

The District Role in Supporting High Performance Schools

High performing education systems have organized their governance structures so that schools are supported with the resources, both human and financial, to succeed. Most high performing international education systems do not have the layers of oversight that we find in the U.S. However, there are lessons for school districts to learn from top performing education systems about how successful school systems support high performance learning environments in the schools. From NCEE's research of high performing education systems around the world, we found that districts can support high student achievement with equity by focusing on the following three areas:

1) Staffing for equity

The district is responsible for attracting and retaining talented teachers and principals in all schools equitably. Successful human resource management systems take into account the fact that high-needs schools may need not only equitable but also additional human resources to support disadvantaged students and help them meet high standards. As part of this effort, these systems use incentives to encourage the best teachers to work in schools serving low-income and minority students. The district:

- Ensures that high-needs schools have access to additional human resources, giving at-risk students needed supports
- Provides incentives for strong teachers to teach in low-performing schools so that students in those schools have the best opportunity to learn

2) Supporting teachers' continuous growth and advancement

The district is responsible for establishing personnel management systems that encourage school staff to continuously improve their skills on behalf of students in their schools. These systems include a career ladder with clear steps with increasing responsibility, and incentives and supports to help staff move up these steps. These incentives and supports help teachers to earn increased responsibility, greater recognition, and career growth opportunities. The district:

- Provides training, tools, and incentives to support teachers progressively acquiring greater skills and knowledge
- Encourages and supports teacher action research

3) Supporting struggling schools

The district is responsible for identifying low-performing schools within the district and providing additional supports to those schools. The system strategically uses the expertise of its top teachers and principals to lead the improvement process in weaker schools. The district:

- Assigns principals and teachers from high performing schools to mentor their peers at schools that are less successful
- Changes principal assignments to infuse all schools with fresh ideas and perspectives, and ensure that the most experienced principals spend time in struggling schools
- Provides additional resources to struggling schools

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In the comparative charts below, we provide examples of effective policies and practices used by top-performing jurisdictions internationally, as well as examples of recent innovations in the US, for each of these areas.

District Role: Staffing for Equity

Effective Policy or Practice	International Examples	US Examples
<p>District ensures that high-needs schools have access to additional human resources</p>	<p>In Singapore, additional teachers are assigned to schools to help primary and secondary students who are struggling. Students work in small groups with these teachers until they are “caught up.”</p> <p>Ontario assigns extra teachers to schools to work with more disadvantaged students, with literacy and numeracy coaches at all schools and School Success officers at all secondary schools specifically to work with students at risk of dropping out or not completing graduation requirements.</p> <p>In Finland, each school has specialist teachers available to work in small groups with any students thought by their teachers to need learning assistance. Teacher teams meet weekly to review progress for students needing help. Almost one-third of students in Finland receive academic support this way.</p>	<p>New York City is rolling out trained literacy coaches to its elementary schools, starting with four high-need districts. The goal is to have every 3rd grade student reading on grade level. Coaches will be training the early grade teachers on research-based strategies to help students improve their reading skills.</p>
<p>District provides incentives for strong teachers to go to low-performing schools</p>	<p>In Finland, small allowances or premiums are offered to attract young teachers to teach in small, rural schools, which are less desirable than urban schools.</p> <p>Because it is challenging to recruit and retain high-quality teachers in rural areas, Shanghai transfers excellent school leaders and teachers from urban schools to rural schools for a few years, and brings teachers and principals from rural</p>	<p>District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) uses IMPACTplus, a program that makes the highest performing teachers in the lowest-income schools eligible for the largest bonuses, as an incentive to get the best teachers to teach in low-performing schools. In addition, teachers in the 40 lowest-performing schools can receive up to a \$20,000 bonus if rated as “highly effective” –ten times higher than the bonus</p>

Effective Policy or Practice	International Examples	US Examples
	schools to urban schools so they can learn and adapt practices upon their return to rural schools. ¹	offered to highly effective teachers at low-poverty schools. A recent study found that DCPS retained 89% of its high performing teachers and only 61% of its low performers. ²

District Role: Supporting Teachers' Continuous Growth and Advancement

Effective Policy or Practice	International Examples	US Examples
District provides training, tools, and incentives to support teachers progressively acquiring greater skills and knowledge	<p>In Singapore, school districts assign School Staff Developers (SSD) to each school. SSDs are in charge of organizing and planning staff development for all the teachers at the school. SSDs complete a five-month training for this work and work together with their peer SSDs to organize trainings and learning opportunities for teachers within and across schools. The also work with the district to help identify teachers with leadership potential for training opportunities and work assignments at the Ministry.</p> <p>British Columbia organizes professional development for teachers at the school level in inquiry groups, where teachers choose a problem or topic to focus on and develop strategies to address. The district trains Coordinators of Inquiry to lead this work. In addition, the district facilitates the creation of cross school and cross district groups through its Network of Inquiry and Innovation.³</p>	<p>Washington, DC's Leadership Initiative for Teachers (LIFT) career ladder provides high-performing teachers with opportunities for advancement inside the classroom, as well as additional responsibility and increased recognition and compensation. The district implemented LIFT to retain top performers, reward experience, broaden recognition, and increase career stability. The district role has been helping teachers understand these new professional opportunities and IMPACTplus, a performance-based pay system that provides salary increases for highly effective teachers and bonuses for teachers in high-poverty schools. Evidence suggests that LIFT and IMPACTplus have improved the effectiveness of the DCPS teacher workforce, both through the attrition of low-performing teachers and the performance gains among those teachers who remained.⁴</p> <p>In a model sponsored by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, district, school, and union leaders come together in networks to do "instructional rounds," an idea adopted from medical rounds that doctors use. The network visits a school that has identified an instructional challenge and visitors are invited to ask questions, share observations, and make suggestions.</p>
District encourages and	In Shanghai , districts sponsor journals of basic education and publish papers by teachers and students that show the results of the action research projects. This helps disseminate	North Carolina published the results of classroom-based action research performed by North Carolina teachers in their classrooms. The online portal has over 200 action

