

RECRUITING QUALITY TEACHERS TO HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS

For More Information:

- <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/scholarships/robinson.html> Prezell R. Robinson Scholars Program
- <http://www.firn.edu/doe/osfa/ctslfactsheet.htm> Florida's Critical Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program
- <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/mtc/teach.htm> The Mississippi Teacher Shortage Act
- <http://www.cerra.org/> South Carolina's Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement

The difficulties in recruiting quality teachers to chronically “hard-to-staff” schools must be addressed to ensure academic success for all students. Often located in high poverty, inner-city or rural areas, hard-to-staff schools suffer from low student performance, high teacher turnover and have high proportions of under-qualified and inexperienced teachers. Research shows that these schools have difficulty attracting and retaining experienced teachers or well-prepared new teachers. Consequently, hard-to-staff schools rely heavily on lateral entry teachers or teachers with little experience.

High quality teachers can be selective in choosing where they want to teach. Cumbersome, delayed hiring practices; lower salaries; negative labels for low-performing schools and undesirable geographic regions often deter both new teachers and veteran teachers from working at hard-to-staff schools. North Carolina is no exception to this national trend. The state has the highest number of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in the country, but a recent analysis shows that half of North Carolina's NBCTs serve in the 20 percent of schools with the smallest percentage of disadvantaged students, while more than one-quarter of schools serving poor and minority students have no NBCTs. The students who need accomplished teachers the most are simply not getting them.

There are no silver bullets for recruiting quality teachers. The experiences in many states demonstrate that salary supplements and other financial incentives are a necessary piece of the puzzle, but monetary rewards alone are not sufficient. A broad array of incentives and supports – financial and non-financial – are necessary to attract high quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

Financial Incentives

- Multi-year bonuses
- Differentiated compensation
- Loan forgiveness
- Relocation reimbursement
- Tuition-free advanced degrees at state universities
- Housing subsidies
- State income tax credits
- College tuition assistance for children of teachers

Non-Financial Incentives

- Early, streamlined hiring practices
- Locating a critical mass of accomplished teachers, such as cohorts of NBCTs, in hard-to-staff schools to reduce isolation and increase networking and support
- Reduced teaching loads
- Smaller class sizes
- Strong leadership and clear administrative support
- Comprehensive induction, mentoring and coaching
- Career pathways

Most of these incentives are being implemented somewhere across the nation, but complete and comprehensive incentive packages are rare. Incentive packages needed to recruit and retain the outstanding 22-year old novice Teaching Fellow to a hard-to-staff school are not the same as the package needed to recruit and retain the 45-year old National Board Certified Teacher or the 58-year old retired teacher who could be lured back into service. In light of these differences, effective recruitment practices in hard-to-staff schools must include a comprehensive incentive package with a menu of relevant choices.

NORTH CAROLINA: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

North Carolina has been proactive in developing policies that strengthen teaching, but to date, few of these policies have specifically targeted the recruitment of teachers who can effectively teach all children in the state's hard-to-staff schools.

North Carolina has one scholarship program, the Prezell Robinson Scholars program, which encourages high school students in low-wealth, hard-to-staff districts to enter the teaching profession. Low-wealth school systems with documented difficulty in recruiting qualified teachers are eligible to participate. Robinson Scholars are 9th, 10th and 11th grade students who are nominated by their district to participate in system-sponsored activities designed to foster their commitment to teaching and enhance the likelihood they will be accepted to and complete an approved teacher education program. These students may be more likely to return to their hard-to-staff districts as teachers, but only 50 scholars statewide receive the Prospective Teacher Scholarship Loan of \$2,500 each year.

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The *Leandro* ruling regarding financial equity in North Carolina schools has helped the state target specific resources to meet student needs at hard-to-staff schools. The governor set aside \$22 million this fall for use by the State Board of Education to implement the Disadvantaged Students Supplemental Fund (DSSF). The DSSF Program provides targeted resources to assist at-risk students in 22 school districts marked by low student performance, low teacher experience, high poverty and high teacher turnover. Some of these funds will go toward expanding existing efforts like the Teacher Working Conditions Survey (including plans to help districts act on the data), K-3 class-size reduction, professional development and other assistance targeted for the highest-poverty/lowest-performing schools in these districts of need. There will also be new investments in the likely expansion of partnerships between public and private schools of education and community colleges located in proximity to hard-to-staff schools throughout the state.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES ACROSS THE NATION

While there are many examples of innovative programs nationwide, Tennessee has effectively issued the most comprehensive package of incentives to recruit high quality and experienced teachers into hard-to-staff schools. Many of the existing examples of state legislative action for addressing the recruitment needs of hard-to-staff schools relate to a series of financial incentives.

