

## **STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL - FAIRFAX COUNTY -**

The goal of SMHC is to dramatically improve student achievement in large, urban public school districts by restructuring their human capital management systems. SMHC reforms aim to recruit top teacher, principal and central office talent and to performance-manage those individuals to improve the effectiveness of instruction in all classrooms. As part of this effort, SMHC is conducting case studies of effective SMHC practices in leading-edge districts and organizations. The case studies focus on the three major elements of all human capital management practices: talent acquisition, talent development and motivation, and talent retention, as discussed in the foundational paper defining SMHC by Odden and Kelly (2008).

SMHC case studies have been completed in the following districts:

1. Boston
2. Chicago
3. Fairfax County
4. Long Beach
5. Minneapolis (local district Q Comp program)
6. Minnesota
7. New York City

SHMC case studies have been completed for the following organizations:

8. Teach For America
9. The New Teacher Project
10. New Leaders for New Schools

This paper is available in the Resources section of <http://www.smhc-cpre.org>.

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## STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup>

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The Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is the nation's 13<sup>th</sup> largest school district, serving approximately 167,000 students. The student composition is 10% African-American, 49% White, 16% Hispanic, 18% Asian, and 7% other. District growth has leveled off over the past few years; however there has been growth of more than 2500 students over the past 2 years. The proportion of Asian and Hispanic students has increased in the last 10 years, while the proportion of African Americans has been stable. Only 19% of the students receive free or reduced price lunch. Student achievement is relatively high. All Fairfax County high schools place in the top 3% of the nation in the annual *Newsweek* survey, with schools recognized as among the best in the state and even in the United States. The district employs about 13,000 teachers in 239 schools.

The current superintendent is Dr. Jack Dale. Dale has served since July of 2004. Prior to becoming Fairfax's district leader, he was superintendent of the Frederick County (MD) Public Schools from 1996-2004. In that position, he was named Maryland's Superintendent of the Year. His immediate predecessor was Dr. Daniel A. Domenec, who is now the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators. Domenec was superintendent from 1998 to 2004.

Despite increasing diversity, the district is still a relatively well-educated middle and upper middle class community in which many parents have managerial or professional jobs. A substantial proportion of district parents work for the Federal government or Federal contractors. This parent population is not generally concerned with NCLB or even state standards, but is

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<sup>1</sup> This case is based on a review of documents and interviews with superintendents, key central office leaders from the human resources, curriculum and professional development offices, and representatives from the teacher's union.

more interested in their children receiving a “world class” education. There is also interest in soft skills and character education. The school board has recently adopted a strategic plan that added goals for essential life skills and responsibility to the community to the academic outcomes expected on the schools. The district began a “Strategic Governance Initiative” in 2005. This is an attempt to blend strategic planning with the policy governance model. This model specifies the role of the school board as setting strategic and operational goals and holding the superintendent accountable for these goals, rather than making operational decisions about how the goals will be achieved. The result has been the development of a broad set of strategic goals in conjunction with the school board. Goal areas include continued rigorous academics that exceed the requirements of NCLB, as well as helping students develop essential life skills and responsibility to the community. Along with the goals, the initiative provides expectations for how the district will operate in areas such as human resources, finance, technology, facilities, and community relations. It does not specify numerical targets or metrics for performance. Performance measures are provided to the school board, however, in annual expectation progress monitoring reports.

The district receives most of its funding from the county, which in turn raises the money from property taxation. The recent downturn in the housing market has left the district with a \$100 million budget shortfall in the 2008-09 school year. More than half of this shortfall will be absorbed by budget cuts. The district requested the county fund the remaining \$50 million, but it ended up having to cut nearly \$40 million more for the 2008-09 school year. These cuts included lowering the market adjustment for staff compensation, increasing class size by 0.5 students, and cutting central office positions. Luckily, some of the shortfall was also made up by cost savings due to changes in the state retirement and life insurance program rates.

One notable feature of this district is a sense of identity or image as a successful, high performing district that is “a good place to work,” with good students and a supportive community. This district does not suffer from the low morale or sense of embattlement found in many large urban districts. There appears to be a sense of efficacy among the leaders interviewed. While several admitted that there are some issues with bureaucracy in the district, there is also an awareness of the need to break down silos and serve principals and teachers on the front line.

