

RIGHT FROM THE START

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S GROUNDBREAKING
TEACHER HIRING STRATEGY

BY LYNN OLSON
SEPTEMBER 2021

FutureEd
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

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FOREWORD

The District of Columbia Public Schools is well-known for its comprehensive teacher-evaluation and performance-based compensation systems. But an equally important component of the district's work to strengthen its teaching workforce has been a systematic, data-driven approach to hiring the strongest candidates in the first place. Known as TeachDC, the system employs a multi-step process for vetting candidates, a state-of-the-art web portal, and data analysis to ensure the city schools select the best applicants.

The results are impressive. The district is receiving more applications and attracting a more diverse pool of candidates. Most vacancies are filled before the first day of school, an improvement that is particularly striking at high-needs schools that often scramble to fill their rosters. Candidates earning higher scores in the vetting process emerge as stronger teachers in the classroom. And DCPS is retaining nearly all of its teachers rated effective and highly effective.

This report, a joint effort by FutureEd and EducationCounsel, explains how TeachDC works and how it plays out in one of Washington's high-need high schools. And the report provides a post-pandemic blueprint for how school districts across the country can adopt more systematic approaches to recruiting, hiring, and retaining the best teachers right from the start.

FutureEd Senior Fellow Lynn Olson researched and wrote the report. Molly Breen, Jackie Arthur and Merry Alderman provided valuable editorial support.

We are grateful to the teams at DCPS and Theodore Roosevelt High School for collaborating with us on the project and we're grateful to Overdeck Family Foundation and The Joyce Foundation for providing funding for the work.

Thomas Toch
Director, FutureEd

Sandi Jacobs
Principal, EducationCounsel

Bolstered by federal coronavirus relief funds, many states and districts are investing in their teacher workforce. Some have proposed bonuses to retain existing teachers. Others are waiving teacher licensure fees, allowing emergency licenses to fill gaps in shortage areas, and piloting new teacher pipelines to increase the diversity of the talent pool.¹

But one path to teacher quality is often overlooked: hiring the right people in the first place. In the past decade, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has made significant investments in the quality of its teaching force. These include state-of-the-art methods for teacher-evaluation and performance-based compensation as well as a highly developed system for recruiting, selecting, and hiring teachers. The innovation at the front end of the teacher pipeline—to institute more systematic, data-based hiring processes—has produced notable results and provides a post-pandemic blueprint for school systems nationwide that want to hire good teachers right from start.

Talent Pool

With more than 50,000 students enrolled in 116 schools and a teaching force of about 4,500, DCPS processes more than 3,000 job applicants a year, competing for teachers with more affluent suburbs in nearby Maryland and Virginia as well as with the city's extensive network of public charter schools.

The district's highest need schools have long struggled to attract top talent, which disproportionately hurts the city's students of color. This challenge contributes to inequities in the distribution of effective teachers that can further exacerbate student performance gaps.

When Michelle Rhee became chancellor in 2007, she made strengthening the teaching corps the cornerstone of an ambitious school improvement agenda. Rhee had previously worked closely with D.C. school officials for nearly a decade as the founder of the New Teacher Project (TNTP), a national organization working to help urban school systems recruit talented teachers. As chancellor, her first step was to introduce a comprehensive teacher evaluation system that allowed the district to identify and reward highly effective teachers and remove under-performers.

The evaluation system, known as IMPACT, served as the foundation for a performance-based compensation system that provides hefty pay to highly effective educators serving high-need schools.² Kaya Henderson, who succeeded Rhee as chancellor after serving as her chief of human capital and leading the design of IMPACT, built on this foundation by constructing a "career ladder" for teachers that provides them with a range of opportunities and higher pay based on experience and performance.

The district's efforts to revamp its teacher recruitment, selection, and hiring practices builds on these systems, using research and teacher-evaluation data to promote earlier hiring, identify candidates most likely to be effective in the classroom, and help schools use that

information to inform their hiring decisions. The district has also provided high-need schools with additional support, including signing bonuses, professional development, and expanded leadership opportunities to motivate effective and highly effective educators to commit to high-need schools, while working to mitigate bias in the hiring process.

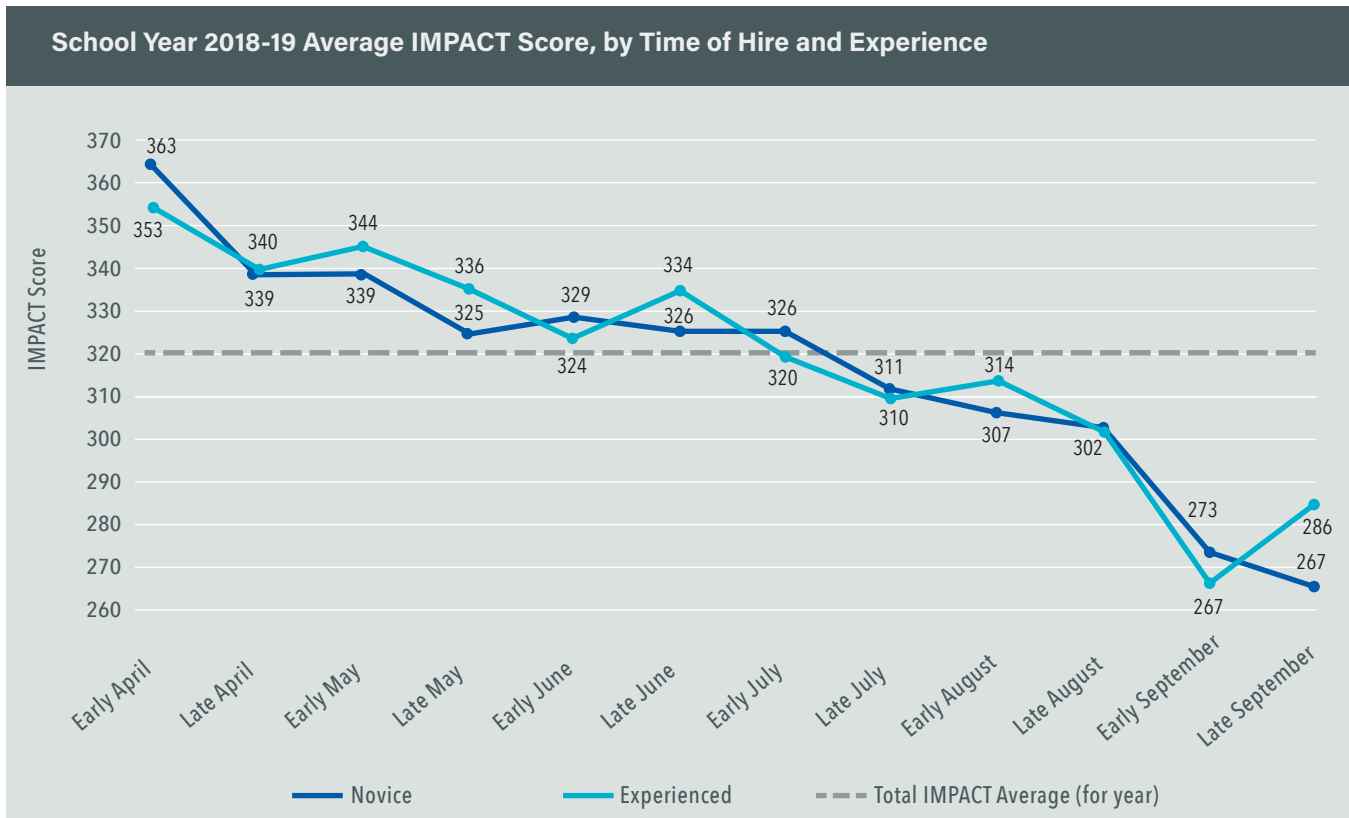
The results are impressive. The number of teacher applications and the diversity of teacher applicants have risen significantly in recent years. Late hiring over the summer or even into the school year is common in urban districts nationally, particularly in high-need schools, and forces schools to scramble for talent, often settling for less-than-ideal candidates. Many districts continue to place a low priority on the hiring process, a problem compounded by uncertain budget, enrollment, and staffing forecasts. But DCPS in most recent years has filled nearly all of its vacancies by the first day of school (out of the approximately 660 new-to-DCPS teachers it hires annually). In addition, the percentage of teachers hired prior to the end of the previous school year—so-

