Recognizing teacher retention as integral to the district’s talent strategy, the district launched a cross-division work team charged with analyzing the district’s retention data, garnering teacher feedback on retention issues, reviewing research and best practices, and developing a set of recommendations for the MNPS Board of Education. The team met for four months, engaged in nine focus groups with teachers, analyzed exit survey data, garnered feedback from national experts in retention and teaching quality, and developed the recommendations contained in this report.
Identifying the Problem: Teacher Retention in MNPS

District Retention

School Retention

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Cultivate a central office culture that fosters great teaching

Prioritize creating a healthy central office culture that fosters great leadership

Evaluate and modify if necessary current central office practices, processes, and mindsets to determine whether and how they foster great teaching, or get in the way of it

Recommendation 2: Evaluate principal quality and ensure alignment with values

Review the principal selection competencies and processes to ensure we emphasize traits around effectively leading adults

Align principal accountability with outcomes that address effectively leading adults

Recommendation 3: Develop clear and high quality onboarding and induction processes for new teachers

Establish a “Welcome to Metro” effect

Launch a New Teacher Academy

Establish mentoring for new teachers as the norm

Build the capacity of principals to support new teachers

Dedicate a full-time central office employee to new teacher supports

Recommendation 4: Identify and elevate great teaching

Define “great teaching”

Recognize great teaching

Elevate teacher voice

Implementation Plan

Expected Outcomes

Appendices

Appendix A: Teacher Feedback

Appendix B: Average Retention Rate, Elementary Schools, 2010-11 to 2015-16

Appendix C: Average Retention Rate, Middle Schools, 2010-11 to 2015-16

Appendix D: Average Retention Rate, High Schools, 2010-11 to 2015-16

Appendix E: Average Retention Rate, Special Schools, 2010-11 to 2015-16

Appendix F: Retention Rate, Early Learning Centers, 2014-15 to 2015-16

Appendix G: Retention Work Team Members
Identifying the Problem: Teacher Retention in MNPS

The work team charged with developing retention recommendations for the district began with a basic question: does MNPS have a retention problem, and, if so, what effect does that have on the district? Beyond the obvious that teacher attrition implies dissatisfaction of some kind, attrition has some very real and negative effects on schools and districts: high attrition has a negative effect on student achievement,¹ is very expensive,² and can destabilize the school culture.³

Yet we also recognize that not all attrition is bad. Teaching is an extremely difficult profession, and some individuals may realize that they are not suited for the challenge. Additionally, some attrition is part of the natural life cycle of any organization, as employees retire or resign for reasons out of the organization’s control.

This report focuses on the attrition that the district can affect. Are teachers leaving because of problems with school culture, or working conditions, or leadership? To find out, we began by analyzing five years of MNPS retention data to answer how many teachers are actually leaving, and who those teachers are.

The results show that retention has not plummeted in recent years. However, the work over the last four months reveals that we have a direct effect on some teachers’ decisions to leave, and we have work to do if we want to slow down the revolving door of teachers.

District Retention⁴

For purposes of this report, we define teacher retention as any classroom teacher or librarian who started one school year but is no longer in a teacher or librarian role the following school year.⁵ We also looked at those educators who began one year as a teacher or librarian but moved into another certificated role the following year (e.g., a coach or instructional specialist).

Comparing teacher retention rates between districts is challenging, as each district has data limitations and unique definitions that inhibit an apples to apples comparison. However, we know that in 2013, of the 3.3 million public schools teachers surveyed by the National Center for Education Statistics, 84 percent remained at the same school, 8 percent moved to another school, and 8 percent left teaching. The National Center on Teaching for America’s Future found that urban districts average around an 80 percent retention rate, though differing definitions and data quality inhibit drawing direct conclusions.⁶ MNPS retains teachers above this national average, with retention rates between 81.77 percent and 85.48 percent over the last five years.

