Barriers to Teacher Hiring

May, 2006

Missed Opportunities Overview

In 2003, TNTP published, Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms, which analyzed the hiring processes of four representative urban school districts.

Key Findings

• Urban districts can generate a large enough applicant pool to selectively fill vacancies
• However, urban district hiring timelines cause massive applicant attrition
• Due to these delays, districts lose the stronger candidates and are left hiring weaker candidates
• HR inefficiencies contribute to the delays, but are not the driving cause. Reforms must address the three policy barriers to late hiring timelines:
  1. Vacancy notification requirements
  2. Teachers Union transfer requirements
  3. Late budget timetables and inadequate forecasting
Our report showed that, with aggressive recruitment, teachers apply to urban districts in large numbers; however, urban districts hire late.

2002 Teacher Applicants vs. Vacancies

Eastern District Hiring Timeline

Fed up with waiting, applicants withdraw after months in limbo.

Withdrawal Rate of Pre-screened Candidates in Eastern and Midwestern 1 Districts

Percent of Withdrawers for whom Late Timelines Were a Factor in Their Decision to Leave

End of May: Over 600 prescreened candidates ready for principal interview and placement

Aug. 12: First new teacher hired

Aug. 20: New Teacher Orientation

Sep. 9: School opens with vacancies after 177 teachers hired

Note: The withdrawal data for the Eastern District and Midwestern District 1 are the attrition rates of the “pre-screened” applicants - those the districts had already interviewed, decided were the best candidates, and chosen for principal interviewing. We do not have the total percentage of withdrawers for Midwestern District 2.

Source: Telephone, written, and e-mail surveys, Applicant tracking databases (2002).
Districts lose stronger and more sought-after candidates

**Percent of Withdrawers Who Had Applied to Teach in a Critical Shortage Area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>37%</th>
<th>69%</th>
<th>55%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwestern</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Midwest 2</td>
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**Quality Comparison of New Hires and Withdrawers in the Eastern District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New hires</th>
<th>Withdrawers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% with significant education coursework</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with degrees in their field</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>3.21</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Southwestern District withdrawers were from a program to hire high-needs teachers for hard-to-staff schools. The differences in education coursework and degrees in field are statistically significant (p<.01). Source: Applicant tracking databases (2002), TNTP file analysis in Eastern District (May 2003).

The candidates that the Districts lose are serious candidates.

Nearly 50 percent of withdrawers said they would have accepted a job offer from the urban district if it had come earlier.

80 percent (4 out of 5) said they still wanted to be considered for a position in the urban district.

**Key Findings**

- Schools are forced to hire large numbers of teachers they do not want and who may not be a good fit for the job and their school.
- Poor performers are passed around from school to school in lieu of a viable teacher termination process.
- New teacher applicants, including the best, are lost to late hiring.
- Novice teachers are treated as expendable regardless of their contribution to their school.

**Unintended Consequences Overview**

Schools are forced to hire large numbers of teachers they do not want and who may not be a good fit for the job and their school.

**Approximate number of vacancies (out of every 10) filled with incumbent teachers with no choice or restricted choice by the school.**

- Midwestern District
- Southern District
- Eastern District
- Western District
- Mid-Atlantic District

Vacancy filled by transfer or excess with no choice by school
Vacancy filled by transfer or excess with restricted choice by school

Across the five districts, in one hiring season:

- **40 percent** of vacancies, on average, were filled by teachers over whom schools had either **no choice at all** or **limited choice.**

Source: District teacher tracking systems.
Every year, the majority of schools in each district are forced to hire at least one teacher (if not more) with no choice or restricted choice.

Percent of schools that had no choice or restricted choice in filling...

- at least 1 vacancy
- 2 or more vacancies
- 3 or more vacancies

Source: District teacher tracking systems.

Compounding the problem is that a subset of teachers forced on schools are poor performers, passed along from other schools.

