No silver bullets

The quality of teachers is one of the most significant determinants of student success, so school districts pursuing better outcomes should consider ten best practices in talent management.

Paul Kihn and Andy Moffit

[1] Of course, other countries are interested in improving teacher effectiveness as well, but this article focuses on specific experiences in the United States, which the authors believe can provide useful lessons in other geographies.

[2] See William Sander and June Rivers, "Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement" (University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment

School systems in the United States have been working diligently to improve teacher effectiveness in recent years.[1] The issue has received a good deal of attention from not only school systems themselves, but also governments and large philanthropic organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The US Department of Education includes teacher effectiveness as a central component in two of its competitive grant programs, Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation. Focusing on teacher effectiveness is logical, as it is widely regarded and amply documented to be the most important in-school determinant of student outcomes.[2]

Yet most school systems tend to manage their efforts to promote teacher effectiveness in an ad hoc way, often focusing disproportionate resources on the latest silver bullet, such as pay-for-performance systems or multimeasure teacher evaluations that include some measure of student learning growth, in the hope that such individual initiatives will deliver the desired results. Perhaps unsurprisingly, research suggests that many stand-alone initiatives have mixed results.[3]

Instead, school systems should more widely adopt the end-to-end talent management practices currently used by other talent-driven industries, including medicine, law, accounting, and financial services. Some school systems in the United

States, such as those in New York City, Denver, and Pittsburgh, have begun implementing the relentless focus on optimizing each of the key activities in the talent-management process practiced in these disciplines. The initial results have been promising.

Of course, individual school systems have unique situations in terms of demographics, politics, and the range of stakeholders involved, which affect the choice of feasible talent management practices, but based on our experience, we have identified ten integrated strategic activities falling into four general categories: (1) find, help prepare, and attract quality teachers; (2) tailor selection and placement to actual needs; (3) individualize instructional support and development; and (4) tie performance management to student outcomes (exhibit). Together, these activities make up a distinctive approach to teacher talent management. None of these activities is particularly radical, and many school systems may

already be doing one or more of them well. But school systems that can raise the bar throughout the entire integrated process should see substantial improvements in teacher effectiveness and the corresponding student outcomes.

As a practical matter, school systems will see less progress if a large contingent of an overwhelmingly tenured teacher population resists improvement efforts; there are limits to available performance-management measures for tenured teachers. Positive change therefore requires that these efforts at talent management be a holistic approach that emphasizes professional expectations and personal growth for all teachers and incorporates the use of positive incentives.

Find, help prepare, and attract quality teachers

To ensure that school systems put quality teachers in their classrooms, administrators need to know where to find talented candidates, assist in their

Center, Knoxville, 1996); Daniel Aaronson, Lisa Barrow, and William Sander, "Teachers and student achievement in Chicago Public Schools" (Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, 2003).

[3] See Douglas N. Harris, "The evidence on Race to the Top," *Education Week*, March 31, 2010; Stephen Sawchuck, "Performance-pay model shows no achievement edge," *Education Week*, June 9, 2010.

Exhibit

Strategic talent management is a multistage process.

Find, help prepare, attract quality teachers	Know, build active partnerships with sources of talent Create, market value proposition that attracts quality teachers
Tailor selection, placement to actual needs	Use data-driven selection process Match teacher placement with system needs
Individualize instructional support, development	Provide quality student data, instructional support Tailor professional-development opportunities Differentiate career paths, opportunities
Tie performance management to student outcomes	Identify, codify core competencies Institutionalize quality evaluation processes, feedback Provide aligned performance incentives

Source: McKinsey analysis; expert interviews

preparation for entry into the profession, and then attract the best people with a value proposition uniquely tailored to their interests.

Know and build active partnerships with sources of talent

Many school systems recruit heavily from nearby teacher-training schools, and traditional teacher preparation programs typically involve practice teaching in local schools. Historically, however, there has been limited coordination between university-run teacher preparation programs and the school systems that employ their graduates in classrooms.

To prepare most effectively the prospective teachers they hope to hire, some school systems are actively partnering with or seeking to influence university programs. For example, the Denver Public Schools have created a teacher residency program in partnership with the University of Denver. Designed to cultivate teachers for employment in high-need Denver schools, the program focuses specifically on special education and bilingual instruction. This program, modeled on physician residencies that emphasize hands-on learning, enables a new recruit to serve as an apprentice in a classroom with a "master" teacher for a year while taking classes to earn a master's degree in curriculum and instruction.