Because of its relatively high levels of student achievement, state policy is not a major constraint on the district. The state does promulgate student standards and tests as required by NCLB, but these do not seem to be a major concern in the district, due to its generally high level of student achievement. Virginia allows substantial flexibility to local districts. The superintendent contrasted Virginia with Maryland, where the state department of education has a greater influence on districts. Teacher and administrator licensure in Virginia appears relatively unrestrictive. The state issues initial licenses based on completion of conventional or alternative teacher training programs and passing Praxis II, the Praxis II specialty area test (for specific license endorsements such as elementary education, chemistry, or foreign language) and a state literacy and communication assessment. Movement of teachers into the state is facilitated by acceptance of other states’ licenses if the holder has three years of experience. New teachers from other states can receive a 3 year provisional license if they have completed a teacher training program recognized by the originating state. The state does have a requirement that districts establish a mentoring program for new teachers during their first year of teaching. Additional requirements were established for mentoring programs in “hard to staff” schools. The

state has also promulgated standards for teacher performance evaluation systems, but these are largely advisory.

The union-management context in Fairfax County is different than in many other large districts. There are no formal labor contracts or exclusive representation of teachers or principals. Teachers can be members of one of three competing associations, an AFT affiliate, an NEA affiliate, and an independent local association. The district is involved in “meeting and conferring” with one or another of the associations year-round. Initiatives concerning teachers or principals are typically discussed with the associations. The teacher associations appear to take a reactive (and often oppositional) role. The Human Resources (HR) director and superintendent find the lack of closure on most issues involving the teacher associations frustrating. There are three principal associations (one for each level of principal), but this dynamic does not arise in that context.

### **1. FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL’S INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY**

Fairfax County Public Schools is evolving its instructional vision and strategy. In the past it has been relatively successful, so that the need to improve instruction has not been as salient as the need to simply recruit enough high quality teachers to fill vacancies and to hire and retain quality school leaders. A district team has been assigned the responsibility to develop the instructional vision. There are several themes that are expected to come together in this vision. These include professional learning communities and teacher teaming, data-based decision making and use of formative assessments, individualization of instruction, student engagement, project-based instruction, use of technology, and other research-based strategies that increase student achievement.

In addition, the superintendent believes that the district needs to think about the kind of instruction needed to provide a world class education, and that there is something to be learned from international comparisons of teaching. Another potential input into the vision is the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning model. The district is planning to develop a walk-through tool to help principals assess how well the instructional vision is being implemented in classrooms.

The district has also invested substantially in professional learning communities and the tools needed by them as an instructional improvement strategy. It has been developing a set of tools, including an electronic curriculum repository and formative assessment item bank. This is intended to make high quality curriculum maps, lesson plans, and formative assessment tools available to all district teachers. It is also working to tie professional learning communities together with the curriculum and assessment system using a plan-do-study-act cycle. This too is under development.

The district faces a number of challenges in developing a coherent instructional vision. These include its size and past success without an explicit vision. District leaders expressed the concern that an explicit vision would be perceived by teachers as reducing flexibility. It is also not obvious how one would measure world-class performance and the specific instructional programs needed to achieve it. The district is proceeding by having a study team develop draft materials which will be shared with principals and teachers, and further developed based on their input.

The district has also been experimenting with longer school days and a longer year. In 1999, the district created the Excel program, which provided full day kindergarten and added 2.5 hours to the school week in 20 schools with lower achievement and higher poverty. In addition,

these schools received additional funds to strengthen their academic programs (e.g., adding specific reading programs) and decreased class sizes. Teachers in these schools received a higher annual salary in return for working a longer week. An evaluation of this program conducted by the district in 2004 suggested it had mixed success. Full day kindergarten and technology-based phonics were judged successful, but not all schools improved performance.

