
A Shared Responsibility:

**Staffing All High-Poverty, Low-Performing Schools with
Effective Teachers and Administrators**



A Framework for Action

Learning First Alliance
May 2005



1001 Connecticut Ave, N.W.
Suite 335
Washington, DC 20036
202 296-5220
www.learningfirst.org

The Learning First Alliance is composed of the following organizations:

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Council of Chief State School Officers
Education Commission of the States
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Education Association
National PTA
National School Boards Association

A Shared Responsibility:

Staffing All High-Poverty, Low-Performing Schools with Effective Teachers and Administrators



A Framework for Action

I. INTRODUCTION

The persistent academic achievement gaps between children living in poverty and those living in affluence endanger our nation's ideals and future prosperity. While we recognize that factors outside of schools—including the effects of poverty on families and children—contribute to these gaps, we help perpetuate them within our schools by failing to do what we know makes an enormous difference: guaranteeing all students access to highly experienced and capable educators. In fact, our most vulnerable students—those in high-poverty, low-performing schools—are far less likely than their wealthier peers to attend schools with the most qualified staff. What's more, because minority children disproportionately attend such schools, it is African American and Latino students who bear the brunt of staffing inequities.

For too long, our nation has done far too little to confront this staffing challenge. Even those who have acknowledged the problem have often resigned themselves to the defeatist belief that we could do little about it. And those who have proposed solutions have often limited themselves to patchwork remedies that

ignore the complex underlying factors that engender and perpetuate the problem.

Fully recognizing that they, too, have not done nearly enough to address the problem in any systematic way, the twelve organizations that make up the Learning First Alliance have engaged in an in-depth examination of the problem and intensive, collaborative dialogue about how to solve it. The result is this document, a framework for action. Rather than promoting a “silver bullet” approach or a simplistic quick fix, the framework outlines a systemic set of actions for addressing the wide range of causes that underlie the problem.

In doing so, the framework recognizes that no one organization or group, not even state and federal legislators, can solve this problem on its own. A wide range of stakeholders must collaborate to address the myriad causes of the staffing gap in disadvantaged schools. The member organizations of the Learning First Alliance are therefore uniquely suited to launch a vigorous national effort to tackle this problem. We represent constituencies ranging from parents to school board members, from teachers to superintendents, from schools of

education to state policy makers. Working together, we know we can make a difference.

Yet we also understand that we can make little headway unless we accept a fundamental premise: We cannot solve the staffing problem simply by producing a greater number of teachers or by moving existing ones around. Educators are not troops recruited and deployed by some centralized authority, but rather professionals who respond to opportunities for employment within national, state and local labor markets. Our goal must be to abolish so-called “hard-to-staff schools” by making today’s high-poverty, low-performing schools the kinds of places where our best educators will *want* to work.

The time is ripe for a collective commitment to action. Certainly, a wide range of educational, economic, and family factors influences student achievement, and we must continue to fight to improve economic and social conditions in families and communities if we hope to erase the achievement gap entirely. But the research is far too clear to ignore at this point: Teachers and administrators matter. They

have a large impact on student achievement and can in fact go a great distance towards closing achievement gaps.¹

Finally, we recognize that the staffing challenge can be a difficult and sensitive issue to discuss. Nothing in this document is meant to denigrate the commitment and hard work of the many excellent teachers and administrators who already work in this nation’s most challenging schools.

To the contrary, we must find new courage to talk about these issues while remaining sensitive to how educators and parents can perceive such talk. And we must form new alliances based on mutual respect and trust to find fair and effective solutions to the complex causes of the problem.

Rather than assign blame for the staffing gap, we must accept shared responsibility for promoting solutions. In doing so, we have the opportunity to stake out a common ground where we can work together towards shared goals. This Framework for Action seeks to create such common ground.

**Box 1:
Learning First Alliance Member Organization Initiatives**

Several LFA member organizations are already undertaking promising initiatives to address the staffing gap:

The Education Commission of the States (ECS)

The Education Commission of the States has joined the Educational Testing Service and Learning Point Associates in the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools, an effort to mobilize policymakers, education leaders, and other key education stakeholders to expand our neediest students’ access to the best teachers. The Partnership plans to produce and disseminate new research, document best practices, and assist state and local policymakers in efforts to improve teaching in at-risk schools.

For more information on the National Partnership, please visit www.ecs.org/NPTARS.

The National Education Association (NEA)

The NEA and the NEA Foundation have awarded five partnerships of NEA affiliates and public school districts \$60,000 each in support of innovative programs to attract and retain fully-credentialed, accomplished teachers for hard-to-staff public schools. The grant recipients are:

- The Arizona Education Association Teaching and Learning Foundation
- Florida A&M University
- The Iowa State Education Association
- The Maryland State Teachers Association
- The University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center

Through these partnerships, teacher unions will work hand-in-hand with local school districts to establish policies, conditions, and incentives that promise to close the staffing gap and improve the achievement of our neediest students.

For more information on the grants, contact Susan Carmon, Senior Program Coordinator, NEA Teacher Quality Department at scarmon@nea.org.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

With funding from the Joyce Foundation, CCSSO has created a State Teacher Quality Network designed to help state education agencies analyze, plan, and implement strategies to strengthen teacher quality, particularly in high-poverty, low-performing schools. CCSSO convenes annual network meetings so that the 37 participating states can develop common solutions to teacher quality implementation challenges and highlight innovative and successful programs.

As part of this project, CCSSO publishes and disseminates a free, bi-weekly electronic newsletter that provides information to all states about recent reports, studies, legislative action, and news articles related to teacher quality and improvement efforts. In addition, the Council is producing a series of policy papers to analyze the relative merits of various strategies to improve teacher quality, and to identify barriers that hinder state and district efforts to attract and retain effective teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

For more information about CCSSO's State Teacher Quality Network, contact Cynthia Prince, Director of Teacher Professional Development, at (202) 312-6868 or cindyp@ccsso.org.

