TEACH +PLUS

Opportunities for Teachers,
Results for Urban Students

*The Equity Equation:
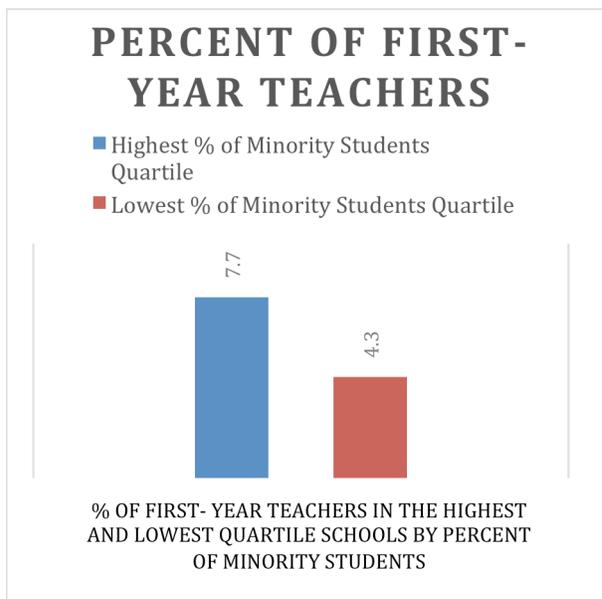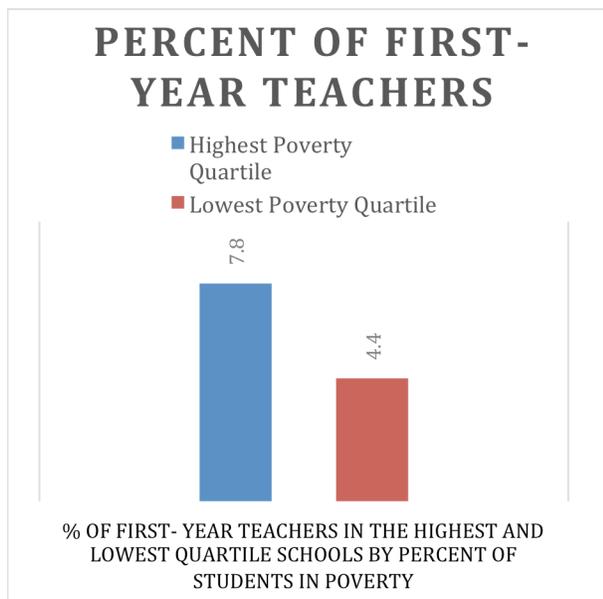Teachers Advise on
Massachusetts' Equity Plan*

Introduction

As Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows, a diverse group of teachers with wide-ranging experiences working in high-needs communities across the Commonwealth, we are committed to ensuring that all students across the Commonwealth have equitable access to experienced and highly effective teachers. As part of our 18-month Fellowship, we have conducted research and considered our own experience to make the following recommendations to achieve this goal.

A Big Problem

Low-income students and students of color in schools in every state across the country are at a severe disadvantage in terms of educational access and opportunity. As U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently noted, these students' disadvantage is considerable in many different areas including "access to safe and healthy learning environments, quality instructional materials and supports, rigorous expectations and course work,"[1] but most notably in their access to the teachers they need to succeed. According to researchers Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff, low-income students and students of color are disproportionately more likely to have teachers who are less effective, unqualified, inexperienced and/or teaching out-of-field.[2]

Massachusetts is no exception. Massachusetts data provided by the U.S. Department of Education reveals that the state's Highest Poverty Quartile Schools employ first-year teachers at almost twice the rate of low-poverty schools (7.8 percent and 4.4 percent, respectively.) The data is similarly bleak when comparing schools with high percentages of minority students: the Highest Minority Quartile Schools employ 7.7 percent of teachers in their first year compared to 4.3 percent in the Lowest Minority Quartile Schools.

PERCENT OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS

- Highest Poverty Quartile
- Lowest Poverty Quartile

7.8

4.4

% OF FIRST- YEAR TEACHERS IN THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST QUARTILE SCHOOLS BY PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN POVERTY

PERCENT OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS

- Highest % of Minority Students Quartile
- Lowest % of Minority Students Quartile

