



Case Study: Teacher Induction Durham Public Education Network (DPEN) Durham, NC

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Public Education Network (PEN) is a national organization of local education funds (LEFs) and individuals working to improve public schools and build citizen support for quality public education in low-income communities across the nation. PEN and its 83 LEF members work in 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico on behalf of 11.5 million children in more than 1,600 school districts, seeking to bring the community voice into the debate on quality public education in the firm belief that an active, vocal constituency will ensure every child, in every community, a quality public education.

The mission of the **Durham Public Education Network (DPEN)** is to focus community resources to ensure the highest achievement of all children in public schools. Founded with seed grants from the Durham Jaycees, the Junior League of Durham and Orange Counties and the Triangle Community Foundation, The Durham Public Education Network was established in 1986 to encourage the Durham community to come together in support of its public schools.

Overview

In March 2003, the Durham Public Education Network (DPEN) convened hundreds of public leaders in the community for a high-profile signing ceremony. They were gathered to sign a one-page community covenant that would allow the community to hold district and community leaders accountable for supporting school improvement.

Shortly after the covenant signing, DPEN made it a point to remind civic leaders of their endorsement of the plan, encourage them to devote staff time and resources to the educational needs of the community, and repeatedly invited them to meet with the public. To help keep leaders focused on their promise, DPEN encouraged attendance at events where educational needs and programmatic opportunities within the community were highlighted. "The LEF believed that agencies had a mandate to solve the problems that faced students and their families, and the LEF reminded them of that mandate."

During the past two years, DPEN has begun to focus more on teaching quality. DPEN worked hard to engage the Durham Public School District (DPS) in conversations and policy changes that would improve teacher recruitment and retention. While this was an important issue within the district, DPEN found it difficult to maintain the engagement of the public-at-large in this work.

Confronting the Teachers' Shortage

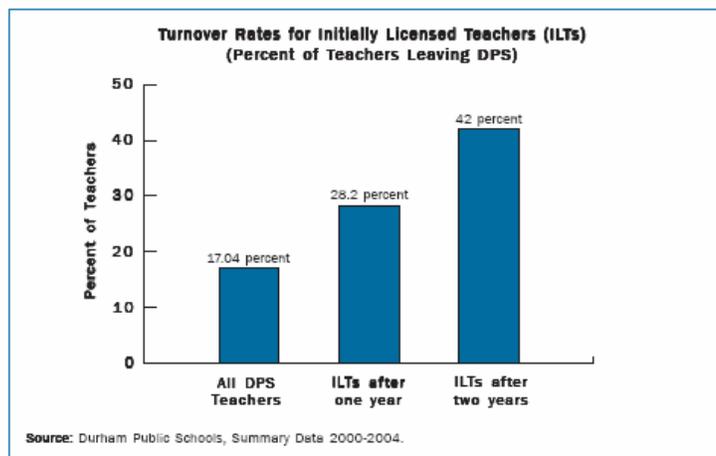
As is the case in many urban districts throughout the country, Durham struggles to staff its schools. Last year, the Durham schools lost more than 17 percent of its teachers – one of the worst attrition rates in the state. (Across the nation the annual teacher turnover rate is 15.7 percent. *Herald Sun*, 5/18/05, Hagen, B1) Perhaps even more troubling, data show that between 2000 and 2004, 28 percent of new DPS teachers left after their first year and 42 after just two years, with high-poverty schools having the highest attrition rates. According to local newspapers, DPS consistently lost teachers to nearby Triangle school districts like Wake, Orange, and Chapel Hill-Carrboro where pay is higher, stress lower, and overall working conditions better.

High turnover rates add considerable financial cost to districts already struggling to make their bottom line. According to Fred Williams, director of recruitment and retention for DPS, it cost the district about \$3.5 million to replace teachers who left for reasons other than retirement following the 2003-04 school year. What makes these attrition rates even more upsetting is that research has confirmed what parents already knew: teacher quality is an important factor in determining student achievement.

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DPEN designated teacher quality as one of its top five priorities in 2001, and in June of 2004, the LEF narrowed its focus to

engaging the community around the teacher quality issues of recruitment and retention. Through research and community conversations, DPEN focused on strategies that would impact policy and practice at the classroom, school, and district level, strategies such as teacher induction practices, mentoring, and principal training. Since that time, DPEN and DPS have worked together to design a program to support new teachers.



