A Blue Sky Paper on School Staffing
An excerpt from *How Much Does a Great School Cost?*
Barbara J. Smith

There are staff members in and outside the classroom and the school, who play key roles in different school systems. At the state or national level, there tends to be many supports offered of the 'policy' kind. There can be duplication of efforts at the district level where there are also multiple levels of services provided for schools in specific regions. In many districts, the central office staff coordinate payroll, benefits, facility and safety maintenance, transportation, academic programming, information technology, legal work, and marketing. An efficient central office should ultimately reduce the administrative load at the individual school level. For instance, district office staff often determine formulas for staffing schools with teachers based on examining demographic data within each school boundary. School occupancy rates, as well as the teacher-student ratios, are often set from ranges established by district and state/provincial requirements. Many systems, including the distribution of funding happen at the Central office or higher level order. Fairness and equity are usually core values that guide school decisions.

Budgeting for Trustees and Central Office Staff

While school Trustees are not staff members in the various school systems, some are paid and such part-time salaries or stipends come from a school budget. AS the key political representatives providing oversight, their perceptions can support or negate change. The larger the school board or district, the more challenging it can be to bring about change. In many cases, there are legacies associated with the various streamlining processes that define district operations. While it makes sense to amalgamate school boards to reduce replication of services, the actual costs of larger school board expansions to accommodate new schools has not been examined much in peer-reviewed journals. It is not known if the savings in Trustee part-time salaries, physical plant operations, and the staffing of fewer central offices, outweighs the educational return. If innovation is less likely to happen within such large-scale operations, then it appears as if change and improvement are not valued as much as reducing costs. A clear view of the actual funds saved through expansion would be an important read for decision makers in education. Larger school boards require many more school Trustees, and the costs can vary between jurisdictions. What are the overall savings?

The generation of 'kingdoms' or departments, with assistants, and administrative staff within these district offices, should also be focus of ongoing fiscal scrutiny. Rather than one person responsible for transportation in a smaller board, now a larger board requires a transportation department. How do we know that there were cost savings in district amalgamations without a clear view of the comparative data?

Looking back on my experience in Ontario, Canada, I recall a vibrant culture of educational change when there were more school boards in the eighties, and within such a milieu, more teacher-leader opportunities. While there were many sound benefits that fueled the amalgamation process, I sense individual boards might have found better ways to become more efficient in their smaller communities before rushing to supersize the districts. For instance, could they have reduced the part-

time salaries of Trustees? Could they have reduced the number of Trustees? I think so. I assume there were 'kingdoms' forming prior to the amalgamations, and a more thorough consideration of out-sourcing alternatives and re-structuring, might have reduced the need for large conglomerates, more difficult to maneuver, in the waves of educational change.

Staffing in Schools

The capacity for change to take hold at the school level is directly linked to teaching and non-instructional staffing. The design of collective agreements in the public system or contracts for teachers in the independent, charter or private schools can set precedence in terms of defining staffing roles and responsibilities. Schools are ripe for embracing innovation when they can strategically revise all variables for change, including staffing. Typically, elementary schools hire strong English Language Arts (ELA) teachers, but it can be challenging to match the work force with passionate Science, Technology, Engineering and Math educators; STEM teachers tend to be more present in a high school setting. The model, whereby the homeroom teacher is responsible for six or more disciplines, may seem comfortable for younger students (to not be on a 'rotary' system with multiple teachers), but the over-reliance on such an approach seems flawed. Teachers, who can plan and implement fewer subjects, have more opportunities to generate student expertise as well as provide more effective remediate or enrichment. The tendency to teach a 'one size fits all' model is much more prevalent when a teacher is required to plan units and lessons for many different disciplines. Examples of innovative schools exist where Kindergarten students spend half of the day with an expert Science-Math teacher and the other half of the day with a liberal arts teacher. Strong STEM or liberal arts teachers have an opportunity in these situations to influence more students, rather than a single conventional class. Rather than see the choices as one teacher verses six teachers, it can be advantageous for schools to consider using pairings of teachers that can share multiple talents at the same time as have the capacity to focus on fewer subjects. We coordinated 'pairings' at one school with one teacher <Teacher 'A'> teaching both classes in the same grade: Math and Science, while another teacher <Teacher 'B'> taught ELA, Social Studies, and Physical Education to both classrooms in the same grade. Both teachers were also responsible for one homeroom which included the teaching of a social and emotional learning class. Figure 21 illustrates how students in third grade worked with co-teachers:

Figure 21: Third Grade Specialist Teaching Schedule

Time	Grade 3A	Grade 3B
8:30	Social/Emotional Learning Class (Teacher A)	Social/Emotional Learning Class (Teacher B)
9:00	Math (Teacher A)	English Language Arts & Social Studies (Teacher B)
10:30	English Language Arts & Social Studies (Teacher B)	Math (Teacher A)
Noon	Lunch	Lunch
12:30	Physical Education (Teacher B)	Science (Teacher A)
1:30	Science (Teacher A)	Physical Education (Teacher B)
2:30	Arts (Teacher C, D, E)	Arts (Teacher C, D, E)
4:30	Dismissal	

