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RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHING  
CANDIDATES FOR AT-RISK POPULATIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

While a student of education at Penn State, two very different teaching opportunities proved eye opening. Not only is there great diversity in the United States educational system, there is great inequity as well. The first experience, in the urban schools of Philadelphia, and the second in Pennsylvania's rural Juniata Valley, helped form my interest in researching educational inequality. Each of these types of environments poses specific sets of challenges to their districts, not only in their struggle to draw qualified teachers to their schools, but also in keeping them there. This thesis focused primarily on the importance of highly qualified teachers and effective classrooms in the inner-city environments and the difficulties and solutions involved in recruiting and retaining effective teachers for these high-risk students. It will involve a discussion of the circumstances in urban schools that make them less desirable places to work. I will also detail some of the many strategies that have been implemented to combat this problem. The effectiveness of these strategies will be analyzed in an effort to examine what does and doesn't work in closing the educational gaps that exist in our school systems.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Author Sarah Caldwell once said, “Learn everything you can, anytime you can, from anyone you can, and there will always come a time when you will be grateful you did.” When I graduated high school four years ago, I pursued a major in education. As a Schreyer Honors Scholar, I chose to become certified in Secondary English Education. I saw this as preparation for a meaningful and worthwhile career.

I joke with anyone who inquires why it is I want to become a teacher that I am simply “going into the family business”: both my parents are educators with a combined 60+ years of experience in the field. I grew up learning about NOREP’s and IEP’s at the dinner table, and listened to lamentations about parent-teacher conferences gone wrong, as well as celebrations of student successes. As I grew, so did my ability to see myself one day dedicating my life to the same profession as my parents. To do so successfully, I came to believe, would require me to open myself up to learning as much as I could from as many different people and experiences as possible.

This decision has informed much of my academic experiences in college. In my four short years in college, I have worked as an undergraduate writing tutor at Penn State Learning where I came to know the value of collaborative learning and the potential of a community centered on mutual improvement without judgment. I have volunteered as a tutor for both adult and adolescent students with varying degrees of developmental and learning disabilities who have taught me that knowing *how* to teach is equally as

important as knowing *what* to teach. I have studied educational systems of countries around the world. I studied abroad, exploring the challenges facing the nation of Brazil. I am currently completing a student teaching practicum in a school district so rural that many students' preferred method of transportation to class is by tractor. The Philadelphia Urban Seminar exposed me to impoverished districts in the heart of inner-city Philadelphia, where many students are contemplating drugs and violence in their own lives instead of contemplating these topics when raised by literature, such as the creative effects of opiates on the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Throughout all these experiences, I have learned much about what it means to be both an educator. It requires dispositions, personal growth, and time to become the sort of person who is likely to be effective in the classroom. Time and time again, I have been overwhelmed by the cast inequalities that exist in the current educational arena. It has become almost unfathomable for me to think upon my own privileged childhood and education while at the same time knowing first hand that there are many students who are being provided a substandard education.

This realization is what has led me to take interest in what is being done to serve those students among the most at-risk populations such as those in the inner-city, urban schools of Philadelphia. As I learned and experienced more and more in my time at Penn State, many questions emerged: Why do these inequalities exist? What is being done to address this inequality? Have any of these strategies proven successful? What constitutes a highly qualified teacher, and how are those responsible for at-risk populations going about recruiting these individuals? What are schools doing to retain talented and competent teachers?

This undergraduate honors thesis, the culmination in many ways of my time spent as a student at Penn State, attempts to dissect and examine these questions from the perspective of someone on the verge of beginning a career in the field.

## Chapter 2

### **The Educational Arena: a Brief History of No Child Left Behind**

“I often wondered why we would let our children go to school in places where no politician, school board president, or business CEO would dream of working.”

- Jonathan Kozol

The notion that every child should have access to a highly qualified teacher, uniform and high standards and an adequate learning environment has its basis in the No Child Left Behind Act. The term “highly qualified” took on new meaning as a result of NCLB. In order to understand this concept in its entirety, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of this act, its benefits, and its limitations.