II. THE PROBLEM

While many school systems have made important strides in improving educational outcomes for low-income and minority children, wide achievement gaps persist. Among fourth graders in 2003, for example, 61% of African Americans and 57% of Latinos performed below the basic level in reading, compared with 26% of white students. In mathematics, too,

African American and Latino students are more than twice as likely as white students to perform below the basic level.²

Unfortunately, the gap does not disappear as students get older. By the end of high school, the average African American or Latino 17-year-old performs at about the same level in reading and math as the average white 13-

year-old.³ Similar gaps exist between poor and more affluent schoolchildren.

As a result, too many young people are graduating from high school without the skills necessary to be successful in college or to compete for middle class jobs in today's workforce.⁴

Low achievement among low-income and minority students places severe limits on lifetime opportunities for millions of young Americans and presents substantial challenges to our democratic institutions and future economic prosperity.⁵

Yet the nation's low-income and minority students—those who rely the *most* on schools for their learning—are consistently *least* likely to have fully qualified teachers and administrators.

By every measure that research has shown to matter for student learning, disadvantaged students receive fewer than their fair share of our best-equipped teachers:

Certification. Teachers in high-poverty districts are less likely to have full state certification. According to the U.S. Department of Education, about one in twelve teachers in high-poverty districts is working under a waiver of certification requirements, compared with one out of every twenty teachers in other districts.⁶ In some states the numbers are far worse. For example, one study found that teachers in California's high-minority schools are still five times as likely as those who teach in low-minority schools to lack full certification.⁷

Subject Matter Knowledge. At the secondary level, classes in high-poverty and high-minority schools are much more likely to be taught by a

teacher who has not completed a college major or minor in the subject taught. One study found that about one third (34%) of math, English, social studies, and science classes in high-poverty secondary schools were taught "out of field" in 1999-2000, compared with about one in every five classes (19%) in low-poverty schools.⁸

The same study revealed that rates of out-of-field teaching are particularly high within middle schools and in shortage areas such as mathematics. For example, 70% of math classes in high-poverty middle schools are taught by teachers who have not completed a college major or minor in mathematics or a related field, such as math education or statistics.⁹

Effectiveness at Raising Test Scores. Newer methodologies for analyzing standardized test performance data allow researchers to conduct studies to measure the impact of individual classroom teachers on the amount that students in their classrooms learn over the course of a year. Several such studies have shown that low-achieving, low-income, and minority students are more likely to be assigned to teachers who are, on average, less effective at substantially raising students' test scores.¹⁰

Experience. Recent teacher effectiveness research also has confirmed what common sense has long held: Novice teachers are, on average, far less capable of raising student achievement on standardized tests than their more experienced colleagues are.¹¹ Yet one federal study found that teachers in the nation's high-poverty and high-minority schools are

about twice as likely to have only three years of experience or less.¹²

While there has been less research on administrators in high-poverty, low-performing schools, the available evidence points to similar inequities in student access to the most qualified principals. For example, an in-depth study of principal shortages in ten metropolitan regions found that high-poverty, low-performing schools struggle to fill vacancies with experienced and qualified candidates, while more affluent schools have a more qualified pool to choose from.¹³ Another study found that high-poverty, low-performing schools in New York State are more likely to have inexperienced principals with weaker academic backgrounds.¹⁴

Why do such patterns persist? The answer lies in a troubling chain of events that creates high rates of staff turnover in high-poverty, low-performing schools, and a constant, uphill struggle to staff them adequately.

Here is how the cycle operates:

First, high-poverty, low-performing schools have more difficulty attracting and hiring sufficient numbers of experienced applicants. For example, high-poverty schools in inner cities regularly receive only a fraction of the applications that schools in affluent systems receive.¹⁵

Second, disadvantaged schools lose staff at a much higher rate than do other schools. A recent study revealed that high-poverty urban schools lose 22% of their teachers annually,

compared with only 12.8% in low-poverty schools.¹⁶ To understand the consequences of that attrition in real terms, consider that a typical high-poverty urban elementary school employing, say, 20 teachers would have to hire about 22 new teachers every five years.

Finally, the cycle is complete when, faced with constant vacancies that result from high attrition rates, disadvantaged schools are forced to fill these vacancies over and over again with less experienced candidates, many of whom will leave in a few years themselves. And many of the teachers who depart seek jobs in schools or districts that have fewer low-income students, fewer minority students, and fewer underachieving students.¹⁷

The complex nature of this problem ensures that simplistic solutions simply will not work. By itself, increasing the supply of qualified staff will not solve the problem, since high-poverty, low-performing schools cannot compete for or retain this staff. Conversely, we cannot work simply to stem attrition rates in those schools, because they will still face a disadvantage in competing for qualified candidates.

We must create a better flow of highly qualified candidates *into* low-poverty schools at the same time that we stem the flow of good staff *out of* those schools. And to accomplish that, we must address all of the various factors that contribute to and reinforce the vicious staffing cycle in high-poverty schools.

**Box 2:
Miami-Dade County Public Schools**

The Miami-Dade County public school district is pursuing a new program to attract and retain effective teachers for its 39 lowest-performing schools, which Superintendent Rudy Crew has designated the School Improvement Zone. Designed in collaboration with the teachers union, the program pays teachers who agree to teach in those schools 20 percent more than they would receive in other schools. Participating teachers work an extra hour every day and five extra days each school year. In addition, they spend 56 hours per year in after-school professional development activities intended to support the Zone's literacy and academic enrichment focus.

The extra incentives for extra work form part of a larger reform strategy that uses the longer school day and extended school year to accommodate intensive reading instruction, individual tutoring for struggling students, and various student enrichment activities. In addition, the district has pledged additional support staff for teachers and students in the School Improvement Zone, including more literacy and mathematics specialists, social workers, community involvement specialists, and college assistance advisors.

Though the program is too new to have had any measurable effect on student achievement, early signs of its impact on teacher recruitment are encouraging: After a December job fair, 113 teachers from within the District, in addition to many new teachers, sought jobs in the troubled schools.

For more information, please contact Joseph Garcia, Chief Communications Officer, at 305-995-4638.

III. UNDERLYING CAUSES OF THE PROBLEM

After careful study and collaboration by all of our members, the Learning First Alliance has identified eight areas of action that we must address if we are to close the staffing gap that plagues American education: leadership, working conditions, professional support, incentives, preparation, hiring and placement, policy coherence, and funding. Our conclusions are based on a thorough review of recent research into the causes of the staffing gap, as well as on the direct experiences of our members.

