

TO GET, GROW, AND KEEP GREAT TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS



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INTRODUCTION

Great schools start with great people. No matter where you go, when you see students inspired to reach for their dreams, you invariably encounter a visionary leader, expert teachers, and dedicated support staff. So that's what we set out to achieve—in all of our schools—almost a decade ago.

We were fortunate to be able to begin this work in 2007 by standing on the shoulders of the thousands of talented educators who have been working tirelessly on behalf of D.C. students for decades—people like 2011 Principal of the Year Maria Tukeva, who, as of this writing, has served DCPS brilliantly for 35 years.

But we also realized we needed to do more to get, grow, and keep great teachers and principals. So we took a hard look at all of our policies and practices related to talent—from recruitment all the way to retirement—and began to sketch a roadmap for the future. Our goal: An outstanding teacher for every classroom, and an outstanding principal for every school.

We've made tremendous progress. As a result of our organization-wide focus on talent, our students are making unprecedented gains. In fact, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the "Nation's Report Card," our students are growing faster than those in any other state. We still have a long way to go, but we're making historic leaps, all because of our extraordinary teachers and principals.

This report tells our talent story over the past eight years. We share what we've accomplished so far, what we've learned along the way, and what work lies ahead. We humbly offer this not as a script for other school systems to follow to the letter, but rather as evidence of what's possible with the right mix of policy and persistence. We hope it inspires both debate and action.

Finally, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank our principals, teachers, and support staff. We are inspired each and every day by their service to our students and their families. They do the most important work in our nation's capital, and we are honored to work alongside them.

Sincerely,

Kaya Henderson Chancellor, DCPS

Jason Kamras *Chief of Human Capital, DCPS, 2011-15*

The Five Strands

To make its vision of great teachers and great principals a reality, DCPS overhauled almost every one of its human capital policies and practices, focusing on five main strands:

RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, AND HIRING

More ambitious and more professional recruitment efforts, more rigorous selection standards, and earlier hiring timelines.

EVALUATION Clearer performance expectations tied to student learning, and a process that gives educators the feedback they need to do their best work.

SUPPORT Extensive curricular guidance, along with personalized coaching designed to help teachers and principals meet clear professional goals.

COMPENSATION Best-in-the-nation salaries and bonuses—driven primarily by performance, not just years of experience or advanced degrees.

RETENTION High-profile public recognition, boutique-style outreach, five-digit financial rewards, and new leadership and professional learning opportunities that don't take the best educators out of schools.

44 DCPS sealed its standing as the nation's fastest-improving urban school district with the 2015 NAEP results. **77**

> - Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of Great City Schools

The Results

There's still much more work to be done, but after seven years, DCPS is making steady progress toward its ambitious goals for teachers, principals, and, most importantly, students. Thirty-five percent of all teachers in the district are now rated Highly Effective—more than double the percentage in 2009-10, the first year of the district's new, more rigorous evaluation system—and 38 percent of principals now receive that rating. Moreover, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), DCPS students have consistently made more progress in reading and math—often dramatically more—than young people in the rest of the nation.



-20 20 -10 0 10 30 DCPS Chicago Los Angeles Fresno Cleveland Dallas Boston San Diego Charlotte New York City Atlanta Philadelphia Detroit

2011–15 NAEP TOTAL SCALE SCORE GAINS (4TH/8TH GRADE READING AND MATH)

IN FOCUS: DCPS 2011-15 NAEP SCALE SCORE GAINS

Hillsborough

Albuquerque



Baltimore City

4th Grade Reading

Houston

Austin







4 DCPS



TEACHER RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, AND HIRING

Rethinking everything in pursuit of top teachers

A small recruitment staff, low selection standards, and outdated policies used to prevent DCPS from opening the school year fully staffed, let alone with the most talented teachers in the country. Today, the district invests in sophisticated, nationwide recruitment efforts and screens applicants for actual teaching skill, not just paper credentials. New hiring policies empower principals to build their teams and ensure that teachers can choose the schools that match their talents and interests. The result: Vacancies are a thing of the past, and the district fills its classrooms with some of the best teachers in the country.

THEN

Limited central office capacity

Hiring teachers is one of the most important things a school system does, yet DCPS used to rely on just two full-time staff members to recruit and select for roughly 600 annual vacancies. Perhaps not surprisingly, the school year typically began with about 100 classrooms missing a teacher.

Low hiring standards

Partly as a result of this limited capacity, the selection process amounted to little more than a resume review. The district tended to hire applicants who simply had the proper paper credentials, and did little to gauge their instructional ability or fit with DCPS.

Forced placement and delayed hiring

The teacher contract required the district to hire "excessed" teachers—those who lost their positions because of budget cuts or school restructuring—before any outside candidates, and strictly in order of seniority. This delayed the entire hiring process and caused DCPS to lose the opportunity to hire talented external candidates. It also often forced the central office to place a teacher in a school regardless of whether the principal agreed with the hire or whether the teacher wanted to work there.



¹ Adnot, M., Dee, T., Katz, V. & Wyckoff, J. (forthcoming paper). "Teacher Turnover, Teacher Quality and Student Achievement in DCPS."

A larger, stronger central office team

DCPS now invests approximately \$2 million per year in recruitment and selection, which helps support a 12-person team. The district also now has a professionally produced recruitment website, and engages in aggressive marketing both locally and nationally. Its 2015 "Come Join Me" campaign in the D.C. metropolitan area, which featured awardwinning DCPS teachers inviting other educators to join the district, led to a tripling of applications. As a result of all of these changes, DCPS is now able to attract some of the most talented teacher candidates in the country.

