

Education Week

American Education's Newspaper of Record

February 27, 2002

The 10-Step Solution

By Arthur E. Wise and Marsha Levine
Education Week

Superintendents of big school districts are faced with a bonanza of Title I funds under the recently enacted "No Child Left Behind" Act of 2001. They are trying to decide how to use the additional money to improve student achievement. Investing in well-qualified teachers is one core strategy. While there are no silver bullets, there are promising practices that have never been tried on a scale equal to the task of improving the flow and quality of teachers to urban schools. One such practice would be the introduction of "professional-development schools."

Here are 10 steps to help urban districts boost achievement in low-performing schools.

These are restructured and restaffed schools operated by districts and universities to prepare new teachers to work effectively in urban settings. Were they to become the norm for teacher preparation and staff development in a city, there is evidence to suggest that student achievement would increase, that new teachers would be more effective, and that those teachers would remain teaching in urban schools longer.

Currently, low-performing urban schools are experiencing the brunt of the teacher shortage. These schools are forced to hire unprepared and inexperienced "teachers," some of whom are the products of quickie alternative- certification programs. The results are predictable: Low-performing children remain low-performing. Sixty percent of the teachers are gone within three years. The schools are forced to replace them with new unprepared and inexperienced teachers. With this passing parade of teaching temps, the cycle of low performance continues.

Here are 10 steps that a school district could take that are likely to improve student achievement in urban districts:

1. Identify the 10 percent lowest-performing schools. Beyond the obvious need represented by the children in these schools, there are two other reasons for selecting them. First, these schools are already low- quality "sink or swim" teacher-training institutions. These are the schools most likely to be assigned the least experienced and least prepared new hires. They also are the schools in greatest need of the most experienced and expert practitioners. This strategy would provide incentives to bring these expert teachers into these schools, along with candidates. Second, if new teachers can be prepared to operate in these most challenging urban schools, they can work in others as well. All teachers new to the district should begin in these schools, whether they are graduates of teacher-preparation institutions or not.
2. Transfer all teachers and administrators in the identified schools. The school clientele should remain the same; the adults should change. New leadership and new faculty

members who share a commitment to a new mission of student achievement, teacher preparation, and staff development are critical for success.

3. Develop partnerships between schools and universities. The partnership is necessary to join the academic knowledge and resources of the university with the practical expertise, resources, and needs of the schools. Both school and university stand to gain from this relationship, which is a departure from more traditional student-teaching arrangements. Both school district and university must be willing to commit resources, share responsibility, and be held accountable for outcomes. Include regional, state, and private universities as well as city-based universities in the partnership. This can expand the pool of teacher-candidates to include those coming from outside the city.

4. Reconstitute the schools as professional-development schools. The professional-development school, or PDS, is to teacher preparation as the teaching hospital is to physician preparation—a new institution to provide high-quality service to students while preparing new generations of teachers. Children in the professional-development school have the benefit of expert teachers and university faculty members present and focusing on their needs. At the same time, these experts are mentoring and supervising candidates who are learning to practice effectively.

**Recruit the best
teachers to be
mentors and
compensate them
accordingly.**

5. Recruit and select the best teachers in the city to be mentor and master teachers and compensate them accordingly. It is essential that senior staff members be specially selected and prepared for assignment in a professional-development school. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification could be considered as one qualification. However,

expertise in teaching must be accompanied by skills in mentoring and supervision. This is, and should be viewed as, a prestige assignment for which appropriate compensation is provided.

6. Require all new teachers to spend their induction year in a professional-development school, to demonstrate that they can teach so that students learn before they are assigned to other schools in the district. If about 10 percent of the schools in a district are professional-development schools, then all teachers new to the district can be accommodated for a year as members of a cohort of interns or induction-year teachers.

7. Create a management and instructional system that ensures that a mentor teacher is responsible for the achievement of every student and that every intern is trained and supervised by qualified mentors.

This may mean breaking the 19th-century "egg crate" organization of the school. Team-teaching might best meet this need in a cost-effective manner. Cohorts of candidates can be integrated into teaching teams led by mentor and master teachers. The team structure can provide time for mentor teachers to work with candidates, and for candidates to have reduced teaching schedules to allow time for professional preparation. Demonstration teaching, large- and small-group instruction, tutoring, peer tutoring, and other strategies would be employed and demonstrated.

8. Create a teacher-preparation curriculum that ensures that interns acquire the knowledge and skill necessary for effective teaching, learning, and assessment. As in a teaching hospital, the curriculum should be developed by school and university faculty members and built around identifying and meeting the needs of the students in the school. The PDS professional-learning model provides opportunities built into the structure of the day for

observations, conferences, participation of candidates in schoolwide and team meetings, and seminars with mentors focused on student work.

9. Evaluate each professional-development school on a periodic basis to determine that it is operating consistent with standards for children, teachers, and professional-development schools.

Determine the funding strategy that makes the most sense.

10. Determine the funding strategy that makes the most sense.

There are many options. One possibility is for districts to pay half the salary for a candidate, with the other half covered by Title I funds. In this way, candidates do not have to forgo a year of salary while they are training. Using Title I funds to supplement candidates' salaries also frees up district funds to compensate mentors and master teachers. Recently retired, highly qualified teachers might be recruited as mentors or master teachers, compensated appropriately but on a part-time basis. District and university can share salaries for professional-development-school coordinators. Mentors or master teachers might have joint appointments in the university, their salaries being supported by both institutions.

Depending on various tactical decisions, this approach may cost no more than the current failed system in the short run, and would save money in the long run by producing a more stable, high-quality teaching force. A district that follows these steps would put into place a strategy for staffing its schools with a flow of teachers who can succeed. A reliable and adequate supply of qualified teachers is a critical factor in breaking the cycle of low performance in urban schools and improving student achievement.

Arthur E. Wise is the president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, with headquarters in Washington, and Marsha Levine is an education consultant who directed NCATE's Professional Development Schools Standards Project. They can be reached by phone at (202) 466-7496, and more information is available at ncate's Web site: <http://www.ncate.org>.