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NEW TEACHER MENTORING IN NEW YORK CITY¹

Public education benefits both individuals and society. Volumes of research have examined the positive returns to education, which range from increased personal income for individuals to the development of shared civic values that underpin a democratic system. The success of the public school system has long been reliant on its human capital in public school teachers. The quality of learning in classrooms depends on the quality of teaching in classrooms.² Research has also shown, however, that the labor force of teachers is growing increasingly fluid – teachers are leaving classrooms more frequently.³ Turnover is an important issue in any domain because of the high costs associated with the disruption of the stability of the organization. Turnover has particularly grim implications on the quality of public education.

When teachers leave, schools replace departed teachers with beginning teachers. Beginning teachers are, on average, less effective at raising student performance than teachers with more experience.² Turnover rates among new teachers is particularly alarming. A number of studies have found that between 40-50% of new teachers leave within the first five years of entry into the occupation.³

Some turnover is inevitable, and not all attrition is negative. Some teachers retire, others leave to pursue other careers, to raise their children, or for other personal reasons; and a small number are dismissed for poor performance. Some administrators may actually seek to decrease teacher retention in order to lower personnel cost or to avoid stagnating pedagogy by replacing veteran teachers with recent graduates. However, high teacher turnover weakens schools and drains the public school system of resources and efficiency. Estimations of exact costs of teacher turnover vary. Teacher turnover costs differ by district but tend to include costs to schools associated with termination, recruitment, hiring, substitutes, learning curve loss, and training. The Alliance for

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² Hanushek, E., Kain, J., & Rivkin, S. (2005). Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement. *Econometrica* 73(2), pp. 417-458.

³ Ingersoll, R.M. and Smith, T.M. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 60, No. 8, 30-33.

Excellent Education conservatively estimates the total cost of replacing public school teachers who have dropped out of the profession nationwide to be \$2.2 billion a year.⁴

Teacher turnover afflicts schools in several non-pecuniary ways as well. The cost of the loss of continuity within the school is not quantifiable. Schools, particularly in urban and rural districts, often have vacant teaching positions without qualified applicants to fill them. In these cases, schools compensate for the loss by filling vacant positions with long-term substitutes or less-qualified replacements. This problem is especially acute in the hard-to-fill areas of special education, mathematics, and science. School reforms require sustained common commitment of vision, which continual staff turnover disrupts. High teacher turnover leaves schools with a lack of experienced teachers to mentor and support newer or struggling teachers. Additionally, the staff in schools with high-turnover lack expertise to contribute to school policy or program decisions. Furthermore, high teacher turnover in schools has negative psychological effects on the teachers who choose to stay. These teachers have to reconcile their decision to stay with the fact that others similar to them in abilities and education choose to leave. Those teachers who choose to stay in schools with high turnover may become increasingly discontent as a result. This case study concerns one school district's solution to the problem of teacher attrition.

Goals

In August of 2004, New York City launched a groundbreaking teacher mentoring program which revolutionized the way new teachers were supported throughout the district. New York City Department of Education is the largest public school system in the United States with over 1.1 million students in over 1,000 schools. Urban cities like New York often bear the most damage from high teacher attrition. For a variety of factors, highly qualified, experienced teachers rarely choose to work with poor minority students in challenging school contexts. The mentoring initiative's goal is to stem the high attrition rates of new teachers by building "a stable, capable cadre of teachers versed in the cycle of teaching, reflecting, and refining the practice that leads to excellence."⁵

Actors

"We've worked hard to recruit the best and brightest teachers for our schools, and now we want to provide them with the wisdom and guidance they need to adjust to and succeed in their new careers."

NYC Mayor Bloomberg

Researchers and school leaders are keenly aware of the detriments associated with high teacher turnover, however, developing political will and support for addressing this problem is a challenge in most districts. A policy window opened in New York City, and the actors capitalized on the opportunity.

⁴ Alliance for Excellent Education.(2004). Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high quality new teachers.

⁵ New Teacher Center Policy Paper. (2006). Understanding New York City's groundbreaking induction initiative. New Teacher Center at the University of California Santa Cruz.

Mayor Bloomberg is the central actor in the initiation of the mentoring program. He staked his mayoral campaign on comprehensive reform of the New York City public school system - going so far as to urge voters to blame him if schools were not improved.⁶ Prior to becoming mayor, Bloomberg received his MBA degree from Harvard Business School. He was a general partner at Salomon Brothers, where he headed equity trading, sales and, systems development. He made his fortune with his own company, Bloomberg L.P., and is among the world's richest people.

