

Principal Turnover in the Baltimore City Public School System

Introduction

Turning around the least performing schools is an essential thrust of education reform nationwide. No Child Left Behind allows the identification of the most persistent under-performing schools that are in dire need of transformation. Highly qualified and competent principals are needed to lead change in schools that are impacted by persistent failure.

Baltimore City

The Baltimore City Public School system is impacted by issues associated with inner cities. Baltimore City ranks as one of the poorest jurisdictions in the state of Maryland. The estimated median household income for Baltimore City was \$37,850¹ in 2006. Baltimore City has the highest number of students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Meals.² Research demonstrates that high-achieving children residing in low income households do not maintain their status as high-achievers over time.³ It is imperative that selected leaders have the ability and resources to respond to the unique needs of a high poverty student population.

Outcomes for Children

Historical assessment data show poor outcomes for many students in BCPS. In the 2002-2003 school year 32.8% of 8th grade students were proficient in state reading assessments. This figure increased to 44.6% in the school year 2006-2007.⁴ Student outcomes in math were far worse: 11.5% of 8th grade students were proficient or advanced in math assessments in the school year 2002-2003. The number of students gaining proficiency in state math assessments more than doubled to 24.4% in the school year 2006-2007.⁵

¹ Median Household Income for Maryland Jurisdictions. Maryland State Department of Planning, Planning Data Services, June 2007.

² Maryland State Department of Education Local Education Agencies School Year 2005-2006.

³ Wyner, J.S., Bridgeland, J.M., & DiIulio, J.J. (2007). Achievementtrap: How America is failing millions of high-achieving students from low income families.

⁴ Baltimore City Data Collaborative. (2007). Maryland School Assessment Across Maryland – 8th grade reading school years 2003-2007. Maryland State Department of Education.

⁵ Baltimore City Data Collaborative. (2007). Maryland School Assessment Across Maryland – 8th grade Math school years 2003-2007. Maryland State Department of Education.

Case Study:

Booker T. Washington Middle School

Booker T. Washington Middle School had four principals in a five-year period. The majority (80.5%) of students are receiving Free and Reduced Price Meal Services (FARMS).

During this five-year period the proficiency rate in 8th grade reading assessments ranged from 25.3% to 41.4%:

25.3% of students passed in 2003
31.1% of students passed in 2004
33.3% of students passed in 2005*
41.4 % of students passed in 2006**
30.7% of students passed in 2007*

* = 1 Principal Change ** = 2 Principal Changes

Figure 1. Booker T. Washington Middle School

Principals with a track record of success are vital to combat the challenges of poverty and poor educational achievement. As a candidate, Governor O'Malley proposed a strategy for addressing this problem of significant financial incentives for principals with effective leadership skills to turn around Maryland's most impacted schools.⁶

In this issue brief, Advocates for Children and Youth examines the extent of principal turnover in low performing Baltimore City Public Schools.

Methodology

Jurisdiction Selection

Middle schools in the Baltimore City Public School System were selected as a school district based on student demographics and enrollment trends.

School Selection

Individual schools reviewed in this brief were selected on Maryland State Assessment (MSA) data and Free and Reduced-Priced Meal Services (FARMS) statistics. Eighty percent of the sample selected is eligible to receive FARMS. Schools that were identified as having highest poverty and lowest performing students were chosen. This study

⁶ O'Malley Brown Campaign, "New Ideas to Improve Public Education in Maryland" (September 2006). The Governor proposed \$200,000 bonuses over four years for "turn around principals."



examined 10 of the district’s 25 middle schools: Harlem Park, Alternative Learning Center, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Canton, Woodbourne Day School, Booker T. Washington, Dr. Roland N. Patterson Sr. Academy, Lombard, Calverton, and Robert Poole.

Principal Turnover

Changes in principal assignment during the period of 2003-2007 were examined. Publications from Baltimore City Public Schools, such as Personnel Employment and Payroll Committee Recommendations for Action report, and student profiles were used to obtain information that identified school leadership changes from the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year until the start of the 2007-2008 school year.

After conducting a preliminary analysis, Advocates for Children and Youth sent the results to the CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System for verification and feedback.

Findings

There were 14 principal changes in the selected 10 schools between 2003 and 2007. Results indicate that 90% of the schools had a least one change in the five year period. More than 80% of the schools had two or more principal changes. Fifty percent of schools experienced three or more changes in principal.

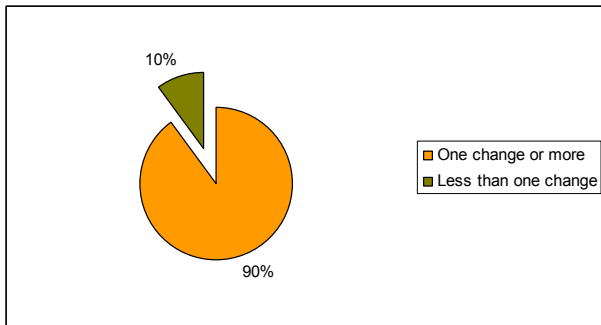


Figure 1. One or more principal changes between school year 2002-2003 and school year 2006-2007.

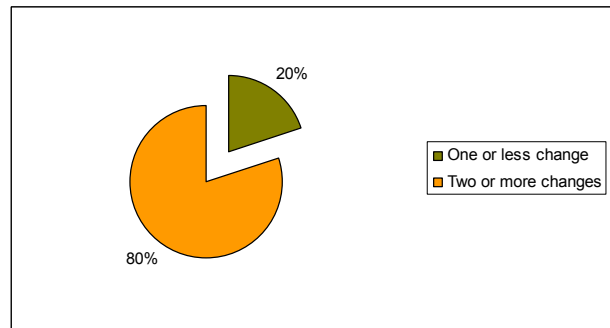


Figure 2. Two or more principal changes between school year 2002-2003 and school year 2006-2007.

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings show a high rate of principal turnover in the lowest performing middle schools in Baltimore City Public Schools. These schools are not only impacted by poverty and low-achievement but also by the issue of retaining quality staff.

Reform

To change the trajectory for low-income students – there should be incentives and conditions that attract talented professionals who can turn around a school. Chosen principals must be supported by a system that provides mentoring, resources, flexibility, accountability, and evaluation.

As a candidate, Governor O’Malley proposed a strategy for addressing this problem— significant financial incentive for principals with the effective leadership skills to turn around Maryland’s most challenging schools.⁷ We must prevent the talent drain away from our low-income inner-city youth. The data reported in this issue brief shows instability in leadership and poor performance in the highlighted schools. This study calls for the implementation of incentives to recruit and retain highly competent leaders.

⁷ O’Malley Brown Campaign, “New Ideas to Improve Public Education in Maryland” (September 2006). The Governor proposed \$200,000 bonuses over four years for “turn around principals.”