1. Need for Stronger Leadership

High-poverty, low-performing schools often lack the kinds of strong, supportive leadership that help attract and retain excellent teachers and

staff in more affluent schools. This inequity is especially alarming, because leadership—which encompasses both *principal leadership* and *teacher leadership*—is essential to establishing the conditions for school success.

The difficulty of attracting and retaining effective principals to high need schools is troubling, given principals' vital importance to school effectiveness: The accumulated research suggests that an effective leader can raise a school's overall student achievement by as much as 10 points out of 100 when other factors are equal.¹⁸

Ensuring good leaders for disadvantaged schools is an essential step toward closing the teacher staffing gap. One mark of an effective

school principal is the ability to work with school staff to assemble a strong faculty. Conversely, ineffective leaders can drive up teacher attrition rates. Recent work by Richard Ingersoll has found that classroom teachers who choose to leave jobs in high-poverty urban schools due to job dissatisfaction (as opposed to retirement, family circumstances, or personal reasons) are more likely to cite poor leadership than any other workplace-related reason for doing so.¹⁹

Not least among a good principal's attributes is his or her ability to share leadership responsibilities with school staff. A recent study of high-poverty schools in Kentucky found that high-performing schools were much more likely than lower-performing schools to exhibit "distributed leadership," in which teachers and administrators share responsibility and decision-making powers.²⁰ In addition, Ingersoll found that lack of input into decision-making is another main reason teachers give for leaving jobs in high-poverty schools.²¹ Clearly, opportunities for leadership must extend beyond administrative staff.

2. Poor working conditions

Basic working conditions in high-poverty, low-performing schools are often far worse than any professional should be asked to tolerate. It is therefore hardly surprising that such conditions are a major cause of high teacher turnover in many schools. Accounts of conditions in high-poverty, low-performing schools commonly cite decaying or inadequate facilities in which staff must work. Even excellent teachers will struggle when faced with leaky roofs, broken windows, and missing lab equipment, conditions that a recent poll of teachers in California identified in many of the state's high-poverty schools.²²

Yet difficult conditions confronted by staff go well beyond crumbling buildings. Teachers who leave jobs in high-poverty urban schools often cite lack of resources, intrusions on instructional time, inadequate time to prepare, and student discipline problems as reasons for quitting. Significant numbers of teachers also cite smaller class sizes and greater parent involvement as conditions that would stem the flow of teachers out of high-poverty, low-performing schools.²³

Box 3:

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey

Concerned about high teacher attrition rates in many schools, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley has led a groundbreaking statewide initiative to survey the state's teachers on working conditions in every public school. Administered for the second time in spring 2004, the survey includes questions in five critical areas: time (including reasonable student loads and protection from classroom interruptions); facilities and resources; school leadership; teacher empowerment (including participation in school-wide decision-making); and professional development.

The results are being used to provide not only a bird's-eye view of working conditions statewide, but also tailored reports to help individual schools and districts improve conditions for their own teachers, and thus better target their resources to address teacher attrition. Each participating school principal receives an eight-page report that compares his or her school's survey results to those of the district and state as a whole. District reports include a summary of all teachers' responses in the district and an electronic copy of each school's report. (School, district, and state reports are available on-line at <http://www.learnnc.org/gov/TWC.nsf>.)

As the reports' findings demonstrate, schools and districts have a powerful incentive to improve their working conditions: Schools whose teachers reported better conditions were considerably more likely to have met Adequate Yearly Progress goals and performed well in North Carolina's accountability system.

To help schools and districts make good use of the survey's findings, the North Carolina Business Committee for Education, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, and Bellsouth North Carolina have teamed up to offer a toolkit for understanding—and acting on—the data. (To view the toolkit, please visit www.teacherworkingconditions.org.)

Other states are already following in North Carolina's footsteps: South Carolina has completed a similar initiative, and pilot projects are either starting up or already underway in Georgia, Virginia, and Ohio. More states surely will be watching this effort to bring critical issues into the spotlight. As Governor Easley writes, "Good teacher working conditions mean good student learning conditions."

For more information about working conditions surveys in North Carolina and other states, please contact Eric Hirsch, Vice President of Policy and Partnerships, Southeast Center for Teaching Quality at ehirsch@teachingquality.org or 919-951-0220.

3. Insufficient professional support

New teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools frequently receive the toughest assignments and the least assistance. For example, a recent study of novice teachers found that those in high-poverty settings are far less likely than their peers in low-poverty schools to experience formal mentoring from an experienced colleague. Those fortunate enough to receive mentoring are much less likely to be assigned a mentor who is located in the same school and who teaches in the same grade level or subject area.²⁴

This "support gap" is especially worrying, given what other research has revealed about the impact of intensive mentoring and induc-

tion programs: Novice teachers who participate in comprehensive induction programs—which include mentoring by a teacher in the same subject, opportunities to collaborate with other teachers, supportive communication with administrators, seminars for new teachers, and more manageable assignments—experience only *half the attrition rate* of those who receive no mentoring or only a bare-bones induction program.²⁵

Schools in disadvantaged communities also have fewer support staff who can help teachers meet the educational and social needs of students. The ratio of students to guidance counselors is significantly higher in schools with large minority enrollments, for example.

Furthermore, counselors in those schools spend a greater percentage of their work days handling attendance and discipline problems, leaving even less time for the academic support and career counseling students in many advantaged communities take for granted.²⁶

Beginning teachers who switch jobs after a few years tend to seek out schools that offer reasonable assignments and basic assistance, sufficient opportunities to learn and grow, and supportive administrators. In other words, like any other devoted professionals, they seek out workplaces that will help them do their jobs well and get better over time, rather than places that seem to stack the cards against them. And too often, they must migrate to more affluent, higher-performing schools to find such conditions.²⁷

4. Weak incentives to teach in challenging schools

Because salaries and benefits in high-poverty districts are seldom better than those offered

by wealthier ones, teachers see little to offset the disincentives to working in disadvantaged schools. Indeed, Ingersoll found that low salary is one of the main reasons teachers who leave jobs in high-poverty urban schools give for doing so.²⁸ We cannot appeal solely to altruism if we hope to convince enough teachers—whose salaries are not high to begin with—to take the most challenging jobs.