"*If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow.*"~ John Dewey

Teacher A was the homeroom teacher for the 3A class. Given this was an arts school, students rotated through part-time arts' experts who taught them concentrated arts blocks of Dance, Music, and Theatre Arts throughout the school year for 90 minutes each day. In this scenario, teachers ate lunch and supervised their students through transitions between classes, with 30 minutes of break time and 60 minutes of teacher preparation time at the end of the day. As a charter school, teachers were contracted to work 8-hour days, and given the 'arts' school niche, more time was required for the teaching of specialized art forms. Such a specialist approach to teaching ELA and Mathematics was prompted by poor standardized test scores in these areas; however, the true gain came when teachers felt empowered to concentrate their energies on fewer subjects and areas that they were passionate about teaching. Having a staffing plan that is aligned with the school improvement and strategic plans makes good sense. Having a mix of teaching administrators, with full and part-time staff enabled the school to reduce teacher: student ratios in each class.

Internships, Residencies and Induction

Staffing can be augmented by inviting interns and education experts into the school community. Some schools opt to bring in student teachers, who share current research and best practices. Colleges of Education can team with local schools to support preservice learning, as well as internship or induction programming. Colleges of education have realized the need for expanding their reach into schools directly, after teachers have achieved their certification. Different kinds of relationships have been established to support new teachers to further develop their capacities in the contexts of classrooms. Many single year teacher qualification programs have expanded to two-year experiences, and many have established internship experiences in schools, as well as provided 'residencies' in much the same way as young physicians are introduced to the medical profession. According to DeMoss (2016), residencies should provide an "integral part of teacher preparation programs." She added that 'residencies', "should become the norm…and a preferred qualification in districts' hiring decisions," and noted that there have been dramatic improvements in countries such as Finland and Singapore: "one of the shifts their nations embraced was to integrate teacher preparation with K-12 school systems. Aspiring teachers are paid to practice under the guidance of an effective classroom teacher for a full year" (p. 6).

Costs need to be factored into budgets for added supports from colleges. In addition to providing field experiences for teachers in preparation programs, teaching and learning experts from different colleges of education can work directly with administrators, teachers, and students to pilot innovative programs. Schools need to expand their professional development budgets to cover the costs for such on-sight expert visits and more colleges of education will need to increase the number of staff and expand job descriptions to include room for induction responsibilities. Depending on specific induction needs of the school and research needs of college professors, schools could provide $15,000 or more in funding to have regular access to such curriculum and school operations expertise. By planning for such support, colleges can be more connected to how schools implement best practices, and in turn, they can examine collaboratively, how practice can influence the ongoing development of educational theory.

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."~ John Dewey

Rigorous Staff Selection Process

A rigorous process for selecting teaching staff is central to nurturing a quality professional culture. Ideally the process should involve a thorough analysis of a resume and covering letter, a series of interviews, observation of sample teaching, reference follow through, and solid background checks. What should move someone to a short list should be the depth of their experiences. A comprehensive bank of interview questions can allow candidates time to explain how they can demonstrate their capacity to plan and create engaging curriculum, as well as instruct in multiple ways to meet the needs of different learners. Questions should also help candidates express how well they develop relationships, and model being life-long learners. To differentiate candidates, interviewers must not rush the process; and subsequently, they must be prepared to invest at least an hour of their time to interview qualified candidates. After scanning many question sources, I found Maxine Driscoll (2017) idea's quite compelling for schools aiming to find staff ready to tackle a 21st century education. She recommends that your questions find out how well the candidates:

- <can> inspire students to innovate, create and problem-solve;
- <can demonstrate> a growth mindset and is 'a learner,' 'a collaborator', and a 'change maker';
- <are> generationally savvy...to ensure they can work with Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y colleagues while teaching Gen Zs and Gen Alphas;
- <are>tech savvy, <possess> innovative and entrepreneurial skills, and <can> utilize them to enrich learning and teaching;
- show persistence, flexibility, and agility <and a 'can-do' and problem solving capacity>; and,
- will facilitate 21st century learning for the students and community.

Rigorous staffing and recruitment practices can set the stage for minimizing the degree to which a school needs to invest in teacher development. Ideally schools will have the autonomy to recruit incredible teachers with multiple talents. Teachers with a desire to learn and improve, exhibit growth mindsets; that is, dispositions ready and willing, to be supported, as well as being supportive of others. It can certainly be advantageous for a teacher to have a track record of moving students to positive action; and teacher-leaders, who are open to moving colleagues to action, also have much to add to a learning organization. Teacher candidates can contribute to solid school teams if they belong to professional organizations, engage in action research, and have a clear record of volunteerism.

