



Connecticut Parent Power

Educating, Engaging, and Mobilizing Parents to Act on Children's Issues

Date: 12/28/10
To: Achievement Gap Task Force Members
From: Paul Wessel, Director, CT Parent Power
Re: Follow up on Teachers at Large / Circuit Rider proposal

I'm sorry I was unable to make our last meeting, but wanted to continue to weigh in on the "Teachers At Large" proposal.

I had the good luck recently to be referred to a September, 2010 McKinsey & Company report entitled Closing the talent gap: Attracting and Retaining top-third graduates to careers in teaching.¹ I was struck in reading this that the frequent emphasis about *current* underperforming teachers (particularly the focus on tenure and seniority) overshadows an equally large issue: our *future* teachers. McKinsey raises a couple of compelling points for us to think about:

- **Internationally, high-performing schools systems draw from the top-third of college students; in the US, the teaching profession tends not to attract the country's "best and brightest."**
- **Half of the current teaching workforce will retire in the next decade.**

Combined with another comment recently from U.S. Senator and former Denver Public Schools Superintendent Michael Bennet²:

- **Nearly half the teachers leave the profession within 5 years,**

all this underscored for me the importance of attracting and retaining strong teachers to the profession moving forward. I continue to think, and have been encouraged to promote, the "Teachers At Large / Circuit Rider" concept.

The next page includes my prior comments on this. Thanks again for your consideration.

¹ Executive summary attached. Download full report at http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/Social_Sector/our_practices/Education/Knowledge_Highlights/Closing_the_talent_gap.aspx

² See <http://bennet.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=0A118123-8524-480C-87F8-BC32F0010433>

Table 4: Proposal 7: concerning "Teachers At Large," I weighed in via email with the following

The value of this approach, like charter schools directly authorized by the State Board of Education, is that it offers up the possibility of a "game changer." To the extent that the power and capacity of the the State Department of Education is enhanced, as many are suggesting, these teachers would be another resource to be deployed by the State in supporting local school districts committed to improvement.

My suggestion is that the SDE and/or Commissioner of Education be directed to collaborate with CAFE, AFT, CEA and other relevant parties to propose an approach by 1/1/12 to implement the concept.

The original proposal was as follows:

