

Teacher Performance Management in

Denver Public Schools

To dramatically improve student outcomes, Denver Public Schools must replace a meaningless teacher performance management framework with one that will accurately differentiate teachers based on their success in the classroom, provide them with the feedback and support they need to improve, and address poor instructional performance effectively and efficiently.

Introduction

In the 2008-2009 school year, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) partnered with Denver Public Schools (DPS) and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) to assess the effectiveness of current teacher performance management policies and practices. DPS and the DCTA have been national leaders in their willingness to examine the difficult issues surrounding teacher performance management and to explore creative alternatives to the status quo. This project was also part of TNTP's national study of teacher performance management, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*, released in June 2009. TNTP's researchers analyzed the following data in studying DPS:

- Interviews with central leadership, union leadership, principals and teachers
- Analysis of district data on teacher evaluation, non-renewal, remediation and dismissal data
- Focus groups with current principals and teachers
- Online surveys of school administrators and teachers (150 administrators and 1863 teachers responded to the surveys, for response rates of 47 percent and 68 percent, respectively)

TNTP's analysis reveals that DPS' current performance management framework is a set of largely meaningless processes that fail to differentiate teacher performance, provide teachers with adequate feedback or effective support, or address poor performance. Furthermore, school administrators have a weak understanding of performance management processes and lack essential training in this area.

Findings

DPS lacks rigorous, clearly communicated teacher performance standards and an accurate way to measure teacher performance against those standards.

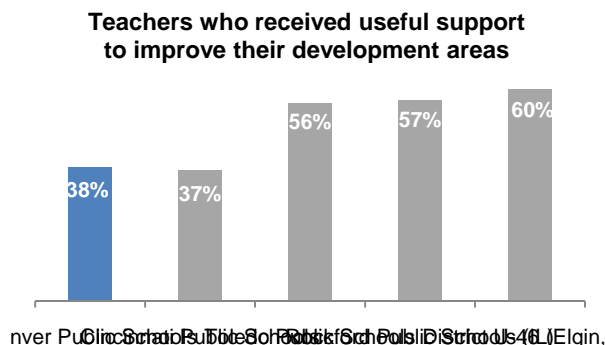
Teachers and school administrators lack confidence in the rigor of district performance standards and the accuracy of the teacher evaluation process. The failure of the evaluation process to accurately measure teacher performance against rigorous performance standards is reflected in its outcomes: 99 percent of non-probationary teachers are rated

Only 38 percent of teachers believe the evaluation process allows accurate assessment of teacher performance.

“Satisfactory,” and development areas are identified for only 40 percent of teachers. In other words, year after year, 60 percent of teachers are told that their performance is fully satisfactory and not in need of improvement in *any area*. Factors limiting the effectiveness of the evaluation process include a lack of administrator training, inconsistent use of student performance data and cursory observations.

Teachers do not receive effective feedback or support to improve their instructional practice.

DPS lags behind its peers in providing effective support that helps their teachers improve. Only 38 percent of DPS teachers who had development areas identified on their most recent evaluation said they received useful support to improve in those areas. Nearly 40 percent of teachers who had development areas identified didn’t even know what those areas were. Rather than providing meaningful feedback followed by targeted support, the evaluation process in DPS appears to be a mere formality with no follow through.



Probationary teachers are not held to a high standard of performance, and they do not receive adequate support to hone their skills as new teachers.

DPS lacks a clear and coherent strategy for utilizing the probationary period to develop new teachers’ skills and remove those who fail to meet expectations. Despite wide latitude under state law to non-renew probationary teachers whose performance does not merit the conferral of non-probationary status—which gives teachers an exceptionally high level of job security—DPS non-renewed just 3 percent of probationary teachers for performance concerns between 2003 and 2008. More than half of DPS teachers don’t believe probationary teachers have adequate support to develop the skills and knowledge that they need to excel in the classroom, and less than half of probationary teachers say they clearly understand what is required of them to earn non-probationary status.

Poor performance goes unaddressed as administrators and teachers seek to avoid ineffective remediation and lengthy dismissal processes.

Although only 1 percent of teacher evaluations in DPS result in a rating of “Unsatisfactory,” teacher and principals report that poor performance is much more widespread: 30 percent of teachers and 70 percent of principals say there is a non-probationary teacher in their school who should be dismissed for poor instructional performance. Administrators do not always give low ratings or pursue dismissal when it is warranted because they view the remediation and dismissal processes as overly cumbersome and time consuming. For their part, teachers do not view the remediation process as a legitimate opportunity to improve and see it instead as the first step toward dismissal. Indeed, fewer than one-quarter of the teachers who enter remediation complete it successfully.

Seventy percent of administrators and 30 percent of teachers say there is a non-probationary teacher in their school who should be dismissed for poor instructional performance.

Recommendations

To address these issues and increase teacher effectiveness in the district, TNTP recommends that DPS adopts the following reforms:

- **Dramatically strengthen the current evaluation system to accurately differentiate and describe teacher performance.** Replace the current binary rating scale with a multiple rating system based on expanded sources of evaluation data and transition to a system in which all teachers are evaluated annually using student performance data as the predominant factor. Incorporate evaluation data into key human capital decisions.
- **Invest in high-quality and ongoing support of administrators' performance management skills.** Shift the focus of administrator trainings away from compliance and toward thoughtful performance management, engaging administrators who have demonstrated mastery in this area in training their peers.
- **Link individual professional development with evaluation.** Align professional development offerings to the performance standards used in the evaluation, and use evaluation data to target professional development to individual teacher needs and assess the effectiveness of particular interventions.
- **Increase the rigor of the probationary period and the effectiveness of teacher development during this critical time.** Evaluate probationary teachers each semester, with the clear expectation that teachers will start out below proficient in most standards and that they must gradually build toward mastery and demonstrate adequate student learning gains to earn non-probationary status.
- **Make remediation a true support for teacher improvement, rather than the first step in the dismissal process.** Establish a joint DPS/DCTA committee to spearhead the reform of the remediation process and hold it accountable for increasing teacher confidence in the process.
- **Introduce lower stakes alternatives to dismissal that will help remove ineffective teachers from the district.** Salary freezes should be put into place for ineffective teachers and those who fail to improve should be offered multi-year unpaid sabbaticals and the opportunity to resign or retire without negative consequence for obtaining a position in another district. The dismissal process itself should be reformed to provide a one-day hearing to confirm that performance evaluation and remediation processes were followed in good faith and not to provide a third-party judgment of the teacher's performance level.

About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) works to end the injustice of educational inequality by providing excellent teachers to the students who need them most and by advancing policies and practices that ensure effective teaching in every classroom. A national nonprofit organization founded by teachers, TNTP is driven by the knowledge that although great teachers are the best solution to educational inequality, the nation's education systems do not sufficiently prioritize the goal of effective teachers for all. In response, TNTP develops customized programs and policy interventions that enable education leaders to find, develop and keep great teachers and achieve reforms that promote effective teaching in every classroom. Since its inception in 1997, TNTP has recruited or trained approximately 37,000 teachers—mainly through its highly selective Teaching Fellows™ programs—benefiting an estimated 5.9 million students. TNTP has also released a series of acclaimed studies of the policies and practices that

affect the quality of the nation's teacher workforce, most recently including *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (2009). Today TNTP is active in more than 40 cities, including Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, New York, and Oakland, among others. For more information, please visit www.tntp.org.



Teacher Performance Management in Denver Public Schools

Report from The New Teacher Project | February
18, 2010



Contents

 **Background**

National landscape

Findings

Recommendations

Appendix



The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a national nonprofit dedicated to closing the achievement gap by ensuring that poor and minority students get outstanding teachers.

- Founded by teachers in 1997
- Partners with school districts, state education agencies, and charter schools
- Targets acute teacher quality challenges
- Investigates the impact of current policies and practices on teacher quality and makes practical, data-driven recommendations for reform
- Past and present policy sites include:
 - Districts:* Chicago, Denver, Milwaukee, New York, Portland, San Francisco
 - States:* Arkansas, Illinois, Ohio, Washington



Study overview

Denver Public Schools (DPS) and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) have made a significant investment in improving teacher effectiveness in the district, including recent reforms to the teacher staffing process which increased schools' ability to staff every classroom with the best possible teacher.

In the 2008-09 school year, DPS and the DCTA partnered with TNTP to:

- 1** Conduct an analysis of current teacher performance management processes; and
- 2** Develop a set of comprehensive recommendations for reform.

