

# Study of HRM Practices on Teachers Performance

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**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

Public education systems in the United States are often lauded for providing opportunities for all students to learn and succeed as graduates. However, educators and policymakers have faced persistent challenges in closing achievement gaps between low-income and minority students and their peers with greater financial resources and from majority backgrounds. Many reform efforts such as No Child Left Behind (2001) have largely focused on developing standards and assessments for students; however, in recent years, researchers and education policy organizations have placed greater emphasis on the performance of teachers and principals as a critical contributor to student achievement. Groups have been formed to support the growth of urban superintendents, chief academic officers, and leaders in technology and operations, but an overlooked group has been those leaders focused on improving Human Resources work in urban settings. The evolution of Human Resources in urban school settings is a key component of closing the achievement gap. There has been increased interest from policymakers, educators, and education researchers in ways to ensure that highly effective teachers and principals are placed in schools that need their talents most, and much focus has been on urban education. In the past, the definition of 'urban' was confined to the number of people living in concentrated areas of poverty where there were urbanized areas of 50,000 or more people or urban clusters of at least

25,000 people and less than 50,000 people in an area (Census Bureau). The definition was focused on specific numbers of people and did not take into account other implications that affect urban public school education. When discussing urban schools districts in more current reform efforts, the complexity of defining urban school settings has lead researchers to include a much wider definition, which encompasses poverty, diversity, population, density, cultural and institutional resources, and social stress and dislocation (Portin et al., 2009).

Schools in major metropolitan areas with high concentrations of low-income and minority students (urban districts) often have significantly lower standardized test scores and higher dropout rates than schools in suburban and rural areas (NAEP, 2012). These districts also have challenges recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers and principals (CPRE, 2009; Levin & Quinn, 2003). There is a growing interest in developing strategic Human Capital efforts to recruit and retain high quality teachers and principals in these districts.

Findings of this study are based on information from urban school districts engaged in a program to develop their Human Capital efforts and resources, and this has been a rare opportunity to focus on the area of Human Resources in the urban school setting. A three-year project that has focused on building the capacity of a set of Human Resources Leaders has

provided an opportunity to examine the perceptions of these leaders as change agents for improving the recruitment and retention of quality teachers and principals. Specifically, this study was intended to examine these districts' implementation of strategic Human Capital practices that impact teacher and principal quality. This study was informed by three bodies of work: (a) Teacher and Principal Quality, (b) Strategic Human Capital Management in Education, and (c) Urban Reform Efforts. All three research areas contributed to a more nuanced understanding of policies and practices that will enable urban districts to recruit and retain quality teachers and principals.

## ROLE OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Research indicates that effective teachers and principals make a difference with student achievement. Evidence indicates that in individual schools across the country, including schools in urban school districts, there are examples of schools increasing student achievement. However, urban school districts have not taken this increased achievement to scale (Chenoweth, 2008). 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 district settings.

## TEACHER QUALITY

Historically, the definition of a "Highly Qualified" teacher was one of teachers who met the federal mandate related to training, years of service and certification. Now, most teachers fit into this set of qualifications, as the Highly Qualified Teaching provision is considered a minimum requirement of certification. However, there is no reference to the interaction of certification with working conditions such as retention, limited resources in high impact schools, and the stress that is put on teachers for not meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind related to meeting Annual Yearly Progress. In a study of five districts in three states, the Highly Qualified Teacher provision did not explicitly reference the goal of staffing low performing schools (Roellke & Rice, 2008).

The traditional definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher is now considered to be the bare minimum for prospective teachers, and Teacher Quality encompasses measures beyond inputs of education, training, and years of service. Several measures of teacher quality centered on student achievement are identified in the research base. The components that are highlighted include the importance of preparation for the role, which is often through systems outside of the traditional university and college preparation approach (Ingersoll, 1999; Curtis & Wurtzel, 2010). Teachers are also expected to have content expertise in the area of teaching (Hanushek, 1996). Finally, teachers are expected to meet and exceed the standards of performance set within the district's evaluation system and meeting the district's quality bar (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Defining 'highly effective' and developing more impactful definitions of teacher quality has proven to be particularly challenging for many districts and their stakeholders. Recent research indicates that there is no single teacher characteristic that indicates whether or not a teacher will be effective, as defined by increases in student achievement; instead, there are a variety of characteristics that more directly affect student achievement (Rothman & Barth, 2009). Rothman and Barth found that certification, generally, was not an indicator of effectiveness although certification such as being National Board Certified had some effectiveness. However, not being certified had a negative effect. Additionally, they found that having subject matter knowledge was highly predictive of teacher effectiveness, but having an advanced degree in the subject made a difference only in secondary education and not in elementary education. Finally, a number of studies have found that experience, as defined by seniority, only matters up into the first four years of a teacher's tenure and teachers generally hit a plateau (Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kane; 2005; Rockoff, 2004).

The definition of teacher quality and effectiveness is critical to the work of Human Resources and how it drives who are hired and how they are remunerated for their work. School districts often hire for "highly qualified" instead of the newer definition of teacher quality and then their pay scales reflect increases for advanced degrees and seniority which have not been proven to be indicators of teacher effectiveness (Rothman & Barth, 2009).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A case study methodology was utilized because it enabled the researcher to consider multiple sources of data and examine the context of each of the districts.

The researcher reviewed demographic data and profiles of Human Resources Leaders from the ten districts in the Urban Schools Human Resources Improvement Project, and then utilized purposeful sampling to identify three participants. Ideal participants had (a) been in their leadership roles for at least a two year period, (b) actively engaged in implementing the Project's work to date, and (c) experience in leadership outside of their current school district (including experiences outside of the education sector). These criteria were selected in order to interview Human Resources Leaders who had the time to implement the strategies taught in the Urban Schools Human Resources Improvement Project and who also had perspectives of leadership practices outside of an urban public school setting. Having the time to implement was important to see if more time allowed the leaders to implement more strategies in a deeper manner. The experience outside of the school district was interesting to see if the Human Resources Leaders perceived this experience as helpful or a hindrance.

In-person interviews were held based on a set of open-ended questions related to the Odden (2011) Human Capital framework (Appendix B). Questions centered on themes of Organizational Strategy, Role Design, Competencies and Motivations, Policy Context, Talent Acquisition, Development and Motivation, and Talent Retention. There were also several questions related to participants' actions in key strategic Human Capital areas and their individual experiences with the Urban Schools Human Resources Improvement Project. The interviews lasted approximately sixty minutes and were conducted in a semi-structured format, which allowed some flexibility for follow-up questions. After conducting the interviews, the researcher sought to make sense of the answers by organizing the interview data into three separate case studies, and conducting cross-case analyses to identify patterns and themes.

## CONCLUSION

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. This study evolves from the importance of recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers and principals in our most disadvantaged schools in urban school districts (Odden, 2011). Based on a review of the literature and the results of this study, several themes emerged and recommendations were made for follow-up. The Human Resources Leaders indicated that having a clear district goal and strategy drive the work of Human Resources to design the roles of high quality teachers and principals and select candidates who have the competencies and motivations that match the role expectations. They identified numerous strategies for

recruitment and retention that are promising in urban school districts, and noted that having a context that supports strong selection, performance management, and compensation of high quality candidates will improve the conditions for students in urban school settings (Odden, 2011).

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