

Towards Equity in Education: A Bold System to Grow and Retain Teachers in Louisiana

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In fall 2016, the U.S. Department of Education awarded the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) a five-year Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to improve the effectiveness of educators and increase student achievement in Louisiana. The goal of this state collaborative TIF project – Louisiana Building On Leadership Development (LA BOLD) – is to expand and enhance participating schools’ human capital management systems that include performance-based compensation and related support. Specifically, participating schools work with NIET to utilize professional advancement opportunities, rigorous instructional evaluation and feedback, ongoing applied professional growth, and a multilayered performance-based compensation system to increase the percentage of effective educators and to improve student achievement.

Unequal Distribution of Effective Teachers

Research has shown that teachers are the most important school-based factor affecting student achievement (Chetty et al., 2014; Lee, 2018; Lee & Mamerow, 2019; Rivkin et al., 2005). Students taught by effective teachers are more likely to stay in school, attend college, and have a higher income (Chetty et al., 2014; Gershenson, 2016; Lee & Lee, 2020). Unfortunately, effective teachers are not distributed equally across schools and districts (Glazerman & Max, 2011; Goldhaber et al., 2018). For example, in Louisiana, students in Title I schools, which serve a high percentage of students from low-income families, are less likely to be taught by experienced or appropriately certified teachers than their more affluent peers in non-Title I schools (Louisiana Department of Education, 2020). According to a report released by the Learning Policy Institute, Louisiana has the third highest teacher turnover rate in the country (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The report also shows that teacher turnover rates in Title I schools are almost 50% higher than in low-poverty schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

To retain teachers, schools need to create working conditions that support teaching and learning. Across school demographics, turnover rates are higher in schools where teachers are more dissatisfied with their working conditions (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2016). In their review, Simon and Moore-Johnson (2015) conclude that when teachers leave high-poverty schools, they are fleeing not their students but the poor working environments that make it difficult for them and their students to thrive. The authors found that administrative support, collegial support, and school culture were the three most important factors that influenced teachers’ satisfaction with their work environment and retention.

Louisiana Building on Leadership Development (LA BOLD)

In an effort to increase equitable access to effective educators, NIET began a partnership with schools in Louisiana where more than half of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. NIET began to assist these schools in 2016 through the support of a U.S. Department of Education Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. The goal of this partnership is to increase educator effectiveness and student achievement by enhancing the schools’ human capital management systems.

The human capital management system strategies implemented through this partnership have four key components described below. Prior research supports the effectiveness of each of these strategies individually in improving teaching and learning. NIET has found these to be even more powerful when implemented collectively.

1. **Professional Advancement Opportunities.** Teachers in grant schools have the opportunity to serve as master and mentor teachers, receiving additional compensation for providing support to career teachers. Along with administrators, master and mentor teachers form a leadership team to deliver school-based professional support and appraise teachers' performance. This element of the human capital management system leverages the contributions of skilled teachers who want to advance their careers and earnings potential without becoming school or district administrators. Research indicates that this empowering of teachers to take on formal leadership roles can improve job satisfaction and self-esteem, which can eventually lead to improved teacher performance and higher retention (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Schott et al., 2020; Snoek & Volman, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).
2. **Ongoing Applied Professional Growth.** One foundational structure of the human capital management systems implemented in grant schools is weekly professional learning meetings – called cluster meetings – led by master and mentor teachers. During these meetings, teachers examine student data, engage in collaborative planning, and learn instructional strategies that have been field-tested in their respective schools. Professional development continues into each classroom as master teachers model lessons, observe classroom instruction, and support career teachers in the improvement of their teaching methods. This support is the exact type of teacher-led, ongoing, and collaborative professional development that research shows increases student achievement and teacher learning (Archibald et al., 2011; Bowgren & Sever, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).
3. **Rigorous Instructional Evaluation and Feedback.** Teachers in grant schools are observed several times a year by multiple trained observers under the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric. The observation results guide both feedback for one-on-one mentoring sessions and plans for cluster group meetings, ensuring relevant professional development for teachers and a consistent vision for instruction. Assessment of classroom instruction is essential to improving educator effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Looney, 2011). Additionally, research shows that implementing rigorous and comprehensive teacher evaluation systems can encourage self-reflection and meaningful conversations about classroom practice (Ritter & Barnett, 2016; Song et al., 2021).
4. **Performance-Based Compensation.** Teachers in grant schools have the opportunity to earn annual bonuses based on their increased responsibilities and multiple measures of effectiveness. NIET's performance-based compensation system follows the best practices identified in the literature in that it is integrated with strong leadership, professional development, reliable analysis of teacher and student performance, and strong feedback (Boyd et al., 2005; Chingos & West, 2012). Pay-for-performance policy has improved both teacher retention (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2018) and student achievement (Brownback & Sadoff, 2020; Pham et al., 2020). Further, a prior study found that teachers receiving performance-based compensation through TIF-sponsored programs report satisfaction with their jobs to the same or greater degree than teachers in control schools (Chiang et al., 2017).