7.7

4.3

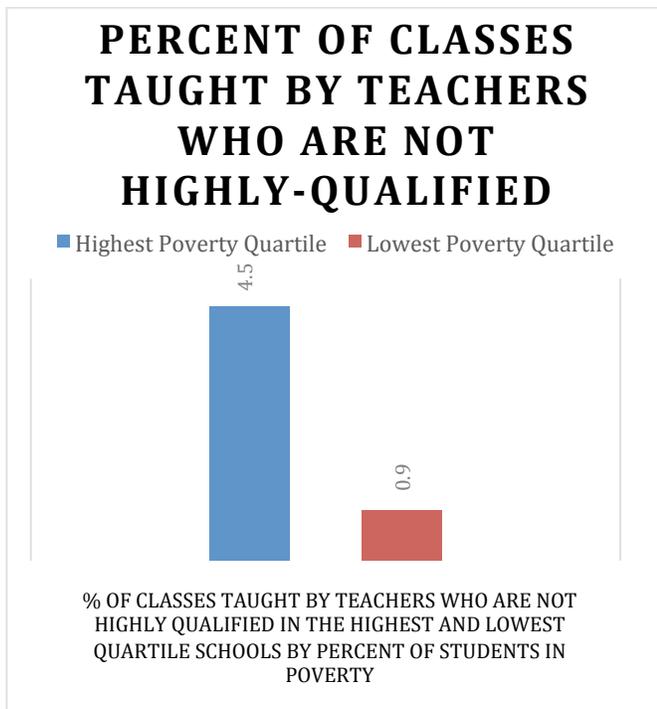% OF FIRST- YEAR TEACHERS IN THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST QUARTILE SCHOOLS BY PERCENT OF MINORITY STUDENTS

An even starker contrast exists when analyzing the distribution of teachers who do not meet the definition of highly qualified: 4.5 percent of classes taught by teachers who are not highly-qualified to 0.9 percent of classes taught by teachers who are not highly qualified.

In order to be defined as highly qualified in Massachusetts, teachers must
1) possess a Bachelor's degree;
2) possess a valid and active Massachusetts teaching license; and
3) demonstrate subject matter competency in each of the core subject areas they are teaching.[3]

According to this data, that means that students in low-income schools are roughly five times as likely to be in a classroom taught by a teacher who is not highly-qualified. Additionally, 4.4 percent of classes taught by teachers who are not highly qualified in High Minority Quartile schools compared to 1.2 percent in Low Minority Quartile schools.[4] This data shines light on a serious injustice in Massachusetts. In many districts across the Commonwealth, the students who need outstanding, experienced teachers the most have the least access to them. Without quality instruction, these students cannot make the gains necessary to be college and career ready.

PERCENT OF CLASSES TAUGHT BY TEACHERS WHO ARE NOT HIGHLY-QUALIFIED

■ Highest Poverty Quartile ■ Lowest Poverty Quartile

4.5

0.9

% OF CLASSES TAUGHT BY TEACHERS WHO ARE NOT HIGHLY QUALIFIED IN THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST QUARTILE SCHOOLS BY PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN POVERTY

PERCENT OF CLASSES TAUGHT BY TEACHERS WHO ARE NOT HIGHLY-QUALIFIED

■ Highest Proportion Quartile
■ Lowest Proportion Quartile

4.4

1.2

% OF CLASSES TAUGHT BY TEACHERS WHO ARE NOT HIGHLY QUALIFIED IN THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST QUARTILE SCHOOLS BY PERCENT OF MINORITY STUDENTS

Executive Summary

Low-income students and students of color in schools in every state across the country are at a severe disadvantage in terms of educational access and opportunity. Low-income students and students of color are disproportionately more likely to have teachers who are less effective, unqualified, inexperienced and/or teaching out-of-field. Massachusetts is no exception.

Teachers are the most significant factor in student achievement. We must recruit and retain the best teachers for the students that need them the most. The task of increasing the equitable distribution of effective teachers to underperforming schools involves 1) retaining, 2) attracting, and 3) developing teachers. Below are our recommendations:

Retain
Recommendation 1: Employ targeted recruitment and retention strategies to ensure experienced and effective principals in all high-needs schools.

Recommendation 2: Provide social and emotional learning (SEL) program grants for high-needs schools to assist students and increase teacher retention.

Recommendation 3: Provide compensated teacher leadership opportunities to ensure continued growth and teacher retention.

Attract
Recommendation 4: Implement a staggered, autonomous, data driven hiring process for high-needs schools.

Recommendation 5: Hold teacher preparation programs accountable for preparing program graduates to be effective educators, including 1) content and pedagogical knowledge, and 2) practical experience with mentorship from culturally responsive master educators.

Develop
Recommendation 6: Double down on the effective implementation of the teacher evaluation system, including providing each teacher with multiple trained observers, frequent observations, and coaching.

Recommendation 7: Use data from the improved evaluation system to provide more meaningful professional development to further develop effective teachers.