Working Conditions Survey

North Carolina Governor Mike Easley believed that “teacher working conditions are student learning conditions.” He began the Teacher Working Conditions Initiative by developing the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, piloted in 2001 and made available to every licensed public school educator in 2002 and again in 2004. The biennial survey covers five broad categories: time, empowerment, professional development, leadership, and facilities. The Governor commissioned the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) to analyze the results and produce summaries of the findings.

The findings from the 2002 survey revealed dissatisfaction across the state with teacher working conditions, particularly related to the amount of time teachers had to do their job. In addition, the findings demonstrated that on average, principals were more positive about working conditions than the teachers themselves. Elementary school teachers were more likely than teachers at other grade levels to rate their experience positively.

One of the main goals of the survey was to provide communities with localized data on their schools’ working conditions, so that policymakers and stakeholders could utilize these in educational decision-making. While 90 percent of schools statewide responded to the 2004 survey, only 23 percent of Durham teachers completed it. With less than a 40 percent response rate, Durham’s data were not generalizable to the district as a whole. (See www.northcarolinatwc.org.)

In order to have a valid school-level report, DPEN worked hard to increase Durham’s response rate on the working conditions survey. They publicized the survey and were rewarded with a 51 percent response rate, a 28 percent increase in responses from teachers and administrators in DPS.

The survey results painted a bleak but more accurate picture of teacher working conditions in Durham. DPS teachers rated working conditions worse than their colleagues across the state. Overall, Durham teachers were less satisfied with their facilities, training, school leadership, time for lesson planning, common planning time, and training. Armed with these results, the district responded by planning programs to address teacher working conditions.

DPEN's Education Summit

The results of the 2004 survey were revealed and discussed at DPEN's Education Summit in the spring of 2005. An annual DPEN event, the goal of the 2005 Education Summit was to educate the community on the topic of teaching quality, with the hope that the summit would culminate in the development of an action plan that DPEN officials could present to the school board and work to put into effect. How could the community make teaching in Durham more attractive?

Marilyn Katzenmeyer, educator and president of Professional Development Center in Tampa, Florida and Barnett Berry, president of CTQ, presented research findings to the group, lending a national perspective. Both warned summit participants that teacher turnover was costly in many ways, including added burdens for veteran teachers. They said turnover was higher in special education and high-poverty areas, leaving these students with the newest, least-seasoned teachers. Speakers emphasized that it was important to stop the loss of existing teachers before worrying about recruitment.

While the discussion was highly relevant to the Durham community, DPEN staff was dissatisfied with the turnout. Fewer than 100 education professionals, school system officials, teachers, parents, corporate leaders, and other citizens participated in the one-day summit. Considering that the school district is comprised of 31,000 students, tens of thousands of parents, and 2,400 licensed employees, DPEN had hoped for and expected more participants. For an organization that works hard to "put the public in the public schools," the turnout was disappointing.

Despite low attendance, the Education Summit did provide an advocacy platform to mobilize citizens to pressure the county commission to increase support and incentives for teachers. The commission increased its support and DPS began responding to the challenges in teacher recruitment and retainment with an assortment of financial and non-financial benefits. On June 30, 2005, the Durham County Board of Commissioners added \$919,774 to the city budget for increased teacher salary supplements for SY2005-06. The increase in funds raised the starting teacher supplement to 13.5 percent, with incremental increases of 0.5 percent for every five years of teaching experience. The total salary supplement provided was comparable to those in neighboring districts. Since pay was not the only concern in terms of retaining teachers, non-financial incentives were leveraged to decrease attrition rates. DPS attained strong support from the local business community who expressed appreciation for school employees by offering discounts and special services to DPS employees and partners of DPEN. By using a New DPS Achievement Card at participating businesses, employees could benefit from discounts at restaurants, housing, rental, automotive, and financial service organizations, among others.

