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**Written Testimony to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
NCLB Reauthorization: Strategies for Attracting, Supporting, and Retaining High Quality
Educators**

1. What specific strategies, programs or policies have been effective in addressing the shortages of teachers in your school or district? What outcomes or progress – with respect to the recruitment or retention of teachers -- have been made as a result of these strategies?

Four years ago, Boston Public Schools (BPS) superintendent Thomas Payzant made the critical decision that the BPS would begin to recruit and prepare its own teachers. Frustrated by the inability of local institutions of higher education to help the district fill openings in high-needs areas, and facing a 50% turnover rate for teachers in their first three years, Superintendent Payzant decided that the district would compete directly with higher education. Payzant was concerned that too many of the teachers coming through existing routes were under-prepared for the realities of urban teaching and not committed to Boston for the long term. Further, existing routes were not producing enough teachers in the high-needs areas of math, science and special education, and too few of the program graduates were teachers of color. Superintendent Payzant started the Boston Teacher Residency (BTR) to recruit and prepare the teachers the district desperately needed but was not getting. His aim was to recruit people committed to Boston, prepare them to know the district's work, and support them to stay in Boston, all while pushing higher education to change its practices in response. Payzant's creation of BTR in 2003 has dramatically altered the way BPS recruits, prepares and retains teachers.

MODEL. BTR tackles a crucial urban school district problem in an innovative way: It places teacher preparation in classrooms rather than in the academy. A site-based school of education anchored in the BPS, BTR is highly selective, and recruits talented and committed people from diverse backgrounds who want to be urban teachers. [Last year, there were 425 applicants for 65 slots.] These aspiring teachers, called Teacher Residents, spend a full school year working with a Mentor teacher in a BPS classroom four days per week. Residents serve as interns under the supervision of the Mentor, they are not teachers-of-record. Residents participate in a specialized curriculum tailored to BPS's reform agenda on Fridays, after school, and in summer sessions before and after the school year. They earn a Massachusetts Initial Teacher License in their primary academic content area, partial credit toward dual licensure in special education, and a master's degree in education from the University of Massachusetts/Boston. During their preparation year, Residents receive a \$10,900 stipend and health insurance (primarily supported through AmeriCorps) to help defray living expenses and incur no cost for the degree or licensure; in return, they commit to teach for at least three years in the BPS. BTR continues to support its graduates for these three additional years, helping them develop from novice teacher to teacher-leader with the goal of building a critical mass of like-minded, effective teachers equipped to bolster school and district improvement efforts. BTR is in the midst of an aggressive scale-up plan. Having prepared cohorts of 12, 36 and 48 teachers, BTR is currently preparing 60 teachers in SY2006-07 and plans to grow to prepare 120 teachers in SY2008-2009, which represents an estimated 30% of the total teachers Boston will hire.

RATIONALE. Underlying BTR is the knowledge that there is one educational reform which we know works: good teachers. Using a medical residency model, BTR draws on the knowledge that effective teachers hold, just as medical interns learn from consulting physicians. BTR's structure marries practice and theory, requiring prospective teachers to wrestle daily with the real-world dilemmas of teaching in a high-pressure, high-support situation. By clustering cohorts of Residents at select host schools, BTR builds strong support networks for both Residents and Mentor teachers. BTR also changes the traditional consumer-producer relationship between school systems and institutions of higher education and ends BPS's total dependence on outside institutions for its teachers. BTR is structured to focus on meeting the BPS's particular needs, to support the Residents to stay in teaching and interrupt the cycle of high teacher turnover, and to raise the quality and consistency of new teachers. Given recent research by Thomas Kane, Jonah Rockoff, Douglas Staiger and others - which suggests strongly that teacher effectiveness increases over the first years of a teacher's career - BTR believes that high retention rates of our graduates will be directly connected to improved student outcomes. BTR also addresses the district's goals of recruiting teachers in high-needs areas – teachers of color and teachers of math, science, and special education – and to keeping them by finding Residents with a strong commitment to Boston and to teaching its children as a long-term career choice.

