

Human Capital in Seattle Public Schools

Rethinking How to Attract, Develop and Retain Effective Teachers

About this study

This study was undertaken on behalf of the 43,000 school children who attend the Seattle Public Schools.

About NCTQ

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a non-partisan research and advocacy group committed to restructuring the teaching profession, led by our vision that every child deserves effective teachers.

Partner and local funder

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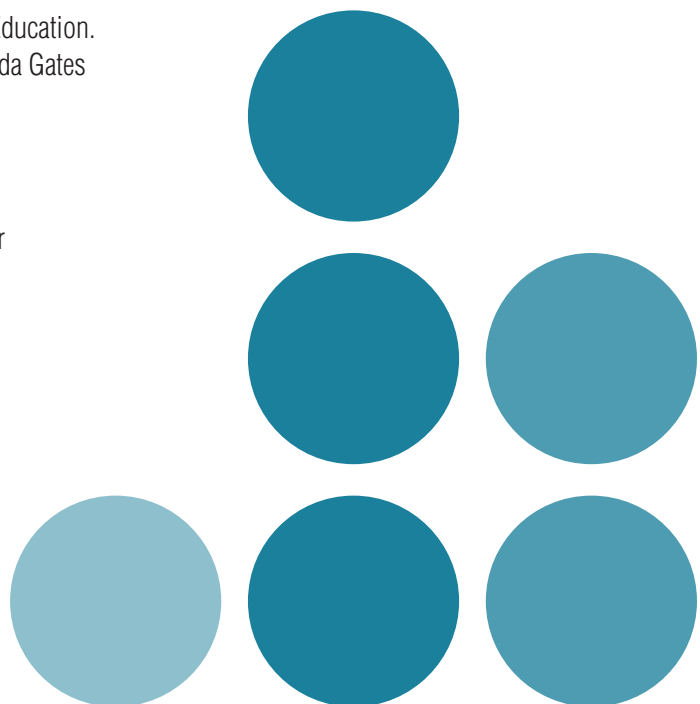


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Human Capital in Seattle Public Schools: Rethinking How to Attract, Develop and Retain Effective Teachers

Preface

Staffing each classroom with an effective teacher is the most important function of a school district. Doing so requires strategic personnel policies and smart practices. This analysis reviews the Seattle Public Schools' teacher policies linked most directly to teacher effectiveness. We put forward ten policy goals that frame our analysis. Each of these goals is supported by a strong rationale that is grounded by research and practitioner insight. See our online appendix for more information (www.nctq.org/tr3).

The study was undertaken at the request of the Alliance for Education, an independent organization that works in close partnership with the Seattle Public Schools.

To produce this analysis, we took the following steps:

- First, a team of analysts reviewed the collective bargaining agreement for teachers, school board policies and the district's strategic operating plan. We also looked at any state laws that might impact local policy.
- We compared the laws and policies in Seattle and the state of Washington with the 99 other school districts and 49 other states found in our TR³ database (www.nctq.org/tr3). This exercise allowed us to determine where the school district falls along the spectrum of teacher quality policies and to identify practices that Seattle might emulate. In a number of areas, we also compare Seattle with the surrounding school districts, its biggest competitors for teacher talent.
- We spoke with local teachers, principals, parents and community leaders to understand how policies play out in practice.
- We requested teacher personnel data, filed through an open records request, to give us a better understanding of teacher hiring, transfer, and placement data, as well as teacher ratings on their performance evaluations. The district provided some but not all of the data we requested.
- We submitted a draft of our analysis to both the Seattle Public Schools and the Seattle Education Association. Both provided factual corrections and other valuable feedback that have been incorporated into this report.

An astute reader will notice that some important areas of teacher governance are not addressed in this analysis, such as teacher working conditions and teachers' ability to contribute to school decision-making. While these factors are important for teacher recruitment, job satisfaction and retention, they are heavily dependent on the culture and day-to-day practices of individual principals and their faculty members. This analysis focuses only on areas of teacher governance that can be more readily affected by a *change in policy, regulation or law*.

Executive Summary

Staffing each classroom with an effective teacher is the most important function of a school district. Doing so requires strategic personnel policies and smart practices.

The National Council on Teacher Quality, at the request of Alliance for Education in Seattle, undertook an analysis of the Seattle Public Schools' existing teacher policies, reviewing the teachers' contract and other relevant documents; collecting personnel data; talking with local stakeholders to learn how the rules play out in practice and comparing Seattle to other districts, both local and national.

We examined four areas of teacher governance in which better policies—both state and local—could improve teacher quality. These areas are:

- I. **COMPENSATION:** The structure of Seattle's salary schedule, which teachers benefit from the current schedule and which teachers are at a disadvantage.
- II. **TRANSFER AND ASSIGNMENT:** The process for hiring and assigning teachers in Seattle, and particularly how the district handles the thorny process of teacher transfers.
- III. **WORK DAY:** An examination of the teacher work day and year, including leave policies and their impact on student instructional time.
- IV. **DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND EXITING INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS:** The quality of support provided to Seattle's new teachers, the rigor and quality of feedback of its evaluation system, the meaning of tenure and, lastly, what it takes to dismiss a substandard teacher.

Here are our principal findings and recommendations.

I. COMPENSATION

Seattle has achieved real success in making teacher salaries, especially starting salaries, competitive with other districts in the Puget Sound area. Still, we find a number of structural deficiencies in the current salary schedule.

Excessive emphasis on coursework. Most notably Seattle's pay structure is built on a popular but erroneous premise that the more coursework a teacher takes, the more effective he or she is likely to become. Districts that heavily incentivize teachers to take more courses—and Seattle is in the extreme among the 100 districts we track closely—are making poor choices with their limited resources.

Seattle is spending a considerable portion of its annual teacher payroll (22 percent) on incentives persuading teachers to take more courses. Teachers are required to take a far greater number of courses (or their equivalent in professional development hours) than what other districts require, in effect the equivalent of a second undergraduate degree and a master's degree combined. *Seattle needs to redesign its salary schedule, eliminating these coursework incentives and reallocating pay to target the district's challenges and priorities.*

Little experimentation with differential pay. The district could make much better use of funds available for teacher salaries by targeting three important but unaddressed areas of need for the district: 1) more money to effective teachers willing to work in the most challenging schools or who are willing to teach lower status courses (e.g., 9th grade standard English versus 12th grade honors English); 2) more money to teachers with skills that are in short supply, particularly mathematics, science and special education; and 3) more money to teachers who are highly effective. With the exception of providing more funding to high-needs schools, Seattle is behind the curve on these pay reforms. *Seattle needs to redouble its efforts to initiate differential pay, as attempted by the current superintendent in the latest contract negotiation.*

Inequitable pay raises. We were dismayed to find a pay structure that worked so clearly against the interests of younger, newer teachers. Unlike most districts which provide relatively equal raises for each additional year of service to teachers, regardless of their experience, Seattle reserves the more sizeable raises for its veteran teachers (approximately \$2,000 a year), while teachers with five or fewer years of experience are eligible for only about a third as much (approximately \$800). *Seattle needs to provide equitable pay increases—with one exception: the year a teacher earns tenure should bring a sizeable pay increase.*

II. TRANSFER AND ASSIGNMENT

Equitable distribution of teachers. Seattle enjoys clear advantages in the quality of teachers it attracts. The district is attracting a high percentage of teachers who have attended more selective colleges. Fifty-eight percent of its new hires last year attended “more selective” or “most selective” colleges as ranked by U.S. News & World Report. Appropriately, these teachers work in both Seattle’s affluent and poor schools.

The “academic capital” that individual teachers bring into schools will help to improve school performance, yet Seattle collects little data about teachers’ own academic backgrounds nor does it know enough about turnover and retention at individual schools. *Seattle needs to collect important data on teachers, such as the number of times it takes a teacher to pass licensing tests and scores on aptitude tests, to ensure that teachers are equitably distributed among schools.*

Hiring timelines. When hiring new teachers, Seattle could better compete with surrounding districts by more aggressive action from the HR department and changing its timelines for hiring. *First, in January and February, Seattle needs to offer generic contracts to particularly talented individuals and those skilled in shortage subject areas. Second, Seattle should begin its spring transfer and hiring season in March, when principals would ideally receive their budgets for the following school year.*

Notification deadlines. Many districts have problems persuading resigning and retiring teachers to give notice early enough to allow the district time to hire a good replacement. *Seattle should give an early notification bonus for resigning and retiring teachers who tell the district by April 30. All resignations should be effective June 30 no matter when notice is given so that insurance coverage continues through the summer months.*

Site-based hiring. Seattle needs to do more to ensure that schools only have to accept teachers into their buildings that they want. There are a number of technical problems that stand in the way of this principle playing out smoothly, primarily: 1) displaced teachers are often assigned by HR without school consent and 2) teachers with super seniority (those with a physical disability and those leaving schools which have been targeted for intervention because of poor performance) can fill a vacancy, regardless of a principal’s view on the matter. *Seattle needs to eliminate all “forced placements,” whether by the HR office or the result of super seniority privileges. Principals should approve of all hires. If a displaced teacher is unable to find a new assignment, s/he should receive temporary work as a substitute with no more than a year on the payroll. If, during that year, the teacher still does not find a new assignment, s/he should be exited from the district.*

District-wide layoffs. With the high number of layoffs taking place in schools across the country this year, much attention has gone to the policy of using seniority as the determining factor in layoffs. A layoff policy that works in order of reverse seniority necessitates the highest number of jobs eliminated and can wreak havoc on schools, forced perhaps to give up teachers regardless of performance and often dismantling an effective team or program. *Seattle's next contract should allow performance to be a consideration when teachers are laid off.*

III. WORK DAY

Work day. While Seattle's secondary teachers put in a contractual work day (7 hours, 30 minutes) that is comparable to the national average, its elementary teachers have the shortest work day in the region at 7 hours, comparing unfavorably to an average of 7 hours, 38 minutes in the surrounding districts, and also well under the national average of 7 hours, 25 minutes, reported by the 100 TR³ districts (www.nctq.org/tr3). A 30-minute difference in a school day is equivalent to cutting 2½ weeks out of the school year. *Seattle should increase the contractual work day not just for elementary teachers but also secondary teachers up to 8 hours.*

Work year. All of Seattle's students are shortchanged on instructional days, receiving three fewer days this school year than the 180 days required by state law. (SPS obtained a waiver to convert three instructional days into professional development days.) *Seattle should adhere to the state requirement of 180 instructional days.*

Leave. Seattle teachers are away from the classroom too often, approximately 9 percent of the school year or 16 days in the school year. Teachers use, on average, almost all of their 10 days of sick leave, their 2 personal days per year, as well as 3 days for professional development purposes. *Teacher attendance should be a factor on the teacher evaluation. Seattle should put in place more forceful language, both prohibiting the taking of personal leave on Mondays and Fridays and limiting professional development activities during instructional time.*

Unlike many districts, there is no correlation in Seattle between high rates of absences and working in high-poverty schools. However, there is clearly a correlation between high rates of absences and student grade level, with elementary schools reporting twice the absence rate as high schools. Certain schools in Seattle stand out for their high absence rates, which we theorize reflects school leadership's degree of tolerance for absences. *Seattle needs to do a better job producing absence reports that provide monthly status reports on where individual schools stands in relation to district totals and averages and highlighting those teachers with above-average absence rates. Principals need to be allowed to request a second opinion from a doctor hired by the school district in the case of teachers whose habitual use of sick leave is excused by a doctor's note.*

IV. DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND EXITING INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Support for new teachers. Not all new teachers in Seattle receive a mentor. In the 2007-2008 school year, there were 145 first-year teachers; however, only 94 were assigned a mentor. While the mentor-to-teacher ratio is good—only 9 mentees per consulting teacher—mentors appear to work at a large number of schools, potentially limiting interaction between teachers and mentors. *Seattle should ensure that all first-year teachers are assigned a mentor.*

Teacher evaluations. Seattle is not identifying its poor-performing teachers. In the most recent school year, only 16 teachers out of a workforce of nearly 3,300 received an unsatisfactory evaluation, 0.5 percent of the workforce. While the frequency and timing of Seattle's evaluation system is exemplary, the current evaluation suffers from a number of structural flaws as shown in the following table:

Problems with the current evaluation system	Solutions
Student achievement is not adequately considered nor are any objective measures of student learning considered.	<i>Student achievement should be the preponderant criterion of a teacher's evaluation and include objective measures.</i>
There are only two ratings a teacher can receive (satisfactory or unsatisfactory).	<i>Evaluation ratings should distinguish between at least four levels of performance.</i>
The district deems a teacher who has merely tried to meet his/her goals to have met a satisfactory standard of performance, even if s/he has not been successful.	<i>Teachers should not receive a satisfactory evaluation rating if found ineffective in the classroom, even if s/he is deemed to have tried.</i>
There are few opportunities to evaluate a teacher in unannounced visits.	<i>Principals and other school leadership should observe all teachers regularly in brief, unscheduled visits.</i>
Principals are not held accountable for the quality of their ratings.	<i>Principals should be held responsible for evaluation ratings by such means of random third-party verifications.</i>

Support for struggling teachers. Struggling teachers in Seattle are offered a number of supports including a peer intervention program, and if performance is enough of a problem, then teachers are placed in an improvement plan. Principals are required to be heavily involved in teacher improvement plans, though much of this responsibility could easily be assigned to consulting teachers with subject-area expertise. Principals may be more inclined to more accurately rate teacher performance if the burden of remediation does not fall so heavily on their shoulders. *Consulting teachers should play an important role in teacher improvement plans.*

Exiting ineffective teachers. A teacher's right to due process can be unfairly disruptive to student learning. Teachers are entitled to a 60-classroom-day remediation plan (essentially three months), which is allowed to extend from one year into the next if teachers do not receive an unsatisfactory rating until the spring. This means that students can start a new school year with a teacher whose job is on the line. *Instead, any teacher whose remediation plan that spills over from one school year into the next should be assigned as a co-teacher the following school year so as to minimize the disruption to students if the principal decides to dismiss the teacher.*

Making tenure meaningful. Evidence of teacher effectiveness is not adequately considered when Seattle makes its tenure decisions. As virtually all teachers receive a satisfactory evaluation rating, virtually all teachers earn tenure, regardless of their actual performance. The decision to award tenure is a \$2 million investment by the state and district that is treated like a minor purchase. *District officials should take an active role in deciding tenure so that the distinction is more meaningful. Teachers should be given a large pay raise for earning tenure.*

What WASHINGTON STATE needs to do

I. COMPENSATION

Washington State's intervention on pay issues is a substantial obstacle to needed pay reforms. The state's efforts at equalizing pay across districts are ineffective. The state should not dictate how its districts pay its teachers, particularly since the state structure is based on a flawed logic that deems teachers with the most coursework as the most effective. *The state should eliminate the salary schedule and TRI structure—and should support district efforts at creating new compensation systems that reward effectiveness or that provide bonuses to attract teachers to hard-to-staff subjects and schools.*

II. TRANSFER AND ASSIGNMENT

Each year, districts are forced to reassign staff due to changes in enrollment or changes in the budget. Though much of this fluctuation is inevitable, some of the disruption to schools could be minimized if districts received their projected budgets earlier. The more time schools have to plan for impending changes in staff positions, the better prepared they will be to staff schools. Along the same lines, too many teachers notify schools of their resignation late, forcing schools to scramble to fill vacancies. *Pass the education budget in March rather than in April and consider a two-year budget. Impose a state deadline for teachers to notify districts of their resignation or retirement by June 30th, so as to provide principals with sufficient time to fill vacancies.*

III. WORK DAY

Allowing teachers to accumulate and be compensated for unused leave may unintentionally encourage teachers to take leave for reasons other than illness, partly because the cash payout isn't a large enough incentive to dissuade teachers from making inappropriate use of the leave. *Eliminate the accumulation of sick leave and any retirement payouts.*

IV. DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND EXITING INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Evaluations. Washington State already has a strong state evaluation policy by requiring annual evaluations of all teachers, but it should go a step further and require that all districts include *evidence of student learning as the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations.*

Teacher dismissal. It takes far too long to dismiss a teacher found ineffective in the classroom. Not only is the 60-day probationary period too long (it should be calendar days, not classroom days, as is the current policy), but teachers can appeal a termination decision far too many times. *Shorten the probationary period to 60 calendar days. Only allow teachers to appeal a termination decision once. Appeals should be made before a panel of educators, not in a court of law.*

Tenure. Tenure in Washington State comes at too early a point in a teacher's career to have collected sufficient and adequate data that reflect teacher performance. *Increase the provisional period for new teachers to four years.*

Introduction

A brief overview of the Seattle Public Schools

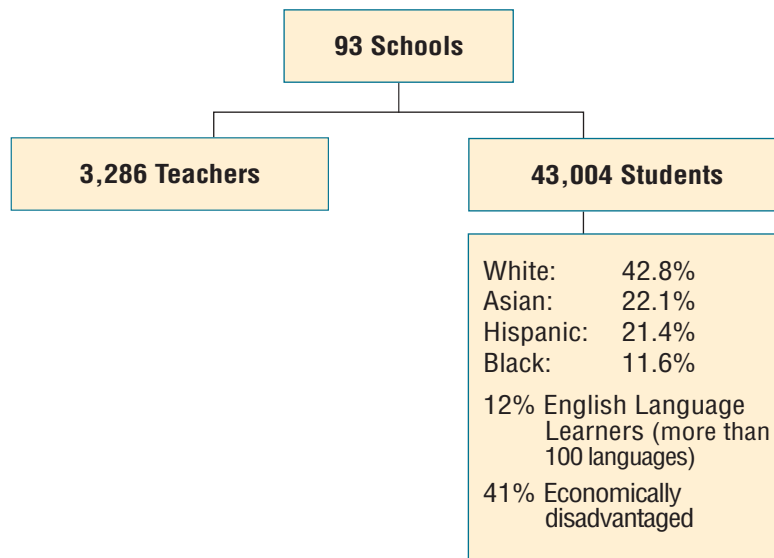
Seattle's public schools face many of the challenges typical of urban districts--children from poor and non-English-speaking families, conflicted attitudes toward race among citizens, declining enrollments. Just as typically, the system is burdened by out-of-date buildings and tangled bureaucratic processes.

But, comparatively, the school system's hurdles are modest. Although Seattle is the state's largest district, with an enrollment about twice that of several suburban districts nearby, it enrolls just 43,000 students. The city of Seattle benefits from more well-off and highly educated residents than the state as a whole, and even the recession has not been able to shake off all the boomtown energy that comes from computer giant Microsoft, headquartered nearby. Seattle has long had a quality of life that has attracted skilled newcomers, a fact reflected in the solid educations and diverse backgrounds of many of the district's teachers.

Many school advocates believe that the district has not fully lived up to these advantages for many of its white, middle-class children let alone for its poor and minority students. In demographic terms, the city divides at the shipping canal and Lake Washington, with the area south of the divide less white and less wealthy. For students in the south end, the record is downright troubling. Achievement gaps between White and Asian students, on the one hand, and Black and Hispanic, on the other, abound. Many are wide. For instance, in 2008 71 percent more White students passed the state's 10th grade math test than did Black students.

Since the 1980s the district has tried to redress inequality and satisfy parents with combinations of mandatory and voluntary busing, on the one hand, and school choice, on the other. The latest plan, to go into effect in the 2010-2011 school year, places greater limits on school choice in an attempt to simplify school assignment and free up transportation money. The effect of the plan on equity is anyone's guess. Its advocates say that new resources and a focus on neighborhood schools will strengthen schools in the south end, while detractors argue that the high levels of parental involvement and fund-raising that have been an advantage for the north end schools will grow.

Demographics of Seattle Public Schools



Starting with Superintendent John Stanford in 1995, district leaders have devolved power to individual schools. Site-based budgeting and hiring continue, but the current superintendent, Maria Goodloe-Johnson, has reined in some of schools' freedom to choose curriculum and teaching practices. Outside reviews that Goodloe-Johnson commissioned when she started the job in 2007 pushed her to take more control. Contended a curriculum audit from the education honor group Phi Delta Kappa: "SPS is buried under so many old plans, initiatives and policies it can't make use of any of them." Nonetheless, tightening control has raised concerns among both parents and teachers, though they acknowledge that the leeway granted in the past could increase the harm done by a poor principal.

Last year the district adopted a five-year strategic plan that, among other priorities, calls for better hiring of teachers and principals, system-wide student assessment, and improved teacher evaluations. As of the last school year, under the provisions of the contract that expired this August, beginning teachers' salaries got a final boost into the realm of most other districts in the Puget Sound area.

Yet this has been a difficult year in Seattle. With a shortfall of \$34 million out of a budget of \$556 million in the 2008-09 school year and anticipating another shortfall in the coming year, the district sent pink slips to 165 teachers (though all but 40 were eventually called back).

Some teachers fear lock-step direction from the central office. Many parents are restless, wondering whether changes will come at the expense of schools that seem to be working well now or whether the promises made for better neighborhood schools will be kept. School advocates hope that the superintendent has garnered enough support in various quarters, including the elected school board, to carry through reforms.