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush officially signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law saying, “We know that every child can learn. Now is the time to ensure that every child does learn.” This new act was designed to be an overhaul of the American education system, striving to provide equal learning opportunities to all students. While the act was nearly universally supported by Democrats and Republicans alike at its signing, upon actual implementation it became clear that No Child Left Behind wasn’t completely infallible. While there are some arguments support various aspects of the law as being beneficial to the American education system, there are just as many criticisms of the flaws of NCLB.

Like the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 and the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 that came before it, the No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001 under the Bush administration strove to improve the education system of America by diminishing what is known as the "achievement gap," or the separation between the scholastic accomplishments of students across the nation. It seeks to do this in several ways. First, the act requires, as explained by the non-profit advocate for education reform, The Education Trust in a pamphlet on the subject, that "States must adopt and define challenging standards for what children should know and be able to do" (Improving Your Schools 3). Just what comprises these standards is left entirely up to state discretion, as in the testing to determine whether or not these standards have been realized. The act does specify however that this testing must occur, in reading, mathematics and science, at least once between third and fifth grade, once between sixth and ninth grade, and once between tenth and twelfth grade (Stecher and Vernez 4). The only other major semi-specific requirement put in place by the government deals with the achievement of what is called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). According to the report "Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind," the government instructs that "AYP targets in every state must reflect the goal of all students performing at proficient levels in reading and mathematics by 2013 – 2014" (Stecher and Vernez 5). It is noteworthy to mention that, in regards to meeting AYP standards, the act makes no distinctions of any kind between students, regardless of learning disability, socioeconomic background, nationality, etc. The proposed justification behind this lies in the act's goal of closing the achievement gap. In order to obtain universal standards, the expectations placed on students must be equal regardless of any other circumstances.

The act also instructs that AYP standards must be based against a concrete goal (the percentage of students scoring at or above the proficient level in the subjects) and not against improvements in the schools performance from past years (Stecher and Vernez 5). No Child Left Behind also attempts to hold states accountable for their educational performances. A report from the US Department of Education on detailing No Child Left Behind explains: “States are now required to submit an annual statewide summary of how the program is improving student achievement or improving the quality of education for students” (No Child Left Behind: a Desktop Reference 107). No Child Left Behind also expanded the rights of parents to access information about the educational system. “Parents now have a right to school district and state data on academic achievement, graduation rates, and the qualifications of their children’s teachers,” explains page four of “Improving Your Schools: A Parent and Community Guide to No Child Left Behind.”

One of the major provisions of the act that is geared towards improving the performance of students, and thereby helping the school to meet these standards, is requiring teachers be “highly qualified” in their subject areas. The pamphlet from The Education Trust explains generally “the law defines a ‘highly qualified teacher’ as having at least a college degree, demonstrating content knowledge in the subjects he or she is teaching and satisfying state certification and licensure requirements” (Improving Your Schools 4). Requirements vary slightly based on grade level and by whether or not the teacher is new or currently employed. The original act required that one hundred percent of teachers be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, but this was later extended to 2006 – 2007 (Stecher and Vernez 9).

Another, and arguably most important, provision of No Child Left Behind has to do with those schools that are not making AYP and are, as classified in the act, in need of improvement. Schools are classified as being in need of improvement when they fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress two years in a row. The report “Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind” clarifies, “There are four stages of identification: Identified for Improvement Year One, Identified for Improvement Year Two, Corrective Action Status, and Restructuring Status” (6). With each year, different requirements are placed upon the school in order to bring them back up to acceptable performance. These requirements start with the drafting of a “School Improvement Plan” – steps the school will take in order to return to achieving AYP – and progress in severity all the way to the replacement of the majority of the staff if labeled “Restructuring Status” (Stecher and Vernez 9). A school’s inability to obtain AYP can also put them in danger of losing financial support from the government. This in a sense becomes counter-productive to urban schools where a lack of money is often the problem they are struggling with in obtaining effective teachers and programs.

