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SYMPOSIUM ON SUPPLY AND QUALITY OF TEACHERS

"THE URBAN EXPERIENCE"
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As the superintendent of a large urban school district, I'm living in the real world. There's a great deal of tension, as you know, in American urban education. I may be having more than my share. When I began in the Austin Independent School District last August, the district was under indictment from the County Attorney, it was being investigated by the state education agency, and it was targeted for a performance review by the State Comptroller. Our data systems were almost non-functional. We have large dropout problems—both in the number of kids leaving school and our inability to keep track of them.

On top of that, next year Austin becomes an official "property wealthy" district in the State of Texas. That means we will lose \$55 million in money we give back to the state and in the loss of hold-harmless money we had been receiving. The Austin economy is booming. Property values are going through the roof. But not everybody in that economy is enjoying the boom. Fifty-two percent of our 78,000 students come from low-income households, and more than 40 percent of our students are classified as "at risk." Forty-four percent of our students are Hispanic, 37 percent are Anglo, 17 percent are African American and 2 percent are Asian. We are the only large urban district in Texas that is classified as property wealthy. And we are the only property-wealthy district with so many low-income children.

The Situation in Texas

That is the world I'm working in. In some ways Austin is unique—given our property wealth that requires us to give money back to the state. But in most ways we are like most other urban school districts in America. And don't forget I'm working in Texas. Teacher salaries in Texas are historically very low. Even with a statewide \$3,000 teacher salary increase last year, Texas teacher pay is still \$3,000 below the national average. In Education Week's recent Quality Counts special issue, Texas received a D—and it was a low D—for its efforts to develop and promote quality teaching in its schools.

I'm sure none of what I'm about to say about our teacher supply and quality problems will surprise you. As with most other places, Texas faces serious supply and demand issues when we talk about teachers and, particularly, quality teachers. In a booming economy like Austin's, those issues are magnified. Last year Texas had 63,300 teacher vacancies. This was created by growth and by a statewide teacher attrition rate of 22 percent. But the 89 teacher preparation entities in the state together produced fewer than 15,000 teacher candidates that year. And, of course, not all those candidates became teachers. One quarter of the newly certified teachers in Texas do not take teaching jobs within the first two years of becoming certified. Many of those who do enter, don't stay long. Of the 15,000 first-year Texas teachers hired in 1995-96, 43 percent left teaching within three years. Less than half of the state's new teachers are still teaching after five years. When we look at those numbers and add to them the fact that nearly one quarter of our teachers are 50 years old or older, we're looking at a real crisis.

We've also got 12,000 teachers in Texas serving on emergency teaching certificates. Eighteen percent of Texas teachers are teaching at least one class for which they aren't certified. Thirty-nine percent of beginning teachers are teaching classes for which they aren't certified. And to scare you even further: 54 percent of the state's beginning high school science teachers are teaching at least one class for which they are not certified.¹

Austin ISD

Against that backdrop, I want to talk more specifically about the realities of the Austin school district. For many years, Austin schools lived a charmed life. The University of Texas produced a number of teachers; everyone wanted to live in Austin; housing was affordable. The city abounds with parks, jogging trails, natural swimming holes, good barbecue and good music. No University graduate wanted to leave. And so, many stayed and taught. Just down the road in San Marcos, we also have one of the state's largest producers of teachers—Southwest Texas State University, formerly Southwest Texas State Teachers College, from which Lyndon Johnson, among others, emerged with a teacher's certificate. So Austin also drew on Southwest Texas, as well as upon teaching programs of smaller colleges and universities in the city.

But then things began to change. The high-technology industry found a home in Austin in the 1980s. High-tech wages for new college graduates skyrocketed. Housing in the city became less and less affordable. Not only do teacher salaries in Austin not compare well to salaries the high-tech industry can offer, but they also don't compete well with other school districts. While we are sixth in teacher salary among the ten largest urban Texas districts, we fall to last in terms of take-home pay because we are one of the few districts in Texas that deducts Social Security as well as for the Teacher Retirement System. We rank third among surrounding districts in our salary level, but again that drops when Social Security is deducted. It's difficult to convince a 22-year-old new teacher to come to a district that takes 7.6 percent more from each pay check than any surrounding district, even though they might appreciate that 40 years down the road.