MNPS Retention of Teachers and Librarians, and Retention in any Certificated Position, 2010-2015⁷

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Retention Rate</th>
<th>Additional Retention for Any Certificated Role</th>
<th>Retention Rate of Teachers/Librarians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-11 to</td>
<td>87.82%</td>
<td>2.58%</td>
<td>85.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12 to</td>
<td>87.49%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>85.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13 to</td>
<td>85.41%</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
<td>84.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14 to</td>
<td>85.55%</td>
<td>3.78%</td>
<td>81.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15 to</td>
<td>89.01%</td>
<td>5.08%</td>
<td>83.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Additional Retention for Any Certificated Role
² Retention Rate of Teachers/Librarians
In some years, we saw more teachers and librarians moving into non-classroom certificated positions. In 2010-11, the district rolled out its instructional coach strategy, moving many teachers into full time coaching positions. And in 2013-14, the district began school-based budgeting in some schools, scaling district-wide in 2014-15. School-based budgeting allowed principals the opportunity to develop unique school designs. In some cases, these designs included additional instructional support (coaches, deans of instruction, etc.). Though we focus throughout this report on retaining teachers in classroom roles, we do recognize that additional instructional support can positively affect performance. Future analysis is needed as to the direct effect on student achievement. Additionally, the district issued a generous retirement incentive program that affected retention in 2013-14.

We define why a teacher leaves the classroom using four categories:

- The teacher retires
- The teacher is non-renewed, meaning the teacher is a non-tenured teacher who is not asked to return by the principal
- The teacher is promoted to other certificated positions, such as coaches or assistant principals
- The teacher voluntary resigns

Our focus is primarily on voluntary resignations – those teachers and librarians who left the district for reasons that may be directly affected by MNPS policies and structures.

### Numbers of teachers who left a Teacher/Librarian position by reason: Promoted, retired, non-renewed, and voluntary resignations, 2010-11 to 2014-15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Promoted to another certificated position</th>
<th>Retired</th>
<th>Non-renewed</th>
<th>Voluntarily resigned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The district began implementing a voluntary exit survey in November 2013 for teachers who resign. One hundred eighty-one of the 607 teachers who voluntarily resigned between November 2013 and November 2015 have responded to the survey, a response rate of 30 percent. The survey asks questions about the primary reason(s) the teacher is resigning and what, if anything, the district could do to retain teachers in the future. The vast majority of respondents (83 percent) say they entered the teaching profession through a university preparation program. Another 11 percent and 6 percent came to teaching through Teach For America and the Nashville Teaching Fellows respectively.

A third of all respondents stated that they accepted a teaching position in another Tennessee district. In 2013-14, the state reported that 135 MNPS teachers left the district to teach in another Tennessee district or in an MNPS charter schools. Twenty-eight of those teachers moved to Williamson County, 27
to Rutherford County, 14 to Sumner County, and 8 to Wilson County. Twenty-one teachers moved to MNPS charter schools.

**MNPS Exit Survey Question:** In terms of your next steps, please indicate one of the following (n=181):

- Teaching in another district in TN: 33%
- Going back to school: 18%
- Position outside of education: 15%
- Teaching in another state: 11%
- Non-teaching position in education: 10%
- Teaching in an MNPS charter school: 7%
- Teaching in a private school: 6%

**MNPS Exit Survey Question:** Why did you choose to leave your teaching position (select up to three)? (n=181):

- Personal reasons (family, moving, etc.): 50%
- Disatisfaction with current administration: 28%
- Had another job offer: 20%
- Professional growth: 19%
- Seeking higher pay: 18%
- Lack of opportunities for growth: 13%
- Going back to school: 10%
- Lack of teacher voice: 9%
- Realized teaching wasn’t for me: 9%
- Classroom resources: 9%
- Technology: 6%
- Other: 1%
We also analyzed the performance of teachers who are leaving MNPS. In 2014-15, 60 out of 5,468 teachers received a level 1 on their TEAM composite score. Of all teachers with an LOE of 1, 33.33 percent left the district (20 of 60 teachers); on the opposite end, of all the teachers with LOE 5, 11.31 percent left the district after 2014-15, suggesting that we are doing a better job retaining higher performing teachers.

**TEAM Composite Scores for all teachers, 2014-15, and for teachers who left the district after the 2014-15 school year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOE</th>
<th>% of all teachers in MNPS</th>
<th>% of teachers who left after the 2014-15 school year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.31%</td>
<td>3.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.33%</td>
<td>16.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>29.47%</td>
<td>28.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>32.38%</td>
<td>82.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.52%</td>
<td>19.66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percent of teachers in each TEAM Level of Effectiveness who left after 2014-15, by Level of Effectiveness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOE</th>
<th>% of teachers who left after 2014-15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOE 1</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOE 2</td>
<td>13.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOE 3</td>
<td>11.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOE 4</td>
<td>11.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOE 5</td>
<td>11.31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is no surprise that teachers in their first five years of teaching experience leave the district at higher percentages than their more experienced colleagues. On average, roughly 20 percent of teachers in their first five years leave, compared to 10 to 15 percent of teachers with six or more years of experience.