Percent of principals who admitted to encouraging a poorly performing teacher to transfer or placing them on an excess list.

“Nine out of 10 times, the person that is coming is not succeeding in their school... everyone wants to keep their good teachers.”

--Eastern District Principal

“I work hard at professional development and building collaborative teams at each grade level and often must accept someone for a position who I know will not contribute to the work of the grade-level team and will, in many cases, be a detriment to children.”

--Western District Principal

Source: Principal survey.
Many principals will do what it takes to hire outside of the contract’s strictures, but this is no simple task.

Nearly half of all Western district principals (47%)...

... reported that they have attempted to hide a vacancy in order to avoid having to post that position to voluntary transfers and excessed teachers.

“The energy it takes to do something deceptively versus by the book is such a waste.”

--Western District Principal

Nearly half of all Western district principals (47%)...
Nearly a quarter (23%) of Eastern District principals... report having a new or novice teacher bumped from their school the previous year.

In addition to bumping, novice teachers are the default for excessing when a volunteer cannot be identified or persuaded to leave the school. Between 26% to 46% of excess teachers were in their first three years of teaching in the five districts.

Percent of first-year teachers whose positions were re-posted:
- **Eastern District**: 50% (Source: Estimates of district staff.
- **Southern District**: 10% (Source: District teacher tracking system.
- **Western District**: 10-15% (Source: Estimates of district staff.

While schools are forced to hire teachers they do not want, they lose new teacher applicants, including the best, because of delayed hiring.

Percent of vacancies filled after June 1, with one month or less to go before the start of school, and after school starts, by district:

- **Midwestern District**:
  - % of vacancies filled after June 1: 85%
  - % of vacancies filled with 1 month or less to go before the start of school: 80%
  - % of vacancies filled after school starts: 30%

- **Southern District**:
  - % of vacancies filled after June 1: 100%
  - % of vacancies filled with 1 month or less to go before the start of school: 80%
  - % of vacancies filled after school starts: 10%

- **Mid-Atlantic District**:
  - % of vacancies filled after June 1: 100%
  - % of vacancies filled with 1 month or less to go before the start of school: 67%
  - % of vacancies filled after school starts: 100%

Source: District hiring databases.
These rules impose an enormous cost on schools, teachers and the entire system. But urban students pay the highest price.

**Impact on schools**
- Schools cannot build an effective staff, attract better leadership, or sustain meaningful improvements.
- Explained one principal, “many of the provisions in this contract go against any logic in effective management. You cannot say, ‘We need to see results’ and not let us have the people in place to do it.”

**Adverse systemic effects**
- Excessive centralization and gridlock as hiring in every school depends on every other school.
- The gains of one school also come at the expense of another, undermining the efforts of urban districts to spread pockets of excellence to more schools.

**Urban students pay the highest price**
- Quality of the teacher is the single most important school-based variable associated with raising student achievement.
- These rules place hundreds, and sometimes even thousands, of teachers in classrooms each year with near total disregard for the appropriateness of the match, the quality of the teacher, or the overall impact on schools.

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**What Unintended Consequences is NOT Saying**

- **Unions are solely responsible for these rules and their effects**
  - Superintendents and school boards willingly sign off on these rules
  - In some districts, central staff protect them

- **Changes in rules will be the silver bullet (as some might want to claim)**
  - Report clearly states that while changing union staffing rules is necessary to improve teacher quality and student achievement, it will not be sufficient.
  - Improved staffing depends on other essential reforms as well: in school leadership, Human resources, budget and planning
  - But changes in these other areas depend on transfer and excess reforms

- **Novice teachers are preferable to senior teachers**

- **All protections/preferences for more senior teachers should be removed**

- **Reducing teacher maldistribution depends on transfer reforms to require experienced teachers to stay in or go to the highest need schools**
  - Any maldistribution problem – both within an urban district and between urban and suburban districts – will not be solved by forcing but through an effective incentive system.