While there are some elements of the act that have potentially served their purpose of improving the educational system, the effectiveness of the majority of No Child Left Behind has been largely in question since its implementation in 2001. One such criticism has to do with the fact that the law creates no sort of national standard in terms of evaluating the academic performance of schools. When passing NCLB, Congress left setting the yearly performance standards school must meet up to the discretion of the states. Needless to say, this created vast discrepancies between different parts of the country in what was being demanded of schools and students. The report

“Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind” explains “Lower standards and lower levels of proficiency in some states may not adequately prepare students for college and careers, both in relation to students in other states and in relation to students in other countries with which we compete economically” (Stecher and Vernez 56-57). The prevailing criticism with this element of the program is that without a more uniform national standard, it is nearly impossible to accurately deduce whether or not the achievement gap across the country is narrowing or widening because the students are not being measured by the same criteria across all educational environments.

In a similar fashion, the lack of a national standard for determining what makes a teacher highly qualified has often come under fire. Once again, states were allowed to make this interpretation for themselves, having only to meet a deadline set by the federal government that by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, all students were to be taught by highly qualified teachers (this initial deadline was not met). Generally, two criteria for a NCLB highly qualified teacher were nationally adopted: that the teacher has a bachelor’s degree and full teaching certification. However, the third requirement, that teachers demonstrate sufficient content knowledge in the subjects they teach, varied greatly between states. “Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind” provides an example: “On the Praxis II *Middle School Mathematics* test (which some states use to determine content knowledge), the maximum passing scores ranged from 139 to 163 (out of a maximum score of 200)” (Stecher and Vernez 16). This twenty-four-point difference illustrates the problem created by a lack of national standard. In this example, a teacher not deemed suitable to teach in one state, could easily be considered highly qualified in another, thus contributing to the problem of educational inequality.

Another chief criticism of the act has to do with the idea of “national proficiency.” With the immense diversity of students in the United States, and their ability to learn, many feel it is too idealistic a goal to expect that all students reach a certain level of academic achievement without taking into account the quality of the education they are receiving. It is this belief that leads contributing authors Richard Rothstein, Rebecca Jacobsen, and Tamara Wilder of the book *NCLB at the Crossroads*, to label the slogan of NCLB – “proficiency for all” –an oxymoron. The authors raise the question that, by setting “challenging standards” for all students, are some students not being challenged to an impossibly high level (Rothstein, Jacobson, Wilder 148)? This is particularly the case with Special Education students. These students have been identified as having some sort of disability that hinders their ability to learn like the normal student. Therefore, the argument proposes, how is it fair or realistic to expect these students to display the same academic performance as a non-disabled student? A sixth grade student with an IEP reading on a third grade level might be measured by their performance on the sixth grade standardized test, and might experience a potential frustration and failure at being unable to achieve an unrealistic goal. This score is also meant to represent accurately the school’s ability to educate its students. Considering the high stakes of these test results, it seems unjust to punish individuals and schools for circumstances that are mostly out of their control.

## Chapter 3

### Highly Qualified Teachers

It is a commonly accepted fact that no other factor that can be controlled by a school district affects student achievement more than the quality of the teacher in the classroom. However, a 2012 study from Stanford University stated that students of color in low-income schools were 3 to 10 times more likely to have teachers who are uncertified, not fully prepared, or teaching outside of their area of preparation than students in mostly white and affluent schools (Strauss, 2013). Many urban districts experience great difficulty in attracting the highly qualified teacher candidates that they need in order to meet the No Child Left Behind requirements. As a result, a greater percentage of America's urban students are exposed year after year to lower-quality teachers than their peers in suburban areas. A study by the Education Trust highlights the danger of this trend, explaining that

Students who have several effective teachers in a row make dramatic gains in achievement, while those who have even two ineffective teachers in a row lose significant ground, which they may never recover. Indeed, students who achieve at similar levels in the third grade may be separated by as many as 50 percentile points three years later, depending on the quality of the teachers to whom they were assigned (Haycock, 1998).

