

Human Capital–Personnel and Professional Development: Introduction

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Critical to the turnaround or transformation of low-performing districts into high-performing learning systems is a robust human capital strategy at the district level that is coupled with high-quality interventions at the school level. Districts must be able to secure and retain a sufficient number of highly effective teachers and principals (their human capital) to ensure that their education systems can successfully deliver higher levels of student achievement.

Compared to other sectors, education lags behind in its efforts to strategically attract and retain top talent. Where other industries refer to a “war for talent” (MacMillan, 2008), the education field is far more subdued in its campaign for more high-quality educators and its actions to meet this goal. A joint study by the IBM Institute for Business Value and the Human Capital Institute found that, while attention to human capital practices varied substantially across industries, *the education field was found to be the least likely to engage in “enlightened talent management practices”* [emphasis added] (Ringo, Schweyer, DeMarco, Jones, & Lesser, 2008, p. 9).

This lack of prioritization of educator talent management is especially unfortunate given that research consistently finds teachers to be the most important school-level factor that affects student achievement, with school leaders being the second most influential contributor to student success. Despite the centrality of excellent teachers and principals for student growth, far too often shortages of effective staff exist. This longstanding problem is especially prevalent in certain subjects, such as mathematics, science, and special education, and certain locations, including rural and urban areas. Typically, these shortages stem not from a paucity of teachers being produced through preparation programs, but rather from pre-retirement attrition from schools. Such attrition is worst in small, high-poverty schools in urban and rural locations (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009). There is also evidence that new teachers in special education are more than twice as likely as other teachers to leave the profession (Butler, 2008). The financial cost of teacher attrition and movement from school to school—underwritten in large part by the American taxpayer—is nearly \$5 billion annually across the country (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005).

A systemic process of comprehensive support must be in place for low-performing schools and districts to attract, develop, and retain effective educators for all learners. A systemic approach involves addressing the whole spectrum of educator quality policies across the educator’s career continuum (Behrstock & Meyer, 2009). This includes educator recruitment and hiring, induction and ongoing professional development, opportunities

for career growth, compensation and incentives, and performance management. Leaders at the district and school level must collaboratively work to align educator quality policies to ensure that a systemic process of support is in place.

In the briefs that follow, resources are provided to support the following approaches to improving human capital:

1. Recruiting staff and attracting high-quality staff to hard-to-staff schools
2. Improving staff evaluation systems
3. Performance-based incentives
4. Differentiating roles, re-assigning staff, and aligning staff competencies with school/student needs
5. Retaining staff
6. Providing career growth ladders
7. Providing professional development

Each of these approaches is outlined in more detail below, along with supporting resources. Local leaders who genuinely support school transformation and are determined to impact, improve, and advance educator quality policies and practices must invest heavily and take deliberate action in the systemic management of the district's most important resource: effective teachers and school leaders.

References

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