It is imperative that we attract and retain high performing teachers to the schools that need them the most; specifically, the schools with high poverty rates and large percentages of minority students. As a state that promises to provide a free and quality education to every child, we must hold ourselves accountable to keeping this promise for the populations that often end up with the least qualified and fewest effective teachers.

Quality teachers are the single most important factor in student achievement. Let's make sure that all

students have equitable access to great teachers by setting up systems to retain, attract, and develop effective teachers to the schools that need them the most.

A Bigger Opportunity for Change

How can we address this access gap? Teachers are the key. Teachers are the most significant factor in student achievement. We must recruit and retain the best teachers for the students that need them the most. The task of increasing the equitable distribution of effective teachers to underperforming schools involves (1) identifying excellent teachers, (2) creating and maintaining conducive working environments to retain already effective teachers, (3) enticing other effective teachers to work at schools with the highest percentages of low-income students and students of color, and (4) continually providing supports and opportunities for teacher growth and leadership. Targeted reform in these areas will allow substantial positive change for many students.

The Massachusetts Equity Plan due to the U.S. Department of Education in June is our opportunity to begin this much needed reform across the state. As key education stakeholders, teachers' input in the Equity Plan is essential. Based on our experiences as educators and thorough research in policy and reform, we have crafted the following recommendations to strengthen the Massachusetts Equity Plan. We are confident our recommendations will retain, attract and develop the effective teachers needed to improve underperforming schools serving large populations of low income students and students of color throughout Massachusetts.

We would love to say that an easy solution to this problem exists -- a simple teacher reassignment policy, a tweak to student assignment, or a targeted stipend to attract highly-effective teachers to the highest-needs schools. However, the problems are too complex to be solved with technical fixes. Below are the real-world solutions that we believe will make the real impact that our most vulnerable students deserve.

Recommendations for Retaining, Attracting and Developing (R.A.D) Teachers
In order to ensure that high-needs students have equitable access to highly-effective teachers, we must Retain, Attract, and Develop highly effective and highly qualified teachers in underperforming schools throughout the state of Massachusetts. You could call this strategy R.A.D. The goal of this approach is to ensure that the students who need it the most have access to great teachers who will impact their learning and help to close the achievement gap. In order to measure success, we recommend that the rollout of the Equity Plan first target schools that are at Level 3, because these schools are in jeopardy of continued underperformance and are failing our students academically, emotionally and socially. Schools classified as Level 3 are seldom provided with the additional funding or supports needed for them to reach and sustain positive outcomes for student achievement.

Below are seven recommendations falling into the R.A.D. categories.

I. Retain

Recommendation 1: Employ targeted recruitment and retention strategies to ensure experienced and effective principals in all high-needs schools.

There are many factors that affect teacher retention but school leadership has the largest impact on overall teacher satisfaction and retention, according to Education Trust.[5] Effective school administrators encourage positive school culture and therefore teacher retention by establishing and supporting clear and focused instructional goals that guide academic progress and setting professional expectations that foster collaboration based on trust, respect, shared responsibility and professional growth.

High-needs schools require administrators with a proven track record of success in improving underperforming schools and increasing student achievement. "The Effective Principal" tells us that school leadership is the "second most important school-based factor in children's academic achievement... [there are] few, if any, cases of troubled schools turning around without effective leaders."[6] In an eight-year longitudinal study that compared principals' characteristics to school performance in New York City Public Schools, data shows that there is a positive correlation between a principal's years of experience and student achievement as measured by standardized tests.[7] Experienced and high quality school leadership is critical to improving learning conditions for low-income students of color.

Considering the effect that administrators have on students and teachers, we recommend that districts strive to ensure that a significantly higher percentage of high-needs schools have a principal with at least five years of experience and with consistent positive student achievement data. Principals placed in underperforming schools serving a majority of low income students and students of color should be required to commit at least five years to their schools. We also recommend incentives to encourage and support these experienced and effective principals' commitment to high-needs schools including progress-based salary bonuses, ongoing administrative training and professional development, and the guarantee of an assistant principal.

Best Practices in Administrative Professional Development
Lynch Leadership Academy, Boston College

Ongoing administrative training and quality professional development is critical for successful principals. The best professional development is specific, actionable, reflective and collaborative. The Lynch Leadership Academy at Boston College embodies these characteristics in their fellowship programs.

