



TEACHER QUALITY ROADMAP REVISITED

Checking in on
Springfield, Massachusetts

November 2013



National Council on Teacher Quality

About this study

This study was undertaken on behalf of the 25,000 children who attend Springfield Public Schools.

About NCTQ

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a non-partisan research and policy organization committed to restructuring the teaching profession, led by our vision that every child deserves effective teachers.

Partner and Funders

This study is done in partnership with the Springfield Business Leaders for Education whose goal is to improve educational attainment to ensure a skilled workforce and economic opportunity for all in the Springfield community. Additional funding for this study was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The NCTQ team for this project

Sudipti Kumar and Nancy Waymack

Executive Summary

At the request of the Springfield Business Leaders for Education, NCTQ undertook a follow-up study of teacher policies of Springfield Public Schools, which was released in October 2011. This study focuses primarily on a review of the agreement ratified in May 2013 between the Springfield Education Association and the Springfield School Committee.

This contract moves Springfield in a significantly positive direction. The district and the teachers union should be commended for their commitment to improving teacher quality. The agreement highlights significant changes in the areas of compensation and work schedule, many of which are in line with previous NCTQ recommendations. Since our original study in the fall of 2011, Springfield has also benefited from changes at the state level in teacher evaluation. Similarly, state policy changes to layoffs scheduled for 2016 will also move the district forward.

As is the case in almost all districts NCTQ studies, the road to improving teacher quality is a long one. Springfield's contract, while a significant step forward, still leaves some opportunities missed, as well as work that must be done to ensure that the new policies play out effectively. To that end, NCTQ provides revised recommendations, including recommendations on how to monitor progress of positive changes.

Overall, we revisit 15 recommendations from our 2011 study in this paper. To track progress, we use a shaded bar to signify how much improvement has been made since NCTQ's original recommendations. A fully shaded bar means sufficient progress has been made since 2011. A partially shaded bar (either at the 25%, 50% or 75% mark) indicates how much the district has changed in this area and highlights the opportunity there remains for growth. No shading notes that there is nothing in the negotiated agreement or other documents that NCTQ reviewed that indicates a positive change.

Overall analysis

- **STAFFING:** Some positive changes, more work to do
- **EVALUATION:** Substantial progress, too early to tell if changes will be effective
- **TENURE:** Some positive changes, more work to do
- **COMPENSATION:** Many positive changes, still room for progress
- **WORK SCHEDULE:** Many positive changes, still room for progress

Methodology

Our analysis of this teachers' contract includes the following:

- A review of the findings and recommendations that NCTQ provided in its district study in 2011
- A comparison of the newly adopted contract with these findings and recommendations, noting progress and additional areas for improvement
- Revised recommendations based on current information
- A summary of the new contract's progress towards improving teacher quality.

In the current and original study, NCTQ frames its analysis around five standards for improving teacher quality. These standards are supported by a strong research rationale and best practices from the field.

1. **Staffing:** District policies facilitate schools' access to top teacher talent.
2. **Evaluation:** The evaluation of teacher performance plays a critical role in advancing teacher effectiveness.
3. **Tenure:** Tenure is a meaningful milestone in a teacher's career and advances the district's goal of building a corps of effective teachers.
4. **Compensation:** Compensation is strategically targeted to attract and reward high-quality teachers, especially teachers in hard to staff positions.
5. **Work Schedule:** Work schedule and attendance maximize instructional opportunity.

In NCTQ's original district study, recommendations based on these standards were separated into three strands: those that the district could initiate immediately through administrative or board level changes, those that needed to be negotiated with the teachers union, and those that would require changes to state law. For the purposes of this analysis, we will revisit those recommendations applying information gleaned from the new contract and a few documented sources such as state statutes or evaluation handbooks.

Drafts of this report were provided to both the district and the union, both of whom provided feedback. They offered valuable context on how policies are playing out in practice, and also noted where certain corrections were needed in the draft. This feedback has been incorporated into the final report.

Standard 1. Staffing

NCTQ made two major recommendations in the staffing section in the 2011 report. At the local level, there appears to be little or no discernible change in the contract, although some progress has been made based on a change in state policy in the criteria for layoffs of tenured teachers.

2011 RECOMMENDATION	PROGRESS
Use performance as the primary determinant in layoff decisions.	<div><div></div></div>
Eliminate forced placement of teachers	<div><div></div></div>

2011 Recommendation

Use performance as the primary determinant in layoff decisions.

Context

Although layoff policies are set at the state level, Massachusetts districts still have some flexibility, particularly the order in which non-tenured teachers are laid off. State policy requires that teachers without “professional teacher status” (tenure) must be laid off before teachers with tenure. If more layoffs are required after non-tenured teachers are laid off, then qualified tenured teachers are laid off beginning with those who have the least seniority. Currently, the state defines “qualified” as a teacher who has the proper certification for that position. Effective 2016, however, the definition of a qualified teacher must include teacher performance as measured through overall ratings.¹ After the change, seniority or length of service can only be used as tie-breakers. This shift in policy will only affect layoffs of *tenured* teachers (those with more than three years of experience). For non-tenured teachers there are no changes in state policy and they will still be laid off based on seniority in each license area.

¹ Massachusetts State Law. Title XII, Chapter 71, Section 42.

NCTQ Analysis

The state's new language allowing for performance-based layoff policies for tenured teachers is a step forward, but it is, for all practical purposes, a symbolic step. The new law would still lay off all non-tenured teachers before considering any tenured teachers. It is unlikely that any round of layoffs would cut so deep as to include tenured teachers. High-performing non-tenured teachers are still not protected.