Seattle faces these challenges with a teacher policy framework that has already gone part of the way toward a fully updated approach to human capital. Site-based hiring is well established in the district and the STAR teacher mentoring program shows promise for helping teachers new to the profession. Both are the product of union-district negotiation. Seattle also acknowledges the importance of student achievement in evaluating teachers.

Other policies, however, are missing or askew. The pay schedule gives too much weight to advanced coursework and the master's degree. The evaluation instrument is not rigorous enough and the hiring schedule needs to be tightened if the district is to get its pick of teachers. And leave policies desperately need attention. These and other changes we detail here will help Seattle's schools fulfill the potential of their city.

Teaching Compensation

Goal 1. Compensation is strategically targeted to making the profession attractive to new teachers and teachers in hard-to-staff assignments. Salaries are structured so as to retain effective teachers. Salaries recognize teacher effectiveness in addition to experience.

INDICATORS

- i. The district's starting salary is competitive with other school districts in the area.
- ii. Additional financial incentives, including bonuses, advanced placement on the salary schedule, and tuition reimbursement, are targeted to filling positions or retaining teachers in high-needs schools and critical shortage content areas.
- iii. The salary schedule does not automatically award permanently higher salaries for advanced degrees or credits.

The state's role in setting teacher salaries

Washington State's efforts to equalize pay among all districts appear to be ineffective and impede pay reform.

To a greater degree than most school districts in the United States, the salary paid to Seattle teachers is determined by the state.

In an effort to keep salaries comparable across the 295 school districts in the state, Washington is one of 17 states prescribing a salary schedule for all public schools teachers, establishing the minimum salaries (base pay) that teachers must receive based on how much education they have, but also allocating money for raises based on teachers' years of experience. When the law was created in the 1970s, the state exempted 13 of its school districts from the state caps, including Seattle, part of the reason that the salary disparities have yet to be closed across all districts.¹

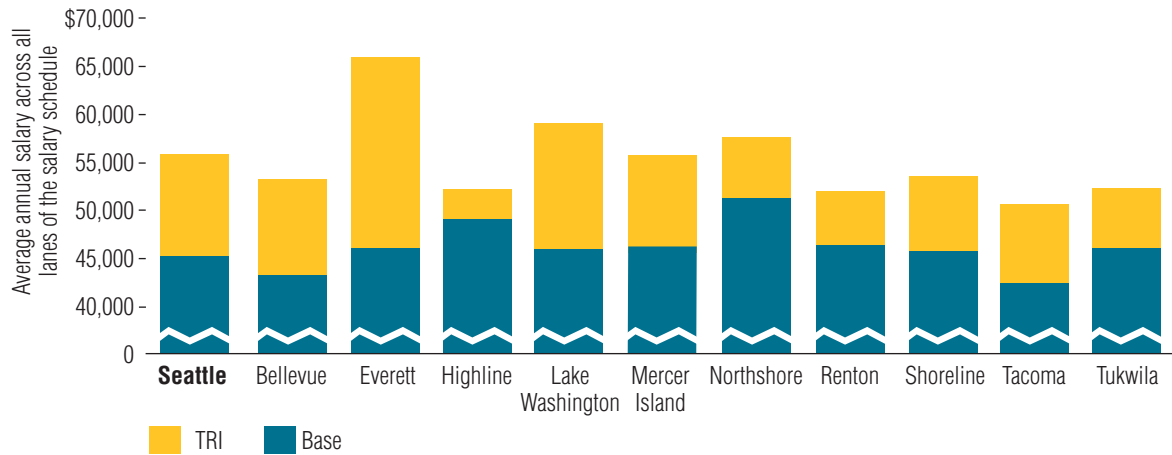
Furthermore, the state allows districts to supplement the mandated state "base pay" with the Time Responsibility Incentive or "TRI," a source of funding that local governments raise through a tax levy. The state exempts 91 districts from caps it imposes on how much districts can raise for the TRI, explaining most of the variation among salaries across school districts.

For these reasons, Washington's effort to equalize salaries appears to be relatively ineffective while also hampering important pay reforms that are needed.

¹ The 13 districts were already exceeding the caps, so rather than raise the cap across the state, which most districts could not afford or force the 13 districts to reduce teacher salaries, they were held exempt from meeting the new state caps. (*2009 Citizen's Guide to the Washington State K-12 Finance*)



Figure 1. Does Washington State law equalize teacher pay across districts?



Source: Salary schedules from the districts surrounding Seattle, available online.

Despite state laws aimed at equalizing teacher salaries across districts, great disparities remain in both the amount of base pay and TRI amounts.

Competitiveness of Seattle’s teacher salaries

Seattle is quite competitive with surrounding districts in salaries for beginning teachers.

Seattle teachers who choose not to pursue a lot of post-baccalaureate coursework earn much less pay than what they would earn in many surrounding districts.

Compared to districts across the nation, Seattle places far greater emphasis on teacher acquisition of course credits as a condition for earning raises.

Typically, districts compete for teachers with other nearby districts. Teacher candidates often make decisions about where to apply based in part on a comparison of salaries among several districts in the same area.

Seattle Public Schools and the local teacher’s union, the Seattle Education Association, have made a concerted attempt to bring starting teacher salaries closer to those of the surrounding district. For the 2007-2008 school year, teachers received a 6.2 percent across-the-board or “cost of living” raise and

Sorting out the sources of teacher pay increases

Public school teachers, including Seattle teachers, generally receive annual raises, often called “cost of living adjustments” or COLA. Such raises generally bear some relation to estimated inflation but can also occur in years with little inflation or even deflation. In the 2008-2009 school year, when inflation was flat, Seattle teachers were still awarded a sizeable 9.7 percent COLA raise.

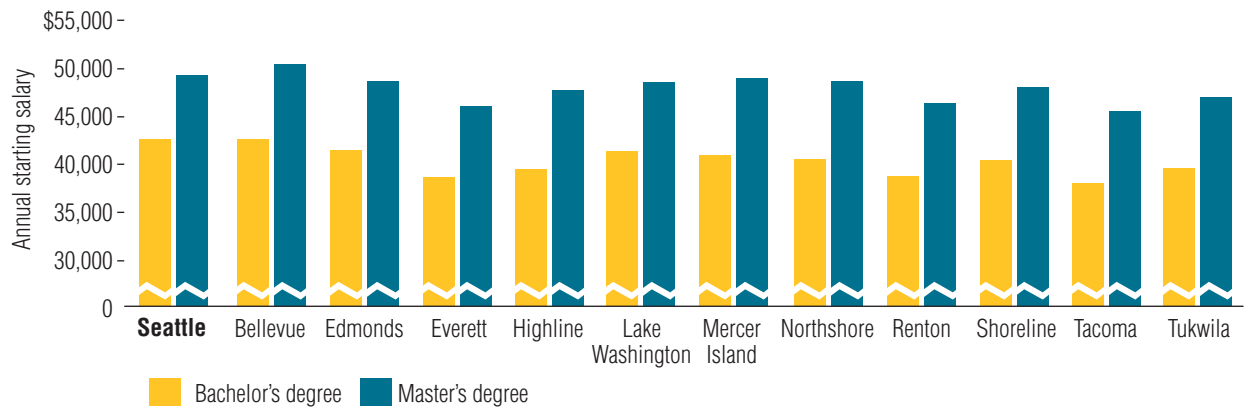
These “COLA” raises are either decided when districts negotiate a new multi-year contract or they are negotiated separately for each year. The COLA is often the only portion of teacher raises reported by the media, but it isn’t the only raise teachers receive.

In addition to COLA raises, public school teachers generally earn additional raises each year for gaining experience, moving up a “step” on the salary schedule typically with each year of service. In 2008-2009, step increases in Seattle averaged \$1,554 or a 1.6 percent increase in salary. However, added to the 9.7 percent COLA raise, teachers received overall an 11.2 percent increase that year.



a similar 9.7 percent increase in the following year.² (Raises were only 1 percent for the 2009-2010 school year, due to the recession.) Because of this effort, essentially **a 16 percent raise over two years**, salaries for Seattle's *beginning* teachers no longer rank near the bottom of area school districts, but are now among the highest.

Figure 2. How do starting salaries in Seattle compare with those in surrounding school districts?



Source: Salary schedules from the districts surrounding Seattle, available online.

Salaries include base compensation, TRI and any additional pay that all teachers in the district receive. Not included in these figures are stipends available to some teachers who take on additional duties such as supervising extracurricular activities.

Two distinct pictures can be painted that portray how competitive Seattle teacher salaries are over the course of a career. On the one hand is the teacher who does not pursue much post-baccalaureate coursework whose salary is noncompetitive both with other districts in the area and with most school districts in the nation. That teacher's salary is unlikely to go above \$43,100 no matter how much experience s/he accumulates. On the other hand is the teacher who is willing to take the coursework equivalent of a second college degree plus a master's degree to qualify for a highly competitive salary of up to nearly \$80,000.

To understand why there are such disparate salaries for teachers in the same district, it is necessary to understand the structure of the Seattle salary schedule.

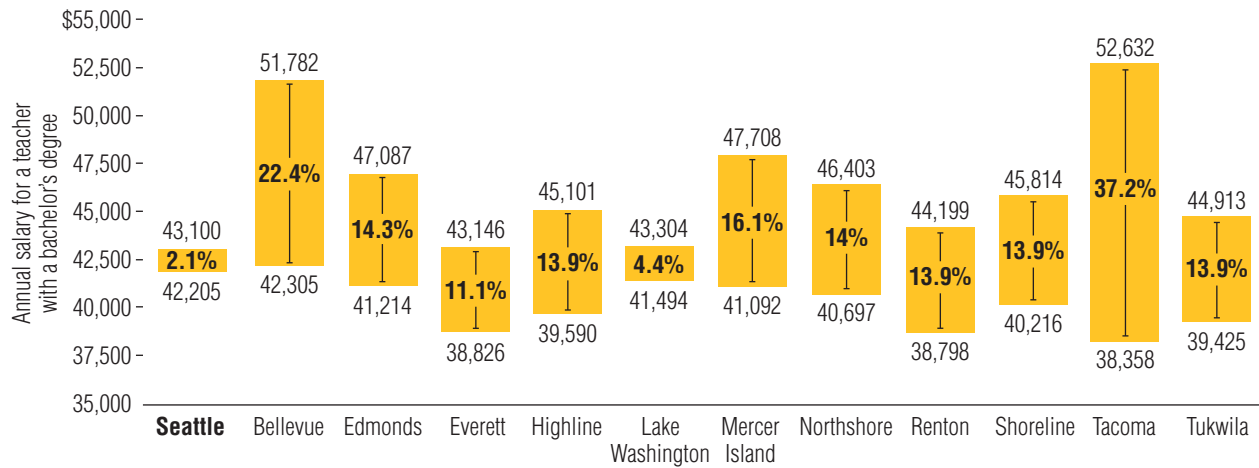
There are nine lanes on the Seattle salary schedule, nearly double the national average of five. Each lane is associated with increments of coursework and a higher corresponding salary.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate how much teachers in the lower lanes of the salary schedule (bachelor's or master's degree) will earn. By way of contrast, Figures 5 and 6 illustrate Seattle's increasingly relatively competitive standing for teachers who have taken enough coursework to qualify for the higher lanes of the salary schedule.

Figure 7 shows the demands placed on teachers in terms of the sheer amount of coursework that the district expects. Seattle requires significantly more coursework to advance lanes than do the surrounding districts.

2 COLAs ranged from 8.9 to 10.7 percent depending on the step (determined by years of service) and lane (determined by amount of advanced coursework) of the salary schedule. Step increases range from \$204 to \$2,509, with a mean of \$1,554. The percentage growth of step increases had a mean of 2.6 for the 2008-2009 school year, and ranges from .4 to 4 percent.

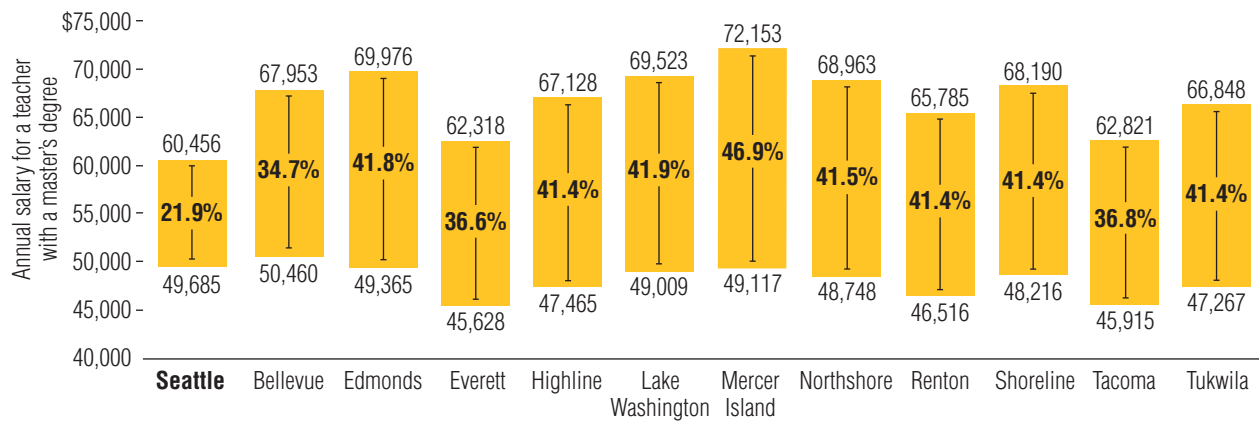
Figure 3. How do starting salaries in Seattle compare with those in surrounding school districts?



Source: Salary schedules from the districts surrounding Seattle, available online.

Teachers with a bachelor's degree have remarkably low growth potential, less than 3 percent (not including cost of living adjustments) over the length of their career! Not only does this increase compare unfavorably with other Puget Sound school districts (which average 16 percent over the length of a teacher's career), but the growth potential is well below the national average of 49 percent.

Figure 4. How much can a teacher with a master's degree earn?

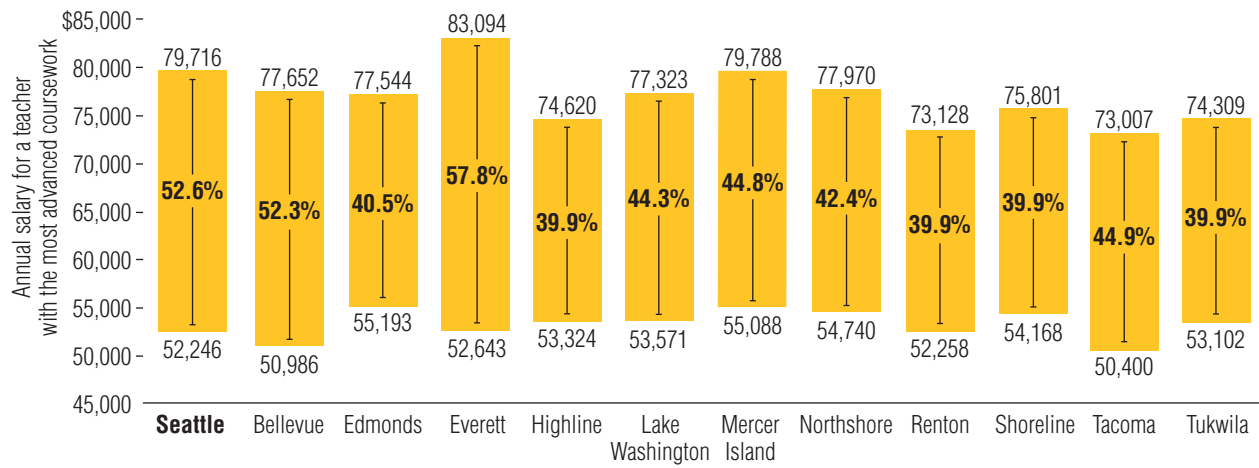


Source: Salary schedules from the districts surrounding Seattle, available online.

Seattle teachers with a master's degree see their salary increase 22 percent, far better than the 3 percent growth potential available to teachers with a bachelor's degree, but still comparing unfavorably with other Puget Sound districts, where teachers with equivalent education achieve an average of 41 percent growth. Nationally, teachers with a master's degree see their salaries increase 57 percent over their career.



Figure 5. How much can a teacher who is on the highest lane of the salary schedule earn?³



Source: Salary schedules from the districts surrounding Seattle, available online.

This figure illustrates the competitive standing of salaries of Seattle teachers who take a great deal of coursework, classified in Lane 8 with requirements that teachers have a “BA+155+MA” --even more coursework than what a teacher would have to take to earn a second college degree as well as a master’s degree. For these teachers, Seattle offers the second-highest salary in the region. It is important to note that Seattle allows its teachers to substitute credit-bearing coursework with in-service professional development to qualify for this lane of the salary schedule, an option that is not available in many school districts.

3 This analysis excludes the lane reserved for teachers with a doctorate degree, because a very small number of teachers in Seattle and throughout the country hold doctorates.

Figure 6. How competitive is the maximum salary in each lane?

Ranking	Lane 1	Lane 2	Lane 3	Lane 4	Lane 5	Lane 6	Lane 7	Lane 8	Lane 9
1st	Tacoma	Lake Washington	Lake Washington	Lake Washington	Mercer Island	Everett	Everett	Bellevue	Everett
2nd	Bellevue	Tacoma	Seattle	Everett	Seattle	Seattle	Bellevue	Everett	Seattle
3rd	Mercer Island	Bellevue	Tacoma	Mercer Island	Northshore	Mercer Island	Mercer Island	Mercer Island	Shoreline
4th	Northshore	Mercer Island	Edmonds	Seattle	Edmonds	Northshore	Seattle	Seattle	Tukwila
5th	Edmonds	Northshore	Mercer Island	Bellevue	Everett	Renton	Northshore	Northshore	
6th	Shoreline	Edmonds	Bellevue	Edmonds	Shoreline	Edmonds	Edmonds	Edmonds	
7th	Highline	Shoreline	Northshore	Northshore	Bellevue	Bellevue	Shoreline	Shoreline	
8th	Tukwila	Everett	Shoreline	Tacoma	Highline	Highline	Highline	Highline	
9th	Renton	Highline	Everett	Shoreline	Tukwila	Tukwila	Tukwila	Tukwila	
10th	Lake Washington	Tukwila	Renton	Highline	Renton	Shoreline	Renton	Renton	
11th	Everett	Renton	Tukwila	Tukwila	Tacoma	Tacoma	Tacoma	Tacoma	
12th	Seattle	Seattle	Renton	Renton					

Source: Salary schedules from the districts surrounding Seattle, available online.

This table shows where Seattle teachers stand in terms of their salary relative to surrounding districts. Teachers in the lower lanes—those with the least amount of coursework—earn the least of any teachers in the area. Teachers in the higher lane—those with the most amount of coursework—earn quite competitive salaries.

Figure 7. What does a teacher need to do to advance to higher lanes?

District	Lane 1	Lane 2	Lane 3	Lane 4	Lane 5	Lane 6	Lane 7	Lane 8	Lane 9	Lane 10
Seattle	BA	BA+22.5	BA+45	BA+45 +MA	BA+90	BA+90 +MA	BA+135 +MA	BA+155 +MA	PhD	
Bellevue	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	PhD		
Edmonds	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	MA+90		
Everett⁴	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+60	BA+75	BA+90	BA+105	BA+120	BA+135
Highline	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	MA+90		
Lake Washington	BA	BA+45	MA/BA+90	MA+45						
Mercer Island	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	MA+90/PhD		
Northshore	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	MA+90/PhD		
Renton	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	MA+90	PhD	
Shoreline	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	MA+90		
Tacoma	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	MA+90	PhD	
Tukwila	BA	BA+15	BA+30	BA+45	BA+90	MA	MA+45	MA+90/PhD		

As this table shows, a teacher in Seattle has to take a lot more courses (or professional development) to advance in the salary schedule. Seattle requires 45 additional credits beyond what other districts require to qualify for its Lane 4 and 90 additional credits beyond what other districts require to qualify for its Lane 6. The net result? It takes much longer to qualify for more pay

The relationship between teacher pay and coursework

Seattle spends 22 percent of its annual teacher payroll to incentivize teachers to take more coursework.

Does Seattle’s policy of tying pay to coursework make sense? In a word, no.

While one might assume advanced degrees (generally master’s degrees) help teachers to be more effective, the education research over the last 50 years has found little to no evidence to support such a policy. The appendix provides a meta-analysis of this research, showing the weak to nonexistent correlation between teachers’ advanced coursework and higher student achievement.

Why doesn’t more education make a difference? It may be because school districts (and states) routinely boost a teacher’s pay for *any* advanced degree, regardless of whether the degree is likely to help a teacher improve. For example, few teachers elect to get a degree that will advance their subject matter knowledge. Nationally, even at the secondary level, less than one in four degrees is in the teachers’ subject area. At the elementary level, only a small fraction of the degrees (7 percent) is in a content area.⁵ There is some evidence that content specific professional development improves teacher effectiveness.

4 Though it is not shown here, teachers in Everett also receive a stipend if they hold an advanced degree. Because a standard master’s degree requires 45 quarter hours, the master’s stipend was included in all lanes equal to or above the BA+45 for our analysis. Everett pays an annual stipend of \$3,292 to teachers with a master’s degree and \$4,114 for teachers with a Ph.D. regardless of what lane a teacher is in otherwise.

