

Testimony to the Council of the District of Columbia Committee of the Whole Human Resources and Human Capital Initiatives in DC Public Schools January 16, 2009

Presented by Margot Berkey of Parents United for the DC Public Schools as part of joint testimony with Mary Levy of the Washington Lawyer's Committee; Iris Toyer of Parents United, and Cathy Reilly of the Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators

Chairman Gray and other members of the Council, thank you for convening this hearing on the topic of the workforce in DC Public Schools. My statements will comprise the first of a four-part testimony on this topic jointly developed with my colleagues Mary Levy, Iris Toyer and Cathy Reilly. We will address:

1. The values that we believe are the essential foundation for improving teaching and learning in our public schools.
2. The approach to reform of our teaching and principal corps that DCPS has described in its five year plan.
3. Data on our workforce and research related to the DCPS approach, and
4. Recommendations for DCPS and the Council that align with our values and are supported by the data and research.

We believe that public schools are the heart of any society and that they must be a source of both stability and growth for the communities they serve.

We believe in the statement of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that, "*The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.*" When schools exist for this purpose, the focus of education and the measures of educational success are deeper and broader than what can be captured through standardized testing. Likewise, measuring the effectiveness of educators cannot rely solely or even heavily on increases in standardized test scores since these are just slivers of what educators seek to achieve.

We believe that because schools are both a reflection of and a builder of societies, they function best with the collaboration of all people in the school as well as with parents and community members. Results are stronger when people work together to meet their needs, to solve problems, to learn from one another and to find ways to continually grow and improve. Time and time again we see that collaboration, especially among teachers and administrators, is producing strong academic outcomes, as well as safer and happier educational experiences for children. Districts as close as Prince George's and Montgomery counties, urban areas like Boston and Chicago, and other communities with high rates of children in poverty are on the path to success because they work together to be better educators. Their districts have put systems and supports in place that foster high quality teaching and learning via collaboration and respectful workplace practices. Their success is achieved and sustained by collaboration and not competition.

We believe that schools serve children best when the adults who comprise the workforce of our schools are treated with respect, given the training, resources and support they need to perform their jobs effectively, and are held to high standards. When any one of those elements is lacking,

it is our children who end up being deprived or harmed. We know from personal experience that a school climate that does not respect and support adults is also one that does not respect or support children effectively.

We believe that all societies are obligated to invest in education and to do so in a way that is equitable and adequate to meet the needs of their population. The goal of educational investment is to achieve sustainable results. We believe investment in sustainable results is essential in every aspect of education—whether in the programs and supports for children, in school facilities, in operating systems or in the human resources and workforce development systems that serve the education workforce. Therefore, we seek human resources systems that seek return on investment through retention of well-prepared and well-chosen personnel.

We look to the current DCPS approaches to human resources and other dimensions of school reform through the lens of these values and we see several contrasts with our core beliefs.

Attachments:

From: www.publicschoolinsights.org

Teachers Learning Together

Mary Russo, The Richard J. Murphy K-8 School, Massachusetts

Results:

- **In 2005, 89% of students passed the Massachusetts math exam, up from less than 50% in 1999**
- **Now ranked in top 5% of Boston public schools on reading and math scores**

In 1999, shortly before principal Mary Russo arrived at the Richard J. Murphy K-8 School in Dorchester, Mass., more than half the students failed the state math exam. Russo's mandate was to boost student achievement. To do so, she focused on establishing collaborative professional development practices that would help teachers learn from each other and work toward a common goal. With better instruction, she reasoned, those test scores would go up.

Teachers at Murphy now spend three times as many hours on professional development as the district requires. Every public school teacher in Massachusetts must create his or her own professional development plan; at Murphy, these plans outline how teachers will use and share the strategies they learn.

When new teachers and paraprofessionals arrive at Murphy in the fall, they not only participate in the district's mentor program, but also attend an orientation led by senior teachers who explain the school's approach to math and literacy instruction, discipline, and other issues. Both novice and veteran teachers get the chance to work with literacy and math coaches, who come from within the school and are nominated by their colleagues. Coaches provide one-on-one classroom consultations and lead 90-minute sessions twice a month for all the teachers from each grade.

