

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COUNCIL, ON HUMAN RESOURCES AND HUMAN CAPITAL INITIATIVES WITHIN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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Good afternoon. There is no question that we all want to have “great people” teaching our children and running the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). The issue is how to attract, develop, and retain them. My testimony will concentrate on facts about DCPS’ workforce, particularly teachers, and on the application of research findings to our particular situation.

As already described in Ms. Reilly’s testimony, DCPS’ on-going activity and Five Year plan as regards DCPS employees is centered on the following:

- Remove large number of teachers through the 90-day plan process, buy-outs, dismissal for failure to complete all certification requirement, and reconstitution of “failing” schools
- Replace these teachers with new teachers, especially through Teach for America (TFA) and the New Teacher Project (NTP)
- Also, apparently as a lower priority -- due to the need to develop processes and identify funding – pay for performance, major improvements in human resources operations (“performance management systems”), institution of a career ladder, professional development, and induction processes for new teachers
- Plan proposals for principals and central office staff that are overall similar

Some of the proposals are very promising: effective performance management systems, school-wide performance awards, expanded and enriched professional development and new teacher induction, and the institution of career ladders. However, these critical initiatives seem to be less of a priority than the others. The rest of my testimony presents data on the DCPS ET 15 (“teacher”) workforce, and other major concerns with current DCPS plans.

My data on the ET 15 workforce are based on DCPS Schedule As, as cleaned by me through comparisons with other sources. They are only approximate due to data quality deficiencies, and I hope to clean them further if they are the best we have – which so far they appear to be. First, a profile of the experience of our teacher workforce in FY 2005 and FY 2008, *using step as a proxy for experience, and defining “teacher” broadly as ET-15, thus including counselors, librarians, psychologists, and social workers* :

**DCPS ET-15 Workforce by Step FY 2005 and FY 2008**

| <b>Step<sup>1</sup></b>  | <b>FY<br/>2005</b> | <b>FY<br/>2005</b> | <b>FY<br/>2008</b> | <b>FY<br/>2008</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1                        | 241                | 5%                 | 264                | 7%                 |
| 2                        | 214                | 4%                 | 197                | 5%                 |
| 3                        | 197                | 4%                 | 189                | 5%                 |
| 4                        | 282                | 6%                 | 115                | 3%                 |
| 5                        | 260                | 5%                 | 119                | 3%                 |
| 6                        | 273                | 6%                 | 121                | 3%                 |
| 7                        | 159                | 3%                 | 140                | 4%                 |
| 8                        | 145                | 3%                 | 129                | 3%                 |
| 9                        | 127                | 3%                 | 161                | 4%                 |
| 10                       | 223                | 5%                 | 189                | 5%                 |
| 11                       | 173                | 4%                 | 131                | 3%                 |
| 12                       | 592                | 12%                | 504                | 13%                |
| 13                       | 1,933              | 40%                | 409                | 43%                |
| 14                       |                    |                    | 153                |                    |
| 15                       |                    |                    | 128                |                    |
| 16                       |                    |                    | 1,020              |                    |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>4,819</b>       |                    | <b>3,969</b>       |                    |
| <b>Summary</b>           |                    |                    |                    |                    |
| Beginning (1-2)          | 455                | 9%                 | 461                | 12%                |
| Intermediate A (3-5)     | 739                | 15%                | 423                | 11%                |
| Intermediate B (6-11)    | 1,100              | 23%                | 871                | 22%                |
| Most experienced (12-16) | 2,525              | 52%                | 2,214              | 56%                |

These data show that: (1) The DCPS workforce is heavily weighted to senior teachers.

This effect may be exaggerated by the inclusion of non-classroom teachers. (2) As the number of teachers has declined the proportion of the most senior and the most junior has

<sup>1</sup> New steps for longevity were added after FY 2005. I have therefore added steps 14-16 into step 13 in FY 2008 to make the figures comparable.

increased. (3) DCPS is developing a larger and larger hole in the middle of the spectrum of experience. (4) DCPS has a serious problem retaining teachers after two years, as is further shown by the following:

**DCPS New Teacher Retention**

| <b>Year of entry</b>  | <b>Total entering</b> | <b>1 year or less</b> | <b>2 years or less</b> | <b>3 years or less</b> | <b>4 years or less</b> | <b>5 years or less</b> | <b>6 years or less</b> | <b>7 years or less</b> | <b>8 years or less</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| FY 2001               | 353                   | 89                    | 157                    | 198                    | 222                    | 240                    | 272                    | 285                    | 291                    |
| FY 2002               | 449                   | 66                    | 171                    | 243                    | 279                    | 334                    | 354                    | 364                    |                        |
| FY 2003               | 292                   | 44                    | 132                    | 174                    | 218                    | 230                    | 248                    |                        |                        |
| FY 2004               | 211                   | 35                    | 105                    | 143                    | 153                    | 165                    |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2005               | 240                   | 51                    | 125                    | 166                    | 192                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2006               | 296                   | 60                    | 136                    | 184                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2007               | 242                   | 42                    | 131                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2008               | 269                   | 39                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| <b>Attrition rate</b> |                       |                       |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2001               |                       | 25%                   | 44%                    | 56%                    | 63%                    | 68%                    | 77%                    | 81%                    | 82%                    |
| FY 2002               |                       | 15%                   | 38%                    | 54%                    | 62%                    | 74%                    | 79%                    | 81%                    |                        |
| FY 2003               |                       | 15%                   | 45%                    | 60%                    | 75%                    | 79%                    | 85%                    |                        |                        |
| FY 2004               |                       | 17%                   | 50%                    | 68%                    | 73%                    | 78%                    |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2005               |                       | 21%                   | 52%                    | 69%                    | 80%                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2006               |                       | 20%                   | 46%                    | 62%                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2007               |                       | 17%                   | 54%                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| FY 2008               |                       | 14%                   |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| Average 01-09         |                       | 18%                   | 46%                    | 60%                    | 69%                    | 74%                    | 80%                    | 81%                    |                        |