5 National Center for Education Statistics, 2002. *The Condition of Education* 2002. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Table 32-2.

While all school districts in the United States reward teachers for more coursework, Seattle's position on this issue is at the far end of the spectrum:

1. Seattle prematurely caps salaries on the bachelor's lane after only six years. While approximately 25 percent of TR³ districts prematurely cap the salaries of teachers on the bachelor's lane, only a handful of districts (e.g., Fresno and Baltimore) do it as early in a teacher's career.
2. The pay premium given to teachers who have a master's degree versus a bachelor's degree is much higher in Seattle (\$10,500) than the national average of \$2,990 (derived from the 100 districts in TR³).
3. Seattle teachers must take a lot more coursework to stay competitive with teachers in surrounding districts. While all districts provide the most pay to teachers with a doctorate, few districts take Seattle's approach, making it necessary to essentially earn another college degree and a master's (or the equivalent in professional development hours) to earn a competitive salary. Seattle's salary schedule has nearly double the amount of lanes as the national average—and the highest lane on Seattle's salary schedule requires nearly double the amount of coursework as the highest lanes on virtually all other district salary schedules.
4. Seattle has a relatively large number of intermediate lanes, giving teachers pay raises for partial work towards a degree, for example. Although this is largely a reflection of state policy, other Washington districts (such as nearby Lake Washington) have streamlined the salary schedule so that there are fewer lanes devoted to degree-based compensation. While all professions seek ways to encourage professional development, it is rare to see it so integrally linked with pay increases. For instance, psychologists, accountants and doctors all must complete continuing education, but such coursework generally does not qualify them for higher pay.

Currently, Seattle is spending approximately \$48 million a year to reward teachers for taking more coursework. The expenditure represents 22 percent of the teacher payroll.

Figure 8. How much does Seattle spend annually to incentivize teachers to take more coursework?⁶

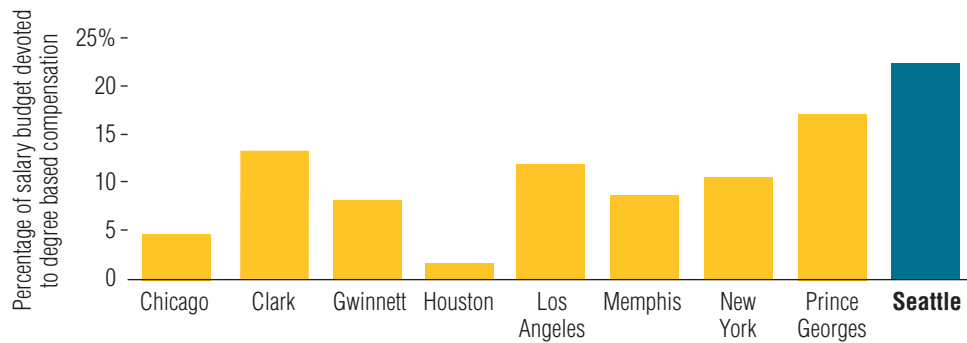
Lane	Credits needed	Number of teachers in each lane (2008-09)	Additional costs to district for the incentive
1	Bachelor's	213	n/a
2	Bachelor's + 22.5 credits	54	\$33,426
3	Bachelor's + 45 credits	266	\$1,794,968
4	Bachelor's + 45 credits + Master's	515	\$5,446,125
5	Bachelor's + 90 credits	465	\$6,329,580
6	Bachelor's + 90 credits + Master's	618	\$10,240,260
7	Bachelor's + 135 credits + Master's	188	\$3,474,052
8	Bachelor's + 155 credits + Master's	846	\$18,771,894
9	PhD	75	\$1,802,700
Total		3,286	\$47,893,008

Note: Data for individual cells for 2008-2009 teacher salary placements were not available. These figures reflect average differentials between the B.A. and every other lane; differentials increase as teachers gain experience and move down the lane. Actual figures would be higher because teachers accumulate additional credits as they gain experience.

Source: Seattle Public Schools.

6 Washington State recently removed the BA + 135 lane from the state salary schedule; teachers on this salary lane have been grandfathered into this lane.

Figure 9. Is Seattle spending more than other districts on incentives tied to advanced coursework and professional development?



Source: Data from respective school districts.

Seattle spends significantly more than the other districts in NCTQ's sample on raises tied to coursework. The eight districts in the graph were selected from among the 20 largest public school districts.

The relationship between teacher pay and teacher experience

Seattle reserves the largest annual raises for its most experienced teachers and the smallest raises to its newer teachers.

Relatively speaking, Seattle teachers are fortunate in not having to wait many years to qualify for their maximum salary.

Seattle's pay structure is inconsistent with what a large body of research teaches us about the trajectory of teachers' growth, in terms of the contributions they make to student achievement. This research has conclusively shown that teachers improve dramatically between their first and second years of teaching, considerably so between their second and third.

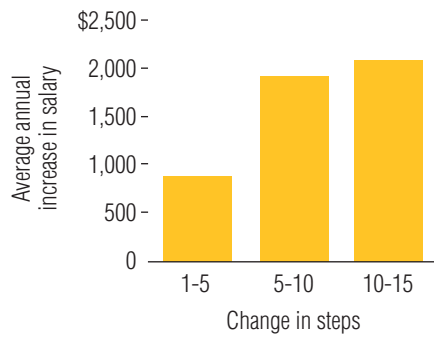
In other words, a 15-year veteran who is considered an exceptional teacher (because she routinely produces well over a year's growth out of her students) was likely just as exceptional in her fourth year of teaching. Also as true, it is statistically unlikely that a weak teacher now in his fifth year of teaching will become measurably more effective given some more years in the classroom.⁷

Given these findings and the advisability of keeping the number of first-year teachers to a minimum (when all teachers are the least effective they will ever be and consistently produce few student gains), a prudent strategy on the part of a district would be to keep these younger teachers longer, averting premature turnover in the first few years. To the extent that the district can target its dollars to incentivize a third-year teacher to stay a fourth, it should do so.

⁷ With better professional development, it may be possible to improve upon these rates, but the degree to which is unknown. These are fairly stable findings produced from many different districts across the United States, where there is presumably quite a variation in the quality of their professional development.



Figure 10. How much are raises for experience in Seattle?



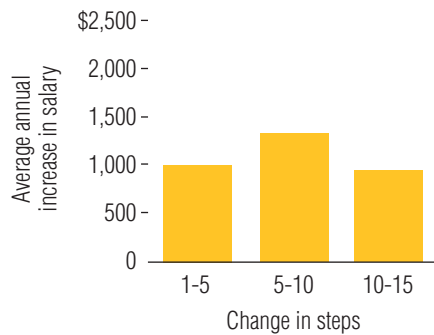
Source: Seattle teachers salary schedule.

Even though teachers improve the most in their first few years of teaching and receive relatively few monetary benefits, newer teachers earn on average an annual pay raise of \$800 compared with experienced teachers who earn a \$2,100 raise each year.

Unfortunately, as Figure 8 illustrates, this is not the strategy in place in Seattle. The salary schedule reserves the largest raises from one year to the next for more experienced teachers. The smallest raises occur in a teacher's first five years in the classroom. As teachers gain more experience, the size of these raises increase quite significantly. In terms of human capital, Seattle's policy does not serve the district well for a number of reasons, particularly because the pension package already serves as a strong incentive for older teachers to stay with the district.

Seattle's approach differs from the 100 TR³ district average, many of which give larger, more equitable raises towards the beginning of the teacher's career, a structure which serves as an important retention strategy.

Figure 11. How are teacher raises structured in the 99 other districts included in TR³?



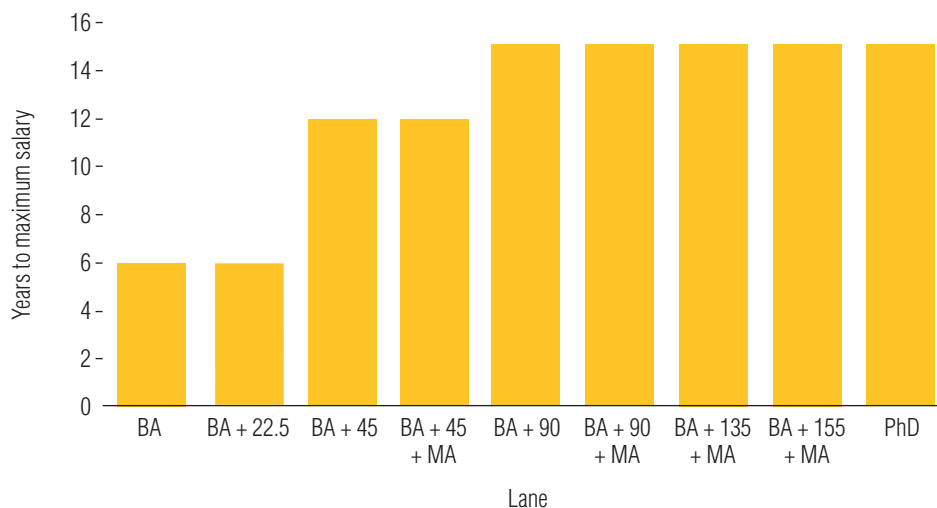
Source: TR³ (www.nctq.org/tr3).

The figure above shows the average raises for teachers in 99 TR³ districts. The structure is fairly equitable, with teachers receiving comparable pay increases over their career.



One strength of Seattle’s otherwise flawed pay structure is the relatively short length of time it takes a teacher to qualify for the maximum salary (in terms of years served) on a particular lane, as shown in Figure 11. With the notable exception of the premature cap on the salaries of teachers in the bachelor’s (and B.A. +22.5) lanes, the length of time it takes teachers to qualify for their maximum salary is at the most 15 years. This span more closely resembles the trajectory of other professionals such as doctors and lawyers and is relatively uncommon among American public school districts, where it often takes teachers 20 to 25 years to qualify for the maximum salary.⁸

Figure 12. How many years does it take for Seattle teachers to qualify for the maximum salary?



Source: Seattle teachers salary schedule.

Teachers with at least 90 additional credits beyond a bachelor’s receive raises every year for 15 years, while teachers without as many courses have their salaries capped after only six years.

Seattle’s progress on differential pay

To date, Seattle has done little to deviate from the traditional pay structure.

Nationally there has been a growing movement to look for ways to reward teachers who work in challenging environments, who can teach subjects in which there is a short supply of teachers (such as science, mathematics and special education) and, most importantly, for being particularly effective.

High-needs assignments

Seattle does have a program in place to provide additional money to teachers who are willing to teach in its most challenging schools.

The district does pay teachers at low-performing schools that have been targeted for improvement a small bonus (\$2,500 for the 2009–2010 school year). The amount teachers receive is comparable to other districts’ bonuses to incentivize teachers to work in a more challenging environment.

8 Vigdor, J. (2008, Fall). Scrap the sacrosanct salary schedule. *Education Next*, 37–42.



Shortage subject areas

Seattle currently does not provide any additional pay to teachers who are qualified to teach shortage subject areas. However, the contract does state that funding for hard-to-fill positions will be sought from outside sources.⁹ The contract also states that any teacher who receives the incentive (though it currently does not exist) must remain in the position for three years, so long as the employee receives satisfactory evaluations and is not released for performance or involuntarily transferred.

In comparison with the 99 other districts in the TR³ database, 51 districts offer some such incentives.

Performance pay

Seattle has been able to make little progress on efforts to reward more effective teachers. In the last round of contract negotiations, concluded in August, the district proposed a pay system that would have rewarded teachers for 1) positive evaluation; 2) student achievement growth; 3) working in a school identified for support or interventions; and 4) taking jobs that the district has a hard time filling. The proposals did not become part of the current contract.

By way of comparison, 28 of the 99 other TR³ districts offer some sort of compensation linked to student learning, whether determined by teacher evaluations, student test scores, classroom evidence, or other means of assessing teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

The state of Washington offers a relatively generous \$5,000 bonus to teachers who are nationally certified (by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards) and another \$5,000 to work in schools where more than 70 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. This policy correctly targets funds to attracting the best teachers to difficult assignments. Seattle does not offer any bonus to its 117 Board-certified teachers beyond what is provided by the state.

“A lot of teachers in my building say at least let’s discuss merit pay; let’s at least have the conversation.”

—Seattle middle school teacher

⁹ The state does provide a scholarship and loan forgiveness program in which prospective teachers seeking certification in a critical-needs area receive priority for the available funds.



Strengths & weaknesses of Seattle’s teacher compensation

Strengths	Weaknesses
Starting salary	
Teachers’ starting salaries are comparable to surrounding districts; SPS recently raised salaries significantly.	None discerned
Structure of salary schedule	
It takes teachers a relatively short amount of time to reach their maximum salary.	<p>Not all lanes on the salary schedule go up by equal increments: e.g., 2.6 percent for teachers with a bachelor’s degree versus 21.9 percent for teachers with a master’s.</p> <p>While some lanes continue for 15 years, other lanes (those requiring the least amount of additional coursework) stop after 6 and 12 years of service.</p> <p>The salary schedule includes too many intermediate lanes for additional credits and coursework beyond a bachelor’s degree (though Seattle is largely emulating the state’s directives).</p>
	The district spends an extraordinarily large percentage of its total teacher payroll (over 22 percent annually) incentivizing teachers to take coursework and professional development.
Differential pay	
SPS offers bonuses to teachers working in low-performing schools targeted for improvement.	There are no incentives to attract teachers to hard-to-staff subject areas nor is there any performance pay initiative.



Recommendations for the Seattle Public Schools

- 1. Work towards the full elimination of all lanes on the salary schedule. Because advanced degrees do not correlate to teacher effectiveness, Seattle should do away with incentives paid for advanced degrees or coursework altogether, while of course grandfathering in teachers already receiving the premiums.**

If this goal is too infeasible to complete all at once (though all of the newly funded Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation “deep dive” districts intend to make exactly this radical change), the district should first eliminate all “intermediate” lanes on the salary schedule that do not equate with an actual degree, including: BA + 22.5, BA + 45, BA + 90, BA + 90 + MA, BA + 135 + MA, and BA + 155 + MA. Teachers who are currently in these lanes would be grandfathered into this new policy.

- 2. Equalize the pay raises that newer teachers receive, and if possible, apportion higher pay raises when teachers earn tenure.** This structure would work towards the district’s retention goals and serve to make the tenure mark a more meaningful distinction. (See Goal 10 for more on this.)

- 3. Reallocate money “saved” from eliminating degree based compensation to raise the salaries of the most effective teachers.** While stipends or bonuses may be appropriate ways to attract teachers to high-needs schools or teach shortage subject areas (including less desirable assignments such as 9th grade English instead of 12th grade honors English), this rather undependable form of compensation is likely not best for rewarding performance and advancing the district’s teacher quality goals.

Consider instead, for example, awarding a certain number of “chaired” positions to highly effective teachers in the districts, paying \$100,000 or more per year.

Another option may be to move a teacher to a higher “step” on the salary schedule for consistently achieving some objective measure of performance with students, such as preparing students to earn 3s, 4s, and 5s on Advanced Placement exams.

Recommendations for Washington State

- 1. Eliminate the state salary schedule and the dysfunctional supplemental pay structure known as the “TRI.”** Exempting districts from following both base pay allocations and money raised through local levies renders the goals of equalizing teacher salaries nearly impossible to meet. Furthermore, the state salary schedule 1) links compensation with coursework, though most coursework has no impact on student achievement, and 2) incorrectly assumes that there is a linear relationship between teacher experience and teacher effectiveness.

Transfer and Assignment

Goal 2. Teacher assignment is based on the mutual consent of principals and teachers; policies minimize the deleterious impact of teachers' reassignment.

INDICATORS

- i. Teachers who lose their current teaching assignment have to actively apply for a new assignment, regardless of whether they are transferring voluntarily out of a school; have lost an assignment through a program change, enrollment shift or school closing; or are returning from a long-term leave or layoff.
- ii. Principals and/or school committees are entitled to select those applicants they wish to interview and have the final say over which teacher is hired.
- iii. When teachers must be moved from one school to another, it is suitable to use seniority status as the determining factor in deciding which teachers must lose their positions.
- iv. Teachers who have lost their current assignment and prove unsuccessful in a year's time in obtaining a new assignment should be terminated.
- v. When teachers need to be laid off and are therefore ineligible for reassignment, teacher performance should be a key factor in deciding who stays or goes.

The district's commitment to site-based hiring


Seattle is not fully committed to site-based hiring; many teachers continue to be placed without principals' approval and often on the basis of seniority.

In the mid-1990s, the district and teachers' union agreed to institute site-based hiring, placing Seattle at the forefront of a movement to give principals and their schools more authority over staffing.

In reality, though, the hiring process is a hybrid: principals and their hiring teams have control over hiring up to a certain point in the spring; then, for the vacancies that remain or emerge following that period, the seniority and job rights of teachers become paramount. A number of exceptions to site-based hiring have been built into the contract, giving principals much less say than it might appear:

1. Teachers transferring *from* schools that have been specifically targeted for improvement--principally the 17 "Flight" schools--are allowed to select new assignments in order

Hiring teams may include any combination of the principal, other staff members and parents, depending on the wishes of the school. Individual schools have discretion in how to reach final staffing decisions, though in most cases principals have the final say. Hiring teams receive training in interview techniques and legal requirements and are allowed to request information from a teacher candidate that goes beyond an application and a résumé.



of seniority without going through any hiring process. (However, teachers transferring to these special schools must be approved by principals, even when the placement is made by HR officials.)

2. Teachers who meet federal and state disability requirements also may bypass the normal hiring procedures, qualifying for new assignments based on their seniority. It is not clear from the contract language whether teachers who lose their current teaching assignment due to a school closing or program change are entitled to these same seniority preferences.
3. Any teacher who has not secured an assignment by July 1 (generally excessed teachers) is placed in a temporary assignment by district HR officials. These assignments are considered “forced placements” because schools are required to accept these transfers without the benefit of site-based hiring.

In the 2004-2009 teachers’ contract, the contract that just expired, teachers who want to transfer schools, teachers who lost their positions because of a program change or school closing and new hires all competed for vacancies at the same time. The new contract alters the process to afford internal candidates—teachers transferring within the system to new assignments—an opportunity to interview for vacant positions before new hires are allowed to apply to fill vacancies. Such a prerogative for internal candidates is common among other school districts and is a fair policy.¹⁰

Figure 13. What are the procedures for transferring and assigning teachers in Seattle?

Phase I

- Internal candidates (voluntary transfers and teachers who lose their current assignment, i.e., “excessed” teachers) apply to vacant positions, advertised on the district’s website.
 - School-based hiring teams screen, interview and hire applicants based on criteria for staff selection developed by the team and aligned with the school’s improvement plan.
 - Hiring teams are not required to choose from the existing pool of candidates; the school may re-advertise the vacancy during Phase II if no suitable candidate is found during Phase I.
 - Teachers may transfer only once in a year. Only high school teachers may transfer during the school year; these transfers may only be at the semester break.
-

Phase II

- Teachers with a disability and teachers working in targeted low-performing schools have first priority and seniority rights (referred to as “super seniority”) to fill any available vacancies after all internal candidates have had the opportunity to apply. Teachers with super seniority are entitled to choose positions with the most senior teachers choosing first.
 - Only schools that are part of either the Flight program or Southeast Educational Initiative program to turn around low-performing schools do not have to accept teachers that the district may want to assign to them. All other schools must.
-

Phase III

- Schools fill remaining vacancies with new hires and from the pool of remaining displaced teachers.
 - Teachers still without an assignment as of July 1 are assigned by HR into either vacant positions for which they qualify, or in temporary assignments as substitutes. If a displaced teacher is assigned as a substitute, s/he receives full pay and benefits until a permanent position is secured.
-

¹⁰ Although the teachers’ contract explicitly outlines procedures for teacher transfers, there are often modifications to the process to accommodate changes in staffing needs. For example, in 2009, faced with a \$34 million budget shortfall, Seattle was forced to lay off teachers. As a result the district hired few new teachers for the 2009-2010 school year, apart from those filling positions in such critical shortage areas as mathematics and science.

How Seattle handles teacher excessing

On paper, Seattle excesses teachers by seniority, the fairest way to handle the situation.

In practice, principals can manipulate the system by pushing out poor performers who must be placed elsewhere.

Teachers also can manipulate the system to avoid an excess or layoff, and principals have no say as to whether they want to keep that person on staff.

Like most districts around the country, Seattle uses seniority status as the basis for deciding which teachers in a school must be moved into new assignments in another school when staffing changes are needed, and also which teachers should be laid off when there are budget shortfalls. This process is called excessing.

Among educators, there is no consensus about a fair process for deciding which teachers to excess. Many argue that excessing should be decided not by seniority but by teacher performance. While recognizing the inherent appeal in this choice, NCTQ considers a seniority-based excessing process to be ultimately fairer to teachers and better for the health of all schools in a district.