called early hires—has increased by 71 percent, and by 158 percent in high-need schools since 2016-17. Studies show that hiring early increases student learning, teacher diversity, and teacher retention rates.³

While many school districts have struggled to diversify their teaching ranks, with male teachers of color particularly hard to recruit, DCPS has increased the racial diversity of its teaching force substantially. And, in recent years, the system has retained 95 percent of teachers rated effective and highly effective by its teacher evaluation system.⁴

A Comprehensive Model

School principals in DCPS ultimately decide whom to hire in consultation with personnel committees at each school, which are required under the district's labor-management contract. Research suggests that giving schools autonomy to choose their own candidates (internal or external) while supporting more robust screening and selection criteria can improve the



effectiveness, diversity, and retention of the teaching pool.⁵

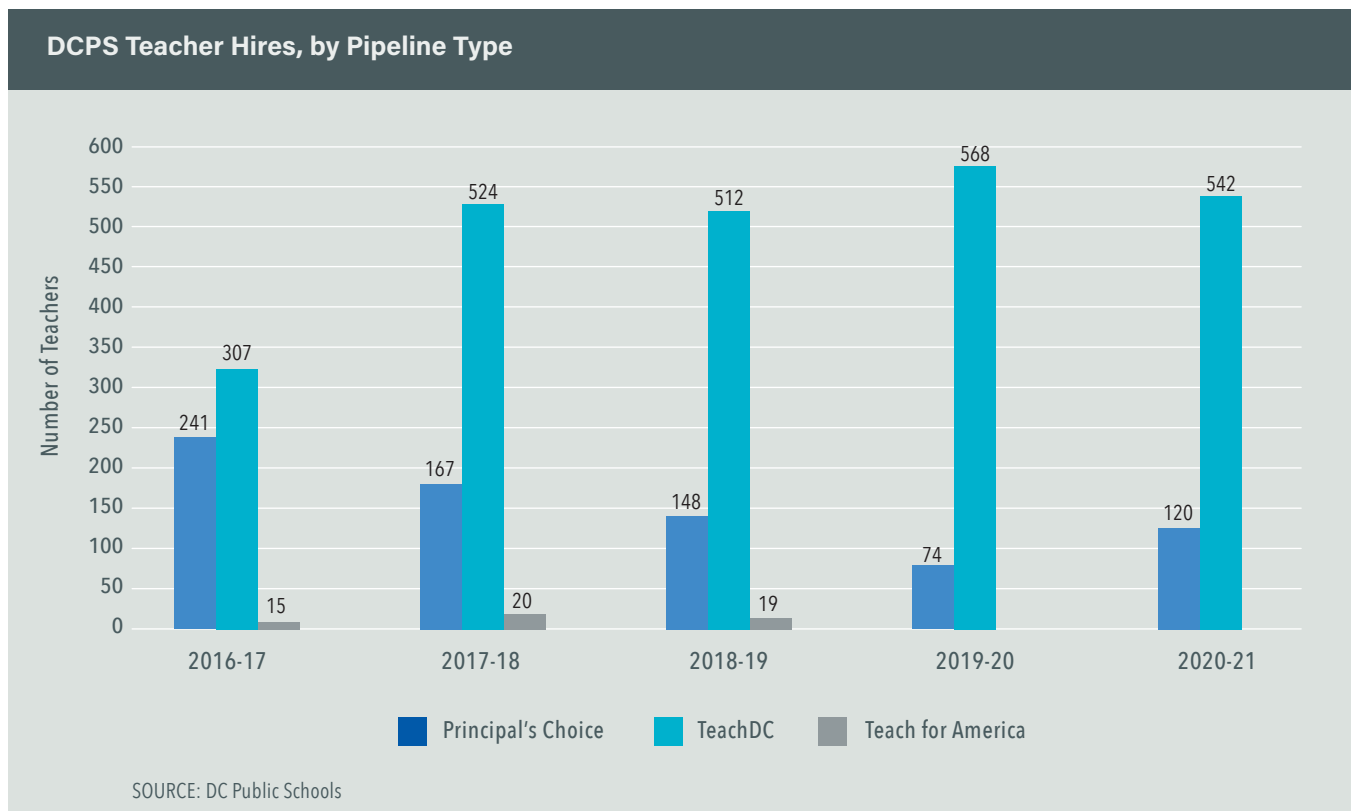
Since 2009, DCPS has replaced a hiring system that relied heavily on teachers' paper credentials and individual principal preferences with a multi-stage, centralized screening process designed to help schools connect with the best candidates. Known as TeachDC, the system is far more comprehensive than those used by the vast majority of the nation's districts.