In sum, the rate of attrition in recent years, compared with a similar study of 1993-1996:

|                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| FY 2001-FY 2009            | FY 1993-FY 1996 <sup>2</sup> |
| After 1 year: 15-20%       | About 16%                    |
| After 2 years: roughly 50% | About 33%                    |
| After 3 years: roughly 60% | About 46%                    |
| After 4 years: roughly 70% |                              |
| After 5 years: roughly 75% |                              |
| After 6 years: roughly 80% |                              |

<sup>2</sup> \*Excludes teachers leaving due to 1996 RIF

The limited data on attrition elsewhere shows that it is high elsewhere, especially in cities, but not as high as in DCPS. Philadelphia loses 50% of its new teachers in three years, compared to 60% here. A study of Florida districts found rates of 27%-55% after four years, compared to 70% here. A study of Texas districts found an average of about 20% after two years, compared to 50% here.

Given where we are, the focus on dismissal and replacement has to be described as institutionalized instability. The research consensus<sup>3</sup> on large-scale new teacher attrition is that it is highly detrimental to education because (1) experience up to 3-5 years makes a significant difference in teacher effectiveness; (2) teacher turnover causes a loss of coherence in program and instruction; and (3) the loss feeds on itself, particularly in low-income schools, which tend to lose more teachers. Teacher turnover is also costly in dollars. A recent study of actual costs in 2004 found that Milwaukee spent \$15,325 per teacher lost and that Chicago spent \$17,872 on recruitment, hiring, induction, other training, and separation costs.

Research on why teachers leave schools, school systems, and the profession of teaching cites factors that are prevalent in DCPS:

- Feeling of insufficient effectiveness in classroom – of not making a difference for students. The consensus seems to be that this is the number one reason.
- Lack of support from school district, principals, and colleagues that could make success in the classroom possible
- Poor working conditions: decrepit and deficient facilities, equipment and supplies
- Poor student discipline
- Unrealistically demanding workloads: teaching multiple grades or subjects, large classes, lack of preparation in subject matter

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<sup>3</sup> I reviewed many studies on the topic of this testimony, a list of which I can provide later. Major sources are Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, *Who Stays in Teaching and Why: A Review of the Literature on Teacher Retention* (Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, Harvard University 2005); National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *Policy Brief: The High Cost of Teacher Turnover* (2007); Alliance for Excellent Education, *Teacher Attrition: A Costly Loss to the Nation and to the States* (2005).

- Relatively low pay, a factor that interacts with others
- These are interdependent, meaning that schools cannot pick one or two “essential” factors and ignore the rest

The remedy for large-scale turnover here, suggested by the research:

- Use, but limit reliance on Teach For America and other teachers whose commitment is limited to two years. Research shows that many leave after two years, and – on the whole -- that their effectiveness is, unsurprisingly, no better than teachers with different preparation. Note that countries with the highest-performing educational systems, like Finland and Singapore, pick the highest performing college graduates (like TFA), and then put them through two years of intensive graduate education for teaching (unlike TFA)
- Strong induction programs for new teachers and strong ongoing professional development for all teachers
- Fix external problems, such as facilities, supplies, equipment and discipline
- Give new teachers realistic assignments commensurate with their background and need to learn the craft of teaching
- Raise pay – since the above will not happen immediately

A second major concern consists of practical problems that need to be resolved

- DCPS has not yet developed a fair and accurate system to evaluate teachers by their “effectiveness”
- There are gross disparities in resources among schools with similar students meaning that teachers and principals are not on a level playing field. How can one compare “effectiveness” between staff at a school with large classes, large adult/pupil ratios, and shortages of supplies and staff at a school with small classes, many more support staff, ample supplies:
- Will buy-outs merely encourage good teachers to leave for jobs elsewhere, leaving behind mediocre or poor teachers whom other districts will not hire?

Third, the measures concentrating on removing and replacing staff are NOT new.

We have tried them before and they have not raised student outcomes or satisfied parents and community. What will be different this time?

- Removal of teachers: 1996 RIF of about 300 teacher, based on six factors, of which seniority was only one; periodic buy-outs; dismissal of hundreds of teachers not fully certified (by Superintendents Vance and Janey) only to replace them with uncertified teachers with no experience
- Dismissal of principals: this practice has been ongoing for 20 years. Typically 25% of our schools open in the fall with a new principal, some transferred but many newly hired or promoted from below.

- Dismissal of central office staff: six years ago Superintendent Vance abolished the jobs of 600 central office employees, re-employing only those whom he selected among those who chose to re-apply
- Replacement of experienced employees dismissed or leaving voluntarily with inexperienced people. In the case of teachers, principals, and central office staff, DCPS was unable to replace those let go with better performers. We lost some excellent people who found better employment elsewhere, usually in our suburbs.
- Reconstitution of schools was employed by all permanent superintendents over the last 15 years. A few did better but most did not improve or even performed worse.
- Principal training programs, recruitment of high quality principals and central office staff from elsewhere, and the preparation of detailed job descriptions (at a cost of about \$1 million) were all tried, but dropped.

In conclusion, some important issues for this city are: Do we want a teacher workforce consisting primarily of first and second-year teachers? How much are we willing to rely on student test results as the main measure of staff effectiveness? Should we focus on dismissal and replacement or on training and supporting the staff we have, and then evaluating them?

Thank you for having this hearing.