Why seniority? Principals often use excessing as a means to remove teachers they would rather not have on staff.¹¹ The process is far easier than firing a teacher. However, it has led to some troublesome problems within school districts, captured by the term “the Dance of the Lemons.” While savvy principals are able to unload their weakest teachers, or “lemons,” those lemons are generally thrust upon those schools which employ either the weakest or newest principals, the same schools which are also the most likely to serve the poorest and most challenging students in the district. It is generally the children most in need of high-quality teachers who are the unintentional victims of the “Dance of the Lemons.”

Alternatively, in districts where principals are given full authority to decide who can teach in their buildings, many principals are often reluctant to hire teachers from the excess pool. There is a stigma stemming from excessing based on performance, making these teachers often considered less desirable hires, making it more difficult for teachers, even those who may actually be good to be hired. Consequently, in Seattle and elsewhere, HR officials end up having to “force place” teachers without the principal’s input. Some districts have chosen to keep a teacher on the payroll who is not assigned to a classroom, an expensive proposition for any school district.¹²

When excessing is done by seniority—and the process monitored by the HR office to make sure it is adhered to—it *should* be easier to persuade principals to consider teachers who find themselves in the excessed pool.

Teachers can switch positions within a school—even across subjects—without the principal’s approval as a means to avoid being excessed or laid off. This is because teachers are allowed to determine their categories for which they are qualified to teach—a more fine-grain distinction than certification. For example, a teacher may be certified in K-8, but has always taught middle school science. The teacher may switch her category, perhaps in anticipation

“If a teacher’s been teaching middle school but has a K-8 endorsement, she can apply to teach kindergarten, even if she’s never taught that grade before. Teachers strategize about [those descriptions], so do principals. It determines who stays and who goes. I may be forced to retain someone as an elementary school teacher, even if I think she’d be a terrible fit.”

—Seattle principal

11 Often the opportunity is created by the principal who says in May he “no longer needs” a French teacher because demand for languages is down. He unloads his weak French teacher, only to find in August that he needs to hire a new French or perhaps, Spanish teacher.

12 For one example, see “Denver teacher placement can add to disparities,” *Denver Post*, August 16, 2009.



of an excess, so that she is also “qualified” to teach first grade. While the teacher may be technically qualified, she may not be good with small children and the principal would have no choice but to keep her on staff.

The 2009-2010 Seattle teachers’ contract places stricter requirements on a teacher’s qualifications to teach a certain subject or grade level (referred to as categories). However, principals still have little say as to whether they think the senior teacher is actually suited to teach in the new assignment, even if they are technically qualified, a loophole that undermines the principal of mutual consent placement.

Figure 14. Transfer policies that support (or undermine) good hiring and placement practices

Policies that support mutual consent:	Policies that undermine mutual consent:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Staffing decisions are made at the school level.■ Teachers apply to vacancies and are selected for interviews by principals and/or their hiring teams.■ Principals and/or hiring teams select those teachers they wish to interview and hire.■ Hiring decisions cannot be grieved.■ Teachers can apply for as many positions as they wish.■ Internal and external candidates compete for jobs at the same time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ District HR office assumes full authority for reassigning teachers who are involuntarily transferred out of a school.■ Teachers are able to secure new assignments based on their seniority.■ Hiring decisions can be grieved.■ Teachers are restricted in the number of vacancies for which they can apply.



Strengths & weaknesses of the current approach to teacher transfer and assignment

Strengths

Weaknesses

Hiring and assignment

School hiring teams fill vacancies during Phase I of hiring on the basis of a teacher's qualifications and fit, not seniority. Teacher placements made during these periods are based on the mutual consent of teachers and school hiring teams.

Teacher placements made during Phase II of hiring are not based on mutual consent. Instead, teachers with "super seniority" secure new positions through seniority preference. Later in the hiring season, the district often places some teachers without regard to the wishes of the school.

Teachers wishing to transfer out of a school targeted for intervention are given "super seniority" status and can choose positions in seniority order. Mutual consent hiring should not be compromised when these teachers can already transfer voluntarily.

Excessed teachers

The collective bargaining agreement requires that "excessing" decisions be based on a teacher's seniority. If excessing is based on performance it can exacerbate the problem of finding new positions for teachers who may have lost their assignment through no fault of their own.

Teachers can switch positions within a school—even across subjects—without the principal's approval as a means to avoid being excessed or laid off.

The district does not have an exit strategy for excessed teachers who do not secure a new permanent assignment. By not placing a limit on how long an excessed teacher can work in a temporary position, teachers can remain without a permanent assignment indefinitely and at great expense to the district.

Seattle schools undergoing district intervention do not have to accept excessed teachers sent by the HR department.



Recommendations for Seattle Public Schools

- 1. Remove super seniority privileges.** Seattle should end the practices of awarding super seniority to teachers who wish to transfer from a school undergoing district intervention. First, this practice affords such teachers preferential status, which is not necessary given that internal candidates already have the first opportunity to apply to vacancies in phase I of hiring. Second, this process undermines site-based hiring, failing to give schools an adequate say in who teaches in their buildings.

In addition, the district should eliminate super seniority for teachers with a disability. Such employees are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires that their worksite make accommodations, if necessary. The law should not be interpreted to allow teachers to enjoy an advantage in assignment over other teachers.

- 2. Eliminate Phase II hiring.** Once super seniority privileges are removed, Seattle should do away with its second phase of hiring, which undermines principals' authority in hiring. Instead, Seattle should continue to afford internal candidates first priority for vacant positions early in the spring and extend the period to ensure that teachers who lose their teaching assignment due to staffing changes are notified in time to participate. Following this internal period, the district should simply open up vacancies to all candidates, internal and external, allowing them to compete for open positions and be chosen by school-based teams. This phase of hiring needs to occur early enough in the spring to attract high-quality new teachers to Seattle, before losing them to other districts.

- 3. Track the performance of excessed teachers to make sure principals are not using excessing as a means to pass off poor performers.** Seattle should track which teachers end up in the excess pool more than once and closely examine their performance through third party evaluations.

Too often poor-performing teachers are passed from school to school, with principals using the process to simply weed out their low performers rather than use the evaluation process as a means to dismiss the teacher. Poor performance should be addressed in the evaluation (and if need be, dismissal) process rather than through excessing.

- 4. Institute an exit plan for teachers in the pool of excessed teachers who are unable to secure a permanent position through site-based hiring.** Extending site-based hiring throughout the staffing season gives displaced teachers ample opportunity to interview for vacancies. Those teachers who do not secure a permanent assignment after one year should be exited "without prejudice" from employment in SPS.

- 5. Base teacher layoffs on a combination of factors, rather than on seniority alone.** Layoffs decisions made by reverse seniority result in more positions eliminated than if teachers of different experience-levels were cut. Junior teachers on average make less money than their more experienced counterparts so more inexperienced teachers must be laid off to save a given amount of school funding. Seniority layoffs are also bad for schools, forced perhaps to give up their best performers at the same time they must keep subpar teachers. Seattle's next contract should allow performance to be a consideration when teachers are laid off.

Goal 3. The timeline for hiring new teachers and assigning transfers occurs early enough so as to minimize disruption to schools and ensures the district has optimal access to top talent.

INDICATORS

- i. Budgets are developed and distributed to principals in the late winter or early spring so that vacancies can be determined by April 1.
- ii. Transfers are prohibited during the school year, except in unusual circumstances.
- iii. Teachers who apply to transfer for the following school year are able to secure assignments by the end of the current school year or early in the summer.
- iv. Policies require retiring and non-returning teachers to provide notice to schools in the spring, before the transfer season begins, to ensure schools have sufficient information to identify staffing needs for the following year.
- v. Vacancies are posted online and teachers apply online in a centralized system.

Timeline for hiring and assigning teachers

Seattle does not hire the teachers it is likely to need early enough.

Schools face vacancies each year as teachers leave or change positions. Needless to say, the resulting turnover is disruptive to schools. The earlier districts anticipate and fill vacancies, the better prepared schools are for the new school year. Additionally, earlier hiring timelines help districts compete for top talent, as many talented prospects typically begin looking for positions in the winter and early spring.¹³

While Seattle Public Schools is aware of the importance of an early hiring timeline (it is addressed in both the new teachers' contract and in the Strategic Plan), the district appears to struggle to meet this goal. Too many teachers give notice of their intended departure during the summer, opening up vacancies late in the hiring season and often leaving the district scrambling to fill positions even after the beginning of the school year. In 2008 Seattle schools opened with 76 vacancies. According to district officials, the majority of those vacancies were the result of teachers waiting until the end of the summer to request a leave of absence or to resign.

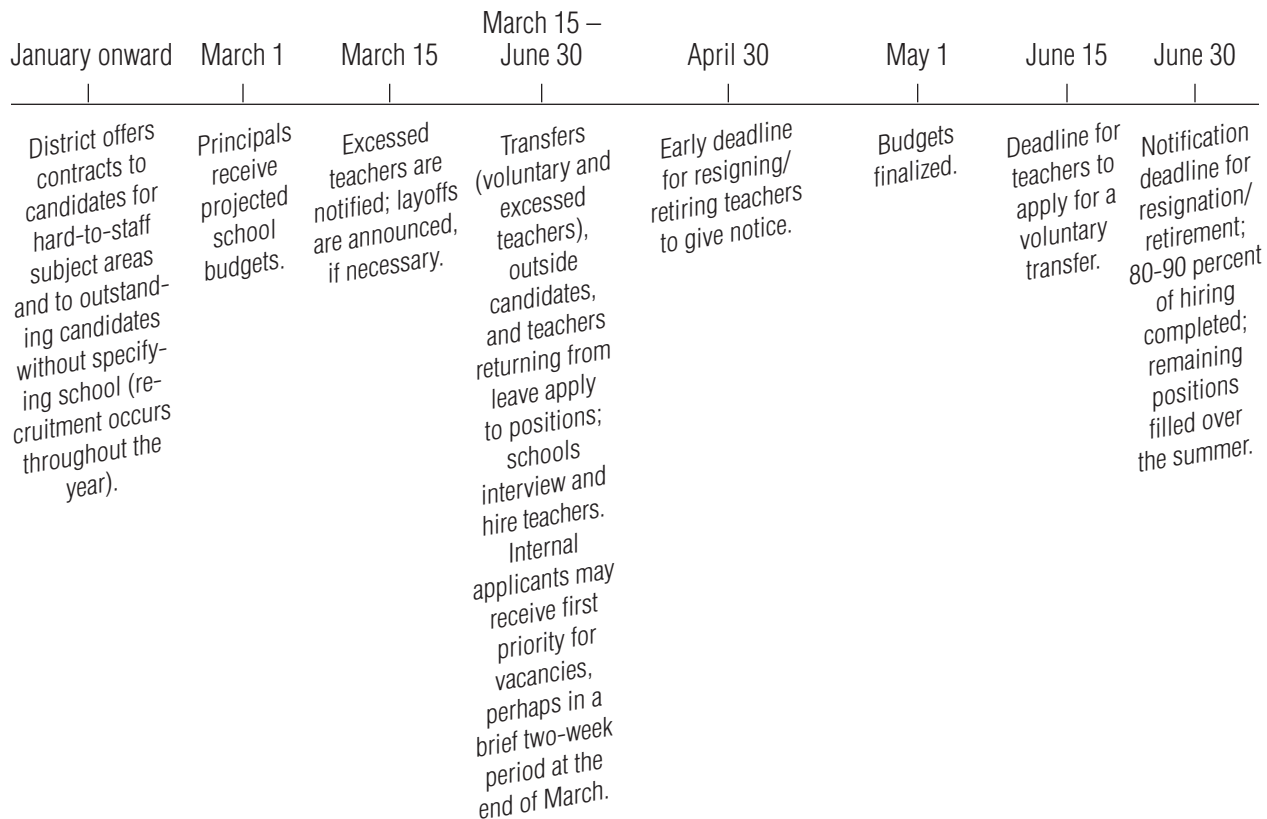
Seattle does not offer contracts before the main hiring season (in January and February) to candidates qualified to teach even hard-to-staff subjects or who are particularly outstanding, something many districts increasingly do. Such contracts are signed with the understanding that the new hire will still need to secure an actual position by applying to and being offered a job by an individual school.

Teachers with "super seniority" rights (teachers transferring from schools targeted for district intervention and those with disabilities) currently have their own placement period, separate from other internal transfers (see Goal 2). This is an unnecessary entitlement since internal candidates already have a period to transfer when they don't have to compete with external hires. Furthermore, it slows down the rest of the transfer and hiring period at precisely the time when it would be most beneficial for the district to begin hiring new recruits.

In the new Seattle contract, an important change in the hiring process was made that prohibits teacher transfers during the school year, except for secondary teachers, who may transfer at the end of the semester.

¹³ Levin, J. & Quinn, M. (2003). *Missed opportunities: How we keep high-quality teachers out of urban classrooms*. New York: The New Teacher Project.

Figure 15. Suggested timeline for ensuring the bulk of hiring is completed by the end of the school year.



Strengths & weaknesses of Seattle’s hiring process and timeline

Strengths

Weaknesses

Transfer and hiring timeline

According to its contract, Seattle attempts to complete the majority of its hiring and placement before the end of the school year.

The district often does not notify excessed teachers about a loss of assignment until after the first phase of hiring, giving excessed teachers less time to obtain a mutually acceptable new placement before the end of the school year.

During the spring of 2009, excessed teachers had only one week to apply for new positions through site-based hiring, and schools had only a two-week window to interview candidates.

Hiring and resignation process

Seattle posts its vacancies online, accessible to all teachers and new hires. New hires and staff may apply online through the district’s user-friendly system.

Neither Seattle’s teachers’ contract nor state law stipulates a deadline for teachers to notify principals of a retirement or resignation.



Recommendations for Seattle Public Schools

- 1. Make the transfer season a discrete period early in the spring, one that includes excessed teachers (teachers who lose their assignment due to staffing changes).** Seattle should continue to strive for the goal of placing the vast majority of teachers in new positions before the end of the school year by enacting some important changes. It should begin its spring transfer and hiring season in March, when principals would ideally receive their budgets for the following school year. By the end of March, excessed teachers should be notified of any changes in their positions, thereby allowing them ample time to interview for a new assignment, along with other teachers.
- 2. Adjust hiring policies to maximize the recruitment of talented new hires.** As discussed in Goal 2, Seattle should begin offering new hires the opportunity to apply for specific vacancies in the spring, as soon as internal candidates have had the opportunity to apply for positions. At the very least, Seattle should consider hiring teachers for a generic pool of hires, including those filling critical shortage areas, so as to retain this pool of talent until vacancies become available.
- 3. Establish an early notification bonus for resigning and retiring teachers who notify the district by April 30.** To encourage teachers to notify the district at the earliest possible date of their impending resignation, Seattle should offer a bonus for teachers who give notice by April 30. To keep teachers from withholding their resignations because they want to keep their health insurance over the summer, resignations should be effective June 30 so that coverage would continue through the summer months.

Recommendations for Washington State

- 1. Pass the education budget in March rather than in April and consider a two-year budget.** The more time schools have to plan for impending changes in staff positions, the better prepared they will be to staff schools with the best teachers.
- 2. Impose a deadline for retiring and resigning teachers to notify their school districts by June 30.** For teachers who fail to notify the district by June 30, the state should permit the district to fine teachers and require teachers to “resign with prejudice.”



Goal 4. The district distributes its human capital talent in an equitable manner across all schools, regardless of schools' populations.

INDICATORS

- i. Schools track the academic capital of their teachers, recognizing its importance as measured by the selectivity of teachers' undergraduate institutions, high SAT and ACT scores and teachers' success on licensure exams.
- ii. Schools have comparably low proportions of new teachers on their staff.
- iii. Schools have comparably high teacher retention rates.

Equitable distribution of teacher talent

Seattle has done a good job making sure that high-poverty schools get their fair share of teachers with strong academic backgrounds, with less success of retaining experienced teachers in high-poverty schools.

The degree to which high-quality and experienced teachers are distributed equitably among low- and high-poverty schools is of both local and national concern. Seattle is taking steps to encourage teachers to work in low-performing schools by offering financial incentives to teach in certain designated schools. Schools undergoing intervention in Seattle receive additional resources and assistance to help close their achievement gaps. Strategies include building ways for teachers to routinely plan together and learn from one another, with the target being increased student learning and extending the school day to provide students with additional learning time. In recognition of the importance of building a stable and cohesive team at struggling schools, principals at intervention schools do not have to accept teachers who are sent to the school through the HR department.

Though measuring teacher quality is a murky endeavor, the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) identified a set of teacher attributes that signal a high-performing school. The IERC found that schools with the following factors produced higher academic gains among their students:

1. lower ratios of first- and second-year teachers to more experienced teachers;
2. higher selectivity of teachers' undergraduate institutions;
3. higher average SAT or ACT scores;
4. lower teachers' failure rates on licensure exams; and
5. lower teacher turnover rates.¹⁴

Based on the data available from Seattle, NCTQ was able to examine three of these five teacher quality indicators: the ratio of inexperienced to experienced teachers, three-year teacher retention rates and the selectivity of teachers' undergraduate institutions. We were not able to look at average SAT or ACT scores or the failure rates on licensure exams but would urge Seattle to develop capacity to do so.

1. Ratio of experienced to inexperienced teachers

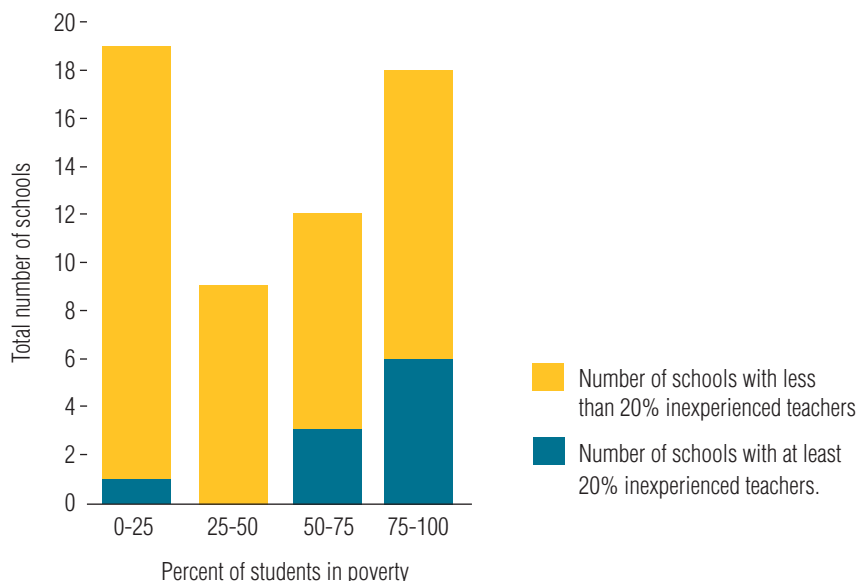
Not surprisingly, a large body of research shows that teachers in their first year are considerably less effective than other teachers, and that second-year teachers, while having markedly improved from their first year, are still not as effective as they will be.

¹⁴ White, B.R., Presley, J.B., & DeAngelis, K.J. (2008). *Leveling up: Narrowing the teacher academic capital gap in Illinois* (IERC 2008-1). Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council.



NCTQ calculated the percentage of staff at each elementary school with fewer than two years of experience, finding that schools with higher poverty rates are more likely to have more inexperienced teachers. As Figure 16 shows, 33 percent of the highest-poverty schools employ large numbers of first- or second-year teachers compared to only 5 percent of the lowest-poverty schools.

Figure 16. Are poorer elementary schools more likely to employ inexperienced teachers?



Source: Seattle Public Schools

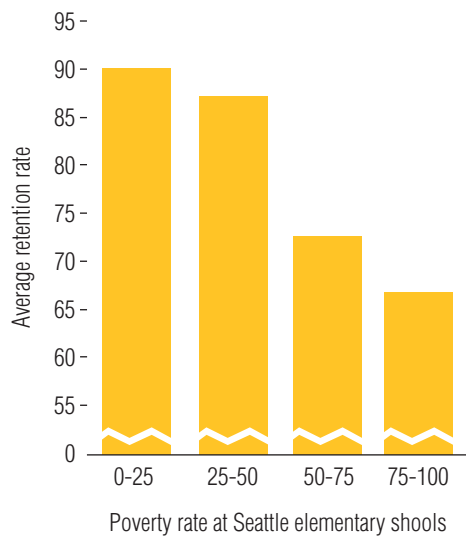
In schools serving high percentages of poor children, it is much more likely that students will be assigned a new teacher. Nine of Seattle’s 30 high-poverty schools employ high percentages of new teachers. By way of comparison, only 1 of Seattle’s 28 relatively affluent schools has a high percentage of new teachers.

2. Three-year teacher retention rates

It makes sense that a school that employs more inexperienced teachers would also report higher attrition rates. Districts can combat that problem by assigning experienced teachers to high-poverty schools, something that is likely only to be successful if incentives are provided coupled with assurances about the quality of school leadership.

