



**Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on Education
Oversight – Teacher Recruitment and Retention
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The Children's Defense Fund's (CDF) Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start and a moral start in life, and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. Through CDF's Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign—a national initiative to stop the funneling of children, especially poor children and children of color down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction and incarceration—CDF-NY works to replace punitive school discipline and safety policies in New York City schools with social and emotional supports that encourage a positive school climate.

Thank you to Chair Dromm and to the members and staff of the City Council Committee on Education for this opportunity to testify before the oversight hearing on Teacher Recruitment and Retention.

Overview

Teacher retention rates have improved over the past decade in NYC, but we still have a long way to go.¹ In the 2012- 2013 school year 20% of newly hired teachers left their teaching position and 10% left the NYC Public School System, after just one year of teaching. And within five years of starting their teaching career, 64% of teachers have left their school and 41% have left the NYC Public School System.² These numbers are troubling and require attention.

In our advocacy to reduce the frequency and duration of suspensions, arrests and referrals to the justice system for school-based disciplinary reasons, we work to ensure that all students and staff have access to positive school climates. Our testimony today will speak to the current state of teacher turnover in NYC and how school climate initiatives can and should be a meaningful part of larger reform efforts to improve teacher retention and, ultimately, student engagement in school.

¹ Krane, S., Mosher, K., Pappas, L., Smith, Y., and Domanico, R. (2015). New York City Public School Indicators; Demographics, resources, outcomes. *New York City Independent Budget Office*. Accessed: <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/new-york-city-public-school-indicators-demographics-resources-outcomes-october-2015.pdf>

² IBID, pg 29.

We understand that high levels of teacher turnover negatively impact student achievement, and also act as measure of many school conditions that lead to low student engagement³—including measures of school climate.⁴ When schools strengthen the conditions under which teachers work and foster a sustainable, positive school climate, schools experience higher student engagement, lower rates of absenteeism, dropout, and pushout, and increased teacher retention.⁵ Our testimony speaks to the possibility of addressing teacher turnover inequity through citywide adoption of best practices in school discipline, including the use of school-wide positive behavioral supports and interventions and restorative justice practices.

Why teacher turnover matters

Among all school resources, well-prepared and experienced teachers are one of the most important determinants of student achievement.⁶ Therefore high teacher turnover poses a number of challenges for administrators and students. In high-turnover schools, students are more likely to have inexperienced teachers who are less effective.⁷ And our most vulnerable students are often disproportionately impacted. Looking at teacher turnover in schools disaggregated by poverty, there is a steady decline in turnover as one moves from high-poverty schools to low-poverty schools. Teachers in high-poverty schools transfer to other New York City public schools in larger numbers.⁸ In addition, high turnover creates instability in schools, which is particularly difficult for schools that are trying to implement reforms.

Moreover, it is costly to continuously recruit and train new teachers. When a teacher leaves a school, there may be separation costs, followed by the expense of finding a replacement and providing the development needed to familiarize the new teacher to the school's policies and practices. This preparation, which consumes time and materials, may be particularly intensive if the newly-hired teacher also is new to the profession. Although these costs are difficult to assess precisely, scholars have estimated the costs of replacing a teacher to be approximately \$15,000 per teacher.⁹

³ Rondfelt, M, Sloeb, S., and Wyckoff, J. (2012). How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement. *National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/Ronfeldt-et-al.pdf>.

⁴ Guinn, K. (2004). Chronic Teacher Turnover in Urban Elementary Schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12(42), 1-25.

⁵ Losen, D.J. (2011). Discipline policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice. The Civil Rights Project at UCLA and National Education Policy Center, citing Muscott, H.S. et al. (2008), *Positive behavioral interventions and supports in New Hampshire: effects of large-scale implementation of schoolwide positive behavior support on student discipline and academic achievement*. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 10, 190-205.

⁶ Clotfelter, C.T., Ladd, H.F., and Vigdor, J.L. (2007). Teacher credentials and student achievement: Longitudinal analysis with student fixed effects. *Economics of Education Review*, 26(6), 673–682.

⁷ Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S. and Wyckoff, J. (2009). *Who Leaves? Teacher Attrition and Student Achievement*. *National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Educational Research*, 23. Accessed: <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/1001270-Who-Leaves-Teacher-Attrition-and-Student-Achievement.PDF>

⁸ New York City Independent Budget Office. (2014). *Schools Brief, Demographics and Work Experience: A Statistical Portrait of New York City's Public School Teachers*. New York, NY: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/2014teacherdemographics.pdf>.

⁹ Milanowski, A., and Odden, A. (2007). A New Approach to the Cost of Teacher Turnover. In *School Finance Redesign Project*: University of Washington. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a84f/2d53c35afce28cdd8d757d740a4c65936521.pdf>.

Teacher retention and school supports

The quality of relationships and the trust between teachers, and between teachers and students, is correlated with student achievement,¹⁰ and when teachers leave schools, previously held relationships are altered.¹¹ Research has shown that teachers' decisions to leave a school are shaped largely by the contexts in which they work,¹² including whether or not the school follows a consistent approach to discipline and whether teachers feel they have the support needed to sustain positive learning environments.¹³ When students and teachers feel their school is a safe environment that is conducive to learning the result is higher teacher retention and larger gains in student achievement.¹⁴

Initiatives to encourage school safety must consider that data from the past three decades has demonstrated punitive disciplinary policies are ineffective at achieving either school safety or academic success.¹⁵ One study in particular found the risk of teacher attrition to be higher in schools with increased amounts of student discipline¹⁶ while schools with higher retention rates are associated with fewer suspensions.¹⁷ Promising approaches, like restorative practices, provide a proactive way to influence and maintain a safe learning environment that also reduces exclusions and addresses conflict and safety issues with the participation of the whole school community.¹⁸

Teachers are more likely to stay in schools where they have influence over school decisions and report a climate of collective responsibility.¹⁹ Building the collective capacity for strong student engagement requires creating a school climate in which the improvement of teaching is a collective rather than individual initiative.²⁰ Teachers are more likely to adapt their teaching practices and successfully encourage student learning in the presence of effective peers.²¹ To intervene in potential teacher turnover, schools must be able to equip teachers with the necessary

¹⁰ Bryk, A.S., and Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in Schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

¹¹ Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., and Wyckoff, J. (2013). How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(1): 4-36.

¹² Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., and Wyckoff, J. (2005). Explaining the Short Careers of High-Achieving Teachers in Schools with Low-Performing Students. *American Economic Review Proceedings*, 95(2): 166-171.

¹³ Kraft, M., Marinell, W.H., and Yee, D. (2016). *Schools as Organizations: Examining School Climate, Teacher Turnover, and Student Achievement in NYC*. New York, NY: The Research Alliance for New York City Schools. Retrieved from http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/research_alliance/publications/schools_as_organizations.

¹⁴ Johnson, S. M., & Birkeland, S. E. (2003). Pursuing a "sense of success": New teachers explain their career decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 581-617. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312040003581>

¹⁵ Bitner, R.L. (2015). Exiled from education: Plyer V. Doe's impact on the constitutionality of long-term suspensions and expulsions. *Virginia Law Review*, 101(3):763-805.

¹⁶ Smith, D.L., and Smith B.J. (2006). Perceptions of Violence: The Views of Teachers Who Left Urban Schools. *High School Journal*, 89(3): 34-42.

¹⁷ Ronfeldt, M. (2012). Where Should Student Teachers Learn to Teach? Effects of Field Placement School Characteristics on Teacher Retention and Effectiveness. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 34(1): 3-26.

¹⁸ Standing, V., Fearon, C., and Dee, T. (2011). Investigating the value of restorative practice: An action research study of one boy in a mixed secondary school. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 26(4): 354-369.

¹⁹ Mancuso, S.V., Roberts, L., and White, G.P. (2010). Teacher Retention in International Schools: The Key Role of School Leadership. *Journal of Research In International Education*, 9(2), 306-323; Allensworth, E., Ponisciak, S., Mazzeo, C., and Consortium on School School, R. (2009). The Schools Teachers Leave: Teacher Mobility in Chicago Public Schools. *Consortium On Chicago School Research*.

²⁰ Berry B. (2011). *Teaching 2030: What We Must Do for Our Students and Our Public Schools... Now and in the Future*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.

