

GETTING THE BEST TEACHERS INTO PITTSBURGH'S CLASSROOMS

5 big findings every Pittsburgher needs to know

The National Council on Teacher Quality (www.nctq.org) recently completed a study called *Teacher Quality Roadmap*, looking at policies and practices in Pittsburgh Public Schools and their impact on teacher quality and student achievement. NCTQ identified a number of tangible recommendations, five of which are listed here.

This study is the first step in making change happen. The much more difficult work lies ahead and it falls to the Pittsburgh community to push for and support reform.

Finding 1: Principals face limitations in their ability to select the best teachers to fill vacancies in their schools.

THE CHALLENGE

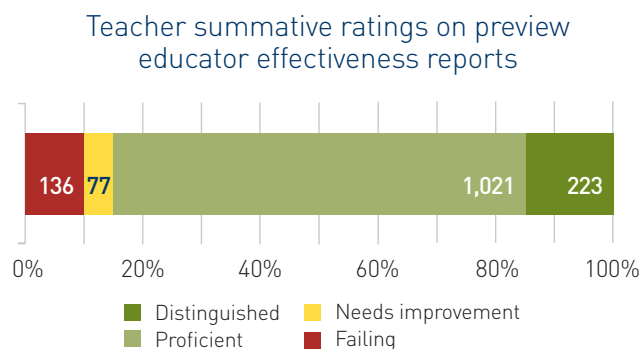
State law requires Pittsburgh and Philadelphia (no other districts) to hire through an “eligibility list” (the top ten percent of candidates in any certification area), which limits the district’s opportunity to have a large pool of high quality candidates, particularly in high-need schools. Most problematic, however, is that principals do not always have final say over who works in their buildings; assignment of certain transferring teachers is done by seniority.

THE SOLUTION

- **Eliminate the eligibility list.** The eligibility list constrains flexibility for both the district and schools. The criteria used for placement on the list can result in high-quality teachers being screened out of the process. The list also makes it difficult for principals to recruit on their own, as they are bound to hire teachers who are on the eligibility list whether or not those teachers have an interest in a particular school with a vacancy.
- **Give principals the authority to decide who works in their buildings.** The district should negotiate with the teachers union to commit to allowing principals to interview and select candidates for all vacancies in every school.

Finding 2: The district has incorporated changes to the teacher evaluation system that have been proven to be effective in discerning high-performing teachers. However, the district provides teachers with few differentiated supports, depending on their evaluation rating.

- **Multiple measures are used to evaluate teacher performance.** Pittsburgh’s model places appropriate weights on objective measures of teacher performance such as value-added data and student surveys, but also places a strong emphasis on teacher observations.
- **The district should provide more differentiated supports for teachers, depending on their performance.** The number of observations, other supports and opportunities should be directly correlated to a teacher’s evaluation rating, but currently teachers in the top two categories and the bottom two categories are treated the same.



Fifteen percent of teachers in Pittsburgh received a distinguished rating on the preview educator evaluator results. The majority of teachers were rated proficient.

Finding 3: The district has developed career ladder positions, but some are more successful than others.

THE CHALLENGE

The strongest career ladder role is the Instructional Teacher Leader 2 (ITL2); however, not all schools have the benefit of this position. Other roles have not been as effective and may need to be reconfigured in the future.

