

GETTING THE BEST TEACHERS IN MIAMI-DADE'S CLASSROOMS

6 big findings every parent needs to know

The National Council on Teacher Quality (www.nctq.org) recently completed a study called *Teacher Quality Roadmap*, looking at policies and practices in Miami-Dade schools and their impact on teacher quality and student achievement. NCTQ identifies a number of tangible solutions, six 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 Miami community to push for reform.

Finding 1 The district needs to do a much better job evaluating teachers.

THE CHALLENGE

Miami-Dade currently does not identify which of its teachers are performing at the top, middle or bottom of the spectrum. At one end, the district's most talented teachers remain unrecognized. At the other end, the district removes far too few of its chronically weak teachers: Last year only 10 teachers out of 20,000 were dismissed.

THE SOLUTION

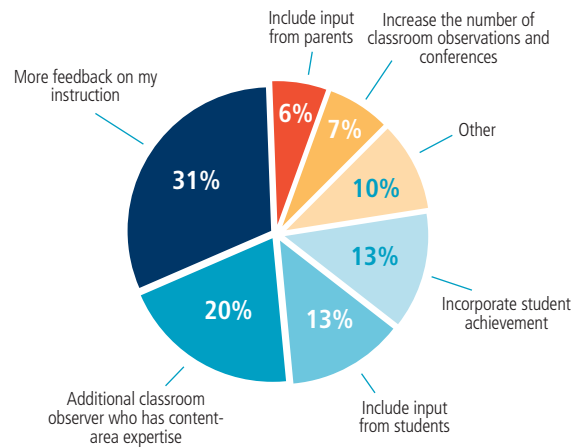
Making sure that the school district puts in place a strong teacher evaluation system is job one. The central office needs to hold principals accountable for evaluating teachers, ensuring that principals are able to clearly distinguish top, average and bottom performing teachers. Good evaluation data are essential for deciding what professional development teachers really need, making better assignments that match the right teacher to the right school and rewarding stronger teachers with higher compensation. Teachers not meeting minimal standards need to be let go, not allowed to teach year after year.

Finding 2 Teachers need more meaningful feedback on their instruction.

THE CHALLENGE

Over half of teachers we surveyed in Miami-Dade said they wanted more or better feedback on their instruction.

Teachers' top recommendations for improving evaluations



Source: NCTQ Survey, March 2011 n=4,601

THE SOLUTION

The district needs to deploy a full-time corps of trained, accomplished evaluators who can provide content-specific feedback to teachers. In other words, evaluators with a math background need to evaluate math teachers.

The district also needs to pay more attention to student feedback. Students have the best knowledge of the quality of instruction they are getting. After all, they are essentially observing teachers for 180 days a year. A new research study finds that *students do a much better job than adults at accurately describing the quality of their teachers*. And it is possible to design a student survey in such a way that very young children can participate and students don't rate a great teacher badly just for being tough.

35 students a year x 180 days x 6 hours a day =
37,800 hours of observations



vs.

1 principal x 2 observations x 1 hour each = **2 hours of observations**



Here are some examples of questions to use in student surveys of teacher performance:

Student perceptions matter

The 7 Cs	Sample questions
Care	My teacher in this class makes me feel that s/he really cares about me.
	My teacher really tries to understand how students feel about things.
Control	Students in this class treat the teacher with respect.
	Our class stays busy and doesn't waste time.
Clarify	My teacher has several good ways to explain each topic that we cover in the class.
	My teacher explains difficult things clearly.
Challenge	In this class, we learn a lot almost every day.
	In this class, we learn to correct our mistakes.
Captivate	My teacher makes lessons interesting.
	I like the ways we learn in this class.
Confer	Students speak up and share their ideas about class work.
	My teacher respects my ideas and suggestions.
Consolidate	My teacher checks to make sure we understand what s/he is teaching us.
	The comments that I get on my work in this class help me understand how to improve.

