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BPS Teacher Retention Faces Challenges

Strategies focusing on collaboration and support show early success

Retention of new teachers in the Boston Public School System (BPS) has become a challenge requiring the development of new support strategies. Over the next several years, the BPS will be required to hire 500 to 700 new teachers each year and will face shortages of teachers in such critical areas as math, science, special education, and bilingual education. Under the federal No Child Left Behind law, these teachers will have to be certified in the subjects they teach. In recent years, Boston's experience is that 50% of all newly hired White, Latino, American-Indian, and Asian-American teachers leave the BPS after four years while 50% of Black teachers leave after three years.

Research by the BPS found that teachers who feel they have poor access to support, including feedback on teaching, help planning lessons, and professional development, are likely to leave the BPS sooner. In response, the BPS has combined existing programs and new initiatives to create the following four strategies to increase teacher retention:

1. Improve coordination between the Human Resources and Teaching and Learning Departments. One such collaboration was this year's jointly planned New Teacher Institute, which provides training for new teachers before classes begin.
2. Increase BPS competition in the market for new teachers by posting openings

earlier in the spring than in previous years. Using more competitive hiring practices will allow the BPS to improve teacher quality. This year, the BPS first posted open teaching positions on February 17, 2006, compared to May 31, 2004 for the 2004-2005 school year.

3. Grow talent through the Boston Teacher Residency program, which is modeled on medical residency, and the Emerging Teacher program, which provides classroom time with an experienced teacher for potential teachers without a background in education.
4. Provide new teachers with intensive, targeted support within the classroom through the New Teacher Support Team, which manages hiring paperwork and hosts events to orient new teachers. Also, full-time and part-time New Teacher Developers give advice on creating lesson plans, supervising classroom behavior, and assessing student learning.

The BPS has realized some early successes through implementation of these strategies. First-year retention has increased from 74% in the 2004-2005 school year to 84% for the 2005-2006 school year. In addition, the school system has increased its capacity for gathering and analyzing teacher retention data in order to continue making improvements in the future.