Applicants first complete an online application and answer short essay questions focused on student achievement—such as how they set goals and track progress—as well as on their core values and beliefs about whether all students can learn to high standards. If they pass that stage, applicants complete a phone interview by a trained teacher, rated effective or highly effective, who focuses on those topics as well as instructional expertise. Selected candidates then advance to the “recommended” pool and may submit an audition video of their teaching.

Since 2011, researchers Brian A. Jacob at the University of Michigan, Jonah E. Rockoff at Columbia University, and Eric S. Taylor at Harvard University have been studying the relationship among applicant characteristics, hiring outcomes, and job performance for teachers in the district. They've found that the TeachDC system for vetting applicants strongly predicts teachers' classroom effectiveness.

In particular, applicants with strong undergraduate achievement (including high GPAs) and highly rated essay and interview scores subsequently earned much higher marks on the district's IMPACT evaluation system than low-rated applicants whom DCPS also hired.⁶ The gap, the researchers found, was twice as great as the growth in performance by newly hired teachers over their first three years in the classroom, a period when teachers' performance typically improves rapidly.

Principals in DCPS have strong incentives to hire good teachers: Research shows teaching quality is the most important school-based contributor to student



achievement and, unlike in most school districts, principals earn bonuses based in part on their students' performance.

But in the early years of their study, researchers found that while principals appeared to consult the "recommended" list supplied by TeachDC, schools were not systematically hiring the most effective candidates within that pool based on the individual screening measures.⁷

"Principals were responding to the information collected by the district and by the TeachDC process," says researcher Eric S. Taylor of Harvard. "Principals were more likely to hire teachers who the district put in the recommended category. So, in that sense, they were using the information. The point the paper emphasizes is that once someone was in the recommended pool, they weren't all the same—it was a big group. And, within the recommended pool, it did not appear that principals' hiring decisions were strongly related to those scores."

In response, DCPS has created a composite index, from A+ to C, in order to send stronger signals to schools about the best candidates. The index is based on how candidates score on each component of the screening process: academic achievement; teaching experience with a preference for teaching in high-poverty schools; the essay screen from the initial application; interview scores on the three key competencies—student achievement focus, core values and beliefs, and instructional expertise—and scores from the audition video, if available.

The Importance of "User Experience"

The school system has also spent the last several years focused on the user experience that both job candidates and school leaders navigate as part of the hiring process, according to Nancy Wright, the director of talent acquisition and retention for DCPS. The district has overhauled the TeachDC online portal through which school leaders can view candidate information. It has increased the amount of information that it shares

with school leaders, including the notes and scores from phone interviews and teaching samples, access to candidates' full teaching sample videos, candidates' essay responses, and a short biography provided by the candidate. And it has improved and created new features to encourage school leaders to engage with the portal.

Principals can "save" candidates to a personalized page in the system and attach notes to candidates' profiles. They can see which candidates have "liked" their vacancies, indicating interest in their school. School leaders also can filter candidates by a variety of factors, such as subject area, grade level preference, interest in part-time positions, interest in a high-need school, or bilingualism.⁸

DCPS also has taken steps to ensure it doesn't lose candidates because of a hard-to-navigate application platform, because they don't feel connected to the district, or because they are wooed away by another school system. "What does that candidate experience look and feel like, so that someone doesn't feel like just another number?" asks Veronica Alvarado, DCPS's manager for teacher recruitment and pipelines. "That's been a huge priority for us, especially throughout the pandemic."

Her team provides one-to-one support for candidates during each stage of the application process through cultivation e-mails, texts, and even phone calls. In the past few years, the school system also has replaced multiple e-mails back and forth to candidates with a Candidate Dashboard that has each stage of the application process presented as a "tile." Tiles only unlock, and go from gray to blue, once a candidate has advanced to that stage in the process. A check mark in the tile indicates when a stage is complete and the submission is being evaluated.

When there is a status update to an application, the candidate receives an email notification prompting them to log into the Candidate Dashboard for more information. Candidates in the recommended hiring pool also have access to a vacancy list that updates in real time and for which they can indicate their interest

level, from highly interested to not interested, for each vacancy.⁹

Supporting Needy Schools

Through a federally funded Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program grant known as RISE, the district also is providing targeted support for 42 of its lowest-performing schools serving 15,783 high-poverty students, to help these schools attract, hire, and retain effective teachers. Data shows that students in DCPS's lowest-performing schools are taught by 12 percent fewer highly effective educators than the district average.¹⁰

RISE schools receive dedicated central-office support to improve hiring and personnel practices as well as preferential access to district hiring fairs that help match candidates with schools. The first virtual hiring fair this past school year, on April 7, was open only to RISE schools.

To augment the district's existing compensation incentives for teachers rated highly effective under the

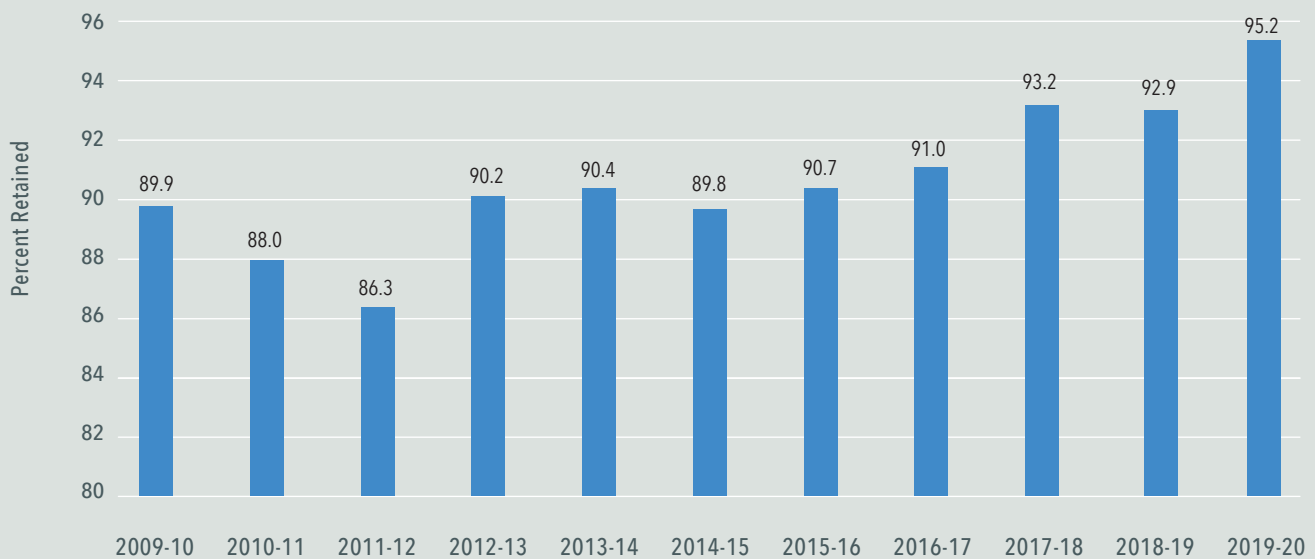
IMPACT evaluation system (up to \$25,000 per year for those working in high-poverty schools), teachers rated effective in RISE schools also can qualify for compensation incentives up to \$5,000 per year.