These meetings include a preparation period, an in-class demonstration, and a discussion following the lesson.

"As we think about students as learners," says Anne Marie Brochu, a literacy coordinator at the school, "we also have to think about teachers as learners." The educators at Murphy say the school's emphasis on reaching high professional standards makes their work more fulfilling, and the chance to collaborate keeps them from feeling isolated in the classroom. An emphasis on data-driven instruction also helps teachers identify gaps in student understanding that they can work together to solve. If one teacher's students did particularly well on a set of assessment questions, for example, he or she can discuss the instructional method that worked.

Russo's approach has paid off. By 2005, the number of the school's students who failed the Massachusetts math exam fell to just 11 percent. And though the vast majority of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, Murphy now ranks in the top 5 percent of all Boston public schools in both math and reading scores. The U.S. Department of Education named Murphy a National Distinguished Title I School in 2001, one of a host of awards and accolades the school has received.

Further details about this story can be found in our sources:

Boston Public Schools, "[Richard J. Murphy K-8 School](#)", December 2007

Joan Richardson, for The Learning Principal Vol. 3, No. 3, "[Quest for Excellence: High-quality professional learning transforms two Boston elementary schools](#)", November 2007

WGBH Educational Foundation, Panel Discussion, "[Empowering Educators: Power of Teamwork in Schools](#)", March 22, 2007

Mary Russo, for [The Evaluation Exchange Volume XI, No. 4, Winter 2005/2006](#), "[Teacher Professional Development: How Do We Establish It and Know That It's Working?](#)", 2005

Frank Levy (MIT) and Richard J. Murnane (Harvard Graduate School of Education), for Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston of the Kennedy School of Government, "[Standards-Based Education Reform in the Computer Age: Lessons from Boston's Murphy School](#)", March 9, 2005

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From www.publicschoolinsights.org

Teachers Teaching Teachers

JoAnn DePue, Springville-Griffith Institute Central School District, New York

Results:

- **88% retention rate of probationary new teacher hires since 2003**
- **Steadily improving state assessment scores and graduation rates over the past five years**

Like many small rural school districts, the Springville-Griffith Institute Central School District in Western New York faces challenges in hiring and retaining teachers. Home to rural farms and small manufacturing facilities, the district serves a diverse population of about 2,500 low- to middle-income students. Many district teachers are nearing retirement, potentially exacerbating teacher retention woes. District leaders worried that high turnover rates would impede student learning.

Six years ago, Springville-Griffith educators took action. The district and the local teachers union, the Griffith Institute Faculty Association, collaborated on a comprehensive and innovative mentoring and induction program that has improved teacher retention and likely contributed to steady improvements in student performance.

In 2002, the district initiated one-on-one mentoring for first-year teachers by tapping into resources from the state's Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), a partnership of small school districts. The mentoring program was so successful and popular that it has expanded to include supports for second- and third-year teachers as well.

First-year teachers in Springville-Griffith's program receive comprehensive and on-going support. New hires start the year with an orientation day conducted by the district's mentor coordinator, where they develop a script for their first day in the classroom. Each new teacher is also paired with a "teacher mentor" who will work with him or her throughout the school year. New teachers and their mentors attend three half-day training sessions on important topics and complete periodic, informal classroom observations to improve their understanding of effective instruction. During these observations, they compare what they see with the New York State Commissioner's Criteria for Effective Teaching.

New teachers also attend two days of training in classroom management and communication, keep a reflection journal on their own experiences, and maintain a formal record of their mentoring and professional development activities. They receive feedback from three formal observations of their classroom teaching and develop a portfolio of lesson plans, assignments and other evidence of their teaching practice.

The district makes sure that teacher mentors are well prepared to support their new colleagues. Mentors attend a training session and new teacher orientation day. They receive a monthly checklist with topics to discuss with their mentees, and they keep a formal log of their mentoring activities, which add up to a minimum of 15 hours per year. They also attend three half-day training sessions on essential areas including peer coaching, supervision, adult learning styles, collaboration, performance review, and professional development plans. In exchange for their services, they receive an annual stipend of \$588, and first-time mentors receive an in-service credit for training.