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Induction program

One of the findings revealed by the Teacher Working Conditions survey was that teachers did not feel well-mentored. Of the DPS teachers who responded, only 22 percent strongly agreed that “new teachers have effective mentors,” compared to 35 percent across North Carolina. The data clearly revealed that the mentoring program in place was not providing consistent support to all new teachers in DPS. According to the November 2005 DPEN report, “Attracting, Supporting and Retaining New Teachers in Durham Public Schools,” new teacher induction needed improvement to be more effective:

New teacher induction refers to a structured process of teacher learning, conducted on-the-job, where novices are prepared in stages over the first few years of teaching. . . . Induction goes beyond mentoring to provide an extensive package of supports, professional development, and standards-based assessments and evaluations. (pp. 4-5)

Following conversations with DPEN, DPS became the first district in North Carolina to fully adopt a district-wide comprehensive New Teacher Center model (from the University of California-Santa Cruz), in which full-time mentors support new teachers.

Beginning in 2005-06, the research-based model supported 35 full-release mentors to work with the district’s new teachers. These DPS veteran teachers serve as mentors for up to three years before returning to their classroom positions. There has been some concern that this model encourages the most effective and experienced teachers to leave the classroom for several years. However, supporters of the program argue that even more students will benefit from the expertise of these mentors as they pass on what they know to new teachers.

Mentors work with up to 15 novice teachers while receiving extensive, ongoing training in four identified key areas: (1) developing an effective mentoring relationship, (2) identifying new teacher needs, (3) mentoring conversations, and (4) formative assessments for new teachers. Mentors and mentees meet on a weekly basis to talk about how to engage students in learning, how to organize their classrooms, and how to plan their lessons. In addition to meeting with their mentees, mentors meet weekly with other mentors for planning and professional development. They also meet with their principals every six weeks.

DPS chose to support new teachers by becoming the first district in North Carolina to fully adopt a district-wide comprehensive New Teacher Center model (from the University of California-Santa Cruz).

Because of the mentor program, new teachers reported in the 2006 Working Conditions Survey that they felt more supported and better prepared than their colleagues across the state. Additionally, only 12.5 percent of new teachers left the district during SY2005-06, less than half the turnover of the past. Currently, DPEN is working with the district to determine its

future role with the teacher induction program.

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Lessons Learned – The Importance of Public Engagement

DPEN's early efforts to engage the public, leading to the creation of the covenant, were effective and powerful. DPEN's work, which encouraged stakeholders to listen to and learn from each other, paved the road for productive advocacy work and laid the foundation for policy change. The covenant effectively set the stage for DPEN's focus on teacher quality issues. DPEN has helped increase Working Conditions survey response rates,

championed the new teacher induction program, developed a principal leadership track, and increased parent and teacher ambassadors in the district.

But despite early successes, DPEN also encountered setbacks. DPEN's current work lacks the backing of the community generated when the covenant was drafted. As evidenced by the low turnout at the 2005 Education Summit, DPEN was unable to help the public understand the importance of focusing on new teachers and teacher quality. Strong personalities, along with DPEN and DPS staff turnover made it difficult to maintain relations and continue progress. Racial division in the community led to distrust, which thwarted policy change.

Recently, both the district and DPEN have brought on new leadership that have the support of the community and have made a point of publicly endorsing each other. There is hope that the new leadership will embrace the community and reinvigorate the public call for the necessary policy changes regarding teaching quality.

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Our Vision

Every day, in every community, *every* child in America benefits from a quality public education.

Our Mission

To build public demand and mobilize resources for quality public education for *all* children through a national constituency of local education funds and individuals.

PEN's Theory of Action

The national office of PEN issued a broad and ambitious charge to LEFs by developing a theory of action for the policy initiatives in 2001. The theory of action asserted that the combination of public engagement and specific school reform goals would result in sustained policy and practice and the public taking responsibility for public schools. It argued that too many school systems lack accountability to their local constituencies, and that the reforms undertaken by school professionals or brokered in back rooms without public engagement are likely to be faddish and ephemeral.

The theory of action identified three categories of the public: policymakers; organized groups; and the public at large. For each, it spelled out strategies and tactics by which LEFs cultivate public engagement: advocacy with policymakers; community strategic planning with organized groups; and community organizing with the public at large. The theory of action went on to provide examples of these strategies in action. It ended with a vision of the long-term goal:

...to create public demand for good public schools and to have this demand actually improve public schools. When we're done, we envision communities with a substantive education agenda making real changes in student achievement. We envision a strong community voice outside the schools — with its own power and constituency — that argues for improvement and helps guide changes. We envision robust community organizations that always are in the process of building new leadership and sustaining involvement. And we envision an accountability system that places shared responsibility for success with everyone in the community. (p. 11).

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