

Is it Better to be Good or Lucky?

Decentralized Teacher Selection in 10 Elementary Schools

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Abstract – This paper reports on a qualitative field study that describes recruitment and interview practices in 10 elementary schools in a large, decentralized urban school district. While all of the schools followed a common procedure, we found striking differences in the extent to which they actively recruited teachers and articulated consistent hiring priorities. We argue that these differences and the schools’ subsequent hiring outcomes are contingent on a complex interaction of school-based knowledge, resource constraints, and each school’s relative standing in the district’s internal labor market. As in prior research on school decentralization, these contingencies offer an important caveat to the premise that school-based hiring will, by virtue of empowerment alone, lead to more effective teacher recruitment and selection.

Keywords: Decentralization; Teacher Selection; Policy Implementation; Education Reform.

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Introduction

Recent research on teachers underscores two important findings: that effective teachers matter for student achievement (Hanushek, 1992; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004) and that high-poverty, high-minority schools often have the least-qualified teachers (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). These findings, and the concerns they raise about effectiveness and equity in the teacher workforce, have put teacher quality high on the nation's education policy agenda. For the most part, policymakers and researchers have focused their attention on improving teacher training, certification, and compensation systems (see Corcoran, 2007).

Others, however, have argued that we need to pay more attention to a lower-profile piece of the puzzle: school district hiring practices (Levin, Mulher, & Schunck, 2005; Levin & Quinn, 2003; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Odden, Milanowski, & Henemann III, 2007). Often framed under the heading "human resource management" (HRM), these practices play an important, if often overlooked, role in establishing and governing the flow of teachers into and between schools. Concerns about their weaknesses, especially in large urban districts with centralized and bureaucratic HRM systems, have led to calls for reform. Relatively little research, however, has focused on how HRM reforms actually play out in practice.

This paper presents results from a qualitative field study of school-based hiring—one of the more foundational ideas for reforming centralized and bureaucratic HRM systems. Prior studies suggest that giving schools more authority over hiring, despite its intuitive appeal, can be hampered by both procedural and knowledge constraints (e.g., Liu & Johnson, 2006). Our findings echo these concerns and highlight an additional complication: a school's relative standing in the district's internal labor market and its effects on the local candidate pool. Accordingly, we argue that an integrated approach to school-based hiring – one that takes into account procedural and knowledge constraints as well as labor market incentives – holds more promise for improving the quality and distribution of the teacher workforce than a focus on school empowerment alone.

Background

The Teacher Quality Challenge

Teacher quality is a high-stakes issue. Effective teachers make a large difference in how much students learn (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Hanushek, 1992; Ferguson, 1998; Goldhaber, Brewer, & Anderson, 1999; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kane, 2005; Rockoff, 2004), but some

question whether they teach the most-disadvantaged students (Lankford et al., 2002). Instead, schools serving poor and minority students often employ the least-qualified teachers: those with less education, less-competitive college alma maters, and lower certification exam scores (Lankford et al., 2002).¹

At the same time, researchers do not really know much about what makes someone a “good” teacher. The attributes that typically drive teacher compensation (degree level and years of experience) are not systematically related to a teacher’s contributions to student achievement on standardized tests – a teacher’s so-called “value-added” (Hanushek, 1986). Instead, quality appears to be contingent on context: mathematics teachers with masters degrees in mathematics appear to be more effective, but English teachers with subject-specific graduate degrees do not (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997); additional years of experience seem to matter at the beginning of a teacher’s career, but less so later (Boyd, Grossman, & Lankford, 2006; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006; Loeb & Wyckoff, 2006; Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004). In short, wholesale proxies for teacher quality are difficult, if not impossible, to find.

This combination of urgency and uncertainty makes improving teacher quality through high-level standard-setting policies, such as licensure, problematic. Licenses and other imperfect proxies for quality are likely to produce both false positives and false negatives. By contrast, district hiring practices – including the face-to-face interactions that occur during recruitment and selection – offer schools an opportunity for deeper and subtler judgments about a teacher’s potential. Unfortunately, it appears that schools districts frequently do not make the most of these opportunities.

The Teacher Selection Challenge

Bureaucratic dysfunction is at the heart of reformers’ critiques of teacher selection practices, especially in urban school districts. In particular, they see over-centralized employment processing, bureaucratic bungling, and rigid assignment and transfer policies as barriers to effective staffing (The Aspen Institute, 2008; Levin et al., 2005; Levin & Quinn, 2003; Useem & Farley, 2004).²

Reforms that call for school-based hiring have a straightforward logic and appeal in light of this critique. In theory, local actors know their school’s staffing needs better than the central administration; they are in the best position to identify an effective match for their school through “information rich” exchanges with candidates during interviews (Liu & Johnson, 2006). In addition, school-level discretion seems particularly important given that professional trust and

collaboration appear to be resources for school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Newmann & Associates, 1996).

Despite these self-evident advantages, school-based hiring reforms face many potential hazards. For example, such reforms are based on the assumption that local schools have incentives to make good decisions, which may not always be the case (imagine a principal facing pressure to give a job to family or friend). They are also based on the belief that local schools have the capacity to take advantage of their authority, when that too may simply be wishful thinking (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; Malen et al., 1990). Finally, they proceed on the assumption that an espoused decentralization plan translates into actual local authority, and yet schools may still be constrained by teacher transfer rules, vacancy notification rules, budget timelines, and seniority preferences that drive when and how decisions are made (Liu & Johnson, 2006; Levin et al., 2005; Levin & Quinn, 2003). To see how these potential advantages and hazards play out in practice, we studied the experiences of schools in an urban district that implemented a school-based hiring reform.

A Case of District Reform

The schools we studied were located in an urban school district in the Midwest. As in many cities, the district's students were mainly from low-income and minority families. Of its approximately 90,000 students, 79% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 84% were from non-White race/ethnicity groups.

[INSERT Table 1. District Demographics 2006-2007]

According to the state's Department of Public Instruction, the district's elementary schools generally performed slightly below schools in "similar" districts elsewhere in the state.³ Still, a majority of the district's fourth graders scored proficient or advanced in reading (64%) and mathematics (53%) the year we conducted our fieldwork. The 10 elementary schools we studied represented a range of the performance, demographics, and locations in the district. Before explaining these school-level differences, we review the district's teacher selection reforms.

In 1999, the district negotiated a contract with its teachers union that opened the window for reforming teacher selection. Prior to that time, seniority rules specified who would teach where. Schools did not interview candidates and had little say about who worked in their classrooms. The 1999 contract allowed schools to adopt a school-based interview committee by a 51% vote of the teaching staff. Within a few years, all of the district's schools had adopted the new system, which had three key components:

1. *School-based interviews and selection decisions.* Under the new system, school-based committees, composed of an administrator, a parent, and three teachers, are responsible for interviewing candidates at the school site during one of three hiring cycles (see below). These committees then make a perfunctory recommendation to the district about the candidate they want to hire.

2. *Multiple hiring cycles.* The school-based committees interview candidates in three separate hiring cycles that run from May through June. The first cycle is restricted to incumbent teachers (i.e., internal transfers) - this is the only seniority privilege in the three cycles. The second and third cycles expand the applicant pool to include student teachers and other applicants who are new to the district (as well as incumbents). Schools can hire teachers in all three hiring cycles. After the third cycle, there is a moratorium on school-based hires and the central administration assigns teachers to fill remaining vacancies.

3. *Teacher-initiated job movement.* Incumbent teachers can apply for jobs in other schools without notifying the school where they currently work. Also, incumbent teachers can request an “incompatibility transfer” that will remove them from their current assignment. Such teachers are then either placed permanently in another school or in “day-to-day” assignments by the central administration.

Both schools and teachers gained benefits under the new system. Schools had more say in defining their staffing priorities (what they were looking for in candidates), their selection methods (the questions they asked applicants) and in making hiring decisions (they could refuse to hire a teacher during the three hiring cycles). The most senior teachers lost some advantage relative to novice teachers, but incumbents of all experience levels were now free to apply to schools across the district without revealing their intentions to their current principal. Outside applicants could also enter the system sooner than before. As for the district, its role under the new system was largely limited to providing annual training for interview committee members, informal support to principals, and keeping the system compliant with the contract.