Our teacher attrition rate of 23.4 percent is close to the state average. Of those, nearly 14 percent resigned or retired, and almost 10 percent transferred to other schools. We lost 1,253 teachers between last year and this year. It is probably no surprise that our largest losses have been in middle school, where we lost 28 percent of our teachers last year. As all of you know, that represents real lost value. We lose those years of experience. We spend a great deal on professional development. When teachers leave, that experience and that investment walk away, and in most cases, we have to start all over again.

We have received a small amount of extra help at the federal level through our federal class-size-reduction grant. Its \$1.8 million provided money for 42 additional first through third grade teachers in the district. This may help our attrition rate because, as we know, smaller class size not only contributes to student performance but also to teacher performance and satisfaction. But, of course, we still need to find capable teachers to fill those new positions.

Now throw into the mix the fact that the demographics of our student population have changed dramatically over the past 15 years. Our district is increasingly Hispanic and increasingly low-income. We have an ever-increasing need for bilingual teachers but a diminishing pool to draw from. Many of our certified bilingual teachers no longer want to teach bilingual classes. We can't match our teachers' skills to the changing needs of our changing student population. Not only do we have more Spanish-speakers coming into our schools, I want every child graduating from Austin schools to be bilingual or have a dual-language competence. But where are we going to get the teachers? We offer stipends (\$1,000) and signing bonuses (\$1,500) for bilingual and special education teachers, but they're not enough to make a difference. The University of Texas at Austin—the state's largest and flagship university—only turns out 30 certified bilingual teaching candidates a year. They are making a concerted effort to increase that number.

We would like to match the demographics of our student population with our teaching population—or at least get closer. But over the last four years, while our Hispanic student population has continued to grow, three-fourths of our new teacher hires over the same period have been Anglo. It's not because we're not trying to increase minority teacher hiring. Few minorities are entering teaching. While a number of these new teachers are becoming very good, most come from middle-class, Anglo homes and have no real urban school experience of their own. We lose a high percentage of our beginning teachers overall, and it is particularly difficult to retain the new teachers in schools with large low-income populations, where the challenges are greater. These are, of course, the schools with the highest turnover rate for teachers, so they disproportionately have received large numbers of brand-new teachers. Understanding the increased responsibilities and abilities required for teaching in an inner-city school becomes one more key component of teacher development.

Science and math teachers are extremely hard to find. Who can blame them when they can dream about getting together with their friends, developing an internet-based startup and by age 30 becoming millionaires through an IPO? Or when entry-level positions in established technology companies offer twice what beginning teachers earn? When we get new math and science teachers, we often lose them quickly to industry. Why? The industry

jobs are out there begging. Teaching is a difficult job, particularly in the first few years. It's increasingly difficult to afford a place to live in Austin. We are desperate to upgrade our science and math curriculum at our middle schools. But we can't do it without teachers. Not only do we lose math and science teachers to other jobs and more affordable suburban districts, but I suspect fewer math and science majors are thinking about becoming teachers. Teaching used to be the first or second option for math and science majors. Now for many it's way down the list.

Special education teachers? It used to be that education majors would get special ed. certification because that would always assure them of a job. They no longer need those assurances. And they don't need the extra paperwork required and all those potential special ed. lawsuits hanging in the air. As we mainstream many of our special ed. students, these special ed. teachers find themselves working as another teacher's supplement. Many become demoralized. After a couple of years of teaching, a large number of our newer special ed. teachers figure out that life might be easier if they had their own classrooms. So they cycle out of special ed. into the school's mainstream. We have about 12 percent of our students requiring some kind of special education. Where do I get those teachers?