At the local level, the current contract is silent on the process for determining the order in which non-tenured teachers are laid off. The district's past practice is to lay off teachers in reverse seniority order by certification area. For example in 2009, 100 teachers received layoff notices which specifically included all first year teachers in non-critical subject areas.²

It is important to note that the district has the option of "non-renewing" the contracts of novice teachers (essentially dismissing them) if their performance has not been satisfactory. District staff contend that this non-renewal process essentially acts as a way to dismiss the lowest performing teachers in advance of any layoff. While this process may work for the weakest teachers, the remaining non-tenured teachers likely still vary in performance from truly great to relatively weak. A layoff in which seniority is the only consideration could easily mean that a highly effective math teacher with two years of experience will be laid off instead of a much less effective math teacher because she had nearly three years of experience.

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation

Create a district policy that factors the performance of non-tenured teachers when layoffs are necessary.

In the face of a pending layoff, evaluation ratings should be reviewed so that the highest-performing teachers in the pool of non-tenured teachers are protected.

2011 Recommendation

Eliminate forced placement of teachers.

Context

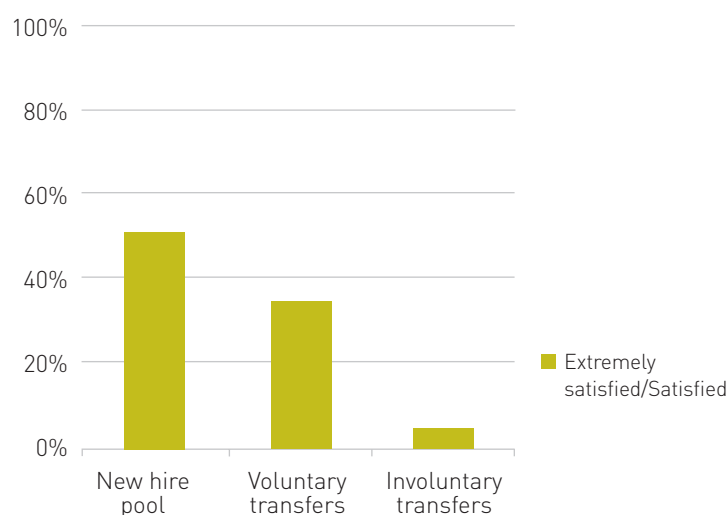
While principals in Springfield are accorded some autonomy over staffing their schools, a single practice undermines this important authority. This practice, forcing principals to accept teachers who have been "excessed from another school" due to staffing fluctuations or program changes, limits a principal's ability to choose his or her staff. The district "force places" any teacher who has not been successful finding a placement with a willing principal.

2 Springfield Education Association sends notice that about 100 teachers might be laid off.
http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2009/06/springfield_education_associat.html



Though there are certainly exceptions, the excess pool is generally not where principals report finding their best teachers. In 2011, principals noted that they were the most satisfied with applicants from the new hire pool, followed by voluntary transfers. Very few principals were content with those teachers placed at their school (involuntary transfers) without any opportunity for an interview or input from the school leader.

How satisfied are you with applicants from the following sources?



Source: NCTQ survey of Springfield school leaders, 2011

Principals were most satisfied with teachers from the new hire pool, followed by voluntary transfers. Very few principals were satisfied with teachers who were force placed at their school.

NCTQ analysis

The teachers' contract does not spell out what should be done with teachers who do not find a new position in the school district. It appears that district culture or tradition set out the process for deciding how forced placements will work. Excessed tenured teachers interview with principals who have vacancies and if they do not receive an offer through this process, teachers are then force placed in a school with a suitable vacancy.³ While this process fills vacancies and minimizes employees that are not covered by a school's budget, it does not ensure that the teacher is a good fit for the school.

3 The Springfield Teacher Newsletter. <http://www.seateachers.com/HTMLobj-1988/March2013Newsletter.pdf>

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation

Eliminate the remaining cases of forced placement.

Principal autonomy in staffing decisions is arguably one of the most important ways to ensure high teacher quality in an individual school. Ideally the district would move towards a policy of *mutual consent* whereby principals have the opportunity to interview and select all of the teachers in their school. At a minimum, principals should be able to reject the assignment of a teacher to their school, including teachers who have lost their assignment in another school no matter what the reason, and extend this authority to all points in the school year.

Districts have approached the assignment of teachers without placements in a variety of ways. Teachers in Houston work as day-to-day substitutes. Washington, DC has offered teachers without placements “buyouts”. Boston recently announced they are doing away with forced placements and will be providing unplaced teachers support to find positions. Depending on the needs of the district, there may be other creative strategies to address the assignment of excessed teachers.

Standard 2. Evaluation

Massachusetts has significantly revised its evaluation framework, implementing a system that incorporates a new teacher evaluation rubric that now includes student learning gains, student feedback and four rating levels (exemplary, proficient, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory). To align with this state model, Springfield has had to make significant revisions to its system.

2011 RECOMMENDATION	PROGRESS
Make student performance the preponderant criterion on which teachers are evaluated.	<div><div></div></div>
Develop a team of independent evaluators to validate principal evaluations and provide content-specific feedback.	TOO SOON TO TELL
Change observation protocol so that unannounced observations can factor into the evaluation.	<div><div></div></div>
Collect and examine student feedback on teacher instruction to align with new state regulations.	TOO SOON TO TELL

Although much of the evaluation framework is dictated by the Commonwealth, Massachusetts does give its districts some control over many of the details of the evaluation model. Below we provide recommendations that are *within the district's purview*: evaluator training, using multiple evaluators during the evaluation cycle, and incorporating student feedback.

2011 Recommendation

Make student performance the preponderant criterion on which teachers are evaluated.