In theory, the system allows schools and teachers to approach selection in ways that best fit their individual situations. But it also increases the complexity of the process and reduces centralized quality control.⁴

Research Approach

To find out how the reforms played out in practice, we conducted a qualitative field study of hiring practices in 10 of the district's elementary schools.⁵ Our study took place about a decade after the initial reform implementation. Our aim was to understand how schools serving different students in different locations across the district approached teacher selection under decentralization.

We began our case selection with a list of elementary schools that had a larger percentage of new teachers than the district average (averaged over the two years preceding our field work – we took this as an indication that these schools had recent experience with the school-based selection process). From this list we wanted a set of schools that represented a range of conditions typically associated with differences in teacher quality. As a rough proxy for attractiveness, we divided the schools into above- and below-average performers based on three years of 4th-grade reading scores; then, in consultation with district administrators, we narrowed our list to schools that represented a range of student populations (all schools served majority-minority populations, but with different dominant groups) and a range of locations in the district. A district administrator made initial contact with each school to say that our research team would ask them to participate in the study. All of the schools we contacted agreed to take part.

Table 2 shows basic information on the schools' students, teachers, and performance. With one exception, all of the schools served a larger proportion of poor students than the district as a whole (this may be because we selected them from a list of schools with higher proportions of 'new' teachers - something that is likely correlated with teacher attrition and student poverty). The majority of the schools enrolled students in kindergarten through eighth grade; three schools served students through grade 5. The majority of the schools served mainly African American students; two schools served mainly Hispanic students. The schools ranged in size from 356 to 852 students. Somewhere between 30 and 40% of the teachers at each school held a master's degree or higher, with the exception of Tyler – where a little over 10% did. Most of the schools performed academically below the district average, although in all but one a majority of fourth graders scored either proficient or advanced on the state reading assessment.

[INSERT Table 2. School Demographics and Performance 2006-2007]

Finally, some of the schools were located in what school personnel described in the interviews as “bad” neighborhoods. Others were located in “good” neighborhoods. **Table 3** hints at some of this variation by showing the total number of homicides reported by the city's police

department within a half mile of each school between 2006 and 2007. Two schools had no homicides reported; two had over 5 reported; one had 10.

[INSERT Table 3. Homicides in School Neighborhoods 2006-2006]

Data Collection

In February and March of 2007 we conducted semi-structured interviews with each school's principal and one teacher (in one school we were only able to interview the principal; in one school we interviewed two teachers) as well as three human resource specialists in the district central office and a leader in the local teachers' union. The interviews lasted about 1 hour and covered a range of topics, including hiring timelines, teacher recruitment, the application, interview, and assessment process, the interview committee's composition and decision processes, and people's perceptions of the quality of the local labor supply (see **Appendix A** for our interview protocol).

In addition to the interviews, we observed a district-run training session for school-based interview teams and examined district and school documents. We also collected the questions each school asked job applicants and school profiles reported in official district "report cards." We examined district administrative data on vacancies and assignments across all three hiring cycles for the 2006-2007 school year. The district vacancy and assignment data show if and when a vacancy occurred across the three hiring cycles, the type of vacancy (e.g., regular teacher vs. special education), if and when the vacancy was filled and, if filled, whether a full-time teacher or a substitute teacher filled it.

Analysis

We used Atlas.ti software to code interview transcripts and each school's interview questions using codes related to the hiring process (e.g., interview committee; supply quantity; teacher recruitment). After our initial coding we created cross-case matrices, wrote memos on specific schools, and wrote memos that integrated evidence across schools. We also created typologies of school recruitment and selection practices. We used the district's vacancy and assignment data to track whether and when our schools had vacancies in the three hiring cycles and whether and when they were able to fill them for the year when we conducted our fieldwork.

Findings

In this section we describe similarities and differences in the schools' recruitment and selection practices and discuss the relationship between these practices, the schools' contexts, and their staffing outcomes.

Similarities

A casual observer would be struck by several similarities in the 10 schools: who was involved in interviewing prospective teachers, when events happened, what events happened. As we note below, these similarities were largely a matter of complying with district policy. In addition, the schools took a similar skeptical posture toward identifying good teachers.

Who was involved. As a matter of district policy, every school's interview committee included the principal, three teachers, and at least one parent. The committee's teachers were supposed to be elected each year by the faculty. But the schools in our sample rarely had more people interested in serving on the committee than they had slots. As a result, few actually held elections; instead, principals talked about recruiting teachers to serve on the committee. A few also talked about recruiting teachers from grade levels or subject areas with vacancies to be filled (for example, involving a special education teacher on the committee faced with filling a special education position).⁶

When events happened. Again, as a matter of district policy, the timing of the process was the same in all 10 schools. Teachers had a district-wide deadline for reporting their intention to retire, and schools had uniform deadlines for completing budgets (which identified openings for the next year); as a result, most schools learned about future openings at roughly the same time. Schools also faced strict deadlines and relatively short windows of opportunity to interview and make hiring decisions (each hiring cycle lasted about two weeks). Every school we visited said they followed these deadlines. Only one principal in our sample said she tried to assess her hiring needs in advance of the prescribed deadlines.

What events happened. All schools took part in two key events during the hiring process: an open house for prospective candidates (called an "informational meeting") and school-based interviews. The informational meetings were designed to present the school to potential applicants. They occurred at the same time and typically included presentations by the school principal and staff as well as a school tour. The school-based interviews generally followed the sequence prescribed by district policy: candidates met with the interview teams and responded to

pre-written questions. None of the schools modified this process (for example, by requesting that candidates conduct a sample lesson).

Skepticism about identifying good teachers. In addition to the above procedural similarities, the principals and teachers we interviewed talked about the task of identifying good teachers in broadly similar terms. With varying degrees of specificity, they talked about wanting to find teachers with prior experience teaching or working with children; everyone was looking for teachers who had positive personalities and dispositions; everyone wanted teachers who were generally knowledgeable about instruction and classroom management. The schools sought information about very similar issues during their interviews.⁷ And yet, nearly all of the principals and teachers expressed skepticism about their ability to assess candidates during the interview process.

In response to a question about how her school assesses whether or not a candidate would be able to manage his or her classroom, for example, the principal at Van Buren said,

You really can't. Those are the things that your interview does not allow you to find out.

The principal at Tyler agreed:

You don't really know [if a candidate will be good]...we have had candidates...who we thought were the best, their answers were so good, and we thought, yeah, this is the one...and then it didn't work out.

Principals cited cases where a candidate “did not live up to” his or her portfolio, where a candidate looked good on paper but did poorly in the interview. Or, candidates impressed them during the interview, but were poor performers in the classroom.

Despite skepticism about their ability to assess teaching ability through interviews, none of the schools asked candidates to perform a sample lesson - potentially a more “real” (albeit imperfect) work sample. When asked about sample lessons by interviewers, one principal said he liked the idea, but thought the district would not allow it. Teachers in another school were skeptical about the value of a sample lesson, and even thought it might dissuade candidates from applying.

Given their skepticism and uncertainty about teacher quality, it is unsurprising that respondents in almost all of the schools said it was more important to hire a teacher with the right disposition than the right skills (they said they could train someone to teach more easily than they could change someone’s attitude). Hiring teams that emphasized disposition described their

main tool for identifying good teachers as “gut” judgments about how well a candidate would fit in with the staff and relate to the school’s students. A principal explained his gut check this way:

I look for genuineness. I look for that individual that...has a tone of social justice...that’s kind of a gut and heart feeling. I try to really hone in on that (Jefferson).

A teacher at his school said, “I wish we had a way where we could say, this is exactly what we look for, but its intangible.”

Another school’s teacher said,

...sometimes it’s just a feeling...a feeling that you get when you meet somebody. So I think that would be probably the only way to differentiate who got hired and who did not...(Quincy).