NCTQ looked at the three-year teacher retention rate for all schools in the district. NCTQ requested data from the Washington State public records office on teacher assignment from the 2005-2006 through the 2008-2009 school years at every Seattle public school. A variety of factors can affect teacher turnover at a given school, but the data suggest that **teacher turnover rates in Seattle schools increase along with a school’s poverty level**. For example, the three-year retention rate for elementary schools in the poorest quartile averaged 67 percent, compared to 90 percent for the wealthiest quartile. The same pattern is true for Seattle’s middle schools, whose average teacher retention rate decreased as poverty increased, though not as dramatically as for elementary schools (82 percent for the wealthiest quartile, compared to 71 percent for the poorest).

Figure 17. Are poorer schools more likely to experience teacher turnover?



Source: Seattle Public Schools.

The higher a school's ranking by poverty quartile, the lower its retention rate of teachers.

In addition to these clear trends, Seattle should take note of individual schools with particularly low three-year retention rates such as Northgate, Minor, Hawthorne, Leschi and Maple. Also, although there is considerable overlap between the 17 schools that the district has targeted for intervention under the Flight project and those with low retention rates and high rates of inexperienced teachers, not all of the outliers are captured in the district's initiative.

Selectivity of Undergraduate Institution

Because teachers who were themselves good students tend to be more effective teachers,¹⁵ NCTQ reviewed the undergraduate institutions of teachers at six schools representing the two ends of the student-poverty spectrum: three low-poverty and three high-poverty schools. We also obtained data on the undergraduate institutions of new hires for the 2008-2009 school year. In both of these test samples a remarkably high number of teachers were from "more selective" or "most selective" institutions, approximately 60 percent.¹⁶ More impressively, **these teachers were not hired in greater proportion at the low-poverty schools than at their high-poverty counterparts.**

As only 27 percent of all education schools in the United States are even housed in "more selective" and "most selective" institutions, Seattle appears to have an exceptional commitment to overall academic selectivity in its hires.

Research indicates that schools with higher proportions of poor students on average have a harder time retaining teachers. They also are more likely than wealthier schools to suffer from a lack of "academic capital" in their staff, such as that indicated by the proportion of teachers who attended more selective colleges and universities.

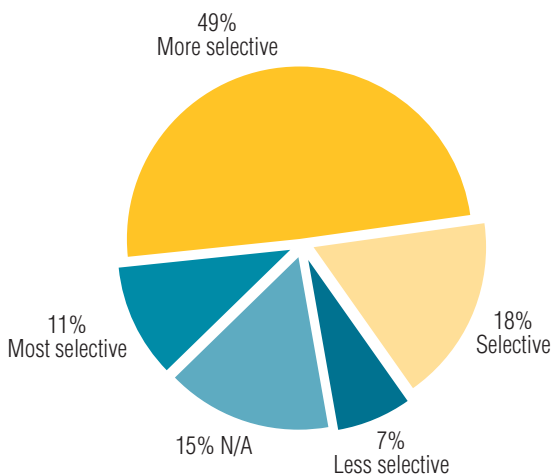
The Seattle Public Schools face significant challenges educating students from low-income backgrounds, but there are reasons to be optimistic: Poverty is concentrated in relatively few schools. The district has a well-educated workforce and access to resources both within and outside the district. With additional attention to the data on the equitable distribution of teachers, Seattle can move faster toward its goal of providing a high-quality education for *all* students, particularly those living below the poverty line.

15 Summers, A., & Wolfe, B. (1997). Do schools make a difference? *The American Economic Review*, 67 (4), 639-652. Ehrenberg, R., & Brewer, D. (1994). Do school and teacher characteristics matter? Evidence from high school and beyond. *Economics of Education Review*, 14, 1-23.

16 Selectivity data determined by *U.S. News & World Report* in the magazine's annual rankings of colleges and universities.



Figure 18. What is the selectivity of undergraduate institutions for new hires?



Source: Seattle Public Schools¹⁷

Well over half of Seattle's new teacher hires come from more or most selective institutions.

Strengths & weaknesses of the equitable distribution of teachers in Seattle

Strengths	Weaknesses
Teacher turnover	
None discerned	Poorer schools have more inexperienced teachers than wealthier schools. Poorer schools have higher teacher turnover than wealthier schools.
Academic capital of teachers	
The academic capital of teachers appears high regardless of whether teachers work at a high or low income school.	More attributes need measuring, such as failure rate on licensing exams.
Data collection	
None discerned	Seattle does not track the distribution of teachers.

Recommendation for Seattle Public Schools

- 1. Track the academic caliber of teachers, particularly of new hires; teacher retention and the proportion of new teachers on staff at each school.** Understanding the disparities across the district is the first step in remedying them.

¹⁷ SPS provided conflicting data for this figure. Data in Figure 17 looks at 71 new hires for the 2008-2009 school year. However, we are unsure how many new hires the district made that year. The figure provided specifically in response to our request was 71; other district documents say there were 309 new hires for that year.

Work Day and Year

Goal 5. The schedule and duties assigned to a teacher support the teacher's ability to be effective.

INDICATORS

- i. The district's calendar creates time for teachers to work without students before the start of the student school year, during the student school year and after the conclusion of the student school year to ensure common planning, team collaboration and professional growth.
- ii. The district provides adequate planning/preparation time to teachers during the work day and there is collaborative planning scheduled on a weekly basis.
- iii. Teachers work an eight-hour day on site.

Length of the teacher work day

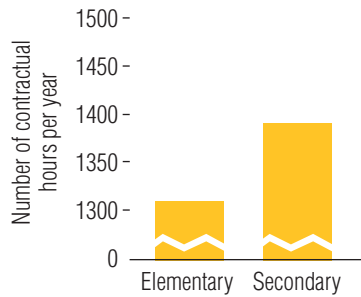
The work day for elementary teachers is too short.

Though an eight-hour work day is standard in most professions, teachers have long enjoyed a traditionally shorter contractual work day under the assumption that teachers do some portion of their work at home. More districts are now requiring a full eight hours on site so that essential time needed for faculty planning and collaboration is not up for debate.

Seattle is unusual in that its elementary and secondary teachers have two different work days (see Figure 19). While Seattle's secondary teachers must be on site 7 hours, 30 minutes each day, elementary teachers are only required to be on site 7 hours each day, the shortest work day of any teachers at any level in the Puget Sound area (see Figure 20). Elementary teachers work well below the Puget Sound school district average of 7 hours, 38 minutes, as well as the 100 district TR³ (www.nctq.org/tr3) average of 7 hours, 25 minutes.



Figure 19. What is the difference in contractual hours for elementary teachers compared to secondary teachers in Seattle?



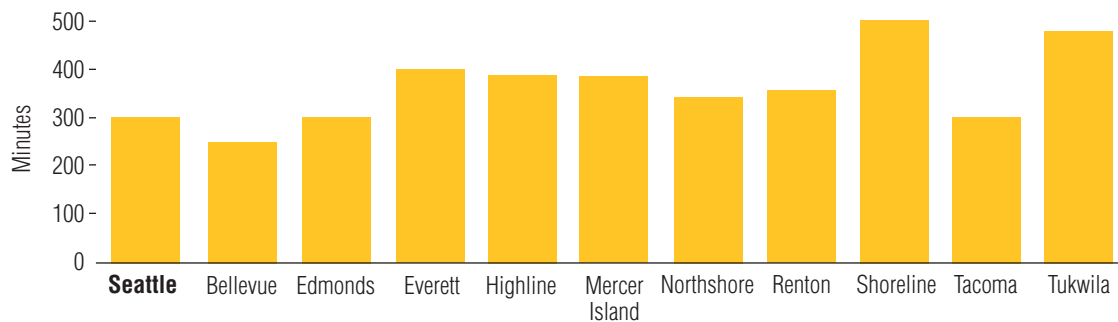
Source: SEA and SPS collective bargaining agreement.

In 1975 Seattle elementary teachers were compensated for lost planning time by the district agreeing to shorten the teacher work day, with the result that 34 years later, elementary teachers are still working 30 minutes less each day than secondary teachers, essentially 2 weeks less time on the job. In spite of the different work expectations, no salary adjustments have been made.

The Seattle Education Association provided an explanation for the shorter work day for elementary teachers. In 1975 the district had a double levy failure and was forced to cut some art, music and physical education from the elementary schools, which in turn led to a cut in classroom teachers' planning time. To compensate teachers for their loss in planning time, the district set the elementary work day to be 30 minutes less each day, cutting their planning time accordingly. In the logic of negotiations, where giving up something is met by getting something, the result can be counterproductive. In this case, what teachers gave up in the end—planning time—was exactly what many of them wanted preserved.

The significance of this time deficit should not be underplayed. Adding up the time lost, Seattle elementary teachers work two fewer weeks than Seattle's secondary teachers as well as their peers in surrounding districts. While many teachers may choose to work additional hours regardless of what the contract says, many do not, making it harder on school leadership to create a collaborative working environment.

Figure 20. How much time are teachers on site without students?



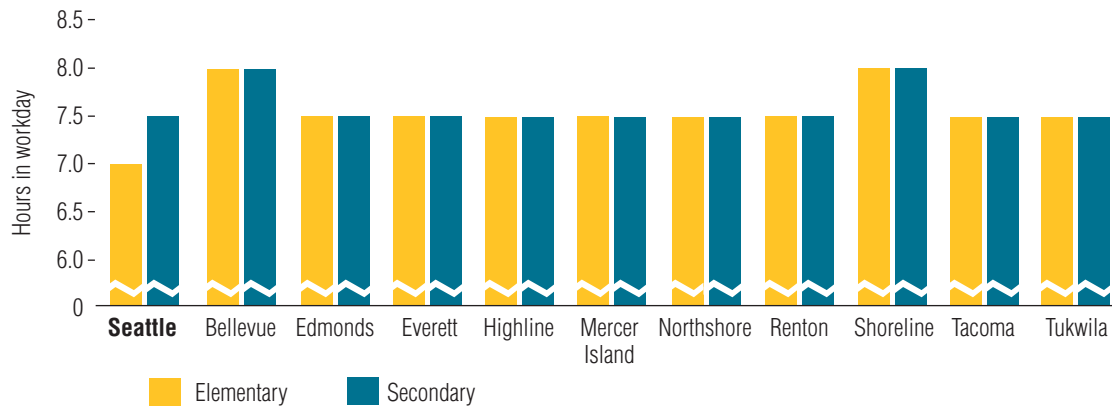
Source: Collective bargaining agreements from Seattle and surrounding school districts.

Seattle teachers are required to be on site beyond the student school day much less than in nearly all of the surrounding school districts.



The approach taken by Asian schools to teacher work time serves as quite a contrast to the model observed by most American schools, and in particular Seattle. In *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education*, Harold Stevenson and James Stigler highlighted differences in how American and Asian teachers spend their day, observing that teachers in Japan are with students only 60 percent of the day. The remaining time is mostly spent planning lessons, collaborating with other teachers and meeting with students one on one. American teachers, in contrast, generally have less than one hour away from students each day, equivalent to an average of 13 percent, or in the case of Seattle's elementary teachers, 6 percent.

Figure 21. What is the length of the contractual teacher work day?



Note: Lake Washington's contract does not specify the length of the work day; it is determined by the principal or immediate site supervisor. 2008-2011 Lake Washington teachers contract, p. 12, Article 12.1.

Source: Calendars and collective bargaining agreements from Seattle and surrounding school districts.

Although only two districts require a full 8-hour work day for teachers, Seattle elementary teachers are the only in the area to work less than a 7-hour, 30-minute day.

Elementary teachers have too little planning time.

Included in the work day for Seattle teachers is a preparation period, equal in length to one full class period for secondary teachers, about the same as what we typically see in the 100 TR³ districts. As previously discussed, Seattle elementary teachers lost preparation time as a result of a funding problem in 1975, leaving elementary teachers with only 30 minutes of daily preparation, significantly below the TR³ average of 44 minutes. Seattle also ranks at the bottom of elementary planning time compared with other districts in the Puget Sound area, as shown in Figure 22.



Figure 22. How much planning time do elementary teachers receive a day?

District	Planning time provided during the student day, weekly
Lake Washington	250 minutes
Tacoma	230 minutes
Highline	225 minutes
Northshore	225 minutes
Renton	225 minutes
Everett	180 minutes
Shoreline	165 minutes
Bellevue	160 minutes
Mercer Island	150 minutes
Tukwila	150 minutes
Seattle	150 minutes
Edmonds	Not stated in CBA

Source: Calendars and collective bargaining agreements from Seattle and surrounding school districts.

Seattle elementary teachers tie for last place in the amount of planning time teachers are given during the student day. Some districts receive additional planning time beyond what is shown here, for example, through early dismissals of students each week, as is the case in Highline and Mercer Island. Seattle does not.

Collaborative planning time. Although Seattle does not provide teachers with additional preparation time for collaborative purposes, the contract makes it clear that a teacher's own planning time should also be used for joint planning: "*The primary purpose of planning periods in elementary, middle and high schools is for the individual teacher to prepare, plan and conference; however, this time shall also be used for period conferences, departmental meetings and other cooperative group planning.*" The explicit language is important. Other school districts, such as Baltimore, have had problems with how these planning periods can be used due to the lack of such language.

In addition to the planning period, the contract permits schools to have after-school faculty meetings once a week, although such meetings are restricted by the contract to one hour.

The school year

In 2009-2010, Seattle students will receive three fewer days of instruction than state law requires.

In the 2009-2010 school year, Seattle teachers officially work 184 days. This work year includes seven days without students, a number comparable to both other districts in Puget Sound (which average just under seven days without students), as well as districts throughout the country.¹⁸ Nationally, 75 percent of the 100 TR³ districts have 6 or more teacher work days and 40 percent of districts provide teachers with at least 10 work days beyond the student school year.

¹⁸ In addition to designated work days, students are released early five days during the year for teacher professional development.

¹⁹ RCW 28A.150.220 (3), Washington Legislature 2009 House Bill 2261 and Seattle Public Schools 2009-2010 school calendar. Seattle was granted three waiver days, which is what legally allows the district to provide fewer instructional days than the statutory minimum. These three days are used for professional development.

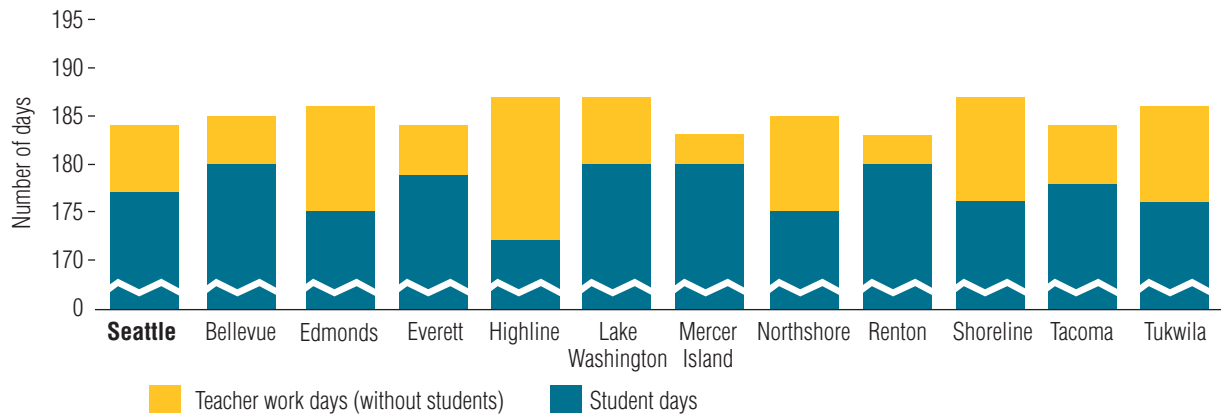


Seattle's calendar fails to provide students with Washington's legally required number of instructional days (180). State law was recently amended to explicitly encourage districts to exceed this minimum;¹⁹ however, the state school board granted Seattle (and 75 other school districts in the state) a waiver to convert three days of instruction into professional development time, which means the district is only providing 177 days of instruction this year.²⁰

In fact, as the next section will discuss, Seattle teachers are taking on average an additional 3 days away from the classroom to participate in professional development activities, further reducing a teacher's contact time, exclusive of any leave, with his or her students down from 177 days to only 174 days.

The number of instructional days in Seattle is not only less than required by law, it is also less than many of the districts in the Puget Sound as well as across the country, which both average 179 student instructional days. While two or three days may seem insignificant, even a few lost school days can have a negative impact on student performance.²¹

Figure 23. How many days do teachers work in the Puget Sound region?



Source: Calendars and collective bargaining agreements from Seattle and surrounding school districts from the 2009-2010 school year.

Seattle is not alone in its failure to provide 180 days of student instruction, as required by Washington State law.

20 Seattle's elementary students attend school for 177 days with a school day length of 390 minutes. Bellevue and Mercer students attend school for 180 days and have a school day of 420 minutes.

21 Marcotte, D.E., & Hemelt, S.W. (2007). *Unscheduled school closings and student performance*. Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor.



Strengths & weaknesses of teacher scheduling in Seattle

Strengths	Weaknesses
Length of the work day	
None discerned	<p>The elementary teacher school day is still a full 30 minutes shorter than that of Seattle secondary teachers, the consequence of a budget problem 34 years ago. The finances were resolved long ago, salaries have improved, but the hours have not been corrected. Compounded over the work year, this results in a difference of over two weeks.</p> <p>The secondary teacher on-site work day is better at 7 hours, 30 minutes, but should be raised to 8 hours.</p>
Daily planning time	
None discerned	<p>Elementary teachers are given less planning time than the majority of districts in the Puget Sound area.</p> <p>District policies do not explicitly provide for any collaborative time; they only acknowledge that individual planning time may be used for cooperative purposes including department or grade-level meetings.</p>
Length of the teacher school year	
Teachers have seven work days without students in attendance.	Seattle's calendar includes too few student instructional days. Seattle's 177 instructional days is below what is required by state law.

Recommendations for the teacher work day and year

- 1. Lengthen the teacher work day.** Ideally the teacher work day should be eight hours, as is standard in most professions; however, an increase in the elementary teacher work day to 7 hours and 30 minutes (the length of the secondary teacher work day) would at least put teacher time on par with other school districts in the Puget Sound area and resolve the problem of identical wages but different time expectations.
- 2. Provide elementary teachers with more planning time.** Because the discrepancy in planning time is undoubtedly due to their shorter work day, Seattle should use the additional 30 minutes per day to increase the amount of planning time elementary teachers receive. This would give teachers in Seattle a similar amount of planning time to what teachers in surrounding districts receive.
- 3. Designate weekly meetings for team/grade level collaborative planning.** The contract currently recognizes the need for collaborative time, but does not indicate an expectation of how often this should occur. The contract requires teachers to be on site an additional five hours per week beyond the student day. The district could designate two of these hours for collaborative planning. Schools should attempt to arrange teacher schedules so that teachers of the same grade or subject level have common planning periods.
- 4. Meet the state's legal requirement of 180 student instructional days.** The State legislature encourages districts to exceed the 180-day minimum, but Seattle instead reduced the number of days. The district should strive to provide students with as much instructional time as possible, beginning by increasing the number of student days from 177 to 180.



Goal 6. Policies encourage teacher attendance and minimize the deleterious impact of teacher absences.

INDICATORS

- i. Sick leave is commensurate with months worked (e.g., 10-month contract provides 10 days of leave).
- ii. Teachers are required to notify the principal or principal's designee of each absence.
- iii. The district produces monthly teacher absentee reports for internal review by principals and administrators that show which schools report high rates of absenteeism and the names of teachers who are chronically absent.
- iv. The district requires medical documentation for habitual use of sick leave and can require additional documentation from a doctor other than the teacher's own should sick leave abuse be suspected.
- v. Absentee rates are a factor in individual teacher performance evaluation, and a school's overall teacher absenteeism rate is a factor in principal performance evaluation.

Seattle's sick and personal leave policies

Seattle teachers use nearly all of the sick leave allotted, elementary teachers more so than secondary teachers.

Specific schools are notable for their high absentee rates.

Teachers take most of their personal leave on Mondays and Fridays.

In the 2007-2008 school year, Seattle teachers on average used 11 of their 12 days of sick and personal leave days. However, this simple calculation may be somewhat misleading. The absentee data provided to NCTQ included those teachers out on extended leave (due to pregnancy or chronic illness), so the averages are likely skewed. SPS was unable to provide absentee data that would have allowed us to disaggregate absences down to the level of the individual teacher. Consequently we are not able to determine the typical number of days taken by teachers who for the most part show up to school every day.

However, it would be fair to state that Seattle teachers take a higher number of sick leave days on average (absent 6 percent of the year) than what other professions report their employees take (absent 3 percent of the year).²²

As show in Figure 23, among individual schools in the district, there is significant variation in the number of sick leave days taken by teachers, ranging from 4 days per teacher at Nova High to 20 days at Sacajawea Elementary.

We can observe big differences in leave rates depending on the grades served in a school, as illustrated in Figure 24. Attendance rates for teachers at Seattle's high schools are significantly better than all other levels. While schools such as Nova High School and Rainier Beach High School have some of the best attendance rates in the district, even the high schools with the highest sick leave rates take up to 40 percent less leave than their colleagues working at the middle or elementary level.

As show in Figure 25, the absentee rate appears to be unrelated to school characteristics. Schools with higher rates of students eligible for free and reduced lunch report about the same average absentee rate as more affluent schools.

