

## Tools, Rules and Schools: Enabling Quality Teaching in Pittsburgh Public Schools

### Long Term Project Goals:

1. *Excellent classroom instruction benefits every student in Pittsburgh Public Schools*
2. *Pittsburgh has public school system that is equitable; which we define as accessible, deliberate, transparent and accountable for adequately serving all students.*

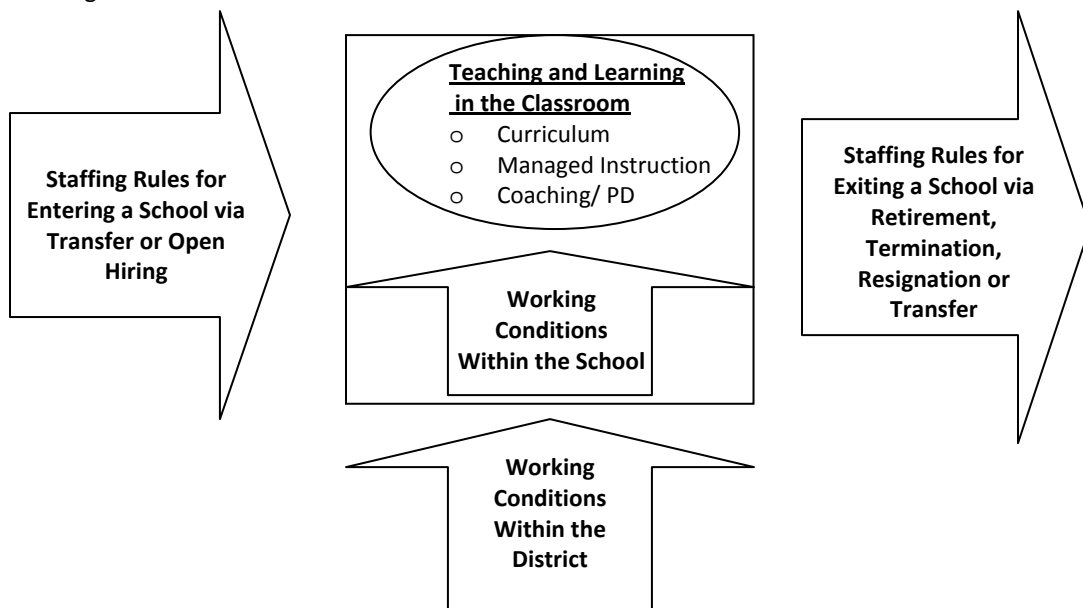
### Background:

At A+ Schools, it is our belief that effective teachers are the biggest contributors to the educational success of children in schools. As an advocate for improvement in public education in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, we are seeking to make changes that ultimately allow for *Excellence for All* in our schools. As outlined as one of A+ Schools' strategic priorities, we seek to ensure that excellent classroom instruction benefits every student within the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

When forming ideas about the direction of this initiative, we explored the areas of: teacher distribution, hiring, recruitment, induction, professional development, evaluation and mobility by gathering and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data. Interviews with teachers, principals and administrators have been conducted and a data request has been submitted and accepted by Pittsburgh Public Schools to share information about the district's teaching force. Preliminary data has been gathered from the PA State Department of Education about the district's teachers and the state policies that allow for the conditions under which the teaching force is created and managed. Through the information we gathered, a review of other teacher quality initiatives in the country and the guidance of the A+ Schools board, we have designed our work to address the following key question:

***In what ways can we support quality teaching and learning in all schools by impacting the staffing rules and working conditions that may exist as barriers between teachers and their best day on the job?***

Teaching and learning that happens in the classroom affects students the most and lies in the hands of teachers. Depicted in Figure 1 are the forces from outside of the classroom that can influence teaching and learning.



**Figure 1: The Forces that Influence Teaching and Learning**

District wide initiatives are underway in regards to evaluation, curriculum, instruction, coaching and professional development in order to provide teachers with tools they can use to advance their practice and improve teaching and learning within their skill set. However, that is only part of what is necessary to ensure that quality instruction happens in every classroom. If teachers aren't able to fully utilize their tools and skills, then the students won't benefit from the teachers' training. Therefore, when addressing excellent teaching, it becomes important to also include an analysis of the working conditions that best support teachers and the staffing rules that apply to how teachers and students are matched. When we look at the process as a system, as shown in Figure 1, we can begin to understand the forces that inhibit quality instruction and seek solutions that will support excellent teaching in every classroom. .

## **Questions We Seek to Answer Through Our Initiative:**

### Teacher Distribution

- To what extent is the distribution of teachers across schools related to where their skills are most needed?
  - What is the current distribution of teachers per school according to gender, salary, district seniority, building seniority, education level, certification, race, qualifications, subject area, etc. in comparison to the student population
  - What are the projected numbers of new teachers that the district will have to hire within the next 5 years? Which schools will be affected the most?
  - What relationships exist, if any, between the factors mentioned above and student achievement in the building?

### Staffing Rules

- What policies and practices, if any, are currently serving as barriers to assigning the best teachers to classrooms that need them the most?
- To what extent do staffing rules contribute to some schools being hard to staff?
  - To what extent is teacher mobility managed in the district, if at all and how does it relate to school quality?
  - What impact do the eligibility list, posting schedule, site based selection, and other hiring practices have on being able to hire the best teachers to fill open positions?