**Average percent of teachers who left by years of experience, 2010-2015**

- 15+ years: 15.23%
- 11-15 years: 10.10%
- 5-10 years: 13.01%
- 2-4 years: 13.95%
- 1 year or less: 22.43%

**School Retention**
The district sees significant variance in school retention by tier levels and types of schools. Though schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students tend to have lower retention rates, there are several exceptions to the rule. Caldwell Elementary, for example, has a student population that is 94.25 percent economically disadvantaged, yet the school has the fourth highest retention rate over five years among all elementary schools.

Our special schools – those serving unique student populations – have the most impressive teacher retention rates in the district, boasting an 18 point spread over the average middle school teacher retention rate. See Appendices B-F for individual school retention rates.

**Average School Retention Rates by Type of School, 2010-2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Average School Retention Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All schools</td>
<td>72.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary schools</td>
<td>75.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle schools</td>
<td>67.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools</td>
<td>73.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Priority Schools</td>
<td>54.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in the lowest poverty quartile</td>
<td>79.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in the highest poverty quartile</td>
<td>68.61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Cultivate a central office culture that fosters great teaching
Central offices can struggle to strike the balance between two essential roles: capacity builder and accountable manager. At times the outspoken advocate for schools, at other times the tough critic, central offices can relay an image of confusion and inefficiency to on-the-ground educators. This lack of clarity has a direct effect on teacher satisfaction, as principals may internalize confusion and transmit it to teachers, teachers may not understand the purpose or rationale behind district initiatives, and district policies may indirectly get in the way of a teacher’s time to teach. Beyond the obvious arguments for improved efficiency and streamlined systems, research has shown that the quality of leadership in a district has a direct positive correlation on student achievement.9

Despite well-intentioned central office staff in all divisions and at all levels in MNPS, it is apparent that the district can improve the way it works and communicates with principals and teachers. The central office should start by naming its role in retaining great teachers. **We recommend adopting a revised theory of action: If the central office creates conditions for principals to thrive, then principals can create the conditions for teachers to thrive, and students will benefit from great teaching.**

As reinforced in the focus groups, teachers thrive when they can spend time on creative planning, and not on unnecessary meetings or paperwork (see Appendix A for a summary of the responses in the teacher focus groups). They thrive when they clearly understand the purpose of programs or initiatives and see genuine connection of these programs and initiatives to improved practice in the classroom. They thrive when they have time to collaborate with their colleagues to grow and learn together. Principals can establish these conditions when the central office operates efficiently, communicates clearly, and leads by example. Are we doing everything we can to create the conditions that allow principals to build learning communities in which teachers can thrive?

This recommendation includes the following action steps for the central office:

- **Recognize that culture trumps everything:** Assess the current central office culture and its effect on principals and teachers; identify and agree on the norms of a new culture that create the right conditions for great leaders and great teachers to thrive; modify central office rules of engagement to exemplify the new culture

“The key organizational action districts can take to support school improvement is to define the mission of the central office as supporting principals to create the educational conditions that promote the climate, organization, instruction, and practices that lead to students’ success.”

-Meredith Honig, et al, Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and Learning Improvement, 2010
• Remove barriers to our own success: Review current district policies, practices, and mindsets to determine whether and how they support principals to foster great teaching, or get in the way of it.

Prioritize creating a healthy central office culture that fosters great leadership

In his book, *The Advantage*, Patrick Lencioni explains that “an organization has integrity – is healthy – when it is whole, consistent, and complete, that is, when its management, operations, strategy, and culture fit together and make sense...A good way to recognize health is to look for the signs that indicate an organization has it. These include minimal politics and confusion, high degrees of morale and productivity, and very low turnover among good employees.”

We need a clear picture of our current culture and norms of engagement to understand their effects on principals and teachers. To assess the current culture, we recommend a culture survey for central office staff, such as the McKinsey Organizational Health Index, or the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI). These tools ask questions such as:

- Can central office employees explain why MNPS exists, where we are going, and how we are going to get there?
- How do central office employees currently behave and interact with one another?
- How do staff communicate (among central office staff and with principals and teachers), problem-solve, and collaborate?
- How do we engage in professional learning and what does it look like (for central office staff and for principals and teachers)?
- What are the things that are truly going well and embody the culture we all want?
- What behaviors are ineffective and holding principals and teachers (and us) back?