Seattle teachers currently receive the following days for leave:

10 sick days

2 personal days

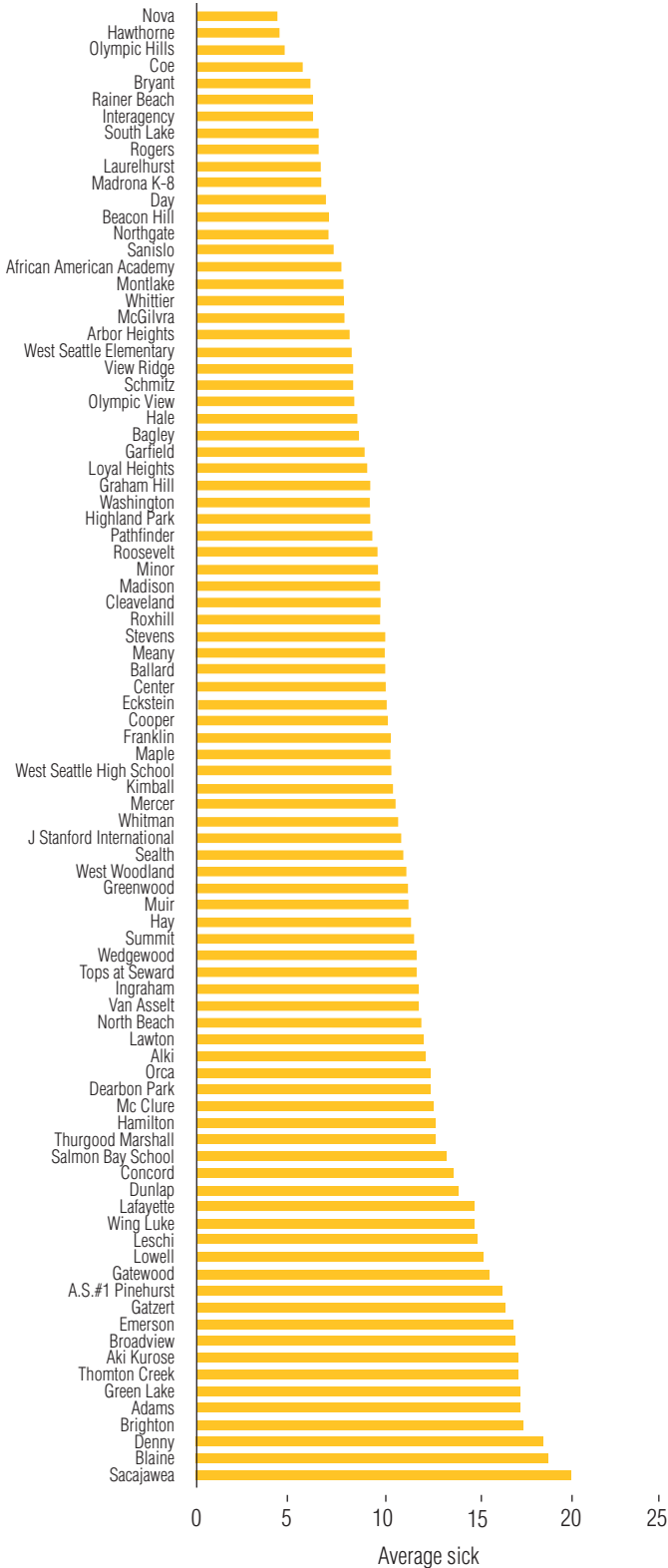
3 bereavement days

Unlimited professional development days,
used as needed.

²² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Labor force statistics from the current population surveys 2003 - 2008*, Table 47.



Figure 24. How many sick leave days do teachers at Seattle’s schools take?



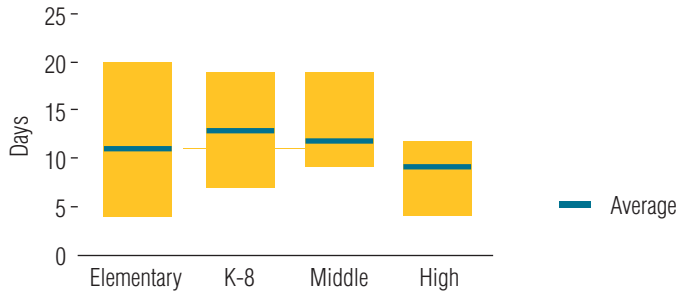
Source: Seattle Public Schools, 2007–2008, Seattle Public Schools Data Profile: District Summary December 2008.²³

23 Schools excluded from the comparison due to incomplete data sets include Boc at Hay, Homeschool, Indian Heritage, Marshall Alternative, MCHS at Northgate, MCHS at Ida Wells, New School.



One-third of Seattle's schools have average teacher leave rates that are above the district's annual allotment of 12 days. This is for two reasons: 1) data provided by SPS captures only total leave taken at a school. One teacher out due to extended illness can throw off an entire school's average. 2) Teachers can accumulate leave year to year, enabling extended absences.

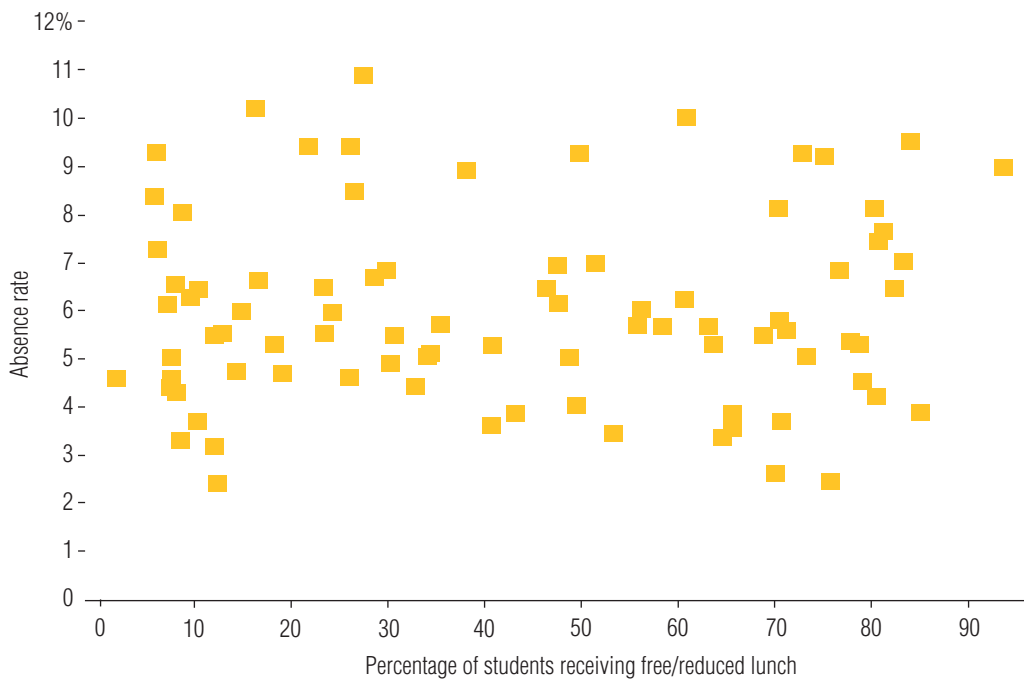
Figure 25. How do Seattle teachers' leave patterns compare based on grade level?



Source: Seattle Public Schools, 2007–2008, Seattle Public Schools Data Profile: District Summary December 2008.

The widest disparities in leave occur at the elementary level, with some schools averaging fewer than 5 days of sick leave but others averaging as many as 20 days per teacher.

Figure 26. Is there a correlation between a school's poverty rate and teacher absences?



Source: Seattle Public Schools, 2007–2008, Seattle Public Schools Data Profile: District Summary December 2008.

These scattered plot points reveal no correlation between student poverty and teacher absence rates in Seattle. Research in other school districts has shown a correlation between absences and poverty rates.²⁴

24 Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J. Are teacher absences worth worrying about in the U.S.? NBER Working Paper.



The relatively high rate of absences of teachers working in elementary schools could suggest that teachers in some schools tend to get sicker than their colleagues teaching older children. However, there are a number of elementary schools with low rates of absenteeism, which argues against that theory. It could also be that there are measurable pockets of unhealthy children in the city who bring illnesses to school that tend to make adults sick. That analysis is beyond the scope of this study.

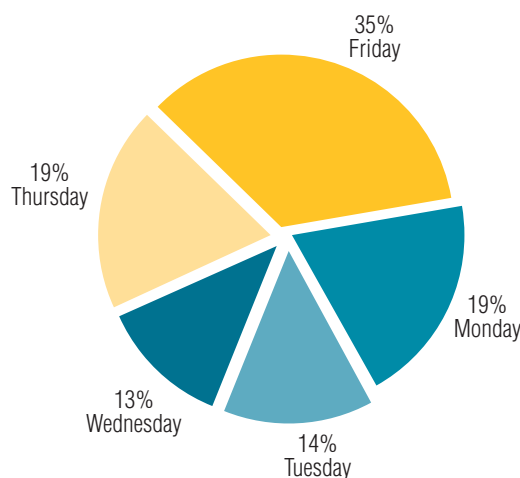
Another plausible theory is that the high absentee rates could be a reflection of the culture of the school and how much absenteeism is tolerated. There is some support for such a theory. One study found that there is likely to be a drop in the attendance rate of a teacher who had a previously good attendance record but who transfers to a school with high rates of teacher absence. The phenomenon works in the reverse as well: a teacher who transfers to a school with lower rates of teacher absences will improve her attendance.²⁵

One strategy that has been found to reduce teacher absenteeism is to require teachers to notify their school principal or designee, rather than the central office or a service, if s/he has to be absent. The current teachers' contract does not state if Seattle teachers are required to notify their principal. There is a new provision in the 2009-2010 contract that stipulates a supervisor may (1) request a conference if s/he is concerned about a teacher's sick leave use (2) require documentation for future absences and (3) require that the employees be examined by a district appointed doctor.

On the matter of the two days of personal leave allotted each year to teachers, the contract encourages teachers not to take personal leave on Fridays or days bracketing school holidays, yet analysis of 2007-2008 attendance data shows that teacher absences for personal reasons are twice as high on Fridays compared to other days of the week.

Many of the 100 districts in NCTQ's TR³ database, such as Boston, Chicago and Denver, do not merely discourage but restrict the use of personal days during the first and last weeks of school, days before and after holidays or school breaks, and days on which more than 5 or 10 percent of teachers are absent.

Figure 27. When do teachers take the most personal leave?



Source: Seattle Public Schools, 2007–2008, Seattle Public Schools Data Profile: District Summary December 2008.

More than half of all sick leave taken by Seattle teachers is on Mondays and Fridays.

“When teachers are close to retiring, some start taking the sick leave they have accumulated because they can only take a quarter of it as cash when they leave.

My daughter’s teacher, who was retiring at the end of the year, took an extra week of vacation at Christmas and then again at spring break. Finally, at a parent meeting on the problem where over 20 parents attended, the principal shamed the parents.

The principal said: ‘Here is this teacher, who has given 20-plus years of service when he was going above and beyond his call of duty,’ she said. ‘That’s his right to take the days.’”

—Seattle parent and teacher

25 Bradley, S., Green, C., & Leeves, G. (2007). Worker absence and shirking: Evidence from matched teacher-student data. *Labor Economics*, 13 (3), 319-334.

Absences due to professional development

Seattle teachers working in low-income schools are more likely to be absent for professional development than their peers working in more affluent schools.

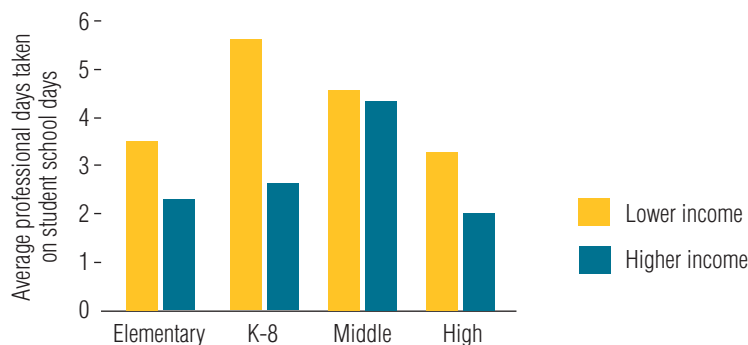
Seattle teachers are absent for professional development approximately 3.2 days a year. These are days that teachers take for professional development over and above the generous six full days and five half days already scheduled by the district in a work year when students are not present.

As Figure 28 illustrates, Seattle teachers working in schools serving low-income students are more likely to take days for professional development than teachers in more affluent schools.

The 2009-2010 contract specifies that the district must offer teachers three choices of when to take required professional development courses: during the summer, after school and during the school day. The attempt to accommodate teachers' schedules is admirable, but only when it doesn't cut into valuable class time.

Seattle has no limit on the amount of class time teachers can miss for professional development. Some districts in NCTQ's TR³ districts restrict the number of days teachers can take off for professional development, generally limiting the number of days between two to five. Other districts such as Polk, Dade and Seminole Counties, all in Florida, go so far as to *prohibit* teachers from taking any professional leave on days that students are present.

Figure 28. How do Seattle teachers' leave patterns compare based on grade level?



Source: Seattle Public Schools, 2007–2008, Seattle Public Schools Data Profile: District Summary December 2008.

The widest disparities in leave occur at the elementary level, with some schools averaging fewer than 5 days of sick leave but others averaging as many as 20 days per teacher.

Attendance incentives

Current incentives appear to be costing the district and state money with little evidence of return.

While use of incentives is a good way to change behavior, it's often not easy to find incentives that work in a particular situation without also generating unintended consequences. What little research exists has yet to show a correlation between sick leave "buy back" programs and improved teacher attendance. Despite this, 13 states, including Washington, and over 60 percent of districts in the TR³ database reimburse teachers for unused leave in order to persuade them not to use the leave.



In Seattle, to qualify for a reimbursement of unused leave before retirement, teachers must have accumulated at least 60 days. Only unused sick days accumulated in the previous year (i.e., a maximum of 12 days) are reimbursed, at a rate of 25 percent of the teacher's daily rate of pay. For example, if a teacher's average daily rate of pay is \$284 (annual salary of \$52,000), she would receive \$71 pre-tax per day of unused leave for a maximum payment of \$852.

At retirement, teachers can be reimbursed for a maximum of 180 unused leave at 25 percent of their current daily rate. Hypothetically a teacher could be reimbursed up to approximately \$15,000 if s/he had never taken any sick leave.

In 2007-2008, Seattle compensated 172 teachers (out of 3,038) nearly \$336,000 for unused sick leave for an average reimbursement of \$1,952 (before taxes) per teacher.

Summary

Seattle teachers are away from the classroom too often.

Combining all sick, personal, and professional leaves, Seattle teachers are away from the classroom an average of nearly 16 days a school year, nearly 1 day every 2 weeks, or 9 percent of the school year.

There are two important caveats to the interpretation of this 16-day figure. When teachers are away for professional development, presumably they are learning something that will benefit instruction. The question is should it come at the expense of the 177 days of instruction that students are allotted each year? We think not. Time away from the classroom for professional development may always be something that a district must allow, but its practice should not be as widespread as the numbers here reflect.

Also, as previously noted, this rate includes the absentee rates of those teachers who are on extended leave due to pregnancy and chronic illness. Most Seattle teachers do not take 16 days away from their classroom. A small group of teachers skew the data in that direction. However, regardless of how many teachers are involved, the absence of teachers requires schools to use substitutes. From the perspective of students and the districts, that's **56,000 instructional days largely lost over a single year.**²⁶

²⁶ Miller, R.T., Murnane, R.J., & Willet, J.B. (2008). Do teacher absences impact student achievement? Longitudinal evidence from one urban school district. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30 (2): in press.



Strengths and weaknesses of Seattle leave and attendance policies

Strengths

Weaknesses

Leave usage

There is no significant variation in sick and personal leave between schools serving low-income populations and those serving wealthier students.

Nearly 70 percent of schools have teacher absence rates exceeding the national average, suggesting that sick leave days are widely seen as owed to teachers whether they are sick or not.

Teachers at lower-income schools are away from their classrooms more often for professional development than teachers in higher-income schools.

Leave policies

Leave allotment of 12 days is in line with the TR³ 100 average.

Medical documentation is required for long use of sick leave, and principals can request documentation when abuse is suspected.

Teachers' new two "no-questions-asked" personal days offer them flexibility to conduct needed business in line with professional norms.

Principals are unable to prevent staff shortages on Fridays or before holidays because too many personal days are taken then—despite the contract encouraging teachers not to use such days if possible.

The district cannot seek a second opinion to verify medical conditions.



Recommendations for Seattle Public Schools

- 1. Closely monitor teacher attendance.** Seattle has the capability to disseminate attendance data to all schools through its SubFinder system and should use this system to communicate attendance problems to principals.
 - a. The district should facilitate principals' ability to monitor teacher attendance by providing each principal monthly status reports on where her school stands in relation to district totals and averages, highlights of teachers at her school with above average absentee rates, etc.
- 2. Schedule professional development during the summer, after school, and on teacher workdays.** Seattle teachers are away from scheduled class time too often for professional development. A longer workday, as recommended in Goal 4, with additional planning time when students are not at school, would help teachers to participate in professional development outside of the school day.
- 3. Make teacher attendance a component of teacher evaluations.** This would only be necessary for cases of abuse of leave such as excessive absences on Mondays or Fridays or where proper documentation was not required. There needs to be some way to hold teachers accountable for abuse of leave.

Recommendations for Washington State

- 1. Eliminate accumulation of sick leave.** Though Washington is not unusual in offering this benefit as part of its unused leave buy-back program, such policies were implemented in a time when salaries were not keeping pace. Accumulating unused leave (regardless of whether teachers can later be compensated) may unintentionally encourage teachers to take leave for reasons other than illness, partly because the cash payout isn't a large enough incentive to dissuade teachers from choosing an extended "paid vacation." Teachers absent due to long-term illness would still qualify for days from the sick leave bank and could also apply for a long-term leave of absence that would be classified separately from sick leave.

Developing Effective Teachers and Exiting Ineffective Teachers

Goal 7. The district provides all new teachers with an induction program, with particular consideration given to teachers in schools serving low-income students.

INDICATORS

- i. New teachers receive regular and consistent support from experienced teachers or mentors. Mentor-teacher assignments are decided before the school year begins.
- ii. Mentors are selected on the basis of their own effectiveness, subject-matter and school expertise, and their ability to work well with other adults.
- iii. Training is provided to mentors; mentees provide feedback on mentor performance.

Most new teachers find themselves overwhelmed and under-supported at the outset of their teaching careers. Even teachers from the most rigorous preparation programs tend to need support. Unfortunately, a “survival of the fittest” mentality prevails in many schools; figuring out how to successfully negotiate unfamiliar curricula, discipline and management issues and labyrinthine school and district procedures—it’s all considered a rite of passage which teachers should somehow tolerate. New teachers often receive the most difficult schedules, more than two subjects to prepare for, or the most challenging students. Talented new teachers can become disillusioned by the lack of support they receive. Those with the most options outside of teaching, such as science teachers, are among the most likely to leave.

Research doesn’t yet pinpoint the characteristics of the best induction programs nor predict the magnitude of the difference induction is likely to make for new teachers or their students. Still, it is reasonable to assume that teachers at the beginning of their careers can get better faster with intensive help. Induction programs can also be seen as helping teachers achieve tenure, which should be a meaningful milestone indicating they are proficient in their work.

Types of support for new teachers

Not all new teachers receive a mentor, and the support provided is insufficient.

Seattle’s induction program for new teachers is focused around the peer mentor program called STAR, for *Staff Training Assistance and Review*. The program was jointly established and is managed by a panel made up of four SEA appointees and three SPS appointees who assign mentors. The mentors, known as “consulting teachers,” are to coach, assist and assess new teachers’ classroom performance.



During the 2007–2008 school year, Seattle’s 11 full-time STAR mentors each had a caseload of approximately 9 teachers. The new contract limits a mentor’s caseload to no more than 15 new teachers, but also caps the number of mentors at 8. In terms of mentor-to-teacher ratio, Seattle appears to be exemplary.

Seattle’s mentor-school ratio may be more problematic. In 2007–2008, the 11 mentors were assigned across the district: 5 were assigned to 54 elementary schools, 1 to 10 K–8 schools, 1 to 10 middle schools, and 4 to 12 high schools.²⁷ It is likely that some mentors have to cover between 10 and 14 schools. A high mentor-school ratio tends to limit the amount of interaction between the mentor-teacher pair and reduces the mentor’s ability to gain school-specific knowledge, a critical component of mentorship. The new contract’s cap of eight mentors will further extend the mentor’s school caseload during years that new teachers are spread throughout most of the districts’ schools. The district could easily solve this problem by hiring more part-time than full-time mentors.

In the 2007–2008 school year, there were 145 first-year teachers; however, only 94 were assigned a mentor. It is not clear why so many teachers did not receive a mentor, particularly since the mentor-teacher ratio is relatively low.