Even though the schools asked their candidates the same questions and tried to numerically evaluate their answers (e.g., a 3 on a scale of 1 to 5), they generally lacked meaningful benchmark responses and corresponding rating scales to help them evaluate the quality of those responses.⁸ Only one principal (Madison) said he tried to “go by the facts” instead of an intuition about a candidate during an interview. An exception to the rule, he said, “We can’t go on feelings. We don’t do that. We go on data.”

And so, at least on the surface, the 10 schools approached the hiring process in similar ways. They used a similar cast of characters, followed a similar timeline, and employed a similar sequence of events. School personnel generally used gut judgments about the quality of applicants. Together, these things constituted a legitimate model of teacher hiring in the district. And yet, below the surface there were notable differences.

Differences

Despite their similarities, the schools showed different levels of engagement in the recruitment of teachers and different degrees of consistency around what they said they wanted in a teacher. Although the schools did not divide perfectly into two groups - those who were more engaged and consistent versus those who were more passive and vague - the majority fell on one side or the other.

Engagement around recruitment. Even as they followed the same basic procedure, the schools took different approaches toward attracting applicants. Some simply relied on the district to post job openings and waited for unsolicited applications. They held information meetings, but talked about them in perfunctory terms; they did little to expand their applicant pools or provide

inducements to make themselves more attractive. Others described energetic recruitment activities⁹ - even going so far as to recruit candidates from other schools in the district. They saw information meetings as opportunities to send messages to prospective teachers about the school and its program; they targeted alternative applicant pools and, in one case, offered extra classroom resources as an incentive to attract a teacher.

Four of the schools were particularly passive when it came to attracting applicants. They used the district's internal recruitment system (which included on-line and print job notices) to identify and attract teachers, and then they waited for candidates to apply. "We'll say [to the district] we have a vacancy and I'm posting the position," explained a principal.

...then we put it out there in the computer world and people go on-line and they say, okay, I'm interested in that position. They call us up and we set up an interview (Adams).

For these schools, attracting candidates and developing an applicant pool was not part of the teacher selection task. In fact, active recruiting was seen as illegitimate: one teacher explained that she and her colleagues were not "out there actually recruiting [because]...I think professionally that wouldn't be a good thing" (Jackson). Instead, the district's system for posting vacancies was "basically the main source of getting teachers to come [to our school]."

Teachers and principals in passive schools did not describe informational meetings – the first chance for candidates to get an up-close look at the school – as an opportunity to "sell" their school. Instead, they said these meetings were for "just general information" and "whatever they [prospective teachers] would want to know about the school." They were "just kind of a mixer." One principal said that the meetings were not very useful because all of the elementary schools in the district were "kind of the same" (Adams). This passive strategy results in an applicant pool that, as another principal said, is basically made up of "cold calls or cold interviews" (Harrison).

Five other schools took a very different approach. They vigorously marketed their school to encourage not only a larger pool of candidates, but to win over specific candidates they wanted in the school, even when they had no shortage of applicants (their marketing even included giving candidates bags or other gear with the school's name and mascot on it). Although they still used the district's infrastructure to develop an applicant pool, they were also active recruiters who sought out applicants on their own initiative. A principal at one school called applicant attraction "a constant" activity (Monroe). Another described getting applicants "by going to a school building that was to be closed the next year..."

I see them in the school and say, hey, you know, your school is closing. You're going to need a placement. I need some middle school teachers. Would you be interested in filling these positions here?" (Jefferson).

This principal was not alone. Another said she would call principals of closing schools "and ask, do you have anybody on staff you think might be interested in working with us here?" (Washington).

Active recruitment was not, however, limited to teachers in schools slated for closure. Active schools also made a concerted effort to recruit teachers they already knew. One teacher estimated that "80% of people we hire have some [prior] affiliation with us" (Washington). Another principal said, "I've recruited people here...[from] my prior building. I brought three people over from that particular school once I had vacancies here" (Quincy). And another said, "I had to go in there [to my former school] and personally bring them, kind of entice them over to our school, to interview for a position" (Jefferson).

In the most extreme example of active recruiting, a principal talked about approaching the spouse of an "excellent" teacher he wanted to recruit; her husband was a police officer:

I saw him [the teacher's husband] riding in his patrol car and I pulled my Suburban in front of the patrol car so that he could not keep going, and I got out of my truck with my hands raised and said, Mr. So and So - and he recognized me - and I said, I have to have your wife, because I knew she was an excellent teacher. I've been bold enough to do those types of things. She came over and joined my staff. So, hey, I'm a risk taker (Jefferson).

The active schools were also more deliberate about using student teachers as an applicant pool (again, candidates whose quality they could judge from experiences prior to an interview). "One of the best ways to get good qualified teachers is with student teachers," said one principal "you see them perform" (Madison). Another agreed about the value of having "a chance to look at them [student teachers], so we really have some idea [of their ability]" (Washington).

Compared to passive schools, active schools also took a more enterprising approach toward their informational meetings. They saw the informational meetings as an opportunity to send clear signals to candidates about the school's mission and work culture in hopes of finding a "fit." One teacher talked about the importance of using the meetings to convey the "idea that our school is set up a little bit differently than most schools...we go into great detail about how we play things out here" (Washington). Another principal explained that he used his tour of the

building - a standard part of information meetings in passive and active schools - to showcase the school's work culture and the quality of his staff. "We make sure that they get to meet and get to know some of the people who are really outstanding, both classroom and support teachers" (Monroe). The school's teacher agreed:

I try to take them to a sampling of rooms...I talk about the bulletin boards, which reflect our learning targets...we change them every four weeks...and they look, and you can see their eyes, they're surprised how detail is attended to here (Monroe).

This school's principal made a point of showing prospective applicants that many of his teachers were working late. All of this was based on his belief that "people with great expertise are really drawn to other great expertise."

Like savvy principals in most districts, principals in active schools talked about taking a proactive posture in their relationship with the district's central human resources department. This included "pulling strings" at the central office to ensure that a particular applicant was hired. "I was able to circumvent the system a little bit and say [to the HR department], this person really needs to be at the top of your list," said one principal (Madison). Another made "trips to the central office" to ensure his favored candidates were moved quickly through administrative hoops (Jefferson teacher). Others relied on connections with central administrators to identify promising candidates. "One of my dear friends," said one teacher, "works at the central office, and she highly recommended some candidates to me" (Monroe). "After 10-15 years," said the principal of Madison, "you know all the ins and outs and you know how to play the system a little bit and get what you want."

Only one of the principals talked about using school resources as an incentive to attract a particular applicant, someone he called "the best teacher in the district." The principal said he told this teacher that he would provide her with a substantial amount of his "carry over money" for a technology program she had always wanted to implement. "So, one of her long-term professional desires, we can actually make come true to get a great teacher here at our building versus somewhere else" (Monroe).

Consistency of hiring priorities. The second major difference between the schools was that some spoke in more specific and consistent terms than others about what they wanted in a candidate. The schools that were more consistent, however, had different priorities: some focused on the importance of instruction, some on classroom management, and some on

commitment. By contrast, principal and teacher comments in other schools were inconsistent or generally vague.

Principals and teachers in five of the schools talked about their hiring priorities in clear and consistent language, but they focused on different things. One school focused on finding candidates with a particular lens on instruction; another focused on classroom management; one emphasized finding candidates with a commitment to a particular student population; another emphasized engagement with families; still another underscored the importance of maintaining a professional culture and sense of exceptionality. These differences reflect more than just the different personal priorities of interview teams; they reflect different themes in the schools.

At Madison, both the principal and the teacher emphasized that the school was interested in making hiring decisions based on a candidate's potential to perform as an instructor in the classroom. In fact, the principal said,

We were using some of the questions that we got from the district, but it just wasn't performance based...I was told that staff I wasn't happy with that and that I would work up some new questions...my ideal interview would be to have a sample of students there and then just let somebody teach.

Both Madison's principal and teacher talked about the importance of hiring teachers who were thinking about working with students on higher-order thinking skills and who could distinguish between low-level and high-level work. As the principal explained, "I'm looking for them [candidates] to use the Bloom's Wheel¹⁰...to engage students in higher-order thinking." The teacher on this school's interview team spoke in exactly the same terms when she explained their interest in teachers who talked about "what level of thinking are you having the kids work at?" She continued that she wanted to see candidates who "actually look at the Bloom's Taxonomy Wheel [during the interview]...looked at the targets" and applied them to a math lesson.