OUTCOMES. BTR measures its success through key outcomes:

1. *Resident placement.* **BTR has placed over 95% of all successful Residents in BPS teaching jobs.**
2. *Teacher retention.* Overall, BPS retains only 53% of its new teachers for a full three years. **BTR has to date placed 89 graduates in positions in the BPS; 86 are still teaching in the BPS (a 96% retention rate).**
3. *Recruitment in high-need areas.* **In its first four cohorts, over half of all BTR Residents have been people of color and over half of middle and high school Residents teach in the areas of mathematics and science.**
4. *Scale.* BTR aims to prepare 30% (120 of 400) of Boston's new teachers by SY2008-2009.
5. *Teacher Quality.* **In a recent survey, principals/headmasters considered 88% of their BTR-prepared teachers as or more effective overall than other first-year teachers at their school, and considered the majority (55%) to be “significantly more effective.” Moreover, when asked to compare their BTR-prepared teachers to their teaching faculties overall, principals/headmasters rated the majority (64%) as or more effective than their overall teaching faculties, despite graduates' lesser experience as teachers.**
6. *Improved student achievement.* BTR has begun to develop a value-added system in conjunction with Professor Tom Kane at the Harvard Graduate School of Education to design a study to track student performance data for the students in its graduates' classes. BTR's ultimate measure of success is the academic achievement of the students in our graduates' classrooms.

There are a few key aspects of the program design worth emphasizing:

1. We do not allow un-chaperoned teaching. Because our ultimate goal is the academic achievement of our students, we are careful not to place the burden of preparing new teachers for our neediest students on the backs of those very same students. Instead, by

pairing BTR Residents with excellent, veteran teachers, we seek to add to the experience of the students in the classrooms while preparing the next generation of teachers.

2. We do not graduate everyone; we believe that there is a healthy level of churn. We tell Residents that getting into the program does not guarantee that they will get out. We see the residency as a year-long job interview in which key district personnel can observe the Residents and make a determination as to whether they are strong enough teachers to receive an offer of employment in the district.
3. We need methods of measuring the value-added student achievement attributable to our graduates. As it now stands, our state does not have such a system. Further, there are many opponents who would point out the flaws in value-added systems. What this does is perpetuate a system in which institutions of teacher preparation cannot be held accountable for the quality of their graduates. We are working to develop our own such system. However, we would benefit from federal help in this area: perhaps requiring states to establish such systems and funding their development.
4. A residency year working with a skilled mentor allows our graduates to bypass some of the first-year teacher challenges. Our graduates and their principals describe their first year of teaching as if it was their “first-and-a-half” year. The first year of teaching is difficult for all first year teachers regardless of preparation, there is no way to get past that reality. However, the fact that BTR graduates know the district’s curricular and instructional initiatives, know the students and the city, and know how the district works, means that they do not face the same shocking experience that so many first year teachers. They are better prepared, they enter with a network of colleagues, and they are more likely to stay.
5. The fact that BTR is district-based allows us to advocate for and leverage other key changes in the district. For example, the district investment in teacher preparation has led it to re-think, and eventually radically overhaul, how it takes on teacher induction. BPS now has a comprehensive induction program for every new teacher hired.

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2. What strategies do you believe are the most effective in terms of providing professional development and support for teachers in high need schools?

We now have three cohorts of program graduates working in BPS classrooms and are preparing a fourth cohort. We have learned a few key lessons:

- **Teachers need to be part of a strong cohort.** Working in a school with a cohort of like-minded colleagues is critically important to retention. Too many of our graduates report to us that the biggest issue they face in their schools is isolation. They want colleagues with whom they can share ideas and questions, test out hypotheses, and exchange critical feedback. Too often, school cultures do not support those types of interactions among teachers. As they work to change school cultures (a long-term goal), these recent graduates need a critical mass of colleagues with whom they can collaborate. The people that we are recruiting and preparing want to work in creative, energetic places with other smart people who are similarly dedicated and keep them growing and challenged. BTR works to place all of its graduates in cohorts once they are prepared and licensed. These cohorts then can in turn help change schools. We see the strong effect on certain schools of an influx of energetic teachers.

- **Teachers need regular, skilled, professional feedback based in their classroom teaching.** All new teachers – even the “best” teachers, the ones principals do not worry about – need regular feedback and opportunities to improve. Too many BTR graduates report to us that they rarely – if ever – have an experienced, skilled supervisor *in their classrooms* to observe and provide feedback. They wonder how they will improve as teachers without that kind of feedback. BTR provides all of our graduates with in-class coaching for three years following their residency.
- **Teachers need to see exciting and challenging career paths.** All teachers, and especially the most talented teachers, need to see a set of opportunities for leadership and career differentiation. The kind of people our urban schools want and need in teaching could do anything – they have the skills and credentials which would gain them entry in practically any company – and we need to make the teaching profession attractive enough for them to stay. We hear from our excellent second and third year graduates that they are looking around for ways to stay engaged and growing. They need to be given additional responsibility and reward for taking on critical tasks within their schools and the district. BTR creates roles for Mentors and Site Directors, which provide opportunities for a number of excellent, veteran BPS teachers. These roles need to be expanded and further formalized across the district.