

HELP TEACHERS TO SUCCEED IN OUR LOWEST-PERFORMING SCHOOLS



OVERVIEW

As every parent knows, a great teacher can make all the difference in a child's life. And the research backs this up, too: the single greatest in-school factor affecting student success is teacher quality. Because of this, DCPS has worked hard over the past few years to recruit, develop, and retain an outstanding teaching force. And it's paid off: we've doubled the number of top-rated teachers in the district, which has helped us become the fastest improving urban school system in America.

But we still have a great deal of work to do. If we are to close the opportunity gap that still separates our children by income level and race, we must ensure that all of our teachers – and particularly those serving in our lowest-performing schools – have the skills they need to be successful.



CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

• Not enough subject-specific coaching

The Common Core standards have set a much higher bar for student learning. As a result, we're asking our teachers to rethink their approach to instruction. For example, just teaching students how to add fractions isn't enough – our young people now need to know why they do each of the steps, and need to be able to justify their answers verbally and in writing. This sort of change is happening in all subjects, so we need to give our teachers more coaching that's specific to their content area.

Strategies to consider: Language arts and math coaches in every low-performing school; groups of itinerant coaches for other subjects, including special education and language acquisition; more teacher leaders who have part-time release to coach their peers.

• Not enough time for teacher professional development

Right now, DCPS has a handful of professional development days spread across the year. While helpful, DCPS teachers need more time – on a weekly basis – to lesson plan, share best practices, and attend critical subject-specific trainings.

Strategies to consider: A weekly "early release" planning block (for example, 1 pm – 4 pm) for all teachers, during which students would engage in enrichment activities; additional professional development days in August before school starts.

• Not enough support around classroom management

In too many classrooms, particularly in our lowest-performing schools, classroom management is still a challenge for many of our teachers. As a result, great lessons never really have a chance to get off the ground. We need to equip our educators with the skills they need to create productive learning environments so that our students have the opportunity to learn in every class, every day.

Strategies to consider: Special "classroom management" coaches for new or struggling teachers; summer classroom management trainings; a structure to collect the best management practices of top DCPS teachers.

• Not enough support for new teachers

Though we've worked hard over the past few years to shift more of our hiring towards experienced teachers, we still have a number of novice educators in our system. Being a first-year teacher is never easy, and this is doubly so if you're working in a low-performing school. We need to provide our newest educators with targeted support to ensure that every child – in every Ward – gets great instruction from Day 1.

Strategies to consider: Intensive coaching or mentoring for new teachers; expanding the DCPS Teacher Residency to ensure that new teachers are better prepared; a summer "DCPS Way" training for all teachers new to the district.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- An increase in student learning and happiness, particularly at our lowest-performing schools.
- An increase in teacher satisfaction and retention, particularly at our lowest-performing schools.
- A narrowing of the opportunity gap across the district.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What else should we prioritize when it comes to teacher development?
- If you're an educator, what professional learning experiences have been most helpful to you?
- If you're a DCPS parent, what skills do you most value in your child's teacher?