

# A POLICYMAKER'S PLAYBOOK

TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHING IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

BY THOMAS TOCH

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## FOREWORD

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has been a source of many sensational headlines over the past decade, from Chancellor Michelle Rhee's on-camera firing of a school principal to recent revelations of district high schools issuing watered-down diplomas.

Yet during the same period, DCPS arguably has done more to modernize public school teaching than any other school district in the nation. It is powerful work, yielding compelling results and important lessons.

Our goal in this report is to tell the story of the District of Columbia Public Schools' teacher reforms for education policymakers and practitioners who want to adapt D.C.'s reforms to their own political and policy environments.

Drawing on hundreds of hours of interviews with past and present DCPS leaders, staff, principals, teachers, union officials, and researchers, we explore why and how the school system's leaders abandoned teaching's traditional policies and practices; the mistakes they made in doing so; the lessons they learned; and the results they achieved. We also examine the reforms in the nation's capital through the prisms of policy, politics, and funding.

Our narrative is supplemented by an array of graphs and charts highlighting the DCPS human capital reforms, and by a set of key policy questions for education leaders exploring ways to strengthen their teacher corps.

A number of FutureEd team members and contributors have made important contributions to this report, including Merry Alderman, Molly Breen, Trish Cummins, Phyllis Jordan, Paige Marley, and Mary Rosende. We are grateful to the many experts and past and present DCPS officials who shared their insights and expertise. Michelle Lerner, the district's deputy chief of communications, was helpful at every turn. Ross Wiener, the director of the Aspen Institute's education program and a close observer of the District of Columbia reforms, graciously offered to read a draft of the report. And we are grateful to the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Joyce Foundation for supporting the project.

Generations of reformers have sought to transform public school teaching into the true profession it deserves to be. The District of Columbia has produced a compelling blueprint for achieving that goal.

**Thomas Toch**  
**Director**

# A Policymaker's Playbook: Transforming Public School Teaching in the Nation's Capital

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## 1. DISRUPTION

When most people think of school reform in the District of Columbia, they probably remember the 2008 Time magazine cover photo of Chancellor Michelle Rhee with a broom in her hand and a hard look on her face. In leading the school system from 2007 to 2010, she was the polarizing public image of a controversial national strategy to improve public education by cracking down on bad teachers.

But in the eight years since Rhee left Washington, her successors at District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) have continued to transform the teaching profession in the nation's capital. Teaching in D.C., and in public education generally, had long been a low-status occupation marked by weak standards and factory-like work rules. Building on Rhee's early work, and learning from her mistakes, her successors have effectively transformed teaching in their district into a performance-based profession that provides recognition, responsibility, collegiality, support, and significant compensation—features that national policy experts have long sought but only partially achieved.

Rhee's successors at DCPS have redesigned teaching through changes that teacher unions and other key public education stakeholders traditionally have backed, such as higher compensation and more chances to work with colleagues, and other reforms that they have typically opposed, including a new generation of comprehensive teacher evaluations, the abandonment of seniority-based staffing, and performance-based promotions and compensation.

Importantly, the work to strengthen teachers and teaching in the nation's capital evolved substantially over the years, away from a narrow focus on teacher accountability, and toward a comprehensive strategy that has combined an emphasis on teacher quality with improvements in curriculum, instruction, and professional development. And while the school district's leaders at first demanded that schools adhere to central direction as the most efficient way to begin to improve a low-performing system, more recently, as many schools have progressed, they have given school leaders more autonomy

in implementing change, while continuing to support them in a variety of ways.

There's no doubt that the school reform stars aligned in Washington over the past decade. Among other things, Rhee and their colleagues were able to sidestep traditional collective bargaining obstacles. And they had ample funding, first from government and foundation grants, then from savings within the district.

Washington's reforms have been marred by teacher protests, a cheating scandal, and recent revelations that the city's high schools were granting many unearned diplomas, as well as the departures of the city's deputy mayor for education and Chancellor Antwan Wilson for abusing enrollment policies.

The diploma scandal prompted reform opponents to declare a decade's worth of educational transformation in D.C. a failure. But there is strong evidence that Washington's teacher reforms have paid substantial dividends.

### **The work to strengthen teachers and teaching in the nation's capital evolved toward a comprehensive strategy that has combined an emphasis on teacher quality with improvements in curriculum, instruction, and professional development.**

Once plagued by defections of talented teachers to charter schools and surrounding school systems and beset by hundreds of understaffed classrooms, DCPS today recruits higher caliber candidates, and retains the highest performers in the city's classrooms.<sup>1</sup> Researchers have found that replacements for low-rated teachers have produced months of additional student learning.<sup>2</sup> The city's students this year ranked 71 percent of DCPS teachers above the national average on the quality of classroom culture.<sup>3</sup> Leaders of even the city's best charter schools now say it is difficult to compete with DCPS for talent.

The school system's revamped teaching force has raised the academic trajectory of many of Washington's students. Many are receiving richer educational experiences, with more exposure to art, music and foreign languages—experiences taken for granted in affluent school districts that are often lacking in urban public education.

Test scores are by no means the sole measure of educational success, but they do matter, and in the District of Columbia they have been rising. The proportion of fourth graders scoring proficient or above on the National Assessment of Educational Progress has more than doubled in reading and math since 2007, when Rhee arrived, moving the District of Columbia up to the middle of the pack among urban school districts at that grade level.<sup>4</sup> Scores rose at every grade level for every student group on the city's spring 2017 administration of the demanding PARCC standardized tests.<sup>5</sup>

These improvements represent only the beginning of a long climb to academic credibility, as the low standards in many of the city's high schools make clear. Washington's many impoverished African American and Hispanic students continue to lag far behind their white counterparts. By no means is every Washington teacher happy with the changes to her profession. And the sudden departure of Chancellor Antwan Wilson in February, after only a year on the job, has unsettled the school district.

But the transformation of Washington's teaching profession and instructional systems has been impressive by any standard. That an urban school system with a troubled past has produced such a comprehensive blueprint for change makes the District of Columbia's work that much more compelling.

This is the story of the DCPS teacher reforms—why and how the school system's leaders abandoned teaching's traditional policies and practices; the mistakes they made in doing so; the lessons they learned; and the results they achieved. It is an analysis based on hundreds of hours of interviews with past and present DCPS leaders, staff, principals, teachers, union officials, and academic researchers who have studied the school district.

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, leadership on school reform has shifted to states and school districts. Through its work to substantially reshape the teaching

profession in the nation's capital over the past decade, DCPS has produced a valuable roadmap for reform for policymakers and practitioners nationwide.

## 2. TALENT

Washington's then-36-year-old mayor, Adrian Fenty, named Michelle Rhee chancellor of the city's public school system in June 2007, the day after a desperate City Council shifted control of the 49,000-student system from an elected school board to the mayor's office.

The District of Columbia Public Schools was dysfunctional. The patronage-plagued central office couldn't manage to calculate daily attendance, much less educate students. New hires often didn't get paid for months. New textbooks gathered dust in warehouses while there weren't enough to go around in classrooms. Elementary schools mostly didn't teach art or music. High school electives were rare. More students dropped out than graduated. A decade earlier, the start of the school year had been delayed three weeks to complete roof repairs. And the system was hemorrhaging students to charter schools. Rhee was the seventh chancellor in a decade.

The school system's teaching force was also foundering. Many teachers received weak training at the University of the District of Columbia and other unselective schools. Low pay made it hard for D.C. teachers to live in the city and forced many to take second jobs. Many schools were understaffed. The best and brightest defected to charters.

In the absence of a common curriculum and citywide teaching standards, instruction in many classrooms was a steady diet of worksheets and other drudgery. "You were never sure what, or how, you should teach," a veteran educator told me. While upwards of 90 percent of Washington's students were below grade level the year before Rhee arrived, 95 percent of the city's teachers had earned satisfactory ratings.<sup>6</sup>

Rhee knew these problems well. Many commentators have characterized her as a tough-talking but inexperienced

outsider, an ingénue with an attitude. In truth, she had been working closely with D.C. school officials for nearly a decade as the founder of The New Teacher Project, a national organization conceived by Teach for America's Wendy Kopp to help urban school systems recruit more talented teachers by skirting the traditional education school pipeline. It was Kopp who recommended Rhee to Fenty. To Rhee, higher quality teachers were key to exploding the notion that poor kids couldn't learn—to proving, in her words, that “demography is not destiny.”

Her first inclination was to get a clearer sense of the teacher talent in each classroom. She quickly resolved to build a new evaluation system that made performance matter. In much of public education, teacher evaluations were subject to collective bargaining, allowing teacher unions to quash provisions they opposed. But Congress in 1996 had given sole control of D.C. teacher evaluations to Washington's school board.

Rhee's predecessors never availed themselves of the provision. As a result, in D.C., like in most of public education, scrutiny of teacher performance amounted to a single, cursory visit once a year by a principal wielding a checklist looking for clean classrooms and quiet students—superficial exercises that didn't focus directly on the quality of teacher instruction, much less student learning. In Washington and nearly everywhere else, school systems actually discouraged principals from taking teacher evaluation seriously by paying teachers strictly on the basis of their college degrees and their years of experience, under a so-called single salary schedule that was introduced back in the 1920s to counter sharp differences in pay between men and women and other forms of unfair employment practices in public education.

Absent incentives to take evaluation seriously under the single salary schedule, many schools and school systems didn't, notwithstanding the fact that the nation spends over \$400 billion a year on teacher compensation. When Rhee arrived in Washington, her team could find recent evaluations on only 20 percent of the city's teachers.<sup>7</sup>

The Washington Teachers Union, the representative of the city's 4,195 teachers, pressed Rhee to negotiate the new evaluation system under the city's collective bargaining contract. She refused.

## Making Performance Matter

Kaya Henderson, who had been Teach for America's D.C. director and then managed Rhee's New Teacher Project work in the city, supervised the drafting of the new teacher rating system as the chancellor's chief of human capital. Her key deputy was Jason Kamras, a Princeton graduate who had arrived in Washington a decade earlier through Teach for America and stayed, becoming the national Teacher of the Year in 2005-06.

Henderson had Kamras spend a year working alone on the project—reading, talking to local educators and national experts, traveling the country trying to find evaluation systems that didn't rate every teacher a star. He discovered that because teacher evaluation was mostly an empty exercise, there was nothing close to a consensus in public education on the question of what constituted a “good” teacher.

In the summer of 2009, after two years of research, Henderson and Kamras launched arguably the most comprehensive teacher performance-measurement system ever implemented in a major public school system.

Called IMPACT, it established citywide teaching standards for the first time, drawing on the work of researcher Charlotte Danielson, Teach for America and others to establish expectations in planning and preparation,

IMPACT CLASSROOM OBSERVATION RUBRIC	
ESSENTIAL PRACTICE	ELEMENT
1. Cultivate a responsive learning community	1A. Supportive Community
	1B. Student Engagement
2. Challenge students with rigorous content	2A. Rigorous Content
3. Lead a well-planned, purposeful learning experience	3A. Skillful Design
	3B. Skilled Facilitation
4. Maximize student ownership of learning	4A. Cognitive Work
	4B. Higher-Level Understanding
5. Respond to evidence of student learning	5A. Evidence of Learning
	5B. Supports and Extensions

Source: *IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effective Assessment System for School-based Personnel, Group 2, 2017-18, p.9*

classroom environment, instruction, and professionalism—making clear to teachers what was expected of them and what effective work looked like.

The new system would measure teacher performance in a variety of ways to get a more complete picture of how teachers were teaching. The traditional practice of observing teachers at work would be greatly expanded to include multiple observations by multiple observers, some of them outside experts in the teachers' subjects. Every teacher would be observed five times a year—three times by the administrators in their buildings and twice by "master educators" from the central office who would provide an independent check on principals' ratings, something that teachers had sought in focus groups that Kamras had hosted during his research.

Teachers would be gauged on their "commitment to school community," such as their contributions to school priorities like lowering suspension rates. And principals could dock teachers for chronic absenteeism and other failures of "core professionalism."

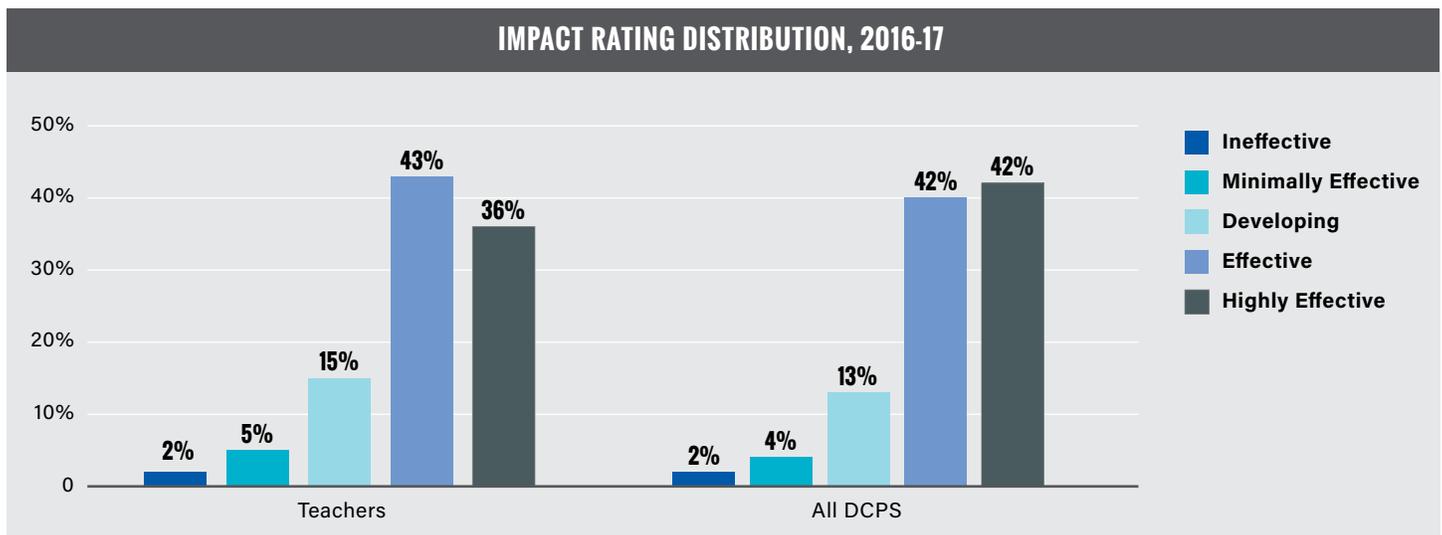
Rhee, Henderson, and Kamras also wanted teachers measured on their students' standardized test scores. During his scouting mission, Kamras spoke frequently with the Harvard economist Tom Kane, a former professor of his in graduate school. Kane had done work showing little relationship between teachers' credentials and their students' achievement. He had been urging that evaluations move beyond

classroom observations to measures of what he argued mattered most—student achievement.

Kamras visited Kane's Cambridge office several times and talked to his mentor nearly every week, as Kane helped him craft a major role for student test scores in Washington's new evaluation system. (Microsoft founder-turned-philanthropist Bill Gates also was swayed by Kane's strategy. At the same time that Kane was advising Kamras, he was launching a \$500-million project for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to add student achievement to teacher ratings.)

Kamras and Kane faced a key hurdle: many factors other than teachers influence student achievement, including students' family income and their parents' education. And some students with the same family backgrounds have had stronger teachers than others in previous years. Kane and other advocates of using test scores to rate teachers attempted to address these realities through "value-added" calculations that sought to level the playing field between teachers by taking factors that teachers couldn't control out of the evaluation equation.<sup>8</sup> That was Kamras' strategy in Washington.

There is a consensus among measurement experts that value-added calculations do effectively identify high- and low-performing teachers.<sup>9</sup> Five leading researchers hired by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to study the issue concluded in a 2015 report that "value-added measures meaningfully distinguish between teachers whose



Source: IMPACT Fast Facts, District of Columbia Public Schools, February 2018.

future students will consistently perform well and teachers whose students will not" on standardized tests.<sup>10</sup> That can't be said of traditional evaluations based on single, drive-by classroom visits.

## Value Added

But strategies for fairly comparing teachers with students of varying backgrounds were new, complex, and imperfect. While value-added ratings do a solid job of identifying teachers at the top and bottom of the performance range, they don't do a great job of distinguishing among the nation's many mid-range teachers.