The district is currently examining how to mesh this program with the Teacher Leadership program for 2008-09. The Teacher Leadership Program is an extended school year initiative designed to provide time for teacher leaders to develop professional learning community cultures in their schools by developing curriculum that advances instruction toward the district's three sets of goals (academics, life skills and responsibility to the community); developing a balanced and comprehensive assessment system; analyzing student achievement data to improve curricular and instructional practices; providing tailored interventions to students; and undertaking professional development activities needed to improve instruction and student learning. The time can also be used to develop teacher leader roles at the school level, including mentors, instructional coaches, and student transition counselors. This program funds extended teacher contracts to 203 or 208 days. Teachers receive a higher annual salary in return for working more days. The program is currently being used in 24 schools, with an extension being proposed for the 2009-10 school year.

The remainder of this case addresses talent acquisition, reform of human resources processes, and talent management, and ends with a conclusions and lessons learned section.

## **2. TALENT ACQUISITION IN FAIRFAX COUNTY**

Teacher talent acquisition is a major concern in Fairfax County. The labor market in the area for teachers, and to a lesser extent, for principals, is highly competitive. There are several

large districts in the area that also hire substantial numbers of teachers. The district hires about 1,600 teachers per year, due to both turnover and growth. Teachers are hired both locally and from out of state. Because Virginia produces fewer teachers than are needed by the state's school districts, new teachers produced in other states are an important supply source. Principals are generally hired from within the district though some are hired from surrounding districts. The district works to keep salaries at plus or minus 5% of its comparison group of five surrounding districts. Labor market competitiveness has been a district priority for both Dale and his predecessor.

About twelve years ago, the need to compete in this labor market spurred a major effort to improve recruitment programs. At that time, the district formed a working group to review its recruitment efforts, and since then has evolved a more timely and effective system. The current HR director began his HR career with this working group, moving over to the director of recruitment from a budget position to spearhead the improvements. The district's efforts are now characterized as "constant, non-stop recruiting."

As the recruitment program has evolved, the HR department has worked on many fronts. One was to speed up the recruitment and selection process and to use technology to make it more efficient. The district was the second in the nation to move to electronic applications and resume scanning. The application of technology helped reduce the time it takes from application to contact for interviews from 61 days to 2. The district now responds to acknowledge applications and request any additional information within 24 hours. Another was to instill a service culture in the HR department. The HR director emphasizes a customer focus in hiring and managing HR staff.

The district's strategic plan and program budget recognize the importance of human resource management and the role of the HR department in the district's success. They explicitly identify several HR areas as expectations for which the school board will hold the superintendent responsible, including recruitment, selection and retention, staff treatment, staff evaluation, and compensation. The HR department produces an annual summary of how it addresses these expectations. The report also describes programmatic efforts made to meet the school board's expectations. Some of the goals have numerical targets for which a met/not met decision is made. The report provides a detailed picture of HR efforts and serves to hold the HR function accountable. For example, the April of 2007 report provided the following information with respect to teacher recruitment:

- A total of 99.5% of full time teaching positions were filled by the opening of school, representing 1,366 teacher hires.
- For teacher positions, recruitment efforts generated eight applicants per vacancy.
- Teacher diversity increased from 14.7 to 15.1%.

Currently, the district's recruitment program is considered successful. In 2006, Fairfax County was recognized by the American Productivity and Quality Center as a model district for recruitment and hiring practices. However, the HR director continues to emphasize the urgency of recruitment and the need to continually innovate to remain competitive in the regional labor market.

### **Teacher and Principal Recruitment**

Teacher recruitment has been the district's primary recruitment focus. It has developed a sophisticated and effective program to fill its 1,600 vacancies per year. Recruitment begins in the fall of the previous year and is coupled with an early hiring process. The goal is to make offers to

the strongest candidates long before the beginning of the school year. However, recruitment goes on non-stop during the course of the year and the staff is constantly reminded of the urgency of recruitment. An electronic application system, job fairs, and year-around recruiting at 85 (primarily regional) colleges yield 16,000 candidates annually. Colleges in East Coast states producing a surplus of teachers (notably Pennsylvania) are targeted. Recruitment took place at 11 job fairs during the 2007-08 school year, located in Virginia, New York, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. Extensive efforts are made to attract a diverse candidate pool. Recruitment messages play up the district's quality of students, the quality of existing staff and programs, and the attractions of the Washington, D.C. area. The HR director characterized the guiding principles of the recruitment program as "Get their attention, spark their imagination, and capture their hearts."