At Harrison, the principal and teacher talked consistently about the importance of classroom management and, in particular, a candidate's acceptance of a school-wide discipline program. As the principal said, "We have a school-wide discipline plan...you [a candidate] have to buy into this...either they're going to buy into it or they're not." The school's teacher emphasized the same thing: "We'll talk to them [candidates] about our discipline system, and it has to be consistent. It's school wide." Neither the principal nor the teacher said that the school was looking for a particular instructional approach. The principal was explicit on this point, saying she allowed teachers to teach, "however they're comfortable...I'm not going to tell them how to

teach.” The teacher described what the school wanted in terms of instruction only as the ability to deliver a “good” lesson.

At Jefferson, both the principal and the teacher spoke in similar terms about wanting a teacher who was committed to working with disadvantaged urban students. The principal said,

We are a school that has a very urban population and if you [a candidate] were to be selected to join our team, [I want to know] if you are sure that you want to work with the urban child in an urban setting.

Likewise, the teacher talked about the fact that candidates need to know that “we don’t have a whole lot of parental support. We have kids that come from very impoverished neighborhoods and backgrounds...[we want candidates who] really want to be here with these kids.” She continued,

...if its somebody who’s like, okay, I just need to get my foot in the door [in the district] so I’ll come to your school and stay long enough until I can transfer, well I don’t know.

Both the principal and the teacher also talked about the fact that the school used the Direct Instruction (DI) teaching model and that candidates needed to buy into it. “There are some individuals,” said the principal, “that don’t believe in DI. They want to have creativity in the way they teach...we say, you know, we’re a Direct Instruction school, the program is scripted, so do you have any problems with following a scripted program in reading?” Likewise, the school’s teacher said that candidates have to be receptive to the schools “very scripted” reading program.

At Washington, the principal and teacher talked about what they were looking for in terms of a candidate’s willingness to be involved with families inside and outside of the school. “This is very important for us,” the principal said. “[We want to know,] are they interested in family involvement...do they want to participate in extracurricular activities [to] develop relationships with students outside of the classroom?” Using similar language the teacher emphasized that the school was “a family centered school” and that they wanted teachers who “get involved in things besides being inside the classroom.” In the end, the principal said, the school was looking for candidates who “are interested in becoming more involved with children’s families. Are they willing to do what it takes to get families involved?” She added, “We need people who are going to be outside of traditional [ideas of] teaching.”

Finally, at Monroe, the principal and interview committee teacher both talked about the school’s hiring priorities in terms of maintaining and building a culture of professional

excellence. The principal's staffing philosophy was that "people with great expertise are drawn to other great expertise, even in a school located in a 'bad' neighborhood...I want people to know," he continued, "that great things can happen within this school, regardless of what's happening out there [in the neighborhood]." The teacher talked about the school's hiring priorities in terms of work ethic and professionalism. "We have a very hardworking staff," she said, "we expect a lot from each other...people are not bound by 'that's my lunch hour, I can't do that.' There are people here at 6:30 in the morning and there are people here until 8:30, 9:00 at night." Rather than looking for particular approaches to instruction or commitments to particular types of students, the principal and teacher at Monroe talked about looking for people who, above all, showed initiative and leadership: "I'm looking for them to say, 'I spearheaded this at my other school,' or 'I've always wanted to do something like this...I'm looking for leadership.'"

In contrast to the five schools just described, the remaining five schools either had a hard time articulating what they wanted out of candidates (beyond generalities) or, if the principal had more specific priorities, the teacher on the interview committee was not aware of them.

For example, although one principal (Van Buren) spoke at length about the importance of hiring teachers with an understanding of doing "projects with students [that] integrate some hands-on experiences," the teacher from her interview committee downplayed the importance of curricular and instructional knowledge. "I would say that spewing curriculum mumbo-jumbo is the least important to me in an interview, because that's all stuff people can pick up as they go...teaching is a difficult job, but it really has nothing to do with how you answer...what type of curriculum you do." In another school (Quincy), the principal talked about the importance of hiring teachers who would be "problem solvers" and who would "take initiative," while the teacher from her interview committee noted that she was "more interested in knowing about how they would set up literacy centers." The same teacher suggested that different people on the school's interview committee had very different hiring priorities: "Other people [on the committee] are interested in how they would handle parents or how involved they would be with technology."

In another school the principal (Adams) talked about looking for "serious educators" who were there "because you know that we work hard for children." She said she "influences the questions [asked by the interview committee] to see what people's understanding is of [teaching frameworks like] Marzano and Bloom." But the teacher on her interview committee said it was

more important to tell candidates that, “our school utilizes direct instruction for a lot of our struggling students.” The same teacher struggled to articulate what the school wanted in a hire; when pressed on what the school wanted in an ideal candidate, she answered, “If they [candidates] have more of what we’re looking for, I would probably say that would probably be the candidate that we would hire.”

Leaders in other schools talked vaguely about wanting to hire teachers who are “in it to help kids and you want to make a difference in the lives of children” or teachers who “have a bag of tricks that works with kids.” Even when pressed (this was a second probe by the interviewer), the following principal (Tyler) struggled to articulate what she wanted in a candidate:

Q: What would make you think someone was more qualified than someone else for your school?

A: Based on what the teacher said or brought to show us, you can tell sometimes.

This is not to say that differing views did not exist on the interview committees in the five more consistent schools. In fact, respondents in several schools said that parents on the interview committees were often most interested in discipline, that teachers were most interested in collegiality, and that principals were most interested in teachers’ professionalism and performance in the classroom. Still, the difference in the five more-coherent schools was that each had a basic consistency and concreteness when it came to their overall hiring priorities – they hit the same points and even used the same language. This was not the case in the other five schools.

Similarities and Differences Across Contexts

The differences between the schools are summarized in **Figure 1**. In general, schools fell into one of two categories - those that with active recruitment efforts and consistent hiring priorities, and those with passive recruitment efforts and inconsistent or vague hiring priorities. Only two of the schools showed a mixed result.

[INSERT Figure 1. Differences in Recruitment and Hiring Priorities Across the 10 Schools]

The above differences are in many ways unsurprising. When individual schools are given more authority, what happens next will depend on a complex interaction of the inclinations of the principal and teachers and the resources and constraints they face around time, money, and knowledge (Malen et al., 1990). When schools are asked to perform tasks they feel ill equipped for, the results may be less than what reformers had hoped. As one principal said,

You know, we're not human resource people that do this on a regular basis. So we really, and sometimes its almost intuitive, have to go with your gut in terms of what you feel is going to be the right thing (Quincy).

The fact that some schools appeared more engaged and consistent (and less reliant on intuition) likely stems from the schools' capacities and resources as well as their relative attractiveness as a workplace (e.g., more-attractive schools can afford to be less-active recruiters). And yet as **Table 4** suggests, there was not a clear relationship between a school's approach and its students, neighborhood, or performance: some relatively advantaged schools (higher performers in 'better' areas) were active recruiters (Quincy), while others were passive (Harrison); some relatively disadvantaged schools had consistent hiring priorities (Jefferson), and others did not (Jackson). In the end, the relationship between each school's contexts and how it approached recruitment and selection was mixed.

Staffing Outcomes Across Contexts

By contrast, the stories that people told about the effect context had on staffing *outcomes*, rather than approaches, were much clearer. Principals and teachers said that their school's relative attractiveness affected the size and perceived quality of their applicant pool above and beyond their own efforts.

[INSERT Table 4. Differences in Recruitment and Hiring Priorities and Context]

Principals and teachers across the schools suggested that the size and quality of their applicant pools was strongly influenced by factors beyond their control: the attractiveness of the neighborhood where they were located and the resources they had. The principals and teachers said that these factors informed who applied and whether they would accept a position as much as a school's approach to recruitment and selection.