The federally mandated definition of a highly qualified teacher includes three requirements. First, a teacher candidate must hold at least a bachelor's degree from an

accredited college or university. Second, he or she must demonstrate adequate content knowledge of the subject that will be taught, usually demonstrated through a state certification test in the level/subject they will be teaching. Thirdly, the individual must be certified or licensed in the state where they will be employed.

As ideal and reasonable as these conditions may appear to be, research shows that many underprivileged districts are being forced to circumvent these stipulations in order to staff their schools. In the summer of 2012, organizations such as Teach For America and several charter networks argued that if Congress held firm to the original highly qualified definition many classrooms would be left without teachers. As a result, districts were permitted to hire teachers who were still in training and not fully certified and these teachers were disproportionately assigned to classrooms serving low-income students.

Full certification is essential to teacher quality and many believe ways to provide this for students in all educational environments should be a major goal of administrators and educational leaders nationwide. December 2013 marked the passage of the deadline originally outlined by the government by which all students were to be receiving instruction from highly qualified teachers.

In 2002, Senator Edward Kennedy warned against diluting the definition of “highly qualified” teachers by not requiring certification and testing proficiencies for educators. Kerry reaffirmed that “we need to ensure when we say all teachers will be highly qualified, we mean all teachers are highly qualified.” So the question remains, what issues stand in the way of schools attaining a highly qualified faculty, and what is being done by districts to overcome these issues?

## Chapter 4

### Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining Effective Teachers

At heart, the current situation facing our educational system is rather simple: it is in desperate and continued need for highly qualified teachers while at the same time the rate of such candidates leaving the profession continues to grow. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there has been an approximate 25% increase in the number of teachers required to staff a public K-12 school since 1988 (Conditions of Education 2013). However, according to a report released by the U.S. Commission on National Security, the number of teacher retirements also continues to grow at a rate of approximately 3,448 more retirees each year (Beard, Johnson, & Pentland, 2001). Additionally, a study released in 2010 by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future supported this projection when it found that in 18 states more than half of public school teachers were older than 50 and that the average retirement age hovered around 59 (Carroll & Foster, 2010). When the number of educators who move between school districts or leave the profession entirely each year is added to this, the total comes out to be about 13% of teachers each year not returning to their previously held position. This creates what the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy refers to as a "revolving door" phenomenon in the profession (Ingersoll 2001).

As this deficit of highly qualified teachers continues to grow, it is ultimately the economically disadvantaged, high-minority, urban schools that are suffering the greatest loss, experiencing around a 15% teacher turnover rate, as compared to their counterparts in suburban and rural schools averaging 13% and 11% respectively (Rightmyer and Larson, 2006). This

turnover rate contributes to inconsistency in failing schools, which does little to help repair the already prominent achievement gap.

The question now remains why are all of these educators leaving? While retirement does play a factor in accounting for the number of teacher not returning to their positions each year, it is certainly not responsible for all of the turnover experienced by districts. Other factors clearly play a role in discouraging teachers from remaining at certain schools or districts, or in the profession at all. A report by the Public Finance Review points to two general categories as being the reason behind high rates of disinterest and attrition of educators: relative salaries and working conditions (Balter and Duncombe 2007).

Financial issues are an obvious factor for many teachers when making employment decisions. Consequently, the more qualified and experienced a candidate is, the more selective they have the ability to be when selecting an employer. On the whole, urban schools whose budgets frequently pale in comparison to counterparts in more affluent areas lack a competitive edge when recruiting these types of candidates. A study by the Education Trust concluded “districts with the greatest number of poor students receive almost a thousand dollars less per student than the quartile of districts with the fewest poor students” (Howey 2005).

While competitiveness of salaries certainly plays a large role in making a school desirable (or undesirable) to highly qualified candidates, several studies have found that environment, chiefly student characteristics, is even more influential. Brian Jacob, associate professor of public policy at Harvard explains in a 2007 report that “research in this area typically compares the salaries and student characteristics in the schools that teachers leave with those in the schools that teachers enter.” He cites a study conducted in Texas which showed a salary increase of only about .4% as compared to a student achievement increase of about .07 standard deviations when examining the differences between the aforementioned schools. Furthermore, the

same study concluded that student achievement also supersedes the racial composition of a school.