There can be a lot of year-to-year turbulence in the ratings of the same teachers, leading experts to urge school districts to use three years of data in generating teachers' scores.<sup>11</sup> And while value-added scores are one of the best ways to control for student socio-economic status, it is difficult for value-added calculations to fully account for factors in a school beyond an individual teacher's control, such as the quality of her principal, the performance of other teachers, and school safety. As a result, value-added ratings tend to favor teachers working in higher-achieving schools—creating a disincentive for educators to work in those that struggle.

Legally, it didn't matter; DCPS lawyers told Henderson and Kamras that the quality of teacher ratings wasn't grounds for legal challenges. But the reform-minded DCPS leaders believed that using multiple measures to judge teachers, including multiple classroom observations by multiple observers, would help compensate for lower value-added scores in under-performing schools, which tended to serve the city's most impoverished students.<sup>12</sup>

But they found that observation scores were also lower in those schools. Ultimately, they used financial incentives to advance their equity agenda, announcing changes in the performance-pay system before the 2012-13 school year. Henceforth, bonuses would be focused on teachers in struggling schools: teachers in low-poverty schools could earn bonuses of up to \$3,000; teachers in high-poverty schools, \$15,000; and teachers in Washington's 40 lowest-performing schools, \$25,000—a move that lifted

retention rates among effective and highly effective teachers at those 40 campuses from 75 percent in 2011-12 to 83 percent in 2016-17.<sup>13</sup> Further, a third of the city's master educators would be shifted to part-time duty and deployed to the 40 low-performing schools to help teachers improve their IMPACT performance.

Then there was the problem of what to do with the test scores of students who had multiple teachers, a particular challenge for special education teachers, who frequently share instruction with regular classroom teachers.<sup>14</sup> DCPS simply excluded special ed teachers from its value-added ratings, a remedy that left many regular teachers unhappy with bearing responsibility for others' work. Nor did value-added systems produce information that teachers could use to improve their instruction, another source of discontent.

Undeterred, Rhee declared that student test scores would make up 50 percent of teachers' ratings if they taught tested subjects and grades. Another 5 percent would be based on school-wide value-added results, to encourage collaboration. "We were bound and determined to include [student achievement]" Henderson told me. "Without a component on where we want to get to—student achievement—we weren't going to be taken seriously" by teachers. "We knew it wasn't perfect, that we would have to make changes in it. But we couldn't let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

Three years later, DCPS leaders would reduce the weight of value-added scores in teacher ratings from 50 percent to 35 percent and eliminate the school-wide scores, in the wake of teacher protests and new research revealing that equal weighting of value-added scores, classroom observations, and student surveys of teacher performance produced the soundest teacher ratings. "Having 50 percent based on value-added scores caused a great deal of anxiety among some of our very best teachers and didn't help improve their practice, so we made a shift," Kamras would later explain.

## Worth the Trouble?

In retrospect, backing value-added measures may have hurt Henderson and Kamras more than it helped them.

They could produce the scores for only 15 percent of Washington's teachers, those teaching grades and subjects with standardized tests. For the other 85 percent of the city's teaching force, they had to rely on different, deeply flawed measures of student achievement: progress toward what are widely known in education circles as "student learning objectives," or SLOs—grade-level goals that teachers select with their principals. Student progress is measured with a wide range of school- or classroom-level tests such as essays and science projects, what DCPS calls "teacher-assessed student achievement data." Teachers like these data because they are more relevant to their day-to-day teaching. But because they aren't standardized, they are unreliable measures for comparing teachers' performance under high-stakes systems like IMPACT.<sup>15</sup>

The need to launch IMPACT with two categories of teachers—one evaluated with value-added scores and one with SLOs—led to open hostility between teachers in some schools, compounding resentment toward value-added calculations throughout the ranks. Many teachers simply rejected the idea of making teachers responsible for test scores when so many other factors went into student achievement.

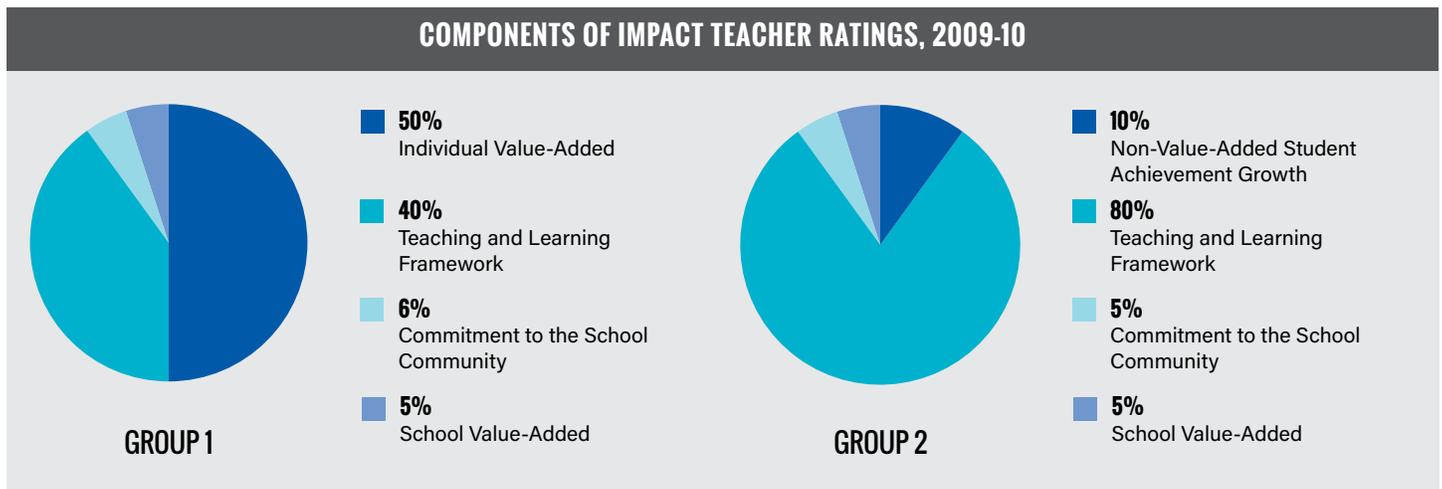
The Washington Teachers Union, and its counterparts nationally, shrewdly sought to discredit teacher evaluation reform as a whole by treating value-added measures (VAM) as if they were the only component of new evaluation

systems. "Test-based teacher evaluation has not worked," Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, the WTU's parent organization, declared. In 2014, the AFT launched an anti-evaluation public relations campaign with the slogan "VAM is a sham."<sup>16</sup>

Then-U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan played into the unions' hands when he ruled that states receiving federal school reform grants and regulatory waivers would have to use student test scores in new teacher evaluation systems, and at the same time introduce demanding new national testing systems tied to the Common Core standards—a move that alarmed and angered much of the nation's teaching corps and intensified anti-testing and anti-Common Core sentiment.

The problem led Henderson to announce in early 2014 that DCPS would discontinue the use of value-added scores for two years, while the district introduced new, Common Core-based PARCC standardized tests. Duncan frantically tried to get Henderson to postpone the DCPS moratorium until after the national teacher union conventions in July, so the unions wouldn't use Henderson's action to attack Duncan's federal policy at the high-profile national events—a measure of the depth of the hole that Duncan had dug for himself. Henderson refused and Duncan waved a white flag, declaring later in the year that states no longer had to use value-added scores in teacher evaluations. Washington's teachers praised Henderson's move.

### COMPONENTS OF IMPACT TEACHER RATINGS, 2009-10



Group 1 teachers are those for whom individual value-added calculations can be made; such calculations can't be made for Group 2 teachers. Source: IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effective Assessment System for School-based Personnel, Group 1, 2009-10 and IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effective Assessment System for School-based Personnel, Group 2, 2009-10.

Three years earlier, however, Henderson's commitment to using student achievement to rate teachers had almost destroyed her work to revamp the teaching profession in the nation's capital.

In March 2011, USA Today ran a front-page story headlined, "When standardized test scores soared in D.C., were the gains real?" The story was an examination of suspected Rhee-era cheating.<sup>17</sup> The paper found a pattern of high numbers of wrong answers erased and changed to right answers. By making teachers' (and principals') jobs and large bonuses dependent on student achievement, Rhee and Henderson had given Washington's educators powerful incentives to raise their students' scores while providing little oversight to ensure they did so legitimately.

"I saw the wrong-to-right score changes and was shocked," a former mayoral staffer told me. "We didn't go in with our eyes sufficiently wide open to the possibility of [cheating]; we didn't put sufficient safeguards in place. To some extent, we should have expected the problem, given the stakes. It was an implementation mistake on our part."

City officials quickly implemented tough new testing procedures and issued a carefully worded D.C. inspector general's report stating that its investigation of a single elementary school failed "to reveal any evidence of widespread cheating" and "no evidence of criminal activity."<sup>18</sup> But test scores in several schools plunged the year after the test-security measures were introduced, suggesting

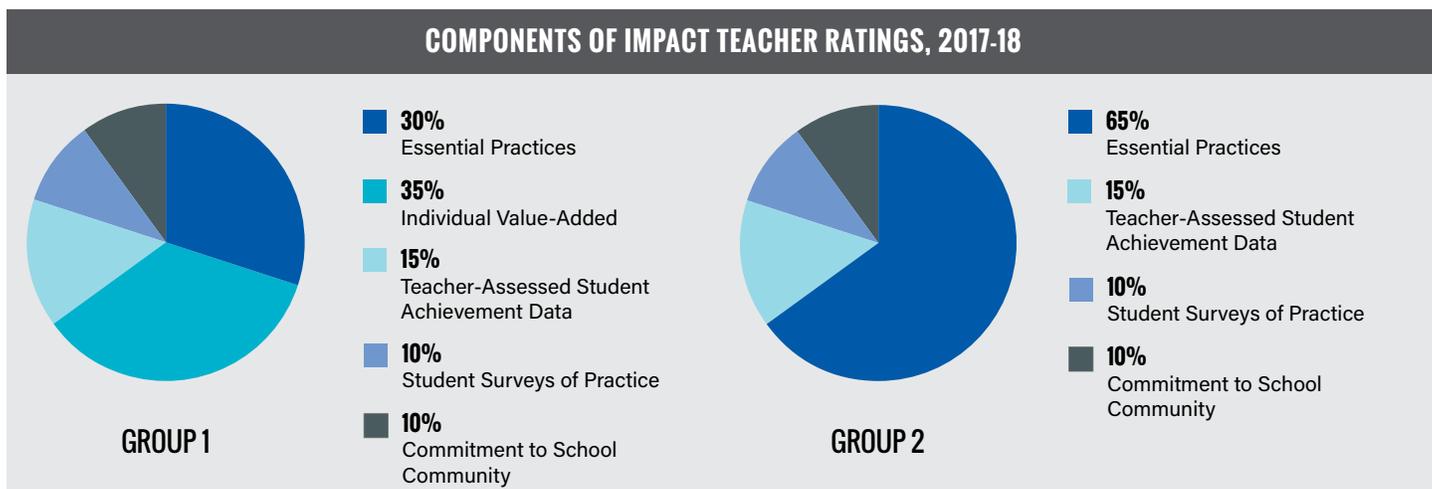
that educators in the schools had received thousands of dollars in bonuses fraudulently.<sup>19</sup>

Rhee and Henderson didn't help themselves by initially denying the problem. Rhee, who had left the District of Columbia six months before the USA Today story broke, claimed that "the enemies of school reform once again are trying to argue that the earth is flat and that there is no way test scores could have improved...unless someone cheated."

The conventional wisdom among the press and the broader public in the wake of the cheating scandal was that teacher reform in Washington was mostly about student test scores, and mostly misguided. Years after the problem was resolved, teacher unions and other opponents of Washington's teacher reforms continued to employ the scandal to discredit the city's reform work.

Even strong proponents of teacher accountability, including former Rhee allies, now say, at least privately, that the price of relying heavily on student achievement in teacher evaluations was very high. A less controversial strategy might have been to calculate value-added scores but use them only to check the classroom observation ratings made by principals. If principals rated teachers much higher than teachers' value-added scores, they could have been required to provide additional documentation to justify their generous ranking, as a way of ensuring rigorous standards in a system that lacked them before Rhee's arrival.<sup>20</sup>

### COMPONENTS OF IMPACT TEACHER RATINGS, 2017-18



Source: IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effective Assessment System for School-based Personnel, Group 1, 2017-18 and IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effective Assessment System for School-based Personnel, Group 2, 2017-18.

## Rush to Judgment

Under Rhee, DCPS principals and master educators would load their teacher observation scores into the new digital repository that the school district built to house the considerable IMPACT information. Kamras' team then tallied teachers' value-added scores, SLO results, observation scores, and other rating results, using a scale of 100 to 400. In the end, teachers received one of four ratings during the program's first three years: "ineffective" (100 to 175); "minimally effective" (176-250); "effective" (251-325); or "highly effective" (326-400). Teachers rated ineffective in a single year, or those rated minimally effective in consecutive years, were fired. Rhee, Henderson and Kamras set the bar high: Only teachers reaching the top half of the scale could be confident that their jobs were secure.

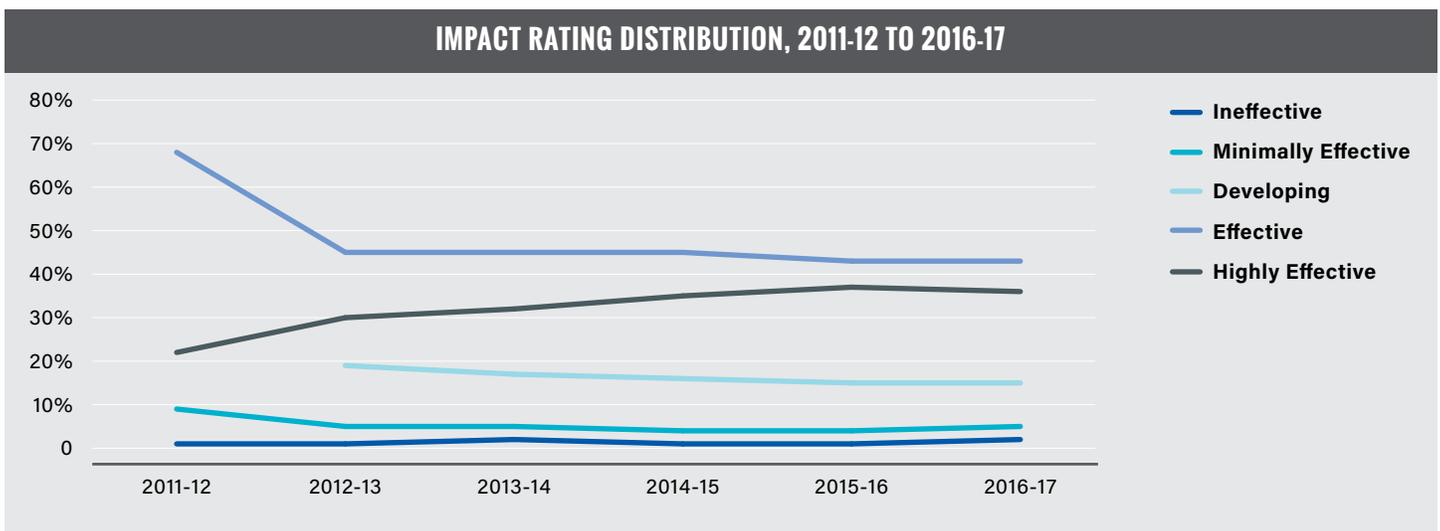
DCPS spent about \$1.5 million building IMPACT. And the program's annual price tag was \$6.7 million, or \$1,064 per employee (plus the cost of principals' time to do evaluation observations), under 1 percent of the DCPS operating budget.<sup>21</sup> The bulk of the money funded the program's master educators, the several dozen experts recruited nationally to rate teachers' classroom performance.