Location. Jefferson's principal, who we characterized as active and consistent, for example, said:

We're located in the poorest area of the city, we're located in the highest crime area of the city, people know that they're gonna be working with the poorest of the poor, with the student population with the greatest needs, with the least amount of parent involvement...that is a turn off to teachers that are looking to be reassigned, or looking to be hired.

He framed the relative attractiveness of his school broadly, by distinguishing between the proverbial “two sides of the tracks” in the district, or as he said, the “rift, so to speak in our district...”

We have the south side schools and the north side schools. And there is kind of a perception out there that north side schools tend to not get substitute teachers, they tend to have the shallow pool to recruit from, but you don't have those same issues over on the south side.

A Jefferson teacher agreed: “The hard thing about being in a school like us, is we can't get away from the neighborhood our school is in. A lot of people hear the address and they're thinkin' hum...But our kids aren't any different from any other school that its in a urban setting, they come with the same issues and problems, but a lot of people don't see that.” She continued by saying this misperception is why “people aren't stomping over here to get into our school. And so we generally get [candidates who are] left over; what nobody else wants.” The school's applicant pool, she said, was made up of “people who usually either have been at a school where they haven't been successful, they're not very strong in discipline, [and] they generally don't wanna stay at a school very long.” A principal at another relatively disadvantaged school, Jackson, (one that we characterized as passive and less consistent) said, “to be quite honest, it's not like we get a whole lotta applications, so we usually interview almost everybody who submits their application here.”

By contrast, relatively more-advantaged schools in “better” areas had more applicants than they could interview. The principal at Washington said, “We don't interview everybody who applies, 'cause we couldn't, sometimes it's just far too many to do that.” When asked what made her school attractive to teachers, the principal of Harrison said, it was “the area, first of all. I mean we are suburban wannabes, as I like to say, because we are so close to the suburbs. The area definitely [makes us more attractive].” One of the teachers we interviewed at a more-advantaged school was very clear on this point:

I come from a suburban setting, so for me to go into a downtown setting or a “bad” neighborhood, I really would not have been comfortable with that. But this seemed very comfortable, I really liked the setting...(Quincy teacher)

Elsewhere, teachers agreed that, “geography plays a role in having teachers come here [to our school]” (Van Buren).

One of the principals at a relatively more advantaged school (Madison) described how his colleague at a relatively disadvantaged school struggled to attract applicants. His friend, he said “claims that he always gets the bottom of the barrel [of applicants]...He gets people that are still in teacher training programs...he has really not a lot to choose from, that’s not fair to him, not fair to his families and, as a result, it’s not fair to our entire system.”

Resources. The relative attractiveness of schools was compounded by the fact that the schools in the toughest neighborhoods were struggling to maintain enrollment, both because of a shrinking school-age population and because of competition from choice schools (e.g., charters and private schools). Shrinking enrollments translated into smaller budgets, which in turn translated into fewer specialists and therefore less-attractive working conditions. Madison’s principal explained,

At many schools here, when budget cuts come and reductions have to come, people start cutting specialist teachers first...fortunately we are able to offer that [specialists] for students. And, in offering that for students, we’re able to offer that for teachers, because teachers have more prep time here than most other schools.

Likewise, Monroe’s principal said one of the things that makes his school attractive to candidates is that he has the resources (based on large enrollments) to sustain, “music, art, and gym, and built-in planning time [something that]...most of the schools do not have...A lot of teachers use that [time] for kids that need extra help. That’s when they can do a small group, or a collaboration with other grade levels.” Because of growing enrollments, the school was “in a very good position in a lot of ways. Where a lot of schools can’t afford to pay for specialists anymore, we’re actually hiring extra specialists.”

The fact that principals and teachers said that their school’s relative attractiveness affected the size and perceived quality of their applicant pool above and beyond their own efforts raises the question whether it is better to be good (active and consistent) or lucky (well located). When we look at actual vacancy and fill data on our 10 schools for the spring during our visit we see two countervailing trends. If we define a school’s fill rate as the percentage of regular teaching vacancies it was able to fill during the three interview cycles, the schools that we earlier categorized as being more active and consistent appear to have higher fill rates than less active and less consistent schools (Figure 2).

[INSERT Figure 2. Fill Rate by Differences in Recruitment and Consistency]

When we consider how long vacancies remained open and the cycle in which they were typically filled, a different pattern emerges. Some of the more active and consistent schools, especially Jefferson, despite filling the majority of their vacancies, take longer to fill them. In fact, some of the passive schools (Van Buren; Harrison; Adams) are more successful at filling vacancies early in the cycle (Figure 3).

[INSERT Figure 3. Average Length of Vacancy by Recruitment and Consistency]

As **Figure 3** suggests, despite his efforts, the principal of Jefferson ends up filling vacancies late in the hiring cycle. In fact, the active/consistent schools did not fill vacancies any more quickly than two of the passive/ill-defined schools. These delays in hiring have important implications for the quality of candidates according to principals and teachers in all schools. The principal of Jackson, for example, said that the “topnotch applicants, most of the time, come through the first cycle.” Monroe’s principal agreed: “What we’ve found is that you have the best chance of getting somebody really, really high quality during the first cycle.” Teachers recognized this difference too:

It almost seems like there is a lot of pressure to do hiring in the first cycle, because they wanna snatch up the good candidates...I do remember a few times we’ve hired nobody, because the candidates were so bad...it seems the first cycle has a lot more choices (Van Buren teacher).

Some principals said they would do almost anything to avoid getting a teacher late in the hiring cycle or, worse, after the interview cycle had closed. Washington’s principal said, “I don’t necessarily want rejects who are just kinda laying out there. If I can staff my building early, that’s what I want to do.” The worst-case scenario, in her estimation, was having a teacher assigned by the central office:

Sometimes, when you get to the third interview process, if you don’t have the best candidates, you’ll just fill it with one of them ‘cause you’ve got at least an idea of who you’re going to get...[the placement process] can be a very risky business.

As we noted above, there was a general sense among the schools that the relative attractiveness of their location was an important influence on applicant pool and quality. **Figure 4** returns to this idea by showing a scatter plot of the number of recent homicides surrounding each school and the schools’ respective fill rates. If we omit the outlier with 10 homicides (Jefferson), the correlation between the two is -0.93 and statistically significant; when including Jefferson, it is -0.65 and statistically significant.

[INSERT Figure 4. Fill Rates and Homicides Near Schools]

A similar picture emerges when we consider the relationship between measures of school poverty and the average length of vacancy (measures of performance, school climate, and financial resources, however, did not appear to be related to fill rates or length of vacancy). In the end, a school's location and relative attractiveness appear to have a central impact on its ability to cope with the task of staffing its classrooms.

Policy Implications

Nearly every respondent, even those who struggled to find high-quality teachers, said that the district's site-based hiring system was better than having centralized teacher assignments. If anything, they wanted *more* local authority (for example, by eliminating the restrictions on who they could interview in each cycle).

At the same time, their experiences suggest that school-based hiring reforms can fall short for at least two reasons. First, as with any authority-based policy tool, school-based hiring policies assume local capacity and technical expertise that may or may not be present. Schools may be more or less entrepreneurial and, especially relevant for teacher selection, more or less clear about who they are as a school and what they want in teacher candidates. Second, the reforms can fall short if they ignore the relative attractiveness of schools and its effect on staffing outcomes. In the end, even though the 10 schools approached teacher selection differently, the impact of these differences appeared to be mitigated by the school's relative attractiveness in the district's internal labor market. Schools lucky enough to have a favored location or resources are able to be passive and a little less coherent and still have relatively decent hiring outcomes. Schools in less attractive areas may ultimately be better off if they are more active and coherent, but their relative place in the local labor market can frustrate their efforts.

Given the importance of context across the system, improving the effectiveness and equity of the teacher selection process is likely to require systemic solutions. These include investing in the capacity of school personnel to conduct effective interviews and evaluate candidates; increasing the supply of teachers for hard-to-staff schools; and collecting and providing more useful information to schools.

Invest In Capacity

As Quincy's principal said, "we're not human resource people that do this on a regular basis." She and her colleagues recognized they needed to build their capacity to select teachers.