Finding 3 Principals need full, uncompromised authority to hire teachers.

THE CHALLENGE

The school district often places teachers in schools even when principals refuse them. While there's a new state law designed to give principals more rights over staffing, the law contains some loopholes, only allowing principals to refuse teachers who have been rated below satisfactory. Given that evaluations have historically not been very meaningful, as over 99 percent of all teachers get high ratings, principals still have little choice.

THE SOLUTION

The Miami-Dade contract with the local teachers union needs to be changed to allow principals full discretion in hiring decisions. It needs to make it possible for a principal to turn down a teacher who may have been rated satisfactory but who may not be a good fit for the school.

Finding 4 The district needs to pay top teachers more.

THE CHALLENGE

Miami is doing very little to nurture and support its next generation of teacher leadership.

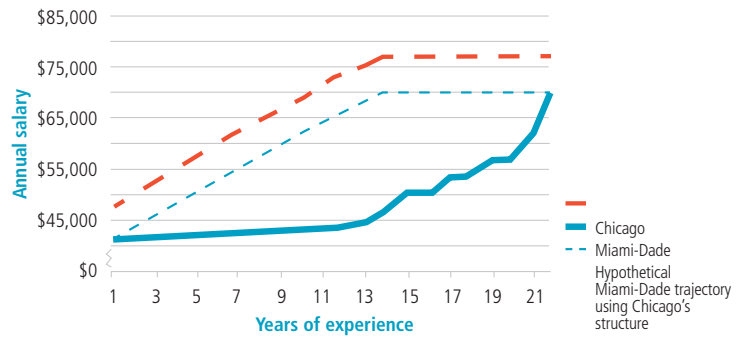
Like most districts, Miami-Dade bases teacher pay on years of experience instead of results, in spite of the fact that research has found that teachers with 20 years of experience are no more apt to be effective than teachers with four or five years experience.

Miami's pay structure is especially tough on young teachers, doing little to encourage them to stick around. In fact, a teacher in Miami gets hardly any raises for the first twenty years on the job. Nearly 70 percent of raises are reserved *for the last few years of service!*

THE SOLUTION

Give high performing teachers the chance to earn big raises at any point, regardless of how much experience they have. Teacher performance should matter more than how many years someone has been on the job.

Teacher salary growth in two districts



Source: NCTQ's TR³ database, www.nctq.org/tr3

Finding 5 Teachers need more time in the school day to work together.

THE CHALLENGE

Most principals and teachers report needing a lot more time to plan. Teachers also want more opportunities to work with their colleagues, though Miami-Dade does not allot specific time for team planning in schools.

THE SOLUTION

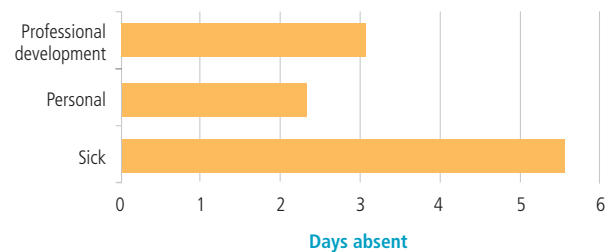
Create space in the official workday that is reserved for department and team collaboration. By extending teachers' official on-site work day from 7 hours, 5 minutes to a full 8 hours – the standard in most professions – teachers would be able to structured time in their schedule to meet with colleagues.

Finding 6 The district needs to reduce teacher absences.

THE CHALLENGE

Over two-thirds of Miami-Dade's teachers are absent for more than 10 days each year. These absences hurt kids and cost a lot of money. Some of these absences are because teachers are excused from class for professional development.

Average absences by leave type, 2009-2010



Source: Miami-Dade Human Resources

THE SOLUTION

The district needs to reserve professional development for times that don't pull teachers away from students.

To find out how you can be involved in making change happen in Miami-Dade, contact the Urban League at (305) 696-4450.