Dean Moje at the University of Michigan claimed that we need to support young teachers who tend to be moved from "classroom to classroom." It can be so difficult when "they can't get their feet under them" (Kaffer, 2017). At Michigan State University, enrollment for teacher preparation programs was down by approximately 35%, "and as much as 45% at the University of Michigan". According to each program head, "the decline is so steep, the impact on the teacher prep pipeline so great, that there is an unavoidable personnel deficit lurking out there, exacerbated by the number of baby boomer-aged teachers approaching retirement." The limited notion of 'ready-made' teachers leaving teacher's college is now a misconception. The development of a teacher does not end on the final day of college teacher preparation; rather, this stage of development is a beginning, and when systems organize schools as learner organizations for staff and students, the quality of teachers should

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."~ John Dewey

continue to improve. Schools that build relationships with colleges of education, can help extend induction type programs, so that teachers stay in the profession, rather than be thrown into the deep end without a life jacket to support them.

To further complicate matters, teacher shortages can make it a challenge to stack a team with a critical mass of exceptional talent. Concerned about less pay and reduced benefits, Moje noted that schools hold teachers "accountable for everything" (in Kaffer, 2017). Research conducted by Donaldson & Moore Johnson (2011) and later, Goldring, Taie, & Minsun (2014) claimed that: "20-70% of newly certified American teachers quit within five years chiefly because of heavy workload and low salary." Schools need to figure out how to keep talent in the teaching field. There can be a natural tendency for teachers to resist new initiatives when they have not been involved in developing them. Fullan (2017) claimed that pushback and resistance happen when, "innovations are highly prescribed (often detailed programs bought off the shelf) but culture is weak and teachers have not been involved sufficiently in developing ownership and new capacities." Even though such actions can lead to short term gains that "tighten an otherwise loose system," Fullan (2017) suggested this is "because teachers have not been engaged in shaping the ideas or the strategy." As Fullan (2017) suggested, without input "there is there is little willingness to take risks."

The upfront work to find talent with a good fit for the school's mandate can minimize costs down the road. A strong teacher at one school is not necessarily going to be effective in every school setting, so doing some serious legwork can contribute to making good hiring decisions. Some schools may out-source the recruitment process, but ideally, school leaders should invest their time to manage this process, as well as save costs. Unfortunately, in many public schools, the principal is handed the teacher roster from afar, with little or no say about their potential fit for the school.

Thinking about and planning for a sustained talent base in schools requires a comprehensive approach to addressing school-wide needs, recruitment, leadership development, mentorship, in-house and off-site support, as well as serious attention to the building of an effective and motivating performance review process. The message from the *21st Century Schools* website claims that it is "nothing short of criminal," when the current system blocks teachers "from offering the highest quality educational experiences to their students" by "often forcing our most creative and brilliant teachers out of the profession" (http://www.21stcenturyschools.com/making-time.html).

When interviewing administrators or special education teachers, I often think of the Disney practice of requiring all executives to dawn a character costume and spend a full day in the park, to gain a deeper sense of their customer's ("guests") needs. An interesting account was shared in *Be Our Guest* (2001) when there was discussion about building an administrative building at Disneyland: "Walt was vehemently opposed: "I don't want you guys sitting behind desks. I want you out in the park, watching what people are doing and finding out how you can make the place more enjoyable for them" (p. 42). Principals and school administrators can do much more than be a teacher for the day. They can teach for at least one hour each day, not simply to reduce overall expenditures, but to build-in perspective on an ongoing basis about what schools are all about: teaching and learning. Principals who teach keep a pulse on the school and are willing to demonstrate their own vulnerability and willingness to be a lifelong learner. A key question for a school leader interview: 'Do you see teaching as a part of your school leader position?'

Probably the most important task for staffing schools with new and talented professionals, is

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."~ John Dewey

to ensure that all school community members are taking on meaningful roles...

Grappling with Ideas
- What do you think are the most important aspects of a quality staffing process?
- What details shared in this chapter do you think are worthy of further review?
- How is it possible to increase the talent pool in schools?

References

DeMoss, K. (2016). For the public good: Quality preparation for every teacher. Bank Street College of Education. June 2016. Retrieved from https://d2mguk73h8xisw.cloudfront.net/media/filer_public/filer_public/2016/06/29/sfp_framework_final_0951.pdf.

Disney Enterprises (2001). Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service. Disney Institute.

Donaldson, M. & Moore Johnson, S. (2011). TFA teachers: How long do they teach? Why do they leave? *Education Week*. October 4, 2011. Retrieved from https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/04/kappan_donaldson.html

Driscoll, M. (2017). 10 Strategies to recruit amazing 21st century teachers. LinkedIn. February 16, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/10-strategies-recruit-amazing-21st-century-teachers-maxine-driscoll/.

Fullan, M. (2017). Coherence Making and Deep Learning: Strategies for System Change that Benefit all Students. Spring 2017 Presentation. Retrieved from https://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/17_Coherence-Presentation-Handout_Red_Jan27.key.pdf

Goldring, R., Taie, S., & Minsun, R. (2014). Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2012-13 teacher follow-up survey: First look. September, 2014. *National Center for Education Statistics.* Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014077.pdf.

Kaffer, N. (2017). How Michigan is failing our teachers. Detroit Free Press. May 27, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/columnists/nancy-kaffer/2017/05/28/michigan-teacher-shortage/346944001/.

Smith, B. (2019). How Much Does a Great School Cost? Brill Publishers.

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."~ John Dewey