

# Testimony of Timothy Daly, The New Teacher Project

Texas State Senate Committee on Education

July 20, 2010

Good morning. Thank you Senator Shapiro and Senator Patrick for inviting me to join you today.

My name is Timothy Daly. I serve as president of The New Teacher Project, a national nonprofit organization founded by teachers in 1997. The New Teacher Project is dedicated to ending the injustice of educational inequality by providing excellent teachers to the students who need them most and by advancing policies and practices that ensure effective teaching in every classroom. Over the last decade, we have recruited or trained approximately 37,000 teachers and released a series of influential studies examining challenges that impair the quality of the teacher workforce in many urban schools. We work in more than 40 cities nationwide.

Here in Texas, we are proud to oversee the Texas Teaching Fellows, a highly selective program that recruits and trains career changers to become excellent teachers in the Austin and Dallas metro areas. Since 2005, Texas Teaching Fellows has attracted over 13,000 applications and provided local school districts with more than 1,100 Fellows. My organization is also working closely with Houston Independent School District to implement an array of foundational reforms that will help schools find, develop and keep great teachers.

Programs like Texas Teaching Fellows have earned The New Teacher Project a reputation for recruiting new teachers effectively, and attracting talent is the topic I'll address today. But while many consider recruitment to be a discrete function that ends when a new teacher is hired

and assigned to a school, we view it as much more than that. We see recruitment as the first step in a sequence of interconnected activities that share a single goal: ensuring that every student sits in a classroom that has an effective teacher.

For decades, school systems across the country have grounded their recruitment functions narrowly around the goal of filling vacancies. The priority has not necessarily been hiring great teachers, but plugging the holes. That's because they have tended to operate in a framework that assumes one teacher is essentially the same as any other. If you accept that false paradigm, it doesn't matter which teacher you put into which classroom, so long as they have the appropriate paper credentials. In a report we published last year, we called this tendency of districts to treat teachers like interchangeable parts "the widget effect."

But as we all know, teachers are not widgets. Teachers vary widely, and as one landmark study noted, "more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor."<sup>1</sup>

This means that we have to approach recruitment and hiring differently. "Filling vacancies" is insufficient. If we are seeking dramatically improved student achievement, we need not just warm bodies but demonstrably effective teachers – teachers whose students are learning and growing.

That's the goal we set for programs like Texas Teaching Fellows. We start by setting high standards and coordinating with our district partners to assess their specific hiring needs. We

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, Horn and Sanders, 1997

then use a toolbox of strategies to attract and cultivate a diverse pool of talented applicants from which we can be selective. And throughout the application process, we drive home that teaching isn't just another job but an opportunity to make a difference. We challenge our applicants to take action, not to be another warm body.

Our experience suggests that this approach works. On average, our programs attract 9 applications for every vacancy; last year, our Texas Teaching Fellows program accepted 13 percent of all candidates. In comparison, the average rate of admission to an alternative certification program in Texas is approximately 80 percent. When we make admissions decisions, we are measuring our applicants against a standard of excellence based on the traits we see in our best teachers, not a set of minimum screening criteria like an acceptable GPA.

Knowing how much teachers matter also drives our approach to training. The training and certification component of our Texas Teaching Fellows program is modeled on a TNTP program in Louisiana that has repeatedly been proven to produce highly effective teachers. For example, in 2009, a state-sponsored study found that new teachers trained by the program outperformed even experienced Louisiana teachers in raising student achievement in math and reading. In math, the positive impact of having a TNTP-trained teacher is roughly *double* the negative impact that being eligible for free lunch has on a student.

But recruiting teachers who are generally better than the average teacher is still not good enough. Here in Texas, we are sharpening our focus on teacher effectiveness further. We recognize that no matter how carefully we select or train our teachers, we cannot know with

complete certainty which ones will do well and which will not until we see how they perform in the classroom. Moreover, in any batch, we're likely to have a few who do not measure up.

For this reason, the effort to bring new talent into our schools can't stop at the classroom door.

Over the next few years, we plan to integrate Assessment of Classroom Effectiveness (ACE) screens into our programs across the country. The ACE screens will ensure that *only* teachers who demonstrate that they are at least as effective as the average new teacher will be recommended for certification and allowed to remain in the classroom. Teachers will be assessed based on three weighted criteria: student academic outcomes (50%); principal evaluation (30%); and program completion (20%). Those who do not clear the bar will be outplaced from the program or denied a recommendation for state certification.

This will not be easy, but it is absolutely essential. It will require many steps, include the creation of better systems for evaluating teachers. It's our responsibility to ensure that their teachers are not just caring, or dedicated, or well-qualified, but *effective*. And when our schools are thriving workplaces that recognize and reward excellent teaching, provide meaningful feedback and useful support, and respond to poor performance, they will become magnets for talent. In the end, that's what will solve our recruitment challenges more than any other strategy.

Thank you very much. I would be happy to answer any questions.