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) and several other systems—in partnership with the New Teacher Project, an alternative teacher preparation program that recruits and places teachers primarily in poor, urban schools—have created their own programs to prepare high-quality applicants for the unique challenges present in their systems. In 2000, NYCDOE created the NYC Teaching Fellows program, which recruits people from other careers to teach in high-demand subject areas,

such as math, science, and special education. The program provides ongoing training and cohort group support as the recruits teach full-time while obtaining a master's degree and certification. Over 10 percent of all NYCDOE teachers today (more than 9,000 teachers) started their careers as fellows, and almost 80 percent of these former fellows teach high-need subjects.[4]

Create and market a value proposition that attracts quality teachers

To attract the talent it needs, a school system needs to communicate to potential candidates a distinctive value proposition. A large part of any job's value proposition is the salary and benefits package. But other considerations can factor heavily as well, such as opportunities for personal development and career growth, working conditions, job security, the organization's and the job's purpose, and the opportunity to make a difference to society.

In developing an attractive value proposition, school systems need to understand what people coming to the teaching profession value. Successful systems continually evaluate their talent pool, conduct market research among applicants and non-applicants, and adjust their value proposition to the extent they can within budgetary and other constraints. For example, recognizing that teaching salaries typically make the profession a less desirable option for top college graduates in the United States, the NYCDOE has offered signing bonuses for certain subjects, including bilingual education and math, and has also offered higher starting salaries (offset by lower pay increases in later years) than have been offered in the past. And to attract professionals from other industries, the NYCDOE has also conducted a broad marketing campaign, called "Teach NYC," that emphasizes the impact teaching can have on children's lives.

[4] NYC Teaching Fellows, "Our impact," https://www. nycteachingfellows.org/ purpose/impact.asp.

In another example, the District of Columbia Public Schools has recently negotiated with the local American Federation of Teachers affiliate to create an innovative new contract designed to offer teachers significant pay increases in exchange for more rigorous performance-based accountability. Teachers who opt into this program can receive a maximum salary of up to $130,000, and district administrators believe that this improved value proposition will attract high-caliber talent into the district's teacher corps.

Tailor selection and placement to actual needs

[5] E. Michaels, H. Handfield-Jones, and B. Axelrod, *The War for Talent* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001).

Beyond having an attractive value proposition, school systems can move toward winning what the private sector refers to as the "war for talent"[5]
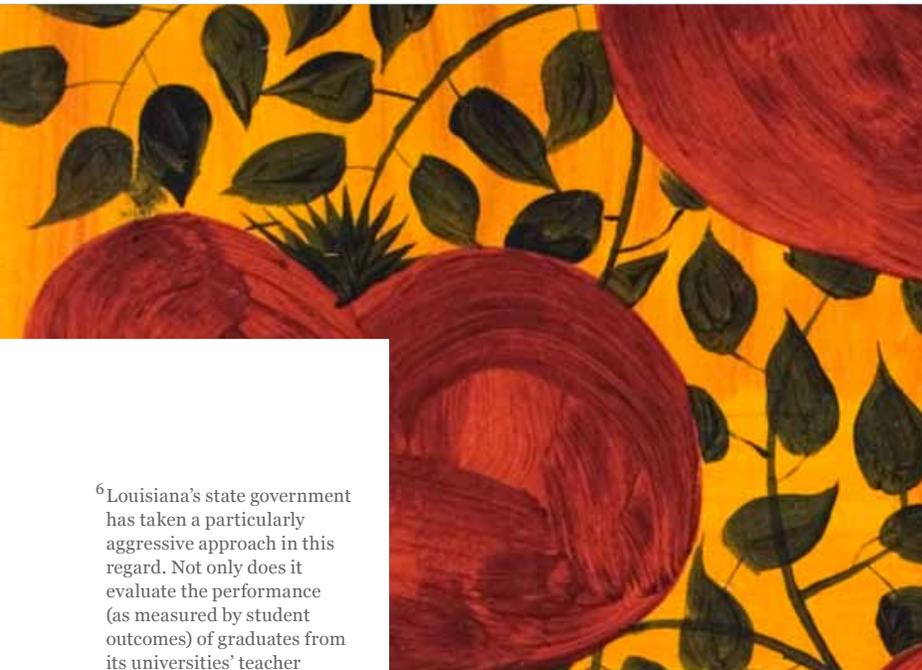
by being more rigorous in how they select and place high-quality teachers.

