

Qualified Teachers for At-Risk Schools: **A National Imperative**

An Inaugural Report From the



NATIONAL
PARTNERSHIP
for TEACHING in
AT-RISK SCHOOLS





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A Letter From the Chairman

MANY AMERICANS ASSUME that the achievement gaps among our nation's students are the inevitable result of poverty, poor family structure, and social problems. And indeed, these are daunting factors and challenges. But research suggests that if our poorest children are given a succession of motivated, well-prepared, and experienced teachers, the gaps in achievement between these children and their more affluent peers can be narrowed—if not completely closed.

The problem we face in America is that although many schools have dramatically increased the achievement of their poorest children, many other schools—and entire districts—continue to lag behind. And in far too many of those underperforming or at-risk schools, a large number of teachers are inexperienced, poorly prepared, and generally less qualified than the teachers in other, more successful schools.

I believe a nation that has planted its flag on the moon and sent robotic scouts to Mars can figure out how to get good teachers into the schools that need them the most. And I am committed to an all-out, comprehensive strategy to do just that, knowing that the road leading from diagnosis to effective action and, finally, to results will be difficult.

As the immediate past chairman of the Education Commission of the States, I championed the issue of teachers for hard-to-staff schools as the signature initiative of my chairmanship. Now I am happy to continue to lead efforts on behalf of that issue both in my home state of Virginia and nationally, as chairman of the National Governors Association and as chairman of the newly created National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools.

The analysis, work, and vision of the National Partnership are summarized in this report, which I hope will serve as a call to the nation for increasing its commitment to the issue and for joining with the National Partnership in addressing one of the most critical education challenges of our time.



Mark R. Warner

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A National Imperative

Few challenges facing America today are as critical as improving the educational attainment of poor and minority children. The dimensions of the problem—and its enormous social and economic consequences—are evident in the following statistics:

- Black and Hispanic 12th graders perform at the same level in reading and mathematics as white 8th graders.¹
- The high school graduation rate for Hispanics and blacks is roughly 55 percent, compared with 78 percent for white students.²
- By the age of 24, nearly half of young adults raised in affluent families have graduated from college, compared with only 7 percent of young adults raised in low-income families; while 34 percent of white adults obtain either a two-year or four-year college degree by age 25, only 20 percent of black adults and 15 percent of Hispanic adults receive a college degree by that age.³
- Eighty percent of inmates under the age of 25 in U.S. prisons lack a high school diploma, and 40 percent are functionally illiterate. Fifty percent of black high school dropouts have been incarcerated; in 2000, there were more black males in prison (791,600) than in college (603,000).⁴
- According to the 2000 Census, the median annual household income was \$33,000 for Hispanics and \$29,000 for blacks, compared with \$47,000 for whites.⁵
- By 2020, there will be a shortage of workers qualified to fill the estimated 14 million white-collar jobs that will be vacated by baby boomers reaching retirement age.⁶

The recipe for reversing these disturbing trends is complex. It requires overcoming the disadvantages that so often plague the 26 million children who grow up in

low-income households: poor nutrition, substandard housing, inadequate health and dental care, physical danger from a culture of drugs and violence, family stress and insecurity, limited adult support, and few opportunities for cultural enrichment.

In addition to these disadvantages, poor children are typically handicapped by substandard and unequal educational opportunities. But of all the educational disparities poor children face, none is more significant than the disparity in the quality of their teachers.

William Sanders⁷ and other researchers have shown the enormous difference that teachers can make in the achievement of their students. One study in Dallas in the mid-1990s, for example, showed that children assigned to effective teachers for three years in a row scored an average of 49 percentile points higher on a standardized reading assessment than children assigned to three ineffective teachers in a row.⁸ By providing the same educational opportunities for poor children as for more affluent children—and, in particular, quality teachers—education can indeed become the “great equalizer” that enables all children to succeed.

Although there is much debate about what makes one teacher more effective than another, research findings point overwhelmingly to the importance of a teacher’s mastery of his or her subject matter. Yet according to Richard Ingersoll,⁹ there is a significant disparity in the content knowledge between teachers in high-poverty and more affluent schools. He found that when compared with teachers in more affluent schools,

significantly more mathematics, science, English, and social studies teachers in high-poverty schools lack a major or a minor in their teaching field. In mathematics, for example, 43 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools lacked a major or minor in their field, compared with 27 percent in more affluent schools.

Not only do the teachers of low-income students tend to be more poorly trained in the subject they teach, they also are far more likely to have significantly less teaching experience. According to the National Center for Education Statistics,¹⁰ 20 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools have three or fewer years of teaching experience, compared with 11 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools.

Even when the teachers in high-poverty schools have experience and credentials, they are generally inadequately prepared and supported to handle the enormous instructional challenges they face—challenges that would test the mettle of the most experienced and accomplished teachers. Experts from across the political spectrum increasingly have come to understand that a system in which teachers with the least experience are given the hardest teaching assignments is not serving the needs of students.

Efforts to improve the quality of teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools have been largely uneven and unfocused. States or districts may tackle the general problem of teacher supply, for instance, and assume that increasing the number of teachers will benefit all schools, including those that are hardest to

staff. But our experience during the last five years in helping states examine and develop policies that address the issue of hard-to-staff schools suggests that the positive effects of such broad efforts rarely trickle down to the most vulnerable schools.

Further, individual schools and districts typically attempt to devise piecemeal solutions that have minimal, short-term impact. Developing policies and practices capable of adequately addressing staffing problems in at-risk schools requires sustained work on both the state and district levels. This, in turn,

requires the ongoing commitment of key stakeholders, adequate resources, and a solid understanding of the issues and the strategies that can be used to address those issues.

The goal of this report is to provide some of that understanding: to discuss what we know and don't know about the challenge of staffing at-risk schools, and to identify some of the strategies that policymakers and other key stakeholders can consider in their efforts to ensure that students in all schools have the high-quality teachers they need and deserve.



The Role of the National Partnership

The National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools was created to raise the visibility of the issue of teaching in at-risk schools; to marshal the support of policymakers, education and community leaders, funders, and other key stakeholders; and to help develop sustained, systemic efforts to address the problem—especially at the state and local levels.

The three organizations that created the National Partnership—the Education Commission of the States (ECS), ETS, and Learning Point Associates—believe that the time is right for a massive national effort to address and resolve the problems our neediest, lowest performing schools face in recruiting and retaining well-prepared teachers.

The evidence from research constitutes a mandate for intensified efforts to provide effective, well-qualified

teachers for every child in every classroom. There is an increasing array of promising strategies employed by policymakers and educators in order to address the issue. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act¹¹ has focused unprecedented national attention on the importance of ensuring adequate academic progress by all students. The NCLB Act explicitly recognizes that one of the key requirements for achieving this goal is that all teachers be adequately qualified. Title I of NCLB (Section 1112) requires each state to ensure “that low-income students and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by unqualified, out-of-field or inexperienced teachers.”

Building on the skill and experience of the three principal partner organizations, and working with other organizations that have expertise to share and a strong commitment to addressing the issue, the National Partnership seeks to:

- Galvanize public and policymaker attention, not only at the national level but in every state and every local district.
- Broaden understanding of the problems of teaching in at-risk schools.
- Work with policymakers and education and community leaders to develop and implement promising solutions that are grounded, whenever possible, in solid research.
- Stimulate the growth and dissemination of research-based knowledge about the problem and its potential solutions.

The Elements of the Problem

What do we mean when we talk about “effective” or “well-qualified” teachers for “at-risk” schools?
What factors contribute to the problem of staffing at-risk schools?

Defining the Terms

Effective and Well-Qualified Teachers. The National Partnership defines effective teachers as those who are able to consistently assist their students in making significant academic progress. To do this, teachers must have a command of their subject matter, understand how students learn, and have a broad repertoire of teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students. Teachers should have, at a minimum, full certification in their main teaching field, though full certification does not ensure that a teacher will have the deep grasp of subject matter and the repertoire of instructional skills necessary to be effective with all students. And while teaching experience also does not guarantee effectiveness, research does indicate that teachers who

have limited experience are generally less effective than teachers who have at least several years of teaching experience under their belts.

At-Risk Schools. A salient characteristic of at-risk schools is that they generally have relatively few well-qualified teachers. Overwhelmingly, the teachers in at-risk schools tend to have temporary or emergency certification, teach in fields for which they lack strong subject-matter preparation (“out-of-field”), or are in their first year or two of their teaching careers. Such schools generally have a difficult time attracting teachers with strong qualifications, especially in core subject areas, and often are unable to keep teachers for more than a few years. Similarly, these schools typically have difficulty attracting and retaining capable and experienced principals and other leaders.

At-risk schools are likely to serve a high proportion of minority and low-income students, have poor student achievement, and—if they are high schools—have lower graduation rates. Such schools often are found in core urban areas, but rural schools also may have many of these characteristics. Finally, while individual at-risk schools with these characteristics may beat the odds from time to time and may significantly exceed the average for student achievement among schools with their profile, we believe these schools are likely to fall back into a pattern of low achievement over time.

What Causes the Problem?

Many factors account for the problem of staffing at-risk schools, and not all schools face exactly the same challenges. Nevertheless, the large body of literature reviewed and synthesized by the National Partnership sheds considerable light on the causes of the problem.

Teacher Supply. Research at the state and national levels has shown that teacher shortages exist but vary by geographic area, subject area, and individual schools. A number of studies have confirmed that teacher shortages are most likely to be a problem in urban areas¹² and isolated or disadvantaged rural districts.¹³ Shortages are most severe in the fields of mathematics and science¹⁴ and special education.¹⁵ And the shortages tend to be worse for schools serving high percentages of black and Hispanic students because teachers are more likely to transfer out of such schools.¹⁶

Teacher Distribution. The growing body of literature on teacher distribution suggests highly qualified teachers “self-select” into higher achieving schools. A particularly revealing study of New York teachers by Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff¹⁷ found that teachers who transferred to another district or left teaching altogether tended to have better qualifications than their peers who remained.

Teacher Recruitment. Studies on the recruiting and hiring practices of school districts point to inefficiencies that deter qualified teachers from working in the most disadvantaged schools. A research study by Liu and Johnson,¹⁸ based on surveys of a random sample of new teachers, found that teachers complained about the lack of information regarding potential placements and about late hiring. In California and Florida, for example, one third of teachers were hired after the school year already had begun. Also, a study by Levin and Quinn¹⁹ focused on urban schools found that late hiring practices were directly responsible for some districts’ inability to hire the teachers they needed. In fact, the districts in the study received five to seven times as many applications as they had positions to fill but failed to make job offers in a timely manner.

Support for Beginning Teachers. The literature related to beginning teacher support suggests that schools serving poor communities may not provide adequate support and resources for new and existing teachers. According to a study by Freeman, Brookhart, and Loadman,²⁰ for example, beginning teachers in schools serving large minority populations in high-poverty areas are more likely to feel that they are not able to develop good relationships with students whose backgrounds are significantly different from their own. These teachers also report a lower level of job satisfaction.

School Environment. Finally, the research literature on school environment reveals that high-poverty and high-minority schools are likely to be more dangerous, overcrowded, and poorly maintained; have higher rates of staff and student turnover and absenteeism; and suffer from an environment that is generally not as conducive to learning as that of other schools.²¹ These schools are more likely to have weak leadership, yet research shows that an important element in teachers' decisions about teaching in particular schools is their confidence in the principal and other leaders.²²

Taken together, these research findings reveal the depth of the national crisis we are facing in terms of staffing at-risk schools with well-qualified teachers. Better teachers self-select into higher achieving schools and leave their less qualified peers behind. Schools in urban districts and in isolated rural areas have a limited pool of qualified mathematics, science, and special education teachers from which to draw—a problem further exacerbated by inefficient recruiting and hiring practices. Even when qualified new teachers are hired, schools do not provide adequate support to help these teachers adjust, grow, and develop relationships with students who are often very different from themselves. And teachers in at-risk schools commonly find themselves in school environments that are often dangerous, overcrowded, and chaotic.

Moving Toward Solutions

A number of states and school districts as well as several foundations, advocacy and research organizations, universities and governmental agencies have established initiatives focused on the problem of staffing at-risk schools. It is our hope that some of the efforts currently under way will prove to be successful, provide solid models for others to emulate, and add significantly to our knowledge base.

State and School District Initiatives

In an effort to improve the preparation, recruitment, and retention of teachers, a number of states and school districts have implemented initiatives that touch on

various phases of the teacher career continuum—from preservice to initial licensure, to hiring and induction, to continued practice and professional development.

Teacher Preparation, Certification, and Licensure. A variety of state and institutional initiatives have been undertaken to improve the quality of instruction and practical classroom experience that traditional teacher-preparation programs provide. These initiatives include efforts to create changes in the allocation of resources, academic organization, faculty roles and evaluation, internal accountability, and relationships with practicing K–12 schools. Some states also are implementing performance-based certification and licensure policies, which establish standards for what teachers should know and be able to do at different stages of their teaching careers.

In addition, some school districts are working in partnership with local universities to provide alternative routes to certification. Because these programs provide shorter paths to becoming a teacher than the traditional route—and because many of them recruit significant percentages of individuals who differ from those in standard teacher-education programs (i.e., candidates who are older, minority, male, or have experience working in urban settings)—school districts in urban and rural areas where shortages are more prevalent view these programs as a solution to filling teaching vacancies more quickly and with candidates who may better meet the needs of their students.

It is important to note, however, that despite the fact that alternative-route programs can reduce the

■ **Carnegie Corporation of New York is funding the Teachers for a New Era initiative in several universities across the nation. Selected universities, such as Bank Street College in New York City, were awarded a five-year grant to prepare more effective and accountable teachers for urban schools, which are most often characterized as hard to staff.**

■ **The No Child Left Behind Act's Transition to Teaching program authorizes competitive five-year grants to partnerships and eligible entities to establish programs to recruit and retain highly qualified midcareer professionals and recent college graduates as teachers in high-need schools. This program includes recruiting teachers through alternative routes to certification under state-approved programs that enable individuals to be eligible for teacher certification within a reduced period of time.**

incidence of teachers teaching outside of their content expertise, alternative programs that provide little pedagogical preparation for new teachers prior to their entry into the classroom still shortchange those teachers and their students. Moreover, to regard alternatively prepared teachers as a panacea for the staffing problems in at-risk schools is to continue to put students in those schools at a disadvantage in comparison with their peers

in schools where there is a more stable and experienced faculty.

Teacher Recruitment. To address the recruitment challenges in at-risk schools, states have been implementing initiatives to tap into already existing and potential pools of teachers. For example, because inefficiencies in many districts' technological infrastructures are exacerbating the hiring process for teacher candidates (by having to submit multiple, sometimes hand-written, applications for a single district), states and school districts are developing Web-based application systems that make it easier for teaching candidates to submit their applications in a more timely and efficient manner.

“Grow-your-own” programs also are being implemented to improve recruitment and retention for hard-to-staff schools, especially in subject areas and in rural and urban districts where data show that at the current rate, teacher shortages are inevitable. Some of these programs begin exposing students to teaching as a profession as early as the seventh grade, while others work with college students or instructional aides.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the mayor's Community Education Alliance, in partnership with Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprises Inc. and two local foundations, supports an incentive program to draw high-performing teachers to nine struggling inner-city schools. Teachers who transfer to the identified schools earn an extra \$5,000 a year. In addition, the program offers up to \$10,000 in equity to highly qualified teachers in the program and a low-interest second mortgage to all teachers who teach in one of the designated schools. The success of this initiative is demonstrated in the improved test scores of students in the nine schools. Based on data from the TerraNova achievement tests in 2002, the Public Education Foundation reported increases in reading and mathematics. And as of 2004, the nine schools were showing higher academic gains on state tests than the top 10 percent of elementary schools. For more information, refer to the City of Chattanooga press release (www.chattanooga.gov/mayor/Press_Releases/CEA%20announces%20results%20504.htm).

Increasingly common at both the state and district levels are a variety of financial incentives—such as higher salaries and signing bonuses—to attract and retain qualified teachers in at-risk schools. But such incentives do not appear to be effective in providing long-term solutions to the staffing difficulties in at-risk schools. Also, increasing salaries for a large number of teachers significantly beyond the inflation-adjusted average would almost certainly require a commitment of federal, state, and district funding far above current levels.

As the percentage of minority students in public schools increases and now stands at 40 percent, the percentage of minority teachers in the profession remains at only 10 percent.²³ Because minority teachers may have special insights into students who are like themselves, may be able more easily to establish trusting relationships with minority students, and can serve as important role models, there has been an increasing push to increase minority representation in the teaching profession.²⁴ A number of states and districts have undertaken special minority teacher recruitment efforts that include strategies similar to the ones previously mentioned. In addition, there is a stepped-up effort to recruit community college students into teaching because minorities constitute a significant percentage of the community college population.

Support for Beginning Teachers. The importance of providing adequate support and guidance to beginning teachers resonates throughout the statistics on new-teacher attrition, particularly in at-risk schools where the rate of teacher attrition is significantly higher than in more affluent schools. A recent study of schools in Colorado, for example, revealed that statewide, 20 percent of teachers left their schools each year from 2001 to 2004, but 10 at-risk schools in the Denver district had annual turnover rates of 50 percent or higher from 2002 to 2003.²⁵

Because research supports the success of comprehensive induction programs—even when other factors such as salary, school conditions, and personal background of the teacher are taken into account—more and more

states and districts are implementing such programs for new teachers. A comprehensive induction program includes a combination of mentoring, professional development and support, and formal assessments for new teachers during at least their first two years of teaching.²⁶ Such programs, while expensive, have proven to be highly effective in keeping quality teachers in the profession, identifying teachers who perform poorly, providing clinical training, building a strong community of teacher learners, and orienting teachers to their local schools.

At least 15 states currently require and fund comprehensive induction programs, including the Teacher Retention Initiative in the state of Virginia, which will fund mentoring programs for new teachers in hard-to-staff schools during their first year in the classroom.

Other initiatives for improving new teacher support include the Cleveland Initiative for Education, which seeks to improve teacher quality and develop policy recommendations for improving teacher induction and retention in Cleveland, Ohio.

Teacher Retention. In addition to the mentoring and induction support offered to beginning teachers, states and districts have developed a variety of strategies to increase the satisfaction, effectiveness, and retention of veteran teachers. One increasingly common strategy is targeted compensation policies that reward teachers not for years of experience but for demonstration of quality. Such evidence can include certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards or

significant achievement gains by a teacher's students. These performance-based measures often have the additional benefit of motivating teachers to immerse themselves in professional development, pursue career advancement opportunities within education, and regard teaching as a more long-term profession.

School Environment. States and districts are beginning to address the important role of the school environment in teacher retention and effectiveness, which is especially important for at-risk schools. Some states have undertaken, or plan to undertake, surveys of their entire teacher workforce to identify the factors that are most distressing for teachers about their work environment. Other states and districts regularly administer school satisfaction surveys that solicit the views of students, teachers, and parents about the climate in their schools and suggestions for improving it. Efforts to reduce the size of comprehensive high schools in order to strengthen the sense of community and connection and thereby increase support for learning are widespread throughout the country. And, increasingly, when the climate in particular schools has led to unacceptable performance, states and districts are restructuring or “reconstituting” schools from the bottom up.

School Leadership. Recognizing that school leadership plays a critical role in establishing a productive school climate, states increasingly are paying attention to the importance of developing and supporting strong school leaders at the building and district levels. Education

policy reforms, reinforced by NCLB requirements, have placed new emphasis on the role of the school principal as instructional leader.

Yet the quality of principals in hard-to-staff schools is reportedly low. A 2001 Public Agenda report²⁷ found that 29 percent of superintendents believed the quality of principals had declined measurably in recent years. In addition, the number of principal openings is expected to grow as the number of retirements continues to increase. This situation will pose the greatest challenges to urban and rural districts with large concentrations of hard-to-staff schools that

The University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education has been contracted to deliver an executive education program specially designed for the needs of a cadre of experts charged with turning around consistently low-performing and hard-to-staff schools in the state. The program focuses on leadership challenges, strategic change, decision making, communications, and partnering. It offers the opportunity for successful school administrators who have already earned at least a master's degree to also earn a professional credential in educational turnaround management. Additional information about the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program is available online (www.darden.virginia.edu/VDOE/).

experience the highest principal turnover rates, often due to lower principal salaries and high numbers of inexperienced principals.

States and local school districts have started to address these leadership issues through initiatives to improve principal preparation, licensure, and professional development. Also, schools are beginning to think of leadership not only in terms of principals but also other school administrators and teachers. The idea of distributed leadership—that is, sharing leadership across various staff levels from teachers to school administrators within a school—is beginning to receive more attention. Although the idea has been around for some time, very little is known about how successful this approach to leadership is in practice.

Efforts of the National Partners

The three partner organizations in the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools have each accomplished, or are currently engaged in, significant work on the issue of hard-to-staff schools.

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) launched its Quality Teachers for At-Risk Schools initiative in early 2003. The goal of the effort, which was initiated by Virginia Governor Mark Warner, is

Through a grant from Washington Mutual, the Education Commission of the States and Learning Point Associates are working in Illinois and Texas to design a blueprint for the use of time for professional development in in hard-to-staff schools. The goal is to provide more opportunities for teacher support and development that will stem teacher attrition and make it easier to recruit new teachers into hard-to-staff schools in the districts. For more details, refer to “Teacher Quality: Use of Time in Hard-to-Staff Schools” (www.ecs.org/html/ProjectbySubject.asp?issueID=129).

to deepen state leaders’ understanding of policy issues that are crucial to improving the supply, distribution, and quality of teachers in hard-to-staff urban and rural schools.

Prior to this effort, ECS spent four years on a project funded by the Wallace Foundation that involved work on the issue of hard-to-staff schools in 17 states. The project convened statewide policymaker and stakeholder meetings, motivated important policy changes, produced several publications on teacher quality, and enabled ECS to develop a comprehensive approach to helping states assess and respond to the teaching crisis in their most at-risk schools. One of the valuable lessons that ECS learned from this work is that efforts to improve the quality of teaching in hard-to-staff schools must specifically target those schools and not the state teacher shortage or quality problem as a whole.

ETS, building on the work of Richard Ingersoll, is analyzing the 1999–2000 *Schools and Staffing Survey* to understand the characteristics and reasons of teachers who leave hard-to-staff schools, as distinguished from those who leave easy-to-staff schools. Similar studies also are focusing specifically on teacher turnover in Native American communities and teacher quality in rural schools. The results of these and other ETS projects will be published by the ETS Policy Information Center and further disseminated by the National Partnership in 2005.

Learning Point Associates, with funding from the Joyce Foundation, is conducting a study to better understand what is necessary to recruit and retain talented teachers in high-need schools. Few research efforts on this topic actively take into account the voice of the subject being studied: the teacher. Focus groups are being convened in both hard-to-staff and easy-to-staff schools in rural, urban, and suburban areas in Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin for the purpose of asking teachers what it will take to get high-quality teachers into the schools that need them most. An array of teacher-tested policy options will emerge from this project, and they will be disseminated through the National Partnership and other state and national communication vehicles.

Learning Point Associates also has been working on a major national initiative on closing the achievement gaps, much of which involves the problems faced by at-risk schools.

Other Noteworthy Initiatives

Another organization that has done significant work on the issue of hard-to-staff schools is the Education Trust. Through its many publications and its work in specific states and districts during the last several years, the Education Trust has become a leading voice for the need to improve the quality of our nation's teachers overall and, in particular, to ensure that low-income and minority students have teachers as well-qualified as those who teach their more affluent, white peers.

Although still limited, financial support in response to regional and local needs for increasing the number of high-quality teachers in at-risk schools has surfaced from both the private and public sector. The Joyce Foundation, for example, provides grants to national and local organizations in support of research, advocacy, and the development and implementation of model programs and policies that address the issue. The Bush Administration also is recognizing the critical need to improve teacher quality in at-risk schools through the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act, which would increase loan forgiveness from \$5,000 to \$17,500 for mathematics, science, and special education teachers who teach in high-need schools.²⁸

What Do We Need to Find Out?

Despite all the research that has been done to better understand disparities in the quality of teachers in our nation's schools, further research is needed. This need includes evaluative research to determine the true impact of the strategies and initiatives currently being implemented to address the problem of staffing at-risk schools.

It includes preparatory research to determine whether other promising ideas will likely translate into effective solutions. And it includes research specifically related to teacher preparation, teacher recruitment, professional development, and teacher retention. Finally, it includes research on a number of related topics, such as the characteristics of effective teaching in at-risk schools and the employment of technology in both classroom instruction and teacher professional development.

Teacher Preparation

Many teachers begin their careers in at-risk schools because these schools have the most openings. But, as documented earlier in this report, these teachers usually leave at the first opportunity. One explanation for this early departure is that their teacher preparation programs have not adequately prepared them for teaching in challenging urban areas or in isolated rural locales. Because these schools may not conform to teachers' expectations, appropriate preparation for the diversity and the challenges that teachers may face in at-risk schools may be key to improving teachers' experiences in these schools.

To better understand whether teacher preparation can be effective in reducing teacher transfers from at-risk schools, largely qualitative studies are needed that involve interviewing and surveying teachers who completed different types of teacher preparation programs with subsequent placements in at-risk schools. An essential component of this kind of study would be a careful analysis of the specific features of the programs that were designed to better prepare teachers for challenging environments, in relation to outcomes such as length of time in initial placement and the types of schools to which they transfer.

Teacher Recruitment

The effectiveness and promise of the two most common policy strategies for teacher recruitment in at-risk schools—creating more efficient hiring mechanisms and offering incentives, particularly for teachers in shortage areas—are difficult to determine. Streamlining hiring processes may be partially effective, especially if hiring deadlines can be better coordinated with teachers' completion of preparation programs. In many cases, however, district collective-bargaining agreements contribute to the delays by giving veteran teachers extra time to apply for job openings.

As mentioned earlier, many urban public school districts now offer housing loans or help with mortgages and closing costs, and others offer signing bonuses or increased starting salaries to attract teachers. Although some incentive strategies are relatively inexpensive (such as signing bonuses for teachers in shortage subjects), others are costly (such as across-the-board salary increases). Money spent on those strategies is ill spent if the teachers fail to stay in their placements. Thus, it is important to develop a better understanding of the relative worth of different recruitment approaches through applying cost-effectiveness models to various strategies with a single set of outcomes, primarily retention of qualified teachers in at-risk schools.

In collaboration with the New York City Department of Education, the New Teacher Project created the Teaching Fellows program in 2000 with the intent to attract young and midcareer professionals to teach in the most underperforming schools. The Fellows program has been able to target its efforts at high needs, particularly minorities and hard-to-staff subject areas. In 2003, 353 new mathematics teachers were hired through a Math Immersion program, and 633 Fellows started the school year as special education teachers. The New Teacher Project also facilitates informal mentorship and support opportunities for new teachers after certification. Once new teachers are in the classroom, the New Teacher Project links them to experienced “lead teachers” from past cohorts and develops forums to foster a support network through a newsletter, a speaker series, and discussion groups for new teachers to reflect on classroom practices. For additional information, visit the New Teacher Project Web site (www.tntp.org/wht/exp.html).

Professional Development

Of the seven teacher characteristics cited by the U.S. Department of Education²⁹ as contributing to increasing student achievement, participation in professional development that is focused on academic content and curriculum was second only to a teacher's cognitive ability. There are countless studies on professional development, including those focused on professional development related to the employment of a specific curriculum. Most of the studies, however, rely on teachers' perceptions of the value of the training they received and do not validate the effectiveness of that training on the basis of the improvement of students' classroom performance.

Recent studies, however, notably by Wenglinsky³⁰ suggest that the professional development received by a teacher influences classroom practices. When these classroom practices involve individualizing instruction to meet the needs of specific student populations and hands-on learning, teachers are more likely to engage their students in higher-order thinking skills, which lead in turn to improved student performance.

Teacher Retention

Research suggests that teachers tend to transfer away from schools with low achievement, high poverty, and high percentages of racial minorities. Job satisfaction, based on factors such as administrative leadership, parental support, and student behavior, also may play

a role in teachers' decisions to move on. But because there is surprisingly little qualitative research that addresses why some schools are hard to staff, little is understood about the dynamics within schools that appear to stimulate teachers to leave.

To supplement the quantitative work, a primarily qualitative research study is needed that focuses on the contexts of hard-to-staff schools and provides evidence from interviews and observations with teachers and interviews with administrators. Moreover, such a study should include both hard-to-staff schools and comparison schools that have similar characteristics but are better able to maintain a stable teaching force. This study would provide state and district policymakers with a better understanding of the reasons some schools are harder to staff than others, even with similar demographics. With this information, policymakers could develop targeted strategies that focus on specific problems in hard-to-staff schools, ensuring greater efficiency in addressing the underlying causes of teacher flight.

The Work of the National Partnership

The dimensions of the task at hand are clear—and they are formidable. To address and begin to resolve the problem of inadequate staffing in at-risk schools, we must pursue four separate objectives:

- We must define the problem clearly and accurately so that the solutions developed to address it are as appropriate, well targeted, and effective as possible.
- We must examine carefully the existing research related to staffing at-risk schools, evaluate the strength of the evidence for our analysis of the problem and for potential solutions, and identify where further research is needed.
- We must develop policy solutions, resources, and instructional strategies that are based upon what we can claim with confidence while being clear and forthright about what we do not yet know.

- We must create a national groundswell to address the issue that yields the political will to forge tough-minded solutions, the public and community support to attempt and sustain them, and adequate human and financial resources to make them successful.

These objectives must be pursued now.

Projected Scope of Work

The National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools has undertaken work that addresses all four of these objectives. This work can be divided into four program areas with specific kinds of activities: information dissemination, research and evaluation, policy development, and resource development.

With continued support from the education funding community, the National Partnership plans to pursue a number of important initiatives within each of these program areas.

Information Dissemination. The success of efforts to resolve the staffing problem in at-risk schools depends upon the commitment of policymakers, education leaders, and the public to make the issue a top priority and on their understanding of the nature of the problem and the appropriate strategies for addressing it. To this end, the National Partnership plans to undertake the following initiatives:

- A national information clearinghouse to collect and disseminate comprehensive, up-to-date information about the problem of teaching in at-risk schools as well as state and local efforts to address that problem, and to provide access to selected resources.
- A Web site dedicated to the issue of teaching in at-risk schools that will serve as the premier national resource for information about the issue.
- An annual national conference, bringing together researchers, policymakers, practitioners, funders, and the media to share information about new findings and promising strategies and to discuss key issues.
- A biannual report on the progress that has been made in recruiting and retaining well-qualified teachers in at-risk schools across the country, on important new research findings, and on the development and implementation of promising state and local policies and instructional strategies.

Research and Evaluation. The National Partnership plans to undertake a number of research-related initiatives:

- A comprehensive synthesis of existing research that addresses our understanding of the problem and identifies appropriate findings in the areas of teacher preparation, recruitment and retention, leadership, and teaching effectiveness as they relate to at-risk schools.
- Cost-effectiveness and other evaluation studies of significant programs and policies.

A valuable Web site affiliated with the National Partnership is the *TQ Source* (www.tqsource.org). This Web site is a national clearinghouse of online information, including state policies, an interactive data tool, regional and national initiatives, and research and publications that address fundamental components of teaching quality (such as teacher preparation, recruitment and retention, and certification and licensure). When fully developed, the *TQ Source* will include resources on topics related to every aspect of the teacher's career continuum, from beginning teaching to professional development to teacher advancement and accountability.

- New research on the problem, including experimental studies.
- Critical reviews, aimed at policymakers and education leaders, of newly published research studies on a variety of related issues.

Policy Development. The ultimate goal of the National Partnership is to help effect successful changes in policy and practice that lead to a more stable and qualified teaching and administrative staff in at-risk schools and thus improvement in learning outcomes for children. The National Partnership's policy development work in districts and states is guided by recognition of five conditions for effective policy change:

- **Condition 1:** Accurate assessment and clear definition of the issues facing policymakers, including assessment of public and political will to address the problem.
- **Condition 2:** Recognition and understanding by a critical mass of policymakers and the public of the importance of the issues addressed.
- **Condition 3:** Appropriate repertoire of policy recommendations geared to the specific social, political, and economic contexts, and an assessment of the pros and cons of various options and implementation strategies.
- **Condition 4:** Strong support from key stakeholder groups for specific policy options and implementation plans.
- **Condition 5:** Immediate and continued assistance to policymakers during the policy development and implementation process in the form of accurate information and frank assessment of policy and implementation strategies and, eventually, of the effectiveness of such policies and strategies.

Specific policy development efforts will include the following kinds of initiatives:

- On-the-ground work in specific districts and states to assist policymakers and education and community leaders in thoroughly and accurately assessing the problems they face in their at-risk schools, evaluating various policy alternatives, and developing and implementing appropriate policy solutions.

- Work with teacher-preparation programs and national associations to help them develop policies and programs that more effectively prepare beginning teachers to be successful in at-risk schools.
- Creation of a national inventory of policy strategies that have been implemented or proposed to address the issue of staffing at-risk schools.

Resource Development. The National Partnership seeks not only to be a catalyst for the development of specific policy solutions but also to help build long-term capacity to successfully address the problems of at-risk schools. To that end, the National Partnership plans to develop or identify:

- Policy development resources that offer guidelines and tools for state and district policymakers and education leaders committed to developing policies to improve teaching in at-risk schools.
- Organizing resources that assist community-based organizations by providing educational information about the issue of teaching quality in at-risk schools and strategies for the effective involvement of parents and other community members in addressing the issue.
- School resources to increase the effectiveness of teachers and leaders in at-risk schools and to help create a supportive professional culture and a productive school environment.

The National Partners and Their Capacity

Each of the three organizations engaged in the National Partnership has a history of working on issues of hard-to-staff schools, teaching quality, urban and rural education, and closing the achievement gaps. Each has built a respected national reputation for the quality and responsiveness of its work.

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is a nationwide, nonprofit organization recognized for its ability to facilitate the exchange of information and innovations for the improvement of education through public policy. Unique among national policy organizations, ECS has a cross-role constituency that includes governors, state legislators, chief state school officers, state higher education executive officers, members of school boards and boards of regents, business leaders, and other key stakeholders. The status of ECS as a nonpartisan interstate compact, involving key leaders from all levels of the education system, creates unique opportunities to build partnerships, share information, and promote the development of policy based on the best available research and strategies.

ETS is the world's largest private educational testing and measurement organization. Its mission is to advance quality and equity in education worldwide. Its products and services measure knowledge and skills, promote learning and performance, and support education and professional development. ETS has a longstanding tradition of providing policy research and program evaluation services to a variety of clients. Its Policy

Evaluation and Research Center focuses on improving the quality of instruction in schools, closing the achievement gaps for underrepresented minorities, conducting large-scale random assignment evaluations, and investigating factors that adversely affect student progress at all levels.

Learning Point Associates is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping educators improve student learning by equipping them with research-based strategies that meet their needs and produce results. Founded as the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) in 1984, Learning Point Associates is grounded in more than 20 years of successful research-based solutions for educators and policymakers. As part of its ongoing mission to provide high-quality research and development, evaluation and policy research, and professional and technical services, the organization has conducted and published research and developed tools, resources, and professional services in many areas.

Collectively, these three organizations bring to the work of the National Partnership the following important capacities:

- The trust and respect of national, state, and local policymakers and education leaders throughout the country.
- The ability to convene policymakers and education leaders at all levels to examine and forge solutions to key education challenges.

- Skill in providing technical assistance to state and local policymakers and school and district educators in their efforts to develop effective policies and improve curriculum and instruction.
- Reliable information about state and local policy initiatives, national education trends, promising policy strategies, and education research.
- A wide range of tools for state and local policymakers, school leaders, and teachers, as well as the capacity to develop additional resources.
- Strong research capacity to gather and evaluate data on federal, state, and district policies; education-related conditions and trends across the country; and programs that have been implemented at the state or local level. This capacity includes experience in conducting cost-effectiveness studies.

Working with community agencies and other local, regional, and national organizations, the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools will serve as the premier national resource for strengthening the quality of teaching in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools through the development of effective policies and resources and the dissemination of accurate, research-based information.

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