

# **Effective Teaching for All Children: What It Will Take**

**Teaching Quality *and* Equity Platform**

**The Education First Compact  
and  
The Philadelphia Cross City Campaign for School Reform**

**March 2009**

**All children** in Philadelphia have the right to have consistently effective teaching in every content area and at every grade level, Pre-K through 12.

In too many of our schools, however, the level of teaching and learning does not meet student needs and does not ensure student graduation and postsecondary success. Furthermore too many inexperienced teachers are concentrated in high-poverty and needy schools where they stay only briefly. Subsequently, poor and minority children have the least chance of being taught by a stable, talented combination of effective new and veteran teachers. This teacher “gap” contributes greatly to the District’s stark achievement gap.

To ensure that all children achieve the basic student right of consistent, quality instruction, we, the undersigned, urge that the School District of Philadelphia recruit, reward, and retain talented school staff; distribute teachers equitably; and effectively support their development in every school.

Two imperatives guide this platform:

**Every child deserves an effective teacher.**

**Every school needs a stable workforce of effective teachers.**

We believe that in order to translate these basic imperatives into reality, the District must do the following:

- 1. Distribute experienced and effective teachers equitably across District schools.**
- 2. Create performance standards for teachers and principals that are aligned with student success, and implement them consistently district-wide.**
- 3. Create an effective professional development strategy that is guided by teacher input and creates a “culture of collaboration” in schools.**
- 4. Give school leaders the tools & resources to hire and create teams of effective teachers.**
- 5. Create a “deep bench” of applicants for teaching positions.**
- 6. Open school with NO teacher vacancies.**

## **The Time is Right**

We believe that this is a crucial moment to demand change on these issues. The opportunities to make significant changes--right now—are heightened because of Superintendent Arlene Ackerman’s commitment to eliminating the achievement gap, the District’s current strategic planning process, the re-negotiation of the contract between the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, and the additional funding available from federal grants, including “economic stimulus” aid. Moreover, the reform of Pennsylvania’s education finance system means that Philadelphia will also receive “PACT” (Pennsylvania’s Accountability to Commonwealth Taxpayers) funds that can help to support these reforms.

Organizations and individuals who believe in the power of education to change lives have joined together to address the urgent need for effective teachers and stable staffing patterns in all of our city’s schools. Our children have waited long enough. We implore District, civic, and business leaders, parents, students and all community residents to add their voices to ours, to make Philadelphia a city where education comes first and where good teaching and school leadership is expected and supported.

# *Necessary Steps to Ensure Effective Teaching for All Children*

## **1. Distribute experienced and effective teachers equitably across District schools.**

The District must actively manage staffing to ensure an effective and stable mix of novice and successful, experienced teachers in **all** schools. To attract and maintain high performing teachers, the District must offer meaningful incentives **and** develop mechanisms to change the work environment in hard-to-staff schools. The District should establish specific targets and timelines for achieving greater equity in the distribution of teachers.

### *Suggested Reforms*

- **Use actual teacher salaries, not averages, in developing school budgets.** The District currently uses average teacher salaries to create school budgets. However, some schools, especially high-need schools, have large numbers of new teachers with below-average salaries and, in effect, receive less funding. **In these instances, the District must eliminate the disparity caused by the difference between average and actual teacher salaries.** This can be accomplished by a) using actual teacher salaries in school budgets; OR b) allocating to schools with more new teachers, funding equal to the difference between the actual salaries of their teachers and the District's average salaries. The additional funds would be used by the leadership team at each school to improve the working environment and attract other experienced, effective teachers to their school. The leadership team could choose from a menu of research-based options developed by the central administration, including additional teachers, coaches, mentors, social service supports, common planning time, materials and supplies, or other needs. School-based decisions would maximize staff ownership of any intervention.
- **Assign effective principals to lead the hardest-to-staff schools.** Principals who are strong instructional leaders, who create positive school climates, and who promote a professional learning community among teachers are more likely to retain teachers in their buildings.
- **Offer incentives for experienced, successful educators to teach in hard-to-staff schools.** Incentives should be designed to attract successful veteran teachers both from within the School District of Philadelphia and other districts. Designed with the input of existing school teaching staffs, incentives might include: salary bonuses, performance-based pay or housing cost assistance. <sup>i, ii</sup>
- **Track and share data on the distribution of teachers and make that information available to the public.**
- **Offer hard-to-staff schools advantages in the hiring process.** Offer principals from hard-to-staff schools preferred status in the hiring process. This could include holding early hiring events specifically for these schools, so that candidates could learn about incentives before interviewing with other schools.