Use a data-driven selection process

Many school systems have faced the competitive challenges of recruiting teachers by investing in the efficiency of their recruiting operations. By identifying demand earlier, streamlining paperwork, and reducing application review times, these systems have reduced costs, improved their ability to move quickly in hiring good candidates, and minimized situations in which time pressure forced them to hire less-than-optimal candidates. But to ensure that they are hiring the best candidates to meet their particular needs, school systems can improve further by adopting data-driven recruiting and selection processes. For

[6] Louisiana's state government has taken a particularly aggressive approach in this regard. Not only does it evaluate the performance (as measured by student outcomes) of graduates from its universities' teacher preparation programs, but it also ties a certain amount of the state aid these university programs can receive to the performance of their graduates. See George H. Noell, Bethany A. Porter, R. Maria Patt, and Amanda Dahir, "Value added assessment of teacher preparation in Louisiana: 2004–2005 to 2006–2007" (Louisiana State University, November 17, 2008).

[7] Budget inequities between schools within the same district—driven by differences in teacher salaries actually paid to teachers of differing seniority—can be as large as or larger than interdistrict funding disparities. See, for example, Education Trust–West, *California's Hidden Teacher Spending Gap: How State and District Budgeting Practices Shortchange Poor and Minority Students and Their Schools* (Oakland, CA: Education Trust–West, 2005).

[8] Timothy Daly, David Keeling, Rachel Grainger, and Adele Grundies, *Mutual Benefits: New York City's Shift to Mutual Consent in Teacher Hiring* (The New Teacher Project, 2008).

example, some systems have been examining the relative success of the teachers they hire from different teacher preparation programs; they focus recruitment efforts on the programs that have produced the best teachers.[6] A few others have made significant investments in identifying the core competencies of their most successful teachers and then focused their recruitment and selection processes on those competencies. The Pittsburgh Public Schools have adopted a framework, called Teach in Pittsburgh, that uses multiple initial screening tools, including a Web-based hiring survey, to identify high-potential candidates.

Match teacher placement with system needs

To maximize student outcomes and teacher retention, school systems should place teachers where their unique skills are most needed. Because of seniority provisions in collective bargaining agreements, more experienced teachers frequently end up in easier-to-staff positions.[7] To address this challenge, some

systems are offering financial incentives—often developed and negotiated with teachers' unions—to encourage high-potential and high-performing teachers to accept placements in hard-to-staff situations. Other systems are more fundamentally changing the placement process: NYCDOE and the school systems in Chicago and several other cities have moved to a "mutual consent" hiring model, which prevents vacancies from being filled based solely on seniority. In this model, both the principal (or school leadership team) and the individual teacher must agree to a particular school assignment. The approach has succeeded in offering teachers and schools better choices, increased flexibility, and greater transparency throughout the staffing process.[8]

Individualize instructional support and teacher development

Successful school systems give teachers access to information, support, and development opportunities—each differentiated by the teacher's tenure, skill set, and classroom needs.

Provide quality student data and instructional support

Just as an individual medical diagnosis must be based on sound data if it is to improve a patient's health outcome, so too will a diagnosis of accurate data on an individual student's performance improve the educational outcome. With the proper information and instructional materials, teachers can deliver more individualized instruction for each student. The school systems that have been most successful in this regard have been moving away from the traditional year-end comprehensive assessments of students' needs and progress to more frequent formal assessments. As a result, teachers are not left to follow their instincts or use informal assessments to determine how well students are mastering material.

For example, the NYCDOE developed an innovative information system, the Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS), which provides a single place for educators to find (and contribute) important information that can help accelerate student learning. Through ARIS's secure online platform, educators can explore data such as assessment results for individual students, share what they have learned by publishing documents and taking part in discussions, find other educators facing similar challenges, and create collaborative communities to solve problems together. NYCDOE also employs dedicated "data coaches," who work with school leadership teams to help them improve their focus and use data to give teachers targeted support for improving their performance.

Tailor professional-development opportunities

As is true for all professionals, individual teachers have their own strengths and weaknesses. In recognition of this fact, some school systems are moving away from one-size-fits-all professional-development opportunities and toward customized programs based on specific classroom subjects or instructional techniques. Others are employing coaches to work with teachers in the classroom, ensuring that training is immediate and relevant to the teacher's situation. For example, the Pittsburgh Public Schools, in partnership with the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, have identified teachers who have proven themselves to be highly effective and designated them "instructional teacher leaders," who provide tailored professional development and coaching to other teachers throughout the district, a role that carries with it additional compensation.