A higher bar

Today, the district uses a rigorous hiring process that identifies teachers with the greatest potential to thrive in DCPS classrooms. The selection team observes every candidate actually teaching, either in person or on video. Applicants must also submit lesson plans and participate in multiple interviews. This process is helping DCPS hire more effective educators than ever before. On average, newly hired teachers are almost a full ratings category more effective than the teachers they replace. For students, that equates to approximately four months of additional learning in reading and math per year.¹

Mutual consent

Thanks to a change in the teacher contract, forced placements are a thing of the past. Instead, all hires are the result of "mutual consent," where teachers apply to specific schools that interest them, and principals make the final hiring decision. Mutual consent empowers principals to hire teachers who will be the best fit for their schools, and empowers teachers to choose the principal and school community that most appeal to them.

Earlier hiring

The earlier a district hires, the more likely it is to snap up the best talent. In fact, the average DCPS teacher hired in May is 20 percent more effective than the average teacher hired in August. That's why DCPS now makes a concerted effort to hire earlier, helping principals map out a talent strategy months before the first applications start rolling in. The results have been impressive: Over the last four hiring seasons, DCPS has more than tripled the number of teachers it's hired by June 30, from 252 in 2012 to 821 in 2015.

NUMBER OF NEW TEACHERS HIRED BY JUNE 30, 2012-15



TEACHER Evaluation

Raising expectations and increasing feedback

In 2009, DCPS transformed its teacher evaluation process from a checklist that did little to help educators improve to a rigorous system that provides teachers with a clear picture of what the goal is, along with actionable feedback to help them meet it. Called IMPACT, this system has created a strong performance-based culture across the district, which has led to unprecedented gains in student learning.

IMPACT'S EFFECTS ON STUDENT LEARNING²



² Adnot, M., Dee, T., Katz, V. & Wyckoff, J. (forthcoming paper). "Teacher Turnover, Teacher Quality and Student Achievement in DCPS."

³ Dee, T.S. & Wyckoff, J. (2015). "Incentives, Selection, and Teacher Performance: Evidence from IMPACT." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Vol. 34*(2), 267-297.

THEN

Inconsistent implementation

Before 2009, it was unclear exactly what was expected of teachers, and many would go a year or more without a formal end-of-year evaluation, or even a single classroom observation. When observations did happen, they varied widely from school to school. As a result, the vast majority of teachers weren't getting the feedback they needed to do their best work on behalf of students.

Disconnected from student achievement

The evaluation process also did not consider student outcomes in any serious way. This created a situation where more than 95 percent of teachers who were evaluated earned top ratings while only 12 percent of DCPS 8th graders could read on grade level.

No useful data

Because so few teachers were actually evaluated, and because nearly all teachers earned the same high ratings, the evaluation system failed to give DCPS the data it needed to make informed decisions about teacher support, compensation, or retention.



Clear expectations and regular, meaningful feedback

The core of IMPACT is the Teaching and Learning Framework, which articulates the district's definition of great instruction. Teachers receive feedback throughout the year on their performance against the Framework. They are formally observed as often as five times every year, and receive feedback every time-in writing and in a one-on-one conference. Some observations are conducted by school administrators, while others are conducted by "master educators"-experts in particular content areas who observe teachers at many different schools. A rigorous, independent study by researchers at Stanford University and the University of Virginia found that this combination of clear expectations and honest feedback "causes meaningful increases in teacher performance."³

Higher expectations and a focus on student learning

IMPACT not only clarified expectations, but also shifted them to focus more on the ultimate goal of instruction—student learning. Now, 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation is based on objective measures of students' academic progress. Thirty-five percent comes from a "value-added" score that uses standardized tests to measure how much academic progress teachers help their students make each year. The remaining 15 percent comes from other measures of student learning that a teacher and principal jointly determine.

Rigorous implementation

Today, every teacher is evaluated every year based on the same standards. This consistency is possible because DCPS invested in building a top-notch team to make it happen. Among many other things, the team developed a video-based training program, called Align, which shows observers how to rate teachers accurately and provide feedback aligned to DCPS expectations. It also created a robust online platform to store all evaluation data, help evaluators manage their caseloads, and allow teachers to easily access their scores and feedback notes. And the team keeps innovating: In the spring of 2016, it will launch an iPhone and iPad application to help observers more easily record their observation notes.

Smart decisions based on reliable data

As a result of IMPACT, DCPS now understands how every one of its teachers is performing. This enables the district to be smarter about all sorts of critical decisions related to its talent. For example, DCPS can now thoughtfully differentiate its teacher support, as the district now knows who needs help, and in what areas. It can also better target its retention efforts toward top performers serving in the highest-need schools. And it can refine its recruitment and selection efforts based on which pipelines and selection criteria are most likely to yield the best teachers. Evaluation data is not, in and of itself, the goal. Rather, it allows the district to be as strategic as possible about its greatest asset: its people.

TEACHER Support

Differentiating to meet teachers' needs

Teacher support in DCPS once largely consisted of "sit-and-get" professional development workshops that treated all teachers the same. Teachers now receive personalized coaching designed to help them identify and meet specific instructional goals, as well as Common Core-aligned curricular support. Teachers also have access to a range of online resources designed to supplement the in-person coaching they receive.



"One size fits all" development

The district's professional development efforts were focused on giving teachers the minimum number of "seat hours" they needed to maintain their licenses, rather than helping them meet individual learning goals. In addition, most professional development consisted of large-group sessions that were not tailored to teachers' unique needs. Finally, teachers received little to no follow-up after these sessions.

No clear curricular guidance

As remarkable as it may sound, teachers in DCPS did not have a centralized curriculum to guide their work. As a result, they were forced to continuously reinvent the wheel on their own. In addition to creating an enormous burden for teachers, this led to inconsistent instruction across the district.