Each year, the HR department evaluates its recruitment sources for yield and quality, modifying its program to draw from the sources with the higher yields of quality candidates. Much effort is also devoted to making the application process smooth and friendly for candidates. Teacher recruitment incentives include a "Smooth Transitions" relocation program which provides a 2 year interest free loan to help defray moving expenses, health club membership discounts, rental discounts, and even a small number of district-supplied housing units with below-market rents for teachers in critical fields. Instead of using a lot of financial incentives, however, the district's approach is to emphasize positive working conditions, the community, and its location.

The district does not have any specific incentives for high need schools or shortage subjects. It also does not emphasize alternative certification programs nor use programs such as Teach For America. Given its high volume of hires and the diversity of teacher training programs

in the area, it does not work closely with any one set of teacher training institutions but recruits from a wide variety of mid-Atlantic institutions.

Principal recruitment. Principal recruitment is largely from within. External recruitment receives far less emphasis than external recruitment of teachers. Principal candidates are largely drawn from the pool of assistant principals, who are in turn largely drawn from the teacher ranks. This strategy depends on developing a pool of potential principals. The district has tried to do this informally and through participation in the Wallace Foundation's Leadership for Educational Achievement in Districts (LEAD). This is the district's 5<sup>th</sup> year of participation in the LEAD program. A major rationale for participating has been the expected need for principals as existing school leaders retire. The combined state and district retirement system makes early retirement very attractive for principals, and the district lost about 60% of its principals in the last five years.

The Fairfax LEAD program includes both the preparation of assistant principals to become principals and the preparation of teachers to become assistant principals. The principal program has focused on the 79-82 schools with the largest numbers of disadvantaged students within the district. Principal aspirants apply and are selected by members of the school district's Leadership Team. Members of each cohort develop an individual leadership plan and participate in courses covering topics like change management, developing cultural competencies, leading data driven decision making, and assessing student success. The aspiring principals can also participate in an accelerated certification program.

Teachers interested in becoming assistant principals can apply for and participate in a year-long internship designed to provide an overview of school-based administration through a variety of leadership experiences. Topics include: developing professionally, leading

people, leading planning and assessing instruction, managing the business of education, and building community relations. To participate, teachers need five years teaching experience, three with the district, and they have to be within 12 credit hours of completing an endorsement in educational administration.

Fairfax also has a program that develops principals to be central office managers called “Supporting the Mission.” This involves principals volunteering to be on teams that learn about the organization and take on a project to improve a process. The results of the teams’ projects are presented to the superintendent.

### **Teacher and Principal Selection**

There are two teacher selection processes. The first is an early hiring process that begins in the fall of the previous school year. Teachers register for job fairs and respond to TeacherInsight, an online screener developed by the Gallup organization. At the fairs, principals interview prospective teachers and recommend making offers. HR staff present review screener results and discuss interview results with principals, and make offers to desired candidates. Those who accept offers are guaranteed placement in the district next fall, subject to reference checks. Candidates’ references are contacted by the HR department by phone. References are considered an important source of information about candidates. Candidates with acceptable references are then referred to schools with vacancies when the vacancy lists are finalized in late spring.

The regular selection process begins after transfers have been accommodated and surplus teachers distributed. This allows a final vacancy list to be posted on the district’s web site in May. At that time, candidates can complete an electronic application, which includes certification information. The HR department collects resumes from these applicants and makes

tentative matches based on credentials and school requirements. A list of names and resumes is sent to each principal with vacancies. The principals contact the candidates and interview them. The HR office provides guidelines for conducting interviews and making decisions at the school level. There is no standard set of questions or interview procedures, but principals are trained on interviewing practices. Principals are encouraged to do panel interviews with teachers on the panel. After principals make their choices, they notify the HR office, which then makes the offer.

Principals are selected by cluster assistant superintendents based on interviews. The interview process includes interaction with a panel that includes staff, parents, and at the high school level, student members. The leadership development programs described above help to develop a pool of potential principals and assistant principals.

