

Spotlight on Hiring

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DC VOICE

1436 U St., NW
Suite 401

Washington, DC
20009

202-986-8535

Fax: 202-986-1243

dcvoice@dcvoice.org

www.dcvoice.org

ABOUT DC VOICE

DC VOICE is a citywide, community-based collaborative of education activists committed to ensuring every child in Washington, DC the conditions for quality teaching and learning. We believe that key to achieving this is an engaged and informed public that both supports public education and holds schools and the full community accountable for the education of our youth.

DC VOICE is a Local Education Fund and part of the Public Education Network (PEN), the nation's largest network of independent, community-based school reform organizations. PEN and the Ford Foundation have provided multi-year core support, with additional support from diverse individuals, corporations, and foundations such as the Fannie Mae Foundation and Eugene and Agnes Meyer Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the READY SCHOOLS PROJECT (RSP) that focuses on the systemic supports in place so that DC public schools (DCPS) can provide high quality teaching and learning for all students. The reporting on this year's RSP is being presented in two parts: the Part I report focused on the findings from 52 school principal interviews. Part II will consist of a series of short reports on parent and teacher focus groups and interviews, and further analysis of four areas: recruitment and hiring, professional development, facilities, and parent and community involvement. (For a copy of *Starting Off Right 2005: A School System in Transition* and subsequent reports, please visit our web site: www.dcvoice.org).

Spotlight on Hiring provides further examination of this finding from *Starting Off Right 2005: hiring practices improved even as reported hiring deadlines were not met*. Information is included on:

1. **Effective practices examples** from other states and districts (pages 3-5)
2. **DCPS' teacher hiring process** information (pages 5-7)
3. **Challenges for DCPS** that stand in the way (pages 7-10)
4. **Recommendations** for the future (pages 10-11)

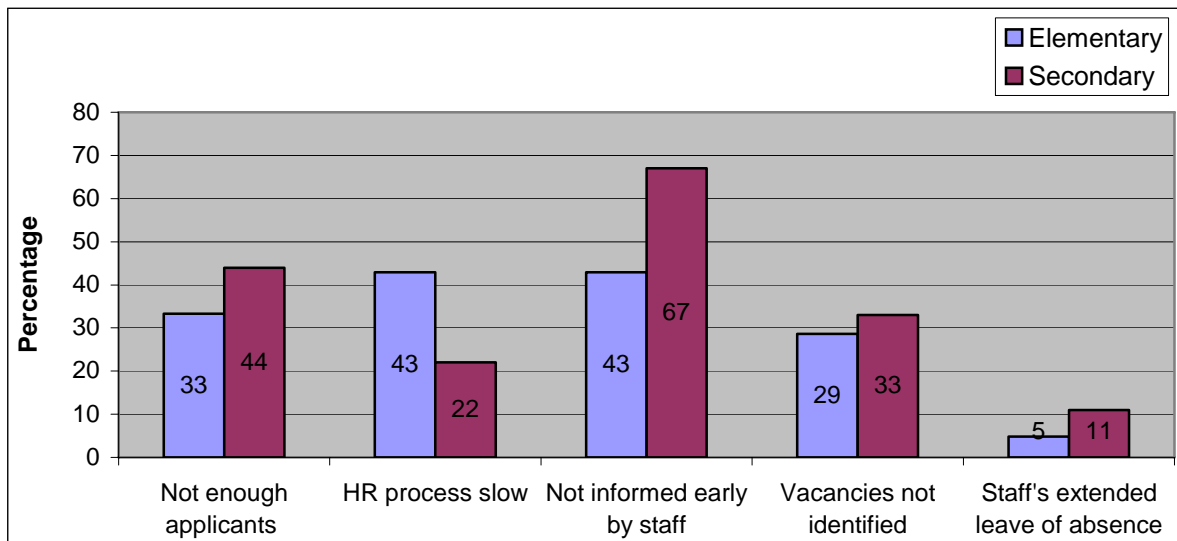
It is our hope that this report will be useful in at least two major ways:

- serve as a catalyst for changes that result in more DCPS classrooms being fully staffed with permanent and highly qualified teachers by the opening of the school year, and
- enable the community to effectively advocate for good hiring practices that benefit all students.

ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS OF RSP 2005 FINDINGS

The interviews with the school principals showed that:

- Twenty-two of the 52 (42%) participating schools had all teachers in place on the first day of school. Among the 30 (58%) schools not fully staffed, there were 56 teacher vacancies.
- The reasons for hiring delays varied, as shown in the figure below.



- On a scale of 1 to 5, principals rated the recruitment and hiring systemic supports they received at an overall average of 3.8. This average was the same for both new and veteran principals.

DC VOICE disaggregated the data in four ways: by school level, subject area, ward boundary, and principal status (whether the school had a new or veteran principal). There were no statistically significant differences in any of these categories. However, a few observations can be made based on principal status:

- Relatively equal amounts of new and veteran principals did not have their hiring complete by the opening of school (60% of new principals and 57% of veteran principals).
- Representative numbers of new principals were distributed throughout the wards (10 new principals participated in the Ready Schools Project, and there were no more than 2 new principals per ward).
- Many of the principals who reported experiencing hiring delays cited individual staff issues as the cause, as shown in the figure above.

- If teacher hiring was complete by the start of school, principals were more likely to give recruitment and hiring a higher overall rating. They credited this to an improved hiring process, including earlier hiring fairs and online access to teacher candidate resumes.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

To start our information gathering, DC VOICE reviewed effective recruitment and hiring practices in other states and local school districts. We particularly looked at Broad prize winners and finalists as well as previous DC VOICE research on recruitment and hiring. Several of these districts have policies and programs that assist in making sure that all classrooms have highly qualified and credentialed teachers. We looked at two areas: state/local policies and union contracts.

State and local policies and regulations

States and districts across the country are investing in varied recruitment and hiring initiatives. In most cases, the Superintendent is in charge of the hiring process, with principals having final approval. A teaching license (or enrollment in a program leading to a license), advanced degrees, desire to work with students from impoverished backgrounds, demonstrated leadership ability, and strong written and oral communication skills are considered the mark of a qualified candidate. Most states and school districts have some sort of alternative certification program that allows those not currently in teacher education programs to work towards getting their certification. Other districts also had very targeted recruitment efforts including starting with interested students in middle and high schools.

- Chicago Public Schools has a Teacher Recruitment Initiative that provides interview tips, application standards and information on their principal-driven hiring process.
- The New Haven Unified School District has a program called Teaching as a Priority (TAP) that provides grant money as an incentive to recruit and retain fully credentialed teachers at those schools with low student achievement.
- The South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) has six major programs that: 1) seek to interest middle school and high school students in the teaching profession; 2) provide scholarships and professional development programs to students seeking a teaching degree; 3) create collaboration between the SC Teacher Forum Leadership Council and the Policy Board for the Board Certification Network of SC Educators, with the goal of improving professional development, policy, and mentoring.

- In New York City, the Teachers of Tomorrow program is designed to recruit and sustain well-prepared, highly motivated certified classroom teachers who serve in schools that have been designated as high-need.

Some Boards of Education across the country have used incentives successfully to attract quality teachers, just as other professions offer incentives to attract high quality employees. However, research shows that small stipends of a few thousand dollars have not been successful in attracting teachers to school districts and/or to the high need areas, which these districts are trying to fill. What has helped are incentives that allow teachers to feel welcomed to a district, and to know they will be part of a professional learning community where they can collaborate with their colleagues and feel that they are contributing to the well-being of their peers and the achievement of their students.