44 I've had so many opportunities to learn and grow in DCPS. Joining this district is the best choice I ever made. 77

> - Craig Duchemin, Special Education Teacher, Autism Hart Middle School





Personalized coaching

Teachers in DCPS now receive regular, on-the-job support. For example, they work with instructional coaches based in their schools, who provide professional development throughout the year in one-on-one settings and in small professional learning communities. The coaches lesson plan with teachers, review student work with them, co-teach, and even conduct model lessons. Teachers also receive feedback from school leaders and from "master educators," content-area experts who conduct observations as part of the IMPACT evaluation process. In addition, teachers receive support from their peers via the Teacher Leadership Innovation program. Through this initiative, highperforming teachers have a reduced teaching load so that they can spend part of the day coaching their colleagues.

Common Core-aligned resources

DCPS now gives the majority of its teachers a Common Core-aligned curriculum to serve as the foundation for instruction, and it's in the process of adopting a curriculum for the remaining subject areas and grade levels. The district has also begun to shift its professional development away from building general pedagogical skill toward building expertise in how to implement the new, more rigorous standards. To aid in this effort, DCPS worked with more than 100 of its teachers to create a set of lessons that serve as exemplars of what engaging, rigorous instruction looks like. Called "Cornerstones," these learning experiences—which are being implemented across the district starting in the fall of 2015-will help DCPS teachers learn how to meet the rigorous instructional expectations of the new curriculum.

A DAY IN THE LIFE



TLI Teacher Leader Rachel Williams wears many hats throughout the day at Leckie Elementary School, and she exemplifies one of the ways DCPS partners with its best teachers to improve instruction.

9:00–10:00 AM Ms. Williams coaches other teachers on two key instructional strategies: shared reading and close reading. She works directly with three of her peers at Leckie, helping ensure that literacy instruction across the school is consistent and rigorous.

10:00–11:00 AM Ms. Williams leads her own class of 4th graders.

11:00 AM–**12:00 PM** Ms. Williams continues to observe and debrief with the three teachers she coaches. A major focus of her work is to help teachers increase the rigor of their reading instruction to ensure that students learn how to grapple with complex texts. Once a week, Ms. Williams uses this time to grow her own practice by working with her TLI leadership coach.

12:00-1:00 PM Lunch

1:00–2:00 PM Ms. Williams teaches another group of 4th graders.

2:00–3:15 PM At the end of the day, Ms. Williams has an extended block of time to lesson plan with the teachers she coaches. For example, she works with them to determine the most important skills to be taught in each unit, scripts questions to address potential student misconceptions, and helps identify ways to differentiate for varying reading levels. She also spends a portion of this time planning with her peers for her own classes.

TEACHER Compensation

Paying teachers like true professionals

No one goes into teaching to be rich, but the women and men who educate our nation's young people certainly deserve to be. That's what DCPS is trying to achieve. Gone are the days of uncompetitive starting salaries, modest raises, and low earning potential. Today, DCPS pays great teachers what they're worth, by offering the highest starting pay of any district in the country and awarding five-digit raises and bonuses based on a track record of excellence in the classroom.

44 The compensation that I receive from the district honors, respects, and values my efforts as a true professional. **77**

- Kathy Hollowell-Makle, Pre-K Teacher School Without Walls at Francis Stevens Elementary School 2013 DCPS Teacher of the Year

⁴National Council on Teacher Quality. (2014). *Smart Money: What Teachers Make, How Long It Takes, and What It Buys Them.* Washington, D.C.

⁵ TNTP. (2012). Keeping Irreplaceables in D.C. Public Schools. Brooklyn, NY.



Slow salary growth

Earning potential was anything but a selling point for teachers looking into a career at DCPS. Firstyear teacher salaries started at \$42,000, and the maximum salary of \$87,000 took two decades and a PhD to reach. This system offered an especially bad deal to newer teachers, who saw very minimal increases in the early years of their careers. Great teachers often left the district far sooner than they otherwise might have because of these uncompetitive salaries.

No connection to performance

Teachers moved up the salary scale based on years of service and the advanced degrees they earned, regardless of how successful they were. This meant that teachers who achieved extraordinary results with their students could earn the exact same pay or even less—than lower-performing educators. And as a result of these policies, teachers often spent thousands of dollars to secure additional graduate credits—and even doctorate degrees—despite little evidence that this coursework actually helped them become more effective with their students.

No connection to school context

Teachers didn't receive any incentives to take on special challenges like teaching in a struggling school. The same salary scale applied to everyone, regardless of where they taught.



Nationally competitive salaries

DCPS now offers top-performing teachers the highest starting pay of any district in the nation: New teachers with Master's degrees can earn a \$50,000 starting salary, and have the potential to earn a \$20,000 bonus on top of that, for a total of \$70,000 in their first year. In addition, maximum pay has skyrocketed from \$87,000 to more than \$126,000. These changes have vaulted DCPS to the top of the nation in terms of lifetime earnings. According to a recent report by the National Council on Teacher Quality, DCPS teachers can now earn \$3.7 million over their careers, which is \$1 million more than the earning potential in the number two district on the list.⁴

Unprecedented earning potential for top-performing teachers

DCPS now places a much greater emphasis on performance with its compensation system, called IMPACTplus. To honor the extraordinary work that its best teachers do every day—regardless of the degrees they hold or how long they've been in the classroom—DCPS now offers bonuses up to \$20,000 every year that a teacher earns a Highly Effective rating. In addition, while all DCPS teachers receive a cost-of-living increase each year, only those who earn Effective or Highly Effective ratings move up the salary schedule. Together, these changes mean that the district's top teachers who are working in its lowest-performing schools can earn more than \$100,000 in salary and bonuses after just four years. It should come as no surprise that, according to independent research, these changes are helping DCPS keep 92 percent of its Highly Effective teachers.⁵

Incentives for taking on challenges

Teachers are also recognized and rewarded for succeeding in the most complicated school environments. For example, the largest salary increases and bonuses are reserved for Highly Effective teachers working in the district's lowest-performing schools. This reflects the district's deep commitment to equity—ensuring that it does everything possible to retain the teachers who are excelling with the children who need their expertise the most.