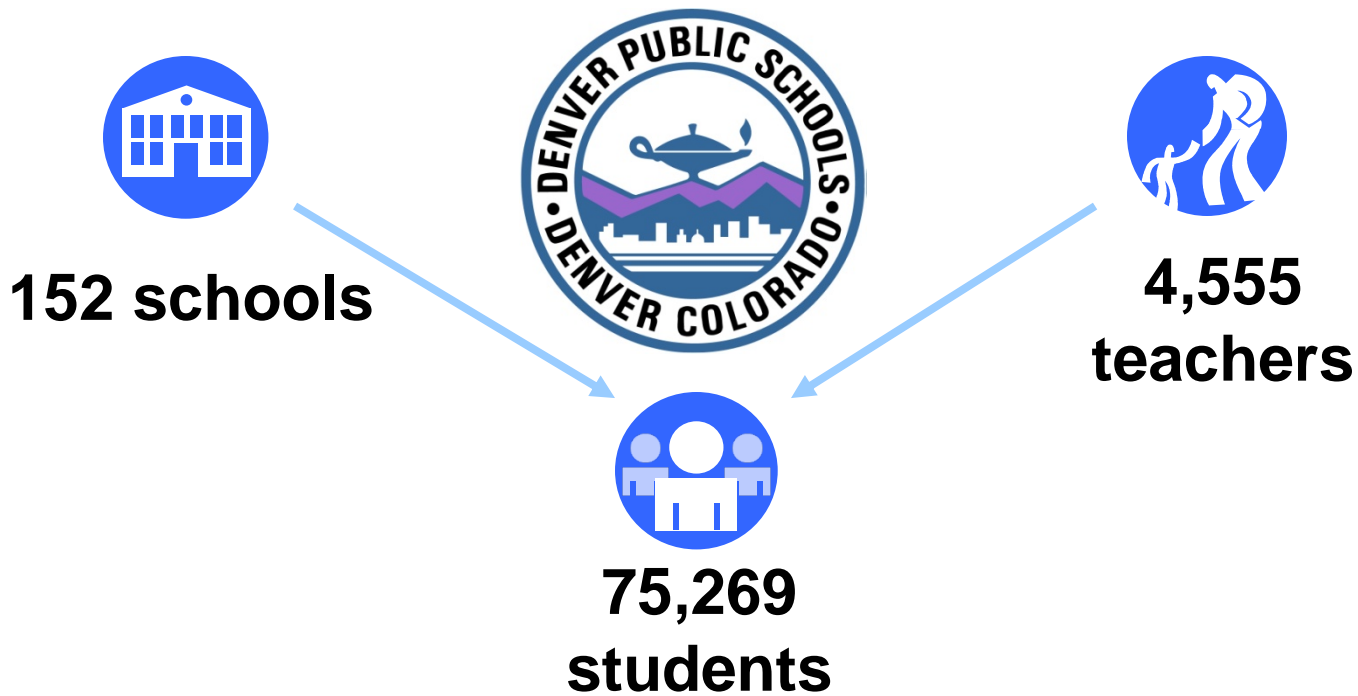
TNTP worked with DPS and DCTA on two fronts: DPS participated in TNTP's research for our recent report entitled *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure To Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*; and through analysis of district-specific factors impacting teacher performance management. Data collection included*:

- Interviews with central district staff, DCTA representatives, principals, and teachers;
- Surveys of all principals, assistant principals and teachers;
- Analysis of teacher evaluation, separation, and remediation data, as provided by Human Resources;
- Teacher and principal focus groups; and
- Comparative analysis of survey data from other school districts*.

* See Appendix for a summary of DPS performance management processes, detailed methodology, and more information about comparative districts



Denver Public Schools Profile: 2008-09



66%
Free/Reduced Lunch

12%
Special Education

88 of 152
*Schools Not Meeting AYP**

77%
Students of Color

52%
Graduation Rate

* AYP = Adequate Yearly Progress, as defined by the federal *No Child Left Behind* act. Data from 2007-2008. Source: Denver Public Schools website and Colorado State Department of Education website.



Contents

Background



National Landscape

Findings

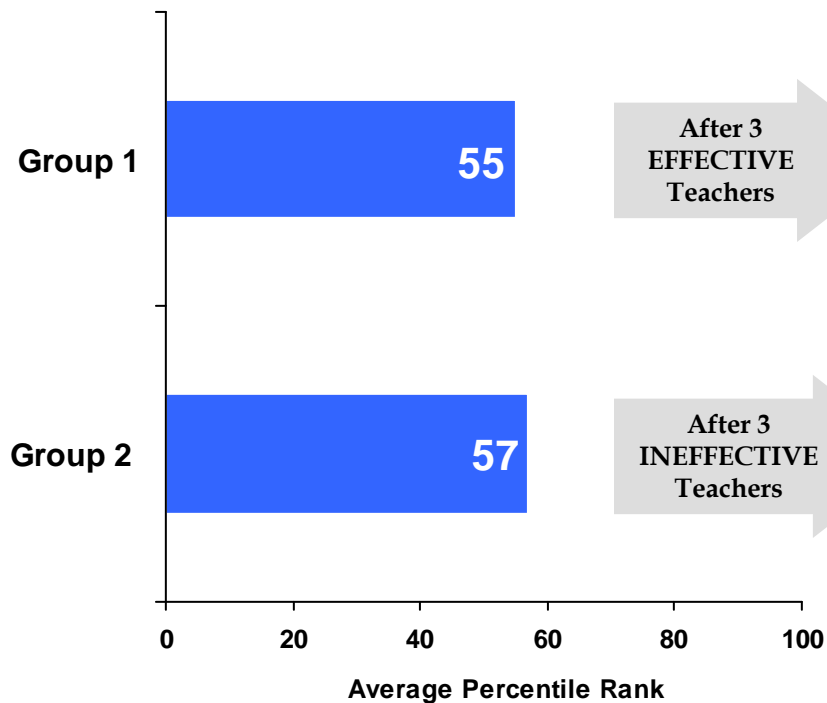
Recommendations

Appendix

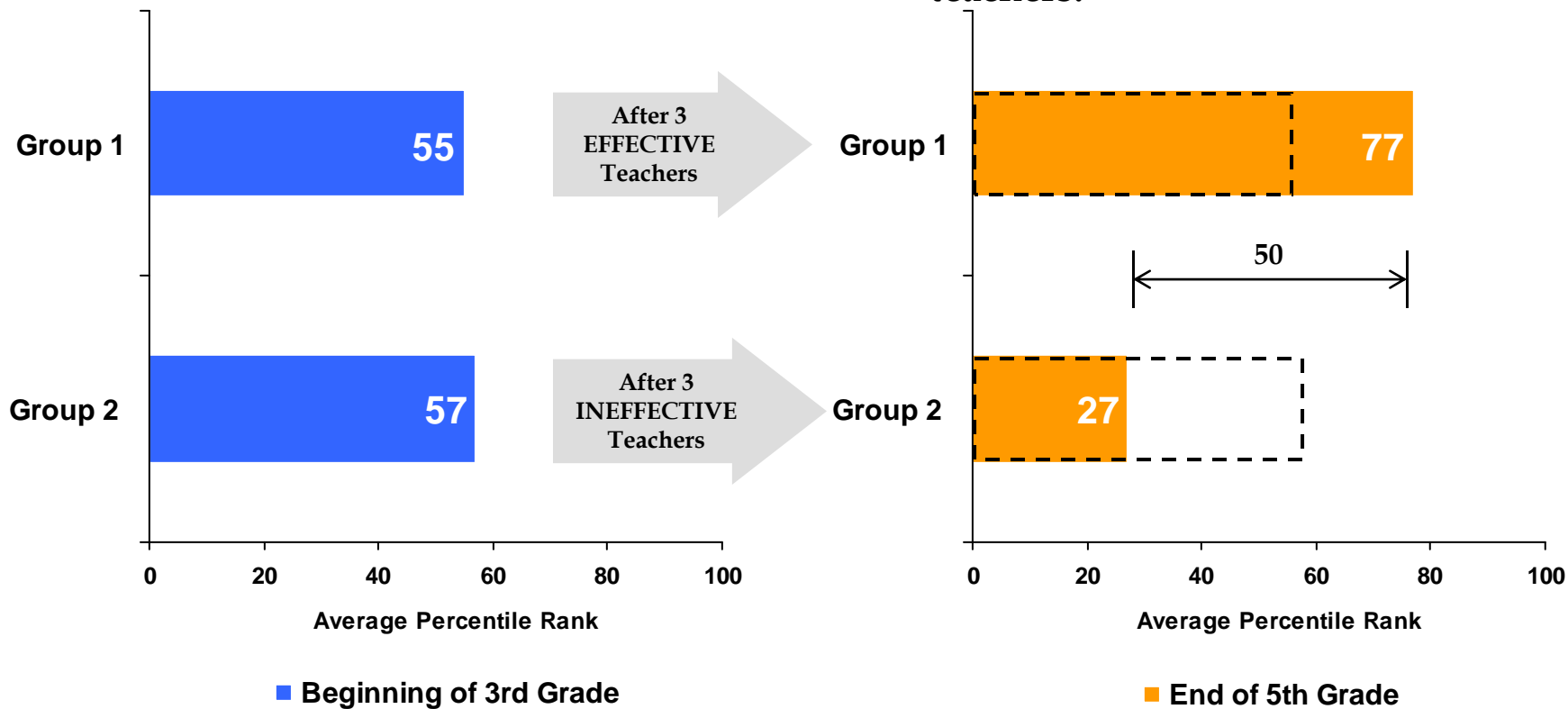


A teacher's effectiveness can significantly accelerate student learning.

Dallas students who start 3rd grade at about the same level of math achievement...



...may finish 5th grade math at dramatically different levels depending on the quality of their teachers.



Original analysis by the Education Trust.

Source: Heather Jordan, Robert Mendro, and Dash Weerasinghe, *The Effects of Teachers on Longitudinal Student Achievement*, 1997.



DPS was one of twelve districts nationwide studied for TNTP's recent report entitled *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*.

The Widget Effect: Treating teachers as interchangeable parts

All teachers are rated "good" or "great."

Although teachers and principals report that poor performance is common, less than 1 percent of teachers are identified as "unsatisfactory" on performance evaluations.

Excellence goes unrecognized.

When excellent ratings are the norm, truly exceptional teachers cannot be formally identified. Nor can they be compensated, promoted or retained.

Professional development is inadequate.

Almost 3 in 4 teachers did not receive any specific feedback on improving their performance in their last evaluation.