Context

In Massachusetts, teachers now receive a summative evaluation rating that is based on a relatively complex mix of factors: an evaluator's judgment of the teacher's performance against four performance standards (curriculum, planning & instruction, teaching all students, family & community engagement, and professional culture) as well as the teacher's attainment of goals in the areas of student learning objectives and the teacher's professional practice, (established by the teacher and approved by the evaluator, at the start of the school year) as interpreted by the evaluator.

To determine an educator's performance against the standards and indicators, the evaluator uses the following evidence:

- **Observations of teacher performance, based on observation and artifacts of professional practice**, including unannounced observations of practice of any duration;
- **Multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement**, including classroom assessments, district-determined measures comparable across grade or subject district-wide, and state-wide growth measures where available, including the MCAS Student Growth Percentile (SGP) and Massachusetts English Proficiency gain scores (MEPA);
- **Additional evidence relevant to one or more performance standards**. The Commonwealth requires that student feedback be used as a source of evidence.⁴ Other relevant evidence from any source can be included, including information provided by other administrators, as long as the evaluator shares the evidence with the teacher.

This got a bit murky when the state explicitly declined to assign weights to these components, stating only that MCAS growth scores will not be the sole basis for determining a final summative rating. According to the Massachusetts State Department of Education, the evaluation serves as a holistic assessment that relies heavily on professional judgment of the evaluator, and as such, a weighted system is not preferred.⁵ Springfield has not issued any policy that sheds additional light here. Accordingly, it is not at all clear to what extent student growth will factor in these summative evaluations.

The importance of all four standards is an equally murky area. Guidance from the Commonwealth would suggest that only the first two standards will be consequential. To receive a "proficient" rating overall, a teacher must only score "proficient" on the first two of the four standards. A "proficient" or "exemplary" score on Standard I (curriculum, planning, and assessment) and Standard II (teaching all students) make teachers eligible for "proficiency" overall. This is an important floor for performance.

4 While student feedback was scheduled to be incorporated in the 2013-14 school year, the state has postponed implementation until 2014-2015.

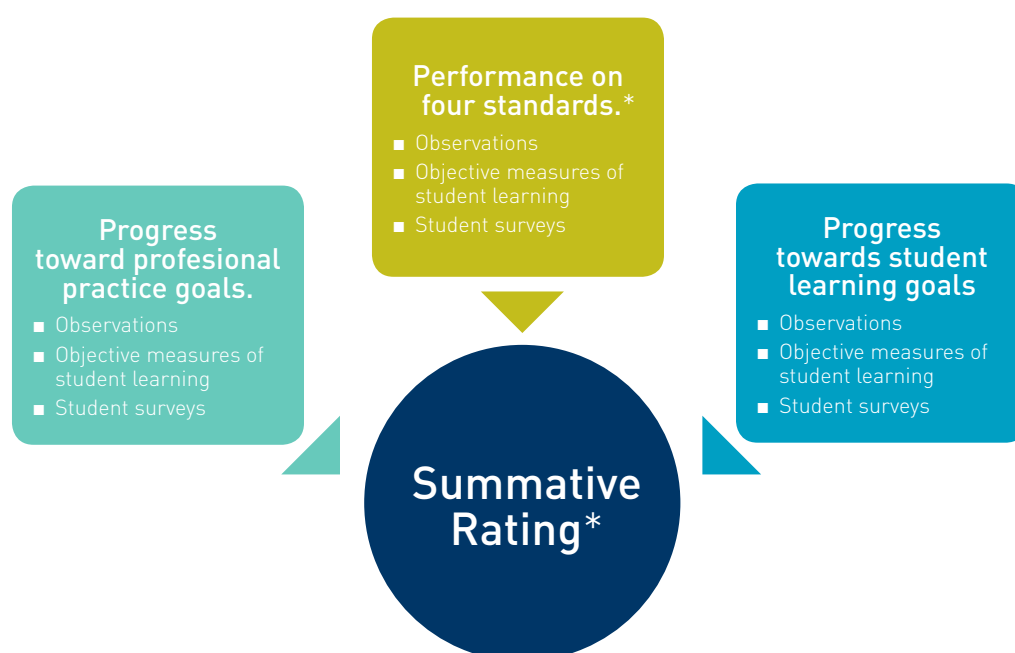
5 Phone conversation with Ron Noble. Massachusetts Department of Education, September 10th 2013.



However, the summative rating does not require teachers to have proficient ratings in the other elements of the evaluation, including importantly, progress toward student learning objectives. A teacher could conceivably perform at the bottom of the third and fourth standards and still be declared proficient. Given this potential loophole, the district will need to take steps to ensure that standards I and II do not turn into the only elements an evaluator looks for when awarding a proficient rating.

Additionally, teachers in Springfield who receive at least a proficient summative rating and a moderate to high impact score are placed on a two year “self-directed growth plan”. The evaluator’s rating for the first year is assumed to be the same for the second year, unless there are significant changes in their performance.⁶ A system that allows high performing teachers to skip evaluations sends a message that evaluations are punitive and unnecessary for successful teachers. It also has the potential to limit the amount of feedback that these teachers receive in a non-rating year; on the evaluation form, evaluators can forgo comments for each performance standard if a teacher receives the same summative rating as the prior year.⁷

Massachusetts summative evaluation rating process



* In order to be rated “proficient” on the summative rating, a teacher must receive a “proficient” rating on Standards I and II.