MAXIMUM COMPENSATION AT CAREER MILESTONES

TEACHER Retention

Going the extra mile to keep top teachers

In the past, DCPS dedicated little attention to teacher retention and lost many talented educators every year as a result. Today, the district makes keeping its best teachers a top priority, and devotes significant time and resources to making it happen.



Few deliberate efforts to retain top teachers

With no clear data on teacher performance, DCPS wasn't able to give raises or new career opportunities—or even just say "thank you"—to its best educators. Besides a Teacher of the Year award, the best the district could do was provide cursory recognition for all teachers equally—without acknowledging the unique contributions of those who made the biggest difference in students' lives. As a result, DCPS frequently lost many of its best teachers to local charter schools and neighboring school districts.

44 DCPS is the first district that's made me feel truly valued as a teacher. That's why I'm building my career here. **77**

> - Frank Medley, Spanish Teacher Whittier Education Campus



An actual teacher retention team

As just one signal of how DCPS prioritizes keeping its best teachers, the district now has a Teacher Retention Team whose primary goal is to ensure that top performers stay. Some of the team's efforts are broad-based, like the annual black-tie gala for all Highly Effective teachers at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the twicemonthly "Opportunities Newsletter" to connect teachers with fellowships, awards, and leadership experiences. But the team also engages in more targeted efforts. For example, if a top-performing teacher is looking to change schools, the Retention Team can help the educator make a great match with another DCPS principal. It also sends personalized "thank you" messages to the district's best teachers, explicitly asking them to stay. And it helps identify a diverse set of educators to share their perspectives as members of the Chancellor's Teacher Cabinet and as central office policy fellows over the summer. It should come as no surprise, then, that DCPS retains 92 percent of its Highly Effective teachers, and 89 percent of those rated Effective.

Pay that makes D.C. affordable

DCPS now showers its best teachers with tens of thousands of dollars in raises and bonuses (see "Teacher Compensation"). In fact, top performers serving the students who need them the most can exceed \$100,000 in total annual compensation after just four years with the district. As a result, in survey after survey, great teachers no longer cite compensation as a key concern in DCPS.⁶

A professional career ladder

Talented individuals look for organizations where they can learn, grow, and take on new responsibilities. In short, they're looking for careers, not jobs—and teachers are no exception. That's why DCPS established a five-stage career ladder, called LIFT, in 2012. Educators start at the "Teacher" stage, and progress up the ladder through the "Established," "Advanced," "Distinguished," and "Expert" levels by demonstrating excellence in the classroom over time. As teachers move through these career levels, they become eligible for leadership positions, new professional learning opportunities, and significant raises. As a result, educators now come to—and stay in—DCPS to build their careers.



PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS RETAINED BY IMPACT RATING FROM 2013-14 TO 2014-15

MEET SOME OF THE TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS CHANGING STUDENTS' LIVES IN DCPS



SHIRA FISHMAN Calculus and Geometry Teacher McKinley Technology High School A former mechanical engineer, Shira Fishman always excelled at math and science. But it wasn't until a summer coaching job that she found her true passion: teaching and mentoring young people. Fortunately for the students of DCPS, she decided to switch careers. She now teaches calculus and geometry at McKinley Technology High School, helping her students consistently achieve over 90 percent proficiency on the district's state assessment. In recognition of her achievements, Shira was named the 2011 DCPS Teacher of the Year and was selected as one of 40 teachers nationwide to win a Milken Educator Award. Despite the accolades, Fishman is one of the humblest people you'll ever meet, and she's always striving to improve. "You become great when you're never done learning and you're never satisfied with 'good enough,'" she says. "You have to constantly reach out to find new ways to get better."



FRANK MEDLEY Spanish Teacher Whittier Education Campus Now in his 18th year in the classroom, Frank Medley is a master at bringing world language alive for his students, instilling in them a lifelong passion for discovery. He pushes the young people in his class to reach new heights, but also makes it safe for them to fall—and then get right back up. Not only is he an extraordinary teacher—for which he received a Rubenstein Award, one of the district's highest honors—but he also mentors new educators, opens his classroom for peer observations, and helps hire new teachers for DCPS. Mr. Medley believes passionately in the transformative power of public education. "I was very fortunate to have some outstanding teachers in my life," he recalls. "They believed in me, encouraged me, pushed me, inspired me, and empowered me. I love the fact that I can do the same for my students."



KATHY HOLLOWELL-MAKLE

Pre-K Teacher School Without Walls at Francis Stevens Elementary School It's no surprise that Kathy Hollowell-Makle was selected as the 2013 DCPS Teacher of the Year: Spend just one minute in her classroom and you'll be captivated by the love and joy that envelops her incredibly thoughtful instruction. Not only does she consistently help her students—many of whom begin kindergarten already behind—to enter first grade at or above proficiency, but she cares deeply about helping them develop socially and emotionally. For example, in her classroom, you'll see students praising each other, working through their disagreements, and making decisions about their own learning. It's the kind of classroom every parent would want for their children. Hollowell-Makle may be working with some of the district's youngest students, but her eye is always on their future. "The best part of teaching is running into former students and seeing the wonderful adults they've become," she reflects.