To create a pipeline of teacher leaders prepared to serve high-need schools, highly effective educators in RISE schools also can apply to fill advanced instructional and leadership roles (such as New Teacher Mentors and Instructional Coaches) under the district's career ladder. DCPS also will pay for national certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards for teachers in RISE schools.

The district also has launched its first cohort of RISE Resident Principals. Six district leaders are serving a residency this year with the school system's strongest school leaders to prepare them to take on the principal role in RISE schools next year, based on vacancies and their match with the local community.

Most school leaders understand that it's tough to attract top talent late in the hiring season. But DCPS had hard data to prove it. IMPACT data showed that candidates

Retention Rate for Highly Effective and Effective Teachers



SOURCE: DC Public Schools

hired by end of June on average had higher evaluation scores, while those hired in September were getting an average score below “effective” on DCPS’s teacher-evaluation system. (Many school districts are unable to make these connections because they have superficial teacher-evaluation systems.)

To encourage RISE schools to hire early, DCPS pays up to \$2,500 to teachers hired by July 1 in critical-shortage areas, including English-as-a-second language, special education, world languages, and math. General elementary teachers are also eligible for these hiring incentives in RISE schools, to ensure that RISE elementary schools can access top talent. (To identify vacancies early, the district pays a \$1,000 departure bonus to teachers if they announce their departure by April 1.)

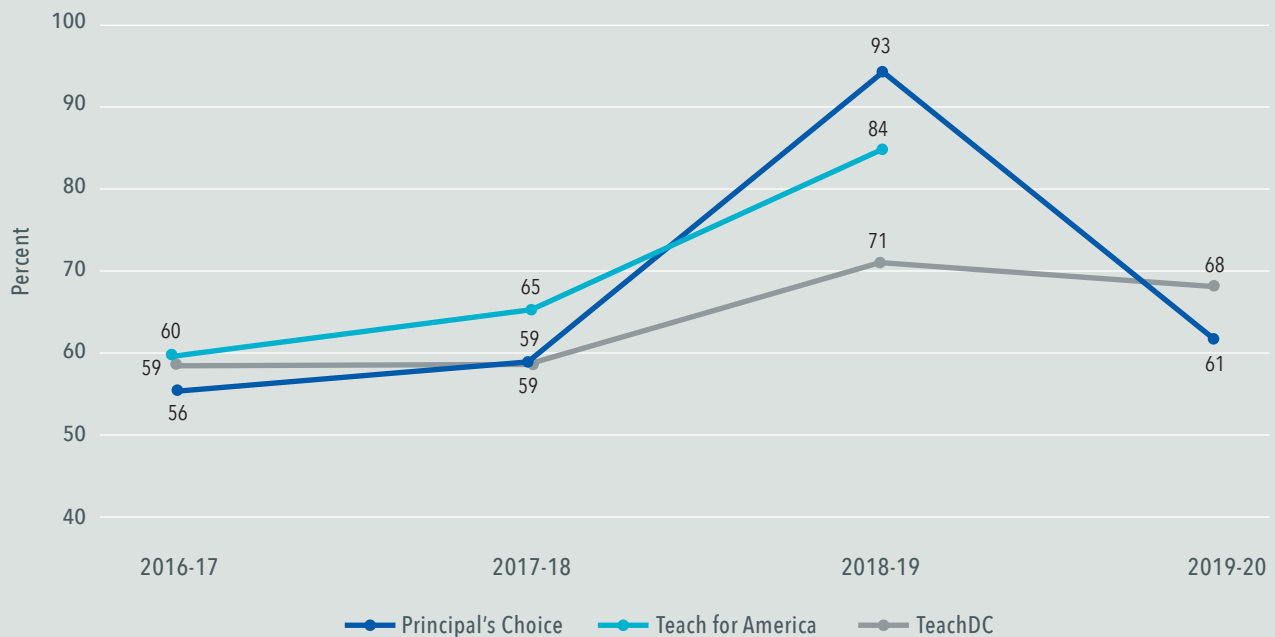
Even the best recruits can’t improve schools if they don’t stay on the job. About 8 percent of teachers nationally leave their jobs each year, and about one fifth of teachers leave in their first five years of teaching, with these numbers significantly higher in high-need schools and

districts.¹¹ To help support and retain new teachers in RISE schools, every first-year teacher entering a RISE school from a university teacher-preparation program or an alternative-certification program is assigned a New Teacher Mentor (a DCPS teacher who has maintained a highly effective rating for at least three consecutive years) from the same grade level or curricular subject.

New teachers meet with mentors monthly during their first three years of teaching. Mentor teacher assignments remain the same throughout this time, to strengthen the bond between new hires and experienced educators and increase support for new teachers vulnerable to leaving the profession. DCPS also assigns all teachers new to the district (years 1-3) to professional learning communities to help forge connections among colleagues.

New Teacher Network Mentors lead monthly meetings and connect new educators with instructional resources and support to help them meet the district’s performance standards. DCPS also has a team of instructional coaches to deploy to RISE schools on an as-needed basis to supplement existing coaching capacity. A RISE

Percent of Highly Effective or Effective Teachers, by Pipeline Type



SOURCE: DC Public Schools

Principal Network provides individualized support for principals and assistant principals.

The district's efforts to signal the value of the TeachDC system and make it easy for principals to use has paid substantial dividends. Districtwide, the percentage of new hires from the "recommended" list has risen from 25 percent of new hires in 2011-13 to 82 percent in 2020-21. Sixty-eight percent of new-to-DCPS teachers hired through the TeachDC platform received an effective or highly effective IMPACT rating during school year 2019-20 (the latest for which data are available) compared to 61 percent of school-initiated hires. That year, 330 new hires came through TeachDC while 45 were sourced by school principals.