Rhee and Henderson decided to launch IMPACT throughout DCPS at the start of the 2009-10 school year, without testing it on a smaller scale, even though many principals and teachers weren't sufficiently trained on the components of the

complex and controversial new evaluation system. The need for the new system and the stronger teachers it would bring was too great to phase it in over several years, Henderson argued. And with the average school superintendent serving only two or three years, they didn't know how long they would have to implement reform. "So we moved forward," Henderson later told me. To Peter Weber, Henderson's chief of staff for several years, it was a matter of maintaining momentum behind a disruptive reform: "If we had piloted IMPACT in 10 schools, we never would have expanded beyond those schools."

Maybe. But Henderson and her team paid a high price in bypassing a pilot. Suddenly, teachers were confronted with a new, untested evaluation strategy they barely grasped, with their livelihoods on the line. Many teachers liked the new teaching standards established under IMPACT. And many, in the words of one former elementary school teacher, were "tired of looking down the hall at Mr. Johnson teaching work sheets five days a week to his fourth grade class, knowing that I would have to catch them up the next year in my class." They wanted weak teachers removed from D.C.'s classrooms.

But the inadequate training, rushed implementation, and high stakes left many teachers anxious and angry. "People were panicked about losing their jobs," the former elementary school teacher later told me. "Everyone thought IMPACT was aimed at getting rid of veterans," added the teacher, who had been working in DCPS for seven years when Rhee arrived, and who is now an award-winning principal in the district.



Source: IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effective Assessment System for School-based Personnel, Group 1, 2017-18, p.9.

Rhee had given teachers ample reason to worry. “Too many of our teachers are not up to the demanding job of educating our youth effectively,” she declared in the 2008 reform blueprint. “We therefore plan to identify and transition out a significant share of the teaching corps in the next two years.” She fired several hundred teachers even before she launched IMPACT, for lacking proper teaching credentials, sleeping in class, and other transgressions.<sup>22</sup> She even showed a principal the door with a PBS camera rolling.<sup>23</sup> In a speech at the National Press Club, she declared that consensus building and compromise were “totally overrated.”<sup>24</sup>

Ultimately, Rhee’s caustic style cost Adrian Fenty, her patron, his political career. She was firing Washington’s predominantly African-American teaching force during the height of one of the worst recessions in the nation’s history. The city’s majority black voters held Fenty, himself black, directly responsible.<sup>25</sup> He lost the September 2010 Democratic primary in a landslide.<sup>26</sup> With a primary victory tantamount to election in the overwhelmingly Democratic city, Rhee resigned in October, launching a lobbying organization called Students First.<sup>27</sup>

To the surprise of the Washington education policy community, and to the dismay of the Washington Teachers Union, incoming Mayor Vincent Gray, the former chair of the D.C. City Council, named Henderson to replace her mentor as chancellor. And to Henderson’s credit, she would make many changes to IMPACT in the coming years—to improve the evaluation system’s efficiency and effectiveness and to respond to teachers’ concerns.

IMPACT’s evolution started with Kamras, who moved up to chief of human capital when Henderson became chancellor, giving a young Stanford graduate and Rhodes Scholar on his team the task of studying the new evaluation system’s strengths and weaknesses after its first year. Rhee and her team had launched IMPACT with scant contributions from Washington’s educators, but Kamras’ year-one study would be very different.

His lieutenant, Scott Thompson, spent nine months soliciting the perspectives of hundreds of Washington’s teachers and principals, through surveys, focus groups, and school visits. He also traveled the country learning from other nascent teacher performance systems.

Henderson and Kamras discovered that teachers’ angst over rating measures based on students’ test scores hadn’t diminished since IMPACT’s inception. Teachers believed it was unfair to rate teachers on the basis of their colleagues’ work. And IMPACT was immensely stressful, they said. It was clear to the DCPS leaders that they had a serious morale problem.

## **Henderson and Kamras introduced major changes to IMPACT at the start of the 2012-13 school year. In addition to reducing the role of teachers’ individual value-added scores, they eliminated whole-school value-added ratings.**

So Henderson and Kamras introduced major changes to IMPACT at the start of the 2012-13 school year. In addition to reducing the role of teachers’ individual value-added scores (making up the difference with a new SLO component for teachers in tested grades and subjects), they eliminated whole-school, value-added ratings to reduce the friction between teachers of tested and non-tested subjects, and because whole-school ratings created that Thompson called “disincentives for high-performers to teach in low-performing schools.”

To reduce teachers’ apprehension, the first of the three annual administrator evaluations for new teachers and low-performers would focus on feedback and no longer count toward teachers’ final ratings. To address teachers’ concern about having “bad days” and improve the consistency in IMPACT scoring, they dropped observation ratings that were a point or more above or below the average of teachers’ other scores.

They reduced the number of observations of highly effective teachers to recognize their performance and reduce the burden of multiple observations. And they reduced master educator caseloads after the demands of tracking the performance of more than 100 teachers in different schools

and the stress of bearing the brunt of a controversial reform led to high turnover rates.

To enhance the consistency of ratings by both master educators and principals, Kamras used \$2.2 million in Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funding to send film crews into DCPS classrooms to capture teaching that reflected the varying levels of performance in the nine areas that IMPACT measured. A team of seasoned DCPS teachers working as “anchor evaluators” pored over the tapes and selected segments that reflected “highly effective,” “effective,” “developing,” “minimally effective,” and “ineffective” teaching.

Beginning with the 2013-14 school year, master educators would have to demonstrate their grasp of the new anchor standards before rating teachers, by watching the tapes and matching the anchor evaluator scores. Kamras made them repeat the certification exercise in the winter and again in the spring, annually. “It’s difficult to keep evaluators normed,” Michelle Hudacsko, IMPACT’s former director, would later say.

**“We didn’t want teachers to feel we were moving the goal post on them every year, so decided to make big changes only every third or fourth year,” said Kaya Henderson.**

Kamras and his team also instituted “feedback audits,” random checks to ensure that principals and master educators were giving teachers effective advice after observations. It didn’t help that under Washington’s collective bargaining contract, master educators couldn’t share the results of their classroom observations with instructional coaches whom Rhee had placed in every school. Master educators, as central office employees, were management, the WTU demanded; coaches were labor.

But if there were any doubt about Kamras’ resolve as a reformer, in 2012-13 he made it tougher for teachers to keep their jobs at the same time that he addressed teachers’

complaints about IMPACT. He raised the score teachers needed for “minimally effective” ratings by 25 points. And having commissioned a study that found students whose teachers scored 350 or above learned the equivalent of six more months of math and eight more months of reading than students whose teachers scored 250, he created a new category between “minimally effective” and “effective”—called “developing,” for teachers scoring 250-300. Then he decreed that teachers would lose their jobs if they spent three consecutive years in the category, or if they slumped to “minimally effective” the following year. Nineteen percent of teachers in the entire DCPS teaching force found themselves in the new category when it was added in 2012-13.<sup>28</sup>

## Heeding Feedback

The next round of IMPACT reforms came at the start of the 2016-17 school year. “We didn’t want teachers to feel we were moving the goal post on them every year, so decided to make big changes only every third or fourth year,” Henderson told me.

She and Kamras reduced by about half the number of criteria used to rate teachers during classroom observations, to simplify the process by targeting what research found to matter most, while adding new measures to gauge teachers’ grasp of the content they taught. The goal was to align IMPACT with the new Common Core curriculum standards.

Henderson and Kamras also added student surveys of teacher performance to the IMPACT mix. Kamras had experimented with surveys in half a dozen schools in IMPACT’s second year, 2010-11, “to give a more complete picture” of teacher performance. He found that the student ratings developed by Harvard sociologist Ronald Ferguson gauged teacher performance as effectively as classroom observations and value-added scores.

But he discontinued the project after a year when teachers protested and he concluded that the new source of information on teacher performance wasn’t worth further antagonizing the rank and file in IMPACT’s early days. Five years later, he again changed course—after the Gates study confirmed the accuracy of the student ratings, and after other research

revealed that teachers with the highest expectations of their students earned the highest student ratings.<sup>29</sup>

Henderson and Kamras also eliminated the master educator program in 2016-17. It was a difficult decision. Many teachers had come to value the cadre of nearly four dozen nationally recruited instructional experts, even as others dreaded their classroom evaluations. But there was substantial turnover in the master educator ranks (“They drive around all day, teachers are often upset when they see them, and they have to write a lot of reports,” Hudacsko told me). Henderson and Kamras would later start providing teachers with weekly informal observations and feedback by assistant principals, coaches, or peer teachers under a new school-based professional development system (discussed in chapter 7) that complemented IMPACT.

Also, they had built sufficient training infrastructure to be more confident in principals’ ability to rate teachers effectively under IMPACT (the introduction of more rigorous teacher evaluations in D.C. and the rest of the nation had revealed many school leaders to be very weak instructional observers). Relying on school leaders would reduce IMPACT’s cost “significantly,” Hudacsko told me, just as a federal grant that had helped fund IMPACT’s launch was winding down.<sup>30</sup>

The changes that Henderson and Kamras made to IMPACT over the years improved teacher morale. But Rhee’s take-no-prisoners stance and IMPACT’s troubled launch made an already disruptive shift in the teaching profession far more tumultuous than necessary. Seventy-five of Washington’s 4,195 teachers received termination letters when the first IMPACT ratings were released in July 2010—dismissed for bad teaching, something that virtually never happened in public education.

And with veterans among those fired, IMPACT effectively ended teacher tenure in the nation’s capital. Last year, 79 percent of Washington’s teachers were rated “effective” or “highly effective.” Another 19 percent received the probationary ratings of “developing” or “minimally effective.” And 2 percent were rated “ineffective” and fired.<sup>31</sup> In all, 938 Washington teachers have lost their jobs under IMPACT—about 3 percent of the city’s teaching force annually.<sup>32</sup> And many minimally effective teachers leave of their own volition.

Attrition among teachers in that category was 51 percent between 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Beyond removing many weak teachers, the introduction of a comprehensive new teacher evaluation system in the nation’s capital has made instructional quality a priority, forcing principals to focus on what matters most in their buildings and sparking conversations in schools about effective teaching that simply didn’t happen in the past. And it laid the foundation needed for other human capital reforms.

### 3. PERFORMANCE PAY

If the long tradition in public education of paying teachers and staffing schools strictly on the basis of years of experience and college credits discouraged principals from taking teacher evaluation seriously, the opposite was also true: Without meaningful evaluation systems, school districts couldn’t reward their best teachers and give others incentives to improve; they couldn’t hire and compensate people on the basis of their performance.

IMPACT ended that Catch-22 in the District of Columbia.

Rhee, Henderson, and Kamras loathed the single salary schedule and seniority-based staffing. Research revealed little relationship between teachers’ credentials and their students’ learning. Paying teachers more and protecting them during staffing shifts because they had been around longer, rather than because they were effective educators, hurt students.

So, with IMPACT in place, with a defensible way of understanding who was doing a good job in the classroom and who wasn’t, they set out to introduce performance-based pay and staffing. “The incentive structure was all wrong,” Henderson would later say. “The weakest teachers were paid the same as the best. I wanted to make good teachers happy and keep them.”

DCPS’ collective bargaining contract with the Washington Teachers Union (WTU) expired in September 2007, a few months after Rhee arrived. The new chancellor planned to

DCPS TEACHER BONUSES					
IMPACT RATING	SCHOOL'S POVERTY LEVEL	BONUS	ADD-ON IF IN IMPACT GRP 1	ADD-ON IF IN PRIORITY SCHOOL	TOTAL POSSIBLE ANNUAL BONUS
Highly Effective	High	\$10,000	Additional \$5,000	Additional \$10,000	\$25,000
	Low	\$2,000	Additional \$1,000	n/a	\$3,000

Source: Leadership Initiative for Teachers, District of Columbia Public Schools, 2017-18, p. 17

put the new policies in the school district's next bargaining agreement. She put Henderson in charge of the negotiations.

The WTU was weak. The union's previous president was in federal prison in West Virginia, having pleaded guilty to mail fraud and conspiracy charges in 2003 for working with her executive assistant, chauffeur, the union's treasurer, and others to embezzle nearly \$5 million from the WTU and its members. The money was spent on such things as fur coats, art, limousine rides and seasons tickets to Washington Wizards and Washington Redskins games.

With the union tainted by the scandal and IMPACT shielded by Congress, the new WTU leader, a junior high math teacher named George Parker who had spent his entire career in Washington's public schools, lacked the clout of some teacher union leaders. As Kamras recalled, "We told them that we're going to fire people, with or without you, but we also want to give top people money, and we can't do that without you."

Still, the WTU had the power to block Rhee's pay-for-performance strategy and the battle for the reform was bruising.

## Bargaining Battle

Negotiations with the WTU and its parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers, which had run the WTU for two years in the wake of the embezzlement scandal, yielded only acrimony for a long stretch—especially after Rhee, apparently trying to drive a wedge between the WTU and its members, announced at a press conference in August 2008 that she would push for a contract that paid higher salaries to teachers who gave up their tenure rights.

Facing a threat to the industrial-style unionism that had dominated teaching since the first collective bargaining contract in New York City four decades earlier, AFT president Randi Weingarten, a hard-edged labor lawyer and former

president of the union's New York local, joined the WTU's negotiating team. Then Rhee began attending the sessions.

Not until spring 2009, when the two sides brought in Kurt Schmoke, the dean of the Howard University Law School and a former Baltimore mayor, to mediate did serious talks begin. Widely respected for his calm demeanor, Schmoke convened some meetings at DCPS's headquarters and at the WTU's offices. But mostly the two sides negotiated at the national headquarters of the American Federation of Teachers, a short walk from the U.S. Capitol.

The negotiating teams so despised and distrusted one another that they refused to sit in the same room. Henderson, Kamras and their lawyers huddled together. The WTU/AFT bargaining team was down the corridor. Schmoke shuttled back and forth with information and ideas.

In September, amid the fear and loathing of IMPACT's launch, Henderson announced during a middle-of-the-night negotiating meeting that DCPS was overstaffed and over 200 teachers would be let go in October, apart from the new teacher evaluation system. Apoplectic, the union representatives walked out and didn't talk to Rhee or her staff for four months.

Eventually they went back to Schmoke's bargaining table because that was the only way they could raise their members' salaries. When a deal was announced in April 2010, Rhee and her team got what they wanted—for a price.

The new contract largely dismantled DCPS' longstanding culture of credentialism and industrial-era job protections. Layoffs, once done strictly on the basis of seniority, would shift to a formula giving the most weight to the previous year's IMPACT evaluations and only a small preference to teachers' length of service.

Teachers unneeded in their schools because of enrollment declines or program changes could no longer demand

the jobs of less-senior teachers in other schools, a widespread practice in public education known as “bumping” that stripped principals of authority over the staffing of their schools, deprived schools of younger talent, and encouraged the continuous transfer of weak senior teachers.

Under the new contract, principals could veto incoming teacher transfers through a policy of “mutual consent.” And the options for “excessed” teachers would be determined by their IMPACT performances. Teachers with effective or highly effective ratings who were unable to find new DCPS jobs within 60 days could request a year’s grace period, at full pay, to continue their search; opt for a \$25,000 buyout; or take early retirement with full benefits if they had 20 or more years of service. If they opted to extend their search, they would get training and temporary assignments. But if they couldn’t land a job within a year, they would have to leave DCPS. Teachers carrying only minimally effective ratings would have only 60 days to find work in another DCPS school or be dropped from the district’s payroll.

The new contract left tenure, traditionally granted to DCPS teachers after two years, technically intact. But it was redefined as a due-process mechanism to protect against unfair treatment, no longer a virtual employment guarantee, since any teacher could be fired for poor performance under IMPACT.

New performance pay provisions were no less radical. Teachers would no longer move up the DCPS salary scale on the basis of years of service unless they earned effective or highly effective ratings. Those with minimally effective status would be frozen on the salary scale.<sup>33</sup>

**Victory didn’t come cheaply. Rhee and Henderson gave every Washington teacher a 22 percent pay hike over five years, three of them retroactive, in the midst of one of most severe recessions in the nation’s history.**

And highly effective teachers would earn annual bonuses as high as \$25,000 a year for working in high-poverty, low-performing schools, bonuses that would be combined with permanent salary increases if teachers earned highly effective ratings in consecutive years. The new compensation system pushed maximum starting salaries from \$51,500 to \$75,000, the highest in the nation, and increased top salaries from \$87,500 to \$132,000 (and \$144,000 a year in year-round schools).<sup>34</sup> That was on top of a substantial benefits package—two and a half weeks of sick leave, a summer break, a dozen holidays, comprehensive medical benefits, and a pension.

