Introduction

Between the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years, Salem Public Schools lost 36 percent of our first year teachers. That attrition rate is far too high. We recommend that Salem schools reconsider our policy around teacher retention and induction.

Teacher retention is about more than simply keeping teachers; it is about keeping the right teachers. We propose a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that hopes to maintain and support the growth of the most effective Salem teachers. The recommendations include rethinking our recruitment and hiring practices, remodeling our induction and mentoring program, retraining administrators, refining our expectations and delivery of professional development for staff, and providing leadership opportunities for teachers. This proposal serves to request a commitment both philosophically and financially to help retain Salem’s most effective teachers.

Recommendations: Increasing Teacher Retention in Salem

We believe that by building teacher and leader supports and opportunities around three main levers in the District Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP), we will create conditions in which high-quality teachers are supported and engaged throughout their teaching career.

I. Recruitment

Salem Public Schools has an opportunity to build a strong system for recruiting new teachers with the many nearby colleges. Recruitment of potential candidates must begin early, preferably prior to the summer. Salem can build upon relationships already established with Salem State University to create structures in which students in the teacher preparation program are placed in all Salem schools for pre-practicum and student teaching placements.

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• **Establish a consistent hiring process and begin recruiting early.** Hiring practices vary between schools in Salem. By providing a guideline for the hiring process for each school to follow when seeking new staff members, expectations for new teachers will be consistently higher across all of the schools. For example, we recommend that Salem Public Schools establish the expectation that schools are required to have more than one round in the interview process -- and that they involve staff members and administrators in hiring. One of the interview rounds should require a performance task or model lesson. Most importantly, begin recruiting potential candidates as early as possible for the upcoming school year. (See TNTP’s report, “Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms.”)

• **Strengthen University partnerships.** Salem Public Schools should continue to build relationships with local institutions of higher education, most notably Salem State University, as a means to leverage the capacity to not only support novice teachers, but to provide continued training and teacher leadership opportunities to mid-career and veteran teachers.

• **Strengthen teacher preparation through a partnership with Salem State University.** Partners from Salem Public Schools and Salem State should form a team that can establish clear and consistent criteria for pairing student teachers with cooperating practitioners. This team should also work to implement the three recommendations that follow:
  
  o **Identify teachers who will serve as cooperating practitioners.** The quality of a student teacher’s training depends on a strong cooperating practitioner. SPS and SSU should identify rigorous criteria to identify teachers that will serve as cooperating practitioners. The selection process could include elements such as classroom observations, recommendations from administrators, and a record of student achievement. These criteria will identify strong teachers who will be able to effectively train student teachers when they enter the classroom.

  o **Create opportunities for SSU students to integrate into the SPS community.** Student teachers should shadow teachers for responsibilities outside the classroom as well as during the teaching day so they can get a true picture of all of the responsibilities the job entails. Student teachers could have a requirement that in addition to their time in the classroom they spend a designated amount of time attending other events with their cooperating practitioner such as parent conferences, open houses, Instructional Support Team (IST) meetings, team meetings, professional development workshops, etc. This would allow student teachers to fully understand the expectations of teachers’ work outside of the classroom.

  o **Build Dual Enrollment Opportunities.** Salem should build upon the Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Program (CDEP) that already exists at the high school and provide incentives for enrolled students who are interested in education degrees to attend Salem State and return to the Salem Public Schools as teachers. Some suggestions include tuition waivers,
bookstore gift certificates, support in the job application and interview process, etc. The partnership team could identify appropriate incentives.

II. Induction and Mentoring

Salem Public Schools has an opportunity to implement a system of supports for teachers throughout various stages of their professional career. Many of the recommendations below come from a model of comprehensive induction programs for beginning teachers from Saphier, Freeman and Aschheim (2011). Teachers will benefit from an integrated approach to induction during their first three years, which includes:

- **Establish a district-wide induction sub-committee.** The cabinet will plan, implement and oversee the induction program, including members of central office, human resources, building-based leadership, the teachers union, and new and veteran teachers. The induction program could also include an orientation to the district initiatives, AIP, and expectations for the upcoming school year.

- **School Committee and community partnerships.** The School Committee can show its continued support for a comprehensive induction program by approving a teacher induction policy and make financial commitments to the effort. We must go beyond the state minimum requirements for mentoring and build a foundation of support so every teacher can have the greatest impact on student academic, social and emotional development as possible.

- **Continue the good work.** Many aspects of mentoring are in place in Salem Public Schools. Beginning teacher courses and mentoring programs are in place and should continue to be run strategically.

III. Administrative Professional Development

In order to ensure that Salem’s most effective teachers are being valued, stay motivated and most importantly, stay in our classrooms, we must train administrators to 1) effectively leverage data to identify highly effective teachers and, 2) implement effective management strategies.