Chattanooga, **Tennessee** has moved beyond the reliance of signing bonuses to attract teachers and focuses its resources on its hardest-to-staff schools. Despite the promise of this effort, it should be noted that the incentives provided by the district are largely possible through a multimillion-dollar grant from several local foundations. While the district's recruitment model is worth examining because of its effectiveness, the state has not taken the model to scale and North Carolina would need to consider implications of and methods for expanding the effort statewide.

Chattanooga provides a comprehensive menu of recruitment incentives and improved teacher working conditions for both novice and veteran teachers. The district offers teachers long-term support through effective learning, leadership and development opportunities, including:

- Free tuition toward a master's degree.
- A \$10,000 loan toward a down payment on a house near eligible schools, forgivable if the teacher remains in the school for a minimum of five years.
- \$2,000 for every teacher who boosts overall test scores by a significant degree.

- A \$5,000 annual bonus for all participating teachers.

The program design also places incoming teachers at these schools with cohort groups of highly accomplished teachers within the same school to ensure effective teacher support. The culture at these previously low-performing schools has been dramatically redefined to focus more attention on student success and teacher working conditions.

As a result of these recruiting efforts, staffing vacancies in these schools have decreased dramatically, the applicant pool of teachers is noticeably stronger and student achievement rates are improving. Parents and community members are recognizing the relationship between improving teaching quality and realizing higher student achievement gains.

In 1999, **South Carolina** tried to recruit experienced "teacher specialists" to work in the state's lowest-performing schools. Despite a bonus equal to one-half of the average teacher salary in the southeast (about \$20,000), the state attracted only 20 percent of the 500 teachers they needed in the first year of the program and, to date, only 208 teaching positions in these schools have been filled.

Florida provides additional funds specifically for teachers in low-performing schools. The state has also created a Critical Teacher Shortage Student Loan Forgiveness Program and established housing programs that provide apartment rental discounts and other assistance for new teachers buying a home.

A few states have supported "grow your own" programs that target paraprofessionals already working in hard-to-staff schools. In 1990, California established the state's paraprofessional teacher training program, providing academic scholarships to defray the costs of tuition, books and fees for those seeking certification. Between 1995 and 2001, more than 300 teachers entered California classrooms through the program, which has a 99 percent retention rate. The program continues to expand; in 2001, there were 42 programs across the state serving almost 3,000 paraprofessionals in 90 districts at an average cost of \$3,000 per assistant. Paraprofessionals are generally long-standing residents of the community and are more likely to successfully transition to full-time teaching in hard-to-staff schools.

In July 2001, **California** adopted a policy that awarded Board Certified Teachers who teach in low-performing schools (those below the 50th percentile on the state's Academic Performance Index) a bonus of \$20,000 over four years. This bonus program represents a specific policy effort to encourage the redistribution of excellent teachers.

CONSIDERING THE WHOLE PACKAGE:

The Mississippi Critical Teacher Shortage Act of 1998

The **Mississippi Critical Teacher Shortage Act** provides numerous incentives to attract new teachers to specific geographic areas of the state that are hard to staff. These include both financial and non-financial incentives designed to attract high quality new and experienced teachers to these regions.

- Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship Program: scholarships for full or part-time students willing to teach for one to three years in hard-to-staff schools after their graduation;
- The William F Winter Teacher Scholarship Loan Program: tuition loans for college students who plan to teach in subject or geographic shortage areas;
- Up to \$1,000 in moving expenses for in- and out-of-state teachers to relocate to a shortage area;
- University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program: scholarships for practicing teachers working toward a master's degree who move to hard-to-staff schools;
- Low-cost rental housing for teachers in some shortage areas; and
- Special low-interest home loans to teachers in shortage areas.

While this is an excellent example of a policy that provides a menu of incentives, it has been in place for more than five years and there are still no well documented outcome data.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- **What type of incentive package could effectively recruit high quality candidates and accomplished teachers into hard-to-staff schools?** Research and state experiences consistently show that while money is important, financial incentives alone will not attract enough quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Teachers will respond to incentive packages which attend to financial concerns, strong leadership, working conditions and opportunities for collaboration and incentives aimed at cohorts of student teachers, or cohorts of NBCIs and other accomplished teachers.
- **What is known about the effects of incentives on recruitment and retention of quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools?** North Carolina, like many other states, does not systematically collect data on the effects of recruitment strategies and staffing critical shortage areas with high quality teachers. These data would be invaluable tools for assessing success.
- **Would special preparation for hard-to-staff schools help recruit new candidates?** Student teachers who have been trained to work with disadvantaged students and who have carefully designed internships in hard-to-staff schools are more likely to be willing to teach in those schools. Partnerships between teacher preparation providers and schools are necessary to provide comprehensive support to student teachers during both the internship and the first years of teaching.