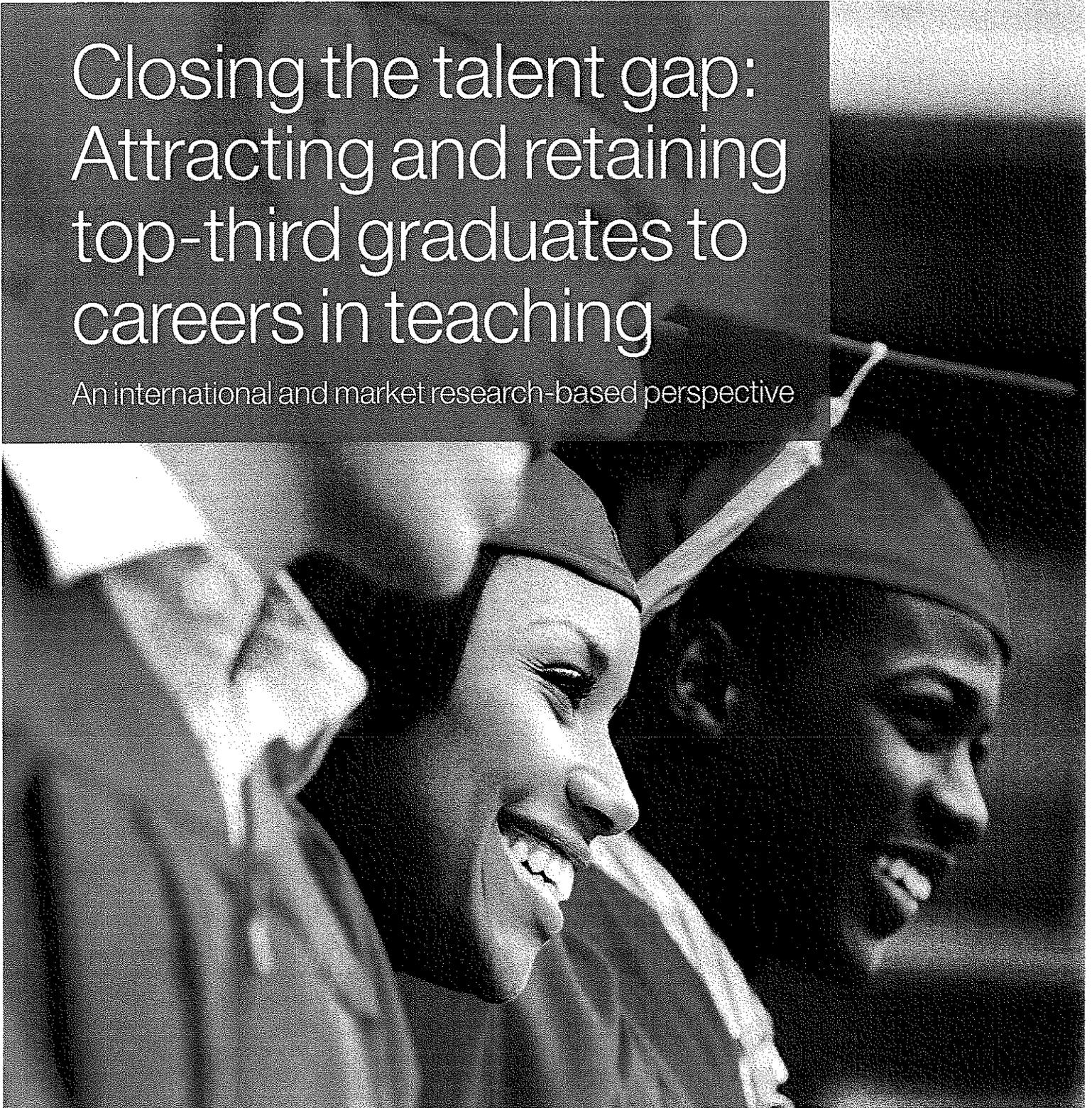
"Teachers at Large" employed directly by the State to work in high-need school districts: Like the "circuit riders" in early American history, the State of Connecticut could directly employ master teachers available for placements in schools around the state. Teachers could move between low-performing schools and less challenging assignments over the course of their career, accruing cross-district expertise and seniority over time. Starting from a clean slate, a new labor relations paradigm could be developed reflecting current best practices, building on the New Haven teachers' contract model and others. Incentives for urban placements and accountability standards could be built into the model. The State itself could bear the cost these master teachers, the local school district could (similar to "cost centers" in the private sector), or they could be jointly shared. This would be a comparable approach to supplementing the existing teacher workforce as that performed today by Teach For America, with the benefit of being able to retain and develop teachers far beyond the two years typical of TFA placements. Conceivably this approach could be expanded to administrators as well.

A number of models for such a state – local partnership have been explored recently in Minnesota, Oregon, Vermont, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania , and Rhode Island. (Hawaii is unique in having no local school districts and all teachers employed by the state itself.) If there's interest in exploring this further, perhaps a request could be made of the Office of Legislative Research.

Education

Closing the talent gap: Attracting and retaining top-third graduates to careers in teaching

An international and market research-based perspective



The U.S. could dramatically increase the portion of top third new hires in high needs districts.



Executive Summary

When McKinsey & Company analyzed “How the World’s Best School Systems Stay on Top” (2007), we found a few common themes. Perhaps the most important was that “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.” This simple statement conveys a profound truth—and masks considerable complexity. Research has shown that of all the controllable factors in an education system, the most important by far is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. The world’s best-performing school systems make great teaching their “north star.” They have strategic and systematic approaches to attract, develop, retain, and ensure the efficacy of the most talented educators—and they make sure great teachers serve students of all socio-economic backgrounds.

The U.S. does not take a strategic or systematic approach to nurturing teaching talent. Buffeted by a chaotic mix of labor market trends, university economics, and local school district and budget dynamics, we have failed to attract, develop, reward or retain outstanding professional teaching talent on a consistent basis.

