



Getting the Best People into the Toughest Jobs

Changes in Talent Management in Education

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Introduction and summary

It is indisputable that teachers and principals have the greatest impact on student learning.¹ Unfortunately, the education system has hired and tenured thousands of ineffective teachers and principals, particularly in high-poverty urban and rural schools. As a consequence, these schools have low levels of student learning.

To remedy this problem, the nation is engaged in multiple activities to get effective teachers into all classrooms and effective principals into all schools through more “strategic management” of education talent. Strategic talent management is an approach that manages all human resource programs—recruitment, selection, placement, development, evaluation, tenure, promotion, dismissal, and compensation—around a set of effectiveness metrics that capture instructional practice and student-learning growth. The theory is that effective principals should manage schools in ways that facilitate teachers’ acquiring the instructional expertise they need to make them and the school effective—that is to say, successful in dramatically boosting student learning.

The issue of strategic talent management in education leapt onto the policy and practice agenda quite recently. Yet in a short time period, huge changes in policy and practice have occurred. From a set of disjointed policies and even-worse practices, a comprehensive and holistic view of strategic talent management in education is developing, supported by new and ambitious federal and state policies and rapidly changing local practices. Admittedly, policy design still needs significant calibration, and local implementation is far from complete. But the landscape of how teachers and principals—the education talent—are managed is dramatically changing. A once-haphazard mix of approaches is moving toward many more strategic systems that are designed to ensure that only effective teachers and principals are recruited, tenured, retained, and well-compensated—particularly in urban and poor rural communities.

This paper examines the evolving landscape of talent management in education, which is broken out in five sections:

- Section one: Talent management, or lack thereof, in education at the close of the 20th century
- Section two: Educational change that began at the dawn of the 21st century
- Section three: Rumbblings of change that evolved into comprehensive new federal and state human-capital management policies and local practices
- Section four: Rumbblings of change that coalesced into a foundation of change across the country and the new world of talent management
- Section five: Why the focus on talent evolved and quickly assumed such a prominent role in the nation's education policy and practice agendas

In part, due to positive state and local response to federal requirements for new education programs such as Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, the Teacher Incentive Fund, and No Child Left Behind waivers, states and districts are identifying and using new channels for recruiting better talent into the nation's schools, especially high-poverty schools in urban and rural areas. States and school districts are also developing new ways of evaluating teachers—methods that use a measure of instructional practice and evidence of student learning, and in some cases student surveys on the academic environment. States and districts are then using these new metrics to determine whether or not to tenure teachers, as a condition for promotion, to implement new salary schedules, and for dismissal—instead of seniority.

Though there is steady progress toward designing and implementing all these new policies and practices across the country, there is also opposition, and the road forward will certainly be bumpy. To be successful, these initiatives need to also solve some major challenges such as making the new evaluation systems affordable; ensuring that the scores that teachers receive on their evaluations derive from “cut” scores that are set at rigorous levels in order to accurately identify the most effective and most ineffective teachers; deciding where to put the toughest requirements for entering the teaching professions so the talent that flows from the new recruitment sources are not shut off; and embedding all this in an effective school improvement strategy that is linked to the new Common Core State Standards Initiative.

At the foundation of every one of these reforms is an acknowledgement across policy communities and shared by a growing number of advocates on the ground

that talent truly matters. In spite of the continuing need to improve curriculum rigor, fund education appropriately, provide quality development and support to teachers, and improve parental support, the undeniable fact remains: There are too few smart and capable people staffing the most challenging schools—people who will work relentlessly to ensure that all students learn. This factor is the impetus for the rapidly changing landscape of human-capital management that is impacting all stages of the educator pipeline.

Among the recommendations we offer is making entry to the profession difficult at every point to ensure that only the top talent meets the entry standards—based on rigorous assessments of content knowledge and by implementing a rigorous “bar exam,” which should assess both instructional expertise and impact on student learning—for the full professional license to be required of every novice teacher at some point after three to five years of teaching. This approach supports both traditional and alternative pathways into the profession, while also ensuring that only demonstrably effective teachers earn the full professional license and then tenure—whatever their pathway into the profession.

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