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**REPORT ON MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS RECOMMENDS IMPROVEMENTS FOR
ATTRACTING AND RETAINING QUALITY TEACHERS**

Study Examined Teacher Recruitment, Staffing, Compensation, and Evaluation Policies

MIAMI, January 19, 2011 – A new report by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) that examines policies and practices by the Miami-Dade school district identifies a number of changes which could yield improved recruitment and retention of its teacher workforce.

The in-depth study, ***Teacher Quality Roadmap: Improving Policies and Practices in Miami***, was done in partnership with the Urban League of Greater Miami. Designed as a tool to highlight what is and is not working in the school district, the report compares Miami-Dade with neighboring districts as well as similar districts around the nation. The report also identifies state legislative reforms.

Research has shown that teacher quality is the single most important school-controlled variable that influences student achievement, showing that having a series of highly effective teachers throughout elementary school can substantially offset the disadvantages typically resulting from a low socio-economic background.

T. Willard Fair, President of the Urban League of Greater Miami says "the report's recommendations, if followed, will move Miami to the forefront in teacher quality reform."

This examination of the state of teacher policies in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools explores the district's contract with its teachers, as well as district practices and state laws that shape the work rules for teachers. Additionally, NCTQ analyzed Miami human resource data; conducted a district-wide survey of nearly 5,400 teachers and school administrators; and held focus groups with teachers, principals and community members.

Kate Walsh, President of NCTQ, says that "Miami's academic progress over the last decade, like many districts in Florida, has been impressive. This report is intended to help the district continue to make great strides, identifying areas where reform is still needed, most notably in the area of teacher evaluation. Our primary recommendation is for the district to turn its attention to doing teacher evaluation well. "

The analysis is framed around four areas in which school districts impact the quality of teachers it is able to recruit and retain: teacher evaluations, how schools are staffed, teacher compensation and their work schedule.

The report found that some of Miami's policies are better than in other districts that NCTQ has examined. For example, teachers in Miami have better attendance rates than teachers in other districts we've studied, using only half of their allotted 10 sick leave days (compared to almost all for teachers in Kansas City and Los Angeles).

Additionally Miami spends far less to reward teachers for master's degrees than other districts, spending just 3.8 percent of its teacher payroll on these differentials. This is largely due to state law which does not encourage districts to reward degrees in its compensation structure, as many states do.

Miami's primary challenges are focused in how it staffs its 435 schools and in the evaluation process for its teachers, even though the district has already been working to improve practice in these two areas.

Among the report's findings:

- Miami's procedures for hiring and assigning teachers to schools do not give sufficient consideration to school needs, placing a large burden on principals to screen applicants and not recruiting a competitive enough applicant pool. Most problematic however is that, principals do not have final say over who works in their buildings.
- While Miami has made some progress at designing a system to reward its best teachers, it is dismissing far too few poor performing teachers. Given that its teacher workforce is over 20,000 teachers, its dismissal rate suggests that teachers are not being held accountable for their performance. In 2010-2011 no more than 10 teachers (less than 0.05 percent) were dismissed for poor performance; an additional six who were dismissed appealed the evaluation procedures and were reinstated. This is the lowest rate of dismissal NCTQ has seen in the districts it has studied.
- The district is not adequately supporting future teacher leaders in the district by routinely laying off its newest teachers while protecting tenured teachers without any consideration of job performance and, also, reserving almost all raises that a teacher can receive (70 percent) for those who have been teaching at least 20 years.
- The evaluation system, in spite of several state mandates, remains in need of much work. Miami-Dade teachers want more feedback about their instruction, particularly from content experts, a need that the peer review program that the district has in place has not been able to fully meet. The current instrument used to evaluate teachers does not sufficiently capture what high quality instruction should look like.
- District record keeping, often a struggle for many urban districts, appears to be a particular problem in Miami-Dade. For example, there is a lot of routine data that it does not collect such as how many teachers are struggling or what is the breakdown of teacher ratings on the annual evaluation instrument.
- There is little indication that the district looks for individuals with strong academic backgrounds when recruiting new teachers, even though research has found that teachers with a strong academic background of their own are more likely to be effective.

The NCTQ analysis is meant to serve a practical purpose, offering clear steps for the district to make alone and jointly with the teachers union, and for Florida lawmakers. In total, NCTQ makes

15 recommendations that would improve the policies shaping the quality of the Miami-Dade teacher workforce.

The most urgent recommendations are focused on improving teacher evaluations:

- Develop a team of full-time independent evaluators, employed by the central office, who can conduct random checks on the accuracy of principal evaluations and provide content-specific feedback on teacher instruction;
- Improve the observation instrument to provide more explicit guidance for principals on what behaviors to look for when observing teachers;
- Collect and examine student feedback on teacher instruction. Surveys of students on their teachers' performance can be designed in such a way to minimize any likelihood of vengeful responses and in fact have a much stronger relationship to true teacher performance than results from observations by adults.

Reforms in other areas of Miami's labor policies are needed too, including:

- Give principals full authority to decide who works in their building.
- Distribute raises more equitably throughout a teacher's career, rather than reserving the largest raises to the most senior teachers, as is currently the case.
- Consider large increases in base salaries—not merely one-time bonuses—for teachers who are rated consistently among the most highly effective teachers in the district.

This report follows other NCTQ district reports in Baltimore, Boston, Hartford, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Seattle and Springfield (MA).

Public release event

A public release event will be held on Wednesday, February 15 at 6:00 pm at the Urban League of Greater Miami, Freedom Hall, 8400 NW 25th Avenue, Miami.

The full report is available at: www.nctq.org/p/publications/nctq_miami.pdf

About the Urban League

The Urban League of Greater Miami, Inc. is a non-profit community service agency. Our mission is to enable black children to reach their fullest potential and their parents to exercise their rights and assume their responsibilities as adults.

About the National Council on Teacher Quality

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. In particular we recognize the absence of much of the evidence necessary to make a compelling case for change and seek to fill that void with a research agenda that has direct and practical implications for policy. We are 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. For more information, visit: www.nctq.org

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