Bloomberg was one of many hopeful politicians campaigning to replace Mayor Guiliani in 2001. Bloomberg, a lifelong member of the Democratic Party, ran for mayor as a member of the Republican Party with Giuliani's endorsement in the general election. With the city's economy still suffering from the 9/11 attacks, Bloomberg campaigned on the city's need for a mayor with business experience. He is known as a political pragmatist and for a managerial style that reflects his experience in the private sector. Bloomberg has chosen to apply a results-based approach to city management.⁷ Bloomberg appointed Joel I. Klein as Chancellor in 2002. Prior to his appointment, Klein served as Assistant Attorney General of the United States in charge of the Antitrust Division.

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the labor union representing most New York City teachers, is also a major player in the inception of the new mentoring program. In fact, the UFT was one of the groups that lobbied to add the mentoring requirement to the teacher credentialing process under state law. Although the UFT and Bloomberg's administration agreed on the merits of mentoring, the two groups were polarized on what seemed to be every other issue in education. The UFT disparaged Klein's appointment as Chancellor because he lacked education experience. Klein's eight-member cabinet did not include a single person who taught or supervised in a NYC school.⁸ The UFT also objected to Bloomberg and Klein frequent reliance on corporate consultants instead of consulting union representatives. The sharpest point of contention between Bloomberg and the UFT centered on the contract. Bloomberg and the UFT could not settle on a contract and it was nearly two and a half years of negotiation and several strike threats before NYC public teachers had a contract.

Top school officials and many business leaders support Bloomberg's contribution to the quality of New York City public schools. They point to a constellation of tangible improvements: a parent coordinator hired for every school; a new training academy for principals; standardized reading and math programs in a city with a constantly mobile student population; new corporate partnerships and tens of millions in private donations; a streamlined administrative structure cleansed of corruption and patronage; and, perhaps most of all, a sharp raising of standards and expectations.⁷

The Department of Education is also a player in the initiation of the NYC mentoring program. Bloomberg's first term as mayor coincided with a major shift of authority over the city's public school system from the state government to the city

⁶ Slackman, M. (2004, April 21). Mayor Determines Focus of 2005 Race: Schools. *New York Times*, Political Memo, p. B1.

⁷ Herszenhorn, D.M. (2004, September 13). Bloomberg Faces his Payoff Year on School Plans. *New York Times*, p. A1

⁸ Barrett, W. & Roberts, A. (2003, October 22-28). The Underside of Bloomberg's School Reform - How the Mayor's Top-Down Revolution Locks Out Communities. *The Village Voice*.

government. From 1968 until 2000, the Board of Education managed New York City's schools. The major appointed only two of the seven members of the Board, thus had limited ability to shape education policy. In addition to the Board, 25 local school boards also played a part in running the system. In 2000, Bloomberg abolished the local boards and Board of Education and instituted a new mayoral agency under his control - the Department of Education.

Another actor in the development of the mentoring program is the New Teacher Center (NTC) of the University of Santa Cruz who is credited with developing the mentoring prototype after which the NYC model was based. The NTC has been training new teacher mentors for 16-years and is active in districts across 31 states. The program has been shown to increase teacher retention and boost student achievement. Nearly 90 percent of teachers who have participated in the Santa Cruz model have remained in the teaching profession after six years, compared with the national rate of 56 percent. The NTC is responsible for training the 300 mentors, each of whom will work with about 17 beginning teachers.⁹

Notably, school leaders, including principals and coaches, were not involved in the development of the mentoring program. Later in the implementation stage, this oversight proved to be a hindrance to the effectiveness of the implementation of the program.¹⁰