Another less discussed factor that contributes to the deficiency of highly qualified teachers is one based on geography. A study by Boyd, et al in 2005 examined the geographic location of employment for new teaching candidates in relation to the location of their hometown as well as the college they attended. The survey concluded that recent graduates were more likely to pursue employment in districts close in physical and demographical proximity to where they grew up. Thusly, education operates on a “predominately local labor market,” rather than out of a desire of certain candidates to actively avoid at-risk, low-achieving children. Jacob 2007 extrapolates these findings to suggest that “this phenomenon [contributes] to a damaging cycle, whereby poorly educated graduates from disadvantaged districts return to teach in those same districts.”

Similarly, the work environment of a school has much to do with recruitment and retention of highly qualified candidates. A survey conducted among teachers in California cited three major reasons for leaving the profession: “an inadequate system” (lack of professional development and planning time, physical resources such as text books and other classroom materials, etc.) “bureaucratic impediments” (district-mandated paperwork, disruptions from class time, and overly-stringent requirements regarding instruction), and “lack of collegial support” (lack of coherence and community among staff and faculty, feelings of isolation, etc.) (Berry 2007). Similarly, a survey conducted among teachers in Alabama found that, when asked to list the most important factors in deciding to remain at a school, teachers overwhelmingly placed “supportive school leadership” over “salaries and benefits” at a rate of 39% as compared to 22% (Hirsch 2005).

## Chapter 5

### **Practices and Solutions Aimed at Addressing Issues with Recruitment and Retention**

#### *Hiring Timeliness and Practices*

The issue of late and ambiguous hiring is one that is clearly costing many schools highly qualified teacher they desperately need in their classrooms. The report from the New Teachers Project recommends several practices to help reduce the burden of late hiring practices. Firstly, they suggest that to be competitive school districts should be aiming to hire between 30-40% of new teacher for the next year by the May 1<sup>st</sup>. This ensures that at-risk districts are coming to the table in time to be considered by the most highly qualified candidates, as they will be the ones picked up off the market the earliest.

To help enable schools to make earlier hiring decisions, research suggests schools require current employees to provide the district with earlier notification of their intent to leave their position. While certain circumstances may result in openings later than anticipated, moving general deadlines as early as March provides a district with much more time to forecast needs for the upcoming year and to move towards posting new vacancies. In support of this change, researchers also recommend removing notification penalties placed on teachers, such as the loss of health insurance for the summer. This will remove a major barrier to earlier notification for many individuals (Levin & Quinn, 2003).

Additionally, the report recommends providing potential hires with school-level placements, not just ambiguous promises of employment. This helps ground candidates' decision-making, as they can take into account many influential factors such as the quality of the school climate and the supportiveness of the administration. Levin and Quinn (2003) explain that, for

large urban districts, “connecting with specific schools and receiving early school placements may be one way to alleviate broader concerns prospective teachers may have about teaching in a high-poverty school system.”

The report from the New Teacher Project also advocates for early and aggressive hiring practices. While under the current system, many districts do not finalize their budget forecasts for the upcoming year until well into the current school year, many believe in the importance of being proactive in aggressively pursuing quality candidates, even without a definite and finalized budget. Levin and Quinn quotes one district budget manager who explains, “A lot of people think you are a good budget manager if you don’t take risks, but you have to take risks if you are managing a school system; otherwise you are denying the kids in the system.”

### ***Budget***

While financial incentives might seem like a quick and easy avenue for bolstering recruitment and retention numbers for schools struggling to land and hold on to highly qualified candidates, research suggests that there are many other factors much more influential in decreasing attrition rates. That being said, increasing the financial affordances made to highly qualified teachers can have an impact in bolstering the desirability of a school or district.

For example, underprivileged schools in inner city Baltimore, struggling to recruit the highly qualified teachers necessary to satisfy the requirements of NCLB implemented a policy allowing new, highly certified teachers to be hired at an advanced level of the pay scale. Instead of being brought in on the first “step” of the scale, new teachers were paid the equivalent to the fourth step – a raise of about \$4,700 (Honawar 2007).