School reformers had been trying, unsuccessfully, to put public school teaching fully on a performance footing for decades.<sup>35</sup> Rhee and Henderson pulled it off. Seven years later, a new collective bargaining contract negotiated between the WTU and then-Chancellor Antwan Wilson, Henderson’s successor, maintained the commitment to performance-based policies and practices.

But victory didn’t come cheaply. Rhee and Henderson gave every Washington teacher a 22 percent pay hike over five years, three of them retroactive, in the midst of one of the most severe recessions in the nation’s history, with the performance-based bonuses and salary increases layered on top. “We wouldn’t have gotten the concessions we got without the across-the-board raises,” Kamras told me.

Parker signed the new collective bargaining contract, he later told me, because of the big pay hike and because Rhee’s performance-pay plan was voluntary—teachers would be permitted to opt out and retain due-process protections (if not security from firing under IMPACT). For the WTU, which attacked Rhee’s performance pay and staffing plan relentlessly, half a loaf was better than none. The union’s membership approved the Rhee deal by a three-to-one margin in June.

The first year’s IMPACT results were released within weeks. After combining some 17,000 classroom observations with student achievement results and the other IMPACT metrics, DCPS announced that, beyond the 2 percent of the teaching force that would lose their jobs for being rated ineffective, 16 percent were put on probation for being minimally effective, 66 percent were rated effective, and 16 percent—556

teachers—scored highly effective and received bonuses averaging \$8,200. Two top-rated teachers earned \$25,000 awards—for teaching high-demand subjects in high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Mistrust of Rhee ran so deep among DCPS teachers at the time that only 60 percent of the city's highly effective teachers made the pay-for-due process trade. Today, teachers rarely turn down the performance bonuses.

In 2013, researchers Tom Dee of Stanford and James Wyckoff of the University of Virginia found that the financial incentives for Washington's top teachers led to higher IMPACT scores in subsequent years.<sup>36</sup>

## Incentivizing Principals

Henderson and Kamras also introduced performance-based pay and staffing for Washington's school leaders.

In 2012-13, three years after launching IMPACT, they began rating principals and assistant principals on a combination of student achievement and twice-a-year reviews by supervisors measuring such factors as instructional quality, student attendance, teacher retention, and prompt responses to students with learning disabilities. The school leaders were rated highly effective, effective, minimally effective, and ineffective. Those below effective had their salaries frozen; highly effective administrators won bonuses of up to \$30,000 a year.

But Henderson and Kamras repeated the same mistake they had made with IMPACT—rolling out the new evaluation system too rapidly. Principals complained loudly about not understanding the new system, and about its emphasis on test scores. Otherwise strong principals were rated below effective if test scores in their schools stagnated or declined in either reading or math, a stipulation that resulted in more than half of DCPS' school leaders earning sub-effective ratings.

"We made some mistakes," Kamras acknowledged the following year. "We should have given our principals more information about the process earlier in the year. And we need to give more thought to...the balance between test scores and leadership skills when evaluating principals." He created a task force to study changes and the following year removed the mandatory below-effective status for those

who didn't raise test scores, reduced the role of student achievement to half of a school leader's rating, and lifted the salary freeze for below-effective ratings—at least for a couple of years.

Unlike in many districts, DCPS principals don't have tenure and instead work under single-year contracts and can be dismissed for any reason. Yet highly effective ratings can earn principals big bonuses—pushing compensation in some cases as high as \$194,000 in fiscal 2017.

## Paying for Performance

The performance pay deal would not have happened without a big, early infusion of outside money to cover teacher pay hikes and bonuses. As Henderson would later say, "We had to put money on the table to get the contract, and D.C. didn't have the money."

To find the funds, Rhee's team borrowed a strategy from New York City, where Chancellor Joel Klein, the hard-edged former federal prosecutor-turned-school reformer, had hired Caroline Kennedy to launch a New York Fund for Public Schools. The Fund's goal was to secure \$80 million in private donations to fund a key principal training program. Rhee recruited Kennedy's deputy, Cate Swinburn, an Ivy Leaguer who had entered public education through Teach for America, to run the D.C. Public Education Fund.

## It wasn't only outsiders who financed the teacher revolution in Washington. Among the early donors were Abe Pollin, then the owner of the Washington Wizards and the Washington Capitals.

After three years of hard work, Swinburn secured \$75 million. Much of it would come from a handful of national foundations in the forefront of education reform—Walton, Broad, Arnold, and Robertson—organizations that predicated their contributions on the approval of Rhee's new teacher contract.

But it wasn't only outsiders who financed the teacher revolution in Washington. Among the early donors were Abe Pollin, then the owner of the Washington Wizards and the Washington Capitals, the city's professional basketball and hockey franchises, and Ted Lerner, owner of the Washington Nationals and revered for bringing major league baseball back to the nation's capital.

With philanthropic support on the table, the WTU and the AFT approved the performance pay plan in exchange for the salary hikes.

### Fueling Reform

Covering the early cost of salary hikes and performance bonuses was only part of the funding challenge Rhee and her colleagues faced. They calculated that Swinburn's millions would carry the compensation reforms for three years and that the cost of performance bonuses would rise, as more teachers won top ratings and embraced the bonuses that came with them.

They were right. The price tag of IMPACT bonuses rose from \$3.2 million in 2010 to \$13.5 million in 2017. On top of that came the cost of building and running IMPACT and launching new reforms.

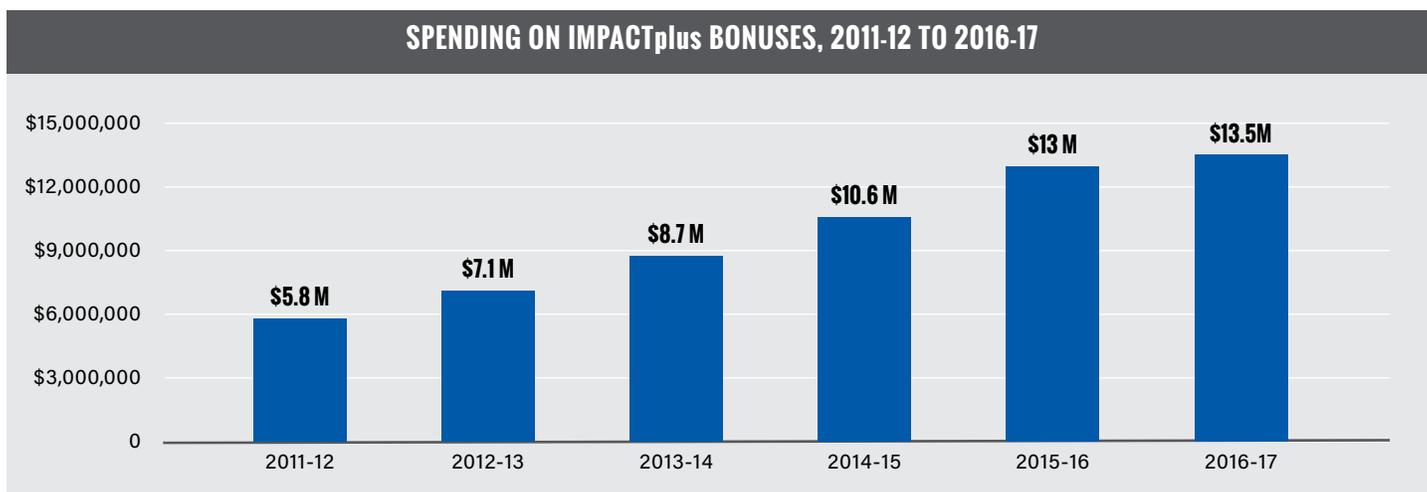
More external funding materialized several months after the performance pay system was enshrined in the 2010 collective bargaining contract, when the U.S. Department

of Education awarded the District of Columbia a five-year, \$75 million Race to the Top grant, part of the federal post-financial-crisis stimulus package. And then another major tranche of federal funding arrived in 2012, when the Education Department awarded DCPS \$62 million under its Teacher Incentive Fund grant program.

But Rhee and Henderson also made several internal moves that helped DCPS cover the costs of the salary hikes, teacher bonuses and other reforms through the district's operating budget.

First, they closed a substantial number of under-enrolled schools in 2008 and 2013, a politically fraught task in public education—one that Rhee learned the hard way, unleashing an intense parental backlash when she announced the first closings in the press without any advanced public warning. They achieved net operating savings by reducing the number of DCPS campuses from 146 to 115, says Peter Weber, who developed DCPS' budgets for several years as Henderson's chief of staff.<sup>37</sup>

Henderson also wrung savings from DCPS' hugely expensive special education system, reducing from 2,200 to 900 the number of special education students attending private schools at DCPS expense. According to Weber, this reduction saved the school district \$120 million a year starting in 2012, an "enormous" savings in a district with \$850 million in annual expenditures.



Source: IMPACT Fast Facts, District of Columbia Public Schools, January 2017 and DCPS IMPACT Fast Facts, District of Columbia Public Schools, February 2018.

And Henderson and her team were willing to shrink the size of the DCPS teaching force slightly, in order to keep high quality teachers in the district with higher salaries, because research found that outstanding teachers had a more positive impact on student achievement than incrementally smaller class sizes.<sup>38</sup>

Together, the outside resources, school closings and special education savings were critical to reform in the nation's capital.

## 4. CAREER LADDER

With an effective teacher evaluation system in place and authority to pay people on the basis of their performance, Henderson and Kamras set about building a “career ladder” that gave teachers who demonstrated success in the classroom higher status, increased professional opportunities, and higher pay—a sharp break from the tradition in public education of teachers playing nearly identical roles throughout their careers, moving methodically up the pay scale based only on their years in the classroom and the continuing education credits they’ve earned.

Known as the Leadership Initiative For Teachers (LIFT), the DCPS career ladder provided incentives for teachers to improve their practice and professionalized teaching by offering traditional classroom educators opportunities to take

on new roles and responsibilities. LIFT helped keep top talent in the school district. And it enabled DCPS to tap a ready-made reservoir of talent for a range of school district tasks—breaking down the longstanding, counterproductive divide in public education between labor and management.

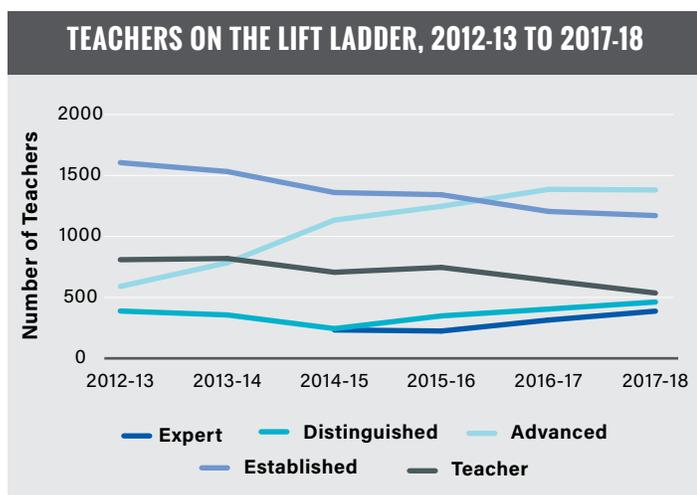
Funded under the federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant and launched at the beginning of the 2012-13 school year, three years after IMPACT’s introduction, LIFT divided D.C.’s teachers into five categories based on their experience and performance: “teacher,” “established,” “advanced,” “distinguished,” and “expert.” Teachers could reach the top status in only six years with consecutive “highly effective” ratings. But moving from advanced to distinguished and from distinguished to expert required consecutive highly effective ratings regardless of teachers’ experience levels.

Henderson and Kamras worked hard to make the career ladder meaningful to teachers. In addition to the annual bonuses that accompanied superior IMPACT ratings, they gave substantial permanent pay hikes to teachers working in high poverty schools (which covered 75 percent of the city’s teachers) as they moved up the LIFT ladder.

They prioritized high poverty schools for three reasons: Research found that top teachers were under-represented in such schools nationally; the schools were often tougher to teach in; and, as Kamras and his team had learned, they yielded fewer highly effective IMPACT ratings.

Depending on teachers’ years of service, reaching the advanced LIFT rung in high poverty schools won teachers increases of \$6,000 to \$9,000; the distinguished category yielded hikes of \$18,000 to \$25,000; and expert teachers earned another \$21,000 to \$26,000 a year—meaning that teachers could increase their base pay by \$60,000 in only five years by earning highly effective IMPACT ratings. In a profession where salary increases rarely surpassed a couple of thousand dollars a year and reaching the top of the salary schedule required decades in the classroom, LIFT was revolutionary.

As another bonus, fewer IMPACT classroom observations were required for teachers in the top LIFT rungs. While most teachers were observed three times a year, distinguished



Source: IMPACT Fast Facts, District of Columbia Public Schools, February 2018.

teachers were visited twice and expert teachers once (provided they did not score below effective).

What's more, Henderson and Kamras created dozens of professional opportunities for teachers through LIFT, many of them providing even more compensation. They could become instructional coaches, members of Henderson's teacher advisory panel, or receive advanced training in the school district's instructional programs. They could apply for policy fellowships and subsidized summer travel abroad.

Under LIFT, the important and lucrative work of teaching summer school would go to the city's best teachers rather than the most senior, as in past practice. And teachers on the LIFT ladder could help in the hiring of new DCPS teachers, attending career fairs, interviewing candidates, and organizing school visits, for \$34 an hour extra pay.

To help publicize these opportunities and signal to the city's teachers that there were rewards for strong performance, Henderson and Kamras appointed "LIFT Ambassadors" in every school, respected teachers who explained the programs to their peers. Cynthia Robinson-Rivers, a D.C. native and Stanford graduate who helped Kamras build LIFT and who is now a DCPS principal, called the LIFT advocates "secret weapons" who lent the program legitimacy.

By 2017-18, the District of Columbia's teachers were spread throughout the LIFT continuum: 15 percent were at the

teacher level; 40 percent were established; 20 percent advanced; 15 percent distinguished; and 10 percent expert.<sup>39</sup>

## Building Central Office Capacity

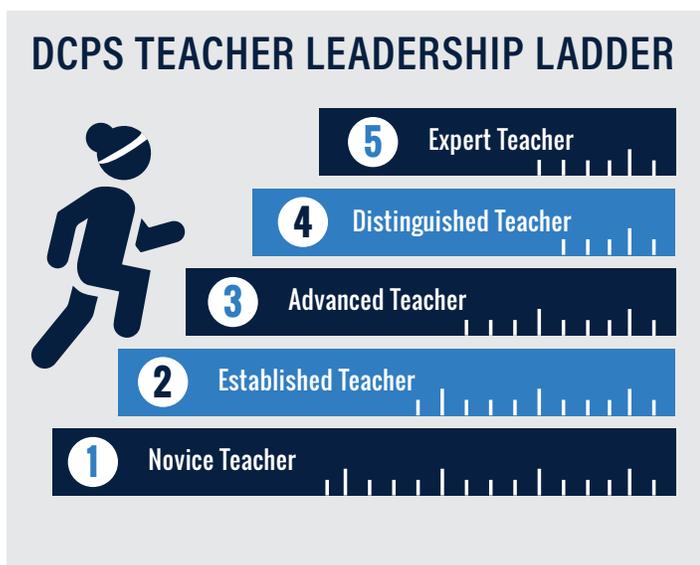
To design, build, and manage complex systems like LIFT, IMPACT, and performance-based pay required central office talent that DCPS didn't have when Rhee arrived. Much of the dysfunction in the school district flowed from staffing decisions based on personal relationships rather than performance, a patronage-driven system dating to the mayoralty of Marion Barry. There was "rampant nepotism," Henderson later told me. "The joke was that everyone in the DCPS central office was connected to one of three families. And it was true."

## Henderson brought in a raft of talent to help lead reform, with many on her new team having started in public education through Teach for America.

The result was a morale killer for teachers, who wasted hours on the phone and at headquarters battling an unresponsive bureaucracy over payroll and other personnel problems.