One School's Experiences

DCPS allowed FutureEd access to the recruitment, selection, and hiring process in one of its schools to understand how the district's systematic approach to staffing is playing out on the ground. Roosevelt High School in Washington's rapidly gentrifying Petworth neighborhood is a RISE school that has been working on its hiring practices over the past few years with district support. Roosevelt, a comprehensive high school, has just under 800 students and more than 130 staff members, making it the third largest high school in the district. About half of its students are Black and half Latino, pulled from across the city.

On a Wednesday evening in late May, the personnel committee at Roosevelt met virtually to discuss the latest hiring interviews, conducted that afternoon. "I know we've had interviews every day this week, and we have one more tomorrow," Principal Justin Ralston began, before recapping the school's current math openings. Roosevelt still needed a 9th grade Algebra 1 teacher, two 10th grade geometry teachers, an 11th grade Algebra 2 teacher, and a teacher certified in both special education and math. A special education teacher at the school, also certified in math, wanted to move into the Algebra 2 spot. The group agreed, which created a second special education opening.

Two candidates completing their teacher training at Roosevelt through the Urban Teacher residency program had applied for the Algebra 1 and geometry positions. Urban Teachers is one of two national residency programs partnering with DCPS to provide prospective educators with yearlong training in the classroom alongside a high-performing mentor teacher, before assuming a leading role in their second year of training. "They're very young," said Begaeta Ahmic, a 9th grade math teacher and the chair of the personnel committee, "but they're both very coachable and very willing to learn and grow." The committee decided to offer them jobs before diving into a discussion of the candidates interviewed that day.

Every year, before the hiring season begins, Ralston meets with the district staffing coordinator assigned to Roosevelt to project hiring needs for the coming school year. A central-office recruitment team member assigned to the school stays in touch regularly and provides additional support for especially hard-to-fill openings. DCPS also shares resources with principals, such as exemplar hiring criteria, questions they can use during candidate interviews, and a hiring guide, as well as hiring webinars for all school leaders to share best practices.

Roosevelt uses both TeachDC, the district's centralized web portal, and a hiring tab on its own home page to source job applicants.

Candidates who respond to the latter have not necessarily gone through the centralized screening process to make it onto the "recommended" list. But by filling out an interest form through the school's website, they have shown a particular interest in Roosevelt, which staff view as a plus. The school administration and personnel committee regularly scour both sites for potential candidates and reach out to conduct initial phone interviews, after which a candidate may be recommended for a more in-depth interview by the personnel committee.

The school keeps an internal tracker of all applicants and job openings. In his weekly e-mail to staff, Ralston includes a spread sheet of existing vacancies and the status of interviews and hiring to encourage staff

members to source potential candidates. “Word of mouth is incredibly powerful in education,” he says.

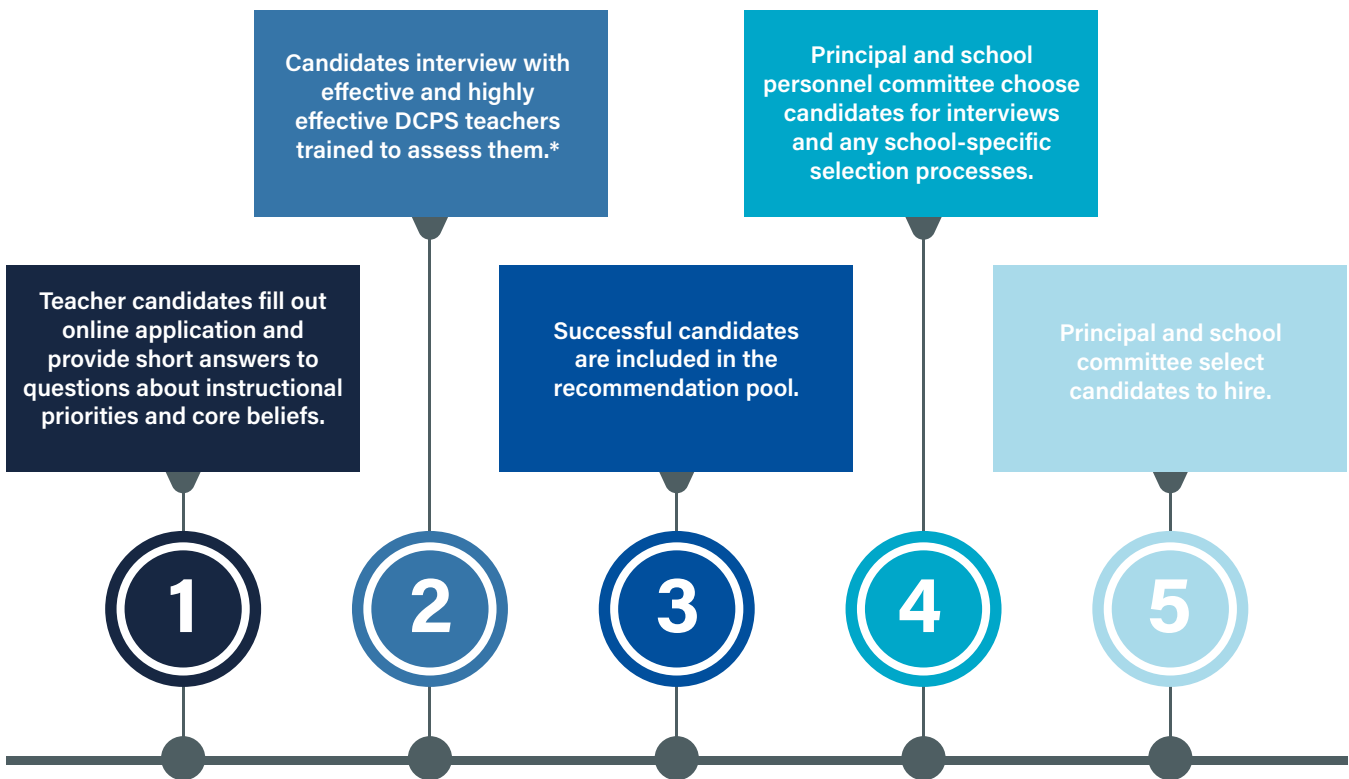
Roosevelt has its own robust screening and selection criteria, in addition to those used by TeachDC, to ensure prospective hires match its unique needs and culture. The district encourages principals to build on the TeachDC screening system. At Roosevelt, all candidates, including those recommended by the district, must submit performance tasks prior to their in-depth interview. For example, candidates may be asked to look at student data, extrapolate what it means, and design reteaching options or observe a lesson and analyze what went well and what didn’t. Ralston says Roosevelt designed the performance tasks to gather more evidence on candidates’ teaching practices. “We rely heavily on the performance tasks,” he says, which the school

developed in partnership with Internationals Network, a network of schools and educators serving multilingual learners.