Fortunately, improving “teacher effectiveness” to lift student achievement has become a major reform theme in American education. Many school districts and states, including some “Race to the Top” competitors and other education stakeholders like local teacher unions and charter management organizations, are finding new ways to measure, evaluate, reward, coach, and replicate effectiveness in teaching. Yet most such efforts focus either on improving the effectiveness of teachers who are already in the classroom—that is, people who have chosen teaching given the current nature of the profession—or on retaining the best performers and dismissing the least effective. Little attention has been paid to altering the value proposition of

teaching to draw young people with strong academic backgrounds to the career.

McKinsey’s work with school systems in more than 50 countries suggests this is an important gap in the U.S. debate, because the world’s top performing school systems—Singapore, Finland and South Korea—make a different choice. They recruit, develop and retain what this report will call “top third+” students as one of their central education strategies, and they’ve achieved extraordinary results. These systems recruit 100% of their teacher corps from the top third of the academic cohort, and then screen for other important qualities as well. In the U.S., by contrast, 23% of new teachers come from the top third, and just 14% in high poverty schools, which find it especially difficult to attract and retain talented teachers. It is a remarkably large difference in approach, and in results.

Paradoxically, U.S. research on whether teachers’ academic backgrounds significantly predict classroom effectiveness is very mixed, and it suggests that merely sprinkling teachers with top-third academic credentials into our existing system will not by itself produce dramatic gains in student achievement. No single reform can serve as a “silver bullet.” Nonetheless, the extraordinary success of top-performing systems suggests a “top third+” strategy deserves serious examination as part of a comprehensive human capital strategy for the U.S. education system. Moreover, given that roughly half of the teacher corps will be eligible for retirement in the next decade, the question “who should teach?” in the U.S. seems especially timely. The research presented here suggests the need to pursue “bold, persistent experimentation” (in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s famous words) to attract and retain top graduates to the teaching profession, so the U.S. can learn whether more teachers with such backgrounds, working in the right school system context, can help

lift student achievement to the levels top-performing nations now enjoy.

This report asks what lessons we might learn from nations that succeed in delivering world-class educational outcomes with top talent in teaching—Singapore, Finland, and South Korea—and what an American version of such a strategy might entail. We conducted market research among teachers and “top-third” college students to understand what it would take to attract and retain such talent, how to do so cost-effectively, and what complementary system changes would maximize the efficacy of such a strategy. Finally, we offer ideas on how to start down a path to achieve this aspiration.

Singapore, Finland and South Korea do many things differently than does the U.S. to recruit and retain top-third+ students. These nations make admissions to rigorous teacher training programs highly selective; some also pay for these programs’ tuition and fees, and give students a salary or a living stipend while they train. In addition, government closely monitors the demand for teachers and regulates supply to match it, so that teachers who complete this selective training are guaranteed jobs in the profession. They offer competitive compensation, so that the financial rewards from teaching suffice to attract and retain top third students given the dynamics of these nations’ labor markets. They offer opportunities for advancement and growth in a professional working environment, and bestow enormous social prestige on the profession. Officials in Singapore, Finland and South Korea view the caliber of young person they draw to teaching as a critical national priority.

McKinsey’s market research with 900 top-third college students and 525 current teachers with similar backgrounds shows that it would take major new efforts for the U.S. to attract and retain more top third+ talent to teaching. Most students see teaching

as unattractive in terms of the quality of the people in the field, professional growth and compensation. Among the 91 percent of top-third college students who say they are not planning to go into teaching, the most important job attributes include prestige and peer group appeal, but compensation is the biggest gap between teaching and their chosen professions. Our research suggests that improving compensation and other features of teaching careers could dramatically increase the portion of top-third new hires in high-needs schools and school districts, and retain these teachers in much greater numbers with complementary changes, such as better school leaders and working conditions.

