

Comment on Site Selection

Prior to the School District/Philadelphia Federation of Teachers 2004 contract, the District primarily based teacher assignment on seniority. At that time, a number of parents, students, community organizations, and education stakeholders advocated for the contract to allow 'site selection' to fill all teaching vacancies at all schools.

As a compromise, the School District of Philadelphia and the PFT agreed to the current system; a hybrid teacher assignment process that fills open teaching positions by seniority in some cases and in other cases allows schools to utilize 'site selection'.

Site selection enables school leaders to interview, recruit and hire teachers that match the school's instructional vision and student needs. Seniority-based assignments do not take into account the school's or students' needs and the school leadership simply accepts whoever is assigned to fill the vacancy.

This year (2009) parents, students, community organizations, and various education stakeholders have renewed the call for full site selection across all schools. This will enable

- 1) Principals and other school leaders (including teachers, parents, and high school students) to develop teams that meet the needs and vision for their school. Most leaders in business, non-profits, and other organizations would insist on having the ability to select their own teams. School-leaders deserve the same ability.
- 2) Schools to recruit and hire experienced teachers to work in 'hard-to-staff' schools. These are typically low-income, predominantly minority schools with poor performance. This inequitable distribution of experienced and effective teachers is a major cause of student underperformance and the 'achievement gap'.

Although, many teachers support full site selection, a significant number have expressed some concerns over its implementation and/or effectiveness.

They have noted that site selection will only help encourage the equitable distribution of experienced, effective teachers if several underlying issues are also addressed:

- Difficult working conditions at hard-to-staff schools
- A lack of supports at these schools
- Ineffective leadership at these schools

One group of teachers, the Teacher Action Group (TAG) believes these issues “provide strong disincentives to teach at these schools (and) just because principals have the power to hire does not mean teachers will choose to interview at these schools.”

TAG also notes “Principals do not have a background in human resources. In addition, as teachers, we have observed many principals using their site selection powers to make nepotistic hires. There are currently no regulations in place to protect against this dishonest practice.”

Therefore TAG has suggested the following reforms in conjunction with the recommendations detailed in the Teacher Effectiveness platform.

- 1. Principals must receive training in how to hire effective staff**
- 2. Teachers serving on site selection committees must be elected by their colleagues, not appointed by the principal.**
- 3. Teachers serving on site selection committees must have a vote that is equal to that of the principal.**

We have included these suggestions to facilitate the discussions and negotiations currently underway between the School District and the PFT.

The organizations that developed the *Teaching Effectiveness platform* believe that a system can be designed that allows full site selection, honors the legitimate needs and interests of the schools, students, and teachers, and fulfills the two goals we listed above.

We are encouraged by TAG’s willingness to explore creative mechanisms to design a truly effective and equitable teacher assignment system. We further implore the School District and PFT to be similarly creative and dedicated to making a genuinely functional system in their new contract.