Once we have a baseline for understanding our culture, we are better poised to identify where we are hindering principals’ abilities to leverage teachers through communication or behaviors.

Simultaneously, we will need to identify and agree on the guiding norms we expect for central office employees. Norms are the web of expectations” around how we interact, communicate, and treat each other. In 2011, central office staff developed guiding norms rooted in the following statement:

• *Success for all students is the responsibility of every MNPS employee. Therefore, MNPS Central Office Personnel are servant leaders, committed to supporting schools.*

The norms include a set of value statements:

• We value...
  - Listening empathetically
  - Communicating effectively and appropriately
  - Disseminating accurate and timely information
  - Developing creative solutions focused on results
  - Assuming personal responsibility

“...leadership is about vision. But leadership is equally about creating a climate where the truth is heard and the brutal facts confronted. There’s a huge difference between the opportunity to “have your say” and the opportunity to be *heard*. The good-to-great leaders understood this distinction, creating a culture wherein people had a tremendous opportunity to be heard, and, ultimately, for the truth to be heard.”

-Jim Collins, *Good to Great*
- Accepting professional accountability
- Developing leadership capacity
- Collaborating purposefully to support student achievement

These values are admirable and appropriate; however, an unscientific survey of current central office staff suggests that they may not be infused into our daily work. None of the individuals on the retention work team could name the guiding norms, nor could anyone recall how and why they were developed. And everyone on the team could point to times when we clearly were not holding ourselves accountable to these values.

**We recommend the development of a new set of guiding norms for central office** – one that reflects the priorities of the district and models expectations for schools – by staff at all levels and across all divisions. This process will require that we review and modify central office rules of engagement around communication, collaboration, leadership, and decision-making. The new rules of engagement should include specific descriptions of the norm in action – how would norms such as “openness and humility at every level” or “a fierce commitment to service” play out in meetings, communications, and daily encounters? We also must hold ourselves accountable to each other for living up to the new expectations by adding these elements to central office employee evaluations. Unlike the norms from 2011, we must regularly reflect on and adjust, if necessary, these rules of engagement, living by the continuous improvement mantra of “lather, rinse, repeat” for maintaining a healthy culture.

**Evaluate and modify if necessary current central office practices, processes, and mindsets to determine whether and how they foster great teaching, or get in the way of it.**

The district’s strategic plan, *Education 2018*, illustrates the role of the central office as a fulcrum supporting two concepts: 1) Support for Schools and 2) Accountability for Results. We must come to agreement on – and clearly communicate to our stakeholders – what we mean by these two ideas, including how central office balances the two. Without clear understanding of our role, the central office may inadvertently get in the way of great teaching.

Supporting schools in a way that fosters great teaching requires central office staff to have “a service orientation toward schools and the community.”

**We need to redefine central office functions, replacing a compliance-driven style of administration with a case- and project-management support approach.** The goal for all district-school interactions should be to keep great teachers in the classroom and protect their time to teach.

For all divisions in the central office, this means assessing, clarifying, and communicating the purpose of district mandates and “non-negotiables.” What bureaucratic hoops do principals and teachers have to jump through when engaging with central office? How can we better protect principals’ time to build effective learning environments for teachers and students? How can we better protect teachers’ time and peel away anything that isn’t essential to great teaching? We then must clearly communicate to teachers and leaders what the district truly mandates, and, more importantly, why.

**To monitor district policies from a systems perspective, we recommend the district hire a policy advisor.** This role would be responsible for reviewing current district policies and procedures, aligning policies across divisions, and ensuring policies are relevant, essential, and up-to-date. This role would also monitor and track all state and federal policies required by the district, as well as ensure that policies and procedures are easily accessible and transparent for employees (including providing guidance on interpreting policies if needed).
In *Education 2018*, “accountability for results” focuses on academic performance, but does not clearly address who is accountable to whom. **We recommend that the central office communicate that the schools are not accountable to the central office; rather we are all accountable to the success of our students.**

**Current Hierarchy Approach to Accountability**

| Central Office | Principals | Teachers | Students |

**Revised Approach to Accountability**

| Students | Teachers | Principals | Central Office |

This adjustment, though minor in language, is significant in impact. It means that central office employees need to adopt a “we’re all in this together” approach. As part of this recommendation, **central office employees should be held accountable to student success through performance reviews**, thereby making student achievement “the primary responsibility of every staff member in the district.”