“We want to know how they think,” explains Ahmic, the personnel committee chair. “Their responses give us a lot of insight before we even sit down to talk to them. And we give them time to talk about those tasks during the interview as well, especially if we have follow-up questions.”

Members of the personnel committee take turns leading the interview based on questions the team has developed. Those questions have evolved over time, but generally focus on identifying candidates who share three Roosevelt priorities: family engagement, including a passionate commitment to serving Roosevelt’s students and families; innovative teaching strategies

Steps for Hiring Teachers Through the TeachDC System



**Prior to COVID, top performers advanced directly to the recommended pool; others submitted an audition video to provide additional evidence of their teaching. The video requirement has been suspended during COVID.*

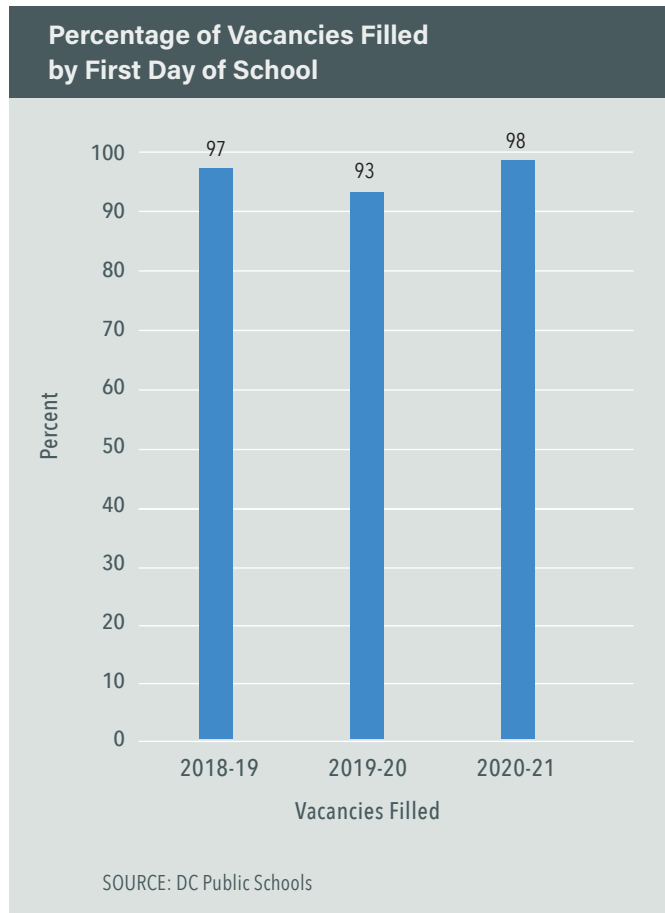
for their subject; and value for Roosevelt's school community, shown through collaborative thinking and a positive response to feedback.

During one interview for the job opening in special education and math, for example, interviewers asked the candidate to describe a specific time when he struggled to connect with a parent. They also asked him to describe an experience when he collaborated with a team member and it didn't go well. How did he handle those situations and what did he learn?

Because Roosevelt is the only comprehensive high school in the district with a global-studies program, the interviewers also asked the candidate how he might use contemporary world issues to increase rigor in the classroom. A math teacher on the committee asked, "How would you help students understand that division by zero is undefined?" A special-education teacher asked how the candidate managed time to meet paperwork deadlines and instruction and how he collaborated with general education teachers to benefit students.

Ahmic, who's been on the personnel committee for four years, asserts the importance of a good group of colleagues. "I really want to be part of deciding who will be at Roosevelt the following year," she says. "It's so amazing to me that teachers have such a loud voice in this process. It's literally teachers making the call, and I think that transparency in hiring is pretty amazing. I know it's not the case everywhere." When the committee cannot reach consensus, they put it to a vote. Ralston walks every staff member—including the two assistant principals and director of operations—through the hiring process. Teachers have led the decision-making for all positions in the building and he has never countered their choices.

During the hiring season, the personnel committee will typically conduct interviews every Tuesday and Wednesday after school, until six or seven in the evening. The interview season usually starts in April, with the goal of being fully staffed by June. "We do not want to be in a position where it's August and we're scrambling to fill



positions," says Ahmic, noting that the earlier they start the process, the more candidates they can interview "to really find somebody who would be a good fit for the school."

"If we're hiring another Algebra 1 teacher," she adds, "I want to work with that teacher over the summer to get to know each other and prepare ourselves for the upcoming school year."

Filling all of its positions for school year 2021-22 was particularly challenging for Roosevelt. On top of the staffing challenges the Covid-19 pandemic has created for schools nationwide and normal staff turnover, the school lost several staff members who had provisional teaching licenses and did not earn their permanent licenses on time. It also had to fill new job openings