The Lynch Leadership Academy uses a comprehensive coaching and residency model to develop effective early and mid-career school principals in urban charter, private and district schools. Fellows are accepted into one of two program cohorts: Aspiring Principal or Sitting Principal. In order to meet

the specific needs of each Fellow and his/her school, the curriculum is differentiated and includes a leadership assessment and school review, a two-day retreat, a two-week summer institute, monthly data-driven professional workshops, local and out-of state school visits and regular individualized coaching. Throughout the course of the year-long program, the Fellows interact with other school leaders and experts from across multiple fields to create and implement an Individual Development Plan that targets specific improvements to effect positive school change and to increase student achievement. In addition, Fellows in the Aspiring Principal program complete a residency program with an effective Mentor Principal to learn, implement and receive feedback around key skills in school leadership such as leading professional development and leadership team meetings, observing and providing feedback for teachers, community and stakeholder engagement and managing daily school operations.

As a teacher at a school whose administrator participated in the Lynch Leadership Academy Sitting Principal Fellowship, Rachael Conway had this to say: "Periodically, my principal's coach and fellow cohort members would come visit our school. They would sit in on our one-on-one meetings with the principal, observe classrooms, and basically shadow my principal throughout the day. As a teacher, it was really nice to see my principal seeking out professional development that would help her grow in her practice. Throughout the school year, my principal's leadership skills really improved and it was reflected in our staff culture and our student results."

Boston Public Schools has partnered with The Lynch Leadership Academy. This district-based principal training and certification program seeks effective educators to participate in the program. In addition to a salary to participate in the year-long course, upon completion of the program and licensure as a school administrator, the Fellow is required to commit at least three years as a Boston Public School principal.

Recommendation 2: Provide social and emotional learning (SEL) program grants for high-needs schools to assist students and increase teacher retention.

The National School Climate Center (NSCC) defines school climate as "the quality and character of school life...based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures."[8] School climate can have a significant impact on teacher retention -- or lack thereof. In addition, studies show that positive and sustained school climates can lead to outcomes such as "positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention."[9] Unfortunately, schools in high-needs districts often lack the organizational structures and supports to effectively foster a strong sense of school community and positive climate. This results in increased student misbehavior, school safety concerns, and high teacher and family attrition.

Given the benefits of a sustained, positive school climate, we recommend that Massachusetts invest in grants that would help high-needs schools develop and maintain positive school climates, with the support of evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. SEL programs provide both students and educators with the tools and ongoing supports to "acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."[10] SEL programs have been empirically proven to result in higher academic achievement as well as socio-emotional and behavioral growth in grades K-12.[11] SEL programs such as Open Circle currently exist in some schools in Massachusetts. However, these programs are often not available in high-needs schools due to lack of funds in the school budget. With these SEL grants, students will no longer feel unsafe in school. By creating this SEL grant program, schools will have the opportunity to build a school community based on a clear school vision, ultimately transforming their school culture, and in doing so, improving school discipline, academic achievement and teacher retention.

We recommend that Massachusetts districts use yearly school climate data from their own districts as well as the TELL Mass Survey to determine which high-needs schools would be eligible to apply for SEL grants. These grants would fund three or more years of a research-based SEL program that administrators, teachers and parents would select for their school. These guidelines would ensure consistency, program effectiveness, as well as staff and parent buy-in.

Students Weigh in on School Climate
By Bernadine Lormilus

I teach at a first-year turnaround school in Boston Public Schools. My school is comprised of students from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Approximately 90 percent of the students receive free lunch and they come from various communities throughout the city of Boston.

As a first-year turnaround school, there are many systems that we are trying to put in place to help improve the school culture and student learning. We have a team of teachers and administrative staff members who meet weekly to discuss ways to improve the school climate. One of the ideas we have implemented was to create school-wide norms so that all staff members are using the same language with students. Our norms are: Respect, Responsibility, and Safety. All teachers have these norms posted in their classrooms as well as throughout the school hallways as reminders for students to remember the school expectations.

In December 2014, a group of fourth and fifth grade students from my school were surveyed about the quality of the school's climate. The purpose of this survey was to hear from students about how they think some of the behavior issues in the school can be resolved.

Students were asked **"What makes you feel safe/unsafe in school?"** The students' responses demonstrate the impact that school climate can have on students' sense of well-being and ability to learn:

"When I get in fights and I feel hurt and get in trouble, I feel like I'm unsafe and this is not fair."

"What makes me feel safe is learning what I can learn and getting fresh air."

Students were asked a final question: **"What do you think teachers/adults can do to help create a safe, learning environment in school?**

These were some of the students' responses:

"Teachers can work with them and have a talk with them."

"Teachers need to help protect kids from doing bad stuff."

"Teachers should stop the kids that are fighting and convince them to learn. I want you guys to stop them by catching them and calming them down."

"I think teachers and adults can help my school become safer because they can make the kids think about what's going to happen in the future. Maybe they will change."

"Well, I don't know much they can do. Only because I feel safe most of the time, but one thing the teachers can stop is people fighting and yelling in the halls because most of it gives me anxiety."