- **Identify the most effective teachers in our schools.** Half of teachers who leave the profession in the first five years are also the most effective teachers in their buildings. This is a direct result of negligent retention practices by administrators. It is essential that administrators have the ability to analyze data in order to pinpoint their best teachers, utilize them during school improvement, and recognize them for their work. Administrators should make it a goal to actively retain as many of these teachers as possible.
Engage in effective personnel management practices. Once these teachers have been identified using a common set of indicators, administrators now need to know how to develop those employees into leaders within the school. The second part of required training would include building administrators to receive professional development in employee management and motivation training. Too often, highly effective teachers are ignored and this results in a loss of motivation and commitment. If principals could have the foundations of skillful employee management practices, they could make sure those teachers felt valued and committed to the work.

IV. Align Professional Development

Professional development (PD) should be differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers so that teachers value PD and find it relevant to their practice. PD should be aligned at the district and school level to the AIP and clearly prioritize goals each year. Currently, the school system emphasizes all priorities equally in PD, which is overwhelming and impractical for teacher improvement each year. As a result, this is prohibiting teachers from excelling in identified areas. Teachers find it difficult to create clear and focused goals and priorities for their own improvement when everything is a priority.

- All schools should align building professional development to the AIP. Building-based PD should be determined as a collaborative effort between the school administrators, coaches, and the school-based leadership team. Building PD must be aligned to the District priorities defined in the AIP, but can and should be differentiated based upon the teachers’ needs at different grade levels or in different subject areas.

- Differentiate district professional development for teachers. The district PD days should be differentiated based on teachers’ prior training and take into consideration gaps for new teachers. For example, on a Teaching and Learning Alliance (TLA) PD day, first-year teachers could be in a session that contains info from the first year of the TLA roll out. At that same time, teachers who are in their third year of teaching would be in a session that is focused on small group instruction because they already have some of the reader’s workshop structures in place.

- Prioritize and coordinate training for all teachers. District and school administrators should collaboratively prioritize PD so that support staff such as special education, ESL teachers, SEI teachers, specialists, and any other support staff are not scheduled to be in multiple PD sessions at the same time. There should be a system of clear communication of who makes the decision of what PD support staff attend and be explicit about the rationale.

- Progress monitoring for targeted PD. When targeted PD is provided at the school or district level, there could be progress monitoring through various methods. Evidence of implementation of targeted PD could be gathered during instructional rounds. In addition, student data could be tracked for achievement in classrooms where the strategies from the PD are being implemented consistently.
• **Empower teacher leaders and coaches.** Empower teacher leaders and coaches to share the knowledge they have gained by utilizing them to run PD workshops and common planning time meetings. Since the teachers and coaches know their buildings, they can craft PD that accounts for the student population and teacher needs at their individual schools.

V. Diverse Pathways for Teacher Leadership Opportunities.

• **Generate multiple career pathways.** Salem Public Schools should provide a diverse set of leadership opportunities to meet the diverse aspirations and skills of its teachers. Salem Public Schools will benefit from continuing to create multiple pathways and leadership opportunities to increase engagement and ownership of teachers.⁵

One example of such a teacher leadership opportunity is the newly created teacher leadership positions. We support Salem Public Schools and the Salem Teachers Union’s agreement to create building-based teacher leadership positions to compliment and expand the work done by coaches. The teacher leaders will provide leadership in an area of their strength, from making decisions based on data to running their grade-level common planning time meetings. In exchange for the additional responsibilities, teacher leaders will have their teaching load reduced by one course that will be covered by a coach. This work is one example of how educators can inform and make a difference in educational policy. The teacher leadership positions hold the promise of leveraging the astounding professional capital we have in each and every Salem Public School and to support teachers to continue their career in the classroom and provide every student with an exceptional teacher.

• **Partner with external organizations to build teacher leadership opportunities.** Teacher leadership opportunities should be built and created both internally and by partnering with external organizations. Two examples of this best practice are the City of Salem partnering with Teach Plus in creating a Teacher’s Cabinet to give feedback to the School Committee on key educational policy issues. The partnership with the Lynch Leadership Academy is an example of Salem partnering with an outside organization to provide aspiring and current principals in Salem with high-quality, embedded professional development. We encourage Salem Public Schools to continue to create diverse teacher leadership opportunities from internal and external organizations so that we can differentiate and individualize career pathways and ladders to meet the widest range of interests and skill sets of our educators as possible.
Salem Teachers Cabinet 2015

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*Jason Colombino, District STEM Coordinator, Salem Public Schools

*Valerie Drinan, 6th-7th Grade Math Teacher, Nathaniel Bowditch School, Salem Public Schools

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Rebecca Lewis, 5th Grade English and Social Studies Teacher, Bentley Elementary School

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End Notes