Union contracts

DC VOICE was interested in understanding if there was typically a significant role for teachers unions on recruitment and hiring. Traditionally, school boards do not want unions to take charge of this aspect, i.e. hiring has been an administrative prerogative and unions have agreed. Most of the union contracts we reviewed showed a dearth of attention paid to pre-service teachers and teacher hiring, but much to do with what happens to teachers after they have been hired, i.e. voluntary and involuntary transfers, seniority, and assignment.

In some places, however, teachers unions and school districts are working collaboratively to improve hiring practices. Maximum class sizes were noted in several contracts, which required the school district to hire enough teachers accordingly. Other contracts talked about teacher participation at different levels. The Washington Teachers Union contract, for example, outlines the involvement of personnel committees at each school (other than those under redesign, restructuring, transformation or targeted assistance). These committees are designed to rank teacher candidates and forward their recommendations on to the principal who will make the final hiring decision from those on the committee list. The Rochester Teachers Union contract has guidelines for screening teacher applicants and involvement of school-based planning teams. It also discusses placement meetings that occur at the end of the school year. The Cincinnati Teachers Union contract outlines the teacher selection process, which includes joint hiring decisions between the principal and a team of four teachers who would be most closely working with the new teacher. The Long Beach Teachers Association contract includes beginning teacher incentives for certified beginning teachers and a longevity incentives program to keep experienced teachers in high-need classrooms longer.

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PROCESS IN DCPS

The competition for high quality teachers to help turn around student achievement is getting more and more fierce. This is especially true for urban districts such as DC, where teachers have many teaching options within relatively short distances. Therefore, effective recruitment of teachers requires many different types of strategies. Some districts, including DCPS, have hiring fairs where candidates come to talk with administrators about Districts and their schools in less formal interview situations. Other districts also have recruiters conduct Internet searches and send out “teacher ambassadors” to visit universities.

What follows is a diagram of the present DCPS hiring process followed by a chart of some possible solutions for problems areas.



Hiring Step	Potential Problems	Possible Solutions
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Prohibitive cost of living in DC ◦ Negative local and national press coverage of DCPS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Community partnerships with housing organizations, real estate developers, etc. ◦ Work with media to combat bad press; improve working conditions
Application	Certification requirements unclear/not transparent on TeachDC.org (official DCPS website for teacher recruitment)—often	Work with LEA licensure administrator and Office of Academic Credentials and Standards (OACS) to streamline language on TeachDC.org application

Starting Off Right 2005: Spotlight on Hiring

	causes applicants to misreport licensure status	
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ No position control system ◦ Time lag in processing actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Implement position control ◦ Upgrade available technology
Credentialing	OACS understaffed	Examine OACS staffing structure
Background Checks	Applicants MUST fingerprint with DCPS; non-DCPS FBI or Department of Justice clearance not accepted	Revisit regulations
Hiring	Human Resources Information System (HRIS) outdated and extremely time-sensitive; data can only be entered within small window of time before system "goes down" weekly basis	Implement efficient HRIS

In the District, teachers are hired from two basics pools of candidates: traditional teacher education programs, and alternative teaching programs such as DC Teaching Fellows (DCTF) and Teach for America (TFA). Traditional teacher education program candidates typically do coursework at a four-year institution. These pre-service teachers participate in a variety of student teaching experiences with a master teacher that varies in length (from 7 weeks to a full year), quality, and relevance to urban teaching. Currently in DC, universities place their student teachers in local schools they have relationships with, and not through a centralized student teacher assignment system.

DC Teaching Fellows enables persons who have had careers in other fields transition into education. Fellows are selected based on both their academic and professional achievements. They hold full-time teaching positions while earning their credentials and often work towards getting their Masters Degree in Education as well. When entering DCPS, Fellows are eligible for a non-renewable three-year Provisional Teaching license. After completing the required coursework and an additional Praxis exam (nationally recognized teacher qualification assessment), the Fellows are eligible for an upgrade from Provisional to Standard. DCPS assesses its needs and sets subject area goals for the program before the start of every DCTF recruitment season. Generally, Fellows are placed in Special education, Math, Science and English as a Second Language and, to a more limited degree, Elementary education. At present, DCPS hires 70 DCTF each year.