Recommendation 3: Provide compensated teacher leadership opportunities to ensure continued growth and teacher retention.

Unfortunately, high-poverty, low performing districts are subject to a higher teacher turnover rate compared to their higher income counterparts. For example, in 2014, Fall River Public School District witnessed a 23 percent attrition rate,[12] whereas Newton Public School District's attrition rate was only eight percent.[13] High turnover in schools directly impacts the success and security of students, especially low-income students and students of color. A study by Ronfeldt et al. concluded, "Teacher turnover has significant and negative effect on student achievement…Moreover, teacher turnover is particularly harmful to students in schools in large populations of low-performing and black students."[14] In order to sustain the growth and change in these upward rising high poverty schools, we need to address these alarming retention rates by incentivizing effective educators to stay in the schools who need them most.

Data from the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2013) shows that "lack of upward mobility" is one of the root causes for the inequitable distribution of effective teachers.[15] By building on the capital of excellent teachers in these high-poverty, low-performing districts, we will be able to close the achievement gap and provide equitable and quality instruction for all Massachusetts students.

We recommend providing compensated teacher leadership opportunities that empower high-quality educators to strengthen their school community by utilizing their strengths both in the classroom and in the school community. Students, teachers, schools and districts benefit when high quality teachers are used to lead a group of colleagues in their school or district through professional learning cohorts.

These cohorts target specific instructional practices and strategies for increasing student achievement. Effective teachers are more likely to stay in the classroom when they have leadership opportunities. Therefore, it is essential that the state provides the resources and support needed to provide these opportunities.

Best Practices: Teacher Leadership

Teach Plus T3 Initiative
The T3 Initiative is an example of teacher leadership program currently operating in the Commonwealth. Designed by Massachusetts teachers in the Teach Plus Policy Fellows program in order to attract highly-effective teachers to high-needs schools, the initiative trains and supports experienced, effective teachers to become T3 Teacher Leaders; preparing them to lead their peers in improving instructional practice and accelerating student academic outcomes while continuing to teach full time.

The Core Collaborative (C2) Initiative
Designed by Massachusetts Teach Plus Policy Fellows, the Core Collaborative (C2) Initiative is a teacher-led professional learning series that brings teachers together to collaboratively learn from each other. Selected expert educators, called C2 Teacher Leaders, facilitate multiple sessions to improve their peers' knowledge of Common Core's implementation, instructional strategies and practices, in order to promote student learning and achievement.

Professional Learning Communities of Effectiveness Grant
The Professional Learning Communities of Effectiveness Grant was established in Washington, D.C. as a part of Race to the Top to build and develop Professional Learning Communities working to address a common educational challenge.

T3 Initiative: The Power of Teacher Leadership
By Rachael Conway

At the beginning of this school year, Dana didn't know her alphabet. Michael could barely decode at an early kindergarten level and struggled with common sight words. During our weekly Service Team Meetings, we set action plans for struggling students like Dana and Michael who really need great teachers and great instruction. I led professional development on guided reading to help equip my team with the skills needed to help these students reach their full potential. Both Dana and Michael grew four reading levels in the first four months of the school year!

My work as a Teacher Leader with Teach Plus' T3 Initiative not only helps me impact my own students, but through my work with other teachers, I can have an impact on their students as well. As a Teacher Leader at a turnaround school, I have the opportunity to lead my grade level team in data-driven instructional improvement to achieve gains that can help my students learn and my school exit turnaround status.

On Tuesday mornings, I attend Instructional Leadership Team meetings along with the other T3 Teacher Leaders, the school principal, and the other administrators. I spend a lot of time analyzing data, planning meeting agendas, and supporting my colleagues. Because of this role, I feel a greater sense of leadership and responsibility to my students and to my school. As a leader, I need to be on my A-game and practice what I preach when it comes to my professionalism and teaching practice at my school. I am very invested in the process of turning my school around, and as hiring season approaches I plan to stay at my school. I could go teach at a school with shorter hours and a lighter workload, but being in a leadership role really makes me feel like I can have a huge impact not just on my own class, but on all of the students in the school.

II. Attract

Recommendation 4: Implement a staggered, autonomous, data-driven hiring process for high-needs schools.

Serving our underprivileged students is no easy task, which is one reason that high-needs schools are the hardest to staff. Staffing difficulties force these schools to hire more inexperienced, under-qualified and less effective teachers. Key changes in the hiring process will better identify effective teachers and provide our high-needs schools a stronger opportunity to hire them.

