

# Human Resource Management Practices on Teachers Performance

Aseem Saxena<sup>1\*</sup> Rajeev Choubey<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, SVN University

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Management & Commerce, SVN University, Sagar (MP)

**Abstract – Educators and policymakers have faced persistent challenges in closing achievement gaps between low-income and minority students in urban school districts and their peers with greater financial resources and from majority backgrounds. Human Resources Leaders must work to ensure that they are implementing strategic actions that will result in recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers and principals in our most disadvantaged school districts. This qualitative study examines the perceptions of three Human Resources Leaders from urban school districts engaged in a cohort learning experience about strategic actions they have implemented to improve teacher and leader quality in their school districts. The cohort experience, with the pseudonym of the Urban Schools Human Resources Improvement Project, involved ten school districts in a learning experience over a three-year period of time. The findings from this study identify the high impact actions of three Human Resources Leaders from urban school districts engaged in the Urban Schools Human Resources Improvement Project.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Teachers and Principals serve as key levers of change at the local school level and strongly influence the academic achievement of students. A number of researchers have linked teaching and school leadership to student performance (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Rice 2010). Leithwood and associates (2004) suggested that the influence of the principal is second only to the classroom teacher in student achievement, and in their research found that the teacher accounted for thirty three percent of student achievement gains (Leithwood et al., 2004). Considering the essential role of teacher and principal quality in improving student outcomes, reform efforts to improve teacher and principal quality have been implemented across the country with the most acute need in urban school districts.

Acknowledging the role of teacher preparation in student success, the Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required that every teacher working in a public school must be “highly qualified.” This meant that teachers needed to be certified and demonstrate proficiency in their subject matter by having majored in the subject in college, passed a subject-knowledge test, or obtained advanced certification in the subject. Veteran teachers had the additional option of proving their subject-matter expertise through a state-determined, objective and uniform standard of evaluation.

This simplistic view of a highly qualified teacher has been debated in the research and most studies have focused on measurable items such as certification, academic degrees and years of experience. However, these basic identifiers contribute to as little as three percent of the overall student test scores (Education Week, July 8, 2011). Although an overwhelming number of teachers have met the “highly qualified” designation of No Child Left Behind, there is little evidence that teacher quality has improved (Center for Public Education, 2009). Recent research indicates that a combination of characteristics may more accurately define teacher quality and, importantly, the extent to which principals can distinguish less-effective and more effective teachers and be willing to act on the assessment (Hanushek and Rivkin, 2010).

## DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected from multiple sources. First, the information was collected for each school district to ensure they met the criteria of being considered urban school districts. Among the eligible districts, data were collected to identify the number of years each Human Resources Leader has served in his/her role in that district. Then, data was collected to determine if the Human Resources Leader had experience outside of their current district. Finally, the researcher reviewed the Year One Urban Schools Human Resources Improvement Project Evaluation to determine the level of strategy

implementation, as determined by the program evaluator. Once that was accomplished, three participants were invited to participate in the one-on-one interview with the researcher. All three Human Resources Leaders who met the criteria agreed to participate in the study.

## FINDINGS

### A. Human Resources Leader A

Human Resources Leader A, from District 8, has served in her current role for three years as the Chief Human Resources Officer. District 8 is an urban school district that serves over 25,000 students, has a 71% Free and Reduced Meal Rate, and has over 4,500 teachers. Leader A states her career purpose as fully utilizing her talents and expertise in positions of responsibility and influence by practicing ethical leadership. Her educational background includes a liberal arts undergraduate degree and master's degree in the area of industrial and labor relations. She has been working in a variety of roles for over 35 years. Her early career roles were focused in the area of labor relations in a large, highly unionized business field. She had several roles in this field and worked her way up to a supervisory position. For a period of over 20 years, she served in a variety of roles in her current school district, including roles related to labor relations; however, all of her roles were in areas that did not directly focus on curriculum or instruction.

### B. Human Resources Leader B

Human Resources Leader B has served in her current role for three years as the Chief Human Resources Officer in a medium-sized urban school district in the Midwest. District 10 serves over 40,000 students, has an 83% Free and Reduced Meal rate, and has almost 6,200 teachers. In her executive profile, Leader B indicates that she has demonstrated leadership experience in both corporate and non-profit environments; she is an exceptional communicator with strong negotiation and problem-solving skills; and she has experience in leading teams and establishing collaborative partnerships both internally and externally. Her educational background includes an undergraduate degree in international business and a master's degree in organizational development and project management. She has worked in a variety of roles in the last fifteen years including the areas of sales, financial management, and nonprofit leadership. She has worked in other roles in her current school district, including leading the development of the district's work related to teacher and leader effectiveness. All of her previous work experience was in roles that did not directly focus on curriculum or instruction.