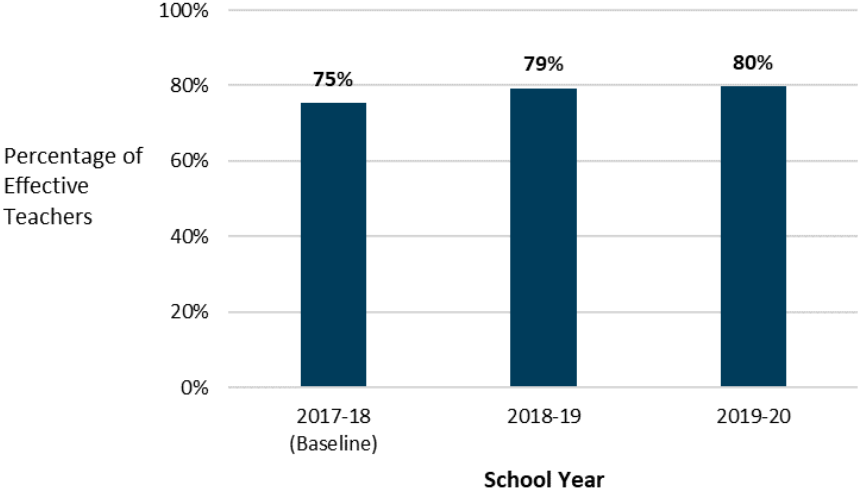
Together, these human capital management system strategies create a conducive working environment where there is a support system and structure in place that helps teachers – and by extension students – to thrive. This environment motivates teachers to stay.

Schools began implementing all elements of the human capital management system in the 2017-18 school year. This brief presents three findings from 2017-18 through 2019-20 (i.e., second through fourth year of the grant).

Finding 1: Increase in the Percentage of Effective Teachers

The percentage of teachers who were rated as effective or above from multiple classroom observations using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric increased from 75% in 2017-18 to 80% in 2019-20 (see Figure 1).

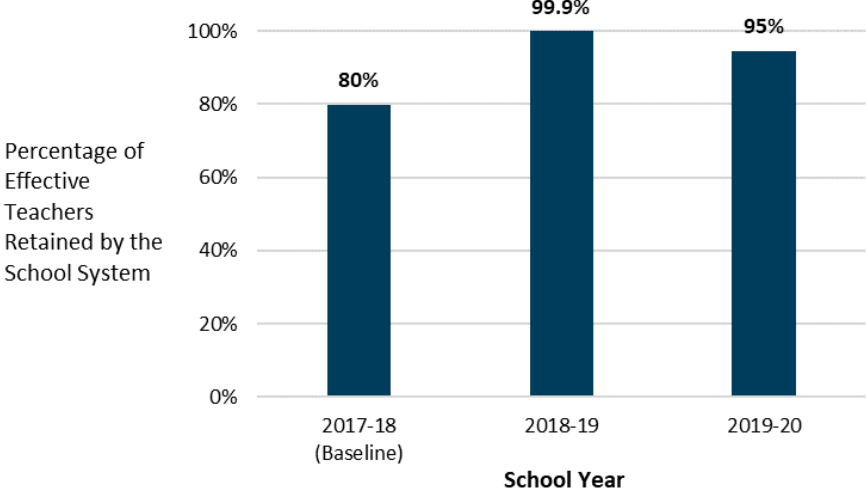
Figure 1. Percentage of Effective Teachers, 2017-18 to 2019-20.