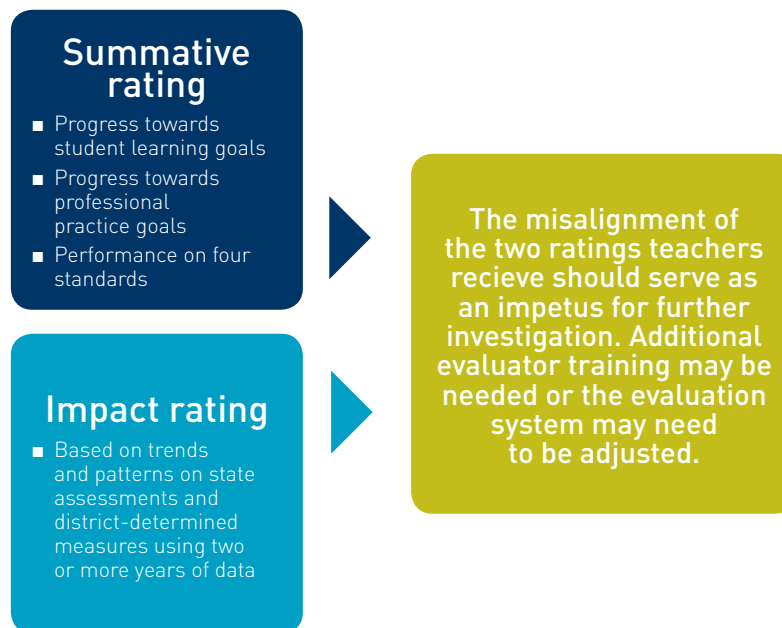
The Massachusetts evaluation process has multiple components which are designed to feed into the final rating. However, in order to be proficient or exemplary overall, a teacher needs to be rated proficient on the first two of the four standards.

6 Springfield Public Schools Effective Educator Development System (SEEDS) Planning and Implementation Guide 2012-2013

7 Educator Evaluation Forms. Two Year Cycle Formative Evaluation.
<http://seeds.sps.springfield.ma.us/educator-forms/>

Beginning in 2016-17, teachers will begin to receive an additional evaluation rating called the “impact rating” that will be based on at least two years of student data. The impact rating is intended to use hard data to measure a teacher’s impact and can be comprised of a range of measures, including district-determined measures, MCAS student growth percentiles (where they are available), or other state assessments. Teachers will receive a rating of high, moderate, or low impact depending on their students’ academic growth.⁸

Massachusetts Summative Rating and Impact Rating Summary



In 2016-17, teachers will receive a summative rating and an impact score. When these two ratings are misaligned, this should serve as a catalyst for the district to understand why, and what adjustments should be made.

NCTQ Analysis

During this significant transition period, Springfield’s evaluation model appears to be following state policy. The district provides a substantial set of resources on its website for evaluators, including an exemplar summative evaluation form and recommended best practices for evaluators who have teachers on improvement plans, among many other tools.

During the summative evaluation process, teacher performance is largely determined by the professional judgment of the evaluator with ambiguous requirements for factoring objective evidence of student learning. Looking to the 2016-2017 school year, the district should make sure reliable

⁸ A rating of high, moderate or low based on trends and patterns on state assessments and district-determined measures. Springfield Effective Educator Development System, April 2012



student data informs the summative evaluation rating, not just the impact score to support the alignment between the summative evaluation and the impact score. When both are in use and applied in a balanced and fair manner, there will be a much better chance of alignment.

Why is alignment of the two ratings important? At best, the system of having two separate ratings is confusing to teachers. At worst, the two ratings could give a teacher conflicting information about his or her performance. The ratings work together to determine the kind and duration of the professional improvement plan a teacher has, but other than that, the impact rating is of very little consequence. The summative rating is the only evaluation rating used to make personnel decisions such as dismissal and whether a teacher should receive tenure.

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation

Monitor alignment of evaluation ratings and student progress.

The district notes that they fully plan to analyze the evaluation rating data when there is a discrepancy between impact scores and summative ratings. This reconciliation is definitely a step in the right direction.⁹

Springfield should articulate the course of action that should take place when discrepancies between the impact score and summative ratings occur with regularity. For example, if impact ratings and summative evaluations are polar opposites as a matter of routine at a particular school or in a specific grade, it should automatically trigger some discussion between the superintendent and principal and ultimately result in action.

2011 Recommendation

Develop a team of third-party evaluators to validate evaluations and provide content-specific feedback.

Context

Research has shown that including multiple observers in the evaluation process increases reliability and validity.¹⁰ Some districts, such as Washington D.C., have content experts who observe all teachers while others use lower-cost approaches. For example, New Haven, Connecticut uses third-party observers only when there is a discrepancy between the principal's observation and student performance data.

Multiple, trained observers (particularly subject-area experts) also serve a second important purpose. They give the superintendent a strong tool for regularly gauging the robustness of an individual principal's ratings, in effect, a second source to spur action to ensure the integrity of

⁹ Conversations with district staff. October 17th, 2013.

¹⁰ The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2013, January). *Ensuring fair and reliable measures of effective teaching: Culminating finds from the MET Project's three-year study*.

evaluations. When a principal's observations closely match those of an alternative evaluator, the district as well as the teachers being evaluated can be more confident that the principal is unbiased and skilled at evaluation. If they do not match, the school district should increase training for the evaluators performing evaluations and ultimately pursue more serious accountability measures.

NCTQ analysis

Unlike some districts, the Springfield contract has the flexibility to include multiple evaluators. While the state requires there be only one *primary* evaluator for each teacher, districts do have the flexibility to include multiple evaluators in the process. Boston, for example, changed the language in its most recent contract to allow for additional evaluators to provide input in a teacher's final rating.¹¹ The district notes that Springfield's contract does not prohibit multiple evaluators. Additional evaluators such as district supervisors and directors could contribute to the final rating by participating in both announced and unannounced observations in existing evaluations.¹²

The district has noted that evaluators go through extensive inter-rater reliability training to ensure the evaluations are valid and reliable. Springfield Public Schools contracted with a vendor to provide teacher evaluation training and evaluator certification prior to allowing an individual to conduct evaluations for principals as well as other central office staff members.¹³

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation

Continue to train evaluators, focusing on the correlation between the strands of evaluation: summative evaluation and impact ratings.