Differentiate career paths and opportunities

To maximize individual performance and retain high-performing individuals, school systems should offer teachers a wide variety of roles and opportunities that encourage growth and learning. Recognizing the importance of a career ladder for teachers who want to stay in the classroom, some systems are moving away from the binary teacher-versus-administrator track, and have created differentiated job descriptions, expectations, and subsequent evaluation and promotion opportunities.

For example, Pittsburgh, in collaboration with its teachers' union, is in the process of defining for teachers multiple "career ladder" opportunities that recognize and reward demonstrated effectiveness while allowing teachers to stay close to the classroom. Highly effective and motivated teachers who are interested in providing intensive, hands-on academic and personal support to students over a longer period of time can follow students from ninth to tenth grade in Pittsburgh's "promise-readiness corps." Content experts for grades six through twelve can help evaluate and coach their peers or design and deliver customized professional development programs through the "high school instructional teacher leaders" program. And through the "K–8 turnaround teachers" program, teachers who are highly effective in both content delivery and student engagement can serve as cultural change agents in low-performing classrooms during a three-year assignment.[9]

Tie performance management to student outcomes

The linchpin of all talent-based businesses is a set of robust performance management processes that ensures a focus on the activities that generate strong outcomes. These processes specify desired competencies and activities. They set and evaluate performance against expectations and ensure responses that will encourage the retention of high performers. The Gates Foundation is investing heavily in an effort to understand the activities that drive student achievement outcomes.

Identify and codify core competencies

Many school systems are working to codify teachers' key competencies and responsibilities, as well as to create a variety of evaluative rubrics. For example, Pittsburgh has developed a new evaluation system called RISE (Research-based

Inclusive System of Evaluation), the result of a multiyear collaborative effort to capture the most important aspects of teaching practice and develop a detailed evaluative tool that the entire district will use to support teachers in improving their performance.

Institutionalize quality evaluation processes and feedback

Most often, teachers are evaluated every other year and rated only as satisfactory or unsatisfactory, without any indication of relative strengths and weaknesses.[10] Systems focusing on teacher effectiveness take a more rigorous, performance-driven approach to evaluations. Having identified what good teaching looks like (based on the kinds of processes described in the previous paragraph), they communicate those elements to teachers. Finally, they evaluate teachers against those elements, using a transparent rubric and process. The most highly developed systems go one step further, tailoring professional development to the individualized outcomes of the evaluation process. A key element is the personalized feedback and training that teachers receive.

Provide aligned performance incentives

To ensure that teachers are focusing on the right activities, school systems should provide meaningful incentives—both positive and negative—that are aligned with student outcomes. Some systems, including NYCDOE and Pittsburgh, are working to ensure that teacher tenure review is an earned milestone, no longer attained by all teachers who achieve a target level of seniority. Other systems are working on emphasizing the role of student performance in teacher compensation. Denver's ProComp system, designed in partnership with its teachers' union, provides additional compensation to teachers if their schools do well, students meet educational growth objectives, and

9 Pittsburgh Public Schools and Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, "Empowering effective teachers," 2010, http://www.pps.k12.pa.us.
10 Daniel Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern, and David Keeling, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act On Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (The New Teacher Project, 2009).

students achieve above-average growth relative to their peers on state exams.

As noted, deploying a range of positive incentives can be particularly useful to improve teacher performance, given the prevalence of tenure among teachers, which circumscribes use of negative consequences. Although the system also includes compensation for inputs such as attendance at development sessions, master's degrees, and satisfactory evaluations, the role of student progress and performance is now firmly entrenched.

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Probably all school systems could benefit by adopting an integrated talent management strategy based on these ten activities, but we definitely do not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach. Each school system will have to design particular activities appropriate to its circumstances. Systems must recognize at the outset any challenges they may face in implementing changes, including the difficulty of installing new management systems and, in particular, the intricacies of rolling out key reforms in a collaborative, nonadversarial manner. The reward can be the sort of long-term success that so many school systems have struggled to find for so long.○

Paul Kihn is a principal in McKinsey's Washington, DC, office, and **Andy Moffit** is a senior expert in the Boston office. Copyright © 2011 McKinsey & Company. All rights reserved.