### **Teacher and Principal Placement**

Teacher placement is largely decentralized, with hiring principals interviewing candidates and making job offers through the HR department. Because this district does not have a formal contract, there are no issues stemming from seniority-based transfers. However, the district does have a “de-staffing” process that attempts to place teachers whose positions are to be eliminated due to enrollment or program changes. This process begins in April when principals use enrollment projections and known resignations to project staff needs for the next school year. The process includes a transfer fair where teachers interested in moving can apply and be interviewed by principals of schools with vacancies. By the end of May, any surplus teachers who have not found new assignments are reviewed by the HR department and matched against vacancy lists. Schools generally are not forced to take surplus teachers they are not comfortable with, but there is an expectation that schools will show some flexibility by taking a teacher who can be assisted by stronger colleagues within the building.

### **3. HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS**

As mentioned above, Fairfax County has used information technology to improve the efficiency of its teacher recruiting efforts. Almost all aspects of recruitment can be done electronically via the district's web site. Vacancy announcements are made and job fairs are announced. Applications are made via the web site, and pre-screening is done electronically. Applicants are tracked electronically and missing information sought via email. The use of technology and other process improvements have allowed a substantial shortening of the time between vacancy announcement and hire.

The district also makes extensive use of the internet for providing information on HR practices and processes to staff and supervisors. One example is the performance evaluation process, for which practice guidelines and samples are available, as well as forms and information on the process. Another example is professional development. As discussed further below, the district not only provides extensive information about professional development opportunities over the internet, but also conducts registration electronically, and is working on a professional development transcript system to provide staff with a history of their professional development activities. These efforts provide quicker service to staff and managers as well as allowing the district to provide more service with fewer staff.

The HR department has also placed a big emphasis on customer focus. This is apparent for both internal and external customers. The HR department maintains a "welcome center" on the first floor of the district headquarters. Staff and job applicants can use the internet to get HR related information and, if needed, talk to first-contact HR staff. The attractive space was custom designed to convey an impression of the quality and efficiency of the district. Principals are considered key internal customers. It is recognized that a positive relationship between principals

and the HR department pays off for HR programs when principals actively participate in job fairs, when trying to place surplus staff, or ensuring HR's place at the table when important decisions are made. The HR director emphasizes the message that principals are HR partners in communicating with the approximately 140 staff in the HR department. Staff people need to anticipate principals' needs and focus on solutions rather than rules. To promote this message, employment staff is required to visit all the schools with which they work and get to know their specific needs. A sense of urgency in providing service is a characteristic the HR department looks for when recruiting and selecting HR staff.

The HR director has the attitude that even though Fairfax's recruitment operations are successful, it is always possible to be more efficient. He is constantly looking for ways to increase efficiency and give Fairfax County an edge in recruiting critical talent. He is also keenly aware of the efficiency of recruiting, selecting, and retaining the right teacher; citing the costs to the students of poor quality as well as the cost of remediating or replacing poor choices.

#### **4. TALENT MANAGEMENT IN FAIRFAX COUNTY**

Fairfax County has several talent management initiatives that continue the emphasis on acquiring teacher and principal talent. Some of these are the province of the HR department, while others are shared with the instructional services and professional development departments.

##### **Induction and Mentoring**

For teachers, induction begins even before the new hire moves to the area. When the job offer is accepted, new hires receive a document from the HR department called "Passport to employment with the Fairfax County Public Schools" that provides information about documents needed to get on the payroll (including written references), requirements (like TB screening), and

the new employee orientation sessions. New teacher orientation sessions are held throughout the year with a major welcome session held in August. Like all new district employees, new teachers participate in a 3 hour basic orientation conducted by the HR department. This orientation session covers getting the employee on the payroll, but also the mission and values of the district, district organization, work rules, and various procedures. New employees receive an 80 page manual covering this material as well. A second orientation session is held at the employing school covering school-specific information.

Specific to beginning teachers is the “Great Beginnings” program run by the professional development department. The program includes a summer session, new teacher seminars held throughout the year, and an on-site mentor. The 3 day summer session focuses on issues likely to be encountered in the first few weeks of school. The once-per-month seminars during the school year cover topics such as classroom management, parent relations, instructional planning, and meeting the needs of diverse learners.

A second year program of seminars is also available and a third year for elementary teachers. This program is voluntary, but there are incentives for attending in the form of credits toward salary schedule advancement.