## *Necessary Steps*

### **2. Create performance standards for teachers and principals that are aligned with student success, and implement them consistently district-wide.**

Good teaching should be clearly defined, in order to bring about high-quality teaching and learning. However, there is no clear definition and no commonly held standard across the School District of Philadelphia for high-quality teaching. Standards vary by region and administrative unit and are often not aligned with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, grade level performance or PSSA proficiency.

#### *Suggested Reforms*

- **Create performance standards for teaching and school leadership aligned with current research.** The District should engage teachers, principals, students, and parents along with national experts, to develop standards for teachers and principals,
- **Create a new performance evaluation system, including performance metrics, based on teaching and school leadership standards.** Consistent standards must be implemented across schools, right now. The current evaluation protocol (with only “satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory” performance criteria) is neither useful nor consistently implemented. Principals should observe and evaluate teachers as described in the 2007 Strategic Professional Development Review of the School District of Philadelphia prepared by Education Resource Strategies (ERS). In the interim, the District should mandate use of the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s (PDE) forms 426, 427, and 428 which are used successfully in many suburban school districts and provide a coherent framework. The District can replace these forms once it has created its own documents and training.
- **Use rigorous performance standards in tenure reviews, decisions on teacher termination, and in the determination of professional development needs.**
- **Upgrade and connect data systems so that personnel information, evaluations, and professional development, etc. can be accessed seamlessly.** Currently, data is kept in separate places within the District making it impossible to chart teachers’ backgrounds, needs, and professional development experiences. An upgraded system could track teachers from their first contact (e.g. field practicum or student teaching) through retirement. The data systems should be integrated with other city and regional data systems as needed.

## *Necessary Steps*

### **3. Create and implement an effective professional development strategy that is guided by teacher input and creates a “culture of collaboration” in schools.**

Effective professional development is essential to improving teaching and learning. The District must upgrade the instructional practices of teachers in order to improve both student academic performance and social skills. Scarce resources (including short term federal “stimulus” funds) should be invested heavily in effective professional development.

#### *Suggested Reforms*

- **Adopt the ERS recommendations for the development of a comprehensive professional development plan (for both principals and teachers).** In its 2007 Strategic Professional Development Review of the School District of Philadelphia, Education Resource Strategies (ERS) found that the District has a “significant need for a strategic professional development strategy. And, “...like many urban districts, the District does not systematically measure, collect, or use evidence-based metrics on teaching quality, leadership capacity, or comprehensive school needs to inform professional development planning. The District must increase investment in professional development and create a comprehensive human capital management strategy that rethinks how it invests in teachers, including alternative career ladders and compensation structures.”
- **Use new standards and evaluations (see Plank #2) to target and guide professional development for teachers and principals**
- **Create adequate and well-facilitated common planning time for teachers to collaborate as professionals.** (According to ERS, at least 90 minutes per week in blocks no less than 45 minutes).
- **Provide new teachers with significant support (induction and mentoring) for their first three years--especially in their first year.** Studies have shown that a system of intensive supports for new teachers improves retention rates and teacher effectiveness.
- **Revise teacher compensation based on unrestricted educational attainment.** Each year the District spends \$63 million on teacher salary increases based upon classes teachers take. This is 39% of the overall spending on professional development. There are no restrictions on the classes, and therefore no guarantee that the classes will address student or teacher needs. The District needs to provide salary increases based on improved performance, and NOT on taking classes with no demonstrable impact.
- **Allow schools to have significant control over their professional development with strong support from central office.**
- **Establish subject-area teacher leaders/coaches in all schools.** School-based teacher leaders/coaches with subject-area expertise provide targeted guidance for their colleagues and play a critical role in creating professional learning communities that are focused on improving student learning.

## *Necessary Steps*

### **4. Give school leaders tools & resources to hire and create teams of effective teachers.**

Research tells us that schools are the most important sites for teacher learning and that a positive school environment is crucial for new teacher retention. Principals and their school leadership teams (which include teacher leaders, and parent and student representatives) must hire their own staff and create professional learning communities. In addition, professional development must be school driven and take into account the schools' actual needs and goals.