Finding 2: High Percentage of Effective Teachers Retained

Additionally, each year, the majority of teachers who were rated as effective or above were retained by the school systems. For example, in 2017-18, 75% of teachers were rated as effective or above (as shown in Figure 1). Of those, 80% were retained into the same school system the following school year (see Figure 2). As demonstrated in the figure below, the percentage of effective teachers who were retained by their school system increased from 2017-18 to 2018-19 and remained high in 2019-20.

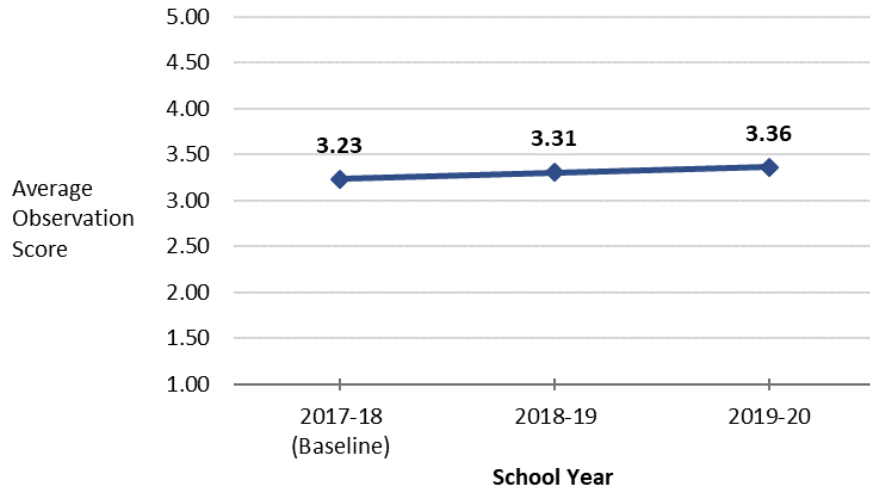
Figure 2. Percentage of Effective Teachers Retained by the School Systems, 2017-18 to 2019-20.



Finding 3: Improvement in the Performance of Retained Teachers

Finally, teachers who were retained into the same school system showed improvement in their performance over time (see Figure 3). Specifically, on average, these teachers improved in their classroom observation scores, and this improvement was statistically significant ($t(579) = 6.51, p < .001$) with a small effect size (Hedges' $g = 0.22$).

Figure 3. Average Classroom Observation Score, 2017-18 to 2019-20.



Conclusion

Providing teachers with career advancement opportunities, multiple evaluations coupled with individualized feedback, relevant and collaborative professional development, and additional performance and role-based compensation creates a system for teachers to thrive. The supportive elements of the human capital management system implemented through the LA BOLD partnership create a collaborative working environment that increases teachers' instructional effectiveness and retains those teachers in the school system. The results after three years of grant implementation indicate 1) an increase in the percentage of effective teachers each year, 2) high retention rates of effective teachers, and 3) improvement in the performance of teachers who were retained by their school systems over time.

Investment in a human capital management system is a promising vehicle for improving student outcomes in low-income schools. By ensuring that teachers continue to grow in their instructional skills and stay in the same school system, the LA BOLD partnership provides students in grant schools a better chance to be taught by effective teachers. In doing so, this decreases differences in access to effective teachers between low-income and high-income students.

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