Support for new teachers does not stop once they reach their second year. They no longer work with a single teacher mentor, but they do attend six after-school sessions covering important topics such as professionalism, classroom management, lesson design, assessment, collaboration and goal-setting. As in their first year, they receive training on effective teaching, get feedback on three formal classroom observations, and maintain a portfolio of their teaching practice.

Third-year teachers also undergo three formal classroom observations, and they submit their portfolios to district administration for evaluation. If they perform well enough on this evaluation to receive tenure, these teachers work with "building mentors" to develop "action research projects," where they test new strategies, record their results and share what they have learned with their colleagues.

Second- and third-year teachers also receive on-going support from these "building mentors." Every school has such a mentor, who trains and oversees teacher mentors and serves as a liaison between new teachers, mentors, and administration. In exchange for their services, Building Mentors receive stipends of \$2325 each.

Mentors are quick to assert that they're not in this work for the money alone. As one mentor puts it, the program offers "a wonderful opportunity for me to be kept abreast of new ideas and skills...and to take advantage of my mentee's many strengths."

Springville-Griffith's teacher support program is paying dividends in both teacher retention and student achievement. Despite its overall 25% turnover rate, the district has retained 88% of its probationary new hires since 2003. In addition, students' state assessment scores and graduation rates have improved steadily over the past five years. The district's far-reaching mentoring and support program has been an essential ingredient of its success.

Further details about this story can be found on Springville-Griffith's Mentoring Program's [webpage](#).

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This story came to LFA's attention as a winner of [the 2008 NEA-Saturn/UAW Partnership Award for Teacher Induction Programs](#).

Story adapted with permission from [NEA](#) and [Springville-Griffith Institute Central School District](#).

From www.publicschoolinsights.org

A Partnership of Expertise and Knowledge

Su Lively, Hampton City Schools, Virginia

Results:

- **78% teacher retention rate, up from 68% in 2001**
- **96% teacher retention rate in Hard-To-Staff Schools last year**
- **Principals report that student achievement in classrooms with new teachers equals that in veteran teacher classrooms by the second and third benchmark testing periods each year**

Hampton City Schools (HCS) in Hampton, VA, face challenges common to many districts around the nation. A combination of early retirement, low salaries, inadequate education funding, and concerns about teachers' quality of life makes recruiting and retaining teachers difficult. At the same time, rising student enrollment has increased demand for more teachers. The result? The number of teachers with zero years experience grows each year.

Citing research that new teachers do less to raise student achievement than veteran teachers do, HCS formed the "New Teacher Induction Program." This program has raised student achievement by enhancing teacher quality and increasing teacher retention.

HCS collaborated with the Hampton Education Association to create and sustain a comprehensive induction and mentoring program for beginning teachers. They formed a partnership that now includes the Virginia Education Association, the National Education Association (NEA), NEA's association for retired educators, and several area colleges. With funding from the Virginia Department of Education [Hard-to-Staff Schools'](#) Project, these partners provide the induction program with the expertise and knowledge of experienced teachers, retired teachers, association leaders, instructional leaders, higher education faculty, state department personnel, and the business community.

In too many schools across the country, teachers are left to sink or swim. Not so in Hampton. Already during orientation week, each new hire meets with instructional leaders and is assigned a "building mentor," a veteran teacher within his or her school. This mentor introduces him or her to school policies, procedures and curriculum issues. Building mentors remain with their new teacher for three years, and in return they receive a stipend and points towards recertification.

Teachers who have no teaching experience get even more help. The district pairs each with a "retired teacher mentor." These mentors, who are selected through an application process and receive a stipend for their services, coach new teachers during the instructional day. They provide feedback, expertise and immediate support in classroom management and effective instructional techniques. They also assist with other aspects of teaching, such as room arrangement, classroom management, and instructional planning. Each new teacher receives at least 25 hours of contact time with his or her retired teacher mentor during his or her first semester teaching. In Hard-to-Staff schools, retired teachers may continue mentoring beyond the first year.

According to one retiree mentor "I can give back to the profession to which I have dedicated my life...make a difference in the lives of beginning teachers who in turn will impact the learning of many students."