There is also a modified version of the “Great Beginnings” program available for experienced teachers new to FCPS. This consists of a 2 day summer program and a school-year seminar. The focus is on learning about the district curriculum and best instructional practices.

All schools have a lead mentor who oversees part time and retired teachers who serve as resource mentors. Mentors are selected by the schools but trained at the central office level.

There is also an initiative called the “LEARN Model” that addresses new teacher skills. LEARN is a model of instruction emphasizing best practices drawn from research on instruction

(including activating prior knowledge, scaffolding, meta-cognition and reflection) and linking to future learning. Specific professional development is available to new teachers on this model.

The district does not have a formal induction program for new principals. It does, however, assign a successful principal to the district office whose job is to work with new principals. This “principal in residence” provides assistance in a variety of areas ranging from school improvement planning to budget and finance.

### **Professional Development**

The district recently removed the professional development function from the HR department and placed it alongside other instructional support departments under the deputy superintendent. A new professional development director was also hired at that time. Professional development had been fairly decentralized to schools and not aligned with district initiatives or instructional vision. The model had been to “offer a lot of professional development courses and let teachers pick the ones they want.”

The establishment of a new professional development office and appointment of a new professional development director were intended to improve the visibility and focus of this district program. The intention is to align professional development more directly with the district’s emerging vision of instruction (when that is completely developed), and to focus professional development offerings on skills that all teachers and other key staff need.

Like most large districts, FCPS offers a range of professional development courses. Some are conducted by district staff at a central academy, while others are delivered electronically. Most courses are offered free of charge to eligible staff. Academy courses can count for re-licensure and some movements on the salary schedule. Courses are offered in content areas such as reading/language arts, mathematics, science, in-classroom management, general pedagogy,

and instructional technology. The latter area is especially well represented in the academy course catalog. Unlike many districts, Fairfax County also provides a substantial number of courses for administrators. Many of these courses are aligned with the district's emphasis on Professional Learning Communities. Other courses cover topics ranging from instructional technology to financial management. The district's interest in developing leaders is clearly reflected in the efforts made to offer continuing development to administrators.

The district has recently implemented an electronic system for managing professional development. The system allows teachers and principals to search for professional development offerings of interest, to register for the course, to access training and development history (including a transcript) and to print certificates of professional development activities. The system provides a central record of all district course offerings. The system will also be enhanced to allow electronic professional development planning. It also offers the possibility of creating a district-wide skills inventory that could be used for developmental needs assessment and succession planning.

### **Performance Management**

The importance of performance management is recognized in the district's strategic plan and program budget. These include expectations for performance evaluation and recognition. Among the expectations are that the superintendent will:

1. Regularly evaluate all personnel based on job performance expectations aligned to the school board's goals and values.
2. Recognize excellence and provide constructive suggestions for improvement.

As with talent acquisition, the HR department produces an annual summary of how the district addressed these expectations. For example, the April of 2007 report provided the following information with respect to staff evaluation:

- As a first step in aligning evaluations with School Board vision, mission, goals, and operational expectations, the Leadership Team evaluations are being reviewed and recommendations will be completed by the end of the current school year.
- 94.5 % of teachers and 83.5% of principals and assistant principals were evaluated within established timelines in 2005-06.
- 305 teachers were non-renewed due to licensure issues in 2005-06 (down from 587 in 2003-04 and 423 in 2004-05).
- Various recognition awards were given to principals, teachers, and support employees.

The teacher evaluation process is applied to new and probationary teachers and once every 3 years to teachers on continuing contracts (tenured teachers). It has both formative (developmental) and summative (continuation of employment) uses. The evaluation instrument consist of 22 “standards of performance” grouped into five domains: planning and assessment, instruction, learning environment, human relations and communication skills, and professionalism. Teachers are rated as not meeting, meeting, or exceeding each standard. There are no rubrics or rating scales that define these levels. Teachers complete a self-assessment, then receive a midyear and a final evaluation, which requires at least two observations. Both the midyear and final evaluations must identify areas for improvement, and those in the final evaluation report are to become goals for professional development in the years the teacher is not being evaluated. Teachers who do not perform to standards are required to develop an improvement plan. If the teacher does not have a continuing contract, she or he is given a