Neither the district contract nor relevant state laws require new teachers to have an assigned mentor at the start of school. The SEA reports that a three-day summer orientation is held for new teachers, but it is not clear if the orientation includes a chance for new teachers to meet with their mentors. That meeting should occur as early as possible.

Mentor selection

The mentor selection process appears rigorous.

Consulting teachers are selected based on teaching ability, classroom management skills, their ability to work cooperatively, communication skills and leadership. Candidates for the positions must submit at least three to five references; one must be from a union-building representative, one from a principal and one from another teacher. The new 2009–2010 contract allows consulting teachers to hold the position for a minimum of one year and no more than four years. Teachers must return to the classroom for at least another three years before reapplying.

According to the 2004–2009 teachers’ contract, mentors are paid \$5,875 a year in addition to their current teaching salary, more than what most TR³ districts pay, but mentor job duties are quite variable among districts.²⁸

²⁷ <http://www.seattleschools.org/area/speced/schoolassignments.pdf>

²⁸ The 2009–2010 contract does not include the amount of the mentors’ stipend.



Strengths and weaknesses of Seattle's new teacher induction

Strengths	Weaknesses
Scope and depth of support	
Good mentor-to-new-teacher ratio.	There appear to be no other kind of induction support for new teachers, such as weekly collaborative planning time for grade level or subject area teams. Not every new teacher is assigned a mentor. Mentors may be servicing too many schools.
Mentor selection	
Seattle has a careful selection process for mentors. Mentors must return to the classroom after four years.	None discerned
Timing of support	
Program is concentrated in first year when support is really needed.	Mentor support for new teachers is apparently not initiated before the school year begins. New teachers at low-performing schools targeted for intervention do not appear to receive any additional support even though their assignments are typically more challenging than those of other first-year teachers.
Program evaluation	
None discerned	It does not appear that the district has a system in place for evaluating the success of the induction program.



Recommendations for Seattle Public Schools

- 1. Ensure all new teachers are assigned a mentor.** Though the ratio of mentors to mentees is good, last year not all new teachers were assigned a mentor. The district's current hiring freeze for all but teachers in critical needs subjects should help ensure all new teachers this year receive a mentor. Seattle should maintain the current mentor force and provide intensive support early on for first-year teachers in the most challenging schools. In addition, it should provide a mentor to each second-year teacher in any of the schools targeted for intensive support (Flight or Southeast Educational Initiative schools) who did not receive a mentor last year.
- 2. Assign new teachers mentors before the student school year begins.** The early weeks of school are crucial for a teacher to establish classroom procedures, assess students' abilities, set goals, and juggle both daily and long-term planning. Without support during the early weeks, a new teacher is left alone to execute many responsibilities vital to student learning.
- 3. Annually assess the STAR program. Survey new teachers on the value of the program.** Assess retention rates and student achievement results of teachers getting the program. Be mindful that the program's greatest challenge is likely to be adding value in the lowest-performing schools.
- 4. Consider additions and alterations to the current induction model.**

Strategies that can be considered:

- a. Seminars with peer teachers who teach the same grade or subject.** Such sessions should be held frequently and led by an experienced teacher, giving teachers the opportunity to share resources, strategies, etc.
- b. Reduced teaching load.** A lesser load allows teachers time to get their sea legs and master the basics of classroom management faster and can also be arranged to give new teachers more time to observe accomplished teachers.
- c. Assign all new teachers a full-time mentor for the first two months of school.** Retired teachers could work as full-time coaches for new teachers for the first two months of school. Providing such intensive support in a teacher's early months in the classroom may be preferable to spreading out the assistance over the course of a year, as Seattle and most districts currently do.
- d. Release time to observe accomplished teachers.** Make sure opportunities for first-year teachers to observe accomplished teachers are plentiful in every school.
- e. Build a video library of high-performing Seattle teachers.** As other school districts and Teach For America have done, the district may want to film its own high-performing teachers. Those videos could augment the video library the district's website currently links to. Incorporating video observations in professional development and mentoring activities can increase their impact, perhaps especially if the observations are of teachers in Seattle.
- f. Place new teachers with highly effective peers.** This is perhaps the best and most affordable induction model. Newer teachers are highly sensitive to teacher quality, and the more effective a teacher's peers, the more likely a teacher will produce higher student learning gains.²⁹

29 Jackson, C., & Bruegemann, E. (2009, July). *Teaching students and teaching each other: The importance of peer learning for teachers*. National Bureau of Economic Research.



Goal 8. Instructional effectiveness is the preponderant criterion used to evaluate a teacher with evaluation results clearly differentiating high- and low-performing teachers. Teachers’ performance is assessed regularly, through multiple observations.

INDICATORS

- i. The evaluation instrument considers objective evidence of student learning, including not only standardized test scores when available, but also classroom-based artifacts such as student work, quizzes, tests, and progress in the curriculum as well as other measurements of student learning.
- ii. The district connects student data to teacher performance.
- iii. All teachers are observed annually. While formal evaluations need not occur every year, in the case of seasoned veterans, all teachers are informally observed (without prior notice) regularly throughout the school year.
- iv. Formal evaluations include classroom observations that focus on and document instructional effectiveness. Teachers’ observed behaviors are assigned degrees of proficiency based on standards and defined by scoring guidelines.
- v. Teachers are formally evaluated by trained observer(s). Observers may include the principal, outside observers, department heads or experienced teachers.

Frequency of teacher evaluations

In terms of frequency and timing of evaluations, Seattle is exemplary.

In Seattle, all teachers, including those with tenure, are observed and evaluated once a year. Teachers in their first and second year are observed multiple times, ensuring that there are various opportunities for feedback. These requirements, if practiced, are much stronger than what is typically found in school districts. All teachers can benefit from feedback, no matter how much experience they have or their performance level.

Years of experience	Observation requirements	Other notes
1st year	Monthly observations in first three months.	Evaluated in January; principal must decide then whether to renew teacher’s contract.
2nd year	Observed 2 times a year. First time must be for 30 minutes in first 3 months of school.	Evaluated once a year.
3 plus years	Observed once a year in a 30- minute announced observation. For teachers with at least four years of experience, the observation need not be continuous or of the teacher in the classroom.	Must be observed second time if performance is in question; state law requires a minimum of 60 minutes in observation time prior to dismissal.

Making evaluations meaningful

Student achievement is important but not the preponderant criterion of teacher evaluation in Seattle.

Any evaluation should look first and foremost at the teacher’s impact on student achievement. Although Seattle’s evaluation requirements emphasize the importance of student achievement and considers direct evidence of student learning (such as examination of student work against a standard or standardized test scores), it is not the preponderant criterion on which a teacher is evaluated.



It appears that Seattle has in the past employed a “value added” data system to estimate how much a student’s learning growth in a tested subject is attributable to his teacher, but the district does not factor any such measure into teacher evaluations, nor is it clear if this system is still in place.

What are the factors of an evaluation?

There are two components to teacher evaluations in Seattle: 1) classroom observation(s) and 2) an assessment of how well a teacher meets performance goals established in the professional development plan, written by the teacher and principal. Only tenured teachers create a professional development plan.

What does the principal look for in the classroom observation? (for ALL teachers)

1. Instructional skill
2. Classroom management
3. Professional preparation and scholarship
4. Effort toward improvement when needed
5. Handling student discipline and attendance problems
6. Interest in teaching pupils
7. Knowledge of subject matter
8. Professional responsibility

Teachers must have satisfactory performance in at least seven of the eight competencies observed in the classroom observation.

What does the Professional Development Plan encompass? (only for tenured teachers)

Principal and teacher jointly establish performance goals based on student achievement.

At least once a year, principals evaluate the teacher’s progress in meeting these goals.

Teachers must make a “good faith effort” to achieve the goals established in the plan; however, there will be no consequences if an employee does not achieve the stated goals as long as their observed classroom performance remains satisfactory.

Note that the evaluation does not include a direct reference to student learning, nor does it require any objective measures of student learning be considered.

Evaluation ratings

Seattle’s binary rating system does not accurately capture differences in teacher performance. Teachers who merely try but are not necessarily successful can receive a positive evaluation.

Many districts have moved to a teaching rubric which lists criteria that a teacher must meet for each performance indicator. For example, Texas’ Professional Development and Appraisal System (see page 58) rates teachers in eight domains. Each domain includes components of effective teaching. Teachers are rated *unsatisfactory*, *below expectations*, *satisfactory* or *exceeds expectations* according to how well their performance matches the appropriate descriptor. The rubric reduces the potential for subjective, inconsistent ratings.

Seattle’s current ratings system needs significant improvement. Teachers are assigned one of two ratings: satisfactory or unsatisfactory. There is no further distinction. Binary ratings systems do not accurately capture more fine-grain distinctions in a teacher’s performance, resulting in fewer teachers rated unsatisfactory.

Binary systems fail to adequately recognize excellence. A top-notch teacher is placed in the same category as an average or even mediocre teacher. Evaluation ratings should distinguish between at least four or five levels of performance.



The construction of the evaluation rating

A teacher is rated either satisfactory or unsatisfactory on each of the eight competencies. Each rating is accompanied by a narrative summary of each of the competencies of the teacher's strengths and weaknesses.

Tenured teachers (those with at least two years of experience) are also evaluated on a separate component, the degree to which they have met the goals established in a professional development plan, prepared by the teacher and approved by the principal. However, it is possible to be rated satisfactory while not achieving the goals set out in this plan as long as the teacher demonstrated a "good faith effort."

It is not clear why the district considers merely *trying* to be an acceptable substitute for a teacher actually meeting his or her goals. For this very reason, objective data that no one can dispute needs to be introduced into the evaluation rubric.

Sample rubric from Texas' Professional Development and Appraisal System

Domain I: Active, successful student participation in the learning process

Exceeds expectations	Proficient	Below expectations	Unsatisfactory
Almost all of the	Most of the	Some of the	Less than half of the
1. Students are actively engaged in learning.	1. Students are actively engaged in learning.	1. Students are actively engaged in learning.	1. Students are actively engaged in learning.
2. Students are successful in learning.	2. Students are successful in learning.	2. Students are successful in learning.	2. Students are successful in learning.
3. Student behaviors indicate learning is at a high cognitive level (e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, etc.)	3. Student behaviors indicate learning is at a high cognitive level (e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, etc.)	3. Student behaviors indicate learning is at a high cognitive level (e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, etc.)	3. Student behaviors indicate learning is at a high cognitive level (e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, etc.)
4. Students are self-directed/self-initiated as appropriate to the lesson objective.	4. Students are self-directed/self-initiated as appropriate to the lesson objective.	4. Students are self-directed/self-initiated as appropriate to the lesson objective.	4. Students are self-directed/self-initiated as appropriate to the lesson objective.
5. Students are connecting learning to work and life applications, both within the discipline and with other disciplines.	5. Students are connecting learning to work and life applications, both within the discipline and with other disciplines.	5. Students are connecting learning to work and life applications, both within the discipline and with other disciplines.	5. Students are connecting learning to work and life applications, both within the discipline and with other disciplines.



Strengths & weaknesses of Seattle’s evaluation system

Strengths	Weaknesses
Role of student achievement in teacher evaluations	
<p>The language in the contract makes reference to student achievement as a factor in teacher evaluation.</p> <p>Teachers and principals meet to develop goals linked to student achievement.</p>	<p>The district’s value-added data system that connects teachers with individual student performance does not factor into teacher evaluations.</p> <p>The evaluation instrument lacks standard objective evidence of a teacher’s performance on which all teachers are evaluated.</p> <p>Student learning is not one of the eight competencies, and therefore it is difficult to hold teachers accountable for this.</p> <p>For teachers with at least four years of experience, it is possible to be rated satisfactory simply for <i>trying</i>.</p> <p>The observation form lacks a measure of objective data.</p>
Evaluation ratings	
<p>None discerned</p>	<p>With only two evaluation ratings (satisfactory and unsatisfactory), it is difficult to differentiate between levels of performance or distinguish high-performing teachers.</p>
Frequency of evaluations	
<p>All teachers are observed and evaluated annually.</p> <p>Observations of teachers with at least four years of experience are not scheduled, nor do they need to be in one sitting. This approach may provide a more accurate picture of teacher performance.</p>	<p>The observation of the tenured teacher is not required to be inside the classroom.</p> <p>There is no requirement for principals to conduct informal unannounced observations.</p> <p>Teachers are generally observed by only one evaluator, the principal.</p>



Recommendations for Seattle Public Schools

- 1. Instructional effectiveness should be the preponderant criterion in all teacher evaluations.** While the evaluation instrument does look at teacher effectiveness, teachers are not held to any objective standard measuring student achievement results. An instrument that gives as much weight to factors that do not directly link to student performance does not hold teachers accountable for their most important function: achieving student growth.
- 2. No more effort grades.** The evaluation instrument should be structured so as to preclude a teacher from receiving a satisfactory rating if found ineffective in the classroom, even if s/he is deemed to have tried.
- 3. Use an evaluation system with multiple ratings for all teachers.** Ratings should differentiate among teachers at several levels—other districts use four or five—of effectiveness.
- 4. All teachers should be observed frequently, in unscheduled visits.** In order to ensure that evaluators view a typical lesson, not all observations should be scheduled. Evaluators need to view what normally occurs in a teacher's classroom, not lessons and activities that have been specially prepared for the observation. Not all feedback needs to be formal—a few quick notes that the observer can later discuss with a teacher can be quite helpful. Especially at the secondary level, observers may need to follow several linked lessons to see how a teacher is faring. Having subject-matter specialists observe teachers for the content of their lessons is particularly important.
- 5. Validate a principal's ratings with the use of outside observers.** Protocols that incorporate multiple trained observers' views permit the district to assess the robustness of individual principals' ratings by comparing them to those of other observers. Particularly important is to have observers who are subject-matter experts. Corroboration of findings may reduce concerns over the arbitrary nature of evaluations, as teachers rightly perceive the single-observer evaluation to be arbitrary and prone to bias or favoritism. These can be done randomly to the degree a district can afford. Even if only one teacher in the building is checked by the third-party evaluator, principals will take this task more seriously.
- 6. Hold principals responsible for evaluation ratings.** Each year the superintendent should look at the evaluation ratings of a school and judge them against the students' performance. Principals should annually report those teachers they consider to be in the top 15 percent and those teachers in the bottom 15 percent, without consequences being imposed. As the district gains confidence in the fairness and accuracy of these evaluation ratings, and principals grow accustomed to the expectation that they should not be rating all teachers in the building as equally competent, the district can ultimately adopt strategies to reward the best, and support (and if necessary, dismiss) the weakest.

Many educators struggle to identify possible sources of objective student data. Some examples include:

- Standardized test scores.
- Periodic diagnostic assessments.
- Benchmark assessments that show student growth.
- Artifacts of student work connected to specific learning standards that are randomly selected for review by the principal or senior faculty, scored using rubrics and descriptors.
- Examples of typical assignments, assessed for their quality and rigor.
- Periodic checks on progress with the curriculum coupled with evidence of student mastery of the curriculum from quizzes, tests and exams.

The best examples are specific to the grade level and subject area.

Recommendations for Washington State

- 1. State law should require that all districts include** *evidence of student learning as the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations.*



Goal 9. Tenure decisions should be meaningful.

INDICATORS

- i. Evidence of effectiveness is the preponderant criterion in tenure decisions.
- ii. Teachers are eligible for tenure after a minimum of four years when sufficient data become available to make a meaningful decision.
- iii. There is a formal process, such as a hearing before a tenure review panel, which makes the final decision.
- iv. Teachers receive a significant pay increase after earning tenure.

Throughout school districts in the United States, the decision to give teachers tenure (often referred to as “continuing” or “permanent” status) is made automatically, with little thought, deliberation or consideration of actual evidence. Seattle is no exception to this lax approach to tenure decisions.

Making good tenure decisions should be a key function of the district in pursuit of its human capital goals. Taking lifetime earnings, benefits and pension into account, tenure represents roughly a \$2 million investment by the district and state in a teacher’s service; few multimillion expenditures of public money are handled so casually.

Making tenure meaningful

**Evidence of teacher effectiveness is not adequately considered when Seattle makes its tenure decisions.
Teachers are not rewarded for earning tenure.**

As required by Washington State statute, Seattle teachers earn tenure after only two years in the classroom. As Figure 29 shows, the majority of states wait three years, still too brief a period. Seven states require four years of teaching before tenure can be conferred.

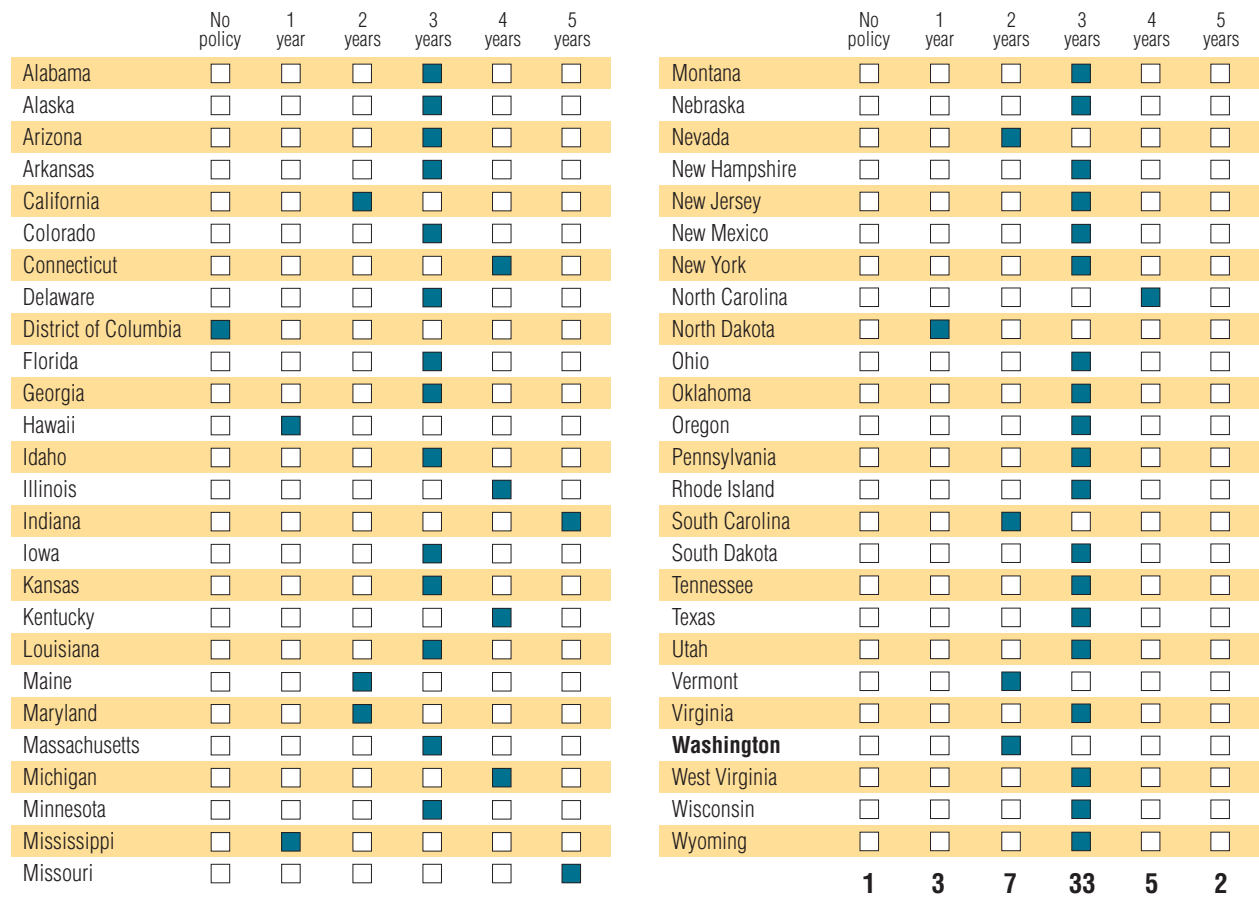
Though student achievement is ostensibly a factor in the district’s teacher evaluations, a key element is not considered, that is, any objective evidence of student learning. This is equally true when tenure decisions are made. Any teacher with a satisfactory rating—and we learned in Goal 9 that more than 99 percent do—is granted tenure.

Also in Washington, principals are not permitted to recommend that tenure decisions be delayed, extending a teacher’s provisional contract for a year, as is permitted in some districts and states.³⁰

30 Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maryland, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas all permit principals to delay tenure decisions.



Figure 29. How long before a teacher earns tenure?



Source: NCTQ State Teacher Policy Yearbook 2008.