Novice teachers are neglected.

Low expectations for beginning teachers translate into benign neglect in the classroom and a toothless tenure process.

Poor performance goes unaddressed.

Half of the 12 districts studied have not dismissed a single non-probationary teacher for poor performance in the past *five years*. None dismisses more than a few each year.



The recommendations in *The Widget Effect* are a call to action for school districts to move beyond treating teachers like widgets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

ADOPT a comprehensive performance evaluation system that fairly, accurately and credibly differentiates teachers based on their effectiveness in promoting student achievement and provides targeted professional development to help them improve.

2

TRAIN administrators and other evaluators in the teacher performance evaluation system and hold them accountable for using it effectively.

3

INTEGRATE the performance evaluation system with critical human capital policies and functions such as teacher assignment, professional development, compensation, retention and dismissal.

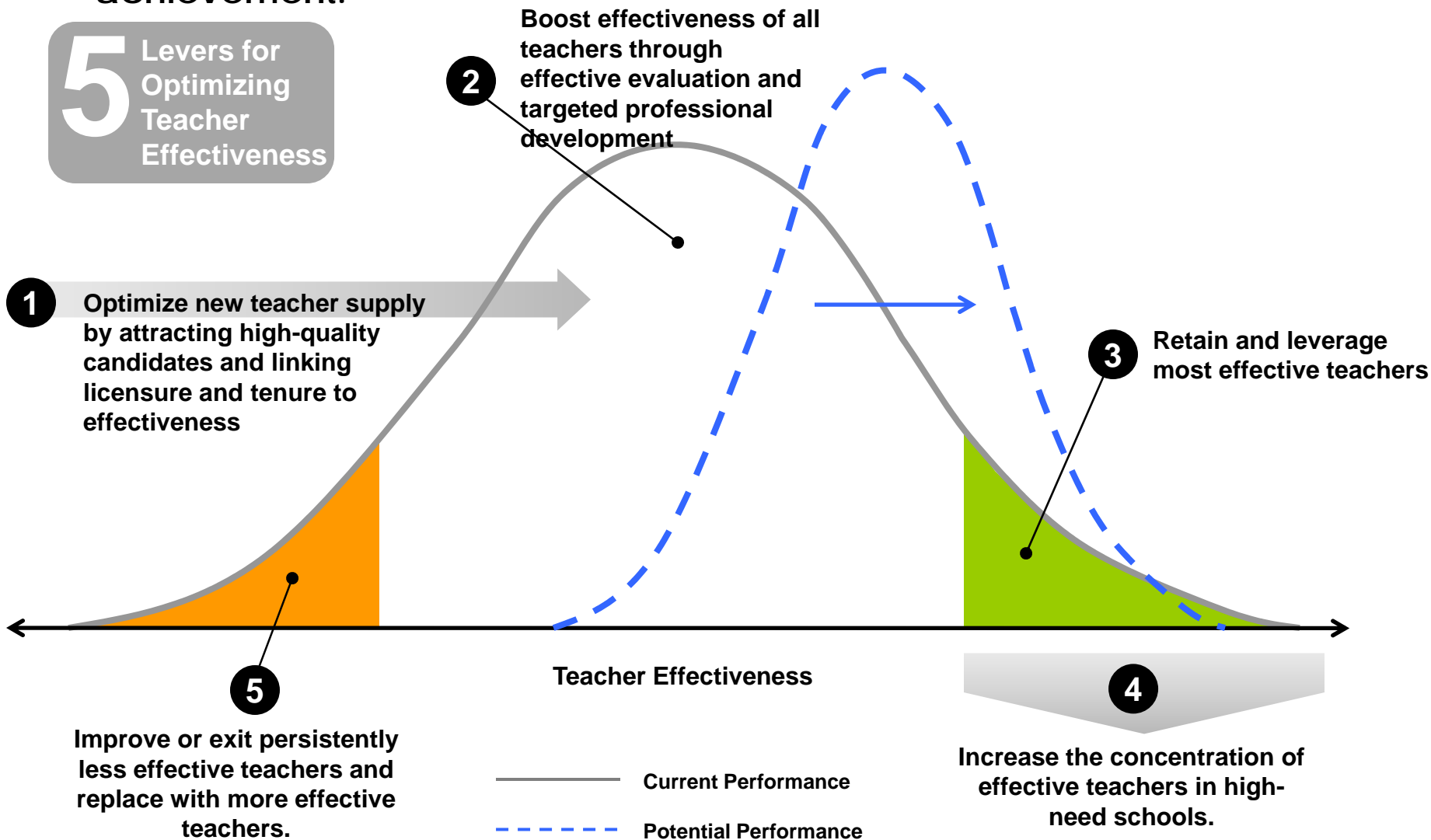
4

ADDRESS consistently ineffective teaching through dismissal policies that provide lower-stakes options for ineffective teachers to exit the district and a system of due process that is fair but efficient.



All states must have a sustained and strategic focus on maximizing teacher effectiveness in order to dramatically improve student achievement.

5 Levers for Optimizing Teacher Effectiveness





Contents

Introduction

National Landscape

 **Findings**

Recommendations

Appendix



DPS must overhaul broken performance management processes and replace them with a new framework for maximizing teacher effectiveness in every classroom.

Summary of Findings

- ▶ Teachers are neither held to a rigorous performance standard nor accurately evaluated.
- ▶ Neither veteran nor novice teachers receive adequate feedback about their performance or effective support that could help them improve.
- ▶ Administrators have a weak understanding of performance management processes and lack essential training and development in this area.
- ▶ Poor performance often goes unaddressed.

Summary of Recommendations

- ▶ Overhaul teacher evaluation and use evaluation data for key human capital decisions
- ▶ Invest in high-quality training and support for administrators
- ▶ Link individual professional development to evaluation
- ▶ Increase the rigor of the probationary period
- ▶ Repurpose remediation as a true support to help teachers improve
- ▶ Introduce lower stakes alternatives to formal dismissal



All key DPS stakeholders could benefit from the adoption of our recommendations.



DPS Board of Education

Greater confidence in high stakes decisions undertaken by the district, such as the conferral of non probationary status and the initiation of dismissal proceedings

Increased transparency for parents and community stakeholders who seek to understand how the district defines, measures, and supports effective teaching in every classroom



DPS Leadership

A unified approach to teacher performance management that will drive excellence in every school and every classroom

Streamlined remediation and dismissal processes which will free central and school administrators to focus on supporting the vast majority of acceptable performers instead of struggling to address poor performance



Schools and School Leaders

A common understanding of effective teaching and what it looks like in every school and at every school level

A culture of professionalism and honest, constructive recognition of areas of growth as well as true accomplishment



DCTA and Teachers

Consistent, cohesive feedback on instructional practice, paired with targeted, effective professional support for every teacher

Increased transparency and credibility in teacher evaluation, remediation, and dismissal outcomes that better support a shared culture of professional growth and excellence



Contents

Introduction

National Landscape

▶ **Findings**

Recommendations

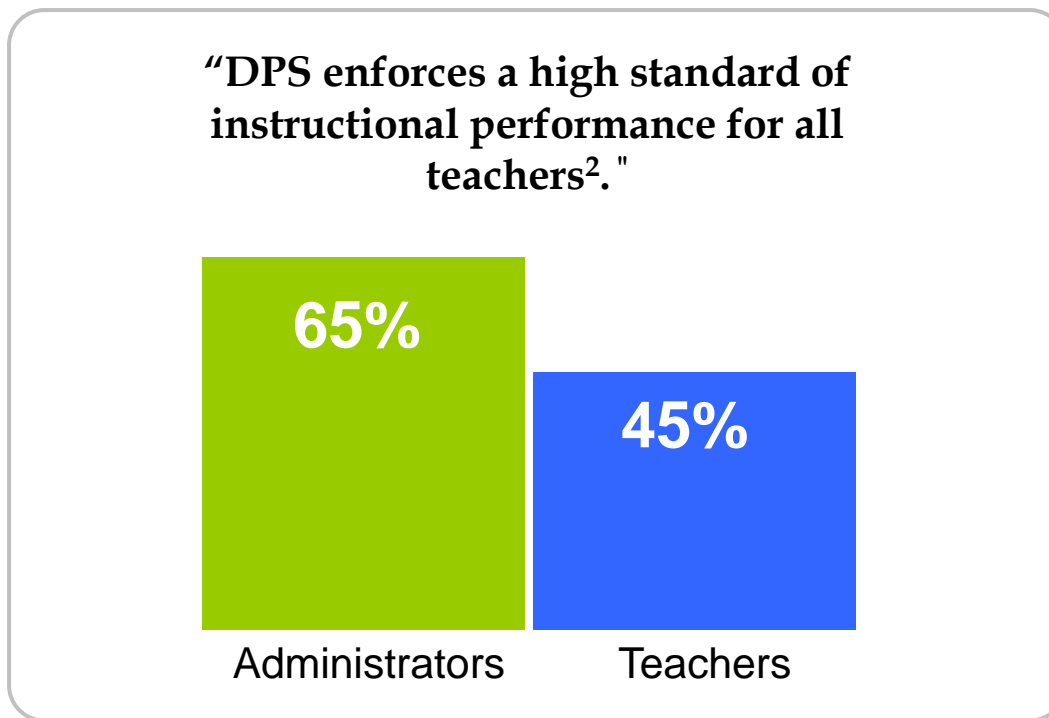
Appendix

#1

DPS lacks rigorous, clearly communicated teacher performance standards and an accurate way to measure teacher performance against those standards.



Fewer than half of DPS teachers and less than two thirds of DPS administrators¹ express confidence in the district's standards for instructional performance.



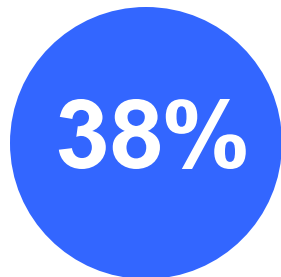
1. Throughout this report, administrator survey results include principals and assistant principals, unless noted otherwise.

2. Respondents answering "Strongly agree" or "Agree".

Source: TNTP surveys of 1863 DPS teachers and 150 DPS administrators in November and December 2008



The formal evaluation process fails to accurately measure teacher performance, due in part to limited use of student performance data and cursory observations.



Only 38% of teachers strongly agree or agree that **the evaluation process allows accurate assessment of performance.**

Factors limiting accurate assessment of teacher performance

23% of teacher evaluations **did not include student performance data**¹

58% of teachers were **observed two or fewer times** for their most recent observation.

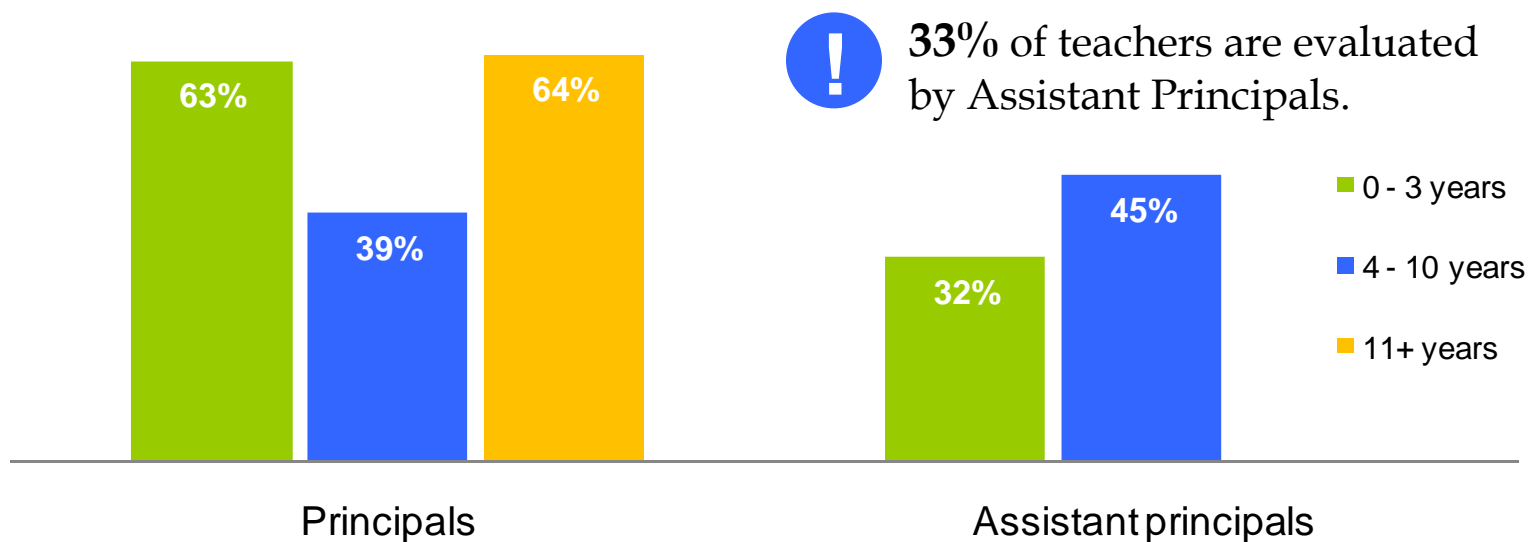
86% of teacher observations were **45 minutes or less** in length, on average

1. Respondents answering “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, or “Somewhat disagree”



Furthermore, administrators are ill equipped to conduct effective teacher evaluations.

Percent of administrators with "Very extensive" or "extensive" training to conduct an effective evaluation¹



1. 31 percent of principals and 36 of assistant principals report "somewhat extensive" training. In total, 48 percent of DPS principals reported "extensive" or "very extensive" training, slightly less than 51 percent, the overall total for districts studied in *The Widget Effect*.



Principals who participated in our focus groups shed additional light on weaknesses in the performance management system.

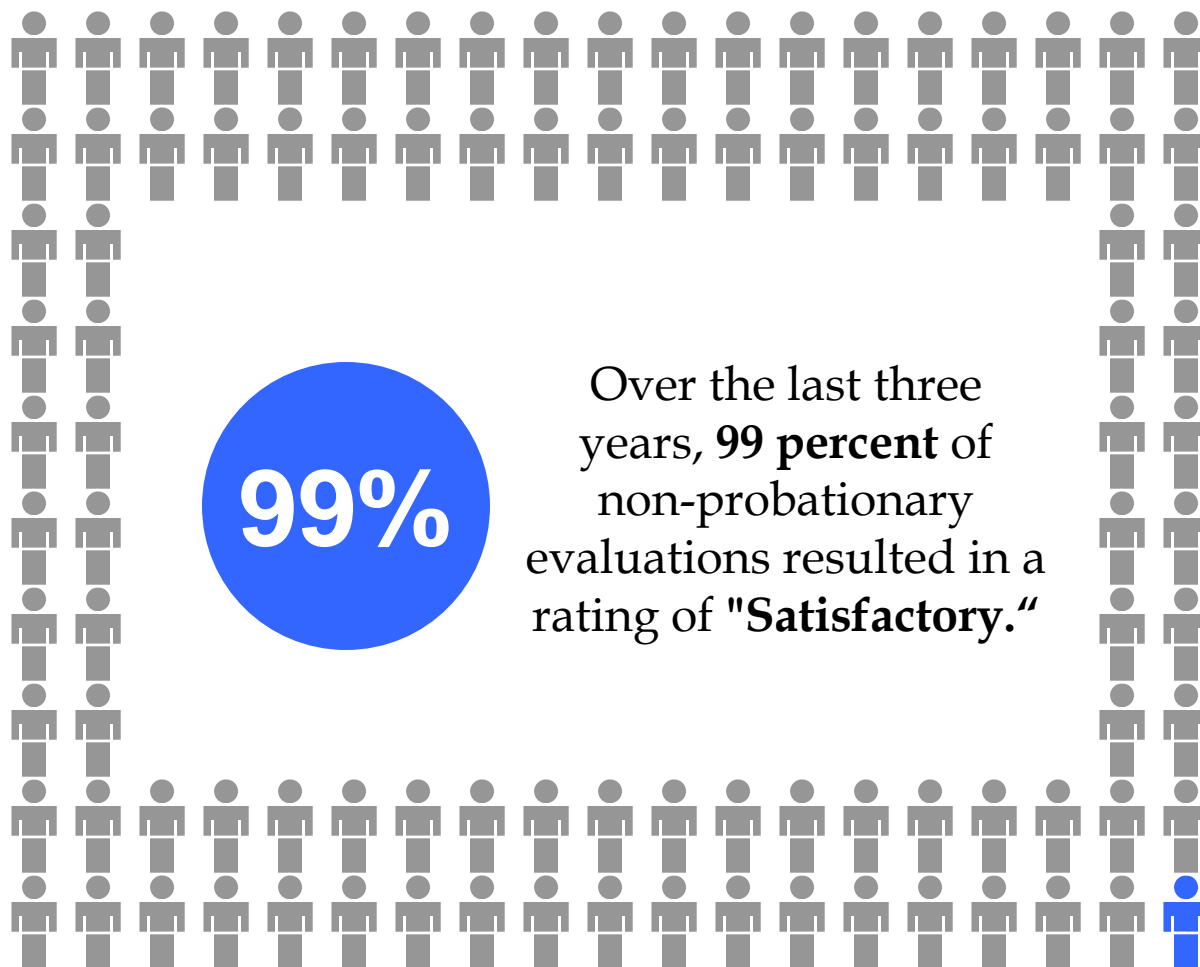
Principal Focus Group Findings

TNTP conducted focus groups with two sets of principals: Group A, consisting of principals identified by DPS and/or the DCTA as strong performance managers; and Group B, the control group. Comparison of responses from the two groups yielded the following insights:

- Many principals equate the district curriculum and planning guides with teacher performance expectations. Those principals identified as strong performance managers move beyond these tools to establish school level performance expectations in areas like rigor of instruction and professionalism.
- Principals rely most heavily on the formal evaluation process to monitor teacher performance and generally do not incorporate informal information sources, such as student and parent feedback. *(Note: In teacher surveys, 85 % said student feedback was “very important” or “important” in how they improved their own instructional performance and 74% said the same of parent feedback.)*
- Those principals identified as strong performance managers move beyond the formal evaluation process to incorporate multiple data sources, including frequent informal observations; review of daily student work; and individual teachers’ contributions to faculty and team meetings, to assess teacher performance.
- Principals prefer to address performance concerns through informal means and through a collegial, collaborative approach. They only move to a more direct, formal, and supervisory approach when informal means fail to yield desired results.
- Principals identify a lack of time as a key obstacle to more rigorous and thorough teacher evaluation and support.



In the absence of rigorous performance standards and an accurate evaluation system, all teachers are viewed as "satisfactory."



Source: Electronically collected, completed, non-probationary evaluation records provided by DPS for SY 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08

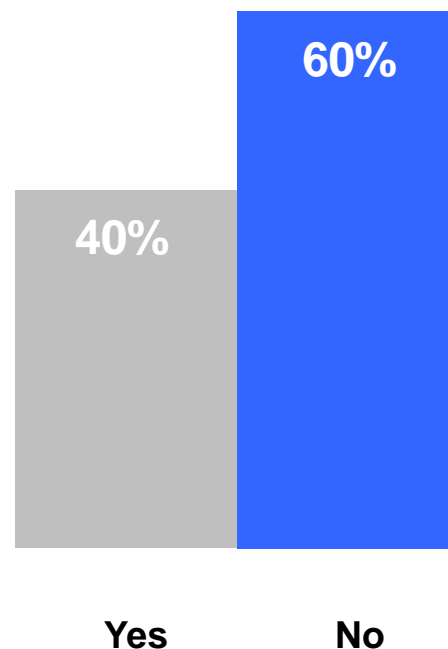


In fact, the performance of most teachers is rated as not in need of improvement in any area.

EVALUATION POLICY

- DPS' teacher evaluation instrument consists of five performance standards: **Instruction, Assessment, Curriculum and Planning, Learning Environment, and Professional Responsibilities.**
- Teachers receive ratings of "Exceeding", "Meeting", "Developing" or "Not Meeting" for each of the three to five criteria associated with each standard (20 criteria total), as well as a single overall rating for each standard.
- If a teacher is rated "Not Meeting" on any single standard or on five or more criteria across all standards, the teacher's final evaluation rating is "Unsatisfactory". In all other cases, the final rating is "Satisfactory".

On your most recent evaluation, did your evaluator identify any areas as "Developing" or "Not Meeting"?





Recommendation:

Dramatically strengthen the evaluation system so that it accurately differentiates teacher performance and yields data for key decisions.

Teacher Evaluation Reforms

Replace the current binary rating scale with a multiple rating scale, with the goal of truly differentiating levels of teacher effectiveness.

Expand the sources of information that are consistently used in teacher evaluation to include student performance data as the predominant factor; student and parent surveys; and multiple unannounced observations of varying length.

Transition to a system in which all teachers are evaluated annually.

Align the evaluation process and other performance management tools, such as SGO's, data trackers, etc., to a common set of performance standards and the common purposes of differentiating performance levels and providing actionable feedback on development areas to teachers.

Use evaluation data for key human capital decisions, including reductions in staff, engaging strong teachers as mentors and coaches, determining teacher assignments, comparing the relative effectiveness of applicant pipelines, and increasing compensation for effective teachers while limiting raises for ineffective teachers.



Recommendation:

Invest in high-quality training and ongoing support of administrators' performance management skills.

Administrator Training Reforms*

Shift the focus of administrator training from compliance with evaluation procedures to competency in effective and meaningful evaluation.

Engage administrators who have demonstrated mastery of performance management skills in training their peers.

Provide regular, structured opportunities for administrators to reflect on their performance management practices with their peers

Create a centrally based team of master evaluators who will conduct random, spot observations of individual teachers. TNTP recommends that these observations not be used for the teacher's summative evaluation, but to compare ratings with school administrators. If DPS elects to include the ratings of master evaluators in teachers' overall evaluation ratings, measures should be taken to preserve administrators' authority to manage school-level instructional quality.

Introduce school-level norming of evaluation ratings, in which teachers observe their peers and then compare observed strengths and weaknesses with those identified by school administrators. Encourage school communities to use these observations as opportunities to develop a common understanding of excellence under performance standards.

* See appendix for a full list of specific areas for administrator training



Contents

Introduction

National Landscape

▶ **Findings**

Recommendations

Appendix

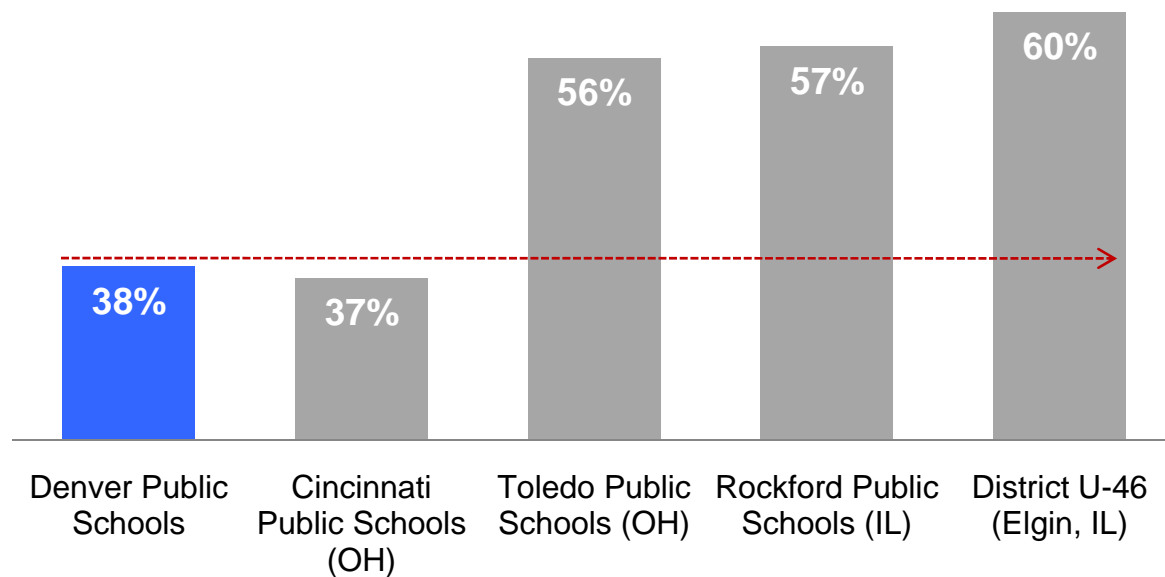
#2

Teachers do not receive effective feedback or support to improve their practice.



Teachers in other districts¹ receive significantly better support to improve than their colleagues in DPS.

Teachers with Identified Development Areas Who Received Useful Support to Improve Their Teaching Practice²



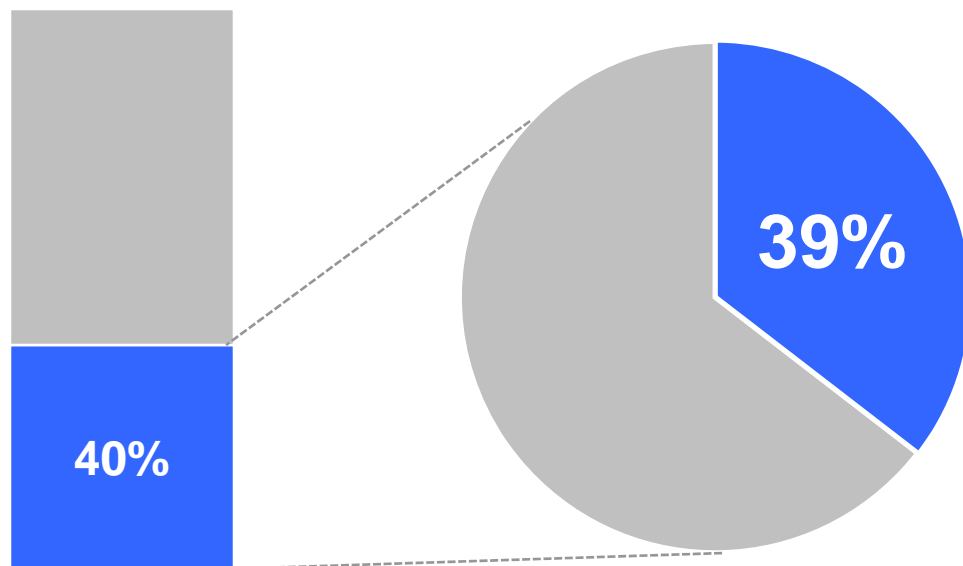
1. See Appendix for additional data on comparative districts

2. Respondents answering "Strongly agree" or "agree"

Source: TNTP survey of 1863 DPS teachers in November and December 2008 and TNTP surveys of teachers in Cincinnati, Toledo, Rockford, and District U-46, as part of TNTP's study for *The Widget Effect*



Teacher evaluations in DPS tend to be isolated interactions with no follow up or supporting feedback loop.



Only 40 percent of teachers have **development areas identified**, and of those, 39 percent **do not know what their development areas are**.

29%

Only 29 percent of teachers who said the evaluation process helped them improve¹ said **their evaluator subsequently told them they had improved.**

1. Respondents answering "Strongly agree", "Agree", or "Somewhat agree"
Source: TNTP surveys of 1863 DPS teachers in November and December 2008



Recommendation:

Link individual professional development to evaluation.

Professional Development Reforms

Develop a set of professional development (PD) interventions for each teacher performance standard, with modifications for specific grade levels and subject areas. Make interventions readily available through a frequently updated PD web portal.

Directly link individual teacher PD to teacher evaluation, so that each teacher participates in interventions geared to his/her specific development needs with clear objectives for timely improvement.

Add structured development components to evaluation conferences. In these discussions, the teacher should reflect on his/her specific development areas and the success of strategies acquired in recent PD activities.

Use aggregate teacher evaluation data to assess the effectiveness of particular interventions, increase the use of successful interventions, and modify or eliminate unproductive strategies.

Use individual teacher evaluation data to identify master teachers in each performance standard and engage these teachers in providing on-the-job coaching, modeling, and strategy workshops to their peers.



Contents

Introduction

National Landscape

▶ **Findings**

Recommendations

Appendix

#3

Probationary teachers are not held to a high standard of performance, and they do not receive adequate support to hone their skills as new teachers.

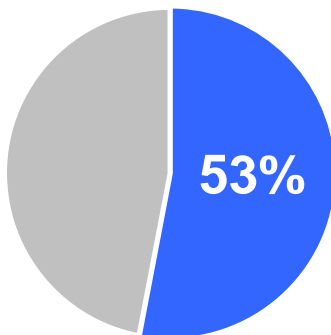


Most probationary teachers do not need to meet a high performance standard in order to earn non-probationary status.

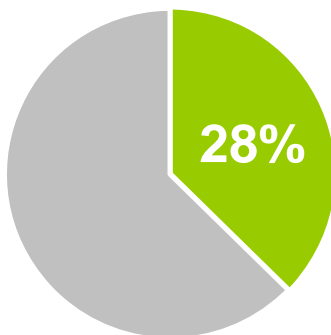
Across **five years** of data, only three percent of probationary teachers were non-renewed for poor performance.

3%

- Reflecting the poor state of teacher performance management nationally, this figure is relatively high compared to other districts studied for *The Widget Effect*, where typically less than one percent of probationary teachers are non-renewed for poor performance.



Slightly more than half of non-probationary teachers strongly agree or agree that **they were evaluated rigorously** to attain non-probationary status



About a quarter of principals and 52 percent of APs have **not non-renewed a single teacher for poor performance** in the last five years.

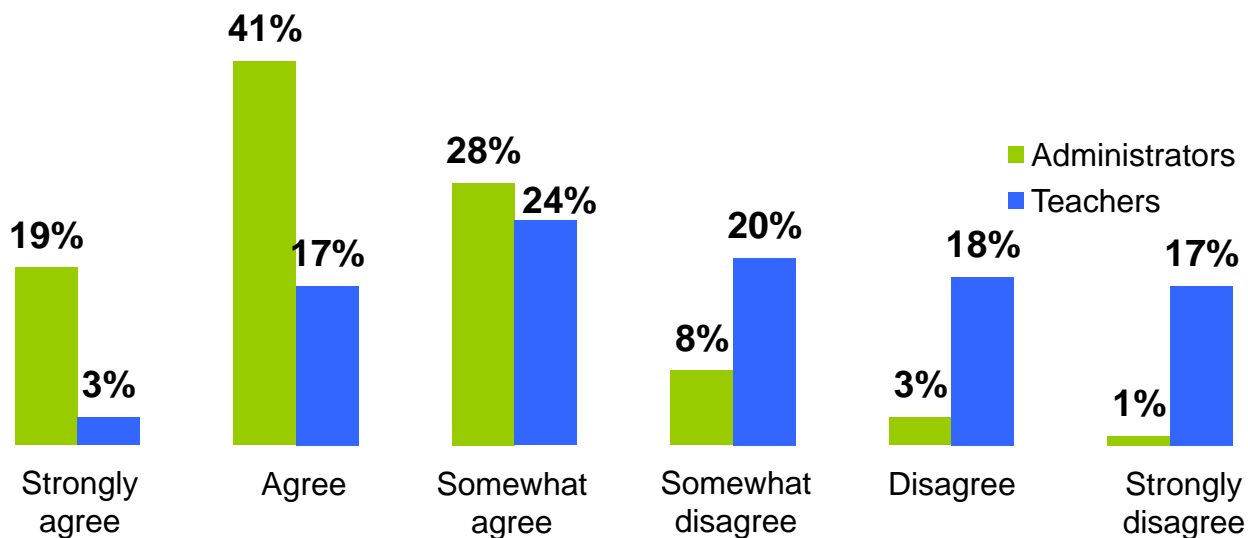
- An additional 25 percent of principals and 14 percent of APs have non-renewed one probationary teacher for poor performance during that time

Source: Denver Public Schools separation data for SY 2003-04 through SY 2007-08 and TNTP surveys of 1863 DPS teachers and 150 DPS administrators conducted in November and December 2008



Teachers want more support during the probationary period, and few understand what is required to attain non-probationary status.

“The district provides new teachers with adequate support during their probationary period to develop the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the classroom.”



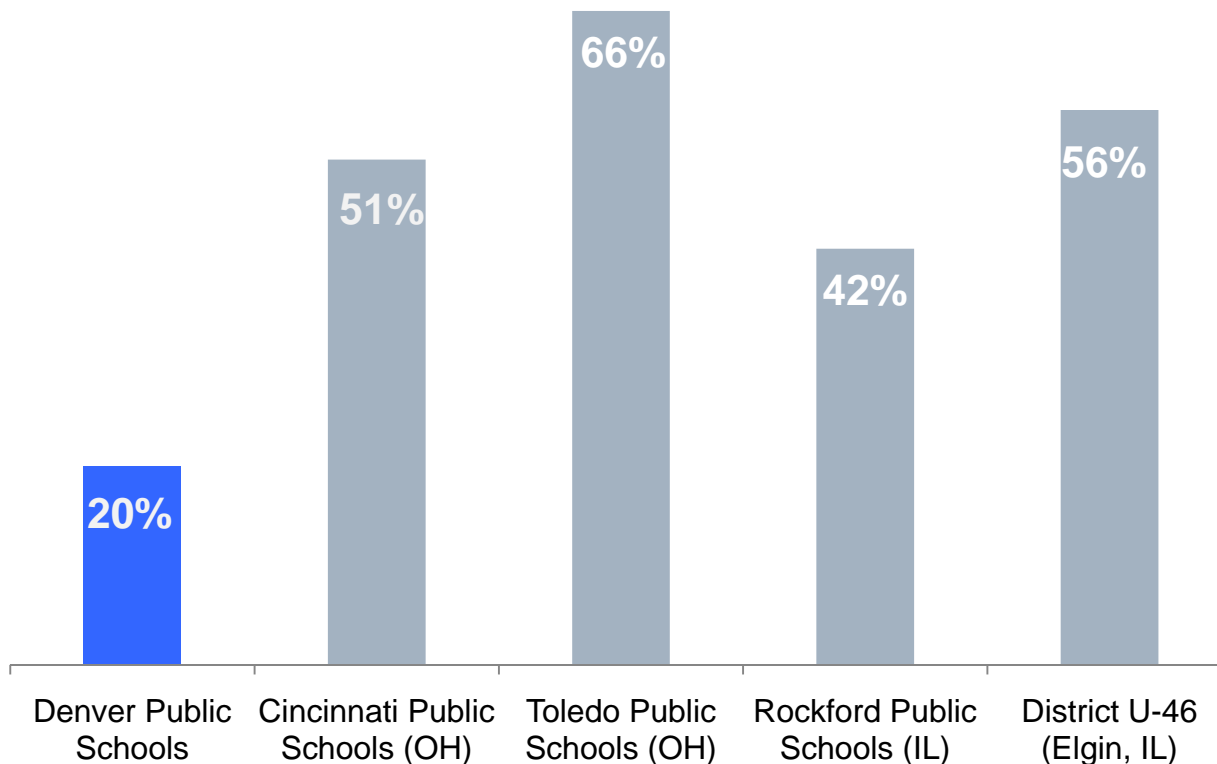
Only **44%** of probationary teachers strongly agree or agree that they clearly **understand the process for attaining non-probationary status**, and only **47%** strongly agree or agree that they clearly **understand what is expected of them to attain non-probationary status**.

Source: TNTP surveys of 1863 DPS teachers and 150 DPS administrators in November and December 2008



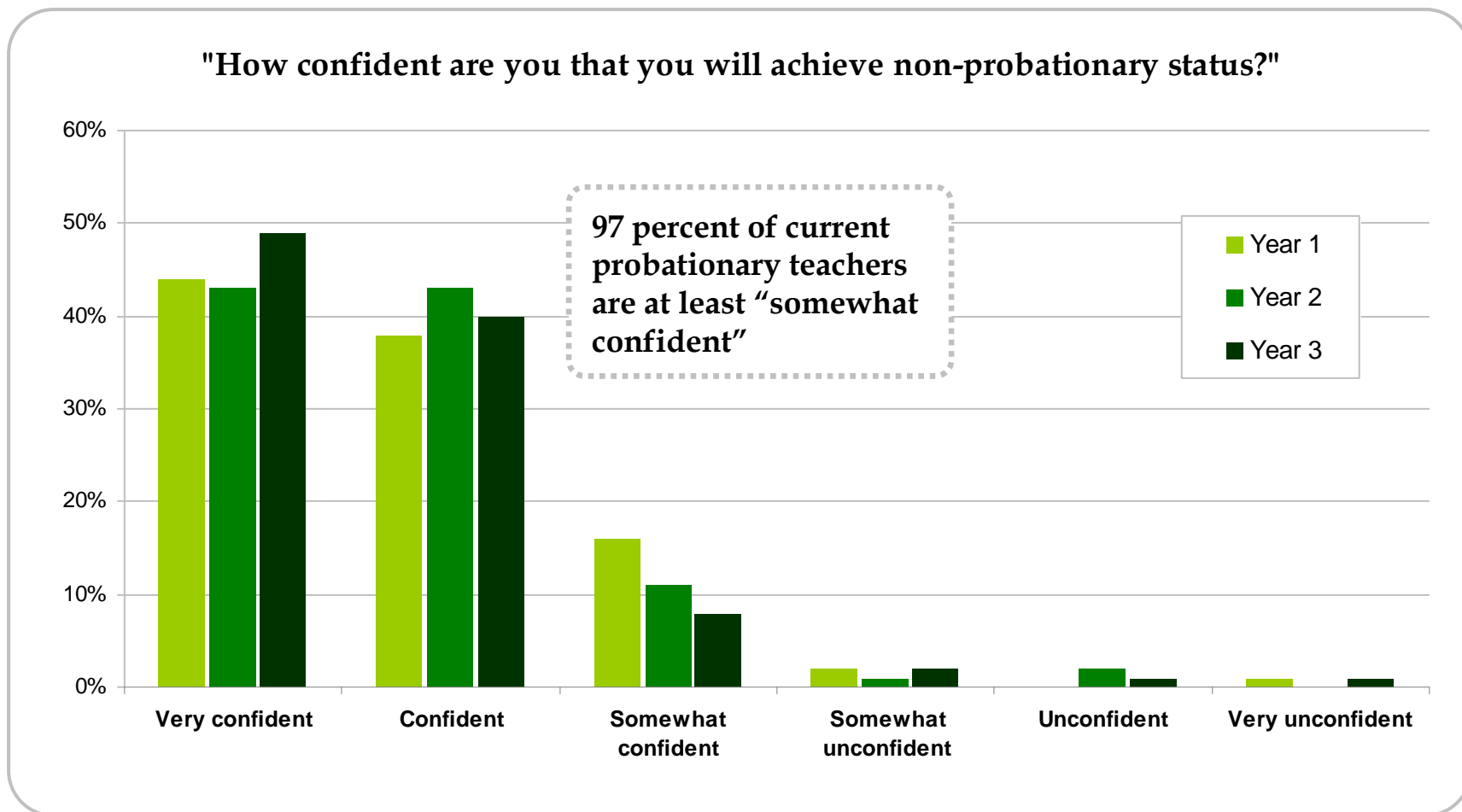
Teachers in other districts receive better support during the probationary period than teachers in DPS.

Percent of teachers who strongly agree or agree that “The probationary period provides new teachers adequate support to develop the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the classroom.”





Despite reporting a lack of support and communication, nearly all probationary teachers in DPS have some confidence that they will attain non-probationary status.



Source: TNTP surveys of 1863 DPS teachers in November and December 2008



Recommendation:

Increase the rigor of the probationary period and the effectiveness of teacher development during this critical time.

Probationary Period Reforms

Clearly communicate performance standards to probationary teachers based on effectiveness in promoting student achievement outcomes.

Evaluate probationary teachers against these standards each semester, with the clear expectation that teachers will start out below proficient in most standards and gradually build toward mastery.

Require probationary teachers to meet the district's threshold for adequate student learning gains (ex. a year's worth of student growth in a year's time) before awarding them non-probationary status.

Strengthen new teacher support in the district by increasing opportunities for on-the-job coaching and differentiating support based on identified deficiencies.

Ensure that non-probationary status decisions are fair but rigorous by supporting principals and holding them accountable for these decisions, e.g. by scrutinizing decisions at failing schools.



Contents

Introduction

National Landscape

▶ **Findings**

Recommendations

Appendix

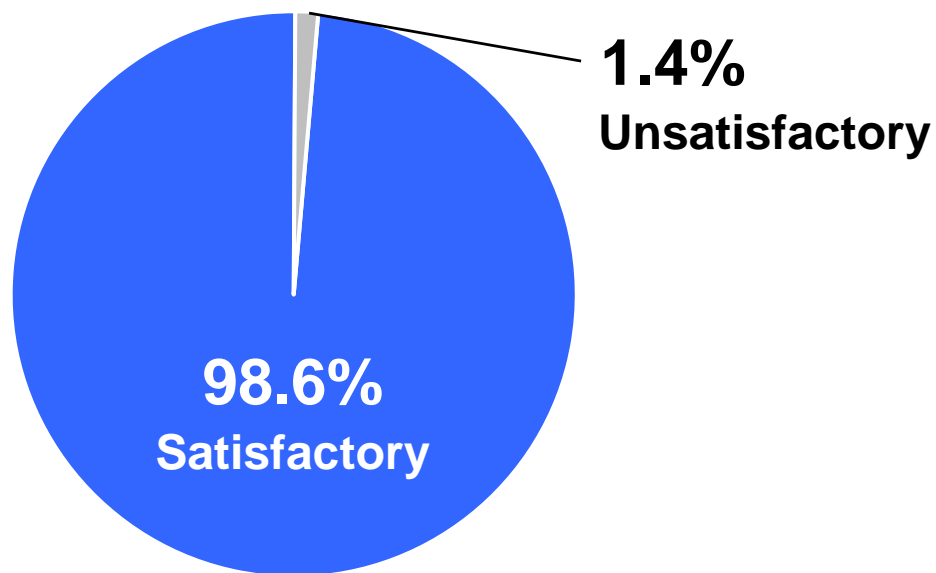
#4

Poor performance goes unaddressed as administrators and teachers seek to avoid ineffective remediation and lengthy dismissal processes.



Poor performance is almost never identified through the formal evaluation process

Summative evaluation ratings for non-probationary teachers, 2005–2008



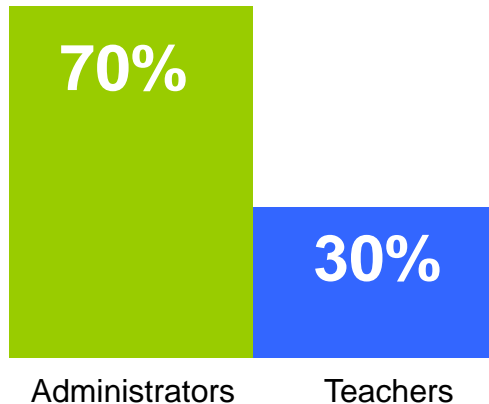
In **three** years only **32** unsatisfactory summative ratings were given out of **2387** total non-probationary evaluations.

Source: Electronically collected, completed, non-probationary evaluation records provided by DPS for SY 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08

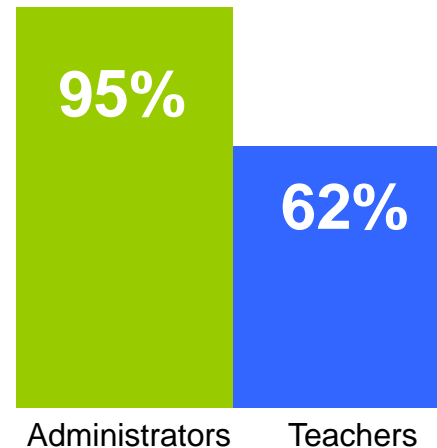


However, administrators and teachers encounter poor performers in their schools and believe these teachers should be removed.

“There are non-probationary teachers in my school who should be dismissed for poor performance.”



“Dismissing non-probationary teachers for poor performance is an important part of maintaining a high quality teaching staff.”



“While I believe that all employees deserve the right to a fair process of job evaluation, I am most concerned with the number of students whose right to a good education has been denied them while we have dragged out the process of relieving teachers who were not capable of providing for their students’ educational needs.” – DPS teacher

1. Respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree”

Source: TNTP surveys of 1863 DPS teachers and 150 DPS administrators in November and December 2008



Administrators view the remediation and dismissal process as too complicated and time intensive, and often avoid it as a result.

81%

81 percent of administrators, including 91 percent of those who have actually initiated a dismissal for performance, **think the “time, effort, and resources required to dismiss a non-probationary teacher for poor performance” is too high¹.**

32%

32 percent of administrators say they do not pursue dismissal because **remediation is too time intensive.**

Responses in principal focus groups point to a need for *increased training* on the dismissal process:

- Before beginning remediation, principals did not know what would be expected of them in the process and were uncertain of their abilities to execute the process effectively.
- Once remediation began, principals found that they received unanticipated and effective support from Human Resources and their Instructional Superintendent.
- Principals reported mixed satisfaction with the peer assistance program.
- Principals described the process as fairly adversarial and very time consuming.



1. TNTP’s survey in DPS did not ask administrators to estimate the amount of time spent on remediation and dismissal. In surveys in four other districts, 60 percent of administrators who had recently dismissed a tenured teacher spent more than 25 hours doing so and 25 percent spent more than 75 hours doing so.

Source: TNTP survey of 150 DPS administrators in November and December 2008 and TNTP-led focus groups of DPS principals conducted in January and February 2009



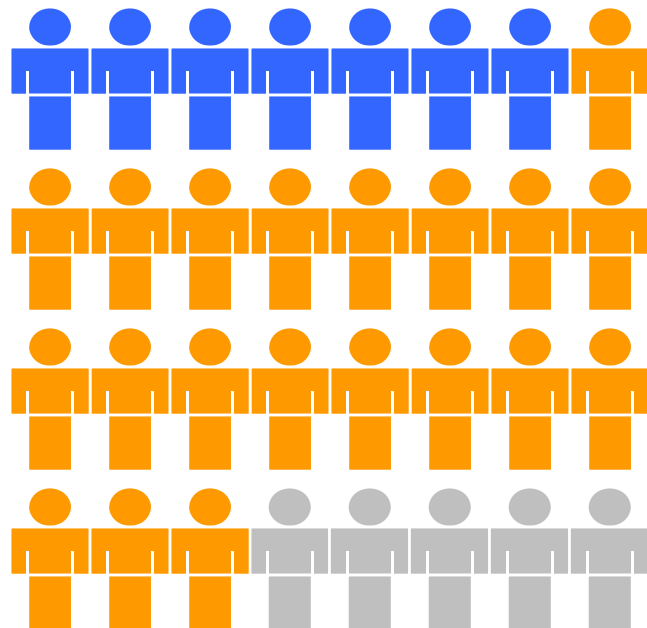
Few teachers believe the remediation process actually helps poor performing teachers improve.