As it is now, our highest need schools often hire late in the process after the hiring pool has dwindled. We recommend district-wide hiring processes be staggered, establishing multiple rounds of hiring that will allow our highest need schools to interview and hire early and first. Also, we recommend full hiring autonomy for high-needs schools, thus eliminating the assignment of displaced tenured teachers in these schools.

The interview process is an integral component in determining teacher excellence. To have the biggest impact on students, it's important for high-needs schools to formulate a thorough understanding of prospective candidates and their ability to increase student achievement. Hiring processes must be data-driven in order to identify the quality teachers needed to better serve our low-income students and students of color. We recommend hiring committees at all high-needs schools receive professional development and training in questioning and analyzing candidates around student achievement data. In addition to the more common interview questions about lesson planning, behavior management styles and parent engagement techniques, interviews must require candidates to provide multiple samples of data to demonstrate student growth. In this way, the hiring process will serve as an opportunity to move beyond mere qualifications, and anecdotal interview answers and focus on teacher excellence.

Hiring Autonomy and Rigor Can Transform Schools

By Ivana Perez-Redondo

Last year, in an effort to recruit more effective and diverse teachers, Boston Public Schools (BPS) revamped its hiring process. As one of the teacher representatives of my school's hiring committee, I witnessed firsthand just how rigorous, collaborative and data-driven this new system is. First, BPS requires administrators, teachers and families to work together throughout the entire hiring process, so that all of our voices are heard. Secondly, the BPS hiring cycle is completely aligned to our highly detailed teacher effectiveness evaluation rubric. When recommending candidates for hire, personnel committees must provide evidence from candidates' resumes, interviews and sample lessons to prove that these teachers have a track record of success.

Although this new process was daunting, BPS provided us with the proper training and tools to make sure we were taking the appropriate steps to hire teachers that would best meet our students' needs. For pre-screenings, BPS trained us on using a resume checklist to note whether candidates listed important details such as student achievement data and involvement in community activities. For interviews, BPS provided us with questions that were relevant to teaching in an urban district, including the meaning of differentiated instruction for diverse students, as well as the importance of cultural competency and using data to track student progress.

The mandatory sample lessons that followed these interviews were also incredibly eye-opening, since they took place at our own school, with our own students. This gave us a taste of teachers' content knowledge, tone, and management style. In these lessons we paid close attention to how candidates interacted with students: Did they explain the purpose of the lesson? Did they only call on the students who raised their hands? How did they respond to the students who were disengaged and had their heads down? Working at a low-performing school, we knew that the stakes were too high to hire candidates who did not demonstrate a sense of urgency in teaching.

While the new BPS hiring process requires some training and extensive documentation, I am confident that it has helped our school community and culture tremendously. In the three years I have worked at my school, we have had 30 to 40 percent staff turnover rates every year due to personnel issues, including inexperienced teachers. Thanks to this new hiring process, we anticipate to have a substantially improved rention rate, providing our students with the stability they need and deserve.

Recommendation 5: Hold teacher preparation programs accountable for preparing program graduates to be effective educators, including 1) content and pedagogical knowledge, and 2) practical experience with mentorship from culturally responsive master educators.

Keeping new teachers in the classroom is a challenge. Across America, teacher attrition at all levels of experience from 1988 to 2008 rose by 41 percent.[16] The drivers of the exodus vary appreciably but for new teachers, it is the lack of preparedness for the realities of the classroom.[17] According to the report Educating School Teachers, three quarters of all the nation's 1,206 colleges and universities are failing

to adequately prepare the teachers they produce.[18] Teacher preparation programs must prepare effective teachers for the demand and changing demographic in urban schools. One of the most powerful levers to create and achieve educational equity for all in the K-12 setting thus begins at the door of the teacher preparation programs.

A recently released policy brief by Teach Plus Massachusetts Policy Fellows, "Ready for Day One," sets forth a three-pronged strategy to reach the goal of improving specific elements of educator preparation programs that lead to the development and delivery of an effective teacher to the classroom on day one.[19] The recommendations set forth are:

1) Rigorous content and pedagogical training that includes diverse learners
Teaching candidates must learn to differentiate instruction for all types of learners, including English Language Learners, special education students, and students with social and emotional needs.

2) High-quality experiential training with an effective mentor
Teaching candidates should engage in a full-year practicum in settings characteristic of the spectrum of classroom settings in the Commonwealth. Each teaching candidate should be mentored by a culturally responsive master educator. This mentorship will help to ensure that novice teachers are prepared to help their students succeed, and will help to reduce attrition.

3) Accountability and evaluation of Teacher Preparation Programs
Finally, the state should expand the measures of teacher preparation programs to include: Volume and quality of practice-based and content specific coursework for teacher candidates; aggregate of student growth measures for program graduates; survey data of program graduates and their employers indicating how well program prepared their graduates to drive student achievement.