Teach for America (TFA) trains undergraduates of all academic majors to commit to teach for two years in urban and rural public schools across the country. Prior to teaching, recruited members complete independent work during the spring and participate in a five-week summer institute in Houston, Los Angeles or Philadelphia. They participate in various professional development activities and also learn about their assigned communities, educational programs and curriculum. Throughout

their two years of teaching, TFA members participate in ongoing professional development and classroom observations, with the option to become fully certified at the end of the two years. Since 1992, Teach For America DC has placed more than 650 teachers in public schools across the city. For academic year 2005-2006, 90 Teach For America DC corps members are teaching in 42 public schools across the city. At present DCPS hires 40 TFA teachers each year.

DCPS CHALLENGES

'05-'06 Recruitment and Hiring

We interviewed several key people involved in the recruitment and hiring of DCPS teachers about the lower number of schools reporting being fully staffed by the start of the '05-'06 school year.

Several theories emerged from these conversations, including the following:

- Given declining enrollments, some vacancies may have been on paper only. Once school started, principals were able to more accurately assess their student enrollment and many realized they did not have the student population to support their vacancies.
- There were a considerable number of resignations during the late summer months (July and August).

Average number of vacancies created due to resignation (as of 8/29/05):

Month	Quantity	Average per week
May	12	3
June	53	13
July	76	19
August	46	12

- These positions were then hard to fill on time given the thin teacher pool at that time of year because teachers had accepted position in other districts. Also if these resignations were in high need areas - Math, Science, ESL, Special education - it was even more of a burden to find quality replacements.
- There were also issues with principals making early and/or timely hiring decisions. Principals in the District are used to hiring late in the summer. However, this year the process was moved up considerably. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Washington Teachers Union allowed for teacher transfers to begin early in the spring and not hold up hiring of new teachers. This was a significant shift – from often not being able to hire until August to now being able to hire in May – and some principals not used to this timeline may not have taken full advantage of this welcome but surprising earlier hiring opportunity.

Ongoing DCPS Challenges

Several recruitment and hiring issues need to be addressed in the three main components of the hiring process: Human Resources, Policy and Local School Capacity.

1. Human Resources

The school system is plagued with a serious lack of effective and efficient technology within the DCPS central office (including HR, Budget, and Assistant Superintendents offices) and also at local schools. Paperwork is physically moved from office to office, carrying with it the potential for human error as well. Principals, HR and the Budget office work off versions of their own separate non-web-based documents that might not be in sync. Also, with a lack of technology, there is a lack of badly needed, real-time data in order to make accurate and timely decisions, especially during peak hiring season. Finally, the lack of technology leads to a need for increased numbers of quality staff to deal with this paper-intensive work.

The technology situation this year was somewhat improved. The pool of teachers available for hiring by principals was accessible on-line during the '05 hiring season, which principals greatly appreciated. In addition, HR was able to make use of a simple vacancy management website that at least allowed for increased efficiency within the department.

2. Policy

There are several policy issues regarding the timing of teacher resignations. For example, in March 2004, the DC Board of Education passed a Declaration of Intent policy that states teachers are to declare their intent to resign by April 15th. However, there is much agreement that this policy has no real effect, and HR staffers work as if there is no policy on the books. One possible problem here is that many teachers are under the impression that declaring early will negatively affect their benefits and/or pay through the summer months. HR has tried to communicate the correct policy, i.e. benefits do not actually expire until 30 days after the effective date of the separation and summer payouts are always due to teachers as 12-month employees (assuming they worked from the beginning of the school year).