NCTQ commends the district on the level of training that evaluators appear to be provided, and the degree to which resources are publically available on the district website. As the impact ratings are rolled out, the ratings which specifically measures student learning, NCTQ recommends additional training and resources be provided to evaluators to understand the connection between the two ratings. Importantly, evaluators should have periodic retraining to avoid the inevitable "drift" in ratings that often occurs. Such training should include understanding the relationship between a teacher's progress towards student learning goals and his progress on standards.

11 Boston teachers' contract. Article V, Section F. "The headmaster, principal, the superintendent's designee, or other administrator outside the bargaining unit will be responsible for all evaluations. However, they may be assisted by other qualified persons (who are not members of the bargaining unit) designated by the School Department."

12 Conversations with district human resources staff. Thursday October 17th, 2013.

13 Ibid.



2011 Recommendation

Change observation protocol so that unannounced observations can factor into the evaluation.

Context

Including informal observations allows evaluators the flexibility to “drop-in” and observe instruction on a day-to-day basis. The more frequently observations are conducted, the better.

NCTQ analysis

State law now requires unannounced observations to be factored into the evaluation and Springfield’s evaluation process reflects this change. While recent research has not shown a discernible difference in a teacher’s performance in unannounced versus announced observations, unannounced observations do provide principals with more flexibility in scheduling and increase the likelihood that a variety of lessons and activities will be observed.¹⁴

2011 Recommendation

Collect and examine student feedback on teacher instruction to align with new state regulations.

Context

Feedback from students can help teachers improve and can give evaluators a better sense of teacher instructional practices.¹⁵ An individual student generally observes a teacher for more than 1,000 hours a year. Multiply that student by a class of 30 and it is easy to see why 30,000 hours of observation are likely to be more reliable than the two hours an administrator may spend observing a teacher.

State law in Massachusetts will soon require student feedback to be part of the “additional evidence” component of the evaluation. The Commonwealth is in the process of developing in-house student surveys that districts can choose to use. Alternatively, districts can also incorporate student feedback in another state-approved way, which could include interviews with students instead of surveys.

The timeline for incorporating this component has been postponed until the 2014-2015 school year.

14 The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2013, January). *Ensuring fair and reliable measures of effective teaching: Culminating finds from the MET Project’s three-year study*.

15 National Education Policy Center. (2010, December). Learning about teaching. Initial findings from the Measures of Effective Teaching Project. MET Project Policy Brief. Boulder, CO.

NCTQ analysis

The Commonwealth will not require districts to use the surveys they design.¹⁶ However, Springfield has noted that they fully intend to use these surveys when they are available.¹⁷ Once these surveys are on hand, they will need to be included in the evaluation structure which must be agreed to by the district and teachers' union.¹⁸

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation

When developed, incorporate student surveys into the evaluation process.

The Commonwealth, partnering with leading experts in survey design for students, has noted that these surveys will be closely aligned to Massachusetts' *Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching*. Surveys created with the support of experts working with state officials have correlated strongly with student achievement outcomes in the past.¹⁹ As the surveys are put into practice in Springfield, the district should monitor the correlation between survey responses, summative evaluation ratings and overall student impact ratings as well as comparing them to responses from students in other districts.

16 Quick Reference Guide: Student and Staff Feedback. "Districts are not required to adopt the model instruments. ESE recognizes that many districts may already have a history of administering student and staff surveys. The model instruments will be an available resource, not a requirement."
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/QRG-Feedback.pdf>.

17 Conversations with district staff. October 17th 2013.

18 Springfield Effective Educator System. April 2012. "ESE will provide model contract language, direction and guidance on using student feedback in Educator Evaluation. Upon receiving this model contract language, direction and guidance, the parties agree to bargain with respect to this matter."

19 Quick Reference Guide: Student and Staff Feedback.
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/QRG-Feedback.pdf>.

Standard 3.

Tenure

The decision to award tenure represents a \$2 million investment by the district in a teacher (considering lifetime earnings, benefits, retirement income, and health insurance). Earning tenure should be considered a significant milestone for teachers who have consistently demonstrated effectiveness and commitment, and in whom the district wishes to invest and to retain.

2011 RECOMMENDATION	PROGRESS
Make performance the primary factor on which to base the tenure decision.	<div><div></div></div>
Reward teachers who earn tenure with a significant pay increase.	<div><div></div></div>

In Massachusetts, teachers earn tenure, or “professional teacher status,” after three years and while state law sets the terms, districts decide whether or not a teacher is awarded tenure

2011 Recommendation

Make performance the primary factor on which to base the tenure decision.

Context

While in many districts tenure is largely an automatic decision, this has not been the case in Springfield, where principals have made actual tenure decisions indicating whether a teacher has demonstrated effectiveness or not. If the teacher and principal disagree, then a content expert is consulted. However, even with an active determination process for tenure decisions, NCTQ reported that in 2011, the district gave tenure to about 235 out of 248 teachers eligible for tenure, a rate of 95 percent. This figure is likely too high, given the bar that such teachers should have to meet. The system may have suffered from a weak evaluation process overall, whereby very few teachers earned an unsatisfactory rating.

Recommended monitoring reports:

- Percentage of teachers with contracts non-renewed in their first and second years by district and by school.
- Percentage of teachers awarded tenure by cohort by district and by school.
- Percentage of teacher in each summative evaluation rating by district, years of experience, certification area and by school.
- Percentage of teachers in each impact rating category by district, years of experience, certification area and by school.

NCTQ Analysis

In conjunction with the new state evaluation system, protocols on how teachers earn tenure have been revised. Teachers must now achieve ratings of proficient or exemplary on each of the four performance standards to earn tenure. If a teacher has not met these marks, the principal must present other evidence to the Superintendent supporting a tenure decision.