We also need to examine how we communicate with teachers and principals, which may inadvertently be getting in the way of great teaching. When teachers are confused about initiatives, or principals do not clearly understand communications, great teaching can suffer. Our Communications Division has laid out a plan for significantly improving the way we communicate with teachers and principals. Strategies for improving internal communications include:

- Eliminating communication gaps between departments to benefit principals and school staff who may receive conflicting messages
- Streamlining what and how we communicate to school staff
- Elevating employee voice, especially teacher voice, in district decisions and strategic direction
- Creating mechanisms for ongoing feedback and continual improvement

We support this division’s direction and see this work as integral to our success. **We recommend the Communications Office publish a timeline and expected outcomes for improving internal communications as part of the division’s plan.**

“Principals who help build collaborative cultures do so by establishing conditions of non-judgmentalism (feedback primarily for growth) and transparency (openness about results and about practice). Most teachers grow under these conditions, and indeed, in a culture of healthy pressure (high expectations), and support (technical and emotional) peers help each other grow.”

-Michael Fullan, *The Principal*
Recommendation 2: Evaluate principal quality and ensure alignment with values

Research is clear that leadership at the school level is the most significant reason teachers decide to stay or leave a school. Focus group participants reaffirmed this with feedback such as: “At our school the principal treats us like family. She takes care of us and we have her back. That is why teachers stay at our school and are loyal to our principal.”

Effectively leading adults requires specific competencies, including:

- How to assess and talk about good teaching
- How to provide specific and useful feedback on performance
- How to coach and motivate people to improve performance
- How to differentiate supports based on the specific needs of individual teachers
- How to implement authentic distributive leadership structures

We need to review the existing processes for selecting and evaluating principals to ensure that a principal’s ability to effectively lead adults is appropriately emphasized.

This recommendation includes the following action steps:

- **Recognize the importance of hiring right**: Review the principal selection competencies and processes to ensure we emphasize traits around effectively leading adults
- **Base principal performance reviews on their ability to lead adults**: Align principal accountability with outcomes that address effectively leading adults; norm principal evaluators around observing these competencies; remove evaluation from the role of the Network Lead Principal

### Review the principal selection competencies and processes to ensure we emphasize traits around effectively leading adults

In 2013, MNPS adopted a new selection process for principals. Developed by New Leaders, the process incorporates multiple, rigorous phases to assess principal candidates’ skills in six areas:

- Personal leadership
- Learning and teaching/data-driven instruction
- Vision, mission, and strategic planning
- Systems and operations
- School culture and family and community engagement
- Human capital management

Throughout the process, principal candidates complete four selection activities and participate in three interviews. These activities and interviews each assess aspects of the six competencies above. Of these six competencies, human capital management most accurately addresses principal candidates’ skills around effectively leading teachers. The human capital management competency includes how the principal hires, evaluates, cultivates, motivates, and communicates with teachers. Although we know this competency is a critical factor in teacher retention,
only 16 percent of the selection process focuses on human capital management. We recommend an analysis of the entire process to ensure alignment with the competencies that are most important to success.

MNPS recently established a new position to manage leadership development, for which the scope of work includes establishing a leadership framework that defines the necessary competencies for high quality leadership. Upon identifying and communicating a new leadership framework that emphasizes the ability to effectively lead adults, the central office must align selection and development processes to that framework.

Align principal accountability with outcomes that address effectively leading adults
The development of principal evaluation systems has taken a back seat in many states due to factors such as the emphasis of teacher evaluation in the Race to the Top program. Although many states, including Tennessee, have developed administrator evaluation systems, the process for successfully implementing these systems has been unclear.

MNPS’ current administrator performance management system, the TEAM administrator evaluation, includes both a qualitative portion and a quantitative portion, each worth 50 percent of the overall evaluation. An assessment of the principal’s implementation of the teacher evaluation process comprises 15 percent of the qualitative assessment. Observation of practice is assessed using a rubric that includes indicators such as:

• Building the capacity of teachers to improve practice
• Leveraging teacher strengths
• Recognizing and celebrating great teaching
• Using teacher evaluations to inform, assess, and adjust professional learning goals
• Providing differentiated professional learning for teachers
• Implementing induction, teacher leadership, and retention plans

The TEAM administrator rubric is aligned to the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards and is research-based and best practice-driven; however, we think the tool does not adequately assess the administrator’s ability to create a culture where teachers want to work. The existing tool includes four standards:

• Instructional Leadership for Continuous Improvement
• Culture for Teaching and Learning
• Professional Learning & Growth
• Resource Management

Aspects of effectively leading adults are interspersed throughout the rubric with unclear logic, but the human capital management competency as a whole is never explicitly mentioned. At times the rubric is disjointed and ambiguous. For example, a principal manager may find it difficult to interpret “builds and sustains a culture focused on continuous improvement,” part of Standard A in the TEAM administrator rubric.