MARIA TUKEVA Principal Columbia Heights Education Campus Thirty-five years ago, Maria Tukeva founded the school now known as the Columbia Heights Education Campus to address the unique educational needs of D.C.'s growing immigrant population from Central America. Her vision and passion are the reason the school has grown from a 40-student "start-up" to a thriving campus, serving over 1,300 students in grades six through twelve. Principal Tukeva is known across the city as having the highest of expectations, and she does everything possible to help her students meet them. Moreover, she's always thinking about what else she can do to make a difference in their lives. "I have to keep thinking about what envelope to push next, what challenge we must overcome," Tukeva says. "My students and their families deserve that from me." This drive to keep improving—and the incredible results it's produced—led DCPS to name Tukeva its 2011 Principal of the Year.



NATALIE GORDON Principal Jefferson Academy Middle School In just four years, Natalie Gordon has turned Jefferson Academy into one of the premier middle schools in DCPS. Under her leadership, Jefferson has added a broad array of advanced and enrichment classes, with the goal of becoming the highest-achieving middle school in D.C. Since joining DCPS, Gordon has participated in a number of leadership development initiatives, including earning her Executive Master's in Leadership through a partnership with Georgetown University. In recognition of her outstanding service, Gordon received a 2013 Rubenstein Award, one of DCPS' highest principal honors. This year, she's taking on a new challenge by serving as a mentor to four first-year principals in the district. "DCPS has provided me with so many opportunities to grow as a leader," she says. "And now I get the chance to give back. It's so rewarding to be able to help others succeed."



ERIC BETHEL Principal Turner Elementary School You could say education is in Eric Bethel's blood: His mother was a special education teacher and his father was a principal. After spending eight years as an elementary math teacher in DCPS, he went on to serve as a master educator and an assistant principal, and then earned one of the first spots in the Mary Jane Patterson Fellowship, the school system's in-house principal training program. Upon completing the Fellowship in 2014, Bethel was selected as principal of Turner Elementary School, where he's already had a dramatic impact. In just his first year, student satisfaction at the school increased 23 percent, the largest increase in the district. Bethel is driven by his passion to help the young people of D.C. "The thing I love the most about being a DCPS educator is the opportunity to help our students chart a path toward a successful future," he says. "There's nothing else I'd rather do."

PRINCIPAL RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, AND HIRING

Pulling out all the stops to find great leaders

Principal recruitment and selection wasn't always a top priority at DCPS. With limited capacity to proactively seek out top talent, the district often struggled to attract school leaders with the right experience and skills. Today DCPS is filling its schools with lifechanging principals as a result of rigorous nationwide recruitment efforts and its own program to develop rising stars—topperforming teachers, instructional coaches, and assistant principals from within the district—to become school leaders.

44The recruitment team made it clear: If you want to change kids' lives, DCPS is the place to be. They were right: Coming here is the best decision I ever made.**??**

> Kim Jackson, Principal Seaton Elementary School
> 2015 DCPS Principal of the Year



Not enough capacity to find and grow great leaders

DCPS devoted very little central office capacity to recruiting and selecting principals—just two employees, neither of whom worked full-time on this critical work. Their efforts largely focused on individuals who had, on their own, indicated an interest in serving as school leaders in the district. Proactive recruitment was limited to the posting of hiring notices in education trade publications. As a result, DCPS struggled to attract top-performing school leaders from other districts.

Limited attention to instructional expertise

Recruitment and selection standards weren't rigorous, and they tended to focus on operational skills, not instructional expertise. As a result, leaders who could demonstrate an ability to "manage" schools were often successful in the selection process even if they had limited ability to improve teaching and learning.

Outsourced leadership development

From 2004 to 2009, the district contracted with an external organization to recruit, select, and train aspiring principals for its schools. While this partnership helped DCPS fill many of its principal vacancies, it also symbolized one of the district's greatest failings: It had no structure to develop leaders internally.



New focus on growing principals internally

In 2013, DCPS launched the Mary Jane Patterson Fellowship, an 18-month program that prepares the district's top-performing educators to become its future principals. The Fellowship represents the district's deeply held belief that internal leadership development is indispensable to its long-term success. It not only signals to the district's best educators that DCPS is a place that values their growth, but it also enables the school system to rely less on external recruitment for its principals. Over the course of the year-and-a-half that Patterson Fellows train, they engage in a variety of learning experiences aligned to the district's six core leadership standards, including serving under two high-performing DCPS principals in semesterlong residencies, and participating in courses at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business. Since the program's launch, 18 of 20 Patterson Fellows have been hired as principals. They now make up more than 15 percent of the entire DCPS principal corps. Most importantly, they've demonstrated unprecedented levels of success for new principals.

National recruitment for proven performers

Though DCPS has recently shifted more of its resources and energy toward internal leadership development, it has also ramped up its efforts to recruit outstanding experienced principals from across the country. The district's recruitment team—now five full-time staff members—aggressively searches the nation for award-winning school leaders, adding every year to its database of more than 2,000 prospective candidates. It also spends a significant portion of its time on individualized candidate cultivation. As the team has learned, "high-touch" recruitment is particularly important for top prospects from outside the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area.

More demanding selection process

The selection process for DCPS principals has never been more rigorous. Candidates first complete an extensive online application, and then participate in three rounds of interviews, all designed to assess their ability to be successful as an instructional leader in DCPS. For example, candidates watch a video of a DCPS lesson, and are then required to evaluate the instruction and provide actionable feedback to help the teacher improve. For the final round, the Chancellor personally interviews candidates. Afterwards, a community panel meets with Chancellor-approved candidates to provide feedback on which individual would be the best fit for their schools. This ensures that the community's voice is always represented at the hiring table.