As director of human capital, it was Henderson's responsibility to fix the problem. "I told Michelle, 'You need to fire some of these people,'" she later told me. She worked with the D.C. City Council to change the employment classification of most central office personnel from "protected service" to "at will." A flurry of pink slips followed, lowering central office staffing from 1,100 to 700 between 2007 and 2010.

Henderson brought in a raft of talent to help lead reform, with many on her new team having started in public education through Teach for America: chief of data and strategy Peter Weber; planning director Abigail Smith; office of human capital chief of staff Anna Gregory; future chief of teaching and learning Brian Pick; director of principal recruitment Hilary Darilek; as well as Richard Nyankori, who led the



Source: LIFT: Leadership Initiative for Teachers, District of Columbia Public Schools, 2017-18, p.4.

transformation of the district's special education system, and of course Jason Kamras, among many others.

The new team worked as both entrepreneurs and adept bureaucrats, designing new programs and skillfully building new administrative systems within a municipal government agency. They suffered the challenges familiar to start-up companies: Fourteen-hour days were routine during IMPACT's rushed launch, an early IMPACT team member told me. Burnout led to substantial staff turnover and breakdowns in communication between schools and the central office. But the team built a tremendous amount of organizational and informational infrastructure in support of their reform agenda. As one example, by 2016 teacher evaluators were loading observation notes into the school district's IMPACT portal via iPads and iPhones.

Reform opponents have attacked Henderson's build-out of the DCPS central office. And adding central staff is a political liability for school district leaders everywhere. But Henderson and her colleagues couldn't have accomplished what they did without the talent they recruited. "You need a robust central office to do the work we did," Weber told me. "You need a non-school-based investment."

## 5. RECRUITMENT

It wouldn't help Rhee and Henderson much to fire bad teachers if they couldn't replace them with better ones. So, armed with the new IMPACT teaching standards, the mutual consent provision in the collective bargaining contract, and a new, performance-focused pay scale, they launched strategies to hire the sorts of outstanding teachers who in the past had mostly shunned the troubled urban school system.

They had to build from the ground up. Before Rhee's arrival, two DCPS staffers recruited and selected some 600 teachers a year, an overwhelming task. The longstanding, union-backed practice of bumping—filling vacancies through internal transfers by seniority before turning to outside hiring—slowed the selection process, putting DCPS at a

competitive disadvantage to Washington's burgeoning charter school sector and suburban school districts.

DCPS made job offers two months later than suburban districts did, a TNTP study found. Kamras subsequently learned from studying IMPACT ratings that teachers hired by May were 20 percent more effective than those hired in August. "The absence of teacher evaluation masks a lot of other problems," Thompson told me. "Because we've got an evaluation system, we're now asking tougher questions about the entire system."<sup>40</sup>

Because there wasn't a shared sense of good teaching, hiring standards varied widely from principal to principal. And candidates were rarely expected to demonstrate their effectiveness in the classroom. "Back then, if you had a pulse, you got a job," a DCPS principal who was a teacher in the pre-Rhee era told me recently. He was hired after a 10-minute interview at a folding table in a school gym.

Several years before Rhee's arrival, then-Superintendent Clifford Janey reported that about 1,100 teachers, or some 25 percent of the DCPS workforce, lacked proper teaching credentials. School years typically started with scores of classrooms lacking teachers of any sort, especially in the city's toughest neighborhoods. Meanwhile, charter schools and suburban districts poached DCPS' best teachers with impunity.

Rhee and Henderson had seen these problems up close at TNTP, where they were recruiting teachers for DCPS. When they moved into the chancellor's office, they quickly expanded the district's teacher recruitment and selection team from two to seven and started building a new screening system.

Launched in 2009, TeachDC was a centralized, multi-stage application process that sought to streamline hiring, screening out less desirable applicants early in the process by providing principals a list of "recommended" candidates who had successfully completed the centralized vetting.<sup>41</sup>

Candidates first submitted applications, including resumes and essays on teaching. If they cleared that hurdle, they had half-hour phone interviews with members of the recruitment team and recruited classroom teachers serving as "teacher selection ambassadors" under the new LIFT career ladder to conduct many of the interviews. This signaled to the

top-rated teachers that the district valued them, and eased the workload of the teacher recruitment team.

Those making the cut taught demonstration lessons at one of seven designated DCPS schools. Finally, applicants were asked to critique the same teaching videos used to train IMPACT evaluators, using the IMPACT observation rubrics—a task that proved to be the most predictive of teachers' performance in DCPS classrooms.

Principals, who were responsible for staffing their own schools, then contacted candidates for follow-up interviews, school visits and additional teaching auditions. The system was a far cry from public education's traditional model of relying heavily on teachers' paper credentials and individual principal preferences. And it was more effective.

But TeachDC didn't solve DCPS' recruitment challenges. Many applicants rated highly under the new screening system didn't make it into Washington's classrooms because many principals didn't use the system, preferring to hire teachers directly. Communications with applicants were problematic (email spam folders proved a big barrier), reducing the number of completed applications. Principals were still hiring late in the recruitment cycle. And there were leadership-related morale problems in the recruitment office. A hundred classrooms lacked teachers at the start of the 2012-13 school year.

## Starting Over

So Henderson and Kamras started over, replacing the entire recruitment team, doubling the office's staffing, increasing its budget to \$2 million, and bringing in TNTP's Washington director—Henderson's successor—to lead the reset in the weeks before the 2012-13 year got underway.

They expanded their recruitment aggressively, pursuing 15,000 urban traditional and charter public school teachers in the Washington region and nationally—a move that prompted local charter school leaders to complain to Henderson and to take their teachers' email addresses off their websites. They targeted highly rated teachers, award winners, and others with proven track records, using DCPS' higher salaries, career ladder, and special perks as incentives. They offered

some two dozen “elite recruits” (the aptly named Capital Commitment Fellows) signing bonuses and a “cohort experience” that would allow them to work together throughout the school year on special projects.

## **By 2015, principals could search a digital TeachDC directory for “recommended” candidates by subject area and grade level, with links to applicants resumes and their component scores.**

And they improved the TeachDC system. They added a Skype option for the initial interviews. And because there were recurring logistical problems in getting candidates to the seven teaching demonstration sites, Kamras' team abandoned that initiative in favor of having candidates submit video examples of their teaching.

Henderson and Kamras pressed principals to hire from the TeachDC “recommended” list. At the beginning of the 2013-14 school year, the recruitment office began sending principals information on district and school-specific hiring trends, showing the relationship between the hiring dates and sources of new teachers and subsequent IMPACT scores in their schools. Armed with the research revealing that early hires produced stronger results, they cajoled principals to push up their hiring timelines.<sup>42</sup>

By 2015, principals could search a digital TeachDC directory for “recommended” candidates by subject area and grade level, with links to applicants' resumes and their component scores, a system that allowed principals to sort applicants by the IMPACT scores their screening results predicted.

The moves made a difference. DCPS still struggles to attract teachers of foreign languages, special education and other specialties, and in the past couple of years has had fewer applicants as the national economy improves. These are challenges shared by districts nationwide.

But a 2016 study of 2011, 2012, and 2013 hiring cycles by researchers Brian Jacob of the University of Michigan, Jonah

Rockoff of Columbia, and colleagues found that TeachDC strongly predicted teacher performance.<sup>43</sup> Those who scored highest on the TeachDC screening subsequently earned higher IMPACT ratings than low-rated applicants. At the same time, TeachDC candidates outperformed their counterparts entering DCPS through The New Teacher Project and Teach for America, who in turn outperformed unscreened teachers hired directly by principals.

The new, more comprehensive vetting system added between \$370 and \$1,070 to the cost of each new hire, the researchers estimated—a price tag that Jacob and his colleagues suggest is “quite small relative to the anticipated long-run benefits to future students of hiring more effective teachers.” In contrast, they write in *Teacher Applicant Hiring and Teacher Performance: Evidence from DC Public Schools*, substantial research has found that traditional hiring metrics—teacher licensure and college course credits—“have little or no power to explain variation in [teacher] performance.”<sup>44</sup>

Today, more DCPS applicants are under contract by the end of the previous school year (28 percent in 2017-18), more new hires have previous teaching experience (84 percent), and more candidates are coming through the TeachDC recommended pool (1,698 in 2017 compared to 211 in 2012).<sup>45</sup> Researchers Tom Dee of Stanford, James Wykoff of the University of Virginia and colleagues have found that replacements for low-rated teachers produce four or five months' worth of additional student learning in math and nearly as much in reading over three school years.<sup>46</sup>

Targeting the exit of low-performing teachers, they have written, “substantially improves teaching quality and student achievement in [DCPS’s] high-poverty schools.” Because more than 90 percent of the replacement of low-performing DCPS teachers has taken place in Washington’s high-poverty schools, the strategy has helped the city’s traditionally underserved students the most.<sup>47</sup>

## Stronger School Leaders

The 2012-13 reorganization of the recruitment office included half a dozen new principal recruitment positions. “The number one reason why young teachers leave is that they have not

found that principals are fair, support them professionally, or care about kids,” Kamras told me during one of several conversations in his spare office at DCPS headquarters near Washington’s train station. “If you aren’t focused on school leaders, you’re missing an enormous piece of the puzzle.”

Rhee and her team wanted to shift DCPS school leaders from their traditional roles as building managers to instructional leaders, spending less time on bus schedules and student discipline and more on helping teachers improve their performance. They saw vividly during IMPACT’s launch the magnitude of that shift, when many principals struggled to explain to their teachers what good teaching looked like.

Rhee, characteristically, hadn’t waited to act. She moved principals to one-year contracts and fired dozens of them during her three-year tenure, including one on-camera, an action that was condemned as unprofessional. She again brought in an outsider with insider knowledge of DCPS to drive reform, a D.C. native and former TFA teacher in Baltimore, Hilary Darilek, who had spent five years directing the D.C. work of New Leaders for New Schools, a nonprofit organization that trained school principals.

When Darilek started at DCPS, weeks before the start of the 2009-10 school year, there were 20 principal vacancies, candidates were scarce, and IMPACT was launching—requiring new and demanding roles for principals. The situation was a vivid reminder that reform in the nation’s capital was neither easy nor immediate.

Two years later, Darilek rolled out a comprehensive, performance-based evaluation system for principals, IMPACT ratings for school leaders, that replaced a system that had been as superficial as the pre-IMPACT evaluations of teachers. Principals and assistant principals would be evaluated twice a year by supervisors stressing student achievement and contributing factors ranging from student attendance to teacher retention, school cleanliness, and timely attention to the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Among other things, the new, more comprehensive evaluations confirmed that principals weren’t doing a great job hiring, often starting the process late in the school year.

Highly effective principals working in high-poverty schools became eligible for \$30,000 bonuses, driving maximum annual salaries from \$117,610 to \$194,000.<sup>48</sup>

Darilek increased support for principals, doubling the number of the school district's regional superintendents, reducing by half the number of principals each supervisor worked with. And DCPS created a new leadership role in a number of schools, director of strategy and logistics, taking many operational and school-community responsibilities off principals' plates as they prioritized classrooms. Today, the city's school leaders spend upward of 75 percent of their time on instruction and under 25 percent on management, Darilek told me.

To build a talent pipeline, Henderson included five new principal-recruitment positions in the 2012-13 DCPS recruitment reset. The team pursued award-winning principals with experience in urban schools up and down the eastern seaboard. As they did with teachers, Henderson and Kamras toughened the principal application process. It included several rounds of interviews with a focus on instructional leadership, an emphasis reinforced by having candidates watch a video of a teacher at work in a classroom, evaluate the lesson, and provide feedback for the teacher. Stakeholders in each school—teachers, parents, staff—had a role in the process. And Henderson, as chancellor, conducted a final interview.

And in addition to recruiting outside of DCPS, Henderson and her team created an internal pipeline, in 2013 launching a year-and-a-half-long training program that includes two semester-long apprenticeships in DCPS schools. "It's pennies in the budget, creates loyalty, and student achievement is higher among those in the program," Darilek told me.

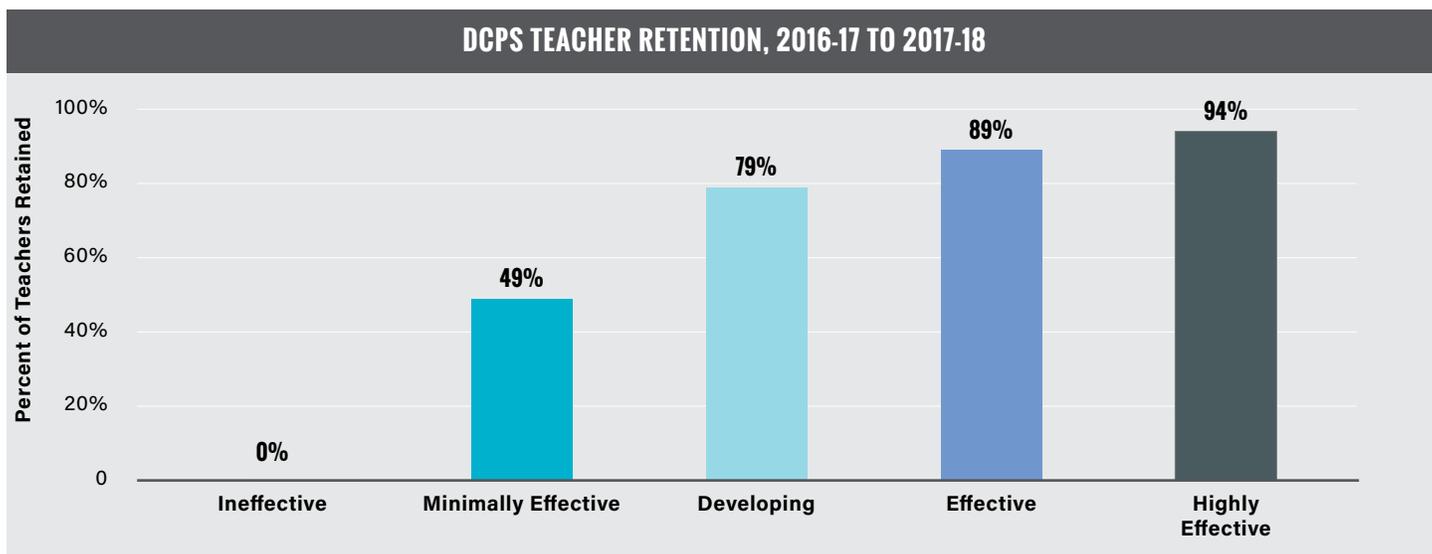
They also launched a new executive master's program in leadership for the city's principals under a partnership with the Georgetown University business school.

School leadership is tremendously demanding work in Washington's many deeply impoverished neighborhoods. Burnout and turnover are endemic. And performance-based incentives for principals require oversight, as the recent revelations of District of Columbia high schools issuing dubious diplomas suggest.

Still, DCPS's reforms have raised the standard of school leadership in the city's schools and turnover has declined, although, in Darilek's words, "retention for retention's sake isn't the goal."

## 6. RETENTION

This was true of teachers, too. The other half of the recruitment equation was retaining top talent in Washington's classrooms. The salary hikes and performance bonuses, the LIFT career ladder, a more responsive headquarters bureaucracy, the later changes to IMPACT—nearly every move Henderson and Kamras made was designed to embrace the school district's strongest educators.<sup>49</sup>



Source: IMPACT Fast Facts, District of Columbia Public Schools, February 2018.

They even established a Teacher Retention Team that feted high performers with personalized thank you notes, leadership opportunities, letters of recommendation, summer fellowships, and an annual black-tie event at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts complete with Grammy-winning entertainers and a rooftop dinner for 2,000. Launched in 2010, the annual Standing Ovation soiree also recognized outstanding principals. It was the sort of event official Washington would throw for visiting dignitaries, produced by George Stevens, the television and film impresario, and funded by the Carlyle Group, the Bradley Family Foundation, the Washington Post Company, the Marriott Family Foundation, and other leading Washington organizations. But it was D.C. educators who packed the Kennedy Center's Concert Hall four balconies high in evening gowns and tuxedos.

Researchers Dee and Wyckoff found that the retention strategies paid off.<sup>50</sup> While charter schools and surrounding suburbs once poached DCPS talent with impunity, the school district in 2016-17 lost only 6 percent of its top-rated teaching talent, even as highly effective teachers grew to 36 percent of the teaching force.<sup>51</sup>

A key factor in the success of the talent retention strategy was a belief among top teachers that the foundation for Washington's new, performance-based staffing system—the district's new teacher evaluation system—was legitimate. Said Dee: "They only stayed once they thought IMPACT was fair."