While this process is an improvement over the approach we observed in 2011, student learning is still likely to be left out of the mix. A teacher who has demonstrated little to no progress on student learning objectives on the summative evaluation, or who has a low impact score, could ostensibly still earn tenure if they do well on the performance standards. If the majority of teachers continue to receive proficient or exemplary ratings as they have in the past, then almost all teachers will still receive tenure in the district.

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation Monitor the overall distribution of teacher summative ratings, student impact ratings and the awarding of tenure.

The most effective way to ensure that tenure is meaningful in Springfield is to make sure non-tenured teachers' evaluations are reflective of their effectiveness and that the district does not renew contracts for teachers with unsatisfactory performance. The district needs to look at this data for each principal to assess if some principals continue to award tenure automatically. Any trends that indicate data are not consistent across summative ratings, impact ratings, and tenure decisions should merit a review. The district notes that it implemented an electronic process that allows it to monitor teacher ratings. This is a step towards monitoring the distribution and should be commended.



2011 Recommendation

Reward teachers who earn tenure with a significant pay increase.

Tenure signifies a district's significant commitment to a teacher and its belief that he or she is an effective teacher. It is important for the district to recognize this milestone with a pay raise. Increases in pay should be tied to teachers' accomplishments rather than using salary increases to mark time – regardless of effectiveness – in the classroom.

NCTQ analysis

Although Springfield has revised its salary schedule, there is not a pay increase incorporated at the tenure mark. A review of the new salary scale is in the next section.

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation

Recommendations on the salary structure for Springfield are provided in the next section.



Standard 4.

Compensation

In the 2011 district study, NCTQ reported that Springfield was making positive strides in the area of compensation reform. This included eliminating some salary lanes that rewarded teachers for taking course credits and implementing a career ladder that provides higher salaries or stipends for teachers who reached a threshold in their careers based on previous evaluation ratings, experience and attendance. In the new bargaining agreement Springfield has made more progress, with room to go further.

2011 RECOMMENDATION	PROGRESS
Offer significantly higher salaries to the best teachers who consistently produce the greatest learning gains.	<div><div></div></div>
Eliminate salary differentials for earning advanced degrees.	<div><div></div></div>

2011 Recommendation

Offer significantly higher salaries to the best teachers who consistently produce the greatest learning gains.

Context

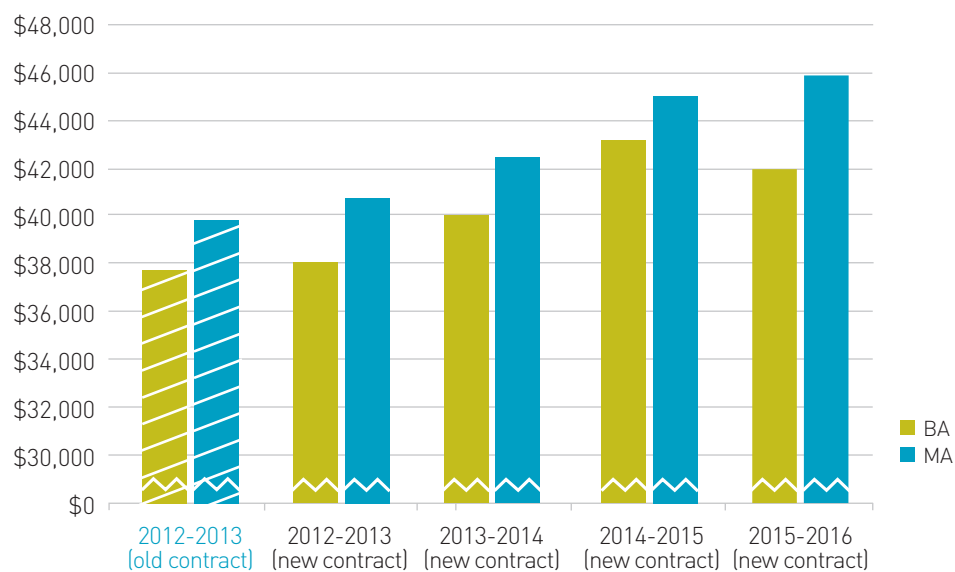
NCTQ made four major recommendations to attract and retain the best teachers in Springfield:

- Raise starting salaries in order to be competitive with surrounding districts when vying for the best teachers to the district
- Offer raises after the first and second year to reduce attrition during the first few years in a teacher's career
- Offer a significant raise after the third year, when teachers earn tenure
- Offer an alternative salary for exemplary teachers (the top 5 percent)

NCTQ analysis

In the new salary schedule, Springfield incorporated many of NCTQ's recommendations. First, the district raised starting salaries for teachers across the board – to \$40,000 for teachers with a bachelor's degree and \$43,784 for teachers with a master's degree in the 2012-2013 school year. Additionally, teachers will receive a 1.5% raise this school year, and 2% raises in each of the next two years. This focus on increasing starting salaries will make the district far more attractive to teachers as they analyze the hiring market in the area and determine where to start their careers.

Starting teacher salaries in Springfield



Teacher salaries are rising on an annual basis, starting with a 1.5 percent increase in the first year and two percent increases thereafter.

Commendably, Springfield also reduced the number of steps it takes to get to the top of the salary scale so now teachers reach their peak earnings in year 12, rather than year 14. This is a positive step, since it gives teachers the opportunity to increase their overall lifetime earnings. However, this structure still pushes higher salaries to the later years of a teacher's career.

Tenure doesn't come with a significant pay increase. Teachers get the largest pay bump between their seventh and eighth year of teaching, at \$1,929 for a teacher with a BA, whereas the pay increase between the third and fourth year, when teachers get tenure, is \$1,500.²⁰ However, it still stands that tenure is an important designation – and providing a sizeable pay increase at this time makes the process more meaningful. Teachers should be compensated for the accomplishments that tenure connotes.