As with every other school district heavy on the demand side, we are forced to hire teachers who are not fully certified. Fourteen percent of our new hires, or 122 teachers, last summer had an emergency permit, a non-renewable permit, a school district permit or a temporary teaching assignment permit. Another 15 percent, or 133 new hires, had alternative certification, and ten percent, or 93 new teachers, had a one-year Texas certificate, based on certification in another state. Altogether, 8.5 percent of our teachers began this year with permits or temporary certification. Ten percent of our teachers began this year with no teaching experience. Twenty-eight percent have been teaching one to five years; forty percent have between six and twenty years' teaching experience; and 21 percent have been teaching more than 20 years.

Creating a Seamless Process to Recruit, Develop and Retain Quality Teachers

So what are we going to do about a quality-teacher supply problem that only promises to get worse? What is the Austin Independent School District going to do, given the very real limits on our ability to raise teacher salaries? We have to create a seamless process to recruit, develop, support, retain and honor teachers from pre-induction through the master teacher level. If we have the ability to add adequate compensation to this list, all the better.

There is, of course, an ongoing tension between teacher supply and teacher quality. The supply problem to a large extent is governed by economic forces we cannot control. But we shouldn't be daunted by the quality problem.

New teachers in Texas have passed the state's EXCET test, which tests basic content knowledge and professional development. That will change somewhat next year, when certification will be divided up as preK-3, 4th -8th grades, and grades 8-12, with subject matter certification required. This testing and certification, of course, doesn't mean a teacher is adequately prepared for what he or she will face in the year ahead. I remember that from my own experience, and I'm reliving that now as my son finishes his student teaching.

I know there is a great deal of talk about how the best students do not go into teaching, about how poorly prospective teachers do on the SAT or GRE compared to other professions. That's all very interesting, and we need to find ways to bring the best and the brightest into our classrooms. But as an urban superintendent, I don't have the luxury of only taking the top of the class. I have to help teachers in my district become the best and the brightest teachers in the country. That is my responsibility as a school superintendent and yours as educators of teachers. If we work together, we can set the stage for high-quality teaching. As Jim Stigler, the co-author of *The Teaching Gap* said, "What we need to do is not identify special people to become teachers, but figure out how to take the average teaching method and improve it." That has to be our mission.

Recruitment

The recruitment of teachers should begin long before college graduation. Among our career pathways, our school district is creating a teaching pathway, asking students beginning in middle school to think about a teaching career, building their understanding and experience of teaching practices through internships as they progress through school, as well as their preparation for majoring in education at the college level. Following the prohibition against affirmative action by Texas schools of higher education, several law schools and foundations began sponsoring law-career preparation opportunities for minority high-school students. The same can be done to recruit minority education students. In addition, education departments should recruit students to come to their schools. Too often,

college recruiting is a function of the Admissions office, which does general recruiting but not targeted recruiting for potential teachers. You've got to show kids you want bilingual teachers, for instance. Don't put tight limits on the number you graduate. Of course, programs that provide scholarships for future teachers or forgive college loans for those going to teach in shortage areas are also strong incentives.

School districts themselves have to do a better job of recruitment so we don't allow that one-quarter of certified graduates to slip away. When I got to Austin, I found a teacher recruitment system that created barriers to the timely recruitment of the best teacher candidates. We've changed that. We're going after the best candidates early, signing them to contracts before they graduate and then assigning them to schools over the summer as we determine openings. We want our master teachers to identify the best student teachers so that we can sign them up the way colleges grab high-school football stars on national signing day.

Development

We are beginning to talk to colleges of education about their preparation of teachers to work in urban school districts. I think we can develop a new understanding of what that requires. And we're willing to provide the laboratory in which student teachers can learn.

When they get to us, we've got to make the transition as seamless as possible. We know that beginning teachers who don't participate in an induction program are twice as likely to leave. The State of Texas has mandated an induction program for each district, but it has provided no new funding. We need to establish a more holistic approach to developing teachers. Many new teachers come to us unprepared academically, socially, emotionally and even physically. Our induction process has to begin to strengthen these new teachers in all these areas. That process must then carry over to a mentor teacher, as required by Texas law, and a team on each campus to provide the support the new teacher needs.