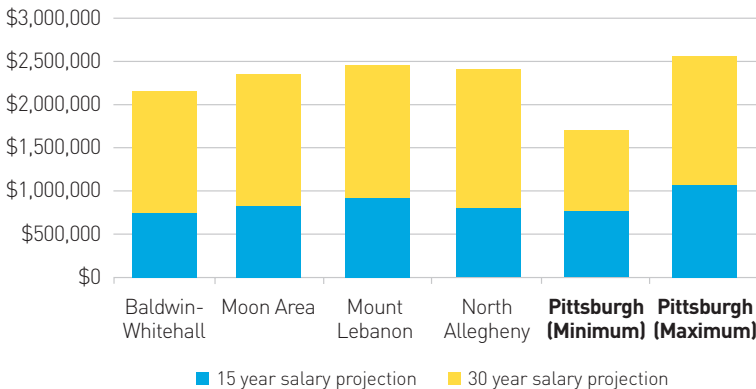
THE SOLUTION

- **Make sure every school has access to an ITL2.** The process of determining which schools get ITL2s and how many they should get should be based on school need. Increase incentives for extremely high-need schools to try to attract suitable applicants willing to work in those schools. Student achievement data, the number of novice teachers in the school, and the experience level of the principal should all be considered.
- **Update career ladder positions and repurpose those that are not working as originally intended.** The district has tracked the success of its career programs, and some of them have been more successful than others. Given the cost and potential value of these positions, repurposing them so that they better fit both teachers' skills and the district's needs would benefit the district. Keeping them as they are relegates high-quality teachers to roles in which they do not use their skills to their fullest capacity.

Finding 4: Pittsburgh's salary system is designed to retain high-performing teachers.

Lifetime earnings for high performing Pittsburgh teachers are above those of surrounding districts, but a teacher who does not perform at the top of her peer group would earn significantly more working in any other area district.

Lifetime earnings for teachers working in Pittsburgh and neighboring districts



After teaching for 15 years, Pittsburgh teachers will cumulatively earn about the same or more than what they would have earned in other districts, no matter how they are rated. Over the course of their 30-year careers, Pittsburgh teachers can cumulatively earn more than teachers in surrounding districts, but only if they are considered a solid performer.

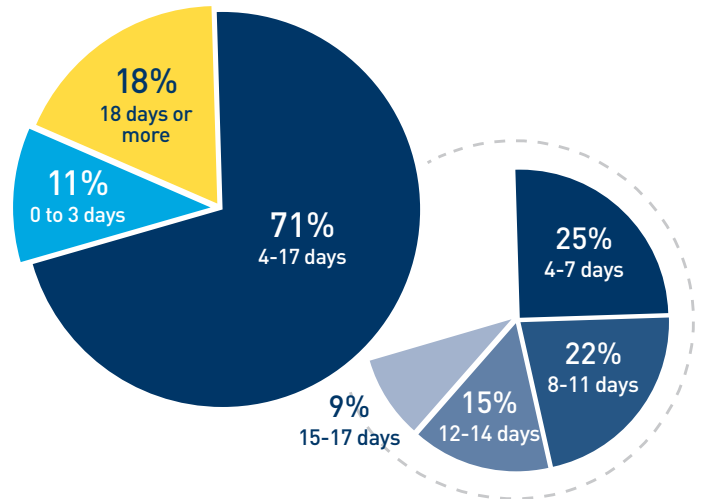
Finding 5: The district should address chronic absenteeism.

THE CHALLENGE

Not taking into account teachers who are out for long-term leave, more than 300 teachers in Pittsburgh were out of

their classrooms 18 or more days in 2012-2013.¹ This represents almost one fifth of the teachers in Pittsburgh. When teachers are chronically absent, the school principal is obligated to make it clear that high absenteeism, no matter what the reason, is detrimental to student learning.

Pittsburgh teacher absences 2012-2013



Pittsburgh teachers were absent an average of 12 days in the 2012-2013 school year, but 11 percent of teachers had excellent attendance, with fewer than three days out of the classroom, and 18 percent were chronically absent; i.e., out more than 18 days of the school year.

THE SOLUTION

- **Commend teachers with excellent attendance and develop a system that flags teachers who are chronically absent.** Teacher attendance is often indicative of larger school culture strengths or challenges. The district should provide principals with up-to-date teacher attendance data and work with chronically absent teachers to address the issues that cause absences.
- **Require teachers to notify a principal when they will be absent.** Whether the absence will be for one day or five, notifying the supervisor directly is a policy that reminds both school leaders and teachers of the importance of being there every day and holds them accountable.

If you would like to learn more or connect with one of the parent organizations working for change in Pittsburgh, contact James Fogarty, with A+ Schools (jffogarty@apluschools.org, 412-697-1298) or Esther L. Bush with the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh (ebush@ulpgh.org, 412- 227-4181).

 National Council on Teacher Quality
For more information visit us at www.nctq.org

¹ NCTQ defines teachers out on long-term leave as those who were out for more than 10 consecutive days.