²⁰ According to the district, many teachers were leaving the district between the 7th and 9th years, which is why they chose to provide a pay bump in those years. Conversations with district staff. October 17, 2013.



There is still no linkage between a teacher's performance and his or her pay in the salary schedule. As such, teachers are still paid simply for advancing based on credits or longevity rather than on their performance.

2013 Revised NCTQ recommendation

Tie raises to accomplishments such as earning tenure and incorporate performance into the salary structure.

Springfield should tie raises to meaningful accomplishments such as earning tenure. Teachers who consistently earn exemplary ratings on their evaluation rating should be rewarded through increased compensation rather than tying pay solely to years in the classroom.

2011 Recommendation

Eliminate salary differentials for earning advanced degrees.

Context

In 2011, NCTQ reported that Springfield had taken strides to reform its salary schedule, including the elimination of some intermediate lanes based on earning credits for salary advancement. However, there are still lanes in place which increase teacher pay for earning a master's degree, two master's degrees, or a doctorate. Given the lack of correlation between advanced degrees and teacher performance, these funds can be used more effectively in other ways. The district should next work to eliminate raises associated with multiple degrees (two master's degrees).

NCTQ analysis

There has been no change in the new contract. There are still four salary lanes based on a teacher's level of education.

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation

Eliminate salary differentials for earning advanced degrees.

The district could creating a performance-based pay schedule for newly hired teachers based on evaluation and student impact ratings while allowing existing teachers the option of remaining on the existing pay scale. The pay schedule should redirect funds from advanced degrees to additional pay for exemplary teachers.



Standard 5.

Work Schedule

In the area of work schedule, NCTQ made many recommendations that focused on lengthening the school day and reforming policies around teacher absences and use of time. The new contract indicates significant change in policy around teacher absences and the structure of the workday that is aligned with NCTQ recommendations. However, there is still room for growth, particularly in the area of school day length.

2011 RECOMMENDATION	PROGRESS
Require teachers to work an 8-hour day onsite.	
Teachers working in schools with below-average attendance should have to notify a school-level administrator of an absence.	
Give teachers more non-student work days so that professional development can be scheduled when school is not in session and distributed throughout the year.	
Explore the degree to which teachers use their daily planning period to attend to personal business off campus.	
Streamline the leave package to incorporate all types of leave granted to teachers.	

2011 Recommendation

Require teachers to work an 8-hour day on-site.

Context

The length of the school day for teachers in Springfield is 7 hours, which is less than the national average of 7 hours, 28 minutes.²¹ While most teachers typically work 8 hours or more on an informal basis, a formal eight-hour day for teachers allows districts to incorporate additional collaborative planning time and flexibility in scheduling.

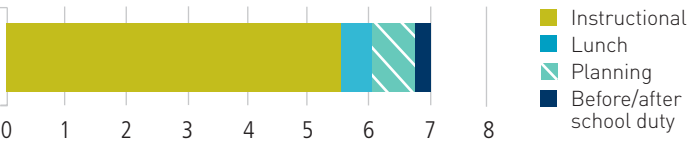
²¹ NCTQ Teacher Contract Database

NCTQ analysis

Springfield deserves some credit for its 7-hour school days for teachers as it is actually longer than those of surrounding school districts in the Commonwealth, hovering between 6 and 7 hours for teachers.

The prior contract required teachers to be on-site one day a week for an additional hour and fifteen minutes to allow for common planning time on a regular basis. The most recent contract redistributes this time to additional non-teacher workdays. As such, teachers are now only required to be on-site for an extended work day twice a month. While we commend the district for adding more professional development days to the calendar (discussed below), it is still the case that teachers do not have enough time to plan and develop together on a daily or weekly basis, an important part of improving one’s own performance.

School day structure for a teacher in Springfield



A teacher’s work day in Springfield is 7 hours. Most of this time is spent with students, with about 40 minutes designated for planning each day.

2013 NCTQ revised recommendation

Lengthen the school day to eight hours.

At the very least, the district should ensure that there is enough time built into the day for routine collaborative planning and professional development, which is now only available twice a month. The district should consider adding back the extra hour teachers had for collaborative time weekly, in addition to the extra professional development days interspersed throughout the year. Given what we are learning about effective professional development, the district should consider more days for teachers working together on-site rather than district-wide events.

2011 Recommendation

Teachers working in schools with below-average attendance should be required to notify a school level administrator of an absence.

Context

Many districts have experienced a decrease in teacher absences by incorporating simple changes such as requiring teachers to call a supervisor before being out or requiring a doctor’s note after



a certain number of days of absence. At the time of the district study, Springfield was expanding its data capabilities to allow principals to track staff attendance; however, there was no mechanism in place whereby teachers contacted their school leaders when they were absent. As a result, most teachers simply notified the substitute calling system unless a system had been put in place requiring them to call their principal directly.

NCTQ analysis

The new contract signifies positive changes in this area. School leaders may require a physician's note when an absence is more than three consecutive days; previously it was five days. Additionally, teachers who are absent more than three consecutive days or on three separate occasions may now be required to call the principal and not just the substitute teacher request line. New language in the contract specifies that school leaders should be aware of patterns which may signify abuse of sick leave, such as high absence rates on Mondays and Fridays or absences right before or after holidays or school breaks.

2011 Recommendation

Give teachers more non-student work days so that professional development can be scheduled when school is not in session and distributed throughout the year.

