

# GETTING THE BEST TEACHERS IN PHILADELPHIA'S CLASSROOMS

## 5 big findings every Philadelphian needs to know

The National Council on Teacher Quality ([www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org)) recently completed a study called *Teacher Quality Roadmap*, looking at policies and practices in the School District of Philadelphia and their impact on teacher quality and student achievement. NCTQ identified a number of tangible solutions, five of which are listed here.

This study is the first step in making change happen. The much more difficult work lies ahead and falls to the Philadelphia community to push for reform.

**FINDING 1:** The district needs to do a much better job hiring and assigning teachers.

### THE CHALLENGE

Philadelphia's procedures for hiring and assigning teachers to schools delay the hiring of new teachers until late into the summer months, when many potential candidates have already found other jobs. Most problematic, however, is that principals do not always have final say over who works in their buildings; assignment of many transferring teachers is done by seniority.

### THE SOLUTION

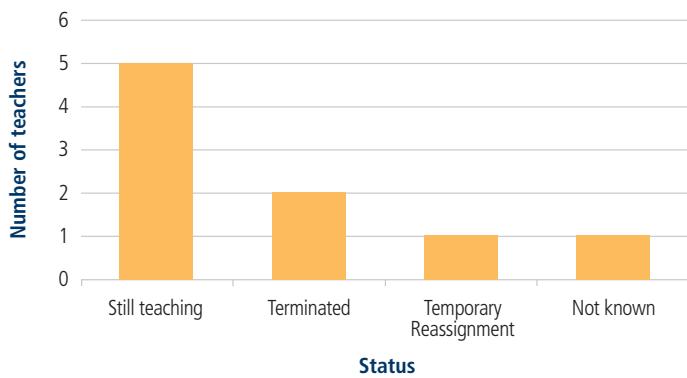
- Give principals the authority to decide who works in their buildings. The district should negotiate with the teachers union to commit to allowing principals to interview and select candidates for all vacancies in every school.
- Hire teachers earlier. Current hiring timelines try to ensure that all positions are filled by early July. The district should use vacancy projections so that it can begin hiring earlier rather than later — even if budgeting is still being finalized.

**FINDING 2:** Philadelphia does not monitor its observation and dismissal procedures to ensure they are working effectively.

### THE CHALLENGE

Philadelphia has established better provisions than most districts for routinely monitoring the progress of its new teachers; however, there is very little identifiable follow-through to ensure that teachers are improving or exiting.

**What happened to teachers found unsatisfactory who were eligible for tenure?**



*Although few teachers are found unsatisfactory, even among those who are, some still seem to be awarded tenure. Out of nine teachers who were at the tenure mark at the end of the 2011-2012 school year, five are still teaching. Only two are known to have been terminated.*

### THE SOLUTION

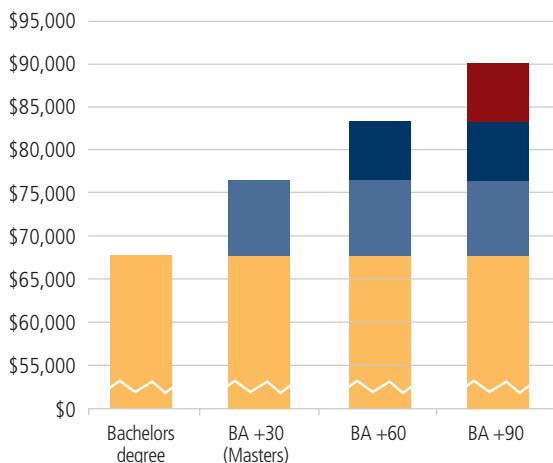
- Use the opportunities for intense support and evaluation before tenure to identify and dismiss teachers who are not effective. Philadelphia's process of providing each teacher a peer coach in the first year of her career and more frequent observations in the first three years of teaching are effective steps.
- Ensure that this new teacher intensive support and evaluation process is connected to recommendations to continue employment or dismiss teachers; the recommendations should reflect reasonable variations in teacher performance.