conditional reappointment. Teachers not on continuing contracts are then evaluated again the next year, and do not advance on the pay schedule. Teachers on continuing contracts not performing to standards also develop an improvement plan, and if not successfully completed, the teacher enters an intervention program and is evaluated again. An unsuccessful evaluation in the subsequent year results in dismissal. The HR department sees the formal teacher evaluation system as primarily aimed at the 2% of teachers with performance problems. It sees the day-to-day interaction with principals and the feedback, coaching, and reinforcement principals are supposed to provide as the more important influence on performance for most teachers. Training principals to provide these is the responsibility of the Professional Development department. At this point, there is no explicit connection of the performance standards to a vision of instruction. As a vision is developed by the district, this may influence the evaluation system, but it is more likely to be reflected in the expectations set at the school level by principals and formative feedback teachers receive.

The district does not measure teachers' instructional practice and systematically connect it to value-added estimates of productivity. It sees building teachers' instructional capacity as the immediate issue. The implementation of Professional Learning Communities, teacher leadership, use of assessments, and curriculum alignment are seen as more productive approaches than trying to assess teacher-level value added. The district prefers to focus teachers on the process of instruction which it believes will contribute eventually to improved student learning. The emphasis for performance management is the role of the individual principal in working with teachers to build capacity. Also, though the district is interested in looking at the growth in individual student achievement as a way to identify promising practices, it has been hindered because the state tests are not currently designed to provide a valid growth trajectory.

Principal performance evaluation is conducted by cluster assistant superintendents who make an evaluation on 20 performance standards grouped into five domains: planning and assessment, instructional leadership, safety and organizational management, communication and community relations, and professionalism. The five domains are broadly correlated to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards. Principals are rated as not meeting, meeting, or exceeding each of the 20 standards. These levels are not defined by rubrics, but the standards are further described in a nine page document. Human capital management responsibilities are the subject of one of the standards, and several human capital management functions are described as part of the standard (including staff selection, induction, professional development, and evaluation). Principals have three evaluation sessions with their evaluators: one at the beginning of the year to discuss the principal's self-assessment, a midyear assessment by the evaluator, and a final summative conference. Staff and parent survey results are an input to the final evaluation rating. Student achievement is mentioned in the evaluation documents, but the evaluation process does not involve assessing principals against specific numerical student achievement goals.

### **Teacher Retention**

The district is well aware that teacher retention is as important to its mission as teacher hiring. The HR director emphasizes that each good teacher retained saves the expense and potential discontinuity associated with having to recruit and hire a new teacher. Although the district has always considered itself a good place for teachers to work, and while teacher retention has been about the same as the national average, the competitiveness of the local labor market means teacher retention cannot be taken for granted. Though the district strives to keep salaries competitive, a good part of its retention strategy depends on the positive aspects of

working in the district and with its children. To reinforce this, Fairfax County has just begun an initiative on teacher working conditions. This has included a working conditions survey done in cooperation with the New Teacher Center (Eric Hirsch, the New Teacher Center Director of Special Projects) and a study of who stays and leaves in the 20 schools with the most at risk students. Based on the finding that good leadership was the strongest influence of retention, the district is working to develop tools to help principals develop conversations with faculty and improve teacher working conditions. It has also influenced district thinking on principal selection, elevating the importance of skills and values associated with engaging teachers.

### **Compensation**

The district uses the traditional single salary schedule for teachers, with 20 experienced based steps (and three additional longevity steps) and six lanes (BA, BA+15, BA+30, MA, MA+30, and PhD). For 2007-08, the lowest teacher rate for the standard 194 day contract was \$43,911, while the highest rate (PhD at the third longevity step) was \$90,289. Extra duty supplements are paid for supervising a variety of coaching and extra-curricular activities. Small stipends are also paid to lead mentor teachers. The district works to keep salaries, especially beginning salaries, competitive with a comparison group of five surrounding districts.

Fairfax County does not make extensive use of performance pay for teachers or principals. There are small bonuses (\$1,000-2,000) provided with some of the Teacher or Principal of the Year awards, supplementing the public recognition. District leaders do not believe that performance pay will be effective and have concerns about the administrative costs of such programs. The district had a performance pay system for teachers in the mid-1980s, but it ended due to employee association issues and funding limitations. This system was based on

principal ratings of teacher performance. Teachers rated as exemplary received a salary stipend for 3 years, after which time they were re-evaluated.

Currently, the district does provide incentives for National Board certification. National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) who teach in high-risk schools (high-risk is not defined) receive a stipend of \$3,500. Those who do not teach in such schools receive \$1,750 and may receive an additional \$1,750 for assuming special teacher leadership roles/projects. This is in addition to the state bonus of \$5,000 for the first year of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certificate and \$2,500 annually for the remaining 9 years. This does not seem to be seen as a human capital management initiative and it receives little mention in the district's compensation handbook or recruitment material. The district has 243 NBCTs.

The district does use a form of incentive for placing teachers in lower achieving/higher poverty schools, most of which are at the elementary level. This program provides higher annual salaries (about 7%) in return for an extended school day. About 20 schools have participated over the last 5 years.

As mentioned above, the district's Teacher Leadership program has a compensation component. This program provides three extended contract options (203, 208, and 218 days) for teachers in selected schools. Schools were selected by the district based on a competitive process. Schools submitted application detailing the use to be made of the additional time to improve school and student performance. Note that there is not a pre-specified set of leader roles teachers need to take to be eligible. Each school can define how it wants to use the additional time, and it is possible for all teachers in a school to be on an extended contract.

The district has three salary grade ranges for principals, with elementary principals in the lowest and high school principals on the highest grades. The grades have 18 steps plus one

longevity step. The lowest grade starts at \$71,337 and the highest ends at \$136,521. The rates are for a 12 month (260 day) contract. There are three similar pay grades for assistant principals. There is no performance pay for either principals or assistants. There are no incentives for working in hard-to-staff or low performing schools.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Fairfax County Public Schools has recognized the importance of human capital in continuing its success as one of Virginia's highest-performing districts. It emphasizes its high quality programs and attractive community in attracting quality teachers and principals, then works to hold them through competitive salaries, good benefits, and positive working conditions. District HR practices are typically of high quality, and HR staff are competent and motivated. The emphasis on recruiting sufficient teachers (and also support staff and even bus drivers in this high-cost area) dominates HR thinking. It is clear that the HR department is aware that HR programs need to work well together in order to recruit and retain the needed teachers. For example, the emphasis on keeping salaries competitive in the market helps make the teacher recruitment efforts work. The various programs for developing leaders also work together well by providing a path from teacher leader to assistant principal, principal, and central office administrator. This is supplemented by the district's use of task forces or study groups to address district issues such as teacher working conditions and instructional vision. There are about 30 such groups working at any one time, so that there are plenty of opportunities for informal leadership development. The district appears to be satisfied with the quality of the people it is hiring. Many of the leaders interviewed for this study mentioned that the district has high quality staff.

The major immediate challenge was the funding shortfall which prompted the budget cuts discussed at the beginning of this case. In the long run, the district faces two other challenges: responding to the increased diversity of its student population and implementing a world class curriculum and instructional program that will move the district from good to great. This twofold challenge requires a careful selection of initiatives to respond to the increasing diversity of the student population, achievement gaps, and lower student achievement in some schools, while at the same time maintaining and improving instructional quality and moving further beyond NCLB definitions of achievement in the others.

The district's approach has been to proceed in an incremental way. Given the high performing history of the district, with no looming crisis or urgent immediate need to change from approaches that have been successful in the past, an incremental approach may be the most viable one. The superintendent believes that in this situation, the best way to motivate change is by getting staff to define problems and develop solutions, rather than imposing a solution from above. To that end, he has established over 30 project teams to assess various issues within the district and develop responses. This is also seen as a tool to build leadership capacity as well as to develop a constituency and direction for change.

Overall, the district's talent acquisition strategy appears to be working well. Because this is a high performing, relatively wealthy district with a competent, and in some areas outstanding, HR program, it has been able to attract staff from the top of the ability distribution. The aggressive recruitment of teachers, the attention to keeping salaries competitive, and the programs for developing potential principals are expressions of this strategy. As mentioned above, the next big step is to develop and codify the vision of instruction and align professional

development. There are also efforts underway to determine how to address and measure progress toward the strategic goals of life skills and responsibility to the community.