The "New Teacher Induction Program" offers more than just mentors. The district also offers new teachers the support of a "teacher specialist." This district employee coaches new teachers during their first five years in the classroom. The teacher specialist visits new teachers in their classrooms, observes them and provides feedback, facilitates discussion groups, models lessons, and presents workshops. The teacher specialist also trains mentors, leading workshops on topics such as coaching new teachers, strong instructional strategies, lesson planning, classroom management strategies and communication skills.

The New Teacher Induction program has been very successful. When it began 6 years ago, the "unofficial" teacher retention rate was 68% (the district did not, at the time, track teacher retention, and this number was determined by a hand-count of the district's separation reports, which list all departing teachers). Over the last few years, the district's overall retention rate has climbed to 78%. Among teachers with both a building mentor and retired teacher mentor, the retention rate increases to 82%. Among schools targeted by the Hard-to-Staff Schools Project, the retention rate last year was 96%. Focus groups and surveys attribute this success to the increased confidence of new teachers, the feeling of professional growth they experience, and the fact that the program eases participants' anxieties about teaching.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the program is also having its desired impact on student achievement. Principals report that, by the second and third benchmark testing periods each year, students in new teachers' classrooms perform as well as veteran teachers' students. Feedback from program participants links this outcome to growth in teachers' instructional skills and the likelihood that they will use multiple instructional strategies. One graduate of the induction program (who later became the Hampton Education Association president) put it this way: "As a career changer, this was key to my success in the classroom...I have no doubt that I am a better teacher and leader..."

This program is also having a positive impact on the Hampton Education Association. Because the district is attracting excellent teaching candidates, improving the retention of effective first-year educators, and easing their transition into the profession, the association is attracting more enthusiastic teachers. These teachers want to be involved in association activities and have taken on leadership roles as building representatives, convention delegates, and local officers.

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Story adapted with permission from [NEA](#) and [Hampton City Schools](#). To learn more about the partnership award, visit the [award page](#) on NEA's site.

Getting Back to Essentials: Effective Professional Learning

By Claus von Zastrow on April 21, 2008

Stephanie Hirsh and Joellen Killion of the National Staff Development Council have written a must-read *Education Week* Commentary calling for far greater national commitment to professional learning. Already in their first paragraph, they drive home a point Public School Insights has been harping on lately: namely, that **recent education reform efforts have squandered much of their promise by focusing more on incentives (or disincentives) than on continuous support for excellent instruction.** Hirsh and Killion write:

For nearly a decade, efforts to raise student-achievement levels have been mostly about driving standards through the schoolhouse door. Accountability has meant putting pressure on educators to raise performance. But ensuring that educators have the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to help all students achieve has not been approached with the same urgency. A concentration on minimal standards for teacher quality and the continual underinvestment in proven approaches to help educators do their jobs more effectively have made it almost impossible for teachers and principals to bring all students to proficiency, as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

This, despite the rising tide of evidence that professional learning can help American schools outperform international rivals:

A growing body of evidence suggests that the right kind of investments in effective, school-based learning for teachers can have an enormous impact, and may well be the difference between lackluster achievement in the United States and the higher performance seen in foreign countries that have invested strategically in teacher collaborative learning.

In their commentary, Hirsh and Killion offer a concise and compelling description of effective professional learning:

In an effective professional-learning system, teachers meet on a regular schedule in teams formed because of common grade-level or content-area assignments and the collective responsibility members hold for their students' success. Learning teams follow a cycle of continuous improvement that begins with examining student data to determine the areas of greatest student need, pinpointing areas where adult learning is necessary, engaging in study to address these needs, developing powerful lessons and assessments, applying new strategies in the classroom, reflecting on their impact, and repeating the cycle as necessary.

To learn more about effective learning systems, see the National Staff Development Council's *Standards for Staff Development*. NSDC is a member of the [Learning First Alliance](#), which sponsors Public School Insights. Link to this story: <http://www.publicschoolinsights.org/node/2214>

Urban Teacher Residency Programs

By Claus von Zastrow on August 29, 2008

It's no secret that schools serving the most disadvantaged students face the toughest challenges in attracting and retaining effective teachers. As a result, the poorest, most vulnerable students--those who need our help most--are least likely to attend schools with fully qualified staff members.