38%

Only 38 percent of teachers strongly agree or agree that **the remediation process gives poorly performing teachers an opportunity to improve their performance.**



Indeed, few of the teachers who enter remediation successfully complete the process.



Of the 32 non-probationary teachers who have entered remediation since 2005:



7 teachers successfully completed the process



20 teachers failed to demonstrate adequate improvement



5 teachers never completed remediation

Source: District-provided remediation data



Most performance dismissal cases in DPS and nationwide last about a year and end with teachers voluntarily resigning or retiring.

48%

of failed dismissal cases nationwide end with voluntary teacher retirement or resignation.

In DPS, **6 of the 7** formal dismissal cases since 2005 resulted in voluntary teacher retirement/resignation

51%

of principals nationwide who have had a dismissal case report that it lasted a year or longer.

Source: Data gathered for TNTP's national study of teacher dismissal. DPS data was provided by the district.



Recommendation:

Provide authentic opportunities for struggling teachers to improve by repurposing the current remediation process and ultimately implementing a comprehensive evaluation and support system that all teachers view with credibility.

Remediation Reforms

▶ Create joint DPS-DCTA committee to spearhead reform of the current remediation process with the goal of creating a meaningful and effective support for struggling performers

▶ Charge the committee to design a remediation process with the following components.

- Meaningful input by the teacher into the remediation goals and activities
- Differentiated and research-based support based upon the teacher's specific deficiencies
- Frequent opportunities for the teacher and principal to determine if support strategies are effective and to make necessary adjustments if not

▶ Hold committee responsible to communicate the benefits and non-adversarial nature of the improved process to teachers and administrators.

▶ Hold the committee accountable for meeting annual goals for increasing teacher confidence in the remediation process.

▶ Once DPS has fully implemented a comprehensive teacher evaluation and support system that teachers view with credibility, consider retiring the formal remediation process and replacing it with integrated support for every teacher as part of the district's overall performance management strategy.



Recommendation: Adopt lower stakes alternatives to dismissal that will help remove ineffective teachers from the district.

Dismissal Recommendations

For teachers who have been given a fair opportunity to improve and are still not performing satisfactorily, offer the teacher an **opportunity to resign or retire** with dignity.

Offer struggling teachers the option of a **multi-year unpaid sabbatical** (without job guarantees upon return) to refresh, recharge or fill skill gaps without distraction.

Enact **salary freezes** for teachers who receive the second-lowest or lowest evaluation rating, and offer financial buy-outs to teachers in these ratings in exchange for irrevocable resignation.

Engage in a one-day **expedited hearing** with a third-party arbitrator to determine if the performance evaluation and development process were followed and that the judgments of school administrator were made in good faith. If so, the teacher should be dismissed that day with no further obligation from the district or union.

Respect the teacher's desire to **seek a teaching position in another district** – as long as they are not a threat to children – by not signaling to other districts the teacher's performance challenges through license revocation or discrediting their professional reputation.



Contents

Introduction

National Landscape

Findings



Recommendations

Appendix



Summary of Recommendations – DPS Board of Education

Objectives – DPS Board of Education

- ▶ Ensure that the allocation of financial and strategic resources is aligned to support the district's and schools' performance management goals.
- ▶ Provide schools with adequate autonomy to implement meaningful building level performance management processes
- ▶ Hold central and school level administrators accountable for faithfully implementing performance management processes, through an annual review of performance management data, including assigned evaluation ratings as compared to school academic performance and rates of conferral of non-probationary status.
- ▶ Act with meaningful deliberation, and not as a rubber stamp, when approving district performance management outcomes, such as non-renewal of probationary teachers and teacher dismissal.



Summary of Recommendations – DPS leadership

Objectives – DPS Leadership

- ▶ Dramatically strengthen the current evaluation system to accurately differentiate and describe teacher performance, aligned to a set of rigorous performance standards and predominantly measured by student performance data.
- ▶ Use teacher effectiveness as a key metric in important human capital decisions, including layoffs; selection of teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and mentors; and increasing compensation for strong teachers while holding raises for teachers who receive low ratings.
- ▶ Develop individual professional development interventions aligned to teacher performance standards, and allocate PD resources on the basis of evaluation data.
- ▶ Hold principals accountable for the decision to grant non-probationary status to teachers by reviewing probationary teacher evaluations to ensure they represent a development arc and by scrutinizing tenure decisions at failing schools.
- ▶ Repurpose remediation through a joint committee with the DCTA
- ▶ Introduce low stakes alternatives to formal dismissal



Summary of Recommendations – Schools and school leaders

Objectives – Schools and school leaders

- ▶ Foster a school culture in which honest discussion of performance is welcome as an essential part of professional growth.
- ▶ Utilize teacher evaluation data for school level human capital decisions, including determining teacher assignments, selecting department and grade level chairs, and retention activities for strong performers. If possible, evaluation data should also be used as the basis for reductions in building staff. However, this reform must be paired with full mutual consent hiring for all schools to prevent the passing of poor performers from school to school.
- ▶ Allocate school professional development resources on the basis of individual development needs, as identified through the evaluation process
- ▶ Align school based performance management tools, such as SGO's and data trackers, with district performance standards and ensure these tools support data from the evaluation process to provide a rich and unified view of individual performance.
- ▶ Evaluate probationary teachers each semester and celebrate the accomplishment of teachers who earn non-probationary status after three years of rigorous evaluation and development.



Summary of Recommendations – Denver Classroom Teachers Association

Objectives – DCTA

- ▶ Train building representatives and individual teachers in the appropriate use and critical importance of the evaluation process. Support and encourage a school culture in which honest discussion of performance is welcomed as an essential part of professional growth.
- ▶ Train building representatives in the purpose of the probationary period to develop new teachers' skills and assess effectiveness in a teacher's early career and charge building representatives with ensuring probationary teachers feel supported *and* accountable for meeting rigorous standards of teacher effectiveness to earn non-probationary status.
- ▶ Conduct an annual survey of teachers' experience with the evaluation process, to assess whether it is seen as credible, fair, and supportive of individual professional growth.
- ▶ Repurpose teacher remediation through a joint committee with DPS



Contents

Introduction

National Landscape

Findings

Recommendations



Appendix



Overview of DPS teacher performance management processes

Probationary period:

- The three year period of a teacher's initial employment in the district
- Probationary teachers can be non-renewed for performance or other causes
- When reemployed for a fourth year, a teacher receives non-probationary status and can only be dismissed for performance concerns via the formal remediation and dismissal process

Teacher evaluation:

- Teachers are evaluated on the basis of classroom observations and other records of teaching service
- Probationary teachers are evaluated annually and non-probationary teachers are evaluated every three years
- Classroom teachers are evaluated by principals and assistant principals

Remediation:

- Upon receiving an unsatisfactory evaluation, a teacher enters remediation for 30 to 90 days to improve up to three serious performance deficiencies
- Peer assistance is available for the teacher

Dismissal:

- If adequate improvement does not occur during remediation, the superintendent may recommend a teacher's dismissal to the board of education
- The teacher can request a hearing with an administrative law judge (ALJ), who issues findings and a recommendation for retention or dismissal. The board of education votes to accept or reject the ALJ's recommendation and this vote must be consistent with the ALJ's findings



Methodology

- The data presented in this report were gathered from five sources:
 - Teacher evaluation, leave of absence, remediation, and dismissal data, as provided by the department of Human Resources.
 - An online survey of district teachers, distributed electronically via SurveyMonkey.com during the period of November 13 to December 8, 2008. The teacher survey response rate was 47% (1,863 out of 3,974) and the completion rate was 71% (1314 out of 1863).
 - An online survey of district principals and assistant principals, distributed electronically via SurveyMonkey.com during the period of November 13 to November 30, 2008. The administrator survey response rate was 68% (150 out of 219) and the completion rate was 79% (118 out of 150).
 - Two principal focus groups in January and February 2009
 - Group A: Principals identified as effective performance managers by DPS and/or DCTA
 - Group B: Control group of principals not identified by DPS or DCTA as effective performance managers
 - One teacher focus group and interviews with teachers who could not attend the focus group, in February and March 2009



Comparative district statistics

	Denver Public Schools	Cincinnati Public Schools (Ohio)*	Toledo Public Schools (Ohio)*	Rockford Public Schools (Illinois)	District U-46 (Elgin, Illinois)
Enrollment	75,269	33,700	27,200	27,622	41,303
Free and reduced price lunch enrollment	66%	60%	55%	72%	48%
Students of color	77%	76%	59%	61%	60%
Full-time teachers	4,555	2,169	1,942	1,833	2,582

* Note: Cincinnati Public Schools and Toledo Public Schools have peer evaluation and remediation.



Areas for administrator training

▶ Defining school-level performance expectations and aligning them with district-level standards.

▶ Consistently communicating expectations to teachers in all subject areas and grade levels and ensuring a common understanding of expectations for the staff as a whole

▶ Providing frequent and immediately actionable feedback to teachers on how they can improve their practice

▶ Managing time spent in classrooms and on administrative tasks and appropriately engaging other team members to increase the amount of feedback that each teacher receives

▶ Accurately assessing teacher performance levels

▶ Accessing and providing differentiated professional development according to identified teacher needs

▶ Efficiently moving poor performers toward appropriate consequences

▶ Better understanding the remediation and dismissal process and how to navigate it.