As an alternative, MNPS can adopt a different principal evaluation rubric, which includes indicators such as “retains effective teachers,” and “provides actionable feedback”. These are indicators that can be assessed through concrete evidence such as teacher retention data, TEAM teacher feedback forms, and TELL teacher survey responses.

We recommend a waiver from the Tennessee Department of Education to develop and/or adopt a new administrator evaluation rubric, aligned to State Board of Education policies, Tennessee
**Instructional Leadership Standards, and laws.** This new rubric would include indicators that more closely align to MNPS’ expectation of effectively leading adults.

Additionally, we recommend that we reconsider having the Network Lead Principals, themselves sitting principals, evaluate other principals. Maintaining principal evaluation at the central office helps to ensure accurate norming and fidelity of implementation across schools, and reiterates the coaching and support role of the Networks. We also recommend developing a principal supervisor evaluation tool that aligns to our revised theory of action: are principal supervisors doing everything they can to create the conditions in which principals can thrive? One example, developed by the University of Washington, includes the following standards, which emphasizes the importance of supporting principals through modeling behaviors and differentiating actions:

- Dedicates their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders
- Engages in teaching practices in their one-on-one work with principals to help principals grow as instructional leaders
- Engages in teaching practices while leading principal communities of practice to help principals grow as instructional leaders
- Systematically uses multiple forms of evidence of each principal’s capacity for instructional leadership to differentiate or tailor their approach to helping their principals grow as instructional leaders
- Engages principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help principals grow as instructional leaders
- Selectively and strategically participates in other central office work process to maximize the extent to which they and principals focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders\(^{21}\)
Recommendation 3: Develop clear and high quality onboarding and induction processes for new teachers

A new employee in any field requires a period of onboarding and induction to reach potential. Yet historically districts have not developed and sustained supports for new teachers as a whole, and MNPS is no exception. In addition to the obvious benefits of supporting a new teacher on the job, a 2004 meta-analysis of research on teacher mentoring found that mentoring programs have a positive effect on teacher retention.  

New teacher induction programs recognize that teaching is complicated and nuanced, and that most new teachers have not been fully prepared for the classroom during their teacher education programs.  

“Current research holds that new teachers require 3 to 7 years to become effective teachers. With almost 50 percent of new teachers retiring within their first five years of teaching, schools struggle to develop a strong core of teachers who can positively impact student learning.”

- The New Teacher Center

Research has shown that the most important factors of an induction program are having a mentor teacher from the same subject/grade level and having common planning time with other teachers in the same subject/grade. Based in part on the evidence, MNPS launched a mentoring program in collaboration with the Metropolitan Nashville Education Association called the Peer Assistance Leadership and Support (PALS) program in 1996. PALS were annually selected and assigned full-time to mentor and advise new teachers. Participants in the retention focus group perceived positive benefits from the PALS program. However, budget restraints resulted in the end of the program in 2009.

This recommendation includes five components:

- **Establish a “Welcome to Metro” Effect:** implement efficient processes for onboarding new teachers; create cohort orientation experience prior to the first day in the classroom
- **Launch a New Teacher Academy:** provide one week of paid induction prior to the start of school that focuses on beliefs, priorities, and district resources
- **Establish mentoring for new teachers as the norm:** partner new teachers with experienced and effective veteran teachers for structured and ongoing support; build on existing work (Atlas i3, Teacher Match) where appropriate
- **Build the capacity of principals to support new teachers:** provide guidance on structures that allow for mentor/mentee interaction; add mentoring to principal evaluation; ensure appropriate assignments for new teachers
- **Dedicate a central office employee to new teacher supports**

Establish a “Welcome to Metro” effect

Retention efforts begin the moment a new teacher starts looking for a job in MNPS. Was the application process clear and efficient? Was the employment offer welcoming and complete? Did the new teacher have quick access to information for payroll, benefits, and policies, or did the new teacher have to hunt those down? Were central office staff welcoming and friendly, or cool and dismissive?