### C. Human Resources Leader C

Human Resources Leader C has served in her current role as Chief Human Resources Officer for over 6 years. District 3 is the largest of the three districts selected with almost 80,000 students. This district has a Free and Reduced Meal rate of just over 72% and employs over 13,000 teachers. In her executive profile, Leader C identifies that she is a strategic leader with success in driving transformational change; she is a strong systems thinker; and she is a creative problem solver who works with stakeholders for results. Her educational background includes an undergraduate degree in the liberal arts field and a degree in the legal field.

## RESULTS DISCUSSION

**Finding #1:** Having a clear organizational goal for improved student achievement drives the work of the district. The researcher found that all three of the Human Resources Leaders identified improving student achievement as the organizational goal for the district and that everything they work on must relate directly to this goal.

The three Leaders were unequivocal about this. Even though many districts espouse the importance of increasing student achievement, the critical understanding by these three Human Resources Leaders is that the work of their departments is critical to achieve this mission. They believe their metrics should demonstrate their coownership of student achievement. According to the Odden (2011) framework, it is essential to have clarity on the goals of the district, and these goals should be directly aligned with the purpose of the organization. According to the latest research, approximately 30% of the K-12 population in the United States, representing 15 million students, attends schools in urban school districts across the country, and the average math and reading scores for these urban school districts falls well below those of schools not considered to be urban (NAEP, 2013). In the 2013 results, only three urban school districts scored higher than other large school districts in math and reading scores, and nine urban school districts scored lower than other large districts in both subjects (NAEP, 2013). These disparities in math and reading scores have led Human Resource Leaders to place special emphasis on student achievement in urban districts.

**Finding #2:** Recruiting and selecting high quality teachers whose skill sets match needs in urban school settings is the key strategy for improvement. All three of the Human Resources Leaders identified getting high quality teachers in their districts as the primary strategy for improvement. The Odden framework (2011) identifies improved instruction as a potential key descriptor of the most important

organizational strategy; however, these Human Resources Leaders indicated that the first step had to be recruiting and hiring potentially strong teachers and then there can be a focus on instructional improvement. Leithwood and associates (2004) indicated that the teacher accounts for thirty three percent of student achievement gains.

Considering research indicating that low income and minority students are the least likely to be exposed to high quality teachers (CPRE, 2009), recruiting and selecting high quality teachers is a key strategy for improving outcomes in urban districts.

Researchers have also identified instructional improvement as essential (Darling- Hammond, 2000 & Saphier, et al, 2008). Although these Human Resources Leaders indicated that they were working on developing rubrics of performance, they indicated in their interviews that the most important first step was selecting high quality candidates first.

**Finding #3:** Redesigning the role of teachers and principals to reflect the qualities and motivations that are needed for success in urban school districts is an essential first step. Because the Human Resources Leaders in this study felt that first order business was selecting high quality teachers, they have taken actions to redefine the role of an effective teacher in the urban setting. All three Human Resources Leaders were clear in their beliefs that urban school settings required teachers and principals with a range of skills far beyond the basic definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher as defined in the No Child Left Behind Legislation. In their interviews, they agreed with the research that indicates basic teacher certification in a subject area has a limited causal relationship with student achievement gains (Kane, et al., 2008).

## CONCLUSION

This research article discusses the developed a comprehensive definition of the competencies and motivations of urban school teachers, and there is compelling current research indicating that novice teachers in high poverty schools are more successful and have higher rates of retention when they show perseverance and passion for long term goals, This is aligned with the research linking the importance of teachers who build persistence in their students. All three of the Human Resources Leaders agreed that these types of characteristics are critical, and they have all lead the work of redefining the role of the teacher to include these competencies and motivations as desirable traits for new hires. Specifically, competencies around motivating and working with diverse sets of students are included in their redefined teacher roles.

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**Corresponding Author**

**Aseem Saxena\***

Research Scholar, SVN University

E-Mail – [svnuphd76@gmail.com](mailto:svnuphd76@gmail.com)