## 7. IMPROVEMENT

Even as Henderson and Kamras upgraded their teaching talent, they realized they couldn't produce the student improvement they wanted with pink slips and thank you notes alone; they had to ratchet up the performance of Washington's entire teaching force. It wasn't enough to get better people in the city's classrooms; they also had to make the people who were already there better. As Kamras put it, "You can't recruit your way to closing the achievement gap. There are not enough super men and

super women in existence. It's about helping solid teachers willing to work hard."

Henderson and her team hired a consulting company to study what it would take to get 90 percent of teachers to effective or highly effective, up from 80 percent. Every model the company produced required the same approach: improving the current D.C. teaching force rather than merely bringing in stronger replacements.<sup>52</sup>

Not every strategy worked. Henderson's team discontinued a mentoring program for new teachers involving 20 central office staff when they didn't see enough difference in IMPACT scores between those who were mentored and those who weren't. As another example, Kamras declared early on that teachers themselves would be responsible for addressing the weaknesses in their teaching that IMPACT exposed; DCPS would provide teachers new resources, but responsibility for using the resources would rest with teachers.

To implement the strategy, Kamras launched an ambitious new Teacher Data and Professional Development (TDPD) initiative that combined information on students, teachers, teaching standards, teaching strategies and curricula within a single digital platform to create personalized, computer-generated professional-development plans—a playlist of workshops, books, and mentoring opportunities—for teachers based on their evaluation results. The system would be built by a Rupert Murdoch-owned education technology company called Wireless Generation with more than \$6 million in funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

To enhance the resources that the Wireless Generation algorithm could draw on for crafting teacher improvement plans, the district's curriculum division commissioned a video company that had done work for the Discovery Channel and National Geographic to capture the city's best teachers demonstrating the district's nine teaching standards at every grade level in every subject—a project dubbed Reality PD. More than 100 of the segments debuted in 2012-13 on a new DCPS Educator Portal.

But expecting teachers to teach themselves proved difficult.

Owing to technical challenges and a lack of clear ownership of the project within DCPS, the ambitious personalized

## **The district's curriculum division commissioned a video company that had done work for the Discovery Channel and National Geographic to capture the city's best teachers demonstrating the district's nine teaching standards.**

professional development engine was never built and the school system parted ways with Wireless Generation.

And teachers didn't gravitate to Reality PD and other resources on the new educator portal.

"Just putting [resources] out there isn't enough," Thompson told me. "Only about 10 percent of teachers can take what they learn in one-off sessions and use it [effectively]. A laundry list of recommendations overwhelms many teachers." Teachers working together to tackle instructional challenges was the most effective strategy, they came to conclude.

As a result, DCPS shifted to having principals and more than 100 instructional coaches (that Rhee had hired in 2008 at a cost of \$13 million a year) incorporate Reality PD and other resources into more structured professional development activities, working with teachers in their classrooms in six-week "learning cycles"—a more productive strategy.

### **The "What" of Teaching**

The district's early professional development work focused on teaching strategies, the how of teaching. Henderson and Kamras realized they also needed to address the what of educators' work—curriculum. "In listening groups, teachers were saying, 'You've told us how to, but we don't know what to teach, we're making things up,'" Henderson told me, adding, "If you don't have deep content knowledge you can have the best teaching practices around, but you aren't going to get where you want to go."

The District of Columbia was an early adopter of the newly released Common Core State Standards in summer 2010.

When Henderson became chancellor in the fall, she wanted to know how the DCPS curriculum stacked up against the demanding new math and reading standards.

The answer was, not well. Everything from teaching materials to the rigor of reading and the quality of teacher's questions varied widely from school to school and classroom to classroom. "It was, Let a thousand flowers bloom," one of Henderson's senior staffers told me. Worse, many teachers had a weak grasp of the subjects they taught. As a result, Henderson's first major move as chancellor was to create a coherent, citywide curriculum that reflected the Common Core's high expectations.

By December, she had put Brian Pick—a 30-year-old alumnus of Princeton, Berkeley and Teach for America, and a former D.C. charter school teacher—in charge of crafting new standards for every subject and grade, fresh course content, updated teaching materials, subject-specific instructional strategies, and subject-related tests to measure students' progress throughout the school year. It would be a total overhaul of the school district's educational engine.

As Kamras had when he developed IMPACT, Pick and a colleague spent several months on a research "sabbatical," reading, talking to experts like core knowledge proponent E.D. Hirsch and the Education Trust's Kati Haycock, and traveling to Louisiana, New York and other states at the forefront of instructional reform. By May 2011, they had final approval for a 27-strand work plan for everything from instructional materials and teacher training to new tests to gauge students' progress during the school year. By June, Pick was leading the development of entirely new Common Core-based reading, math, and writing curricula.

He worked closely with Student Achievement Partners, a company founded in 2007 by Rhodes Scholars David Coleman and Jason Zimba and curriculum expert Susan Pimentel to develop rigorous content for the nation's schools. They would play a central role in the drafting of the Common Core standards that were released by the National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers three years later. Since then, the company has worked with school districts to implement the voluntary national standards. Pick also enlisted local talent in the

enterprise—50 Washington math teachers and 50 English language arts teachers with highly effective IMPACT ratings.

With funding from the federal Race to the Top grant, Pick and his team started with a pre-K-to-grade 12 reading curriculum that they launched at the beginning of the 2011-12 school year. Working through the summer of 2011, they built 30-day teaching units in every grade, putting a premium on replacing textbook-based instruction with a range of “authentic texts,” high-quality literature and non-fiction readings.

Each unit lists a handful of “anchor texts,” along with dozens of articles, novels, plays, poems, essays, and other works as suggested readings. And they drafted “essential questions” for every unit, learning activities, and target vocabulary. “We wanted more complex texts, authentic texts, texts that were worth teaching,” Pick told me. They also changed social studies and science materials to increase the amount of reading students do in those subjects. With a highly mobile urban student population, it was important to have a common, district-wide curriculum, they reasoned. A new math curriculum followed in summer 2012, and a writing curriculum in summer 2013.<sup>53</sup>

## Delivery Problems

But delivering the Common Core in urban classrooms proved difficult. With their emphasis on mastery of demanding texts and their focus on advanced math concepts rather than just computation, the standards required much more of students. After watching the district’s stronger teachers struggle to teach the new subject matter effectively over the next couple of years, Henderson, Pick, and Kamras realized they needed to help teachers deliver the new curriculum. “We have a great curriculum, but it’s hard to teach,” as Kamras put it.

DCPS’ results on demanding new national tests from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) in the spring of 2015 confirmed Henderson’s concerns. Only 25 percent of students scored proficient in English language arts and only 21 percent in math.<sup>54</sup> Henderson deserves credit for having the city’s students take the much more difficult tests when many school districts were avoiding them, as Ross Wiener, the

director of the Aspen Institute’s education program, has argued. But the results were sobering.

Teachers told DCPS leaders that they wanted the school district to provide them with Common Core-based instructional standards and units of study, but not individual lesson plans and definitely not the highly scripted lessons favored in some school districts. “No great teacher wants to teach with 180 days’ worth of scripted lesson or with everyone doing their own thing,” Pick noted. “We need to be in the middle.”

But Henderson’s team didn’t like the quality of the individual lessons they were seeing from many teachers. So Pick assembled another team of 100 top teachers from the upper reaches of IMPACT and LIFT in the summer of

**But delivering the Common Core in urban classrooms proved difficult. With their emphasis on mastery of demanding texts and focus in math on advanced concepts not just computation, the standards required much more of students.**

2015 to draft sample lessons for every subject at every grade level to give teachers models of rigorous, engaging Common Core-aligned teaching. These became known as the Cornerstones lessons.

With foundation funding and support from Student Achievement Partners, Pick’s cadre produced a video archive of over 200 of the hands-on Cornerstones lessons.<sup>55</sup> Two sample lessons give a sense of the material covered: 1) In “Growing Vegetable Soup,” kindergarten “students will taste new fruits and vegetables, while learning how to sort foods according to their food groups and sources. They will create a drawing of foods they enjoy and identify whether each is a fruit or a vegetable.” 2) As part of a model Ted Talk addressing the question, “What is the American Dream and how is it achievable for all Americans?,” eighth grade “students will study effective narratives by analyzing structural and language techniques used by powerful TED speakers, and

present their own talks to peers and the community.” When teachers asked the school district to expand the bank of model lessons, Pick’s team produced dozens more the following summer.<sup>56</sup>

## Systematic Support

Yet Henderson and her team concluded that the Cornerstones project didn’t go far enough; teachers’ Common Core instruction needed more intensive and systematic support.

The school district had moved to subject-specific professional development for its teachers a couple of years earlier. But the teachers were meeting only five times a year in central locations, supplemented by support from the district’s network of classroom coaches—a lot more professional development than teachers in many school districts receive, but not enough for Henderson and her team.

Even as they launched Cornerstones in spring 2015, Henderson’s team started planning an even more ambitious initiative, one that wove the school district’s earlier teacher reforms into a revolutionary new instructional-improvement program for DCPS educators.

One of the many lessons they had learned from studying IMPACT evaluation results was that teachers who improved the most tended to have instructional coaches who gave them regular feedback focused on one or two key teaching strategies, rather than a smorgasbord of improvement activities. Henderson’s team also wanted to leverage research showing that teachers working together on topics directly relevant to upcoming instruction was the most valuable type of professional development.

With several million dollars in funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Gates Foundation, and the Schusterman Foundation, and with support from Leading Educators, a nonprofit teacher professional-development organization, they built a new school-based professional-development system focused on teaching the Common Core. Kamras moved to a new office of instructional practice to head the project.

Beginning with the 2016-17 school year, under the new Learning Together to Advance Our Practice initiative (LEAP),

Kamras’ team assigned the bulk of the DCPS teaching force to grade-level and subject-matter teams within their schools.<sup>57</sup> Led by subject-matter expert teachers and administrators known as LEAP Leaders, the teams of half a dozen or so teachers would meet weekly for 90 minutes to prepare for upcoming Common Core units, deepen their subject-mat-

**Henderson’s team also wanted to leverage research showing that teachers working together on topics directly relevant to upcoming instruction was the most valuable type of professional development.**

ter knowledge, hone their teaching techniques, and review student work and school data.

In the following days, LEAP leaders would visit team members’ classrooms to observe how teachers were implementing what they had learned from the weekly seminars. These visits were followed by one-on-one debriefings, a system that provided teachers with regular feedback as well as opportunities to practice new teaching techniques without the high stakes attached to IMPACT.<sup>58</sup>

This is the sort of collaboration and support that many public school teachers, isolated in their classrooms, have long said they want but rarely get. As a veteran DCPS reading teacher put it, “Now it feels like people care about our work.” As part of the process, LEAP leaders would upload notes into a new DCPS portal designed to give teachers immediate written recommendations. This allowed Kamras’ LEAP coaches to monitor LEAP leaders’ work.

## Learning Teams

Henderson and Kamras debuted their latest teacher reform during two weeks of LEAP leader training in July 2016.

Seated around tables on the basketball court of one of Washington’s newly renovated high schools, experts from

Leading Educators taught the LEAP basics to the assistant principals, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and (at the high school level) department chairs who would run the LEAP teams in their schools. Topics included the LEAP curriculum, do's and don'ts of teaching adults, feedback strategies, dealing with teacher resistance and other features of their new roles.

The LEAP leaders—516 of them working with 3,147 teachers in the program's first year—were the keys to shifting professional development from “downtown” to schools, and from large-scale lectures to continuing conversations among colleagues. They would have their own cadre of central office coaches, also trained by Leading Educators.<sup>59</sup>

Principals' days were too busy to lead individual LEAP teams, so Kamras tapped assistant principals to be LEAP leaders. But there weren't enough assistant principals to lead the many teams. So the majority of LEAP leaders were teachers. To Kamras, that was a plus. LEAP had evolved out of work begun several years earlier by Kamras' team and Leading Educators to create teacher leadership opportunities for highly rated teachers moving up the LIFT ladder.

Launched in seven schools in 2013-14, the Teacher Leadership Innovation Program (TLI) gave highly effective teachers reduced teaching loads and training to take on new roles and responsibilities in their schools, including coaching colleagues. Funded out of the federal grants as part of the DCPS performance based teacher system, the program doubled to 14 schools in 2014-15 and doubled again the following year, as teacher performance improved in schools with teacher leaders and TLI teachers reported valuing the sense of professionalism the work afforded.

When LEAP launched at the start of the 2016-17 school year, the majority of the school district's 180 TLI teachers transitioned into LEAP leader roles, earning \$2,500 stipends on top of their salaries and IMPACT bonuses. Starting small and expanding the TLI program gradually over several years, including training for principals in how to share leadership roles with teachers, was important. “If we had tried to launch the concept citywide with LEAP, we would have gotten so much more wrong,” Chong-Hao Fu, Leading Educators' chief learning officer, told me.

Henderson and Kamras also folded IMPACT master educators into the ranks of LEAP leaders. The federal funding that supported the master educators was running out, principals' IMPACT ratings were becoming more reliable, and while many teachers had come to value observations by the independent subject matter experts, it was challenging to staff the positions. The work involved a lot of driving and paperwork, and what were often difficult conversations with struggling teachers. But the LEAP leader role, requiring content expertise and skills in observation and feedback, was well-suited to the master educators. So Henderson and Kamras eliminated the master educator component of IMPACT for 2016-17, and shifted some of the master educators to LEAP. “We could no longer afford MEs, but we also saw a new opportunity,” Henderson told me.

## **To reduce the workloads of the LEAP leaders, and to encourage consistency in the LEAP program throughout the school district, the DCPS central office created a detailed LEAP curriculum aligned with the Common Core.**

The observation and coaching components of LEAP leaders' work also made the DCPS network of instructional coaches duplicative. So Henderson and Kamras ended the program and shifted the best coaches into LEAP leadership roles. They insisted that every LEAP leader candidate—coaches, master educators, and assistant principals alike—take exams in the subjects they would teach as LEAP leaders, and they hired the top performers for the LEAP roles. Nearly a decade into reform, with many schools improving, Henderson and her team were giving individual schools larger leadership roles, while continuing to establish common standards.

To reduce the workloads of the LEAP leaders, and to encourage consistency in the LEAP program throughout the school district, the DCPS central office created a detailed LEAP curriculum aligned with the Common Core, complete with

instructional practice guides, videos, PowerPoint decks, resource lists, and teacher “action steps” for their classrooms—what amounted to the nation's first Common Core-aligned adult curriculum.

“We heard over and over that they didn't have time or the expertise to plan professional development themselves,” Katie Burke, the director of LEAP design, told me. The school district's central office also supports LEAP leaders and teams throughout the school year, using funding from Title II of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, some philanthropy, and redeployed professional development monies.

## Building Commitment

Not surprisingly, given LEAP's scale and the fact that it changed teachers' daily routines and relationships in basic ways, researchers studying LEAP found mixed results in the program's first year. There was “a huge amount of variability” in school-to-school implementation, concluded Bridget Hamre, part of a team of researchers from the University of Virginia and Stanford.

Fully 96 percent of DCPS principals and LEAP leaders found LEAP to be a valuable use of time and an improvement over prior professional development. And 73 percent of teachers in schools that implemented LEAP with high fidelity—holding LEAP seminars, conducting the classroom observations and feedback sessions, following up on teachers' performance—said LEAP improved their teaching.<sup>60</sup>

But DCPS reported that only about one-third of its schools implemented LEAP with high fidelity. Only 71 percent of teams met weekly as expected. And while the LEAP model calls for weekly teacher observations, only three-quarters of DCPS teachers reported being observed at least twice a month.<sup>61</sup>

Many LEAP leaders strayed from the curriculum and many didn't use the online feedback portal assiduously. Hamre and her colleagues concluded that LEAP was “relatively successful” in “shifting the focus of [teacher professional development] to the intensive study of content-specific teaching.”

