



National Council on Teacher Quality

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Alexandra Wilding  
Director of Communications  
National Council on Teacher Quality  
Phone: 202-393-0020 x131  
Email: [awilding@nctq.org](mailto:awilding@nctq.org)

James Fogarty  
Communications Director  
A+ Schools  
Phone: 412-697-1298 x100  
Email: [jfogarty@aplusschools.org](mailto:jfogarty@aplusschools.org)

Monique McIntosh, M.Ed.  
Vice President of Programs & Services  
Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh  
Phone: 412-227-4152  
Email: [mmcintosh@ulpgh.org](mailto:mmcintosh@ulpgh.org)

**REPORT ON THE PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS RECOMMENDS  
IMPROVEMENTS FOR ATTRACTING AND RETAINING QUALITY  
TEACHERS**

*Study examines teacher staffing, compensation, talent management, professional culture and evaluation policies*

**PITTSBURGH, May 22, 2014** – Today the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) released a report that examines teacher quality policies and practices in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. The in-depth study, *Teacher Quality Roadmap: Improving Policies and Practices in Pittsburgh*, identifies a number of changes which could better support the recruitment, development and retention of effective teachers and provides Pittsburgh with a tailored analysis identifying the teacher policy areas most in need of critical attention, as well as areas of strength for the district. Comparisons between Pittsburgh, neighboring districts and similar districts around the state and nation provide context and examples of promising practices.

"This report reinforces a lot of the work that the district, the PFT, and the community have already done. We know that great teaching needs to be measured and supported. Now we have this extensive research project guiding us in our efforts. It's a powerful resource," said Carey Harris, Executive Director of A+ Schools.

“This NCTQ report underscores the areas that we need to address if we are to attain the sort of reform that can result in equal access to quality education for all of our students,” said Esther L. Bush, President and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh’s primary teacher policy challenges are focused in how it staffs its schools. The district has been working to improve practice in this area, but significant improvements, including removing state-imposed restrictions, still can and should be made.

“Pittsburgh is among a handful of pioneering districts sincerely grappling with teacher quality and the issues that have contributed to the poor health of the profession and demoralization of teachers,” Kate Walsh, President, NCTQ said. “The district appears to be heading in the right direction, but it needs to double down, with a particular focus on placing its greatest talent in the classrooms serving children who depend the most on a high-quality education.”

Among the report's findings:

- Pittsburgh is in its first full year of implementation of a new evaluation system with multiple measures, including classroom observations, value-added measures and student surveys, and in many ways is ahead of most districts nationwide in modernizing its evaluations.
- Pittsburgh’s procedures for hiring and assigning teachers to schools delays the hiring of new teachers until late into the summer months, when many potential candidates have already found other jobs. Most problematic, however, is that principals do not have final say over who works in their buildings; assignment of some transferring teachers is done by seniority.
- Even under Pittsburgh’s new evaluation system, it can take over two years to dismiss a poorly-performing tenured teacher.
- Pittsburgh’s teacher salaries start out lower than those in surrounding school districts but they quickly increase to a competitive level for high-performing teachers.
- High school teachers in Pittsburgh spend less time with students and have more time for professional development than their peers in most districts, but there is no evidence of this practice having yielded results.

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 Pennsylvania lawmakers. In total, NCTQ makes 28 recommendations to the district, some of which require negotiations with the teachers union, and four recommendations to the state that would improve the policies shaping the quality of the Pittsburgh workforce.

The most urgent recommendations are focused on improving hiring and staffing policies:

- **Continue allowing Pittsburgh to use its evaluation framework as designed.** Pennsylvania granted Pittsburgh a one-year approval for its evaluation model, and the state should extend this approval.
- **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. 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.
- **Eliminate the eligibility list.** While attempting to focus hiring on the most qualified candidates, the eligibility list, a state-required ranking of teacher applicants, hinders 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 eligibility list adds another step to a long hiring process and puts Pittsburgh (and Philadelphia—the only other Pennsylvania district required to use an eligibility list) at a disadvantage, since teachers applying for jobs in neighboring districts do not have to jump through these hoops.

Reforms in other areas of Pittsburgh’s policies are needed as well, including:

- **Provide more differentiated supports for teachers depending on their evaluation rating.** The number of observations, other supports and opportunities for advancement 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.
- **Allow performance to be a factor in determining which teachers will be laid off.** Pennsylvania is one of a few states where seniority is the sole criterion determining teacher layoffs. This is not a helpful policy in promoting effective teaching, and the state should revise it so that performance is a preponderant criterion in determining layoffs.
- **Raise salaries so that some portion of teachers earn more money in Pittsburgh than in surrounding districts, ensuring that Pittsburgh is not just competitive but superior in pay.** Now, teacher pay in Pittsburgh is competitive with surrounding districts for strong teachers, but it does not offer a significant advantage.
- **Look for high-impact but low-cost ways to reward high-performing teachers.** In addition to or in lieu of current career ladder roles, Pittsburgh could offer higher salaries to the top teachers (teacher “chairs”) who consistently produce the greatest learning gains. Recognized chairs could be located in high-need schools, which could benefit greatly from the expertise these teachers bring with them. Having one chair in each school would send a strong signal that the district values its superstars and would also be a morale booster for all teachers.

- **Commend teachers with excellent attendance and develop a system that flags teachers who are chronically absent at the district level, with the central office following up with principals to make sure issues are resolved.** 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.

This examination teacher of policies in Pittsburgh 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 personnel data and held focus groups with principals, parents, community members and students. NCTQ would like to commend Superintendent Linda Lane who has shown bravery in putting the district policies under the microscope in this way.

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

The full report is available [here](#).

### **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](http://www.nctq.org).

### **About A+ Schools**

A+ Schools is the community advocate and leader for educational equity and excellence in Pittsburgh's Public Schools. It serves as a community force advancing the highest educational achievement and character development for every public school student. Its core purpose and focus of work is to increase educational equity in Pittsburgh schools. For more information, contact A+ Schools at [412-697-1298](tel:412-697-1298) or visit [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org).

### **About Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh**

The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh was founded in 1918 with the shared National Urban League mission of enabling African-Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity and power, and civil rights. Today, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh has become one of the most accomplished affiliates in the country, leading by example with a

perfect 5 out of 5 on a recent performance review conducted by the National Urban League. For more information, visit: [www.ulpgh.org](http://www.ulpgh.org)