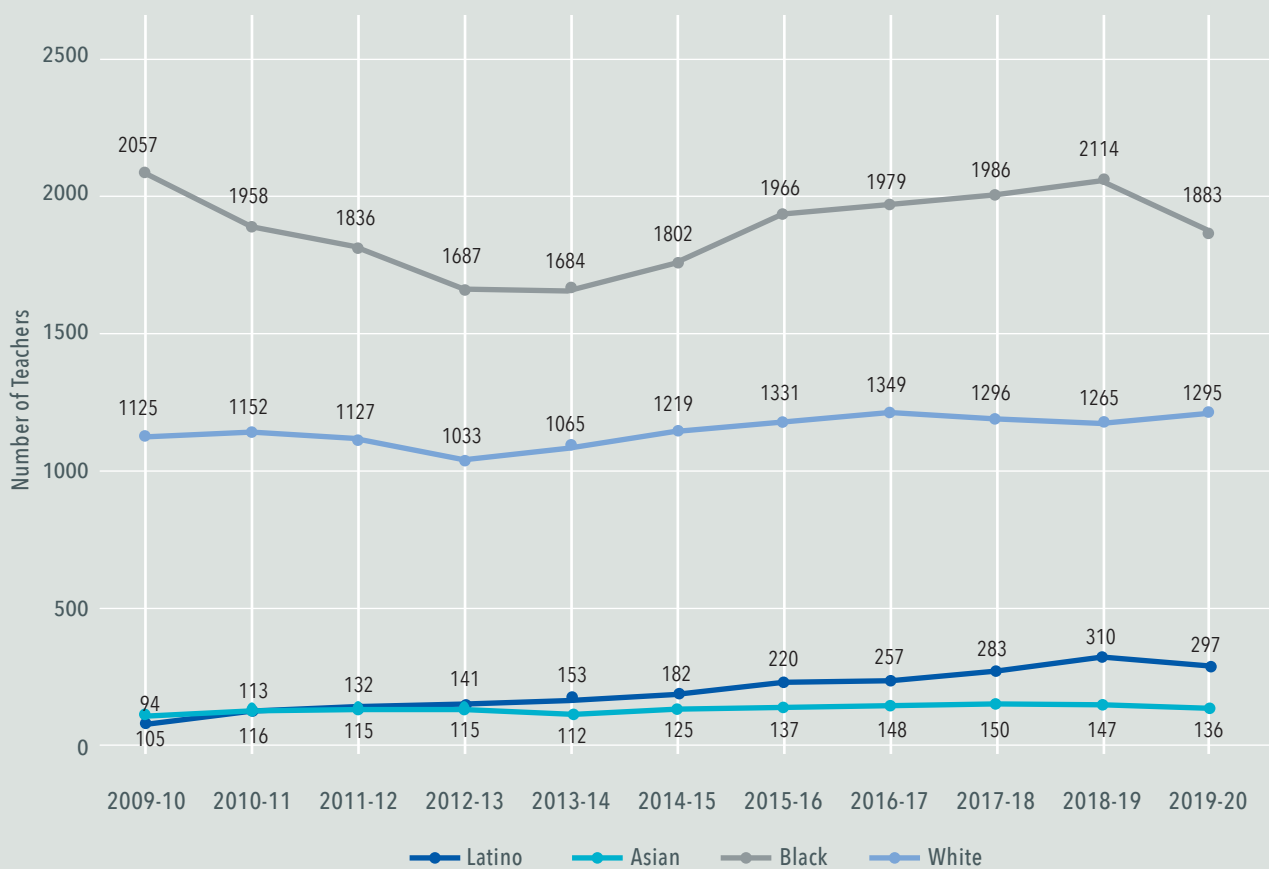
because the school's student population is growing. And many of its openings were in shortage areas, such as special education, math, and an opening for a school psychologist.

To help recruit candidates, Roosevelt uses social media such as Instagram and Twitter to showcase the school throughout the year. It holds its own open houses for prospective teachers which it advertises through word of mouth. This year, the district's virtual hiring fair also helped surface job candidates. After the first virtual hiring fair in April, 45 candidates completed "interest forms" on Roosevelt's hiring page. Stacy A. Fells, Roosevelt's chief of school staff, is responsible for making sure job applicants feel supported, letting them know where they

are in the application process and, once they are hired, helping them navigate the system's onboarding process.

The school's focus on teacher hiring and the infrastructure it has created to build on the DCPS TeachDC system has yielded strong results. By the end of June, Roosevelt had filled all of its teacher vacancies for the 2021-22 school year, except for a Junior ROTC position which it filled soon thereafter. Of its new hires, most came from TeachDC, including previous Urban Teacher residents at Roosevelt. Two others came through direct contacts Ralston had with a school where he once worked that was phasing out its middle school and one teacher came through a recommendation by another staff member.

Number of DCPS Teachers 2009-10 to 2019-20, by Race and Ethnicity



SOURCE: DC Public Schools

Increasing Teacher Diversity

Like many schools and school districts, Roosevelt and DCPS want to increase the diversity of their teaching staff and ensure that those hired stay long term.

DCPS has the advantage of location. The city is popular among millennials, and attracting talented teachers to the nation's capital is far easier than to rural Mississippi, for example, or East St. Louis.

But the district also has intentionally pursued partnerships with national organizations such as Teach For America, the Urban Teacher residency program, and Relay Graduate School of Education, which also offers a teacher residency program. All have strong track records of recruiting highly skilled and diverse teaching talent.

In addition, DCPS has begun collaborating with local universities on its diversity efforts. It is partnering with Howard University to recruit teachers of color in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Through Howard's teacher residency program, participants earn a master of education degree in exchange for a three-year commitment to teach in DCPS. The residency program aims to recruit a cohort of at least 50 percent males per year and attract the majority of candidates from a range of disciplines and occupations. The district has also paired with American University and George Washington University to recruit educators to fill teaching and school leadership vacancies and is working with Georgetown University to create a pipeline of dual language educators, with an emphasis on developing local talent.

DCPS also is addressing its diversity challenge from another direction. Effective and highly effective teachers who interview job candidates go through an extensive training process, with equity front and center, to ensure that bias doesn't creep into their interviews. The district offers additional support to candidates of color through the application process, such as a writers' workshop with tips on strengthening their submissions and access to preparation courses for those who have yet to pass the Praxis teacher licensing exam.

The school system also hosts events at Hispanic-serving teacher preparation institutions and provides its recruitment materials in both English and Spanish. Candidates whose first language is not English can take the PCMAS, a basic skills exam in Spanish that is equivalent to the Praxis basic-skills teacher licensing exam. "This is personal to me as someone who grew up in a bilingual household," says Alvarado, the DCPS teacher recruitment and pipelines manager.

Against the backdrop of the district's efforts, Roosevelt has approached the diversity challenge in two ways. It benefits from DCPS's partnership with Urban Teachers to help grow, develop, and cultivate its own in-house pool of teaching candidates. There were seven Urban Teacher residents at Roosevelt in the 2020-21 school year—the most of any school in the district.

Cesar Juarez, who teaches 11th and 12th grade math at Roosevelt and serves on the personnel committee, completed his Urban Teacher residency training at Roosevelt after graduating with an undergraduate degree in chemical engineering. "I was really blessed to be able to find a good fit right away," he says. "I just wanted to be in a school community that has students that look like me. I'd never had a teacher who was Latino when I was growing up in Chicago."

During his two years as a teacher resident, he was able to observe classrooms in multiple subjects, not just math. "I wanted to see what the Roosevelt student experience is like holistically from the moment they walk in until they walk across the graduation stage," he recalls. "I really feel like I was learning so much from the school community."

In addition to growing its own candidates through Urban Teachers, Roosevelt prioritizes hiring DCPS alumnae who grew up in the district—both because they are more familiar with the community and the historical challenges facing city residents and because they are less likely to leave. "We have been able to really expand our DCPS alumnae at Roosevelt over the last couple of years," says Ralston, noting that 20 of his 132 staff members are a product of DCPS schools.