We have explored cost-effective ways to pursue such a strategy, although they are not necessarily inexpensive. We examined reform scenarios informed by our market research on how many more top-third students would choose to teach if certain aspects of the profession changed, and if such efforts were targeted in various ways, along with some indicative cost scenarios for a large urban district (of 50,000-150,000 students) and an “average” state (representing 1/50th of the U.S. student population). *Please note that these scenarios do not represent recommendations, but are meant to show a range of options for recruiting and retaining top-third students that could inform discussion.*

In one scenario, for example, the U.S. could more than double the portion of top-third+ new hires in high-needs schools, from 14% today to 34%, without raising teacher salaries. In this scenario, teachers would not pay for their initial training; high-needs schools would have effective principals and offer ongoing training comparable to the best professional institutions; districts would improve shabby and sometimes unsafe working conditions; the highest-performing teachers would receive

If teachers drawn from the top third at much greater scale could help close the achievement gap, the economic and social returns could be enormous.

performance bonuses of 20%; and the district or state would benefit from a marketing campaign promoting teaching as a profession. The cost of this scenario for an illustrative large district with half of its schools serving high poverty students might be roughly \$10-30 million per year at current student-teacher ratios; for an “average” state, the cost would be \$66 million (half of one percent of current K-12 spending). If the same scenario was applied to “turnaround” schools—the lowest-performing one in 20 schools targeted by the Obama Administration—which serve roughly 5% of students, a similar result would follow at a cost of \$1-3 million per year in the district, or \$20 million for the state (or two-tenths of one percent of current K-12 spending).

Given the real and perceived gaps between teachers’ compensation and that of other careers open to top students, drawing the majority of new teachers from among top-third+ students likely would require substantial increases in compensation. For example, our market research suggests that raising the share of top-third+ new hires in high-needs schools from 14% to 68% would mean paying new teachers around \$65,000 with a maximum career compensation of \$150,000 per year. At current student-teacher ratios, and applied to all current teachers as well, this would cost roughly \$100-290 million for the large urban district and \$630 million for the average state. It would be considerably less expensive to focus such an effort on “turnaround” schools.

The predictions emerging from our market research are inexact, to be sure. But if our estimates are close to correct, a top-talent strategy would involve substantial costs, and would therefore likely require the country to reexamine many elements of its human capital system, including student-teacher ratios, the basis and structure of teacher compensation over time, and per-pupil school funding formulas

and levels. The cost of top-third initiatives could be reduced significantly, however, by accepting higher student/teacher ratios, raising the salaries of only those teachers deemed effective by comprehensive evaluations, transitioning existing teachers to this pay structure on an “opt-in” basis, or by finding ways to reallocate less effective K-12 spending. Further research might reveal less expensive ways to use prestige and peer groups to attract top talent to high-needs schools for a career, as Teach for America has done for shorter stints, or whether well-defined paths for advancement within the profession could have an analogous impact on retention.

Beyond cost-effectiveness is the question of how the system must change to produce more truly effective teachers—or how to put the “+” in a “top-third+” strategy. The three countries we examine use a rigorous selection process and teacher training more akin to medical school and residency than to a typical American school of education. A U.S. version of a top-talent strategy might aim to transform schools of education directly, give districts the power to demand better-equipped educators, or rely more heavily on identifying effective and ineffective teachers early in their careers. Singapore’s integration of a top-third approach with rigorous performance management systems, moreover, shows these can be mutually reinforcing strategies: a nation need not choose between drawing high-caliber talent to the profession and assuring that this talent delivers results in the classroom. For an American “top-third+” strategy to be effective, it would need to address not only the attraction and retention of top-third graduates to teaching, but also the many levers that support the efficacy of teachers once they are in the classroom.

Our research makes a compelling case for exploring top third+ strategies with pilots in high-needs districts or in a state, perhaps via a new “Race to the Top Third”

grant competition, or through collaborations among school systems, philanthropic institutions, and other education stakeholders. Given the complexity of the issues, and the regional and national dimensions of the talent pool, the research also suggests there would be benefits to creating a National Teaching Talent Plan. A commission assigned to this task might propose next steps and timelines for phasing in changes in how we recruit, prepare, retain, and reward teachers, informed by global best practice.

Progress will require research, experimentation and learning, but the economic and social returns from getting it right could be enormous. McKinsey research last year found that the achievement gap between the U.S. and top performing nations—a burden borne most directly by low-income and minority students—imposes the economic equivalent of a “permanent national recession” on the United States.¹ In our education system research and work in more than 50 countries, we have never seen an education system achieve or sustain world-class status without top talent in its teaching profession. If the U.S. is to close its achievement gap with the world’s best education systems—and ease its own socio-economic disparities—a top-third+ strategy for the teaching profession must be part of the debate.

1 “The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America’s Schools” McKinsey and Company (2009).