Focus group feedback from new teachers made it clear that we have ample room for improvement around new teacher onboarding. For purposes of this document, we are defining onboarding as all those activities necessary to get up and running in a new district (e.g., setting up direct deposit, enrolling in benefits, understanding leave policies, etc.) but do not relate to direct supports around job performance.
The Human Capital Division has recently launched a process for onboarding new employees virtually, allowing new hires to complete paperwork online. We anticipate that this new system will improve the efficiency and accuracy of onboarding paperwork, but we also must ensure we are providing direct contact and friendly smiles so new teachers feel welcomed in MNPS. This may sound naïve or basic, but we cannot underestimate the effect that genuine high quality customer service has on new employees. We recommend quality customer service training, managed by the Communications Division, for all Human Capital staff members who have contact with new teachers.

New teachers have so many things to think and worry about, and whether or not they can access their email should not be one of them. We recommend that Human Capital staff develop and communicate a new set of orientation materials that include:

- Information about Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (Board Members, Strategic Plan, Teacher and Student Demographics, Schools Information)
- Onboarding Resources (email, Employee Self-Service, technology help, student and staff data systems)
- Conduct and Responsibilities (expectations for behavior, frequently asked questions)
- Employment Basics (evaluations, leave, benefits)

These materials should be available virtually at all times for future reference, and include links to appropriate forms and sites.

Launch a New Teacher Academy
Building on the introduction to district policies and resources, a New Teacher Academy allows teachers the opportunity to ask questions and get answers before the school year begins. The district has held workshops between two and four days in previous years that cover everything from the TEAM teacher evaluation to signing up for professional development to implementing project-based learning. We recommend that representatives from all divisions in central office work directly with current teachers to develop the New Teacher Academy, building on previous work from the Office of Instruction and the Teacher Leadership Institute.

Critical to this recommendation is paying for new teachers to attend. To pay teachers to attend all or part of a New Teacher Academy results in a price tag of over $600,000. We recommend that the district allocate money to pay teachers to participate in the New Teacher Academy because we so strongly believe in the importance of starting new teachers off right, an important component of retention. We also believe that teachers deserve to be paid for their time.

As part of the New Teacher Academy, the district could consider incorporating a New Teacher Network similar to those in other states and districts. A New Teacher Network “is a teacher-led network, with all activities and topics selected by teachers, for teachers.” New teachers meet monthly to provide insight into district and state initiatives, opportunities for collaboration and reflection, and collegial support.

Establish mentoring for new teachers as the norm
Ongoing mentoring and coaching from an experienced and effective mentor teacher can be the difference between a first year teacher calling it quits or staying on and persevering. TELL teacher survey results indicate that individual schools are doing a better job in recent years providing new teacher supports; in 2015, 82.6 percent of teachers responded that school leaders make a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about new teacher support, up from 78.2 percent the previous year. The district has worked with principals to assign mentors for every new teacher. However, 32 percent said they are not formally assigned a mentor in 2015, and 61 percent say they do not have formal time to meet with their mentor during school hours.
We can do better. **We recommend allocating leadership stipends specifically earmarked for mentors through the school-based budgeting process.** To accommodate all new teachers, the cost to the district for a leadership stipend estimating 100 hours of mentor time would be $1.5 million.

Alternatively, the district could establish district-level mentor positions that principals could “purchase” through the school-based budgeting process. Much like data coaches, schools could share a full-time mentor depending on their number of new teachers. The New Teacher Center estimates that full-time mentors remain effective when the mentor to mentee ratio stays around 1:15. With this ratio, the district would need to hire roughly 40 full-time mentors, with a price tag of around $2.4 million.

**Build the capacity of principals to support new teachers**

Principals need central office support to develop and monitor effective new teacher induction programs. **We recommend that central office staff develop guidelines on establishing mentor programs, highlighting some of the great programs already in existence in the district.** These guidelines would include how to select mentors, identifying professional learning opportunities for mentors and mentees, and monitoring the programs. We also would expand on the lessons learned through a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards pilot around sharing effective teaching practices with new and veteran teachers alike. The pilot, which began in MNPS in 2015, provides MNPS teachers with access to videos and written analysis of Nationally Board-Certified teachers’ teaching: “While the videos show accomplished teaching in action, the written analyses of [Nationally Board Certified teachers] make the invisible and intangible aspects of accomplished teaching explicit by offering the teachers’ own planning, intentions and analysis for the activity or lesson shown.”27 We recommend expanding on this work by engaging coaches in the pilot schools to facilitate professional learning and reflection with new teachers.