Of course, intangible incentives play a role as well. America’s educational culture bestows greater professional status on those who work in the least demanding environments, i.e., in wealthy, well-equipped schools and in academically rigorous “honors” and AP courses.²⁹ While state and local leaders can do a great deal to counter such perverse incentives by publicly recognizing and honoring highly competent teachers who choose to take on our toughest educational challenges, too few teachers currently receive this kind of recognition.

**Box 4:
Benwood Initiative, Hamilton County, Tennessee**

Educators, civic leaders, and community groups are working together to improve teaching in the nine lowest-performing schools in Hamilton County, Tennessee, all located in the city of Chattanooga. Named for the foundation that kicked off the effort with a grant to the local Public Education Foundation, the Benwood Initiative comprises a unique mix of innovative educator incentives and supports.

All Benwood teachers receive extra support in the form of additional training in reading instruction, reading specialists who can work with struggling students, a full-time parent coordinator, and a reorganized workday that provides more flexibility for helping students. New teachers receive extensive mentoring and hands-on coaching. The district has pitched in by improving school leadership, replacing six of the nine principals and offering leadership coaching to help administrators better guide and support teachers.

Benwood teachers with a high level of demonstrated ability to raise student achievement, as measured by Tennessee's Value-Added Assessment System, are eligible for \$5,000 annual bonuses, as well for as generous forgivable housing loans and free tuition toward a master's degree. In addition, all teachers in schools that, on average, boost student achievement by at least 15% over the state average earn a bonus of \$2,000.

Even the early results have been impressive. The Benwood schools no longer scrape and scramble to hire teachers every summer, and student achievement is increasing rapidly. In 2003, the Benwood schools out-gained 90% of all schools in the state on value-added measures of growth in reading. In 2004, five of the 9 schools received straight A's for their gains in all four subjects tested by the state; two other schools received three A's and one B each.

For more information on the Benwood Initiative, please contact Dan Challener, President of Hamilton County, Tennessee's Public Education Foundation, at (423) 668-4233 or dan@pefchattanooga.org.

5. Inadequate preparation for work in high-poverty schools

Too many teachers and leaders come to the job unprepared for real-life work in challenging schools and classrooms. According to federal survey data, one out of three teachers does not feel prepared to use a variety of instructional methods in the classroom or to select and adapt appropriate instructional materials, and 43% do not feel well prepared to handle classroom management and discipline.³⁰ Another study found that 63% of new teachers believe teacher training programs do only a fair or poor job of making sure educators “are able to deal with the pressures and stress of teaching.”³¹

The preparation of school principals has also come under criticism. A recent national review of leadership programs in education schools concluded that most do not adequately equip leaders for the challenges they must confront in schools.³²

Add to that the fact that working in urban schools presents additional—and unique—

challenges. Candidates need to be prepared to be effective in schools where students are behind academically, are more likely to exhibit health and social problems, and face more difficult circumstances in their communities and families. Though some institutions have begun to offer intensive programs specifically designed to prepare candidates for teaching in such environments, including extensive clinical experience in challenging classrooms, others still offer generic “one size fits all” training.

6. Difficulties with hiring and placement

Counterproductive hiring and placement practices in some districts create a significant and needless barrier to recruiting highly qualified teachers who are willing to teach in high-poverty, low-performing schools. Such problems can have multiple causes: cumbersome application processes, poor customer service, insufficient data systems for tracking vacancies and candidates, high student mobility rates that create difficulties in forecasting vacancies, late notification deadlines for departing teachers, seniority provisions that require

additional time for internal transfers, and late budgeting.

Whatever the causes, the results can be devastating for low-income students: In some urban districts, hiring and placement can take so long that qualified candidates feel compelled to accept jobs in suburban districts with less complicated hiring processes.³³ And late hiring all too often leaves those teachers who do take positions in high-poverty, low-performing schools with little or no time to prepare for the school year. A recent survey of new teachers found that those in high-poverty schools were three times as likely as those in low-poverty schools to have been hired after the school year officially began.³⁴

7. Policy Incoherence

Federal, state, and local policies often are not sufficiently coordinated with the challenge of staffing high-poverty schools. According to *Education Week*, only 14 states offer incentives to recruit and retain teachers for hard-to-staff schools.³⁵

There is, however, cause for hope at the district level. Just under half (46%) of school districts participating in a recent nationally representative survey reported increasing recruitment efforts to attract qualified teachers to high-need schools.³⁶ Slightly over half (53%) reported supporting extra professional development in these schools. Yet other policy levers go largely unused. For example, fewer than one in 10 districts (8%) reported offering financial incentives to attract teachers to high-need schools. Nor is it clear that existing dis-

trict policies are always intensive or effective enough. A 2004 study of 12 districts in four southeastern states revealed that, even in districts with a reputation for improving teacher quality, few aggressive measures were in place to address staffing problems in high-need schools.³⁷

What's more, policies in other areas, such as testing and accountability, can indirectly impede efforts to staff disadvantaged schools. For example, one study found that the introduction of a school accountability system in North Carolina might have increased the already high teacher attrition rates in that state's high-poverty schools.³⁸

8. Inadequate funding

Long-standing school funding inequities that result from antiquated state systems for financing public education present a significant obstacle to staffing high-poverty, low-performing schools. This point cannot be made emphatically enough: *We cannot adequately staff high-poverty, low-performing schools until we adequately fund them.*

Simple common sense should tell us that, to tackle the greater challenges they face, schools serving large disadvantaged populations should receive *additional* resources on top of equitable base funding. Yet nationwide, high-poverty districts receive less money—about \$1,348 fewer state and local tax dollars per student—than low-poverty districts.³⁹

District budgeting practices can shortchange high-poverty schools even further. For exam-

ple, recent research reveals that districts commonly spend fewer actual dollars to staff their higher-poverty schools, because such schools disproportionately employ more inexperienced teachers, whose pay, in turn, is lower on the salary schedule. The large school-to-school spending inequities that result are typically hidden because most districts

misleadingly use average teacher salaries instead of actual salaries to report school staffing budgets.⁴⁰ A California study found that, over the 12 or 13 years a student spends in public schools, that salary gap can translate into a spending gap of \$100,000 per student, with the poorest students on the losing end of the equation.⁴¹

Box 5: The Challenge of Staffing Rural Schools

While schools in inner cities and rural areas are generally hardest to staff, the challenges they face are not entirely the same. The need to address these challenges is, however, just as pressing in rural as in urban areas: Rural schools make up about 30% of all U.S. schools, and they educate about one out of every five American schoolchildren.