PRINCIPAL Evaluation

Creating a culture of performance

After developing IMPACT for teachers and other school-based staff, DCPS introduced a new principal evaluation system in 2010 that focuses on key instructional leadership practices and measurable student achievement goals. A far cry from the checklists of the past, School Leader IMPACT helps principals hone their skills by setting clear expectations, providing regular feedback, and fostering yearlong conversations about how to meet ambitious student goals.



THEN

Focus on process, not results

In the past, the principal evaluation consisted of a two-page checklist that did little to highlight the importance of increasing student learning. For example, the "student achievement" category had the same weight as the other five, more process-oriented domains. As a result, nearly all principals earned one of the two highest ratings, regardless of how well their schools were actually performing.

Inconsistent expectations

Remarkably, there was little guidance about what constituted "meeting expectations" in any part of the old evaluation. As a result, evaluators used their own discretion, which understandably led to widely varying results. And because principals didn't have clear expectations to aim for, the evaluation process couldn't authentically guide their development.

Little follow-up

Once completed, evaluations were usually filed away with little in the way of next steps. Moreover, they were rarely—if ever—collected or analyzed centrally. This made it nearly impossible to use the evaluation process as a tool to guide the district's human capital policies, or to foster a shared culture of accountability for student achievement.



Greater focus on student performance

Today, School Leader IMPACT helps focus attention across the district on what matters the most: student success. It does so by tying 50 percent of the overall evaluation to quantifiable measures of student progress. For this half of the evaluation, principals annually select five student goals, which must be approved by the Chancellor. To earn a Highly Effective rating, principals must meet the majority of their student goals. These targets have helped principals focus their limited time and energy on the activities that will help their students most. As the old adage goes: What gets measured gets done.

Frequent and specific feedback

The remainder of a principal's evaluation rating is based on performance against six Leadership Framework standards: Instruction, Talent, School Culture, Operations, Family and Community, and Personal Leadership. The Instruction category carries nearly twice the weight of each of the other five, reflecting the district's emphasis on instructional leadership. Each standard is tied to a detailed rubric that paints a clear picture of what performance looks like across four ratings levels: Highly Effective, Effective, Minimally Effective, and Ineffective. Principals receive formal evaluations twice per year, but they also receive monthly feedback to help them leverage their strengths and address their growth areas. To ensure consistency of expectations—and to ensure that principals receive specific and actionable guidancethe instructional superintendents (who manage school leaders) engage in a feedback review process with their managers and the Chancellor twice per year.

Actionable data

DCPS now has more accurate information than ever before about principal performance—information it uses to make smarter decisions about principal hiring, professional development, compensation, and retention. For example, lower than average scores in the Talent standard of the Leadership Framework led to increased support from instructional superintendents and the central office recruitment and staffing teams around effective hiring practices. As a result, school leaders now focus on teacher hiring much earlier in the season, enabling them to secure the best talent. DCPS also uses evaluation results to identify principals for opportunities to expand their impact. For example, principals with Highly Effective ratings in specific standards are tapped to host school visits for their peers, and to coach new and aspiring principals.

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION COMPONENTS



PRINCIPAL Support

Developing true *instructional* leaders

Support for DCPS principals once followed a district-wide, one-size-fits-all approach. Today, principals receive stronger, more individualized support focused on what matters most—instructional leadership and DCPS is making important shifts to give them the time they need to make it their top priority.

44 After every meeting with my instructional superintendent, I feel like I've been turbo-charged with ideas to address the challenges at my school. Her feedback has been priceless helping me make adjustments that have been transformative for my students. **77**

> - Katie Lundgren, Principal Marie Reed Elementary School

THEN

Limited differentiation

DCPS offered principals a number of professional development opportunities, but usually in day-long sessions that didn't differentiate to meet individual needs. And instead of focusing on leadership skills, these sessions tended to focus on things like administrative tasks or facilities management.

Unrealistic management caseloads

Providing one-on-one support to principals was also a challenge. Principals' managers (called instructional superintendents) were stretched very thin: Each managed up to 30 school leaders. This meant that instructional superintendents only had time to visit their schools a few times per year, and intensive one-on-one coaching was simply out of the question.

Missed opportunities to leverage great principals

Leadership development programs had limited space and were generally considered a privilege only available to those who had worked in DCPS the longest. Similarly, principals who had the most seniority were considered top candidates to assume principal manager roles, regardless of whether their skills made them a good fit for those jobs—an approach that likely undermined the overall quality of principal support across the district.



Frequent, personalized feedback

Today, principals receive more feedback on their performance than ever before. Over the last few years, DCPS significantly decreased the caseload for instructional superintendents—from as many as 30 principals to, at most, 14. This change means instructional superintendents now have the time to provide individualized support to each of their school leaders. On site visits, they meet with their principals to co-observe instruction, review school data, discuss leadership growth areas, and assess progress toward annual student achievement goals. New principals receive even more personalized support through a recently launched program that leverages the district's highest-performing leaders to serve as mentors.

Innovative partnerships

Challenging traditional notions of professional development, DCPS has developed partnerships to further strengthen its principal corps. With Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, the district helped create an Executive Master's in Leadership program tailored specifically for DCPS principals. This yearlong learning experience not only helps school leaders develop valuable leadership skills, it also fosters deeper relationships among the participants. These relationships endure well beyond the program, providing school leaders with peer support for the innumerable challenges they face in their roles. And in a partnership with the New Teacher Center, DCPS now gives successful principals the opportunity to become formal mentors to new school leaders in the district.

Instruction above all else

DCPS has shifted its support for principals to focus on instruction rather than operations. For example, new principals participate in orientation sessions that feature a state-of-the-art online platform to build their understanding of the DCPS Teaching and Learning Framework, which outlines the district's instructional expectations. They also learn about the DCPS curriculum and its suite of student assessments. Far less time is devoted to things like procurement and facilities management, which—though important—now take a back seat to instruction.