And yet the short training session we attended during our field visits focused more on what *not* to ask interviewees (for legal reasons) than on how to ask good questions. One way the district might improve its schools' hiring capacity is to better integrate its training on teacher selection with its training on instruction. The district has already provided training on Bloom's Taxonomy and Marzano's principles of instruction in order to set a broad agenda for instruction. Currently, however, these ideas do not inform its training on teacher selection. Collaboration between the office of professional development and the office of human resources could improve and focus the district's training on selection (e.g., developing questions that get at the knowledge and skills that are relevant to the district's instructional agenda, or developing benchmark answers to help evaluate of candidates).

Increase The Supply For Hard-To-Staff Schools

Despite people's enthusiasm for school-based hiring, several respondents acknowledged that the system posed new problems for relatively less-attractive schools. An HR specialist in the central office even speculated that fully qualified teachers were *less* equitably distributed under the school-based hiring system than before. Unfortunately, attractiveness often had less to do with the school organization itself and more to do with the *perceived* quality of neighborhoods throughout the city. Addressing this problem at the neighborhood level is, of course, politically complicated. It involves a host of stakeholders and interests throughout the city. Addressing the problem within the district will likely require the cooperation of the district, school board and teachers' union. Principals in the most-disadvantaged schools recognize the need to compensate teachers more for working in disadvantaged schools:

In an ideal world, I would like...especially in the area of special education, for [the district] to say, in our neediest schools, we're going to motivate experienced teachers...to work in these buildings through offering them some type of incentive, whether that be financial, whether that be some comp time, or things of that nature, so that we can get those experienced individuals in our building (Jefferson).

In addition to providing incentives or improving working conditions, the district might also increase the potential supply of teachers for disadvantaged schools by rethinking its centralized screening procedures. According to respondents in the central HR office, the district currently receives thousands of applications for the typical elementary education position. To avoid overwhelming schools with applicants, the district reduces this number by screening out

candidates based on their certification, a background check, and their score on the Urban Teacher Perceiver assessment, an instrument intended to capture the candidates' potential to serve urban students. A district HR specialist said that she sometimes selects only 20 applicants to “clear for hire” out of a pool of 350. This kind of filter keeps the applicant pool manageable from the district's perspective, but it involves a trade off. For it to be a plus for *all* schools, the candidates it filters out must be unambiguously worse than the candidates in the limited pool or the forced placements faced by disadvantaged schools. Disadvantaged schools might, for example, have a wider applicant pool if the centralized screen was limited to certification and background checks. It is impossible to know, however, because the district and its schools lack critical information about the applicant pool, which leads us to our final point.

Collect and Provide Applicant Information

From a systemic perspective, effective teacher selection requires good information both about individual candidates as well as application and hiring patterns across schools. We have already suggested that the district might invest in the capacity of school personnel to collect better information during interviews. There are, however, two additional ways in which the district might unlock valuable information.

First, the district could share candidates' scores on the Urban Teacher Perceiver with principals. Although the district values the instrument enough to use it, it currently does not share the results with principals who might find them informative. Second, the district could collect more information on its internal labor market to help identify staffing problems and the nature of those problems. Currently, the district collects information on vacancies and placements, but does not collect information on a school's applicant pool (this information is kept separately at each school in paper records). This means that the district has no systematic information on the size or characteristics of schools' local applicant pool. With better information on vacancies, applicants, and hiring outcomes, the district could take a more strategic and differentiated approach to both capacity-building and making disadvantaged schools more attractive.

The lessons we can draw from just 10 schools are, of course, limited. We cannot generalize to other schools or districts or points in time. Our analysis pays too little attention to the broader labor market in which the district is located and how it influences the supply of teachers; it also ignores broader demographic trends and their effects on demand. Moreover, without systematic data on who applies to which schools, the application process, and hiring outcomes, there is no

way to empirically consider the selection decisions made by schools. If schools are to address teacher quality by rethinking how they hire teachers, the collection of such data and investigation of these questions are important areas for further research.

In the end, efforts to improve teacher quality are by their nature complicated and multi-dimensional. Single solutions – for example, the decentralization of hiring authority alone, increases in regulations such as the NCLB’s Highly Qualified Teacher Provisions, or changes in pay - are unlikely to have the desired effects. Unless reformers also address capacity, working conditions, and incentives, school-based hiring may have the perverse effect of making some schools that are extremely disadvantaged worse off.

Endnotes

¹ Experienced and well-qualified teachers (as measured by such things as certification status or certification exam score) tend to migrate away from disadvantaged schools and toward places that serve more-advantaged and high-achieving students (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, Summer 2006; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2004; Lankford et al., 2002).

² This is chiefly a critique aimed at large urban districts. Most school districts actually appear to use a combination of centralized and decentralized processes when they select teachers: district-level administrators tend to conduct initial assessments of candidates based on minimal qualifications; school-based personnel conduct more substantive assessments (e.g., interviews) and make the actual hiring decisions (Balter & Duncombe, 2005; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Strauss, Bowes, Marks, & Plesko, 2000; Wise, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 1987).

³ The state considers districts to be similar if their student demographic and district spending data fall within the same range (For example, the state's "ranges" for percentage economically disadvantaged students are 0-10%, 10.01-25%, 25.01-50%, 50.01-75%, and 75.01-100%; per pupil expenditures include the "ranges" =<\$7000, \$7001-\$8000, \$8001-\$10000, and >\$10000).

⁴ The reforms also moved the hiring process earlier in the calendar; however, they did not change teacher compensation, which continued to be based on a traditional pay table known as a single salary schedule. Under the single salary schedule, teacher pay levels are determined solely based on their degree and experience levels.

⁵ All names are pseudonyms.

⁶ Committee members in all schools attended a district-run training session that provided basic information on how to write interview questions and on federal and state laws governing interview procedures (e.g., not asking unfair pre-employment questions about a candidate's marital status or plans for pregnancy).

⁷ For the nine schools that provided us with a copy of their interview questions, eight included questions that asked candidates to talk about instructional practice and classroom management. The ninth school included several questions regarding instructional practice, but no explicit questions regarding classroom management. The majority of schools also asked candidates questions about interacting with coworkers and parents.

⁸ Research outside of education suggests the superiority of structured interviews over unstructured ones (Henemann III & Heneman, 1994), but the schools' reliance on gut judgments raises serious questions about their reliability.

⁹ This discussion focuses on *internal* recruitment - that is, the identification and attraction of applicants from among teachers already working in the district. None of the schools were actively involved in the *external* recruitment of teachers from outside of the district (an activity that was generally under the purview of central administrators).

¹⁰ That is, Benjamin Bloom's classification of "the goals of the educational process" - in particular his distinctions between different cognitive objectives: knowledge; comprehension; application; analysis; synthesis; evaluation (see Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956).

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. District Demographics 2006-2007

Total enrollment (PreK-12)	89,903
% Eligible for Subsidized Lunch	79.3
% American Indian	0.8
% Asian	4.5
% Black	57.7
% Hispanic	21
% White	16

Source: State Department of Public Instruction

Table 2. School District Demographics and Reading Performance 2006-2007

<i>School</i>	<i>Total enrollment</i>	<i>% Poverty</i>	<i>% Black</i>	<i>% Hispanic</i>	<i>% White</i>	<i>Teacher FTE</i>	<i>% teachers w/ MA or higher</i>	<i>% 4th grade advanced/proficient in reading</i>
Adams*	852	78.4	94.1	0.5	3.4	54	38.9	60
Harrison	362	73.2	61.6	2.5	24	30	36.7	60
Jackson*	394	98.2	90.4	6.9	2.5	30	30	68
Jefferson*	463	97.4	97.2	0.2	2.2	25	28	41
Madison	513	91.4	92.8	0.2	2.9	37.5	44	52
Monroe**	762	95.8	18.2	73.2	7	54	44.4	68
Quincy	356	94.4	78.9	2.8	12.4	23	30.4	60
Tyler*	702	95.6	12.5	75.1	8.5	48	14	57
Van Buren*	718	90.8	95.8	1.1	2.8	51	45.1	56
Washington*	429	88.8	90.2	1.6	6.8	26	34.6	62

*K-8; **Expanding to become K-8; **bolded reading performance is above district average: advanced + proficient (63.3)**
 Source: State Department of Public Instruction

Table 3. Homicides in School Neighborhoods 2006-2007

<i>School</i>	<i>Total # of homicides within 0.5 miles of the school between 2006 and 2007*</i>
Adams	4 (1 in 2006; 3 in 2007)
Harrison	0
Jackson	6 (4 in 2006; 2 in 2007)
Jefferson	10 (6 in 2006; 4 in 2007)
Madison	2 (both in 2006)
Quincy	0
Tyler	3 (1 in 2006; 2 in 2007)
Van Buren	5 (1 in 2006; 4 in 2007)
Washington	3 (2 in 2006; 1 in 2007)

*Based on data from city's police department records management system. These data are not edited for Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) or Incident Based Reporting (IBRS) purposes, and so should be interpreted with some caution.