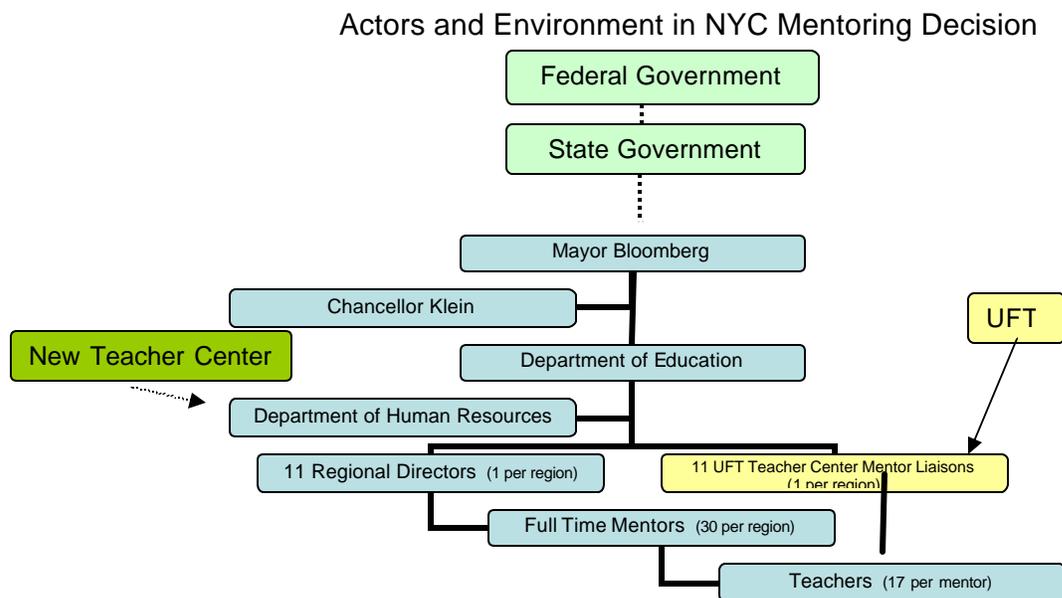


Figure 1: Actors and Environment

Social Structure

The social structure leading up to the decision to institute the NYC mentoring program was highly centralized. Mayor Bloomberg – the self-appointed “Education

⁹ McNulty, J. (2004, September 6). New Teacher Center trains 300 mentors for New York City schools. *UC Santa Cruz Currents*.

¹⁰ New Teacher Center Policy Paper (2006)

Mayor” – prioritized education as his main goal and surrounded himself with like-minded actors to advance his agenda. Bloomberg had been highly successful in the private sector, and he and his appointees bring with them a business mindset and corporate approach to education. The UFT was mistrustful of Bloomberg, who many consider to hold more concentrated power over the schools than any mayor since the 1870’s.¹¹ Bloomberg wielded a considerable amount of power, however, he was still accountable to the State as well as the Federal levels of government.

Technology

The components of the NYC Mentoring Program are as follows¹²:

Rigorous selection process

A panel of knowledgeable education stakeholders and instruction leaders in each of the City’s 11 regions selected the top 339 applicants from among an application pool of over 1,600 NYC educators based on a set of rigorous criteria: including previous educator performance; ability to identify, articulate, and develop high quality instruction; understanding of diverse student populations; and advanced interpersonal skills.

Full Release Time

Mentors are released full time from their jobs to ensure that their number one priority is to help beginning teachers succeed. Salaries are commensurate with the mentor’s most recent position held. Each mentor is paired with 17 new teachers and is expected to meet with each teacher at least 1.5 hours every 6 school days.

Intensive professional development for mentors

Mentors are trained by the New Teacher Center through an extensive professional development program that includes 4 three-day intensive Mentor Academies and bi-weekly Mentor Forums. The program seeks to help mentors understand how to identify the components of high quality teaching using standards-based assessments and tools. The program allows top educators to understand what it is about their own teaching that is effective and then teaches them how to translate that knowledge to beginning teachers in ways that move practice forward.

Formative Assessment System

Mentors receive and learn how to use a comprehensive Formative Assessment System, which includes a series of protocols to ground mentor/teacher conversations in instructional development that leads to improved new teacher practice. A centerpiece of the Assessment System is the Continuum of Teacher Development, occasionally referred to as Teaching Standards, which provides rubrics around the elements of high quality instruction, allowing mentors and new teachers to reflect on classroom practice and assess how new teachers are progressing over time.

¹¹ Herszenhorn, D.M. (2004, September 13)

¹² New Teacher Center Policy Paper (2006)

Regionally based programs

Rather than being based at the school level under the supervision of the principal, mentors are based at the regional level. Under the direction of the program's 11 Regional Directors and 11 UFT Teacher Center Mentor Liaisons, mentors work with new teachers in multiple schools within each region and develop relationships with administrators at each school site. A central office for new teacher induction ensures consistency across all regions, handles logistical support, and initiates dialogue around sharing of best practice across all regions.