### Teacher Working Conditions

- To what extent do working conditions, on the school or district level, determine a teacher's ability and/or willingness to deliver quality instruction?
- To what extent do working conditions contribute to some schools being hard to staff?
  - What conditions (professional development, cultural literacy support, leadership, student behavior support, etc) are important to teachers in Pittsburgh and would equip them to provide the best instruction?
  - What factors can be replicated and implemented across schools?
  - At which schools are teachers satisfied with their working conditions?
  - What are some of the actions that teachers take if they are unsatisfied with their working conditions? How do they impact the teaching and learning that goes in the school?
  - What impact do teacher absenteeism and the frequency of substitutes being assigned to schools have on the number of quality instructional hours for students and school excellence?

## **Project Team**

Carey Harris, A+ Schools  
Mayada Mansour, A+ Schools

Dr. Mary Kay Stein, University of Pittsburgh's Learning Policy Center  
Dr. Julia Kaufman, University of Pittsburgh's Learning Policy Center  
Dr. Rip Correnti, University of Pittsburgh's Learning Policy Center  
Dr. Catherine Awsumb Nelson  
Barnett Berry, Center for Quality Teaching

**Project Deliverables- Team members leading each section are in parenthesis**

Report 1 (Catherine Nelson)- Policy Brief, including:

- An explanation of the position held by A+ Schools in terms of this initiative
- Context to support the reasons why the initiative is framed in the way that it is
- A sense of urgency in an argument for why we, as a community, should act now to support quality teaching

Report 2 (Learning Policy Center)- Analysis of Teacher Distribution and Policy Recommendations, including:

**Descriptive Quantitative and Qualitative Data:**

- Schools will be broken into quartiles according a variety of factors, including, but may not be limited to, socio economic status of the student body, achievement levels at the school and number of disciplinary actions per 100 students
- Data describing teachers in each of the quartiles listed above will be examined, including, but may not be limited to, number of teachers with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards accreditation, years experience, building level seniority, etc.
- Patterns in the data will be examined comparing the school quartiles with teacher characteristics.
- Trends will be outlined that could support or refute the notion that the distribution of quality teachers is not related to where their skills are needed most
- Based on the quantitative analysis, principals of select schools that exhibit both high and low trends regarding the teacher population will be interviewed for their perspectives on the teacher hiring process and interviews will be conducted with district staff and union officials

**A Regression Based Analysis:**

- The results of the descriptive analysis will be run through a number of regressions to understand whether there is a statistically significant relationship between teacher and school characteristics

**An Analysis of Policies and Practices with Recommendations:**

- An analysis of the staffing rules that exist as products of the policies and practices that may have created the observed distribution of teachers will be conducted
- Recommendations will be made for local and state policy changes to staffing rules that will result in a more effective way to match teachers to the students' needs

Report 3 (Learning Policy Center)- Identification of "Hard to Staff Schools"

**Descriptive Quantitative and Qualitative Data:**

- In analyzing the data regarding teacher transfers from 2006-2009, schools will be identified that have had chronic staffing problems, or would be considered hard to staff.
- Patterns in the data will be examined by comparing the characteristics of teachers in hard to staff schools, teachers in schools that are not hard to staff and teachers that have been the most mobile.

- A purposeful sample of schools will be chosen as subjects for a qualitative analysis to better understand the working conditions (both internal and external) that may make a school hard to staff
- A comparative case-study will be conducted to analyze the similarities and differences in working conditions (leadership, professional development, curriculum, student support services, teacher attendance, availability/ quality of physical and human resources (e.g. coaches, substitute teachers, etc)) between the schools with the highest and lowest number of staff changes

**An Analysis of Policies and Practices with Recommendations:**

- An analysis of the policies and practices that support the working conditions that contribute to making schools hard to staff will be conducted
- Recommendations will be made for local and state policy changes that will support the creation of working conditions that make schools attractive to teachers

Commentary by National research teams (Center for Teaching Quality)- Support and Context

- Review of A+ Schools initiative by Center for Teaching Quality and other organizations that are conducting research nationally
- Support in designing project components which may lie within the scope of expertise established by other researchers (e.g. working conditions survey)
- Feedback on the work done by the A+ Schools Project Team

Public Campaign (A+ Schools) that Includes:

- Key findings and recommendations from reports 1, 2 or 3 being disseminated and discussed within the community
- Comparisons between the staffing rules and working conditions findings and student achievement as reported by the 2009 Report to the Community will be emphasized.
- Information will be collected through action research done by volunteers that visit district schools, interview school staff using a protocol developed based on the findings of reports 1,2 or 3 and research on the resources and practices that have been successful in closing the achievement gap.
- Opportunities will be created for the public to engage in conversations about equity based on the data collected and to advocate for the policy recommendations for ways to equitably and adequately support the learning conditions for all students.

**Measures of Success**

- At least 65 volunteers will be trained and will participate in the public campaign for quality teaching
- At least three reports will be published by the A+ Schools Project Team and covered by the media
- At least one of the recommendations made will appear in the 2010-2013 Collective Bargaining Agreement
- At least one of the recommendations made will be implemented by the Pittsburgh Public School Board
- At least one state legislator will be identified as the A+ Schools champion and will carry the long term recommendations made to the PA Education Committee

**Timeline**

Pittsburgh Public Schools has provided the data that was requested. Negotiations for the next collective bargaining agreement can begin anytime between July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 and February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. Project deliverables will be released incrementally from March to August of 2009.