



**MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Hard-to-Fill Schools Task Force Report

March 16, 2021

Background

In June 2020, Director Annie Woodward, District #4, presented for referral Resolution 2021R-005 regarding difficulty in recruiting and retaining talent in MPS schools in the Central Region. At its regular monthly meeting on September 24, 2020, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors (the Board) considered the resolution and discussed similar difficulties with recruiting and retaining talent in other MPS schools, particularly the Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools.

The Board passed a motion to create a task force to review the challenges in staffing within the CSI schools (the Task Force). The Task Force members were to have varied experiences in this area, to include principals of CSI schools, talent management professionals from the Office of Human Resources, and representation from the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA). The Board held Resolution 2021R-005 in committee until the Task Force can present its review and resulting recommendations.

Task Force's Charge

The Board charged the Task Force with reviewing possible revisions in current policies or procedures to increase the recruitment and long-term stability of employees working in hard-to-staff schools. Specifically, the review was to include, but not be limited to, the current school transfer and interview processes, possible incentives, and the need to ensure that building leaders are collaborative and practice shared leadership.

Summary

The Task Force reviewed the charge from the Board and Resolution 2021R-005 to provide focus and clarity to the Task Force's efforts. The Task Force focused its examination on the problems schools face in recruiting and maintaining a staff of highly-qualified and culturally diverse teachers to serve the students of Milwaukee Public Schools, especially those schools designated as hard-to-fill.

Goal: To recruit and retain professional educators in the CSI schools in MPS in order to create, build and sustain inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments.

The work of the Task Force was grounded in data and research. The Task Force was divided into three separate groups, and each group was provided recruitment and retention data for

CSI schools, as well as selected survey data. Each group member was also charged with relying on their experience and/or an expert lens to help identify why hard-to-fill schools are not able to attract and retain highly qualified and culturally diverse candidates to their schools. Each group utilized the system of Five Whys, a root cause analysis, to identify a problem of practice that could be hindering the recruitment efforts of the CSI schools. The Task Force met as a whole group periodically to review and discuss the work product and recommendations of the subgroups.

Group 1

The problem of practice identified was the importance of onboarding new staff and to identify a process through which all new staff can be integrated to serve the students. Ultimately, **schools need to do a better job of onboarding new employees** to improve the climate and culture of the building. Principals need to be given a script to adopt and modify to ensure the new employees get the necessary assistance as they join the school staff. The initial excitement of a new job, or a first job can soon turn to anxiety and concern. New employees can get overwhelmed with all of the logistical, daily tasks to become comfortable in the new environment, while at the same time trying to acclimate themselves to the classroom and to teaching a new group of students. The onboarding needs to be uniform, consistent and it needs to be spread over the first day, week, month and continue for at least the first year.

Group 2

The problem of practice identified surrounds **mentoring and training of teachers in hard-to-fill schools**. Mentoring is necessary to help the teachers (staff) understand the culture of the students served and the surrounding environment. This, in turn, will help the teachers to commit to and remain in hard-to-fill schools. The mentorship component will ensure that teachers learn to create, build and sustain inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments. It will create a sensitivity to marginalized populations and help to develop nurturing classrooms with a self-care environment.

Group 3

The problem of practice identified is that while MPS does recruit/attract a diverse teacher candidate pool, many of the teachers are hired on permits and the **problem is ensuring these individuals enroll in and complete their programs in a timely manner to become fully-licensed educators**. There is unlimited research that points to the fact that the number of students in education is dropping and that many people who choose teaching ultimately leave the field. Therefore, in order to ensure quality teachers, MPS needs to focus on the permit teachers and provide them with support to finish their programs and become fully-licensed and professional educators.

Areas of Focus

Even though the Task Force was divided into subgroups, each group recognized from the data that MPS recruits well and that the primary issue for MPS is the retention of qualified staff. Thus, each group had similar recommendations that address retention of staff, including additional professional development and training targeted to the CSI schools. All of the teams also promoted the necessary training on culturally-inclusive practices and building relationships among staff within and outside of the building. Finally, certain members also participated in meetings with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) regarding staffing concerns in CSI schools. Among the topics discussed with DPI is consideration of incentives to attract and retain educators in these schools. Incentives were reviewed and recommendations were made to the entire group.

The areas of focus provide the framework for the recommendations outlined later. The areas of focus identified from the subgroup's work are as follows:

Climate and Culture

Recruiting teachers and teachers of color only gets them into the building. For teachers of color especially, "we must pay equal, if not more, attention to their retention to make long-lasting change in the diversity of the workforce" (The Education Trust -Teach Plus, September 2019). In order to retain teachers and teachers of color, school leaders must create a climate and culture where all stakeholders are valued and appreciated.

Professional Learning and Support

When school districts provide relevant professional development opportunities for experienced leaders, staff, and new teachers, school leaders are able to create and sustain inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments.

Mentoring and Coaching

Mentorship is a critical component when developing new teachers during pre and post-employment. Mentorship training and coaching will ensure teachers learn to create, build, and sustain inclusive teaching and learning environments.

Incentives

School districts must compete with outside districts and companies. Hard-to-fill schools must also compete with schools within the district. Districts must consider various options to improve employee satisfaction and leadership pathways in hard-to-fill assignments.

Recommendations

1. Develop and implement a district-wide school-based **onboarding protocol** for all new employees in the district. A district-wide plan will ensure a standard of care with onboarding new employees. But the onboarding effort must be driven within the schools to ensure success. The onboarding should focus on:
 - Basic Needs
 - Expectations
 - Community
 - Academic Goals
 - Professional Growth Plans

This recommendation aligns and supports District Priority #2 - Improve District and School Culture

2. Develop an equitable **professional learning plan with supports** that strengthen the capacity of all staff in Standards-Based Instruction and in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy/Cultural Relevance. In particular, the professional learning plan should incorporate:
 - a. Enhanced mentorship/coaching, especially for new or permit teachers
 - b. Provide release time for professional learning, such as a half-day release, one or two days a month.
 - c. Extend the New Educator Institute throughout the school year to provide ongoing support to new teachers.
 - d. Provide professional development during the summer, such as 4 days for 4 hours a day, particularly for new and permit teachers.
 - e. Require Principals in CSI Schools to attend professional development to support recruitment and retention strategies.
 - f. Provide embedded academic support for permit teachers:
 - i. 4-hour release/weekly to focus on teacher preparation program
 - ii. Before and/or after-school opportunities

This recommendation aligns and supports District Priority #3 - Develop Our Staff

3. Develop competitive compensation, benefits, and **incentives** to improve recruitment and retention efforts in hard-to-fill assignments
 - a. Provide recognition at varying milestones
 - b. Provide Stay Bonuses at varying milestones
 - c. Provide incentive for effective retirees to return to work as a substitute teacher in CSI schools
 - d. Reimbursement of STEDI assessment for substitute licensure

- e. Reassignment of Supplemental Teachers and Substitute Teachers on Special Assignment to only CSI Schools/Central Region

This recommendation aligns and supports District Priority #4 - Ensure Fiscal Responsibility and Transparency

Conclusion

The Task Force believes the recommendations should be adopted as a comprehensive plan to address recruitment and retention challenges in hard-to-fill schools. Taken together, the recommendations address the employee life cycle: attract, recruit, onboard, develop, and retain. The Task Force limited its scope to identifying recommended changes. The Task Force recommends that the administration flesh out details for proper implementation of the recommendations, to include a cost analysis.