Yet LEAP's first year revealed the potential power of the program: In schools where LEAP was implemented with high fidelity, the percentage of students scoring proficient in reading on the city's standardized PARCC test increased four times more from 2016 to 2017 than in schools where LEAP was implemented with low fidelity. The gap was even greater in math.

Widening and deepening LEAP's presence in DCPS depends on school principals buying into the initiative. “DCPS has to move principals and teachers from compliance to commitment” to get the full benefits of LEAP, says Ross Wiener of the Aspen Institute. “The design and investment from the central office is impressive, but ultimately educators in each school have to ‘own’ LEAP for it to improve practice.”

To build commitment, Kamras and his team have made modifications in the program in response to teacher feedback, as they did with IMPACT. They have also increased support for schools struggling to implement LEAP effectively. To stress the program's importance, fidelity of implementation has become part of principals' evaluations, and bonuses.

LEAP has shifted the locus of improvement in DCPS from the individual teacher to the school. By moving teacher professional development inside schools and making it part of daily life, LEAP places a bet on empowering schools to be learning organizations for adults as well as for students.<sup>62</sup> The focus is on preparation rather than remediation.

In that sense, LEAP builds substantially on the conversations about what constitutes good teaching that IMPACT kindled among teachers and principals. By further reducing teachers' long-standing sense of professional isolation in public education, of being imprisoned in their classrooms, LEAP has signaled to teachers that they are valued professionals doing important work, and that their improvement is a district priority.<sup>63</sup>

“LEAP is a key to building teacher morale in an era of high standards,” Kamras told me. “It says, ‘We get that this is hard and we want to help you.’”

## 8. CATALYSTS

The District of Columbia Public Schools has launched a remarkable number of major initiatives over the past decade to strengthen instruction in Washington's schools—new teaching standards, a comprehensive teacher evaluation system, a new educator compensation system, a redesigned recruitment and hiring system, new curricular materials and instructional strategies, a new student testing system, a teacher career ladder, an ambitious school-based teacher professional-development system, and new information-management systems. What's more, Rhee and Henderson had to raze much of DCPS' dysfunctional central bureaucracy and build a new administrative infrastructure before it could pursue this ambitious agenda.

The tenacity with which Rhee, Henderson and their colleagues pursued their vision of a performance-based teaching profession was an important factor in the breadth of reform in the nation's capital. But there were other key contributors.

### **The shift to mayoral control of the city's schools enabled the hiring of a firebrand reformer like Rhee and produced over nine years of leadership continuity.**

The shift to mayoral control of the city's schools enabled the hiring of a firebrand reformer like Rhee and produced over nine years of leadership continuity. As contentious as Rhee and her reforms were, there surely would have been a sharp change in direction if the selection of Rhee's successor had been left to an elected school board.

Instead, incoming Mayor Vincent Gray replaced Rhee with her deputy. Henderson was smoother around the edges than Rhee, but she shared Rhee's reform agenda and was just as driven: she had spent her early years in public housing just north of the Bronx as the only child of a single mother who was a public educator by day and a postal worker by night; school

reform was personal for her. She had lived in Washington for years, and knows the city's school system well.

Henderson and her team had time to build on Rhee's early reforms, using the new teacher evaluation and performance pay systems, for example, to establish a teacher career ladder that improved teacher retention. They were able to respond to major challenges—such as their realization that even the city's best teachers needed support in teaching the Common Core— with comprehensive initiatives such as Cornerstones and LEAP. And they were able to address early mistakes without major course changes, notably modifications to the IMPACT evaluation system in response to teacher feedback.

Continuity in the chancellor's office also helped the school district to retain senior talent like Pick and Kamras and the strong teams they formed. That, in turn, led to a shared vision of reform in the DCPS central office, something that hadn't existed under the six different leadership regimes and fractious school boards of the previous decade. "You couldn't find three people talking about the mission of the school district when I worked in the central office in 2000-01," Peter Weber, who worked in DCPS for a year pre-Rhee before returning as Henderson's chief of staff, told me. "In 2010, everyone was."

The continuity in leadership continued after Henderson's departure in 2016. New Mayor Muriel Bowser was committed to building on the DCPS reforms rather than taking the school district in a new direction. She brought in Antwan Wilson from Oakland to succeed Henderson, and during his brief tenure he stayed the course on reform.

Henderson's ability to build a new teacher evaluation system outside of the DCPS collective bargaining contract was another advantage. Teacher unions have traditionally used the bargaining process to minimize both the rigor of evaluations and the consequences of low ratings for teachers. It's an arguably shortsighted stance. As DCPS has demonstrated, meaningful evaluations create a sound basis for removing poor performers and provide a solid foundation for career ladders and increased compensation—reforms that raise teaching's stature and draw talent to the profession, outcomes teacher unions would seemingly support.

In the same way, other districts could embrace DCPS' strategy for strengthening its existing teachers if they are able to

secure under their collective bargaining contracts an ability for teachers to lead professional development teams of their peers (and be paid for the leadership work), and sufficient flexibility in teachers' daily schedules for the 90-minute weekly LEAP meetings.

## Millennial Magnet

But it would have been difficult for Henderson to strengthen Washington's teaching corps if she couldn't replace teachers removed through the new evaluation system with stronger talent. Researchers at the University of Virginia and Stanford found that she was able to do that. And the new recruitment and hiring systems, career ladder, and higher, performance-based pay were clearly important contributors.

So was the fact that the District of Columbia had become an increasingly vibrant city and a magnet for well-educated millennials, helping to attract talent to DCPS' classrooms and to the district's central office, an advantage that many school districts don't have. Still, many talented teachers and administrators were drawn to DCPS because of the district's commitment to reform. Other reform-minded school districts could attract talent in the same way, regardless of where they're located.

Ample resources—both the \$200 million in federal and foundation funding and the internal savings from school closings and special education changes—were another key reform catalyst.

In 2010, as the school district's reforms ramped up, DCPS received three times as much money per student—\$705—from the nation's largest education philanthropies as the next largest school district recipient.<sup>64</sup> "It would have been really tough to do reform without the outside money," Peter Weber told me.

DCPS' growing enrollment (fueled in substantial part by increasing confidence generated by the city's school reforms) also brought in more revenue, as did the generosity of mayors Gray and Bowser, who tapped the proceeds of Washington's booming local economy to increase city funding for DCPS. At the same time, Weber told me, Henderson and her team were aggressive in earmarking as much money

as possible for reform-related expenditures. "Public sector finance people are an extraordinarily conservative lot," Weber said. "As a result, [in many school districts] you are not optimizing spending on kids." Or as Henderson told me, "There's always \$10 million here or there you're spending on dumb stuff. I told them to go find it" and spend it on reform.

But the cost of reform necessitated central office layoffs in 2015, despite the district's outside revenue and internal savings. DCPS enrollment declined slightly in 2017-18, for the first time in six years, while the cost of Washington's improving teaching force continues to rise. Weber warns that the new teacher contract Wilson signed in 2017, with a 9 percent across-the-board pay hike over three years, will "dramatically exacerbate the teacher cost problem" over the next couple of years. A key question is whether the city's recent high school scandal and the abrupt departure of Chancellor Wilson will erode confidence in the school district, driving down enrollment and intensifying the financial challenges. At some point, DCPS may have to cap the percentage of teachers as the top of its evaluation and career ladder systems.

## A Long Climb

Teacher support for reform has grown steadily since Michelle Rhee's arrival, with 81 percent of Washington's teaching force now saying they are satisfied with their jobs.<sup>65</sup> But teaching in the city's many impoverished neighborhoods continues to be very demanding work. Even though only 6 percent of highly effective DCPS teachers left the school district last year, the city's 40 lowest-performing schools had to replace 30 percent of their total teachers.

Not all of the attrition was problematic. Nine percent of those teachers were fired for ineffectiveness or were low-rated teachers who resigned. Another 9 percent moved to other DCPS schools or to new roles, often with promotions. But 12 percent were effective teachers who left the school district. And replacing nearly a third of a school's teaching team is challenging regardless of the reasons for the departures.<sup>66</sup>

As the recent revelations of substandard diplomas in the city's neighborhood high schools makes clear, the school district still has a very long way to go academically. Achievement levels among students of color, who make

up 82 percent of enrollment, lag badly. Only 15 percent of black students scored “proficient” in math last year on Washington’s new, more demanding Common Core-aligned PARCC exams, compared to 76 percent of white students.<sup>67</sup>

As many of Washington’s schools improve, DCPS leaders will have to navigate the tricky balance between centralization and school autonomy, between lock-step change and capacity-building and innovation. If giving teachers and principals free reign when they lack capacity and commitment is problematic, giving them a sense of ownership of their schools, signaling to them the importance of their contributions, is key to winning their commitment to reform.

And uncertainty hangs over the DCPS central office. Kamras, after nearly two decades as a DCPS teacher and administrator, departed in December 2017 to become superintendent of Richmond Public Schools in Virginia (where he plans to make teachers and teaching a priority). IMPACT’s deputy director and other DCPS staffers followed him there. Brian Pick recently announced he was leaving DCPS to attend the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Following Chancellor Antwan Wilson’s forced resignation in early 2018 and the attendance scandal in the district’s neighborhood high schools, other senior staff members are also looking to leave DCPS. Opponents of the district’s teacher reforms (primarily teacher unions and their allies) have argued—falsely—that the reforms are the source of the district’s recent high school problems and should be abandoned, shaking the confidence of some central office staff.

Still, the transformation of teaching and the teaching profession in the nation’s capital has demonstrated that traditional public school systems can be laboratories of innovation. Notably, the reforms that the school district’s detractors have opposed most strongly have been central to its transformation. Creating the opportunities to advance within the profession, the substantial compensation incentives, and the culture of collegiality and continuous improvement that LEAP provides would have been next to impossible without abandoning seniority-based staffing; without performance-based pay and a career ladder; and, ultimately, without knowing who is doing a good job in the classrooms and who isn’t.

Rhee, Henderson, and their colleagues have proven that it’s possible to attract talented teachers to the nation’s urban

school systems and get them to stay. Teaching can be turned into attractive work with career opportunities, professional support, and substantial pay. No school system can simply wave a wand and overcome the impact of poverty on the students it serves. But by overhauling its teaching corps and the daily lives of teachers in schools, DCPS has given its students a far better chance than they had before.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The following questions are designed to help state and local education policymakers and practitioners analyze the District of Columbia Public Schools' human capital reforms, providing insights into what it would take to introduce the reforms successfully in their own states, districts, and schools. Questions focused on learnings from D.C. are in regular type face; questions exploring the implications of the DCPS reforms for other school districts are in **bold**.

### 1. DISRUPTION

- What were the characteristics of the teaching profession that Michelle Rhee inherited?
- **Do you face different challenges than DCPS?**
- What was her theory of change?
- How did the DCPS reforms evolve? Why did they evolve the way they did?
- **How would you sequence human capital reform in your district? Why?**
- What are the key ingredients of DCPS' success?
- DCPS had some advantages in pursuing reform. **How can you leverage these or other advantages in your district?**
- What did successful human capital reform require of DCPS' central office?
- What is the right mix of central control and school autonomy at different stages of reform?
- What conditions need to exist in individual schools for school leaders to successfully assume more autonomy?
- What mistakes did DCPS leaders make? **How would you avoid them in your district?**
- Can a case be made to teacher unions for supporting DCPS' reforms? **What other constituencies are critical to reform in your district?**

### 2. TALENT

- What were the key features of DCPS' new teacher evaluation system? How did the new system differ from the district's old system?

- How did DCPS build a shared vision of quality instruction? **What is the instructional vision in your district? How is it communicated? How widely is it shared? Why?**
- What are the arguments for and against including student achievement results in teachers' ratings? **How do you approach the use of value-added data in your district?**
- What were the pluses and minuses of launching the IMPACT evaluation system without pilot testing it? **What would you do in your district?**
- How, and why, did IMPACT evolve over the years?
- Teacher satisfaction with the system has risen since IMPACT's inception. What led to the shift? **How would you encourage teacher buy-in?**
- What questions does teacher evaluation reform raise about the role of school principals and their selection, support and supervision? **What does "instructional leader" mean to you?** What were the benefits of a more meaningful teacher evaluation system?
- **How could you implement human capital reforms less controversially?**

### 3. PERFORMANCE

- Could DCPS have introduced performance-based pay without eliminating seniority-based staffing? Why or why not?
- **What would it take to introduce performance-based pay in your district?**
- How would you determine if a performance-pay system is successful?
- How important do you think it is to introduce performance-based pay for principals? What are pros and cons of the concept?

## 4. CAREER

- Why did Henderson create a teacher career ladder? **What would you want from a career ladder in your district?**
- What were the keys to making the concept work in D.C.? What enabling conditions needed to be in place?
- **How should school districts gauge the success of career ladders?**

## 5. RECRUITMENT

- How did DCPS establish a national teacher-recruitment system?
- How does the district's new TeachDC hiring system differ from traditional school district vetting systems?
- Why had DCPS teachers left for charter schools in the past? What were the keys to stemming that exodus of talent?
- How did DCPS overhaul principal recruitment?
- **What conditions would you need to redesign teacher and principal recruitment in your district?**

## 6. RETENTION

- How did DCPS' approach to teacher retention differ from traditional efforts? **How do your efforts match those of DCPS in scope and strategy?**
- What are the key ingredients of the DCPS strategy?
- The relationship between teachers and principals has often been cited as a reason for high teacher turnover. **What policies could strengthen teachers' trust of and respect for their principals?**

## 7. IMPROVEMENT

- The DCPS reforms evolved away from a singular focus on teacher accountability, toward a comprehensive strategy combining teacher quality with improvements in curriculum, instruction, and professional development. **Why? Where on this continuum would you start work to improve instruction in your school district? Why?**

## What improvement components do you already have in place that you can build on?

- An early system of personalized, on-line professional-development floundered. **Why? How would you apply the lessons learned there to your district?**
- LEAP shifted the locus of improvement in DCPS from the individual teacher to teams of teachers in schools. **Why?**
- What are the advantages of school-based professional development? **What obstacles would you face in introducing the model?**
- **What traditional teacher policies and school structures need to change to enable school-based professional development and other DCPS reforms in your district?**
- What roles should school districts' central offices and schools play in strengthening instruction? **How should those roles evolve over time?**
- **What strategies would you use to communicate the proper division of reform labor between your central office and your schools?**
- How did DCPS central office communication with teachers evolve between 2010 and 2017? **What are the obstacles preventing this kind of communication in your district? What are the solutions?**

## 8. CATALYSTS

- What were the key drivers of the DCPS teacher and teaching reforms?
- **Were they unique to DCPS, or could they be replicated in your district?**
- **Could you improve teachers and teaching substantially without the DCPS drivers?**
- **What reform catalysts do you have in your district that DCPS lacks?**
- **How can districts pursue comprehensive reform without large infusions of outside funding of the sort that DCPS enjoyed?**
- If you were Michelle Rhee or Kaya Henderson, would you feel good about what you've accomplished in D.C.? **Why or why not?**