²¹ C. Jackson and E. Bruegmann. (2009). Teaching Students and Teaching Each Other: The Importance of Peer Learning for Teachers. NBER Working Paper 15202. Washington, DC: National Bureau of Economic Research.

tools to create a climate in their classrooms that will improve or increase teacher effectiveness, and decrease the number of discipline referrals.²² As one piece of remedying the issue of teacher turnover is to reduce student disciplinary incidents,²³ we need to better identify and invest in potential interventions that improve school climate.

Restorative Justice

School-based restorative justice is a whole-school approach focused on student inclusion in the school community, rather than exclusion, to address issues of student discipline,²⁴ student performance,²⁵ school safety,²⁶ student pushout,²⁷ and the school to prison pipeline²⁸. Schools can perform restorative justice in many ways, including peer mediation programs, classroom community meetings, youth courts, or community circles (where members of the community engage in conversation).²⁹ There is a growing body of research supporting the effectiveness of restorative practices in schools; evidence shows that restorative approaches can result in improved teacher retention, improved teacher morale, reductions in the amount of instructional time lost to managing student behavior, improved academic outcomes, and reductions in racially disproportionate referrals.³⁰ In one study, researchers reported that teachers using restorative practices felt closer to and developed better relationships with their students, and noticed an improvement in student awareness of the impact they have on other people.³¹

Restorative Justice is a process set to involve those who have a stake in a community to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible.³² In school settings, restorative practices work from a whole-school, strength-based model that allows for meaningful and supported opportunities for students and school community members to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions.³³ One example is the Council's investment in the Restorative Justice Initiative which, now in its second year, enables 25 participating schools to keep working toward becoming safer places, reducing exclusion and the demand for exclusion, and encouraging positive, supportive climates for

²² Thapa, a., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., and Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A Review of School Climate Research." *Review of Educational Research*, 38(3): 357-385.

²³ Ingersoll, R., and Kralik, J. (2004). The Impact of Mentoring on Teacher Retention: What the research says. *Teacher Quality*. Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/50/36/5036.htm>.

²⁴ Hopkins, B. (2002). Restorative Justice in Schools. *Support for Learning*, 17(3): 144-149.

²⁵ Morrison, B., Blood, P., and Thorsborne, M. (2005). Practicing Restorative Justice in School Communities: The Challenges of Culture Change. *Paper submitted to the Public Organization Review: A Global Journal, Special Issue on restorative and community justice* (G. Bazemore and S. O'Brien, eds).

²⁶ American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools?: An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations. *American Psychologist*, 63(9):852-862. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf>.

²⁷ Morrison et al. (2005), *op. cit.*

²⁸ Haft, W. (2000). More Than Zero, The Cost of Zero Tolerance and the Case for Restorative Justice in Schools. *Denver University Law Review*, 77: 795.

²⁹ Restorative Practices Working Group. (2014). Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline Schools, A Guide for Educators. Cambridge, MA: The Schott Foundation for Public Education. Available at <http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf>.

³⁰ Clifford, A. (2002). *Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles*. Santa Rosa, CA: Center for Restorative Process; See also Hopkins, B. (2003). *Just Schools: A Whole School Approach to Restorative Justice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

³¹ Kaveney, K., and Drewery, W. (2011) Classroom meetings as a restorative practice: A study of teachers' responses to an extended professional development innovation. *International Journal on School Disaffection*, 8:5-12.

³² Zehr, H. (2002). *Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

³³ Zaslow, J. (2009). *A restorative approach to resolving conflict*. Reston, VA: Principal.

students, educators, and their communities.³⁴ We appreciate the Council's sustained support for this initiative.

Conclusion

Our testimony today illustrates that school climate is central to issues of teacher retention. It is our hope that the Council continue dialogue with the DOE on the value of sustainable investment in restorative justice in schools and ending disparities in the use of punitive and exclusionary school discipline practices. We remain grateful to the Council for funding the unprecedented 2015-16 and 2016-17 Restorative Justice Initiative and for the continued commitment to matters of school climate. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

³⁴ Advancement Project, American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, National Opportunity to Learn Campaign. (2014). Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools, A Guide for Educators. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from http://b3cdn.net/advancement/5d8bec1cdf51cb38ec_60m6v18hu.pdf.