In addition to signing and salary bonuses, financial incentives can also be linked to the reduction of financial burdens in some cases. For example, provides up to two years of forgivable loans out of a four-year program for students willing to teach critical and understaffed subjects such as special education and mathematics. The forgiveness rate

usually totals to about \$3,000. The program offers double this amount to candidates willing to teach these subjects in at-risk areas. The program was successful in nearly doubling the amount of candidates it funded from 2004 to 2007 (Berry 2007).

Using financial incentives as a method for increasing the number of highly qualified candidates in struggling districts will more than likely continue to rise, as the Teacher Incentive Fund launched by the Department of Education in 2007 has already pledged upwards of \$100 million to helping struggling districts. However, research again calls into question the actual power of such large expenditures. In an effort to recruit highly qualified and specialized teachers to its most needy and at-risk school, South Carolina launched an aggressive financial stimulation package designed to attract candidates. However, “despite an \$18,000 bonus, the state attracted only 20 percent of the 500 teachers they needed in the first year of the program and only 40 percent after three years” (Berry 2007). This deficiency resulted from the fact that many teachers who applied were dismissed because of lack of qualifications, and of those qualified teachers many were reluctant to move to high-risk districts as a result of things like lack of administrative support and poor working conditions.

Massachusetts attempted to implement a similar program a few years before in 1999. The Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program was aimed at serving 13 of the states most needy districts by utilizing a \$60 million endowment to persuade mid-career professionals to transfer to at-risk schools. Even in spite of the \$20,000 bonus offered, the program failed to attract its desired 500 recruits per year, achieving instead only about 200. The program also suffered from an increased rate of attrition of those candidates who did end up making the switch. A study of the program concluded “by the third year...46% of all recruits had left, while 55% of recruits in the high-needs districts were no longer teaching.” In total, by 2003, the program had spent almost \$1 million to recruit and train 74 candidates no longer serving the districts (Berry 2007).

### *Support from Administration*

While financial incentives have been proven to have some success in increasing the desirability of a certain position, a large amount of research suggests that support from quality administrators is an even larger deciding factor. Milanowski, et al (2007) conducted a survey of candidates at three different teacher training institutions. This study measured the increase in desirability with the manipulation of certain variable characteristics. Regarding financial incentives, the study found that an increase of \$5,000 improved the odds of a candidate saying they would take a job by approximately 4%. In comparison, the hypothetical situation of having a principal “with a reputation for understanding teaching and learning and establishing supportive relationships with teachers” increased the odds of a respondent answering in the affirmative by as much as 17%.

While the influence a strong administrative presence can have on bolstering the recruitment and retention capability of an at-risk district is repeatedly demonstrated by the research, many districts are still underequipped with competent principals and administrative teams. In a report published by the Public Agenda for the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, 29% of superintendents polled said that they believe the caliber of principals applying for positions in school districts was decreasing (“Trying to Stay Ahead,” 2001).

In light of all this evidence, many schools have begun attempting to better prepare administrators to do their jobs in hope of increasing school desirability. One such program is the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program that offers school administrators with at least a master’s degree the chance to earn professional development credit. An entity of the University of Virginia, the program trains “high-impact school leaders” in techniques geared at establishing and maintaining a positive school culture and smartly using data to inform school decision making and to monitor progress towards goals designed through a shared decision-making process (UVA Darden School of Business).

While programs like this offer districts the opportunity to revamp their pre-existing leaders, there are also other solutions being tried that don't necessarily involve retrofitting candidates. For example, a report from the Rainwater Leadership Alliance on the subject of principal preparation cites the recent efforts of the University of Illinois at Chicago to overhaul their principal preparation program. They began by drafting what they call their "Competency Framework" for principal candidates. Additionally they adopted the Chicago Public Schools' Office of Principal Preparation and Development's competencies and success factors as a standard of performance for the first half of its three-year Ed.D. program. Ultimately, these core changes have provided UIC's principal preparation program with a higher level of student performance, and a higher quality end result, by establishing clear performance and learning goals up front. It also includes components entailing hands-on learning experiences, and candidate-by-candidate learning assessment before the completion of the program.