Context

In the original analysis, data showed that professional development was a major reason for absences. Because teachers in Springfield had fewer non-student days than the national average (five days versus eight across the nation), increasing the number of professional development days provides some additional opportunities for teachers to get professional development without students missing out on classroom time with their teacher.²²

NCTQ Analysis

The Springfield contract now stipulates that teachers have eight non-student work days as opposed to five. There is also an option to add two additional professional development days, if the superintendent so chooses. As such, Springfield now matches the national average on teacher work-days.

2011 Recommendation

Explore the degree to which teachers use their daily planning period to attend to personal business off campus.

Context

Springfield's prior contract contained an unusual provision in which teachers could use their daily planning period to attend to personal business off campus. While this in and of itself is not necessarily bad practice, it does warrant further exploration to ensure that this practice is not being abused or undermining time for teachers to spend time planning together. While promoting flexibility in the school environment is commendable, teachers should not be out of the building during a planning period when department meetings are supposed to take place.

NCTQ analysis

Commendably, in the new contract there is a stipulation that teachers can leave the school a maximum of four times a month during their planning periods, without requesting permission from their principal, by signing in and out. This is a good balance between allowing flexibility for teachers with managing the needs of the school overall and the necessity for having teachers on-site most of the day.

2011 Recommendation

Streamline the leave package to incorporate all types of leave granted to teachers.

Context

In 2011, Springfield teachers received 15 days for sick and personal leave, which was on the high side in comparison to most other districts across the nation. Most of this leave was considered "sick leave," with the exception of two days that could be used as personal leave and could be used for any reason.

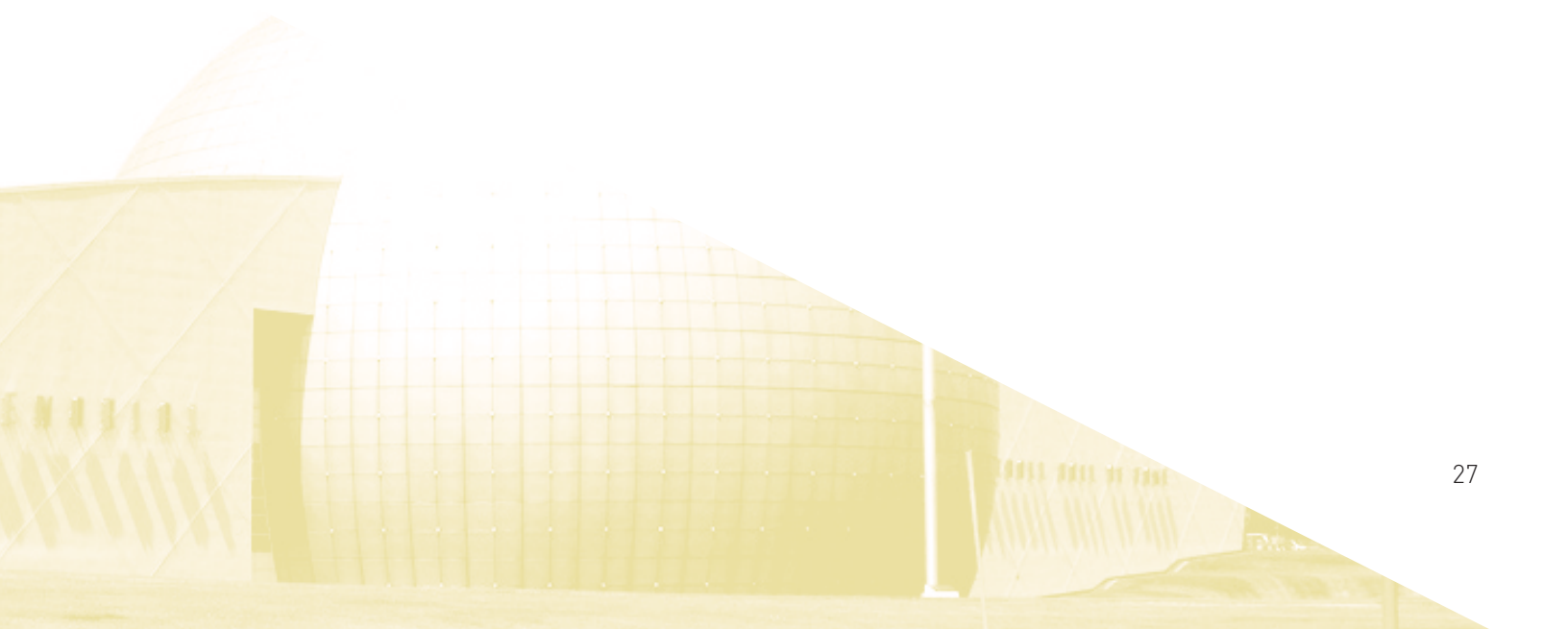
NCTQ analysis

In the new contract, the number of sick leave days granted to teachers is reduced from 15 to 10. Teachers who use four or fewer sick days a year will earn an additional five sick days at the end of the year. Unused accumulated sick leave can be paid out upon retirement at the rate of 15 percent of the total unused leave balance. This is a reasonable amount of leave time for a teacher and it is a positive step as an attendance incentive; however, an equivalent cash incentive paid out at the end of the year rather than providing additional leave would be preferable and could avoid the ironic reward of getting additional leave for not using leave.

Conclusion

With the adoption of this contract, Springfield Public Schools and the Springfield Education Association have made some progress in creating the conditions to improve teacher quality. Over the course of this contract, the next four years, the district will need to monitor implementation of the new evaluation system, the tenure process as well as other revised portions of the contract.

We are hopeful they will also use this time before negotiations begin again to work together to make progress on other areas of the contract such as staffing, the length of the school day and time for professional development and collaboration, and rewarding high performing teachers. With the changes made to date and improvements in the areas noted above, Springfield could be a model for other districts in Massachusetts and nationally.





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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.

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