Principals also have more time than ever before to devote to instructional leadership thanks to the district's increased operations support. For example, the central office now manages certain aspects of facilities management and budget development that used to fall on principals' shoulders alone. In addition, DCPS recently created a new school-based role, Director of Strategy and Logistics, to take most of the operational responsibilities off of principals' plates. As a result, principals now spend under a quarter of their time on non-instructional matters, down from nearly half before the program started.

PRINCIPAL COMPENSATION

Breaking the mold on principal pay

In the past, DCPS didn't offer salaries competitive enough to attract and retain the most talented principals, and didn't use raises and bonuses to recognize outstanding performance. But all that's changed. Today, DCPS uses a compensation model that's designed to reward great principals for their extraordinary work—and it offers them the highest earning potential in the region.



THEN

Comparatively low salaries

Starting salaries for new principals were more than \$10,000 lower than those in the region's highestpaying district. And because the salary scale offered only relatively small raises from year to year (and sometimes none at all), the disparity with nearby districts became even greater over the course of a principal's career. At \$117,610, the maximum principal salary in DCPS was the lowest in the region by tens of thousands of dollars.

No differentiation for school type

The previous salary scale gave little consideration to the different challenges leaders faced depending on the size or type of school they led. Whether principals led high schools or elementary schools, large or small schools, struggling schools or higherperforming ones, they all earned essentially the same salaries.

No connection to performance

Principals' raises were based on years of service or earning an advanced degree, never their job performance. That meant a principal who completely turned around a failing school earned the same salary increases as any other principal—even one who was not meeting expectations. In addition, DCPS didn't offer any performance-based bonuses to supplement base salaries.



Highly competitive pay

Today, DCPS is determined not to lose any talented principals because of pay. At every stage of their careers, the district's principals earn at least as much as, and often more than, their peers everywhere else in the region—even before factoring in performance bonuses. Starting salaries are approximately \$20,000 above what they were, and principals' earning potential has nearly tripled—from a maximum salary increase of about \$29,000 over their entire careers to a maximum of \$80,000.

More money for leading more complex schools

The new salary scale for principals has six different categories, each for a different school type. For example, starting salaries for high school principals are about \$15,000 higher than those for elementary school principals, in recognition of the unique challenges inherent to running a secondary school campus. Similarly, principals of large schools (500 or more students) earn \$6,000 more than those running smaller campuses.

Unprecedented raises and bonuses for top performance

Performance is now the biggest factor in principal compensation for both base pay and bonuses. For example, gone are the days of automatic pay bumps for every year of service. Now, annual "step" increases only accrue to principals who earn an Effective or Highly Effective rating. In addition, leaders at high-poverty schools earn a \$30,000 bonus *every* year they earn a Highly Effective rating. Their peers in low-poverty schools receive a \$20,000 bonus. As a result of all of these changes, a top-performing high school principal in a high-poverty community can surpass \$170,000 in total annual compensation in just four years.

EARNING POTENTIAL FOR DCPS PRINCIPALS

\$30,000 Bonus potential for Highly Effective principals

\$108,000-\$124,000

Range of starting principal salaries

\$172,000-\$188,000

Range of maximum principal salaries

PRINCIPAL RETENTION

Making smarter decisions based on performance

In the past, DCPS missed opportunities to keep its best principals, and it rarely transitioned out ineffective ones. Today, the district uses the results from principal evaluations to make smarter retention decisions—going all-out to keep outstanding principals for as long as possible and ensuring that consistently low-performing leaders don't remain indefinitely.

THEN

Little recognition for the most deserving school leaders

The district made few efforts to publicly recognize and celebrate top school leaders, beyond nominating one principal each year for an award sponsored by the *Washington Post*.

Little turnover, even among ineffective leaders

DCPS used to measure principal retention as a single number: how many principals stayed from year to year, regardless of performance. Nearly all principals remained in their jobs until they retired—a situation that provided stability, but sometimes at the expense of what was best for students.



⁷ Walsh, E. & Dotter, D. (2014). *The Impact of Replacing Principals on Student Achievement in DC Public Schools*. Washington, D.C.: Mathematica Policy Research.



Strategic approach to retention

Armed with meaningful performance information from the School Leader IMPACT evaluation system, DCPS now makes smarter decisions about principal retention. Principals who earn consistently high ratings receive a wide range of incentives to remain in DCPS for their entire careers. These include raises and bonuses (see "Principal Compensation"), multi-year contracts, district-wide leadership opportunities, and public celebration at the annual Standing Ovation gala at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts. The results speak for themselves: DCPS retained 94 percent of its Effective and Highly Effective principals from 2014-15 to 2015-16, up from 84 percent in 2013-14. At the same time, all principals who earned Ineffective ratings in 2014-15 were replaced. Though leadership turnover is difficult, a recent independent study showed that the changes DCPS made were leading to meaningful gains for students.7

New career opportunities for top leaders

As counterintuitive as it may sound, great principals—who are some of the busiest people on the planet-often want to do even more to support the district. Given this, DCPS now deliberately targets its best school leaders—in large part as a retention strategy-to serve in a variety of mentoring and policy-making roles. For example, top principals are now tapped to host Patterson Fellows (principals-in-training) for a semesterlong residency in their schools, to coach and support new DCPS principals as mentors, and to inform district-wide policy-making by serving on a variety of task forces, including the Chancellor's Principal Cabinet. These opportunities help great principals advance their careers, grow their system-level thinking, and develop new leadership skills-all without leaving their schools.