**We also recommend that central office staff work with principals on school design that incorporates new teacher supports throughout the budget review process.** This support would focus on developing and funding mentoring in each school, and also on ways principals can better protect new teachers’ time for planning and reflection, as well as strategically assign new teachers to manageable caseloads so as not to overwhelm them. Promising options could include assigning teacher assistants to new teacher’s classrooms or reducing the number of preps for new teachers.

**Dedicate a full-time central office employee to new teacher supports**

We can quickly assess what the district prioritizes by reviewing central office staff roles. Currently the central office does not have anyone specifically dedicated to new teacher supports. **We recommend a position whose sole purpose is to coordinate and facilitate the New Teacher Academy, support principals around mentoring new teachers, and manage any mentoring program district-wide.**
Recommendation 4: Identify and elevate great teaching

Great teachers in MNPS are recognized annually through the state Teacher of the Year honor. Through the Nashville Public Education Foundation, the district also honors “Blue Ribbon” teachers who have been nominated by their peers or principals. The honor is bestowed on 50 teachers annually, and comes with a $1,000 check. Though important, one time a year honors for a handful of teachers do not mean that MNPS is consistently recognizing great teaching. On the contrary, focus group participants stated that they hear a lot more about what teachers are doing wrong than what they are doing right.

But teachers don’t want to just be recognized for great work; they want to have a seat at the table in district policymaking. MNPS recently launched a Teacher Advisory Council made up of district Teachers of the Year and runners-up over the last four years. The purpose of the Council is to provide direct feedback to the Director of Schools around district policies that affect teaching quality. The first Teacher Advisory Council meeting took place in early November 2015, and participants provided feedback on the draft recommendations contained in this report. The dialogue was honest and thoughtful, and the Council is a step toward integrating teacher voice into district policymaking, but it is not enough.

This recommendation contains three components:

- **Define “great teaching”**: clarify and clearly communicate how the district defines great teaching to establish expectations and agreed-upon standards for performance
- **Recognize great teaching**: based on the district definition of great teaching, develop processes and practices that regularly recognize teachers
- **Elevate teacher voice**: support principals in elevating teacher voice in school policies and decisions, and infuse teacher feedback into district decision-making

Define “great teaching”

The state defines great teaching in two ways: a Level of Effectiveness of 4 or 5 on the TEAM teacher evaluation and the selection criteria for Teachers of the Year. Additionally, the state defines “persistently high performing teachers” using TEAM scores over time. The Blue Ribbon process uses slightly different criteria. Teachers and administrators alike talk about great teaching for tested teachers differently than for non-tested teachers.

The district needs to clarify what we mean when we say we want a great teacher in every classroom. Does that mean a teacher with a Level of Effectiveness of 4 or 5? A teacher who receives high marks on social-emotional learning frameworks? Do years of experience factor into this? Continuing education?

**We recommend that a group of stakeholders come together to jointly define great teaching.** At least half of the stakeholders should be made up teachers (with a representative mix of tested, non-tested, tenured, non-tenured, and all tiers), with the remaining half representing community partners (the Nashville Public Education Foundation, Conexión Américas, the Chamber of Commerce, and others), and district staff. We hesitate to recommend another work group to develop yet another definition of something; however, we believe that we cannot truly recognize and elevate great teaching – or infuse teacher voice into district policymaking in a meaningful way – without first deciding what we mean by great teaching.

Recognize great teaching

Teachers do not go into this profession for the money. But financial bonuses can help honor and retain great teachers. **We recommend providing individual bonuses in addition to base pay** that could come in many forms: budgetary flexibility for principals to reward specific teachers based on school goals; district awards for consistently high performing teachers (based on the agreed-upon definition of high
performing mentioned above); continuing to provide retention bonuses to effective teachers in priority schools.

Additionally, the district could expand on its annual Teacher of the Year awards ceremony by holding another annual ceremony focused on recognizing exemplary teachers as defined by the agreed-upon definition of great teaching. DC Public Schools, for example, hosts a formal reception honoring highly effective teachers a prestigious venue.

Elevate teacher voice
Our focus group participants made it clear that they want and need a voice in district policy decisions, but they also need to be managing and leading decisions in their own schools. Some principals do an excellent job involving teachers in shared decision-making and distributive leadership. **We recommend the district develop a set of guidelines for principals around selecting teachers for leadership roles and implementing a distributive leadership decision-making model in their schools.**

**We also recommend that the district develop a process by which it receives teacher feedback on district initiatives,** prior to the roll out of new initiatives and ongoing for continuous improvement.