The Importance of Mentorship
By Kalimah Rahim

At the start of my teaching career, I met a phenomenal master teacher. She stopped me before I even entered the class and asked me a series of questions. Then and there I became her mentee. I did not have a degree in education nor any experience. That first year after a few obvious stumbles, aha moments, observations of student behavior, and support from my mentor, I worked effectively and raised MCAS scores by 52 percent. I knew nothing about educational theory, but I did know if a student could not write a simple, compound, or complex sentence. I could deduce whether a student made meaning of a text by asking questions that would demonstrate comprehension. I also knew that relevance and engagement mattered. I was not qualified, but I was becoming effective. My on-the-job-training with my mentor was pivotal to how I approach teaching.

Fast forward to today, I am qualified and effective. Yearly, I meet new faces with different needs from my previous classes. Lev Vogotsky, Jean Piaget, and Urie Brofenbrenner are indelibly inked into my mind, so when I meet a troubled student I have the ability to access theory for how to see and discern his or her behavior.

When I met Joseph, he was a reticent, truant, socially and emotionally challenged, youth facing criminal charges. I assigned *Manchild In the Promised Land* by Claude Brown -- a coming-of-age book set in Harlem -- as a jumping-off point to get Joseph engaged. Joseph later shared with me a formative experience. Upon entering a youth detention center he realized "this is *Manchild In the Promised Land*" and understood that education was the only avenue out of his misery. "I don't believe that I had ever actually read an entire book," he said. "It has really changed my life."

By the end of our year together, 2013-2014, Joseph was my best student. He began to stay after school to complete assignments, revised his papers no matter how many times I asked, modeled what it meant to be an engaged reader and critical thinker, and often parroted my statements as he helped other students who were off task: "You're having an off topic conversation. Can I assume that you have completed the assignment?"

At the start of Joseph's senior year, I hardly recognized him as I passed him in the hallway. The transformation was astounding. Upon meeting him again that day I shared my joy in seeing the change in personality and affect. He was in school on time and eager to engage in the process of learning. Gone were the hardened edges that previously held him back from realizing his full potential.

With strong mentorship and pedagogical education, I am realizing mine as well.

III. Develop

Recommendation 6: Double down on the effective implementation of the teacher evaluation system, including providing each teacher with multiple trained observers, frequent observations, and coaching.

Teacher quality matters. As the leaders of their classrooms, teachers play a critical role in students' learning, but not all teachers have the same impact on students. All students deserve effective instruction, which is only possible through reliable evaluations.

Recent changes to the evaluation system have increased the potential for evaluations to be a meaningful tool for educators. The evaluation system includes several strong elements. For example, now all teachers are evaluated on either one- or two-year cycles. Evaluations are now more of a two-way process, where teachers have the opportunity to self-assess, set goals, and upload evidence to showcase their practice.

Unfortunately, the evaluation system has not been implemented consistently or faithfully across school settings in a way that accurately identifies effective teachers. To increase reliability and effectiveness, evaluations should include:
* *Multiple trained observers.* Observers should be required to complete a certification program in order to demonstrate competency in identifying effective classroom practice. Each teacher

should be paired with multiple trained observers to increase reliability of evaluations. Evaluators may include school and district administrators, department directors, coaches, and/or peers. Regardless of role, the key is for all to be fully trained to observe and evaluate.

- *Frequent observations*. To increase reliability, evaluations must occur more than two times per evaluation cycle. Frequent, ongoing classroom visits (both formal and informal) would provide a more accurate gauge on teacher effectiveness. Evaluators should also receive guidance on how to create observation schedule to ensure that they plan to visit every classroom on their caseload.
- *Time and support*. Often, evaluators do not provide thorough evaluations or feedback because they do not have the time. Evaluators often waste so much time simply moving from classroom to classroom, often across schools. In such cases, we recommend the use of video to record lessons to be viewed by a single evaluator or team of evaluators at a later time. Districts should prioritize evaluation check-ins to provide evaluators the opportunity to continue to hone their evaluation skills. This will also provide evaluators the opportunity to connect with others and strategize the best ways to support struggling educators.

A robust evaluation system is only useful when implemented with fidelity within schools and across districts. Through stronger and more accountable implementation, the current evaluation system will be our strongest tool in identifying and developing effective teachers.

The Importance of High-Quality Evaluations
By Lindsey Mayer

It was my first formal evaluation and I had a strong, but not outstanding, evaluation. I was told this was standard for a first-year teacher. I was great, but I shouldn't expect to be earning great reviews until I had a few years under my belt.