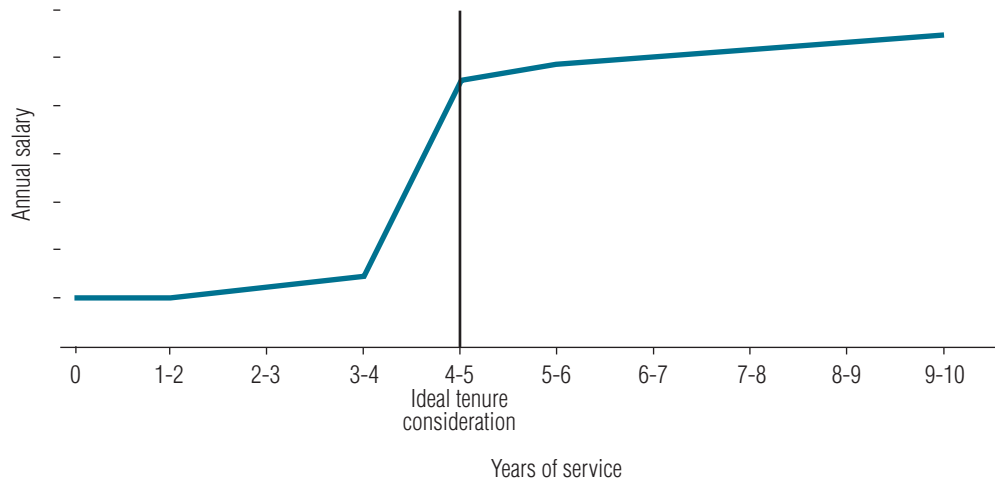
Rewarding tenure

Seattle’s salary schedule does not give teachers any bump in pay at the tenure. Instead, Seattle’s salary schedule reserves the largest annual raises for more experienced teachers. The smallest raises occur in a teacher’s first five years in the classroom. As teachers gain more experience, the size of these raises increase quite significantly (page 20).

Tenure should be a significant milestone in a teacher’s career, and one way to make it a distinction is to tenure with a significant pay raise.



Figure 30. What does an alternative pay structure look like?



Until tenure is granted, salary increases in the first few years of a teacher’s career should be relatively small. After teachers receive a significant pay raise with tenure, annual increases continue. Furthermore, there are no lanes on this schedule that reward teachers for advanced degrees. Any additional compensation should be tied to teacher effectiveness, but should not alter the base pay teachers receive.

Strengths & weaknesses average of Seattle’s tenure policies

Strengths

None discerned

Weaknesses

Tenure is virtually automatic should a teacher be rated satisfactory.

Even second-year teachers can grieve their performance evaluation that qualifies them for tenure.

Tenure is granted after only two years.

Recommendations for Seattle Public Schools

1. District officials should take an active role in deciding tenure. The decision to award tenure is a lifetime commitment to a teacher and should be treated with due importance. There should be a formal hearing to decide whether or not to award tenure to a teacher. The school principal would make a recommendation at the tenure hearing but would not make the final decision. Teachers would also present evidence of their effectiveness. The tenure hearing does not replace the importance of annual evaluations in retaining or dismissing teachers.

Principals should not have the right to delay the tenure review (essentially depriving teachers of a change in status that should lead to a major bump in salary) but can recommend to a teacher that s/he elect to delay.

2. Give teachers a significant pay increase for earning tenure. When the above recommendations are in place, the tenure distinction will be more meaningful. At this time, the district should reward teachers with the largest pay increase of their career.



Recommendations for Washington State

- 1. Increase the provisional contract period for new teachers to four years.** Tenure in Washington State comes at too early a point in a teacher's career to have collected sufficient and adequate data that reflect teacher performance. Ideally, districts would accumulate at least three years' worth of such data. This robust data set would prevent effective teachers from being unfairly denied tenure based on too little data, while also preventing the district from granting tenure to ineffective teachers. Delaying tenure for four years also permits a formal hearing process to be administered more meaningfully; fewer teachers would be eligible, as the weakest teachers would have already been weeded out through the evaluation process.

Goal 10. Teachers who demonstrate instructional deficiencies receive assistance; teachers who do not improve are dismissed.

INDICATORS

- i. A principal places a teacher on an improvement plan after negatively evaluating a teacher's performance.
- ii. There are formally stated consequences for unsatisfactory evaluations and a clear mechanism to assist struggling tenured teachers.
- iii. Observations occur early enough in the year to provide sufficient time for poor-performing teachers to improve and for administrators to make a decision about a teacher's continued employment by the end of the same school year.
- iv. Teachers are only allowed to appeal a decision for dismissal once, and such an appeal should not be made in a court of law but before a panel of educators.
- v. Teachers are not allowed to grieve a personnel action.

Washington State law, not the local teacher contract, establishes the actions that districts can take to address severe classroom performance concerns, up to and including how and when remediation and dismissal of a teacher can occur.

Support for struggling teachers

Seattle is not identifying poor-performing teachers.

The Seattle Public Schools and the Seattle Education Association have negotiated an intervention program for how to help struggling experienced teachers, essentially intended to intervene before an employee is placed on formal probation. It appears to be rarely used. In the 2007-2008 school year, only 26 teachers out of a workforce of nearly 3,300 teachers (0.8 percent) received support through peer intervention, and 24 of those teachers were in their second year.

The main challenge in Seattle lies not in providing appropriate remedial support, as the district has set up what appears to be a strong program in this regard, but rather the identification of poor-performing teachers in the first place. Only 16 experienced teachers out of a workforce of 3,286 (0.5 percent) received an unsatisfactory rating in 2007-2008 and consequently placed in the state-mandated improvement plan. Of the 16 teachers placed on the improvement plan, 11 improved and 5 left the district (2 were terminated and 3 resigned). There is a clear disconnect between teacher performance ratings and student achievement.

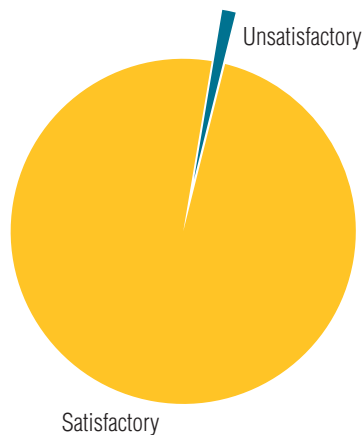
Seattle Public Schools has found a workaround approach to make it easier to dismiss underperforming new teachers (in their first year), without having to go through the formal remediation period that state law requires for all underperforming provisional teachers. First-year teachers are given a *temporary* contract, distinguished from the *provisional* contract that second-year teachers have. Principals must decide whether or not to dismiss the first-year teacher or renew his or her contract by January.

The workaround is not without its flaws. Principals interviewed by NCTQ expressed that, by January, they often had insufficient material on which to decide a first-year teacher's continued employment—and often gave those teachers the benefit of the doubt.

“In January you have to say whether you want to convert one-year contracts to continuing. Last year half of my regular classroom teachers were new. How was I supposed to get a sense of all those people in the first three months of school?”

—Seattle principal

Figure 31. How are Seattle teachers rated?



Source: Seattle Public Schools.

In 2007-2008, a tiny proportion—0.5 percent—of the district's 3,300-teacher workforce was rated “unsatisfactory.”

What happens to teachers found unsatisfactory?

Tenured teachers and those on a provisional contract with an unsatisfactory evaluation are placed on a 60-day improvement plan, referred to as probation. As defined by state law, the principal must meet with the employee at least twice a month and make written evaluations of the teacher's performance.³¹ Also, as set out in the teacher contract, teachers have the right to request union representation in all meetings or interviews which may lead to disciplinary action.³² (Teachers cannot make such a request for annual evaluation meetings, but can for any meetings that occur while on probation.)

Also defined by state law, teachers can be placed on probation anytime after October 15, but not before. The 2004-2009 teachers' contract also put an end date on placing teachers on probation (January 20) and a date by which principals had to decide whether or not to dismiss a teacher (May 1). Both the January deadline for placing teachers on probation and the May deadline for deciding whether to renew the contract were eliminated in the 2009-2010 teachers' contract. While the new structure gives principals more time to fairly assess a teacher's performance before deciding whether probation is necessary, it means probation may extend into a new school year.

Exiting ineffective teachers

The due process rights afforded to teachers can be unfairly disruptive to student learning, as requisite remediation for underperforming teachers can extend from one year into the next.

In spite of the benefits from removing the January 20 deadline for placing a teacher on an improvement plan, a new problem has been created. The 60-day probationary period (meaning 60 actual school days, not 60 calendar days) must sometimes extend into the following year, should the principal not evaluate the teacher and place her on probation until late in the school year. The 2004-2009 teachers' contract required that principals decide by May 1 whether to dismiss a teacher on an improvement plan. This date has also been eliminated from the 2009-2010 contract. Students should not have to start a new school year with a teacher whose performance is in question.

31 State law permits the principal to designate another employee, though it does not specify who, to work with the teacher on probation during this period. Presumably this responsibility could be taken over by a STAR mentor teacher; see Goal 7.

32 SPS AND SEA 2009-2010 teachers' contract, Article III, Section C.2



Washington State law is quite clear about what must happen to teachers who are judged as not having improved at the end of a 60-day probation. They are to be removed from their assignment and placed in an alternative assignment until the remainder of the school year, with the continuation of full compensation and benefits. If such reassignment is not possible, the employee is placed on paid leave for the balance of the year.

The process of teacher dismissal, however, often does not end at the end of the 60-classroom-day probationary period, which is more like 90 days. Washington law allows a teacher to appeal a district's decision to terminate a teacher four times:

1. The teacher can appeal the principal's decision to the local school board.
2. The teacher can then appeal the school board's decision to the superior court.
3. The teacher can then appeal the superior court's decision to the court of appeals.
4. The teacher can then appeal the court of appeals' decision to the state supreme court.

"It's pretty stressful to have a teacher on an improvement plan. There are observations every 10 days with a progress report after, and you have to have an SEA rep at each meeting. A second evaluator often evaluates the teacher as well to forestall a prejudice on the part of principal."

—Seattle principal

These appeals are consistent with what most states currently allow. While they may be appropriate for someone who is being dismissed on criminal grounds or in danger of losing a teaching license (for which Washington State actually has a separate process), they clearly represent an excessive application of due process rights that should be afforded a teacher found to be an ineffective instructor.



Strengths & weaknesses of Seattle intervention policies

Strengths	Weaknesses
Support for struggling teachers	
Seattle provides supports for struggling teachers that are tailored to severity of the teacher's needs.	The district and union jointly manage the peer intervention program.
Structure of probation	
None discerned	Principals must be heavily involved in the 60-day probationary period even though some of the responsibilities would be better suited for a mentor teacher.
Timeline for probation and dismissal	
Teachers may enter remediation at any time after Oct. 15, meaning that the remediation and dismissal process can occur within a single school year.	60 classroom days of probation is too long; this translates into roughly 3 months out of the school calendar of potentially lost class time for students. With the removal of the May 1st deadline in the new contract, probation may extend into a new school year, creating unnecessary uncertainty and disruption for a new class of students. Due process rights for a teacher dismissed for being ineffective are excessive.

Recommendations for Seattle Public Schools

- 1. Give consulting teachers a greater role in providing support for teachers on probation.** While it is the principal's responsibility to evaluate teachers, assistance during the 60-day remediation can be from mentor teachers, as state law allows, who have subject-area expertise and can, therefore, be of invaluable assistance to the struggling teacher.
- 2. Any teacher whose remediation plan that spills over from one school year into the next should be assigned as a co-teacher the following school year.** The principal teacher should be a strong teacher, who can coach the struggling teacher. If the struggling teacher does not improve and has to be removed, the disruption to student learning will be minimal.

Recommendations for Washington State

- 1. Shorten the probationary period to 60 calendar days (not classroom days).** The 60-classroom-day period as is stated in current law is too long and works against students' interests.
- 2. Distinguish the process for dismissing ineffective teachers from dismissal or license revocation for dereliction of duties, or felony and/or morality violations in state statute.** Washington groups all grounds for dismissal under the vague heading "probable cause."
- 3. Allow teachers one opportunity to appeal a decision dismissal. Appeals should be made before a panel of educators, not in a court of law.** It is in the best interest of both the teacher and the district that a conclusion be reached in a reasonable amount of time. Prolonged appeals tax limited resources and may dissuade districts from attempting to terminate ineffective teachers.



Seattle's intervention program

The district and union recently made changes to the Intervention Staff Support Program to help experienced teachers who have performance difficulties. Two mentors from the STAR program are to serve as consulting teachers for the 2009-2010 school year. The program, jointly managed by the district and the union, is intended as an intermediary intervention for struggling teachers before the more severe consequence of placing the employee on "probation." The 2009-2010 contract prohibits principals from placing teachers in the program; teachers themselves must volunteer. Furthermore, teachers requesting assistance may not have any documentation of the support in their personnel file.

What the program entails:

- Consulting teachers observe struggling teacher and determine performance goals for teacher. Building principal, consulting teacher and participating teacher all must later agree on these goals.
- Consulting teachers continue to observe struggling teachers, with pre- and post-observation conferences.
- Subject-area consultants can be brought in.
- Consulting teachers are expected to regularly communicate with building principals about the progress of the struggling teacher.

Appendix

The Impact of Teachers' Advanced Degrees on Student Learning

Metin Ozdemir, Ph.D., & Wendy Stevenson, Ph.D. UMBC

An extensive review of the studies published in peer-reviewed journals, books, and reports was conducted. For the purpose of literature search, we relied on multiple data bases including ERIC, EBSCOHOST, PsychInfo, and PsychLit. In addition, we carefully reviewed the reference sections of each article and chapter to locate additional sources. We also used online search engines such as Google and Yahoo search to locate updated publication lists and resumes of researchers who frequently publish in this field.

For the current meta-analysis, 17 studies (102 unique estimates) were selected as they have provided statistical estimates which allowed us to calculate effect sizes and re-compute the p-values for the meta-analysis.

All studies included in the meta-analysis were focusing on testing the effect of teachers' advanced degree (a degree beyond bachelor's degree) on student achievement measured as grade, gains in grade over one or two years, scores on standardized tests, and gains in standardized tests over one or two years. Teachers' advanced degree included M.A. degree, M.A. + some additional coursework, and Ph.D. Student achievement variables included achievement in math, reading, and science areas

Out of 102 statistical tests that were examined, 64.7 % (n = 66) of the estimates indicated that teachers advanced degrees did not have any significant impact on student achievement. On the other hand, 25.5% (n = 26) indicated a negative effect, and 9.8% (n = 10) suggested a positive effect of teachers' advanced degree on student achievement.

It is important to note that all 10 of the estimates suggesting positive effect ($p < .05$) of teachers' advanced degree on student learning were with analyses conducted on 6th and 12th grade students' math achievement. On the other hand, 23 negative effects ($p < .05$) were reported by studies focusing on achievement in Kindergarten or 5th grade achievement in math and reading, and the other three were on 10th and 12th grade achievement. Studies which reported significance level at $p < .10$ were not considered as reporting significant effect.

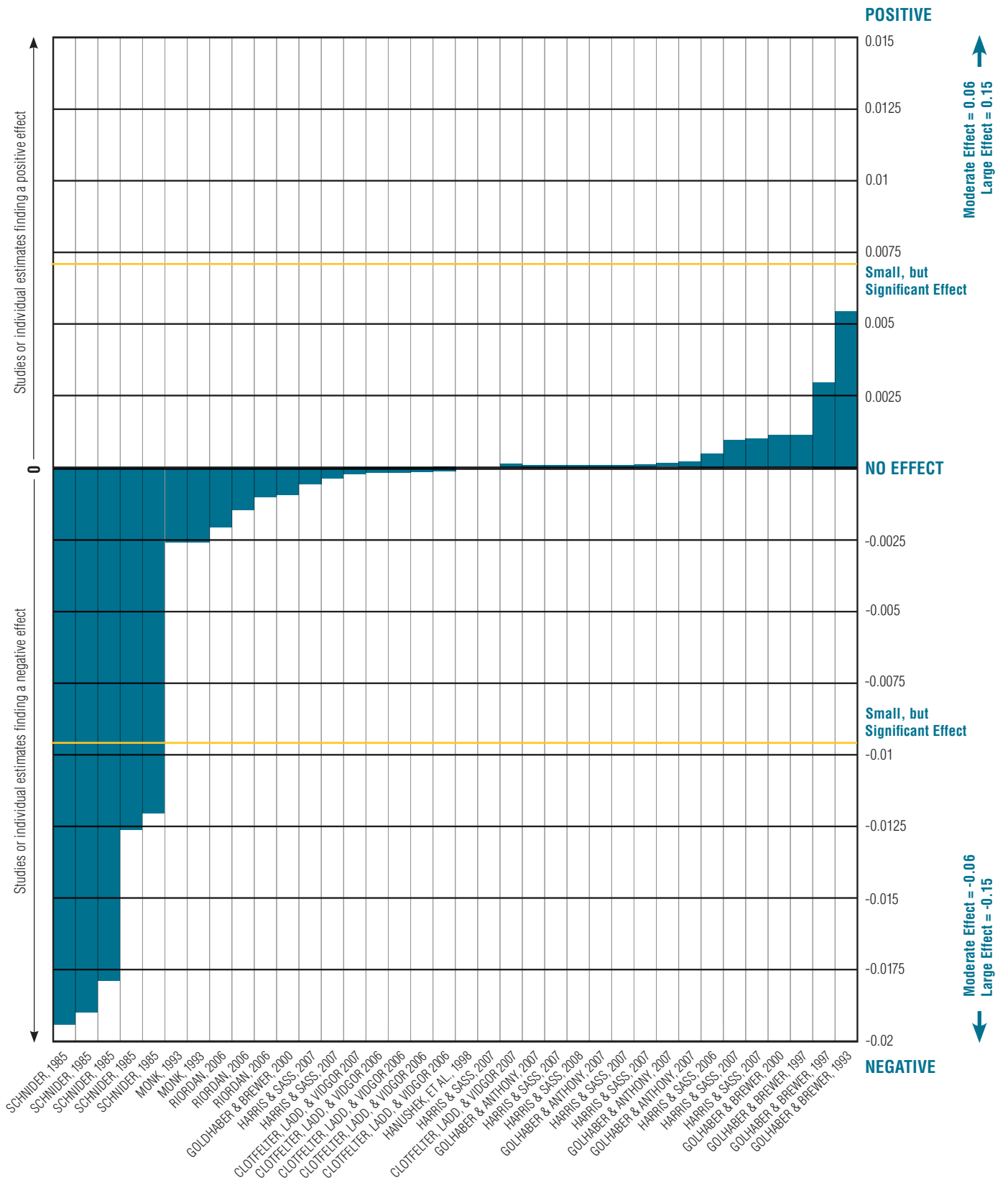
The studies examined in this meta-analysis had varied sample sizes. The minimum sample size was 199 whereas the maximum was over 1.7 million. Further analysis showed that there was no association between sample size and the direction of findings.

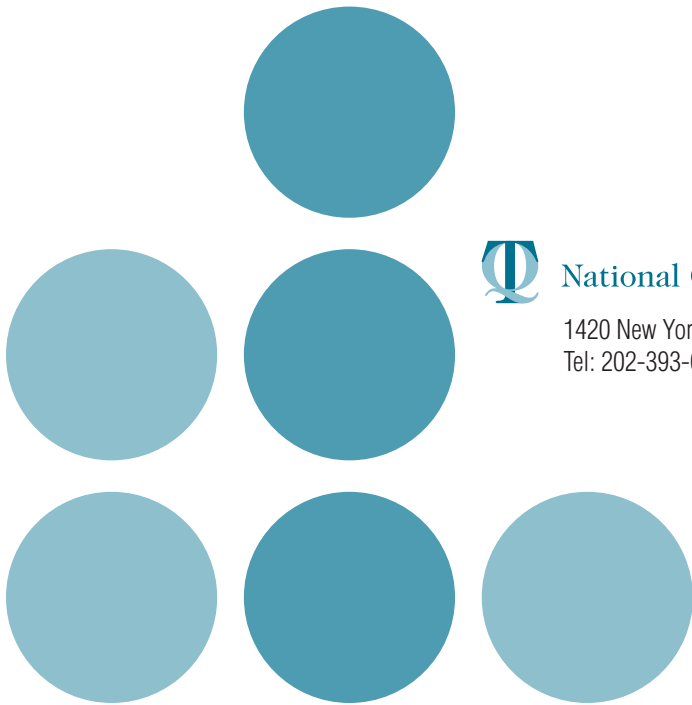
The average effect size estimate of all the 102 statistical tests was very low (.0012), which suggests that the impact of having advanced degree on student achievement is low. The highest effect size was .019, suggesting small effect.

One major concern regarding the studies reviewed in the current meta-analysis was that most studies to date did not identify the type of advanced degree they examined. In the current study, we identified only two studies (e.g., Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997; 2000) which examined the effect of subject-specific advanced degree on student learning. Specifically, Goldhaber & Brewer (1997) examined the effect of M.A. in math on grade 10 math test scores. They reported a positive effect of teachers' M.A. degree in math on math test scores. Similarly, Goldhaber & Brewer (2000) reported positive effect of M.A. in math on math test scores of 12th grade students. Of note, both studies reported low effect sizes.

It is possible that categorizing different types of graduate degrees under a single category of "advanced degree" resulted in biased estimates of the impact of teachers' graduate training on student achievement. Future studies should examine the impact of subject-specific degrees on student achievement in the respective disciplines so that the findings would improve our understanding of the value of teachers' advanced degree in improving student learning. Given this major limitation of the literature, the findings of current meta-analysis should be interpreted with caution.

The impact of teachers' advanced degrees on student learning





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