Schools in rural communities are more geographically isolated, leaving them a smaller home-grown labor pool from which to recruit while making it harder to recruit from the outside. Many rural communities lack the social and cultural attractions of cities, and they offer fewer housing options.

In addition, because rural schools tend to be very small, teachers often have to provide instruction in multiple subjects, which can greatly increase preparation workload. To meet No Child Left Behind's "highly qualified" designation, moreover, rural teachers will have to achieve certification and demonstrate subject matter knowledge in all the subjects they teach. The need to clear these extra hurdles can dissuade new teachers from taking positions in rural schools and presents special challenges to incumbent teachers. Because limited access to colleges and universities can restrict options for on-going professional development, incumbent teachers often have few opportunities to improve their qualifications.

Compounding the disincentives to teaching in rural schools, pay disparities between rural teachers and their urban and suburban counterparts often approach a twenty percent differential, affecting both recruiting and retention.

Despite the differences between rural and urban districts, a growing number of rural school districts shares challenges commonly faced by their large urban counterparts, including an influx of English language learners, greater numbers of impoverished students, and a more mobile student population.

Education stakeholders at all levels will have to adopt targeted strategies to help rural schools overcome the unique obstacles they face in finding and keeping qualified teachers and school leaders.

IV. A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The Learning First Alliance Framework for Action is the result of wide-ranging research, decades of collective experience, and sustained conversation among organizational leaders and staff members. It is intended both to guide the efforts of LFA member organizations and their affiliates as they work together to solve the problem, and to offer a shared vision and vocabulary to help other stakeholders understand what role they can play in this important effort. We believe that, for several reasons, the framework offers tremendous new hope for overcoming our national impasse on staffing all schools with qualified teachers.

The first is what it says.

The framework approaches the staffing problem neither with the pessimism of the past nor with rose-colored glasses. It is based on an objective, clear-headed, and honest treatment of a very complex problem, one that builds on a realistic understanding of teachers and administrators as professionals who encounter perverse incentives in a lopsided labor market. By offering solutions across eight action areas instead of dealing with just one or two isolated parts of the problem, this framework addresses head-on the full range of interconnected conditions that cause the staffing gap. For the first time, stakeholders can work from a shared vision that, if carried out with commitment and vigor, truly has the power to support significant progress.

The second is who is saying it.

We believe past attempts to diagnose and deal with this problem have been too limited in scope precisely because of the difficulty of lining up enough support from powerful actors to offer more than just piecemeal solutions. The twelve members of the Learning First Alliance comprise the largest and most influential set of associations in education, representing constituencies that range from teachers to principals, from parents to state and district education leaders. Our collective strength permits a frank assessment of the problem and a wide-ranging set of solutions. By sharing responsibility and working together, this set of national organizations, their affiliates, and their members can spur action on a number of fronts and, collectively, truly make a difference.

The third is how the framework is constructed.

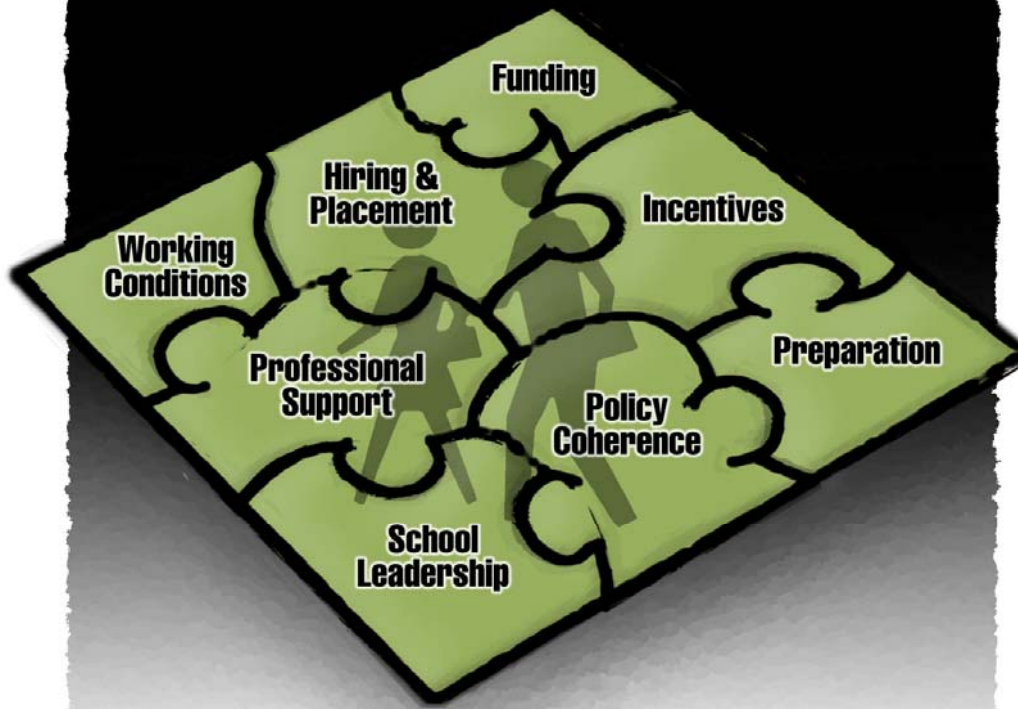
Rather than merely listing what must be done in each of the eight action areas, we have employed the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle to emphasize that all the areas fit together into a larger whole. While stronger incentives or improved hiring practices are critically important, for example, they represent only single pieces of the puzzle. Instead of limiting their attention to one or two aspects of the staffing problem, states and districts that seek to solve it must always keep the bigger picture in view.

Of course, no state or district can tackle all eight action areas at once. While it is hard to imagine any progress at all if certain pieces—such as strong leadership and adequate fund-

ing—are not in place up front, practical constraints might force some states and districts to begin by addressing a few areas and building from there. And a few places might be missing only a few pieces of the puzzle to begin with. Still, as the puzzle metaphor suggests, the staffing gap is a complex problem that requires a systemic solution.

Solving this problem will not be easy. However, we are convinced that thoughtful and concerted action *can* solve it. To that end, we urge you to read the following framework with hope rather than cynicism, as a set of opportunities rather than simply challenges.

The Learning First Alliance Eight-Part Framework for Action



School Leadership

Ensure that high-poverty, low-performing schools have effective leaders.

Working Conditions

Make the job “doable” with adequate resource staff, manageable class sizes, and a safe, supportive environment free of major plant problems.

Professional Support

Provide intense teacher support so that teachers succeed in challenging classrooms.

Incentives

Compensate staff for taking on tougher assignments working in high-poverty, low-performing schools. Recognize and reward improvements they make.

Preparation

Ensure that teachers and leaders are prepared to be effective in high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Hiring and Placement

Create processes and practices that facilitate the timely hiring and placement of effective teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Policy Coherence

Establish a coherent set of federal, state and local policies that promote recruitment and retention of effective teachers for challenged schools.

Funding

Ensure adequate and equitable funding based on student needs.



School Leadership

- School system leaders focus on getting and keeping the best leaders for challenged schools
- Principals are supported by the central office and receive professional development—through training, mentoring and coaching—from “master” principals and collegial learning networks for district principals in challenged schools
- Principal evaluation is fair and reasonable
- Ineffective principals in challenged schools are removed
- Principals have authority and autonomy to hire teachers and other staff
- School leadership is distributed and includes teacher leadership



Working Conditions

- Class size and teacher loads are adjusted down in challenged schools so that teachers can provide the intensive instruction needed by their students
- School staffing is linked to student learning needs rather than standardized staffing formulas. Extra resource people, such as counselors, paraprofessionals, and social workers, are assigned to help with the myriad of problems that impede learning in high-poverty students
- School norms, rules, and discipline practices create a culture of safety, civility, and positive behavior among students and adults
- School and community leaders jointly create and sustain school/family/community partnerships that: foster trust and respect; strengthen community commitment to engagement in students' learning; and build a safe and supportive school environment
- School principals and teachers are given the training, time, and support for effective communication with students' families
- Physical plant problems are fixed



Professional Support

- State and district leaders recognize that the task of improving learning is much tougher in high-poverty, low-performing schools and address those greater needs with more resources for intense teacher support, including:
 - A formal induction program and mentoring for novice teachers
 - Manageable teaching assignments for novice teachers (e.g., reduced class load/class sizes, time for mentoring/coaching/planning, and easier-to-teach class assignments)
 - Quality professional development on instructional practices that are effective with challenged students
 - Mentoring and coaching, especially for faculty new to teaching or inexperienced with teaching in a high-poverty school
 - Assistance from subject experts, and
 - Collegial learning within the school and with other schools
- Counselors, social workers, paraprofessionals, and secretaries are seen as vital members of an effective school team and receive the professional support needed to succeed
- Collaboration between districts and universities provides quality professional development and support for teachers, support staff, and leaders in high-poverty, low-performing schools



Incentives

- State and local policy makers create a broad range of financial incentives (e.g., additional compensation, bonuses, additional retirement benefits, and other special incentives) to attract and keep effective leaders and teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools
- State and local leaders actively encourage experienced teachers and principals to choose assignments in high-poverty, low-performing schools, and they recognize these teachers' and principals' successes
- School districts build valid and reliable systems to assess teacher and leader effectiveness in increasing student learning



Preparation

- Schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDE's) design and implement preparation and induction programs aimed at helping teachers be successful in high-need schools
- SCDE's create professional development schools in high-poverty, low-performing schools
- SCDE's help districts with high-poverty, low-performing schools identify the best candidates from among their graduates, and they assist these graduates in securing positions early
- SCDE's monitor/assess candidates' post-graduate placement and retention in order to improve preparation programs
- SCDE's graduate leadership programs prepare candidates who can create school working conditions that improve teaching and learning for teachers as well as students
- Incentive programs encourage SCDE faculty to spend time working with teachers and leaders in high-poverty, low-performing schools



Hiring and Placement

- Attracting and hiring effective teachers and leaders for challenged schools is a district goal, with benchmarks, action plans, and accountability
- Superintendents and key central office leaders ensure that the district has:
 - Clear hiring goals and accountability
 - A clearly defined applicant process flow
 - Sufficient systems to track applicants and vacancies, and
 - High-quality customer service
- Teacher unions and school boards ensure that negotiated agreements reduce barriers to early hiring of teachers for challenged schools by:
 - Requiring early vacancy notification by teachers and principals
 - Removing disincentives to giving early notification (e.g., terminating health insurance)
 - Creating transfer policies that enable principals to select the most qualified candidates and hire them before the end of the school year
 - Providing incentives for transferring into challenged schools
- There is a hiring “fast-track” for filling positions in challenged schools so that school leaders can interview and make offers early to the best internal and external candidates



Policy Coherence

- Federal, state, and district systems of rewards and sanctions for low-performing schools hold people accountable for improved achievement in ways that do not deter teachers and principals from going into these schools
- Standards for the accreditation of school districts and/or state approval of district improvement plans promote local policies and practices that attract and retain effective teachers and leaders for high-poverty, low-performing schools
- States target funds used for class size reduction, professional development, and rewards for accomplished teachers (such as National Board Certified teachers) to provide incentives and supports for teachers working in high-poverty, low-performing schools



Funding Based on Student Needs

- Intra- and inter-district resource inequities are made public and addressed through state and district policies and fiscal allocations
- State and district funding for education is student-based, adequate, and equitable—students with the greatest needs are funded at a higher level
- Districts ensure that funds are equitably distributed among all schools

V. A COMMON CAUSE: MOVING TOWARD SOLUTIONS

We must commit now to bringing about a future in which no school is considered “hard to staff.” The stakes simply could not be higher. Ethically, we can no longer afford to tolerate school staffing patterns that constrain the learning and diminish the future prospects of literally millions of our low-income and minority young people. Economically, we cannot accept the loss of talent and productivity that such young people can contribute to our society if they are all given an excellent chance to succeed in school.

This framework offers a common ground where the members of the Learning First Alliance can come together with policy makers, community leaders, foundations, and others to work towards such a future. Because leaders of so many constituencies within the education system worked together to create the framework, it offers a collective sense of purpose, a shared vision of the problem and its potential remedies, and a common language that diverse stakeholders can use to address it.

A number of our member organizations are already undertaking innovative projects to improve staffing in high-poverty, low-performing

schools. (See “Box 1” on page 2.) But we intend to do more. Over the next year, we will actively promote substantive collaboration among national organizations, their state and local affiliates, and individual members. We will:

- Disseminate the framework as widely as possible among the affiliates and members of our respective organizations, as well as to parents, policy makers, and the public;
- Identify the framework’s implications for each member organization and discuss how each can adapt its plans and policies to a systemic vision for change;
- Use the framework with state and local education leaders to foster frank discussions of the problem, its causes, and each education stakeholder’s role in solving it; and
- Spur action at multiple levels to address the underlying causes of school staffing inequities.

Working together and guided by a vision for comprehensive change, we can close the staffing gap, and, in doing so, provide a better future for children who attend today’s high-poverty, low-performing schools. The time to act is now.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Framework for Action emerged from over two years of intensive and collaborative work by many people both within and beyond LFA's twelve member organizations. We are deeply grateful to staff from LFA member organizations who gave generously of their time and expertise in helping develop the framework. Cindy Prince, Joe Villani, Segun Eubanks, John Mitchell, Amy Hightower, Judy Seltz, and John Nori worked tirelessly to map out the framework's fundamental principles, assemble research, review drafts of the final document, and provide valuable advice on advancing LFA's work on school staffing issues. Members of LFA's state affiliate organizations helped shape the project early in its development.

Former LFA staff members Judy Wurtzel, Wendy Togneri, and especially Patty Mitchell shepherded the project from its beginning stages to nearly final form. The project would not have been possible without the LFA Board's on-going strategic guidance and its profound commitment to equitable staffing in American schools.

We are also grateful to members of the broader education, research, policy, and practice communities for their input. Barnett Berry, Eric Hirsch, Dan Challener, Mike Hill, Michelle Rhee, Jessica Levin, Ray Daniel, Lee Quisenberry, and Tom Corcoran, among others, offered valuable feedback on the framework at various stages of its development.

Finally, we thank Craig Jerald for his patience and persistence as he worked with us to write this extended *Framework for Action*. Few others could have brought as much knowledge and as sound judgment to the task.

Endnotes

¹ A study in Tennessee, for example, found that two groups of students who start out at the same level of achievement can end up 50 points apart on a 100-point scale if one group is assigned three ineffective teachers in a row and the other is assigned three effective teachers in a row. See Sanders, W. and Rivers, J. (1996) Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, 3. Another study, using Texas data, found that the low-income students who have five years of highly effective teachers in a row during elementary school can join their wealthier peers in mastering grade-level math by seventh grade. See Hanushek E. & Rivkin, S. (2004). How to improve the supply of high-quality teachers in D. Ravitch (Ed.), *Brookings papers on education policy: 2004* (pp. 7-44). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

² National Center for Education Statistics, *National Assessment of Educational Progress 2003*. Accessed February 18, 2005 from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>

³ Haycock, K. & Huang, S. (2001, winter). Youth at the crossroads: Facing high school and beyond. *Thinking K-16*, 5(1). Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 5.

⁴ The American Diploma Project. (2004, February) *Ready or not: Creating a high school diploma that counts*. Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc.

⁵ For example, in 1979 male college graduates earned about 17 percent more than those with only a high school diploma, while today that same educational-wage gap now exceeds 50 percent. See Levy, F. & Murnane, R., (2004). *The new division of labor: How computers are creating the next job market*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 6, 44-47.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education. (2004). *Meeting the highly qualified teachers challenge: The secretary's third annual report on teacher quality*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁷ Esch, C. E., Chang-Ross, C. M., Guha, R., Tiffany-Morales, J., & Shields, P.M. (2004). *California's teaching force 2004: Key issues and trends*. Santa Cruz, CA: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 27.

⁸ Jerald C., & Ingersoll, R. (2002, August). *All talk no action: Putting an end to out-of-field teaching*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 4.

⁹ Jerald, C., & Ingersoll, R. (2002, August). *All talk no action: Putting an end to out-of-field teaching*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 7.

¹⁰ For example, a study of third grade teacher assignments in two large metropolitan school systems in Tennessee found that while black students made up 38% of all students, they comprised 51% of students assigned to teachers in the bottom quintile of effectiveness. See Sanders, W. & Rivers, J. (1996). *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, 10. See also Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H., and Vigdor, J. (2004, October). *Teacher quality and minority achievement gaps*. Durham, NC: Duke University Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy; Hanushek, E., Kain, J, O'Brien, D., & Rivkin, S. (February 2005). *The market for teacher quality* (Working Paper 11154). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research; and Babu, S. and Mendro, R. (2003, April). *Teacher accountability: HLM-based teacher effectiveness indices in the investigation of teacher effects on student achievement in a state assessment program*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003.

¹¹ Viadero, D. Teacher turnover tracked in city district. *Education Week*, 24(24), 16. A recent study found that an otherwise highly effective teacher capable of improving student achievement by nine points annually would only be able to raise achievement by five points if he or she were a first-year teacher. See Hanushek, E., Kain, J, O'Brien, D., & Rivkin, S. (February 2005). *The market for teacher quality* (Working Paper 11154). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 29.

¹² Mayer, D., Mullens, J., Moore, M. (2000, December.) *Monitoring school quality: An indicators report* (NCES 2001-030). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 13.

-
- ¹³ Roza, M. (with Celio, M.B., Harvey, J., and Wishon, S.). (2003, January). *A matter of definition: Is there really a shortage of school principals?* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Center on Reinventing Public Education, 18.
- ¹⁴ The study found that urban schools are more likely to have inexperienced principals and principals who graduated from less competitive colleges and universities. See Papa, F.C. Jr., Lankford, H., and Wyckoff, J. (2002, March). *The attributes and career paths of principals: Implications for improving policy.* Albany, NY: University at Albany, State University of New York, 2.
- ¹⁵ Roza M., & Hill, P. (2004). How within-district spending inequities help some schools to fail in Ravitch, D. (Ed.) *Brookings Papers on Education Policy: 2004.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 204. The authors note that “[i]n our research, we have seen over and over that schools in wealthier neighborhoods can receive over a hundred applications for a teacher vacancy, while schools in poor neighborhoods receive only two or three.”
- ¹⁶ Ingersoll, R. (2004, November). *Why do high-poverty schools have difficulty staffing their classrooms with qualified teachers?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 9.
- ¹⁷ Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H., and Vigdor, J. (2004, October). *Teacher quality and minority achievement gaps.* Durham, NC: Duke University Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy. See also Freeman, C., Scafidi, B., and Sjoquist, D. (2002, December). *Racial segregation in Georgia public schools 1994-2001: Trends, causes, and impact on teacher quality* (FRP Report 78). Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University Andrew Young School of Policy Studies.
- ¹⁸ Waters, T., Marzano, R., and McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement.* Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 3.
- ¹⁹ Ingersoll, R. (2004, November). *Why do high-poverty schools have difficulty staffing their classrooms with qualified teachers?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 11. Among teachers who leave high-poverty rural schools, poor leadership comes in a close second to low salary as the leading reason.
- ²⁰ Kannapel, P. & Clements, S. (2005, February). *Inside the black box of high-performing high-poverty schools.* Lexington, KY.
- ²¹ Ingersoll, R. (2001, January). *Teacher turnover, teacher shortages, and the organization of schools.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 24.
- ²² Harris, L. (2004, May). *Report on the status of public school education in California 2004.* Los Angeles, CA: The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.
- ²³ Ingersoll, R. (2001, January). *Teacher turnover, teacher shortages, and the organization of schools.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 24.
- ²⁴ Johnson, S. M., Kardos, S. M., Kauffman, D., Liu, E. and Donaldson, M. L. (2004, October 29). The support gap: New teachers' early experiences in high income and low-income schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(61). Retrieved November 3, 2004, from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n61/>.
- ²⁵ Smith, T. and Ingersoll, M. (2004, fall). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(3).
- ²⁶ The student-to-counselor ratio in high schools with 50% or higher minority enrollment is 313-to-1, compared with 256-to-1 in high schools with less than 6% minority enrollment. Among counselors in high-minority high schools, 41% spend more than 20 hours per week dealing with attendance and discipline problems, compared with 30% of counselors in low-minority schools. Parsad, B., Alexander, D., Farris, E., and Hudson, L. (2003, August). *High school guidance counseling* (NCES 2003-015). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 62, 70.

-
- ²⁷ Johnson, S., & Birkeland, S. (2003, fall). Pursuing a 'sense of success': New teachers explain their career decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 599. Studying a cohort of 50 beginning teachers in Massachusetts, the researchers found that those who moved to other schools within three years looked for schools that provided time for collaborative work, opportunities for growth, appropriate assignments, adequate resources, supportive leadership, and orderly climate. However, "One of the most striking features of the data is that all of the Movers transferred to schools serving populations wealthier than in their original schools. The average change in student eligibility for free or reduced-priced lunch from the Movers' first schools to their second was 46 percentage points."
- ²⁸ Ingersoll, R. (2001, January). *Teacher turnover, teacher shortages, and the organization of schools*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 24.
- ²⁹ Haycock, K. (2000, spring). Honor in the boxcar: Equalizing teacher quality. *Thinking K-16*. 4 (1).
- ³⁰ Calculations based on data downloaded on February 24, 2005, from the National Center for Education Statistics website, *Schools and Staffing Survey 1999-2000 Questionnaire Item Bank*, <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/SASS/sassib/>.
- ³¹ Public Agenda. (2000). *A Sense of Calling: Who Teaches and Why?* New York: NY: Author. HTML version accessed February 22, 2005 from www.pubicagenda.org/specials/teachers/teachers/htm.
- ³² Levine, A. (2005, March). *Educating School Leaders*. New York, NY: The Education Schools Project.
- ³³ Levin, J. and Quinn, M. (2003). Missed opportunities: How we keep high-quality teachers out of urban classrooms. New York, NY: The New Teacher Project.
- ³⁴ Johnson, S. M., Kardos, S. M., Kauffman, D., Liu, E. and Donaldson, M. L. (2004, October 29). The support gap: New teachers' early experiences in high income and low-income schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(61), 6-8. Retrieved November 3, 2004, from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n61/>.
- ³⁵ Education Week. (2005, January 6). *Quality Counts 2005*. Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education.
- ³⁶ Center on Education Policy (2005, March). *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, DC: Author.
- ³⁷ Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2004). *Unfulfilled Promise: Ensuring Highly-Qualified Teachers for our Nation's Schools*. Chapel Hill, NC: Author.
- ³⁸ Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H., and Vigdor, J. (2004, October). *Teacher quality and minority achievement gaps*. Durham, NC: Duke University Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, 20-25.
- ³⁹ Carey, K. (2004, fall). *The funding gap 2004: Many states still shortchange low-income and minority students*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust. Federal funds narrow this gap somewhat because they are so heavily targeted toward low-income children. However, the federal government shoulders only about 8% of all education funding, so the amount is not enough to make up the difference, let alone act as the supplement to a level playing field that federal education funds are intended to be.
- ⁴⁰ Roza M., & Hill, P. (2004). How within-district spending inequities help some schools to fail in Ravitch, D. (Ed.) *Brookings Papers on Education Policy: 2004*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- ⁴¹ The Education Trust—West. (2004, February). *California's hidden teacher spending gap: How state and district budgeting practices shortchange poor and minority students and their schools*. Oakland, CA: Author.