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supports teacher action research	<p>the findings, increasing the profession’s collective knowledge. The district also hosts award ceremonies to honor excellent teaching and motivate teachers to improve their practice.</p> <p>The Ontario Ministry of Education gives awards annually to teachers who excel in achieving results for students and in contributing research to the field.⁵</p> <p>The Academy of Singapore Teachers provides courses for teachers to help them conduct classroom-based research and critical inquiry. See the attachment with course descriptions.⁶</p>	research projects and resources that teachers can access on subjects ranging from core subject area teaching to parental involvement and technology integration.

District Role: Supporting Struggling Schools

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District assigns principals and teachers from high performing schools to mentor their peers at schools that are less successful	<p>The Shanghai “Empowered Management” program matches a low-performing school with a high-performing school. The high-performing school is contracted – usually for two years – to support and develop the low-performing school in specific areas of need, such as teaching quality, school management, parent engagement, etc. Teachers and principals from both schools move between the two schools to implement best practices and turn around the low-performing school. The performance of the low-performing school is carefully monitored through evaluations conducted by the district bureaus. The high-performing school is only contractually paid if the terms of the contract have been met and the low-performing school demonstrates some success. In addition, other arrangements can be made, such as asking principals from high-performing schools to manage multiple</p>	Rhode Island provides mentors to principals in low performing schools, as part of a “menu” of supports in the state School Transformation Program. ¹⁰

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	<p>schools or schools in a particular area can form a cluster and share resources, including teachers. To date, over 60 schools have been successfully improved using this model.⁷⁸</p> <p>In Finland, municipalities organize schools into networks, and school staffs are expected to regularly collaborate, with the more experienced leaders and staff becoming mentors to those with less experience.⁹</p>	
<p>District changes principal assignments to infuse all schools with fresh ideas and perspectives, and ensure that the most experienced principals spend time in struggling schools</p>	<p>The Singapore Ministry monitors principals' qualifications and assignments to ensure that principals are exposed to a range of school contexts over the course of their careers, thereby using this system as both a form of ongoing professional development for principals and a way to ensure that struggling schools that principals with the skills and qualifications to address their challenges.¹¹</p>	<p>In Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia, aspiring principals complete residency programs at two different schools. As a result of these school-based experiences, the district gains a better perspective of the skills and competencies each leader brings and can make school assignments that take into account school needs. This is particularly important for struggling schools that may need significant changes and strong leadership.</p> <p>Boston Public Schools partnered with Boston College and the Lynch Leadership Academy to provide a full-year residency program for turnaround principals, who upon completing the program were invited to lead turnaround schools.¹²</p>
<p>District provides additional resources to struggling schools</p>	<p>While Finland does not label schools as "high-performing" or "low-performing," collaboration across all schools is the norm and schools are flagged for additional resources (teachers) and support based on the results of sample tests or educators' own</p>	<p>Some districts in Massachusetts negotiated a provision in the collective bargaining agreement to allow teachers to visit other schools (up to 3</p>

Effective Policy or Practice	International Examples	US Examples
	<p>professional judgment that some students are not succeeding.</p> <p>In British Columbia, one strategy to support struggling schools is school clustering. Multiple schools develop a joint business plan and in turn receive funding for professional development, extracurricular programs and classroom resources across the cluster. High-performing schools benefit from the cluster system because of the increased funding they receive, while low-performing schools gain both funding and insight and support from the teachers and administrators at the high-performing schools.</p>	<p>working days) to encourage collaboration and peer support.¹³</p>

¹ Cheng, K. (2014). Shanghai: How a big city in a developing country leaped to the head of the class. In M. Tucker (Ed.), *Surpassing Shanghai: An agenda for American education built on the world's leading systems.* (pp. 21-50). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

² TNTP, *The Irreplaceables*. 2012.

³ Beyond PD

⁴ Thomas Dee and James Wyckoff, "Incentives, Selection, and Teacher Performance: Evidence from IMPACT," Working Paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2013, p.27. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w19529>.

⁵ Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). "Developing and Sustaining a High-Quality Teaching Force." Retrieved from <http://asiasociety.org/les/gcen-darlinghammond.pdf>, p. 8.

⁶ <http://www.academyofsingaporeteachers.moe.gov.sg/professional-excellence/research-and-critical-inquiry/critical-inquiry-courses>

⁷ National Public Education Support Fund (2011). Singapore and Shanghai. Retrieved from <http://www.npesf.org/singapore-shanghai>

⁸ See also the Xiao Tang case study example of an Empowered Management partnership

⁹ Sahlberg, P. (2015). *Finnish Lessons 2.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* Second Edition. New York: Columbia University, Teachers College Press, p. 165, 169.

¹⁰ <http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Information-and-Accountability-User-Friendly-Data/Transformation/RI-Flex-Menu-School-Interventions.pdf>

¹¹ Dr. Poon Chew Lin, Deputy Director, Research and Evaluation, Planning Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore, personal communication, May 13, Dr. Poon Chew Lin, Deputy Director, Research and Evaluation, Planning Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore, personal communication, May 13, 2015.

¹² <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/turnaround/practices-report-2014.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/turnaround/practices-report-2014.pdf>