One promising solution is attracting attention: Urban Teacher Residency programs. These programs combine master's-level education coursework with clinical teaching experience in actual urban classrooms. According to a recent article in *Voices in Urban Education*, these programs are showing early success in poor urban schools. **Ninety percent of graduates from a Boston program--and 95 percent of graduates from a similar program in Chicago--are still teaching three years after graduation. Compare that to national urban school retention rates, which typically run between 30 and 50 percent.**

The programs succeed by combining some essential ingredients of successful teacher retention programs: mentoring, professional collaboration, school/university partnerships, on-going support for teachers, and concrete links between research and classroom practice.

Link to this story: <http://www.publicschoolinsights.org/node/2138>



Thursday, Feb. 14, 2008

How They Do It Abroad

By Linda Darling-Hammond

When school starts each year, the most important question on the minds of parents and children is, Who will my teacher be? The concern is well founded. Researchers have discovered that school's deepest influence on learning depends on the quality of the teacher. Students lucky enough to have teachers who know their content and how to teach it well achieve more. And the effects of a very good (or very poor) teacher last beyond a single year, influencing a student's learning for years. Put simply, expert teachers are the most fundamental resource for improving education.

This lesson has been well learned by societies that top international rankings in education. The highest-achieving countries--Finland, Sweden, Ireland, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Canada--have been pouring resources into teacher training and support. These countries routinely prepare their teachers more extensively, pay them well in relation to competing occupations and give them lots of time for professional learning. They also provide well-trained teachers for all students--rather than allowing some to be taught by untrained novices--by offering equitable salaries and adding incentives for harder-to-staff locations.

All teacher candidates in Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands, for example, receive two to three years of graduate-level preparation for teaching, at government expense, plus a living stipend. Unlike the U.S., where teachers either go into debt to prepare for a profession that will pay them poorly or enter with little or no training, these countries made the decision to invest in a uniformly well-prepared teaching force by recruiting top candidates and paying them while they receive extensive training. With its steep climb in the international rankings, Finland has been a poster child for school improvement. Teachers learn how to create programs that engage students in research and inquiry on a regular basis. There, training focuses on how to teach students who learn in different ways--including those with special needs. The Finns reason that if teachers learn to help students who struggle, they will be able to teach their students more effectively.

Singapore, top-ranked in math by the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, treats teaching similarly. When I visited Singapore's National Institute of Education, the nation's only teacher-training institution, nearly all the people I spoke with described how they were investing in teachers' abilities to teach a curriculum focused on critical thinking and inquiry--skills needed in a high-tech economy. To get the best teachers, the institute recruits students from the top third of each graduating high school class into a fully paid four-year teacher-education

program (or, if they enter later, a one-to-two-year graduate program) and puts them on the government's payroll. When they enter the profession, teachers' salaries are higher than those of beginning doctors.

Expert teachers are given time to serve as mentors to help beginners learn their craft. The government pays for 100 hours of professional development each year for all teachers. In addition, they have 20 hours a week to work with other teachers and visit one another's classrooms. And teachers continue to advance throughout their career. With aid from the government, teachers in Singapore can pursue three separate career ladders, which help them become curriculum specialists, mentors for other teachers or school principals. These opportunities bring recognition, extra compensation and new challenges that keep teaching exciting and allow teachers to share their expertise.

Most U.S. teachers, on the other hand, have no time to work with colleagues during the school day. They plan by themselves and get a few hit-and-run workshops after school, with little opportunity to share knowledge or improve their practice. In a study of mathematics teaching and learning in Japan, Taiwan and the U.S., James Stigler and Harold Stevenson noted that "Asian class lessons are so well crafted [because] there is a very systematic effort to pass on the accumulated wisdom of teaching practice to each new generation of teachers and to keep perfecting that practice by providing teachers the opportunities to continually learn from each other."

With these kinds of investments, it is possible to ensure that every teacher has access to the knowledge he or she needs to teach effectively and that every child has access to competent teachers. Such a goal is critical for the U.S. if it is indeed to leave no child behind.

Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun professor of education at Stanford University

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- <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1713557,00.html>