Research by Jacob and colleagues has found that, across the school system, local applicants from Washington D.C. and, to a lesser extent, Maryland and Virginia, are more likely to be hired. Their findings are consistent with other studies that suggest school systems are more likely to hire locally. While DCPS used to source large numbers of candidates from Teach For America, for example, those numbers have declined substantially and are now down to 2 to 3 percent of new-to-DCPS hires each year.

While the challenge of diversifying the teaching force is far from over, DCPS has made progress. As of the 2019-20 school year, 14 percent of the DCPS workforce were male teachers of color, three-and-a-half times the national average. The number of Latino teachers, while small (297 out of roughly 4,000 in 2019-20), has tripled during the past decade. And in 2017-18 and 2018-19, the district retained effective and highly effective Black and Latino teachers at higher rates than equally high-performing White teachers.

Alvarado identifies two hiring challenges that remain a struggle for the school system. First, DCPS is a large, complex bureaucracy that can't move as nimbly as the city charter schools. As a result, strong candidates may get bogged down in the hiring and onboarding process and pursue jobs elsewhere. In response, the district is working to reduce the average time between a principal selecting a candidate for hire and that person receiving an offer letter.

Second, teacher hiring is ultimately a school-based decision in D.C., in line with its commitment to give principals more autonomy in exchange for holding them accountable for results. While the district strongly encourages principals to use TeachDC to source candidates, it is reluctant to require it.

"The vision was that principals should be autonomous. They should be responsible for their schools. And, in this particular case, that means that they have a lot of autonomy over whom they hire," notes Eric S. Taylor of Harvard. "I think that explains a fair amount of why some people who don't appear on the TeachDC recommended list are hired. It doesn't mean they're not a

good candidate." They could have been hired before they completed the multistep screening process, he explains, or found their way to a school through an alternate route.

The district has worked hard to share information and build relationships with school leaders to increase their investment and trust in the centralized process, says Alvarado. "It is a tool, a resource that we provide. We walk all new principals through the platform, highlight the information they can find there, provide ongoing supports so they know how to use the platform. But in terms of checking how often they use it, making sure they are reading through the candidate's short-answer responses, it's not, at this moment, something that we're tracking."

Nonetheless, Brooke Amos, the project director for RISE, says the district's efforts to help school leaders understand the importance of smart hiring and its relationship to on-the-job performance is paying off. By presenting data to principals that demonstrates the correlation between early hiring and stronger job candidates, for example, or providing them with something tangible like a composite score, DCPS "was able to compel people to take action and prioritize hiring in a way they hadn't before."

Malcolm Gladwell, among others, has argued that because it's so hard to predict who will be effective in the classroom, school districts should use minimal screening criteria and then weed teachers out based on their performance on the job.¹² But the research on sophisticated systems like TeachDC suggests that districts *can* do a better job predicting who will be a good teacher. Moreover, DCPS has shown that careful screening and weeding can work together to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

IMPACT allows the district to provide feedback to and ultimately separate low-performing teachers, whom the district replaces with better hires. (DCPS separates approximately 3 percent of teachers due to their IMPACT rating—either ineffective once, minimally effective twice, developing three times, or a rating that declined from developing to minimally effective—while 16 percent of

minimally effective teachers leave on their own accord, either resigning or retiring.) One study found DCPS teachers hired to replace low-performing teachers contributed an average of more than four additional months of student learning in a single year in math and reading.¹³

Over the next few years, school systems will receive a historic influx of funding to address fall-out from the pandemic. A powerful way for districts to use those funds to improve student achievement, especially for low-income students and students of color, is to strengthen their teacher recruitment, selection, and hiring practices. The District of Columbia Public Schools provides a strong example of what's possible.

DCPS ANNUAL HIRING CYCLE

AUGUST

- Begin process of cleaning and analyzing application and hiring data
- Conduct first end-of-year step back for reflection while season is still fresh in team members' minds

SEPTEMBER

- Deep dive into data from previous season; host multiple reflection and brainstorming sessions; begin mapping key priorities for the upcoming season
- Develop planning calendar for the upcoming cycle
- Develop high-level recruitment strategy
- Finalize stages of selection process
- Begin Fall recruitment

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

- Develop selection materials (e.g., interview questions and rubric)
- Finalize detailed recruitment strategy and processes
- Develop marketing materials
- Build-out/update the teacher application in Salesforce
- Create application and vacancy projections and goals

DECEMBER

- Train selectors
- Launch teacher application
- Begin main recruitment season
- Engage senior leaders and instructional superintendents around benefits of early hiring

JANUARY

- Execute main recruitment season focused on events (ongoing through May)
- Screen candidates (ongoing through summer)
- Extend early offers for top candidates (ongoing through April)
- Engage senior leaders and instructional superintendents around benefits of early hiring

FEBRUARY

- Hold pre-hiring season meetings with principals to ensure they are prepared
- Facilitate hiring season readiness webinars and disseminate supporting resources

MARCH

- Hold pre-hiring season meetings with principals to ensure they are prepared
- Facilitate hiring season readiness webinars and disseminate supporting resources

APRIL

- Vacancies go live; principals can begin selecting candidates for hire
- Provide school leaders with hiring support (ongoing through summer)
- Hold first hiring fair

MAY-AUGUST

- Continue recruitment, make pivots based on vacancies
- Continue screening candidates and moving them through the application process
- Hold 2-3 additional hiring fairs

ENDNOTES

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- ³ John P. Papay and Emily Kalejs Qazilbash, "What Do We Know about Teacher Hiring? Using Early, Open, and Intensive Hiring Processes to Build the Teacher Workforce," Providence, R.I.: Annenberg Institute, Center for the Study of Educators, Brown University, June 2021.
- ⁴ All figures provided by the District of Columbia Public Schools.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Brian A. Jacob, Jonah E. Rockoff, Eric S. Taylor, Benjamin Lindy, and Rachel Rosen, "Teacher Applicant Hiring and Teacher Performance: Evidence from DC Public Schools," *Journal of Public Economics*, August 11, 2018.
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- ¹¹ Desiree Carver-Thomas and Linda Darling Hammond, *Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It*, Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2017.
- ¹² Malcolm Gladwell, "Most Likely to Succeed: How Do We Hire When We Can't Tell Who's Right for the Job?" *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2008.
- ¹³ Melissa Adnot, Thomas Dee, Veronica Katz, and James Wyckoff, "Teacher Turnover, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement in DCPS," National Bureau of Economic Research, March 1, 2017.



RIGHT FROM THE START
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S GROUNDBREAKING
TEACHER HIRING STRATEGY