### ***Support for New Teachers***

Another retention strategy supported by research is that of providing mentoring and continued support for teachers just entering the field. These types of programs can include anything from induction and orientation events held throughout the summer to mentoring programs that pair a novice teacher with a veteran teacher in the school. One study conducted in New Mexico found that a group of 141 teachers participating in this type of mentorship program yielded only a 4% annual attrition rate compared to the 9% statewide attrition rate (Jacob 2007). Other studies have found well designed and implemented teacher induction and mentorship programs can reduce attrition by as much as 50% (Mentoring and Supporting New Teachers 2002).

These types of programs provide fledgling teachers with the autonomy to plan and run their own classrooms, while at the same time giving them a channel through which to receive support. A study from the Harvard Graduate School of Education discovered that new teachers:

“reported receiving little guidance about what to teach or how to teach it. Instead, most described struggling on their own each day to cobble together content and materials, often with no coherent, long-term plan for meeting specific learning objectives” (Johnson, et al., 2001). This lack of support led to feelings of frustration among novice teachers. However, teachers in districts with “integrated professional cultures” reported positive experiences within their first few years of teaching. In these types of schools, new teachers experienced “frequent and meaningful” contact with members of administrations, as well as other more experienced teachers, and also reported that responsibility for the school and its students was shared among all members of the faculty (Johnson, et al., 2001).

An example of one such effective program is that implemented ABC Unified School District in Southern California. Their “Peer Assistance and Support System” (PASS) assigned fledgling teachers with experienced “peer coaches,” usually veteran teachers who have retired from the profession. These coaches serve as an educational resource for new teachers. Additionally, they conduct between five and ten evaluative observations of the new teachers in order to offer praise and constructive criticisms. Coaches are also responsible for creating progress reports for their candidates, in collaboration with the teacher and the building principal.

### ***School Environment & Student Characteristics***

A substantial amount of research supports the idea that teachers are drawn to working with students they feel are “teachable.” These students are those who, regardless of race, socio-economic background, or even intellectual ability or achievement, are semi-well behaved and motivated. This ultimately leads to what Jacob (2007) labels a Catch 22, as producing this type of student requires the involvement of quality educators, yet quality educators are driven away by the nature of students who most need them.

Research has found that this level of academic agreeability is very closely linked to student behavior. Essentially, if a student is not focused on learning, they won’t learn. For

students to make the greatest amount of academic progress, their primary focus must be on learning. A report by the American Federation of Teachers concedes that schools are not necessarily to blame for students' behavior, and no school can perfectly correct the behavior of every single troubled student. However, the report does point out that "schools can affect the level of aggression in students just by the orderliness of their classroom" (Walker, et al., 2004).

The authors outline several strategies that could help improve student behavior. Firstly, they underscore the importance of drafting and enforcing an achievable and practical school code of behavior. This code should be the result of a collaborative effort from all parties involved in the school, from bus drivers and custodial staff to the superintendent and the school board.

Once established, this code should be enforced faithfully all the way down to the classroom level and should permeate all aspects of management therein. This would include practices such as establishing and reinforcing clear and simple rules, arranging the physical classroom space in such a way as to minimize student distractions and disruptions, and faithfully and consistently delivering the predetermined consequences whenever an infraction occurs (Walker, et al., 2004).

In addition to discipline, the report also recommends integrating a positive behavioral support program in schools. This type of practice is founded on the belief that it is equally, if not more important to catch students doing "good" as it is bad. Juniata Valley High School in Alexandria, Pennsylvania utilizes this sort of program to help promote a school community that values "Hornet P.R.I.D.E.": Preparation, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Equality. When students are found embodying one or more of these traits, faculty members may award them a "buzz bill" (named after the school mascot, the Hornet). A buzz bill is a quarter sheet of paper on which the teacher describes the positive behavior of the students and which quality it falls under. Students then write their home address on the card and turn it into the office. After the office has recorded the bill, thus entering the student in a monthly drawing for recognition prizes, it is

mailed home to the student's family notifying them of the accolade their son or daughter has received.