Table 4. Differences in Recruitment and Hiring Priorities and Context

<i>School</i>	<i>Recruitment approach and hiring priorities</i>	<i>Homicides 2006-2007</i>	<i>% Poverty</i>	<i>% 4th grade advanced/proficient in reading</i>
Jefferson*	active/consistent	10	97.4	41
Madison	active/consistent	2	91.4	52
Monroe**	active/consistent	4	95.8	68
Washington*	active/consistent	3	88.8	62
Quincy	active/ill-defined	0	94.4	60
Harrison*	passive/consistent	0	73.2	60
Adams*	passive/ill-defined	5	78.4	60
Jackson*	passive/ill-defined	6	98.2	68
Tyler*	passive/ill-defined	3	95.6	57
Van Buren*	passive/ill-defined	6	90.8	56

*K-8; **Expanding to become K-8; **bolded reading performance is above district average: advanced + proficient (63.3)**
 Source: State Department of Public Instruction

Figure 1. Differences in Recruitment and Hiring Priorities

		Engagement in Recruitment	
		Active	Passive
Consistency of hiring priorities	High	Madison Jefferson Washington Monroe	Harrison
	Low	Quincy	Jackson Adams Tyler Van Buren

Figure 2. Fill Rate by Differences in Consistency and Engagement

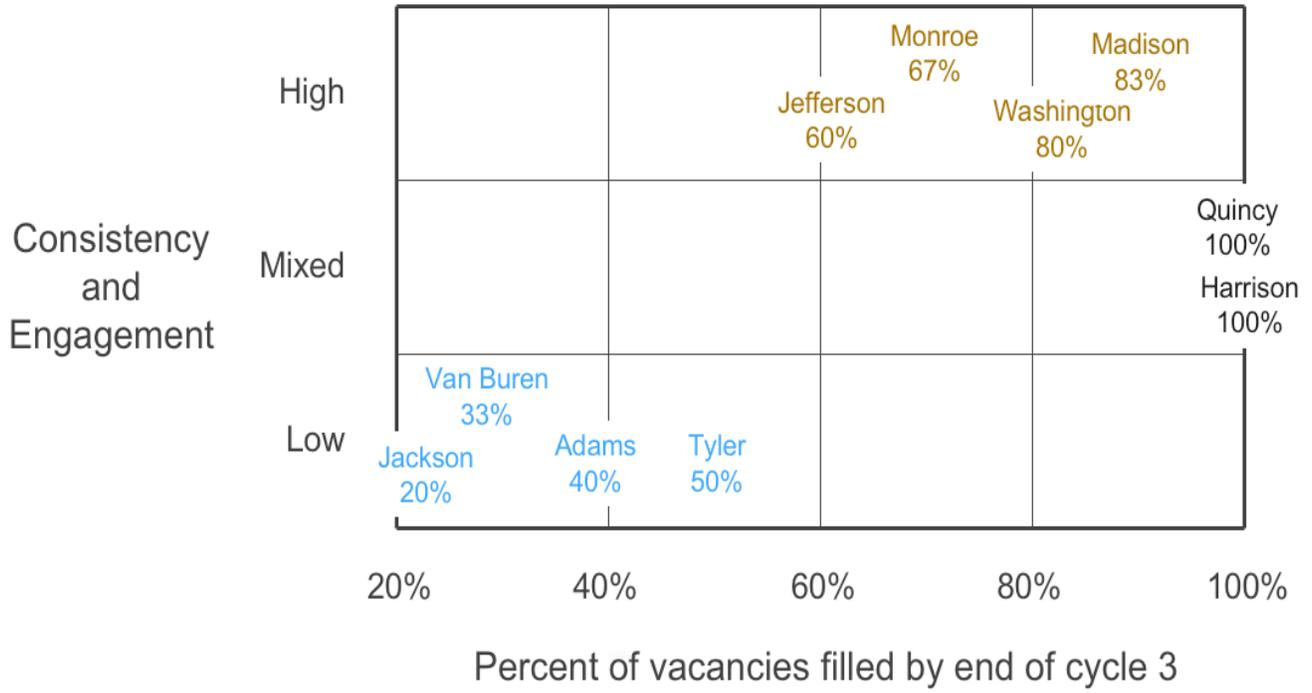


Figure 3. Average Length of Vacancy by Consistency and Engagement

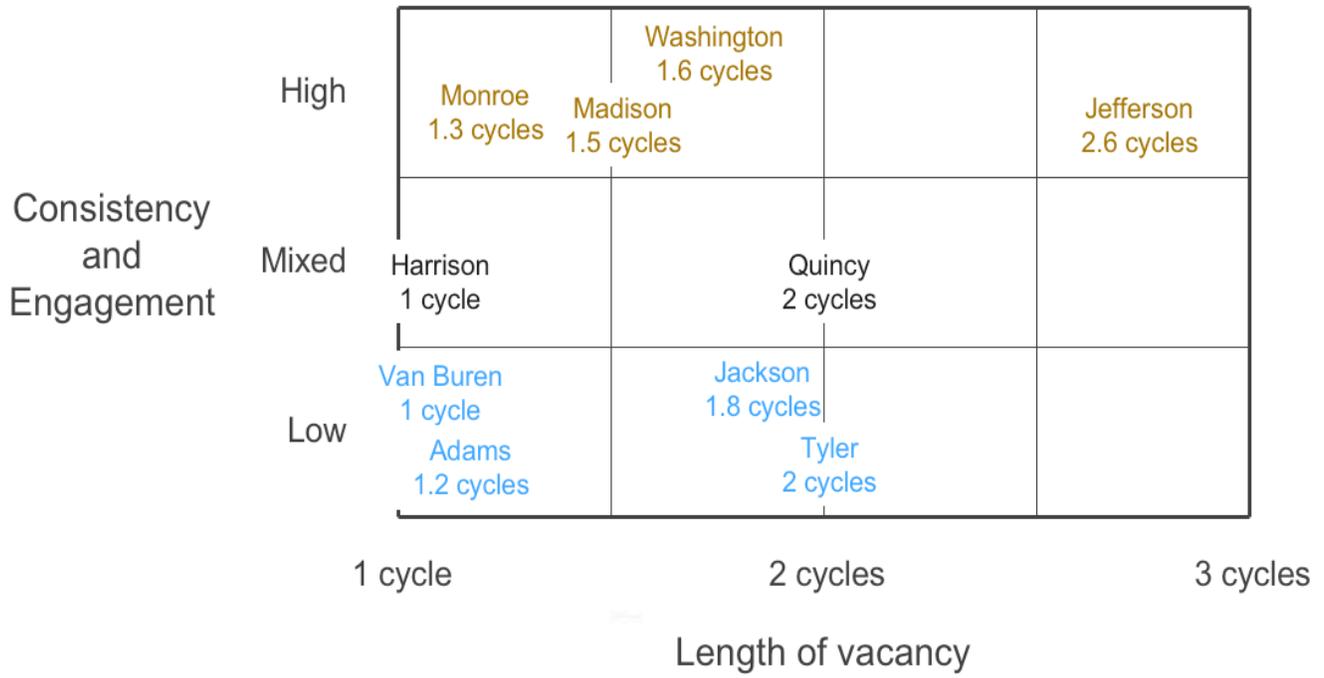
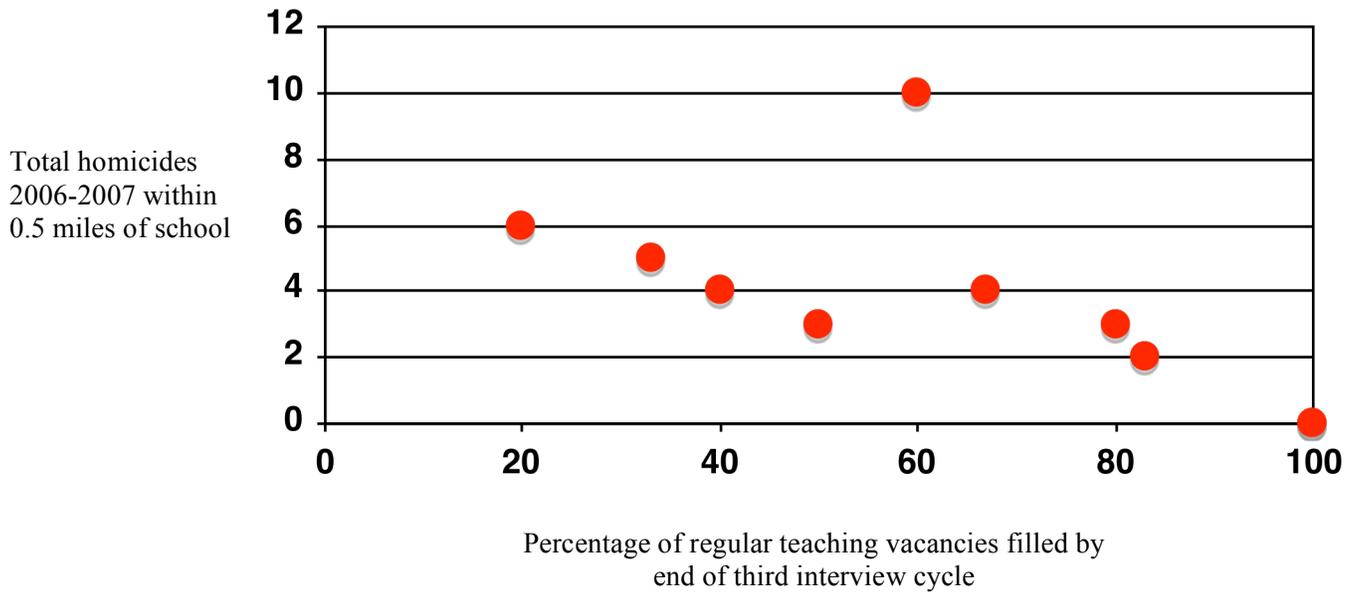