Environment

In 2004, the State of New York Board Regents made a modification to the teacher certification requirement that stipulated that before receiving their full teaching credential, all new teachers with less than one year's teaching experience in New York State must receive a quality mentoring experience in their first year of teaching. This change in regulation was intended to help stem the high teacher turnover rates and also to provide more comprehensive methods for inducting new teachers to better impact student achievement. While multiple state policy organizations and advocacy groups lobbied the legislature to attach funding to the new mandate, legislators a shortfall in the State budget inhibited any new appropriations from being allocated. The response to the new legislation varied dramatically across districts. Due to the lack of financial support, some school districts only satisfied the minimum requirements, disregarding suggested state guidelines for developing induction programs. Other districts found loopholes to circumvent the requirement altogether, such as only hiring teachers with at least one year of experience when vacancies occurred.¹³

New York City, however, committed to invest \$36 million in teacher mentoring. Some have suggested that New York City's ability to invoke a comprehensive and robust new teacher support strategy is in large part due to the work that has already been done to develop the political will and raise the expectations of the school community around quality education.

The City of New York elected Michael Bloomberg to the office of the mayor on an education platform two years prior to the mentoring addendum to the teacher certification requirements. With the establishment of the aggressive and politically charged Children First Initiative, the Mayor of New York City and the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools focused public attention on public education and raised the bar on educational accountability. Mayor Bloomberg's political leadership enabled the New York City Department of Education to create a new community of expectation that would enable significant change. He launched a series of initiatives that would ultimately lead to one of the largest annual student test score gains ever made in New York City. The mayor publicly articulated the link between recruiting and retaining teachers and advocated for high quality, instructionally focused mentoring. He used research which showed the new teacher attrition rates were costing the district and state up to hundreds of millions of dollars. Mayor Bloomberg's administration is known for its data-driven, results based approach to city policy. Once it was decided which mentoring program research showed would best meet the goal for supporting and

¹³ New Teacher Center Policy Paper (2006)

developing new teachers, the Department of Education re-allocated local city funds toward the effort.

A mentoring program had been in effect in New York City in the past. The new mentoring program differs from the earlier Mentor Teacher Internship Program, which the UFT helped develop in collaboration with the Board of Education. The former mentorship program enlisted active classroom teachers as mentors who worked only with one or two new teachers during their first year of teaching. However, this mentoring was available only to a subset of new teachers – such as uncertified teachers or Teaching Fellows. Hiring full-time mentors was a key stipulation of Bloomberg’s new mentoring plan.

The UFT’s relationship with Mayor Bloomberg was highly contentious. As would be expected, the union reacted vociferously to Bloomberg’s centralization of power. The union accused Bloomberg new top-down bureaucracy for stamping out teacher flexibility and creativity. “Now I am not saying let a thousand flowers bloom. I’m not saying that there should be no standards or guidelines,” UFT president Randi Weingarten said, “But teachers need to have their professional judgment respected if they are to be effective in the classroom.”¹⁴ The UFT and teachers only settled on a contract agreement after the implementation of the mentoring program, and just before Bloomberg’s re-election campaign, which many considered a political ploy. Even so, at the time of the inception of the mentoring program, the union was still contract-less and blamed the stubborn and arrogant mayor’s office for their situation.¹⁵ At first the UFT supported Bloomberg’s Children First Initiative, but in its implementation found that the initiative focused on creating a new top-down bureaucracy that left no room for classroom flexibility or creativity; and that it did nothing to address class size or safety - two of UFT’s main concerns.

When it came down to negotiating the mentoring program, union officials were concerned that the mentors are being stretched too thin. “Seventeen new teachers for every mentor is too many,” said Weingarten. “How do you engage in a real way with new teachers if you don’t get to spend sufficient time with them?” Each mentor supports 17 first-year teachers on average in three to eight schools, sometimes miles apart. The union conceded the mentor load based on Department of Education’s demonstrated budget constraints. However, the union has not given up. “We are going to continue to fight to lower the ratio,” Weingarten has said.¹⁶

As the effects of high teacher turnover intensify in schools across the nation, the outcome of the NYC mentoring program will become increasingly important. The success or failure of the initiative will have major implications for state and national education policies on strategies for beginning teacher retention.

¹⁴ McFadyen, D. (2004, September 23). “UFT: Schools No Better Under Klein’s Watch.” *New York Teacher*.

¹⁵ Saminather, N. (2005, November 7). Teachers May Have Approved A New Contract, But That Doesn’t Mean They Like It. *Columbia Journalist*.

¹⁶ McFadyen, D. (2005, February 17). Mentors provide crucial support to new teachers. *New York Teacher*.