Since the implementation of the program a few years ago, faculty of the district have found not just a decrease in negative, undesirable behaviors, but also a rise in students acting kindly towards their peers and teachers. Students have also responded enthusiastically to recognition events and award opportunities associated with the program.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

As a result of the disparities in educational opportunities being afforded students of different demographics, the movement towards educational equality has permeated nearly every level of the political system in the last decade. Efforts to try to provide all children with equal access to reliable, quality education has given birth to many movements, associations, and organizations with the goal of bolstering the academic lives of all children.

The initial passage of the No Child Left Behind act in 2001 marked the advent of terms such as “adequate yearly progress” and “highly qualified teachers.” Aimed at living up to the promise of the American dream that this nation is one of equal opportunity for all. It attempted to do this by addressing the very core of educational quality: the teachers themselves.

In the years following the implementation No Child Lefts Behind, a simple, yet perhaps temporary, conclusion has emerged: it’s not going to be as easy as initially thought. Reality has, in many ways shattered the overly-ambitious, overly-idealized language of the bill, particularly in regard to those provisions insuring that all children of this country are being instructed by individuals who are qualified to be providing that service.

In light of this shortcoming, a tremendous amount of research has been conducted geared towards identifying and rectifying those obstacles that stand between all schools and highly qualified candidates. This list is long and continues to grow; what is clear is

that there is not a simple one-stop-fix for the issues of educational inequality plaguing the country's most needy districts. Everything from poor teacher salaries to concerns over workplace safety cause a rift separating the aspirations of NCLB from their fulfillment becoming a reality.

Just as there are many issues facing the current educational system, there are equally as many proposed solutions, all with varying levels of success. In this vastness, there are many expected confirmations, such as the fact that teachers are more likely to want to teach students that want to learn, as well as many seeming misconceptions, such as the fact that increasing the pay check of a teacher might not make them more willing to show back up for first period in September.

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**The Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College** **Sept. 2010 - May 2014**  
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### STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Juniata Valley Middle/Senior High School, Alexandria, PA** **Jan. 2014 – April 2014**

- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading
- 10<sup>th</sup> Grade English
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### RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

**EverFi, Inc., Washington, D.C.** **June 2013 – Aug. 2013**  
**Marketing Intern**

- Conducted market research to help sharpen dialogue around new products and promotional opportunities.
- Maintained and edited company website and blog.
- Conducted data collection and analysis regarding company events.

**Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, D.C.** **June 2012 – Aug. 2012**  
**Intern for Policy and Leadership**

- Developed marketing strategy for national policy fellowship program.
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- Worked collaboratively with supervising staff to expand the organization's website.
- Attended national gatherings of elected officials and policy makers as a representative of the Institute.

**Penn State Learning, University Park, PA** **Jan. 2011 – Jan. 2013**  
**Peer Tutor of Writing**

- Provided feedback to students of various ages, educational backgrounds, and ethnicities on a wide range of writing assignments.
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**Penn State Department of Psychology, University Park, PA     Aug. 2011 – Dec. 2011**  
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#### **ACTIVITIES**

- Penn State Lion Ambassadors Executive Board Member, Committee Director
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- Master of Ceremonies – Penn State Lion Ambassadors “Be a Part From the Start” freshman pep rally
- Movie Extra: *I Am Number Four* (2011); *Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012)
- Penn State University Pride of the Lions Pep Band, Member
- History Director – Penn State Student Handbook
- Student Pennsylvania State Educators Association, Member
- Relay for Life – Murrysville, Master of Ceremonies and Coordinator of Activities
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#### **HONORS/AWARDS:**

- Schreyer Honors Scholar – Penn State University
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- Presenter, 2011 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (Miami, Florida)
- Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society
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- Penn State University President’s Freshman Academic Award
- Finisher, Washington D.C. Rock ‘n Roll Half-Marathon
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