Figure 4. Fill Rates and Homicides Near Schools



Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Before we talk about what it's like to hire teachers, we hope you can begin by telling us a little about yourself.

1. How long have you been the principal/a teacher at _____ school?
2. What did you do before becoming the principal/a teacher here?
3. [If teacher] How long have you been a member of the interview team here?

Questions about Vacancies

Let's begin at the beginning by talking about job openings.

1. When do you usually know that you'll have to hire a teacher to fill a vacancy in the next school year? [*Ask for examples, including the reasons for the vacancy: growing enrollment, maternity leave, dismissal, retirement, etc.*]
2. So, you usually find out about vacancies in [MONTH]. When do you notify the district about a vacancy? When do official efforts to recruit a teacher to fill the vacancy usually begin?
 - a. *If there is a lag:* Is there anything you can do to find candidates the meantime?

Questions about Advertising and Presenting the School

Now I'd like to ask you some general questions about how the school presents itself and gets the word out about vacancies to prospective teachers.

1. Other than official postings with the district, do you do any formal or informal advertising for teaching positions?
2. We understand that prior to Cycle 1, schools with vacancies hold informational meetings. What are those meetings like?
 - a. How do you get job candidates to come to these meetings? How many usually attend?
 - b. What does the school do? [*Presentations and documents?*]
 - c. Who represents the school at the meetings? [*Principal, teachers, parents, students?*]
 - d. Are you looking for specific things from the candidates who attend these meetings? If yes, what are they?
3. Do you do anything else to spread the word about your job postings? Who are these efforts trying to reach?

4. Are there things about your school that make your school particularly attractive to candidates?
 - a. Is there anything about your school that makes it harder to attract candidates?
 - b. What is the hardest part about selling your school?

Questions about the Application Process

We understand that there are 3 hiring cycles. Before talking about how each of those cycles differs from each other, we want to get a general sense of what you look for in a candidate.

1. What types of application materials do candidates have to submit to the school?
 - a. Is there anything beyond the required district documents? *E.g., transcripts, sample lesson plans, written statement, etc.*
 - b. What's the reasoning behind different materials?
2. When you look through written applications, what makes someone stand out and make you say, "I want to interview this teacher"? *Experience, advanced degrees, subject matter knowledge, college major...*
 - a. Where do you get your best candidates? *Internal transfers, etc.*
 - b. What proportion of candidates do you find through personal contacts or connections verses other sources?
3. Who has primary responsibility for screening the applications and deciding who to invite for an interview?
4. How do you notify a teacher that you want to interview him or her for a position?
 - a. Do you send them any additional material [*E.g., more information about the school or the interview process itself, etc.*]
 - b. What is the typical time between application and notification?

Questions about the Interview Team

We understand that school interview teams consist of an on-site administrator, teachers (must be the majority), and at least one parent.

1. How are people selected to be on the interview team?
2. What type of training does the team receive?

3. Does the team meet before they review applicants to discuss what they are looking for in a candidate?
4. Do team member have specific roles during the interview process?

Questions about the Interview Process

Now we'd like to ask you about the actual interview process.

1. How long are the interviews?
2. What materials do you ask the candidates to bring to the interview [*sample lesson plan, etc.*]? What do you do with those materials?
3. What topics do your interview questions cover? Is it possible to get a copy of your interview protocol?
 - a. Do you use a scorecard or a commercial scoring system (e.g. *Teacher Perceiver*)?
4. Do you ask the candidates to perform any tasks, such as teach a sample lesson or provide an on-the-spot writing sample?
5. During the interview, what kinds of signals are you looking for that will tell you the candidate will be a good fit for this school?
6. Do you look for different qualities from candidates applying for different positions in the school?
7. What happens after the interview is over? How does the team digest the information from the interview? What process do you use to decide who will be hired? *Scoring system, etc.*
8. How and when do you notify a teacher that you want to offer him or her a job? When do you have to notify the district?
9. As you work to hire teachers for this school, who are you competing against to get the candidates you want?

Questions about the Quality of Applicants

Take a minute to think about some of the best teachers you've known/worked with at this school. What characteristics did they have that made them good teachers?

The next few questions are about the quality of the applicants that you get here at this school.

1. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the applicants that you get at this school?

2. Does the quality of the applicants differ in the three different hiring cycles? How so? [E.g. *Training, Experience, Colleges...*]
3. How many applicants do you typically get when you post a vacancy? How does this vary by grade level or subject area – any shortages? How does this vary by Cycle?
4. How many offers to you make before you find a candidate who accepts?
5. When you look through the applications you get in each of the cycles (Cycle 1, 2, and 3), about how many would you say you take seriously as potential hires?
6. What do you do when you can't find any candidate to fill a position?

Final Questions

1. [*If the interviewee has experience outside of the district or experience with hiring in the district prior to decentralization.*] How would you compare the current hiring system in the district with how things worked before/in your other district?
 - a. Is the general quality of the applicants different? How so?
 - b. Is the “fit” between the applicants and your school different?

One of the things we've noticed in talking to principals in other districts is that they often have to “work the system” to get the teachers they want. They hide vacancies, or actively recruit teachers in the system whom they have worked with in the past.

2. Do principals here still have to “work the system” to get the teachers they want? Why/Why not? Examples.
3. Is there anything that gets in the way of your being able to hire teachers effectively?
4. What if anything would help you do a better job hiring teachers?
5. Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we haven't covered?