In addition, the guidelines for retiring are unclear. There seem to be two issues at work. One is that for many teachers their retirement anniversary (the date at which they can retire) is late in the summer or after the start of the school year. This need to wait until that specific date before they separate only creates more issues with trying to hire teachers on time. The other issue is the perception that one has to wait until the new fiscal year starting on October 1 in order for salary increases to be completely in effect, thereby creating an actual incentive to not resign earlier. These

issues need to be examined and policies clarified, written or removed in order for earlier hiring to be truly maximized.

Certification is also an issue in the District. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) defines a highly qualified teacher, but it is up to each state to interpret NCLB and determine what counts for certification. At this time, DC has some of the strictest certification requirements in the nation, making reciprocity with other states extremely difficult. Although all school districts require Praxis tests, the specific tests required by DCPS are sometimes not aligned with those required in neighboring districts so teachers in the Metro area cannot easily make the transfer into DCPS. Also there is insufficient assistance for teachers in getting the needed training, guidance and support for the certification process. Given DC's unique situation, adding additional roadblocks for highly qualified teachers to teach in the District seems counterproductive.

3. Local School Capacity

Administrators need to be prepared to begin their recruitment and hiring process much earlier than before and take advantage of the improved practices in HR. Encouraging principals to focus on hiring earlier will allow them greater freedom to choose the teachers that are of the highest quality and best suit their schools. In addition, when teachers make their intention to resign known early often depends on the relationship they have with their school administration. Fostering trust between principals and teachers can help both principals and the District better predict staffing needs.

Concerns for the '06-'07 school year

Unfortunately, several big areas of uncertainty have the potential to cause recruitment and hiring difficulties for next year. For example:

- Some schools may have to lose teachers because of 2006 budgets shortfalls caused by the upcoming teacher and principal pay raises. Supposedly many of these excessed teachers will then be reassigned to other schools.
- The No Child Left Behind deadline requires every classroom to have a certified highly qualified teacher by 2006. Earlier this winter DCPS identified 1,100 teachers as uncertified and faced with possible termination.
- Master Education Plan (MEP) initiatives such as Early Childhood, Art and Music and Advanced Placement courses as well as potential school closings and consolidations will all affect both the kind and number of teachers needed next year.

HR staff members are diligently working to make sure the earlier hiring that occurred last year is a reality again this year. However, these uncertainties create additional challenges for them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy

There are several policies that currently set up unnecessary roadblocks and others that would be helpful but are missing at the present time. DCPS and the Board of Education need to:

- **Clarify the policies** concerning benefits, pay, and retirement; offer enticements to teachers to retire during the summer.
- **Create and implement a coherent hiring timeline** that aligns a strengthened Declaration of Intent policy, teacher excessing and reassignment decisions, and hiring of new teachers.
- Review and **revise teacher certification** regulations.

Process

Thanks to the hard work of Human Resources staff the hiring process has been streamlined and accelerated. However, improvements still need to be made to:

- Improve **technology** at all levels.
- Expand and increase collaboration with multiple **teacher recruitment pipelines**, including centralizing and capitalizing on student teachers as another source of qualified new teachers.
- Explore ways to create both **greater local school capacity** and greater trust between the schools and DCPS central offices.

Incentives

Incentives can have a positive effect on recruitment. DCPS and the City must collaborate to:

- **Strongly support teachers:** assist new teachers with subsidized certification, moving expenses, etc., and continuing teachers with well funded quality professional development.
- **Improve working conditions** in all schools.

DC VOICE's conclusion after further examination of DCPS hiring practices is that this is mostly a good news story: both present implementation and future planning seem to be moving in the right direction. However, systemic problems remain that are beyond HR's control. Solutions will require new resources, improved management practices, policy review and revision, and strong community support to ensure that the changes initiated are sustained. Because HR is where everyone's DCPS career starts, and because it often continues to be the "face" of DCPS both for its employees and for the public, making the changes needed is of crucial importance. Improved hiring practices will help ensure a high quality teaching force that can provide the quality education our children deserve.