

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – May 6, 2009

Contact: Karen Rutzick, ConnCAN
Tel: 203-772-4017 x19
Cell: 202-406-0456
Email: Karen.Rutzick@conncan.org

Contact: Bess Keller, NCTQ
Tel: 202-393-0020 x15
Cell: 410-302-3425
Email: bkeller@nctq.org

Report: Hartford school district must rethink staffing strategy

National Council on Teacher Quality and ConnCAN team up on report looking at Hartford teacher policies

Hartford, Conn. – The National Council on Teacher Quality today released an incisive report on how teachers are attracted, developed and retained in Connecticut’s capital city, concluding that Hartford's current policies regarding teachers hinder the district’s top priorities to raise student achievement and narrow Connecticut’s worst-in-the-nation achievement gap.

This report – produced in partnership with the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) – is planned as the first of several studies that will examine teacher policies in a number of urban school districts across the country, funded with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The 60-page report focuses on four areas: 1) compensation; 2) transfer and assignment; 3) work life and school climate; and 4) developing effective teachers and exiting ineffective teachers. It concludes that, despite recent headway, Hartford's staffing policies and contractual provisions do not go far enough in supporting Hartford’s ambitious “All-Choice” school turnaround plan.

Among the most important findings in the report are these:

- Starting salaries are lower for Hartford teachers than in any of the five neighboring districts.
- The district is spending nearly \$18 million a year to incentivize teachers to earn advanced degrees, though the research is conclusive that the vast majority of these degrees do not make teachers more effective or increase student learning.
- The first stage of Hartford's hiring process is cumbersome, poorly timed and not conducive to attracting the greatest talent.
- The teacher contractual work day in Hartford is among the shortest in the nation.

- Hartford teachers have twice as much sick leave--20 days per year--as the average in the country, which is 10 per year.
- The teacher contract imposes unnecessary restraints on school operations, particularly after-school meetings.
- New teachers are not currently receiving effective support.
- Evaluation systems are broken: tenured teachers never have to be observed; 91% of nontenured teachers and 97% of all tenured teachers are ranked as competent or above, in spite of very low student achievement.
- Tenure, essentially a district's \$2 million lifetime commitment to a teacher, is awarded automatically with little consideration for the magnitude of the decision or a teacher's classroom effectiveness.

"Working to staff every classroom with an effective teacher is the most important function of any school district," said Kate Walsh, NCTQ President. "That means putting in place smart policies that work relentlessly towards that goal."

"The first step in this process involves a candid conversation," Walsh continued. "We believe we have provided a strong and credible analysis that should serve as a platform for real change, change that is in the best interest of Hartford school children."

"As the capital city in the state with the nation's largest achievement gap, we must leave no stone unturned in the effort to turn around Hartford's public schools," said Alex Johnston, ConnCAN CEO. "That means taking a hard look at Hartford's human capital policies and making smart decisions about how to hire, retain and compensate teachers. We are very fortunate that the National Council on Teacher Quality is helping lead the way with quality research."

NCTQ's recommendations for specific action include:

- Give principals more freedom in choosing who they interview and hire and give teachers more freedom to apply for vacancies.
- Begin to lengthen the teacher work day from 6 hours 45 minutes towards a goal of 8 hours per day.
- Reduce the annual number of sick leave days from 20 to 10, a move which would require the Connecticut legislature to rescind among the most generous teacher leave policies in the nation.
- Gradually eliminate the incentives for teachers to earn master's degrees outside a content area; dedicate savings to raising starting salaries or to funding a new national model of intensive new teacher support.

The National Council on Teacher Quality undertook this study in pursuit of the interests of Hartford public school students. It received no local dollars, either from the Hartford Public Schools, the Hartford Federation of Teachers or ConnCAN. Both HPS and HFT were asked to participate in interviews and were given a draft copy of the analysis to comment upon. HFT declined to participate.

###

The National Council on Teacher Quality advocates for reforms in a broad range of teacher policies at the federal, state, and local levels in order to increase the number of effective teachers. It is committed to lending transparency and increasing public awareness about the four sets of institutions that have the greatest impact on teacher quality: states, teacher preparation programs, school districts and teachers' unions. To learn more visit: www.nctq.org.

The Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) is a statewide outreach, education, and research organization working to close Connecticut's achievement gap. To learn more visit: www.conncan.org.