

## **Investing in a Well-Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom**

### **The Issue**

Chicago Public Schools loses \$17,900 on every teacher who leaves the district. Nearly 4,800 teachers leave the Chicago Public Schools each year, meaning that the total cost of teacher turnover to the district is over \$86 million per year. The situation is not unique to Chicago; across the country, more than \$7 billion is lost annually to teacher attrition (NCTAE, 2007).

Teacher turnover disproportionately affects academically struggling, high-poverty schools. It is these schools—the ones with already too few resources spread thinly over many needs—that engage in a constant cycle of recruiting, hiring, training and replacing staff year after year. These schools have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers, often needing to fill vacancies with underprepared staff. Because of the lack of resources, little is left for support or professional development, which can lead to teachers feeling overwhelmed and frustrated, and ultimately leaving the district or the profession.

### **The Solution**

Simply put, at the federal, state and local levels, we need to invest in teacher support and development. This includes teacher preparation, induction and mentoring programs, and innovative, teacher-led peer assistance and review. It also includes addressing the conditions that make attracting and retaining teachers in certain schools persistently difficult.

The AFT has consistently called for strengthening teacher preparation, including emphasizing pedagogy, providing a meaningful and realistic clinical experience, and instituting rigorous exit and licensure exams. Traditional teacher preparation programs are the route through which most teachers enter the profession, and they provide the foundation for long-term

classroom success. Particularly with the large-scale retirement of baby boomers, it is essential that we rebuild the strong core of career teachers who remain the strength of any school.

In terms of induction, the New Teacher Center of Santa Cruz recently found that “an investment in an intensive model of teacher induction pays \$1.66 for every \$1 spent” (Fulton, 2005). Comprehensive induction programs, which are often estimated to cost approximately \$6,000 per new teacher, should be viewed as an investment. The short-term return on this investment is the savings associated with annual re-staffing. The long-term return on this investment is the increase in teacher effectiveness (as research documents that teacher effectiveness grows over the first five years or so of teaching) and the growing cadre of staff who can provide professional support for other new teachers. A comprehensive induction program includes, at a minimum: one mentor (whose full-time job is to mentor teachers) per 12 new teachers, common planning time, a reduced teaching assignment, and participation in structured professional development with a network of other new teachers.

In order to be successful, teachers need job-embedded professional development such as the professional development provided through teacher centers. One of the most highly touted success stories in recent years is the Benwood Initiative—which focused on the lowest performing schools in Chattanooga, Tenn. In 2000, education leaders in Chattanooga recognized that, in the city’s nine schools with concentrated student poverty, high teacher turnover was the primary cause of low student achievement. The district invested heavily in attracting teachers through housing and salary incentives, as well as through comprehensive professional development that included training in reading instruction,

coaches for all new teachers, and assistance to principals to guide and evaluate instruction. The result has been a dramatic drop in teacher turnover rates, and an increase in the number of applicants for every job opening in the Benwood schools.

The AFT has long supported peer assistance and review programs as part of a comprehensive professional support system for teachers, in order to ensure that only capable, well-prepared teachers who meet high entry standards are offered permanent positions, and that unions and experienced teachers help set the standards for all teachers. In practice, places like Rochester, N.Y.; Toledo, Ohio; and Cincinnati provide models for this initiative.

It is an unfortunate reality that, currently, schools serving large numbers of children in poverty have trouble attracting and retaining teachers. These schools often face challenges in the areas of safety and order, poor administrative leadership and support, insufficient professional development, and inadequate teaching materials and facilities. In truth, poor teaching conditions equal poor learning conditions. The solution is to make hard-to-staff schools desirable places for students to

learn and for teachers to teach. School systems need to identify the strategic mix of programs, professional supports and incentives to ensure that each school is a positive environment for students and teachers.

### **AFT's Role**

The AFT is committed to investing in a well-qualified teacher in every classroom. That means we will work with state and local officials to increase the availability of induction programs that support new teachers as they enter real schools with real challenges, and that counsel out, through comprehensive peer assistance and review programs, those who will not make it. It means we'll work for the investment in career ladder programs that allow good teachers to take on leadership roles, like being a mentor or master teacher, and that ensure they are appropriately compensated. With these in place, local districts and unions will be able to negotiate or otherwise agree upon high-quality induction programs with teacher leaders coaching their new colleagues—really taking responsibility for the profession. And it means that we will work to ensure that every school is an attractive place to teach and learn, that it is safe and orderly, and that it has up-to-date labs, textbooks and materials.