# TIMELINE

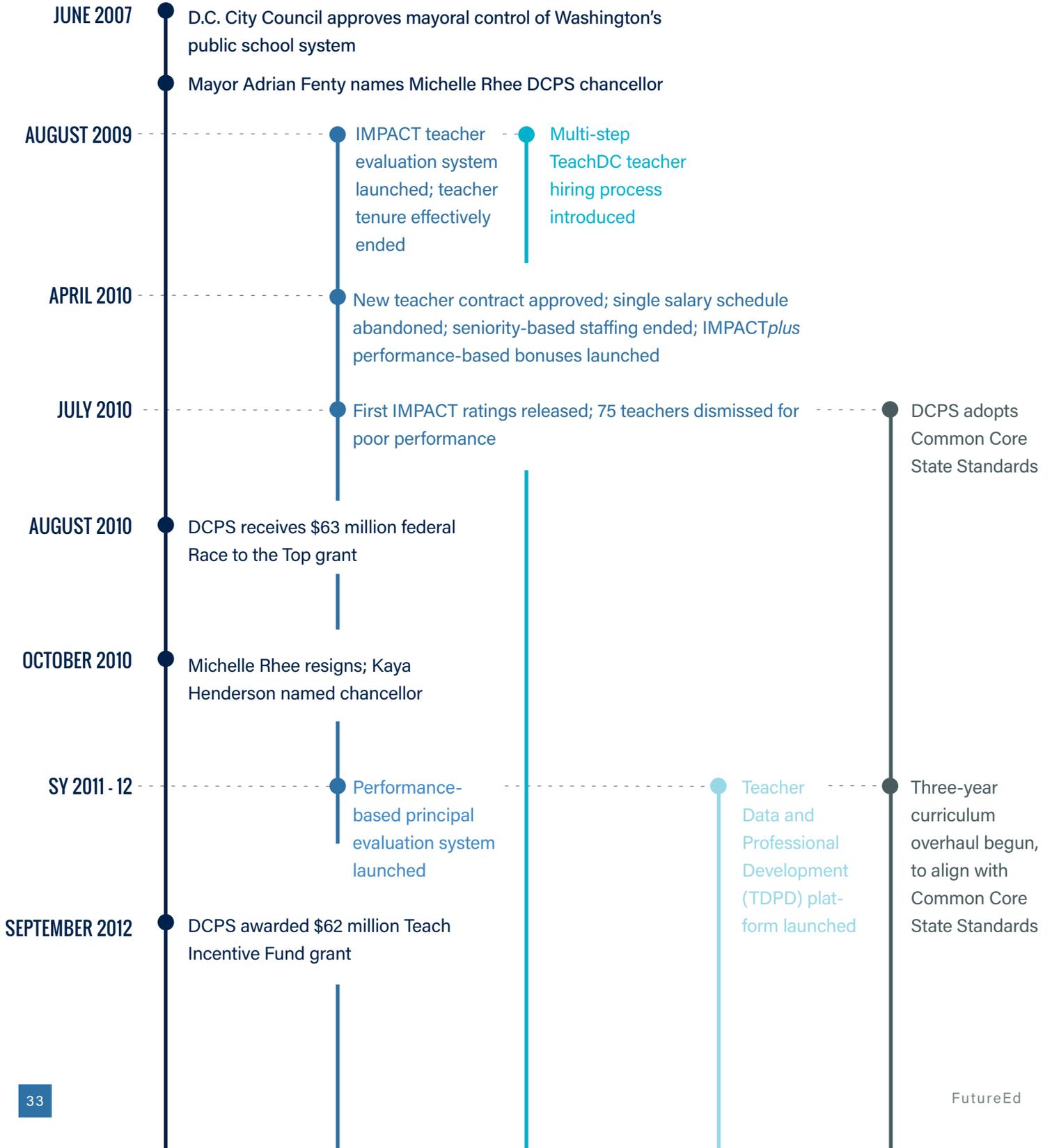
## DCPS MAJOR EVENTS

## EVALUATION & COMPENSATION

## RECRUITMENT & HIRING

## LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT

## CURRICULUM



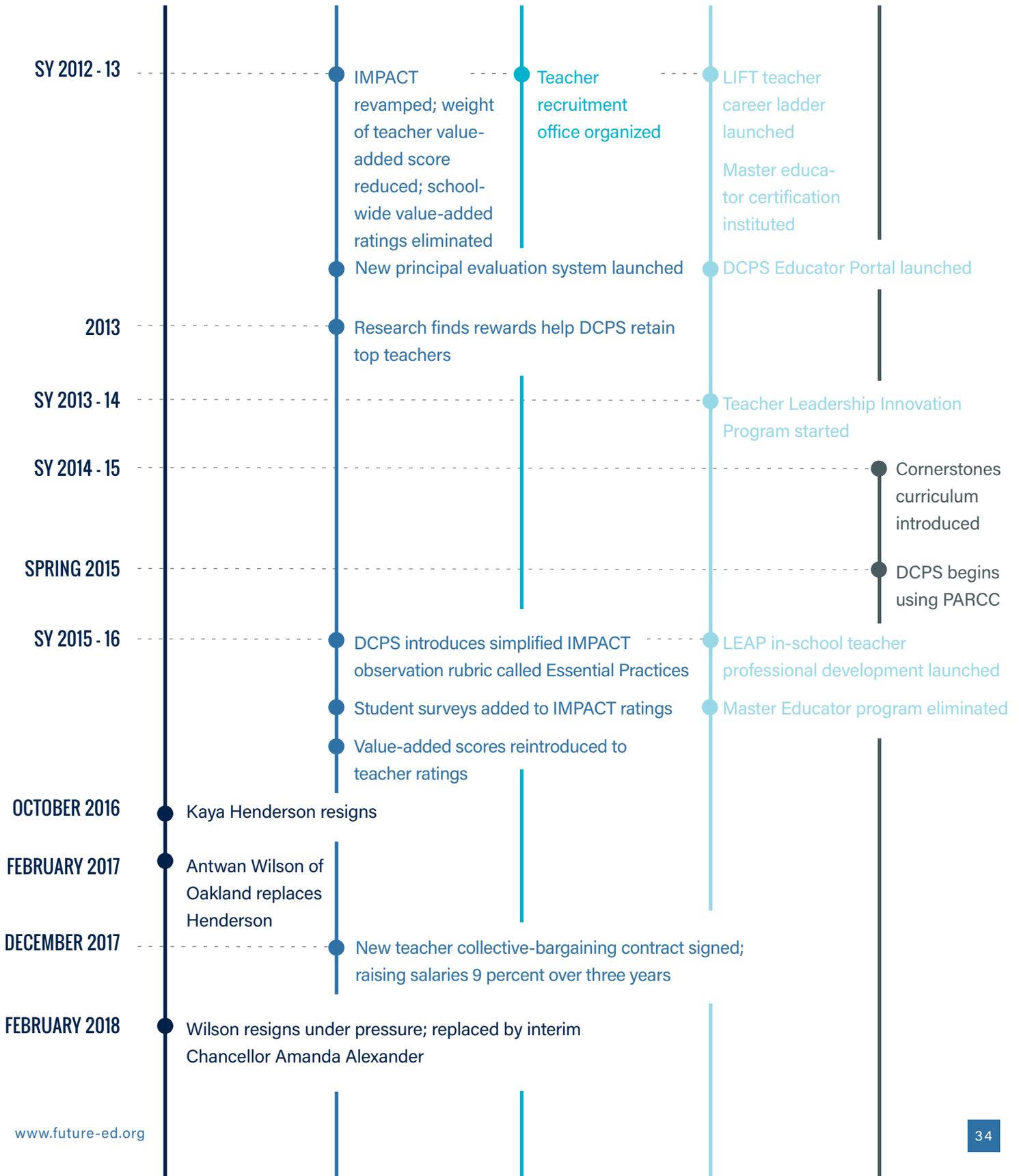
**DCPS MAJOR EVENTS**

**EVALUATION & COMPENSATION**

**RECRUITMENT & HIRING**

**LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT**

**CURRICULUM**



## RESOURCES

### IMPACT

<https://dcps.dc.gov/publication/2017-2018-impact-guidebooks>

### IMPACT

<https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/1%20%20%20Teachers%20Grades%204%20with%20Individual%20Value->

### IMPACT

<https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/2%20%20%20Teachers%20Grades%203%20with%20Student%20Survey%20Data.pdf>

### LIFT

<https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/2017-18%20LIFT%20guidebook%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

### Cornerstones

<https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/CS%20Brochure.pdf>

### LEAP

[https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/page\\_content/attachments/LEAP%20Handbook%202016-2017.pdf](https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/page_content/attachments/LEAP%20Handbook%202016-2017.pdf)

## ENDNOTES

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- 2 Melinda Adnot, Thomas Dee, Veronica Katz, and James Wyckoff, "Teacher Turnover, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement in DCPS," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (2017), <http://cepa.stanford.edu/wp16-03>
- 3 Author correspondence with Michelle Lerner, District of Columbia Public Schools, May 1, 2018
- 4 [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/districtprofile/overview/XW?cti=PgTab\\_OT&chort=1&sub=MAT&sj=XW&fs=Grade&st=AP&year=2017R3&sg=Gender%3A+Male+vs.+Female&sv=Difference&ts=Single+Year&tss=2015R3-2017R3&sfj=NL](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/districtprofile/overview/XW?cti=PgTab_OT&chort=1&sub=MAT&sj=XW&fs=Grade&st=AP&year=2017R3&sg=Gender%3A+Male+vs.+Female&sv=Difference&ts=Single+Year&tss=2015R3-2017R3&sfj=NL)
- 5 <https://dcps.dc.gov/release/dc-public-schools-release-2017-parcc-scores-showing-significant-gains-across-all-grade>
- 6 <https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/13014786/no-right-answer>; author interview with Jason Kamras
- 7 Author interview with Jason Kamras
- 8 It required loading into a computer the previous year's test scores of a teacher's students, together with the scores of every other student in the city with the same achievement and demographic backgrounds—and then predicting, based on the previous year's results, how the teacher's students would perform on the current year's tests. If the teacher's students outperformed expectations, the teacher would be rated above average; if the students underperformed their peers, the teacher would get a low rating.
- 9 Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff, "Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood," American Economic Review 104, no. 9 (September 2014): 2633-2679.
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- 11 Researchers Peter Schochet and Hanley Chiang of Mathematica have found that when teachers' ratings are based on three years' worth of student scores, value-added ratings should be expected to misidentify a quarter of teachers judged "highly effective" and an equal number judged "ineffective." Closer to a third would be misclassified if rated on the basis of a single year's scores. Peter Z. Schochet and Hanley S. Chiang, "Error Rates in Measuring Teacher and School Performance Based on Student Test Score Gains," U.S. Department of Education, 2010.
- 12 Research also revealed that comprehensive teacher-evaluation models like that of DCPS were stronger than the sum of their parts. "Multiple measures produce more consistent ratings than students achievement measures alone," the \$500 million Gates study found. "Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching: Culminating Findings from the MET Project's Three-Year Study," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, (January 2013): 5, <https://www.edweek.org/media/17teach-met1.pdf>
- 13 DCPS Responses for Thomas Toch FutureEd Inquiries, District of Columbia Public Schools, March 2018: 3.
- 14 Heather M. Buzik and Nathan D. Jones, "Using Test Scores from Students with Disabilities in Teacher Evaluation," Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice 34, no. 3 (2015): 34. This is also a challenge under the growing number of flexible teaching arrangements in public education, where team-teaching, learning that blends fact-to-face instruction with technology, and other innovations are expanding.
- 15 In a comprehensive 2014 study of state practices for evaluating teachers in non-tested subjects and grades, five testing experts at the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment concluded that "evaluation procedures for this population [of teachers] has greatly lagged behind that of other teachers," and that it is "extremely difficult" to come up with measures of this sort that are "rigorous and comparable across schools within districts." Erika Hall, Douglas Gagnon, Jeri Thompson, M. Cristina Schneider, and Scott Marion, "State Practices Related to the Use of Student Achievement Measures in the Evaluation of Teachers in Non-Tested Subjects and Grades," National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, 2014: 3, [http://www.nciea.org/sites/default/files/publications/Gates\\_NTGS\\_Hall\\_082614.pdf](http://www.nciea.org/sites/default/files/publications/Gates_NTGS_Hall_082614.pdf)
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- 17 [https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2011-03-28-1Aschooltesting28\\_CV\\_N.htm](https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2011-03-28-1Aschooltesting28_CV_N.htm); <https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2012-06-22/DC-schools-test-cheating/55764600/1>
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- 19 At Noyes Elementary School, proficiency rates dropped from 84 percent in reading and 63 percent in math in 2009 to 32 percent in reading and 33 percent in math two years later. At Aiton Elementary, another award-winning school, reading and math proficiency peaked at 58 percent in 2008 and then plummeted to 21 percent in reading and 17 percent in math under stricter testing protocols in 2012.
- 20 Ross Wiener, director of the Aspen Institute's education policy program, proposed this idea.
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- 22 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/08/AR2011020804813.html>; author interview with Kaya Henderson
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/03/AR2008070303441.html>
- 23 <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/02/michelle-rhee-probably-shouldnt-have-fired-school-principal-on-national-tv/>
- 24 <http://www.press.org/news-multimedia/news/dc-schools-chief-says-much-more-work-ahead>
- 25 <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/electorate-profiles-2016.html> (This leads you to a table with DC demographic breakdowns of voters.)
- 26 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/14/AR2010091407328.html>
- 27 <http://www.newsweek.com/why-michelle-rhee-isnt-done-school-reform-68975>
- 28 IMPACT Fast Facts, District of Columbia Public Schools, February 2018
- 29 DCPS pilot tested the student surveys in 25 percent of the district's schools in 2015-16, expanding the program district-wide the following year. Some school systems also use other measures, including "contributions to school culture," peer surveys, and "professionalism."
- 30 Author interview with Michelle Hudacsko, April 2016
- 31 Correspondence with Alden Wells, District of Columbia Public Schools, March 2016
- 32 That's higher than in other parts of the country, and critics have argued that large numbers of satisfactory ratings under new evaluation systems nationally is evidence that the reforms have been ineffective. That point of view ignores an important feature of the new evaluation systems, which, like D.C.'s, have several categories above "ineffective," resulting in substantial differentiation among "effective" teachers. Traditional ratings were binary: teachers were either effective or ineffective. And the mere fact that teachers and administrators are having conversations about what constitutes good teaching, based on published rubrics, is itself a substantial step forward.
- 33 Salary freezes would also apply to "developing" teachers when that category was introduced in 2012-13.
- 34 LIFT: Leadership Initiative for Teachers, District of Columbia Public Schools, 2017-18: 14.
- 35 In a 1955 report to President Eisenhower, the organizers of a White House education conference urged that, "Every effort...be made to devise ways to reward teachers according to their ability without opening the school door to unfair personnel practices." But no school district in the nation had a fully performance-based staffing system in place when Rhee arrived in Washington. Experiment after experiment had failed to strengthen teacher evaluation enough to defend the shift. Performance-based employment systems that couldn't reliably compare teachers' performance couldn't last and didn't. The non-profit National Institute for Excellence in Teaching has created a comprehensive educator-effectiveness model that provides powerful opportunities for career advancement, professional growth, instructionally focused accountability and competitive compensation for educators. See, <http://www.niet.org/tap-system/elements-of-success/>
- 36 <http://www.nber.org/papers/w19529>
- 37 <https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/Consolidation%20Plan.pdf>
- 38 Author interview with DCPS official Michelle Lerner
- 39 Author analysis of data from IMPACT Fast Facts, District of Columbia Public Schools, February 2018.
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- 44 <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22054>
- 45 [https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/page\\_content/attachments/DCPSWeThePeople.pdf](https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/page_content/attachments/DCPSWeThePeople.pdf): 7 DCPS Responses for Thomas Toch FutureEd Inquiries, District of Columbia Public Schools, March 2018: 3.

- 46 [https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/TeacherEval\\_170105\\_v2.pdf](https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/TeacherEval_170105_v2.pdf): 9
- 47 In some instances, the price for stronger instructors was the loss of educators with strong community ties.
- 48 <https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/FY17%20CSO%20Principals.pdf>
- 49 <https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/1.%20General%20Education%20Teachers%20with%20Individual%20Value-Added%20Student%20Achievement%20Data.pdf>
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- 51 IMPACT Fast Facts, District of Columbia Public Schools, February 2018
- 52 Author interview with Brian Pick
- 53 They also added art, music and physical education in every school, a rarity in urban school systems.
- 54 <https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/2015DCPARCCPresentation.pdf>
- 55 <https://dcps.dc.gov/page/cornerstones>
- 56 Now DCPS is sharing the lessons with other school districts in a Cornerstones Network serving nearly 1 million students. DCPS also brought in BetterLesson and LearnZillion, new online networking platforms that provide teachers with thousands of lessons and other teaching materials and an opportunity to connect with teachers globally.
- 57 [https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/page\\_content/attachments/LEAP%20Handbook%202016-2017.pdf](https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/page_content/attachments/LEAP%20Handbook%202016-2017.pdf)
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- 59 In addition, Leading Educators trained the entire faculty in 40 high-need DCPS schools.
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- 61 Is LEAP Working? District of Columbia Public Schools, 2018: 1.
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- 67 [https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/2017%20PARCC%20Results%20Deck\\_Press.pdf](https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/2017%20PARCC%20Results%20Deck_Press.pdf): 12





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TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SCHOOL  
TEACHING IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL**