication about candidacy status, and ease of providing and receiving documents and information to and from the district or school

- Mentoring, Induction, and Professional Development. Consistent and high quality for new and veteran teachers
- Financial Incentives. Scholarships, loan repayment, tuition reimbursement, increase in base pay, signing bonus, pay-for-performance, pay for additional responsibilities, other incentives—subsidized housing, cell phones, laptops, relocation reimbursement, and child-care services
- School Structure and Operations. Initiatives that redesign the current school or district organizational structure and systems to enhance or improve the school climate, usually by providing teachers with more leadership opportunities and goal-oriented principals

The categories represent topics of recruitment and retention presented in the four policy scenarios that drove the discussions in the focus groups. The policies are represented in summary form, and whether or not the policy currently is funded can be identified by symbols (i.e., “+” for “funded,” “-” for “not funded”). The selected policies in Tables 5–7 speak more directly to recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools. A more detailed description of these state policies as well as additional policies addressing teacher quality that were reviewed and categorized in each respective state can be found in Appendixes D, E, and F.

Illinois

Illinois recently announced a new strategic plan that includes a focus on teacher quality to expand and improve the pool of highly qualified educators in the state’s public schools by supporting the preparation, recruitment, and retention of educators with expertise both in content areas and child development. While the details of the plan are being worked out and it is not clear to what extent the initiatives will be funded, high-quality public education continues to be a primary focus for the state as demonstrated by an increase of \$330 million in state education spending for fiscal year 2006. Table 5 details the Illinois’ strategic plan.

Table 5. Illinois Strategic Plan

Policies and Initiatives	Recruitment				Retention			
	HR Prep, Access, Process	Mentoring, Induction, Professional Development	Financial Incentives	School Structure/ Operations	HR Prep, Access, Process	Mentoring Induction/ Professional Development	Financial Incentives	School Structure/ Operations
Preservice teacher requirements	+							
Illinois Teachers and Child Care Providers Loan Repayment Program			+					
ITEACH Teacher Shortage Scholarship Program			+					
Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois		+	+			+		
Grow Our Own Teacher Education Initiative	-							
Quality teacher incentive and mentoring law		-	-			-	-	-
New teacher induction and mentoring program		-				-		
Illinois Teaching Excellence Program						+		+
Illinois standard teaching certificate induction and mentoring program		-		-		-		-
Illinois Education Job Bank	-				-			

Ohio

In response to the passage of the NCLB Act, Ohio began reviewing its high-quality teaching initiatives. It created the Governors Commission on Teaching Success, a task force of teachers, parents, college administrators, school administrators, faculty, business and community leaders, and public officials to develop recommendations that would help Ohio recruit and retain teachers, build its capacity to perform at consistently high levels, and create school environments with effective leadership in which teachers can teach and students can learn. In February 2003, the commission submitted its final report to the governor. The report included 15 recommendations and suggestions on how to implement the recommendations. The recommendations included: (1) clarifying expectations for teachers and principals, (2) recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, (3) preparing teachers and principals to succeed, and (4) advancing the professional practice of teachers and principals. Although the report was not ready prior to setting the 2004 budget, the state still set aside \$1.7 million to begin investing in high-quality teaching initiatives.

To specifically address the issue of recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools, the Ohio Department of Education identified improving teacher quality in high-need schools as one of its main foci in its 2006–07 strategic plan, detailed in Table 6. If funded, one initiative would provide stipends worth \$2,500 annually to 150 highly qualified teachers with at least three years of teaching experience in middle or high school mathematics or science. In return, these teachers would commit to teaching in hard-to-staff schools around the state.

Table 6. Ohio Department of Education 2006–07 Strategic Plan

Policies and Initiatives	Recruitment				Retention			
	HR Prep, Access, Process	Mentoring, Induction, Professional Development	Financial Incentives	School Structure/ Operations	HR Prep, Access, Process	Mentoring, Induction, Professional, Development	Financial Incentives	School Structure/ Operations
Governor’s Blue Ribbon Task Force on Financing Student Success				–				–
NCLB Teacher Quality Grant	+	+		+	+	+		+
Governors Commission on Teaching Success	+	+		+	+	+		+
Camp Attracting Prospective Educators	+				+			
Ohio Principal Leadership Academy				+				+

Wisconsin

In February 2005, Governor Doyle proposed a two-thirds funding increase for K–12 education. In June, the Joint Finance Committee denied the governor’s proposal. In early July, the assembly granted final legislative approval to the state budget, but with a \$400 million reduction in public education spending from the governor’s original budget request. The governor subsequently vowed to veto the budget in hopes of regaining some of the proposed increases for public education spending.

Moreover, a recent assembly bill directs the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to award grants of up to \$100,000 to no more than 20 school districts for the design, development, and implementation of a differentiated compensation program for teachers in the 2005–07 fiscal biennium. The initiative is designed to help schools attract highly qualified teachers to their ranks.

Table 7. Wisconsin Strategic Plan

Policies and Initiatives	Recruitment				Retention			
	HR Prep, Access, Process	Mentoring, Induction, Professional, Development	Financial Incentives	School Structure/ Operations	HR Prep, Access, Process	Mentoring, Induction, Professional, Development	Financial Incentives	School Structure/ Operations
PI 34 Administrative Rules	+	+				+		
State teaching standards	+							
Loan forgiveness			+					
Minority incentives			+					
Title II funds				+				+
Teaching quality supplemental grant	+							

Note: Several attempts were made to contact the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to verify the accuracy of the above policies. Without verification, Learning Point Associates does not guarantee the accuracy of the policies referenced.

Recommendations

Policymakers are wrestling with the challenge of how to better recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Teacher opinions and perspectives shared in the focus groups suggest a willingness to embrace some new ideas but a general wariness of others. The following set of recommendations is intended to build on the ideas generated by the expert panel and the policy scenarios that were the basis for the teacher focus-group discussions. The recommendations also take into account teacher reactions to the policy scenarios and are intended to align with and supplement existing state policies to improve teacher quality in high-need schools in Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin, as documented in the previous section.

Recommendation 1: Improve and enhance recruitment and hiring practices to attract high-quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

At the local level, policymakers should consider developing a consortium approach with other like-minded districts interested in jointly developing an online recruitment system. This system would allow candidates to review not only job openings but local incentive packages, explore district background information, post applications, and receive feedback in a timely manner—all leading to personal interviews with interested school principals.

At the state level, policymakers can seek federal funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Quality Enhancement–recruitment grant program to develop and implement a statewide online recruitment database linked to each school and district in the state and focused specifically on recruiting teachers who are qualified to work in at-risk schools. The statewide database should include access to both programs and tools designed to assist prospective teachers in assessing their aptitude to work in hard-to-staff schools. The goal would be to help teachers identify their areas of expertise before they begin the application process.

Recommendation 2: Provide school leaders with adequate resources and tools to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

Locally, policymakers should review school and district hiring and placement practices and the role of the principal in making hiring decisions to ensure that district shortage areas and the hardest-to-staff schools are being staffed first with the highest quality teachers. It is important to better prepare principals to engage in the interview process in hard-to-staff schools by providing training to help them identify key teacher attributes necessary to succeed in a diverse classroom. Further, school leaders should have the freedom to offer incentive packages to recruit and retain the best teachers to hard-to-staff schools for longer than a year.

States may consider building on the emerging research base stating that principal preparation programs are insufficient to meet the demands of increasingly high-stakes accountability environments in education. One option is to require state accreditation of school administrator programs to provide evidence that they are preparing principals to effectively recruit and motivate new teachers—especially in at-risk schools—as well as evidence of effective teacher evaluation techniques.

Recommendation 3: Increase targeted access to mentors and ongoing professional development for teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

Districts with high percentages of at-risk and hard-to-staff schools should seek out partnerships with local teacher-preparation programs to develop and implement cohort approaches to teacher training and mentoring. In addition, districts might offer financial incentives—subsidizing the costs of the preparation program or the state certification test—to cohorts of teacher candidates in their final two years of a preparation program if they commit to teaching in a particular set of schools. Similarly, in exchange for financial support for their teacher candidates, the teacher-preparation program would commit to provide ongoing mentoring and inservice opportunities for teachers. This combination of financial incentive and access to ongoing support would make committing to an at-risk school more attractive to a newly minted teacher.

Just as states should seize upon the opportunity to build on existing state policies in the three states included in this study, state policymakers are urged to require high-quality induction and mentoring programs for all new teachers, including state-funded stipends for training and mentor programs.

Recommendation 4: Develop flexible compensation packages, including incentives and pay-for-performance measures targeted to teachers in at-risk schools.

Schools should develop state networking groups of local union leaders and two to three national experts in alternative compensation systems and human resources policies. A neutral education organization can facilitate these groups to create models of career advancement tied to pay increases and opportunities for professional growth.

Similar working groups in cities in Iowa, as well as Cincinnati and Denver, have discovered lessons for what to do differently or better—especially with building the knowledge base around alternative compensation and various approaches to linking teacher pay to student performance. One approach to conducting the state networking groups is to develop a menu of financial incentives and pay-for-performance measures that would serve as a common basis for the conversation among groups. The goal would be to increase understanding of various approaches to flexible teacher compensation and to assess the most likely opportunities for change in states and local communities.

The teacher focus groups conducted in the Midwest revealed their financial incentive and pay-for-performance preferences. More importantly, the lack of access to information related to these types of programs and policies indicates a need to build the knowledge base among teachers and their local leaders to broaden their understanding of both the pros and the cons of various approaches to teacher compensation that eventually will strengthen the teaching profession.

Concluding Remarks

The message from teachers to policymakers is that the problems with recruitment and retention in hard-to-staff schools are challenging but not insurmountable. It is clear that teachers have definitive yet diverse opinions about changes to the processes and procedures used to recruit and retain them. Politicians and education reformers should take notice—teachers have a lot to say about these issues and no reliable forum in which to share their thoughts. Moreover, until teachers have access to the most up-to-date and reliable information on current policy initiatives designed to reform their own profession, they will be slow to embrace most new initiatives.

Policymakers and education reformers must invoke the true voices of teachers as they help states, districts, and schools develop new approaches to improve the processes and procedures used to recruit and retain high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools. This warrants additional teacher commitment, which may be gained with the use of new dissemination and communication vehicles that inform teachers about state and national opportunities to access professional development and other resources directed at enhancing the teaching profession.

Another idea may be to provide a hotline and Web site for teachers with questions or comments about recruitment and retention practices around the country—a sort of clearinghouse of information on current trends. This may begin to infuse the teaching ranks with information on current policies and practices used to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools—an issue of which the focus groups revealed teachers were clearly unaware.

Finally, the role of teachers in the eventual success of a new program or policy should not be underestimated. Teachers in the focus groups were delighted to have the opportunity to share their perspectives and insights, did so on their own time, and frequently overcame multiple inconveniences such as location and weather to participate. Identifying more and ongoing opportunities to include the teacher voice in policymaking at the district and state levels likely will improve the success of policy and program implementation over time.

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Appendix A

Methodology

To gather useful data for this project, we designed a deliberate process to facilitate the discussion around how to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. First, we convened a panel of experts to help design policy scenarios for the teacher focus groups. We then tested the scenarios on a focus group of currently practicing teachers to refine them and gauge possible directions for discussion. Finally, we recruited teachers to participate in the various focus groups.

Expert Panel

Implementation of the study approach began in August 2004 with the identification and convening of a small group of national education policy experts. These experts met for two days to develop four research-based policy scenarios—essentially test cases—that were used as the basis of the focus-group conversations. The policy scenarios were developed independently of individual state policies in Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin to test the widest variety of options possible. The policy scenarios built on the knowledge and expertise of the group and were informed by current research and examples of innovative solutions being tried around the country. The policy scenarios were designed to provide structure for the focus groups and act as different, stand-alone solutions to the challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

Pilot Testing

In November 2004, Learning Point Associates conducted two pilot focus groups to test the policy scenarios and facilitator questions with a subset of the NCREL Teacher Advisory Council members. The pilot focus groups allowed Learning Point Associates to ensure that the content adequately drove discussion and the process effectively engaged teachers to think creatively about the scenarios and their potential future actions. Teachers identified minor problems and points of confusion with the facilitator questions and policy scenarios. Using this feedback, Learning Point Associates made minor adjustments to the scenarios and questions.

Focus Groups

Because the study aims to understand the perspectives of teachers who teach in urban, suburban, and rural settings, Learning Point Associates identified large cities in each of the three target states—Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The cities identified were Chicago, Cleveland, and Milwaukee. Learning Point Associates committed to recruiting study participants teaching in each city's public schools. To better understand teachers who may or may not teach in hard-to-staff schools, teachers in surrounding suburban schools were recruited as well. Further, the voice of rural teachers was included because rural schools often face difficulties attracting and retaining high-quality teachers due to lower pay and geographic isolation.

Learning Point Associates secured meeting space and recruited teachers for the focus groups. Seeking school district (and in one case, teachers union) approval, finding agreeable dates, and securing meeting space at schools proved to be the most challenging aspect of the project. Conversely, teacher recruitment was relatively simple because teachers were extremely eager to talk and share their views and were grateful for the opportunity. In two instances, we decided to conduct two focus groups in one location due to the overwhelming response from teachers. In almost all other cases, Learning Point Associates created a waiting list because the focus groups were oversubscribed.

A convenience sample of K–12 urban, suburban, and rural public school teachers from Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin was selected to participate in focus groups held from December 2004 to early June 2005. Focus groups allowed us to collect qualitative data in a small-group format, providing a more efficient data-collection process than individual teacher interviews. In addition, focus groups generated more interaction and discussion among teachers, allowing us to better explore nuances underlying teacher attitudes toward hard-to-staff schools.

Four focus groups were held in each locale—urban, suburban, and rural—for a total of 12 focus groups. Each focus group consisted of at least 9 but no more than 15 participants for a total of 130 participants.

Focus-group participants were asked to complete a participant information sheet in order to provide basic information such as years of experience, subjects taught, and number of schools at which they taught. A summary of this self-reported data can be found in the Profile of Focus Group Participants and Their Schools section of this report.

Each focus group was facilitated by an experienced facilitator and, in most cases, an experienced note taker attended each focus group. In focus groups where no note taker was present, the facilitator used a recording device. Often both a note taker and recording device were used.

At the outset of each focus group, the facilitator provided a definition of “hard-to-staff schools” to ensure a common understanding of the term. Hard-to-staff schools are defined as “schools where there is a high proportion of at-risk children and there is not yet a track record of success.”

One difficulty inherent in almost all focus groups was keeping the participants focused on the issue at hand as participants used it as a forum to vent frustrations about their perceptions of problems in their school, district, or profession. Overall, the focus groups were able to provide substantial information to inform this report on the challenges of staffing low-performing schools. Focus groups also provided information that offers guidance to policymakers and education leaders as they work to refine current practices and legislation.

Response Analysis and Limitations

Participant responses were categorized by policy scenario and question. Next, responses were reviewed by question to help develop overarching themes, and then roughly weighted by the number of times different focus groups provided similar feedback. These similarities were then contrasted with any differences mentioned by focus-group participants. The main themes were then reviewed according to their overall weight—determined by the frequency of citation by individual focus groups—and the relative weight of the focus group from which viewpoints about an issue or concern surfaced.

Overall focus-group results were then categorized based on the policy scenario in which they were discussed and reported in relation to what teachers think about each scenario relative to their perspective on deciding to work in or stay working in hard-to-staff schools.

This study relies on self-reported data from teachers who attended the focus groups. These self-reported data offer the opinions of the participants, not established facts. The focus groups provided us with a good sense of what the participating teachers think about these issues. However, it is not determinative. Policy must be made with a variety of considerations in mind, and ultimately schools exist to serve students. In addition, as with any study of this nature, it is important to be cautious when generalizing from the results. For instance, it is possible that teachers who elected to participate had especially strong feelings about these issues, were especially knowledgeable, or were systemically biased in some other way.

Appendix B

Focus Group Policy Scenarios

Hiring Teachers Now

Brenda Jackson has been a public school teacher for nine years. She currently teaches prealgebra and algebra to seventh and eighth graders at Mount Rik Middle School in an affluent suburb of a large Midwest city. Brenda earns a great deal of satisfaction, and an additional several thousand dollars per year, from her participation on a districtwide curriculum-development committee and in a New Teacher Mentoring Program. Brenda is grateful to work in a district that provides a great deal of support to teachers, and she appreciates the recognition she gets for the good work she does.

But lately Brenda has grown restless. She is not as challenged by teaching as she once was, and although she cannot imagine leaving the classroom for an administrative job, she longs to put her hard-won expertise to the test. She also cannot help but think about a recent newspaper article series on how hard it is for inner-city schools just a few miles away to find and keep good teachers. However, Brenda also remembers a colleague on the curriculum committee who applied to work in that district last year and did not even get a job offer until mid-September. She puts the notion out of her mind, quells her restlessness, and goes back to focusing on what she does best—teaching mathematics.

Later while reading her favorite professional journal at home one April evening, Brenda comes across an article about an unusual new hiring system being implemented in that same urban district. Excited by the prospect of learning about inner-city teaching jobs and perhaps getting an offer without having to wait months for a response, Brenda decides to submit her application.

The next morning, Brenda visits the Web site listed in the article and begins the process.

First, the Web site asks Brenda to provide some standard information about her professional qualifications:

- Where and when did she graduate from college, and with what kind of degree and grade-point average?
- What kinds of teaching certificates does she hold?
- How long has she been teaching?
- Where has she taught and what subjects has she taught?
- What professional leadership positions does she hold?

Then Brenda is pleasantly surprised by a series of questions about what kind of teacher she is, what her educational philosophies are, and what special areas of expertise she has:

- What proportion of time does she spend on various kinds of classroom activities such as teacher lectures, individual problem solving, group problem solving, and working with manipulatives?

- How much homework does she give to her students per night?
- What are her grading policies?
- How does she monitor whether students have mastered important knowledge and skills?
- Does she collect and analyze data on student achievement throughout the year?
- What does she think is the most important factor in whether students learn?
- What level of student failure is she willing to tolerate at the end of a particular unit before moving on to the next?
- How concerned is she with the pacing of instruction and coverage of the curriculum?
- What are her attitudes toward annual standardized tests, and what strategies does she use to help students prepare for them?

In addition, Brenda is asked about the kind of environment in which she likes to work:

- Does she prefer focusing on her own classroom and students or collaborating with other teachers on curriculum and student needs?
- Does she think teachers should be publicly recognized or rewarded for student performance on standardized tests or other measures?
- Does she think teachers should be recognized individually or as part of a group?
- Does she prefer to deal with student behavioral issues on her own, or does she prefer a schoolwide approach?
- How strict does she believe teachers should be when it comes to setting and enforcing rules for classroom behavior?

The Web site tells Brenda that teachers and administrators in participating schools with job openings also have answered these questions, and her responses will enable the system to provide them—and her—with an analysis of how those work styles and preferences match up.

Then Brenda reaches the final group of questions, which she considers to be the most important:

- These questions allow her to tell the system about things that she, personally, *must have* in a teaching job in order to consider an offer, and additional things she *desires to have* in a teaching job.
- Using dropdown menus and type-in boxes, she is asked to answer questions about a number of factors related to compensation, benefits, and working conditions.
- The Web site then asks her to rate each of those factors as either “nonnegotiable” or “preference” and to rank those she marked as “preference” on a numerical scale.

Here are a just a few examples of factors that Brenda programmed into the system:

Table B-1. Web Survey’s Nonnegotiable and Preferential Factors

Factor	Brenda’s Response	Nonnegotiable or Preference	Rank Among Preferences
Contract: base salary	Greater than or equal to \$45,000	Nonnegotiable	
Contract: length of guaranteed employment on condition of satisfactory performance	Three years	Nonnegotiable	
Assignment: subject area(s)	Mathematics only	Nonnegotiable	
Assignment: specific classes	Prealgebra, algebra	Preference	2
Assignment: grade level(s)	Seventh or higher	Preference	1
Assignment: additional duties	No additional duties outside of classroom teaching	Preference	4
Leadership opportunities	Curriculum	Preference	3

Brenda is surprised to see the option for a guaranteed length of employment, but when she clicks the “find out more” button for that option, she learns the district has negotiated nonlayoff provisions for a group of its hardest-to-staff schools. The Web site tells her that in marking that factor as “nonnegotiable,” she will not be considered for any jobs in schools that do not fall under that provision. She considers going back and selecting “preference” for that one, but decides not to for now.

Finally, Brenda is asked if she has any preferences among a list of schools provided by the Web site. She has none at this point, so she chooses “none.”

Within 10 minutes, Brenda receives an e-mail that reads as follows:

Dear Ms. Jackson,

Thank you for submitting your application to the district’s online application system. You provided us with the following information and preferences. Please review them and make any changes you would like within the next 24 hours.

Beginning tomorrow, you will receive daily e-mails about the status of your application. You also may log on to the Web site at any time to check the status of your application, update your information, or change your preferences using the following user name and password: bjackson2, c8jkif33. (However, please note that changing your preferences midway through the process might delay the interview process.)

You will receive an e-mail and phone call if and when one of our principals would like to invite you in for an interview.

Four days later, Brenda receives an e-mail and a phone call inviting her to interview with the principal and teacher hiring committee at Merit Middle School. She reviews the information provided about the school in the e-mail and decides to accept the interview.

Teaching Fellows Program

Henry Higgins has been a ninth-grade science teacher in a large urban high school for four years. While he came into teaching with high hopes of making a difference in the lives of his students and has worked hard to become an effective teacher, he is not sure all of the hard work is paying off. He faces many frustrations with his job and does not know where to turn for help. Half of his colleagues are disenchanted with teaching and the other half are polite but distant. His principal, while a very nice individual, does not seem to have the time or energy to be supportive of Henry's desire to become a better teacher and make a difference.

In the spring of his fourth year of teaching, Henry received an invitation to apply to a new district program being piloted at New Horizons High School, one of the lowest performing high schools in the district and on the brink of being reconstituted. New Horizons High School is a small public high school that has had a teacher turnover rate of nearly 50 percent every year for the past five years.

The new Teaching Fellows Program was developed to recruit high-quality new teachers to the district and to expand the opportunities for leadership responsibility for high-quality veteran teachers. This new program design includes the following:

- The school principal selects and hires a cohort of new and veteran teachers from within the district to revitalize a failing school.
- The teachers are recruited to become part of the cohort and are hired in the late spring.
- Cohort members must participate in an intense, three-week summer professional development program that helps prepare them for the challenges they will face at New Horizons.

Henry, who seriously was thinking about spending the summer looking for new employment outside of the teaching field, decides to give the pilot program (and teaching) one last chance. Maybe if he has some peer support and intense professional development, he will not feel like he is flying solo in the classroom all of the time. Perhaps he will be able to grow professionally as a member of a cohort of teachers who also want to make a difference in students' lives.

The cohort selection criteria include the following:

- The district identifies five to six high-quality veteran and new teachers from throughout the district to invite into the Teaching Fellows Program.
- The New Horizons High School principal takes part in the selection of prospective cohort members.
- Cohort members need to be from across content area, be ethnically diverse, and match the shortage needs within the school.

Professional Development Summer School

All cohort members attend a paid, three-week professional development summer school program in which they work with each other on cohort-identified school improvement issues. This coursework can lead to advanced degrees from the Hope School of Education.

Super Fellows Mentoring Program

During the school year, all Teaching Fellows have access to content-specific Super Fellows mentors who provide guidance on instructional and classroom-management issues during the first two years of the program. In the third year of the program, Teaching Fellows can apply to be a Super Fellows mentor within the district. Henry likes the idea of eventually becoming a mentor teacher and providing the much-needed support he did not receive in his first years of teaching.

Home School Team Professional Development

Existing school staff at New Horizons participates in the same professional development activities tied to the local school improvement plan during the year as the Teaching Fellows cohort. The home school team staff can provide important insight and information regarding the school, students, and school families. Existing school staff will have the option to stay at New Horizons and contribute to the instructional goals set by the Teaching Fellows cohort at the end of the first year of the program or the district will provide them with assistance in finding a new placement.

Evaluation

The Teaching Fellows Program will be evaluated continuously by an external evaluation firm to assess whether there is less teacher turnover in the cohort school and whether there are gains in student achievement and better attendance by Years 3 and 4 of this program.

Cohort members make a commitment to stay in the new position for three years and receive a stability bonus if they stay beyond four years. Henry figures this will be the real test of his commitment to teaching and children.

In addition, Henry likes the description of the informal cohort activities, including the monthly pizza meetings, and the closed-security cohort electronic mailing list that gives members of a professional community a place in which they can share information and ideas.

All in all, Henry likes the concept of joining the Teaching Fellows Program cohort because he appreciates being respected as a professional; having the camaraderie of like-minded teachers with which to grow; having meaningful, targeted professional development; and facing the challenge of helping to turn around a failing school and improve student achievement of at-risk children.

Turnaround School

Mary Bethune Academy, a PK–8 school, is located in the zip code with the highest concentration of poverty in a Great City Schools district. Ninety-nine percent of the low-income and working-class African-American and Hispanic student population are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

The academy is classified as a school identified for improvement (SIFI) under NCLB because the students are not meeting AYP in reading and mathematics. Currently, 25 percent of students are proficient in reading, and 39 percent are proficient in mathematics.

Because Mary Bethune did not meet AYP, parents have the right to transfer their children to other schools in Great City that are not on the SIFI list. Students who do not transfer are eligible for supplemental educational services or free tutoring provided by state-approved service providers such as Catapult Learning, Kaplan, Newton Learning, or Platform Learning.

The reform school board recently hired a new chief executive officer (CEO), Theresa Parsons. She is taking an aggressive approach to innovation and accountability so Mary Bethune Academy will meet AYP, be removed from the SIFI list, and the district will win the accolades by replicating Mary Bethune’s success and closing the achievement gaps.

CEO Parsons proposes the following changes for Mary Bethune:

1. Turnaround Principal—Jasper Richardson, turnaround principal, leads the school improvement effort. Richardson is experienced in transforming high-poverty schools from SIFI sites into high-performing schools with a culture of success. As the school’s instructional leader, he maintains a school environment that provides appropriate and adequate instructional materials, treats highly qualified teachers as professionals, and nurtures a community of learners. Teacher recruiting and retention are a major part of this principal’s evaluation.
2. Leadership Team—Teachers are key decision makers and members of the school’s leadership team. Lead teachers mentor new teachers, coach veteran teachers, and lead a school within a school. Senior teachers serve as resident experts in each of the content areas of the curriculum. The school leadership team provides the CEO with the information needed to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the local union to give the Mary Bethune school community the freedom and flexibility needed to locally customize the hiring process and organization of the school.
3. Schools Within Schools—The school is divided into Grades K–2, 3–5, and 6–8 schools within schools—each with about 100–180 students. Each lead teacher will select a team of four to six teachers to stay with the same group of students in the multigrade schools within schools to build relationships with students and parents. Teachers control the size of instructional groups and teaching loads on their team.

4. **Rich and Challenging Curriculum**—A schoolwide approach to academic basics is emphasized, but importance also is placed on the arts and physical education. Character education and social skills are taught to guarantee a safe and orderly environment. Research-based programs and instructional materials are identified to meet curriculum standards.
5. **Extensive Professional Development.** Teachers receive two weeks of curriculum and classroom management training before joining the school staff. Two free periods each day are dedicated to individual and team planning and professional development. At least five days will be provided every year for ongoing training. The professional development program will be tailored to the needs of teachers based on the results of student-performance data from the online student assessment system and teacher-identified needs.
6. **Parent and Community Engagement.** The Family and Student Support Team develops individual plans to support each child’s development and provides links to community service providers. Community resources are mobilized to orient new teachers, enhance the curriculum, and enable students to participate regularly in community service projects.

The Mary Bethune Academy leadership team will have at least six months to interview existing staff, recruit and hire highly qualified teachers, and conduct staff development before launching the reconstituted school.

Financial Incentives

Many states and school districts are offering—or considering—a wide range of incentives to attract qualified teachers to high-need schools. Consider the following list of incentive examples.

Pay incentives

- **Increases in base pay:**
 - **Flat increase**—An additional \$5,000 per year in base pay, for example, which might include retention incentives such as \$5,000 per year plus an additional \$2,500 at the end of every five-year period a teacher remains at the school.
 - **Percentage increase**—A 10 percent increase in base pay, for example, which might include retention incentives such as a 10 percent increase plus an additional 5 percent at the end of every five-year period a teacher remains at the school. (This differs from a flat increase in that more experienced teachers with higher salaries will receive more than younger teachers lower on the pay scale.)
- **Signing bonus**—A one-time \$10,000 bonus plus additional \$3,000 bonuses at the end of every three-year period a teacher remains at the school.

- Pay-for-performance—Teachers would not automatically receive additional money for teaching in a high-need school, but instead would be eligible for significant bonuses based on the performance of their students on standardized assessments, either individually, collectively, or both. For example, schools participating in the Teaching Advancement Program offer one or both of the following kinds of performance pay:
 - Based on evaluation—Teachers are individually observed and evaluated six times per year by administrators or master teachers using a standardized evaluation system and rubric.
 - Based on student performance—Individual teachers, teams of teachers, or the whole teaching faculty earn bonuses based on a value-added analysis of how much student achievement improved during the year on standardized assessments.
- Pay for additional responsibilities or contributions—Teachers would not automatically receive additional money for teaching in a high-need school, but instead would be eligible for significant bonuses based on additional contributions they make outside the classroom. For example, the Teacher Advancement Program provides additional pay for teachers who take on additional responsibilities as mentor teachers, those who assist new teachers and lead planning and professional development activities, and those who, as master teachers, oversee mentor teachers and work with the principal to manage instructional programs and guide school improvement efforts.

Other incentives

- Subsidized child care
- Housing subsidies or forgivable loans
- Student-loan forgiveness
- Reimbursement of expenses related to relocation
- Preferred placement for one's children in the district's schools
- Laptop
- Cell phone and/or a personal data assistant, plus free minutes
- Reduced or waived tuition for one's children at state colleges and universities
- Free tuition for teacher's graduate education
- Wellness program (such as a health club membership)
- Increases in pension, plus immediate vesting in pension plan
- Flexible vacation plan, to make it easier to take time off during the school year
- Clerical support

The following is a current example of financial incentives being employed (The Teaching Commission, 2004).

In return for accepting a position in certain high-need schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee, teachers with proven track records in raising student achievement are eligible to receive a combination of incentives, including the following:

- \$5,000 annual bonus
- Free tuition toward a master's degree
- \$10,000 loan toward a down payment on a house near one of the schools, forgivable if the teacher stays at the school for at least five years
- \$2,000 for every teacher in a school that boosts its overall test scores by a significant degree

Appendix C

Participants in the Learning Point Associates Expert Panel

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Appendix D

Description of Illinois Policy Initiatives and Programs

- The Illinois Teachers and Child Care Providers Loan Repayment Program is designed to encourage students to enter the teaching and early childcare professions and teach in low-income schools. The program provides grants of up to \$5,000 to eligible recipients to help repay educational loans. Fiscal year 2003 appropriations equaled \$2.7 million, and the program was similarly funded in 2004, 2005, and 2006.
- The ITEACH Teacher Shortage Scholarship provides up to \$5,000 to academically talented students (especially minority students) pursuing teaching careers, especially in shortage disciplines or hard-to-staff schools. Recipients are selected based on academic excellence, status as minority student, and financial need.
- Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois offers education students \$5,000 per year for four years in exchange for agreeing to teach in a poor- or low-performing school for five years after graduation. In addition, scholarship recipients receive a \$2,000 stipend annually to cover living expenses during the summer so they can attend seminars that include mentoring from master teachers. These scholarships are intended for minority and low-income high school seniors.
- The Grow Our Own Teacher Education Initiative is designed to recruit and prepare parent and community leaders and paraeducators to become effective teachers and teacher leaders in hard-to-staff schools and teaching positions in schools serving a substantial percentage of low-income students. Further, the initiative is designed to increase the diversity of teachers based on race, ethnicity, and disability. The goal of the Grow Our Own Teacher Education Initiative is to add 1,000 teachers to low-income and other hard-to-staff Illinois schools by 2016 with an average retention period of seven years as opposed to the current rate of 2 ½ years for new teachers in such areas. The initiative was authorized in July 2004 and scheduled to begin in January 2005. As of July 2005 the initiative was unfunded.
- The quality teacher incentive and mentoring law has two components: (1) an incentive program, which states that teachers who graduate in the top 10 percent of their class, have an initial certificate, and have made a commitment to teach in the Illinois public schools for at least three years will receive a \$1,000 signing bonus; and (2) a mentoring program that provides qualifying school districts with funds to develop or expand teacher mentoring programs.
- The New Teacher Induction and Mentoring programs were to establish and implement new teacher induction and mentoring programs by the beginning of the 2004–05 school year in every public school or in two or more public schools acting jointly. The program was designed to provide a mentor teacher to work with all new teachers for at least two years. While this law passed in 2003, it is not yet funded.
- Illinois Teaching Excellence Program is designed to provide monetary incentives and bonuses to teachers who are employed by school districts and hold a master certificate. The incentives include: (1) \$3,000 to teachers who complete a program and receive a master certificate; (2) \$1,000 to teachers who hold a master certificate and provide 60 hours of

mentoring during that year to classroom teachers; and (3) \$3000 to teachers who hold a master certificate and provide 60 hours of mentoring during that year to classroom teachers in schools on academic early warning watch or schools in which 50 percent or more of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) sent out notices to teachers in November 2004 that compensation may be prorated in the 2004–05 school year due to the increase in master teachers.

- ISBE made improving teacher quality statewide a top goal in its comprehensive strategic plan in March 2005.
- The Illinois Education Job Bank (www.iasaedu.org/Jobbank) is a Web site created through a partnership between ISBE and the Illinois Association of School Administrators that lists jobs around the state and allows job seekers to directly access district postings, post resumes, and apply for positions electronically for no fee. There is also an automatic matching service between posted job opportunities and resumes through the Illinois Education Job Bank Resume Builder. There is a minimal annual fee to post vacancies. Other Web sites that focus on Illinois teaching jobs include Recruit Illinois (www.recruitillinois.net) and the National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse (www.recruitingteachers.org).
- The Central States Teacher Exchange Agreement and National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification Interstate Agreement gives educators from any of the member states a comparable certification upon submission of an application and fee through the regional office of education. According to the April 2005 report from Illinois Education Research Council, Illinois does not have a reciprocity agreement with any state, and the only state that recognizes the Illinois test is Missouri.
- The Illinois standard teaching certificate induction and mentoring programs and policies are as follows: (1) a formally trained mentor shall be assigned to each new teacher, and no mentor shall be assigned more than five new teachers during a given year; (2) each new teacher shall receive formal mentoring conducted electronically, consisting of an established sequence of sessions no shorter than two school years in duration, and three observations at the minimum shall be part of the mentoring; (3) the program shall afford mentor teachers and new teachers with systematic opportunities for contact with each other so they will receive professional and social support in the school environment; (4) new teachers must have the opportunity to participate in professional development; and (5) the program requires formative assessment of new teachers' professional development. These policies were passed in 2003 and no funding has been made available.
- Return to Teaching in Subject Shortage Area Program allows retired teachers to remain in retirement status and continue to receive their retirement annuities while engaging in employment in a designated subject shortage area. It provides health insurance benefits under the state.
- The Illinois Special Education Tuition Waiver aids teaching candidates who commit to teaching special education in Illinois for two years. They are eligible to receive a waiver of all tuition for four years of college.

Appendix E

Description of Ohio Policy Initiatives and Programs

- The legislature appropriated \$187,500 for fiscal years 2006 and 2007 to provide incentives for highly qualified teachers to teach in hard-to-staff schools in the areas of special education or middle or high school science or mathematics.
- To increase the number of teachers in high-need areas such as mathematics, science, and foreign languages in Grades 7–12, the state receives federal funds to support the
- Expanding the Pool of Qualified Teachers program and provide financial aid to current and former military personnel who wish to become teachers.
- A smaller version of a grow-your-own program, Camp Attracting Prospective Educators, is a four-day summer camp experience designed to introduce Ohio high school students to teaching and professional education as career possibilities. The camp provides an opportunity for 100 high school students from diverse backgrounds who are interested in the education field to experience a university environment, to develop leadership skills and positive self-images, to explore a career in education, and to interact with peers and professional role models from diverse backgrounds.
- The state set aside \$7.2 million in 2004 to pay for the application fee for approximately 500 teachers to pursue National Board certification. These moneys also pay for stipends of \$2,500 that the approximately 2,250 nationally certified teachers in Ohio receive annually.
- The Teacher Recognition Program awards mini grants of \$500 to \$6,000 to classroom teachers to improve instruction and student performance.
- State funds support school districts implementing the Teacher Advancement Program. This program, developed by the Milken Family Foundation, bases teacher compensation on demonstrated skills and student achievement. Currently, Columbus and Solon school districts are beginning to implement Teacher Advancement Program and restructure their compensation systems in order to attract, retain, and motivate teachers. In the same vein, in 2004, \$188,000 of the grant money was set aside to support six districts developing performance-based compensation systems.
- Professional academies for teachers, principals, and superintendents in the Appalachian region of Ohio are funded under the Rural Appalachian Initiative.
- Schools with graduation rates of 75 percent or below for an average of three years, or who are in academic emergency, are eligible to receive funding for five additional professional development days for 9th- or 10th-grade reading, writing, mathematics, science, or social studies teachers.
- Leadership training funds are not only for Ohio teachers. The 2004 proposed budget requested \$676,260 for the Ohio Principal Leadership Academy and \$546,000 for the Ohio Leadership Academies for Superintendents.

- The Ohio licensure standards require that new teachers receive mentoring on an ongoing basis consistent with the performance-based assessment and guidelines provided by the Ohio Department of Education. In 2004, \$19.4 million supported the entry-year program. Conversely, state policy suggests that no school district is required to establish or maintain a mentor teacher program in any year unless sufficient funds are appropriated to cover the district's total costs for the program.

Appendix F

Description of Wisconsin Policy Initiatives and Programs

- Legislation indicates that the “state superintendent may not grant to any person a license to teach unless the person has received instruction in the study of minority-group relations, including instruction in the history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in this state.”
- In 2000, a new state law required higher education institutions to rework all professional education programs to include performance-based assessments and other requirements such as testing for content knowledge. This law also changed the landscape of the state’s licensure system to one that includes three tiers—initial, professional, and master level with time limitations—and required professional development and mentoring components.
- The PI 34 Administrative Rules charged the state superintendent to operate a program that would provide prospective teachers with one-semester internships under the supervision of licensed teachers. The program also may fund inservice activities and professional staff development research projects. The state superintendent charges school districts fees for participation in the program.
- Under a consortium consisting of two or more school districts or cooperative educational service agencies, or a combination thereof, the districts may apply to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for a grant to provide technical assistance and training for teachers who are licensed or have been issued a permit by the state superintendent. Furthermore, in 2003, \$500,000 was set aside to fund peer-review and mentoring programs. The grantees are required to provide matching funds, which may be in the form of money or in-kind services, equivalent to at least 20 percent of the amount awarded.
- Loan forgiveness or loan deferment is embedded into policies addressing the need for teachers in the city of Milwaukee. For example, the Milwaukee Teacher Education Center offers a loan program to defray the tuition costs for those enrolled in a teacher education program.
- The Minority Teacher Loan Program provides financial resources of up to \$2,500 per year to minority college juniors or seniors or candidates already holding a bachelor’s degree who are enrolled in a program of study leading to teacher licensure. Loans are forgiven when the borrower is employed in an eligible Wisconsin school district. Students must agree to teach in districts with at least 29 percent minority students. One fourth of loans and interest are forgiven for each year the recipient teaches in designated districts.
- Wisconsin has nearly \$46 million in Title II, Part Q, funds to train, hire, and retain skilled educators. The funds will be distributed based on enrollment (20 percent) and number of students below poverty line (80 percent). To be eligible for a subgrant, a local educational agency shall conduct an assessment of local needs for professional development and hiring. The district also may use these funds to recruit and hire highly qualified teachers.

- A recent assembly bill (AB 100) directs the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to award grants of up to \$100,000 to no more than 20 school districts for the design, development, and implementation of a differentiated compensation program for teachers in the 2005–07 fiscal biennium. To be eligible for a grant, a program must base all or part of teacher salary increases on one or more of the following factors:
 - An increase in a teacher’s knowledge about teaching or about the subjects he or she teaches or an improvement in his or her teaching skills.
 - The assumption by a teacher of additional responsibilities, including mentoring other teachers.
 - The assignment of a teacher to a grade level or subject area in which there are teacher shortages.
 - The assignment of a teacher to a school that is hard to staff or is low in pupil performance.
- Last year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction received \$1.5 million to support state teacher reform efforts. This year, a Teacher Quality Supplemental Grant of \$113,375 was awarded to the Wisconsin PK–16 Leadership Council, organized by leaders of Wisconsin’s educator sectors. The Teacher Quality Enhancement funding will support leadership and collaboration efforts to continue reforms of teacher education and licensing in the state. One of the council’s goals is to improve the quality of PK–16 teacher preparation and professional development.



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