PRINCIPAL RETENTION RATES BY SCHOOL LEADER IMPACT RATING, 2014-15 TO 2015-16

97% Highly Effective 91% Effective Principals



HUMAN Resources

Putting employee satisfaction above all else

Key to the success of DCPS' efforts to reimagine hiring, evaluation, support, compensation, and retention for its teachers and principals was a parallel effort to overhaul the nuts and bolts of its human resources operation. Gone are the days of unanswered phone calls and late paychecks. Through an uncompromising focus on customer service, increased automation, and cleaner data, HR is now the indispensable foundation upon which all the other reforms operate. THEN

A challenge for employees, not a solution

HR's past challenges are well documented. Paychecks sometimes went to former employees, and even to those who had passed away; the district struggled to answer basic data questions (like how many employees were on payroll); and it was not uncommon for personnel paperwork to be misplaced, or lost altogether. As a result, teacher and principal confidence in HR was low—and big changes to how the district hired, supported, evaluated, compensated, or retained them just weren't operationally possible.

44 Things have really changed in HR. The team is super responsive and helps me solve any problems I have...That means more time in my day to be thinking about what matters the most: my students. ??

> - Carolyne Albert-Garvey, Principal Maury Elementary School



An obsessive focus on customer service

Great customer service—every day, for every employee—is now the goal for the district's HR team. In 2008, DCPS created "HR Answers," a new unit within HR whose sole purpose is to answer questions and solve problems for all current, former, and even prospective employees. The relatively small team (just four employees) does an enormous amount of work: On average, it addresses 2,200 questions a week (surging to over 2,500 per week at peak times), with a 91 percent satisfaction rate (based on 2015 survey data). Because HR Answers now solves many questions by email or over the phone, employees rarely have to make trips to the district office for personnel matters.

More automation

To increase efficiency and improve customer service, the HR team also moved many of its paperbased processes to the digital world. For example, employees can now register for benefits, apply for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, and apply for retirement, all online. This means employees get better and faster service anywhere they have an Internet connection. Moreover, this means that the HR team has more capacity to tackle other, more complex challenges.

Cleaner data

The HR team has also significantly changed how it collects, reviews, and stores personnel data. For example, upgrades to its technology infrastructure now allow the team to digitize records and maintain them more efficiently and accurately than ever before. As a result, the HR team can instantly access answers to basic questions that typically stumped the district in the past. For example, as simple as it may sound, DCPS can now reliably report the number of teachers it employs, where they work, what they do, and how they've performed. This information is critical to the success of the district's human capital initiatives. Without it, the district simply would not be able to run IMPACTplus, its performance-based compensation system.

HUMAN RESOURCES BY THE NUMBERS

Average number of employee questions answered each week 2,200 Number of paper-based processes automated since 2010

Customer satisfaction 91%

LESSONS LEARNED

DCPS is often asked what advice it would offer to other school systems considering the kinds of human capital changes it has made. Here are the district's top five lessons after eight years of doing this work.

There's no perfect place to start.

This work requires wide-ranging changes that may understandably seem overwhelming for school systems just starting down the path. Actually achieving the goal of a great teacher in every classroom and a great leader in every school will take years—perhaps decades—even in the best-case scenario. DCPS certainly hasn't gotten there yet, even with all the progress it has made. While it's important for school districts to approach this work with a clear understanding of the challenges, these challenges can also easily create paralysis. There's so much work to be done that a district might not know where to begin—and as a result, it never begins at all. The solution is, quite simply, to start somewhere. Instead of worrying about what the sequence of reforms should be in a perfect world, districts should decide which issues would be best to tackle first—based on their unique history, political context, and resources—and then take action. Those reforms can create momentum for the next wave, and then the next after that.

2 Teachers and principals make you smarter—so listen to them.

The most successful education policies are rooted in a clear understanding of the experiences of the people doing the work: teachers and principals. School districts need to make educators full partners in the design and implementation of new policies by giving them authentic opportunities to share ideas, guide decisions, and provide feedback. Some of DCPS' best policy ideas, like the LIFT career ladder program, came directly from teachers and principals.

3

Implementation is (almost) everything.

Conversations about education policy often focus on design—for example, which observation rubric to use for evaluation systems, or exactly how to construct a salary scale. But policies are only as good as their implementation. No matter how good a particular idea looks on paper, it won't succeed or even last very long if it isn't implemented consistently, fairly, and accurately. School districts certainly need to focus on getting the broad strokes of policy design right, but they should focus at least as much of their attention and resources, maybe even more, on implementation. And because so much rides on good implementation, keep the new ideas as simple as possible.



Missteps are inevitable; it's how you respond that matters most.

No district can attempt a total overhaul of its human capital system and get everything right in the first year. DCPS certainly didn't, and it still hasn't. That's not a reason to give up, though. It just means that a commitment to constantly monitoring what's working and what's not—and acting to fix things that aren't—should be an integral part of major policy reforms from the start. In particular, school districts should make a public commitment to learn from and respond to feedback from educators, students, families, and the entire community.

5

Great people are necessary, but not sufficient.

Perhaps the greatest lesson DCPS has learned over the past several years is that while great teachers and principals are essential, they need the right support to reach their full potential. For example, as remarkable as it may sound, DCPS did not have a curriculum for the vast majority of subjects until very recently. As a result, teachers and principals had to develop units of study on their own. That's a daunting task, even for the best educators. To leverage the extraordinary talent that DCPS worked so hard to get, grow, and keep, the district realized it needed to give teachers and principals a world-class, Common Core-aligned curriculum. Now, teachers and principals use their valuable time to adapt units of study for their particular students, not create them from scratch. That means happier educators, and better outcomes for children. And this is just the first step. DCPS has come to believe so deeply in the importance of improving support for teachers and principals that it has created an entirely new, cabinet-level office—the Office of Instructional Practice—to tackle the challenge.



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