## *Suggested Reforms*

- **Adopt full site selection at all schools. School leadership teams must be able to select their own teachers, in order to create effective and stable teams of teachers.** The current hybrid system confuses both applicants and administrators and impedes efficient and equitable hiring. The role of seniority preference in the staffing process should be minimized.
- **Hold principals accountable for hiring teachers and support them in the hiring process.** The District should provide principals with training on both determining their hiring needs and selecting teachers. Principal participation in job fairs should be made mandatory and principals should be meaningfully evaluated on their participation in the hiring process.
- **Increase parent and student input in the hiring process.** Students and parents should participate in the interview process and have a say in what qualifications are needed for a school's particular positions.
- **Provide supports and trainings to develop distributed leadership in all schools.** For school-level decision making to be effective, distributed leadership skills and opportunities have to be cultivated. For example, leadership opportunities could include establishing school-based, subject area teacher leaders (see Plank #3) and teachers that provide in-class support.
- **Create a career lattice for teachers.** Keep talented educators in the classroom and in the system by providing career advancement opportunities.

## *Necessary Steps*

### **5. Create a “deep bench” of applicants for teaching positions.**

There are, on average, two and a half applicants for each teacher vacancy in Philadelphia, and often there are several applicants for some positions and none for other, harder to fill, positions. This can lead to classroom vacancies and the hiring of less talented teachers. This does not have to be the case. Other cities have tackled this recruitment problem and increased their pool of applicants. Expanded recruitment efforts should seek out high-performing graduates and experienced teachers with excellent knowledge of their subject area, strong pedagogical skills, and a desire to work in urban classrooms. Targeting applicants with Philadelphia roots may also increase retention.

### *Suggested Reforms*

- **Identify and aggressively recruit high performing students in traditional and alternative teacher certification programs.** Early recruitment will give the District an advantage in attracting top graduates. To attract more highly qualified teachers, the District should recruit in neighboring states and then help certified teachers obtain PA certification waivers, or reciprocity agreements.
- **Evaluate and expand the “Teacher Diversity Campaign.”** Minority teachers have been found to have a positive effect on the academic performance of minority students.<sup>iii</sup> The District should evaluate its progress in recruiting more teachers of color.
- **Expand teacher residencies and other “alternative routes” into the teaching profession.** Often aimed at career changers or new teachers, alternative routes should be aligned with the District’s short and long-term staffing plans. This includes the development of ways to keep talent in the District.
- **Develop a “Grow Your Own” Program.** The District should develop teacher training programs for individuals without bachelor’s degrees who are either currently employed in or active in District schools or community education groups. Teachers who come through these kinds of programs are much more likely to enter hard-to-fill positions and stay in low-income schools.<sup>iv</sup> The District should explore collaboration with teacher preparation institutions and community-based organizations to develop a Grow Your Own program.

## *Necessary Steps*

### **6. Open school with NO teacher vacancies.**

Classrooms without teachers are dangerous and unfair to students. They are disruptive to student learning and to the school community as a whole. The District should complete teacher assignment early in the summer so that school communities have sufficient time to prepare for the school year.

#### *Suggested Reforms*

- **Move up the hiring schedule so that hiring decisions can be made earlier in the year.**
- **Move up the timeline of transfers of veteran teachers.**
- **Revise retirement rules and incentives so that teachers give timely notice of their retirement (preferably by mid-March).**
- **Determine staffing vacancies in a timely manner and work with partners to fill expected vacancies.**
- **Eliminate agreements and practices that do not permit the hiring of new teachers until all current teachers have been placed.**

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<sup>i</sup> National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (June 2007) Policy Brief: The High Cost of Teacher Turnover, *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future*, Washington: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future . One model initiative was created in Chattanooga and has resulted in a significant decrease in vacancies at the District's lowest performing schools.

<sup>ii</sup> Incentives for teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools are a permissible use of PACT (Pennsylvania's Accountability to Commonwealth Taxpayers) funds.

<sup>iii</sup> Dee, T. S. (2001). *Teachers, race, and student achievement in a randomized experiment*. NBER Working Paper Series. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>iv</sup> Young, V. & Berry, J. (2006). *Grow Your Own Illinois: An Innovative Approach to Providing High Quality Teaching in Low Income Communities*. Independence, OH: Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling.

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*For more information on the Effective Teaching for All Children campaign or to endorse the campaign go to: [www.phillyTOE.org](http://www.phillyTOE.org)*

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*The Education First Compact, convened by the Philadelphia Education Fund, is a diverse group of organizations committed to improving public education in Philadelphia.*

*The Philadelphia Cross City Campaign for School Reform is a standing coalition of local organizing and advocacy groups seeking to improve Philadelphia public schools and increase equity in education.*