I was shocked. Was I really going to be evaluated in a professional setting with a lockstep review typical for all new teachers? I needed constructive feedback on my areas for improvement. And I wanted to be encouraged in specific areas where I shined. This evaluation system seemed very arbitrary to me. And it did not reliably identify where I could grow or what I share what I could for others.

Bottom line, it didn't make me a better teacher for kids.

Now, with six years under my belt, we have welcomed a new evaluation system that has the potential to identify teacher effectiveness. Now, I am assigned a primary evaluator with three secondary evaluators. Observations are more frequent and feedback is more timely. I conduct a self-assessment, upload evidence that demonstrates my performance, creating a more balanced view of my instructional practice. There was a two-way line of communication before my formal formative and summative evaluations.

All the pieces for an effective evaluation system are in place, but those pieces are not consistently

coming together in a meaningful way across the Commonwealth's schools.

Evaluators can be inconsistent. Teachers can choose evidence that may not accurately reflect practice. The process may not be paired with opportunities to develop. In some schools, it still feels like a process for the sake of the process. We have more work to do before the system is helping to improve teacher practice across the state.

Recommendation 7: Use data from improved evaluation system to provide more meaningful professional development to further develop effective teachers.

With an accurate description of teacher effectiveness from improved implementation of the evaluation system, district and school leaders can make smarter decisions that promote greater equity for students. For example, with such data, they have the ability to make informed decisions about which teachers to move or remove, ensuring greater equity in distribution of effective teachers. Moreover, more reliable evaluation systems will allow school leaders to identify specific instructional gaps and offer "high-quality professional development that leads to significant gains in student achievement."[20] Too often, teachers are disenchanted with school-wide and district-wide professional development because it does not always directly benefit their practice.

Therefore, we recommend that school and district leaders aggregate and analyze teacher evaluation data to inform professional development for teachers. As schools link their professional development to evaluation data, they will help educators to respond to the needs of their specific community and students. For instance, if the data shows that teachers need support with behavior management, then school leadership could provide professional development sessions around Positive Behavior Systems or Responsive Classrooms. If the data shows that teachers need assistance with curriculum and planning, then school leadership could provide opportunities to target that instructional gap. In this way, schools can fill specific gaps and strengthen practice from within to better serve students.

From Paper to Practice

As the Department of Elementary And Secondary Education continues to craft and eventually finalize our state's Equity Plan, continued teacher input must remain a high priority throughout the process. Listening to teachers' experiences, ideas, and recommendations will be the difference between strategies that work and those that don't. Also, teacher buy-in is necessary. More teacher input in the development of the Equity Plan will increase general approval and support of the plan and facilitate its implementation. In our dedication to equity, we hope to work in collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to increase teacher input into the Massachusetts Equity Plan and its implementation. We suggest facilitating multiple teacher focus groups as DESE continues to formulate the Equity Plan and as they move from development to finalization.

Too often in education, the best laid plans fall apart during implementation. We suggest the creation of an Equity Task Force. The Equity Task Force should consist of policy makers, teachers, parents and

students who will encourage, support and monitor the implementation of the Equity Plan strategies across the state.

With increased teacher participation through multiple focus groups and the creation of the Equity Task Force, we can help ensure that the strategies in the Equity Plan move from mere paper to effective practice.

Conclusion

It is imperative that we attract, retain, and develop high-performing teachers to the schools that need them the most; specifically, the schools with high poverty rates and large percentages of minority students. As a state that promises to provide a free and quality education to every child, we must hold ourselves accountable to keeping this promise for the populations that often end up with the least qualified and fewest effective teachers.

In order to ensure that the highest performing teachers are teaching in the highest needs schools, we must put systems in place to retain, attract, and develop great teachers. Too often, great teachers don't want to stay in low-performing schools. We must give teachers paid leadership opportunities and carefully select the strongest school leaders who will focus on developing a positive and cohesive school climate for families and staff alike.

In order to get these great teachers through the door, we must transform the hiring process to allow the lowest performing schools to hire early and have the first choice among the best candidates. Great candidates should be identified through an improved data-driven hiring process that requires much more than generic responses to interview questions, and rather, a proven track record of leading students to achieve.

Once we have retained and attracted the best teachers and leaders, we have to invest in their long-term development through targeted professional development that is based off individual teacher needs determined by evaluations, self-assessments, and observations. New teachers must be equipped with the tools to be highly effective in challenging school environments through mentorship programs and improved teacher preparation programs.

Quality teachers are the single most important factor in student achievement. If we retain, attract and develop effective teachers to improve underperforming schools, we can better serve our low income students and students of color throughout Massachusetts.

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