In AISD, new teachers receive a two-day orientation that immediately precedes the first day those teachers go to their schools. Most of their time in those two days is spent with a master teacher at the same grade level or in the same discipline. There are also special development sessions for novice teachers. They spend the morning of the second day of orientation in the classroom of the master teacher and the afternoon with their principal. The novice is assigned a mentor teacher. The mentor teachers on a single campus work with a lead mentor teacher on that campus. If requested, novice teachers can also visit the classrooms of master teachers or have a master teacher model a lesson in the novice's classroom. New teachers also receive special professional development sessions throughout the year on such topics as classroom management, effective parent conferences, and grading and reporting.

The question is: is this enough? Of course not. Two days of early orientation is probably short by two weeks. But the cost of adding teacher days becomes prohibitive.

Texas has also introduced the Beginning Teacher Activity Profile as part of its Beginning Educator Support System. This centers around an instrument districts can use to begin a reflective dialogue with novice teachers to help them build their practice. It is to be used as part of the mentoring process and will be able to indicate a school district's support of novice teachers. This year only 100 new teachers in the state are piloting the project.

At the same time, professional development for all teachers and administrators must be ongoing. We are partnering with the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh to help us institutionalize ongoing improvement of teaching and learning in our classrooms. Over the next 18 months, all our administrators and teachers will participate in staff development to refocus the district on best teaching practices. We will also come to a common understanding of a set of standards against which we will measure student performance. Parents, teachers and administrators will be part of that community-wide learning process. It is our hope that these district-wide learning processes will not only improve teaching and learning but will restore the passion for teaching among some teachers whose flame may have flickered.

And we are not forgetting content. Our work with the Institute for Learning is focusing on literacy and math instruction at all levels and is content-based. We have literacy and math specialists in all our schools that serve large low-income populations and in other schools that make this a priority. These specialists act as in-class coaches for teachers, devoting a large part of their time to new teachers and to teachers new to a grade level.

Support, Retain and Honor

We have to provide continuing support for classroom teachers. That comes in the form of resources. It comes in the form of clean, safe and robust school environments. It comes in the form of collaboration. Once we have a common understanding of our standards and the principles of learning developed by the Institute for Learning—once a school is on a firm footing—I plan to support each of those schools in working as a learning community, teachers and principal together, to put forth plans that they want to use to educate their students in the most effective manner. It won't be one size fits all. In this way, not only will we see real school-wide commitment to teaching, but teachers themselves will have a role in determining the practices of their schools. We must honor their experience, their expertise and their judgment, and we must provide them with all the resource support we can muster. In this way, I believe many teachers will stay with us, building their schools, who might have left in frustration before. They will be held accountable for their decisions and their practice, but I've found that good teachers welcome accountability.

We also want to move toward arriving at a common understanding of the teaching profession as a continuum of learning with career developmental stages (drawing on a model developed by Allen Odden), each with performance characteristics, assessment strategies and professional development plans. The career development stages move from the entry professional to the developing professional with two to five years experience, to the journey professional at five years, the senior professional at eight years and the Master teacher, complete with National Board certification at 10 years.

We have to find ways to recognize and honor our best, experienced teachers, so they don't automatically move into administration for more pay and more latitude or out move out of education altogether. One way we are exploring is having the University of Texas, for instance, sign up some of our best teachers as adjuncts, to assist them with the education of student teachers. A recent grant to the university will provide stipends to master teachers working with student teachers.

Conclusion

Urban school districts are faced with a difficult problem: how to maintain an adequate supply of quality teachers. As long as the economy continues to climb, the supply problem will probably only get worse. But we can do something about quality. What we have learned from the TIMSS findings is that adequate teachers producing underwhelming classroom results can become good teachers with high-performing students if they begin to teach differently. We can make a difference in teaching and learning in our classrooms. Working together—the colleges of teacher education and your clients, the school districts of this country—we can bring high quality teaching and learning to every classroom in this country. That has to be our goal.

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