**FINDING 3:** Philadelphia's compensation structure does not reward effective teaching.

### THE CHALLENGE

The district spends \$70 million each year to compensate teachers for earning additional course credits that do not, on average, make teachers more effective but it does not currently invest in incentives to keep its highly effective teachers in the district.

## Salary by education level for a 10th year teacher



*Philadelphia's salary schedule sends one clear signal to teachers: earn as many credits as you can if you want to earn a higher salary. A teacher who has a master's degree earns 13 percent more than a teacher without one, and a teacher who earns the equivalent of three master's degrees will see a pay boost in the 30 percent range.*

### THE SOLUTION

- Link the largest raises to significant accomplishments, including the year in which a teacher earns tenure, provided tenure becomes a real milestone in a teacher's career and not an automatic decision.
- Develop career ladder positions to allow qualified teachers to receive increased compensation for increased responsibility and leadership while continuing to teach students. These positions can provide needed coaching and feedback for peers while giving high-performing teachers an opportunity for career growth and higher pay without leaving the classroom.
- Offer higher salaries to the top teachers who consistently produce the greatest learning gains.

**FINDING 4:** As required by the state, Philadelphia employs a "Last In, First Out" (LIFO) policy where seniority is the only criterion for cutting positions.

### THE CHALLENGE

Not only is experience a poor predictor of teacher effectiveness after the first few years, it also results in more teachers being laid off when trying to close a revenue gap (it is necessary to lay off more junior teachers because they are less expensive).

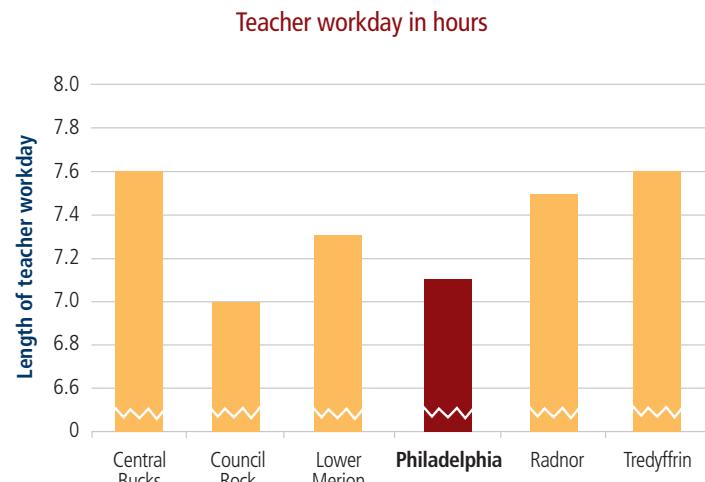
### THE SOLUTION

- Lobby the state for a more nuanced approach, which allows for teacher performance to be a factor when positions must be cut.
- Avoid issuing unnecessary pink slips. While anxiety over finances is understandable, the district needs to recognize that issuing unnecessary pink slips will invariably result in high numbers of teachers leaving because they are worried about not having a job; many of these are teachers the district can ill afford to lose.

## FINDING 5: Teachers need more time in the school day.

### THE CHALLENGE

At 7 hours 4 minutes, Philadelphia teachers' official workday is among the shortest in its area.



*At 7 hours, 4 minutes, Philadelphia's teacher workday is shorter than most of the other surrounding districts.*

### THE SOLUTION

Move toward an eight-hour contractual workday that is performed on-site. In the era of school accountability, when so much of a teacher's work involves interaction with others, teachers need to be at work on-site for a standard eight-hour day.

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If you would like to learn more or connect with one of the parent organizations working for change in Philadelphia, contact Brian Armstead, with the Philadelphia Education Fund ([BArmstead@Philaedfund.org](mailto:BArmstead@Philaedfund.org), 215-665-1400) or Joseph Butler with the Philadelphia School Partnership ([jbutler@philaschool.org](mailto:jbutler@philaschool.org), 484-785-8112).



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