

Repealing New Jersey's teacher residency requirement

Background

New Jersey's educator residency requirement dictates that teachers, school leaders and district personnel who work in New Jersey must establish residency in the state within one year of starting employment.¹ Revisions to New Jersey's Urban Hope Act extended the timeline for residency for a small group of teachers in charter schools to five years.² This revision is not enough. We must repeal the residency requirement for all teachers in New Jersey so that talented teachers who live in New York, Pennsylvania or Delaware can help give New Jersey kids a high-quality education.

Students

Currently, there are 1.36 million students in New Jersey public schools.³ Research indicates that the most important school-based factor for student achievement is teacher quality.⁴ The residency requirement has a direct impact on students because it helps determine *who* serves in the classroom. Are the most qualified candidates applying and accepting available teaching and leadership roles, or is New Jersey limiting itself to candidates who already live in New Jersey or are willing to move?

While the residency impacts students across the state, it is especially burdensome for New Jersey's urban school districts: Newark, Camden, Trenton, Jersey City and Paterson. The New Jersey Department of Education identified 249 Priority and Focus schools statewide in need of dramatic improvement. Priority schools constitute the lowest performing 5 percent of schools in terms of student learning. Focus schools are identified as schools with large achievement gaps. More than 100 of these schools are located in Newark, Paterson, Camden, Trenton and Jersey City.⁵ Every student in New Jersey deserves the best teachers in their classrooms, but the nearly 113,000 students in these

¹ "New Jersey First Act," State of New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lwdhome/content/NJFirst.html>.

² "Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee Statement to Senate, No. 2821," New Jersey Legislature, accessed February 14, 2014, http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2012/Bills/S3000/2821_S1.HTM.

³ "New Jersey Public Schools Fact Sheet," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/fact.htm>.

⁴ "Improving Student Learning by Supporting Quality Teaching: Key Issues, Effective Strategies," Editorial Projects in Education, accessed February 10, 2014, http://www.edweek.org/media/eperc_qualityteaching_12.11.pdf.

⁵ "Regional Achievement Centers: Priority and Focus Schools," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/rac/schools/>

school districts *need* the most talented and passionate teachers and school leaders, regardless of what state they call home.⁶

Teachers

New Jersey's residency requirement places an unnecessary burden on teachers and school leaders. A teacher's ability to provide an excellent education for their students should not be impacted by geography. Lifting the residency requirement for teachers would give schools a broader pool of candidates from which to recruit, which is especially important for hard-to-staff positions. Currently, New Jersey has a shortage of highly qualified science, technology, engineering, mathematics, special education and ESL teachers. During the 2013-2014 academic school year, the majority of these shortages were reported in the 31 former Abbott districts.⁷

Furthermore, to keep their jobs and continue serving kids, New Jersey teachers can't move out of the state—not to help an ailing family member, not to move in with a spouse, not for any reason. As a result, great teachers from cities that neighbor New Jersey can't work here. Current teachers feel that they don't have the flexibility they need to maintain sustainable careers.

Moreover, New York and Pennsylvania do not have statewide residency requirements for their teachers. This puts New Jersey at a significant disadvantage when attracting new talent to the teaching profession.

Conclusion

We need to repeal the teacher residency requirement to give New Jersey students the excellent teachers they deserve and give teachers the peace of mind they need to create long-lasting teaching careers in New Jersey.

⁶ "2012-2013 Enrollment Data," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/enr/enr13/>.

⁷ "Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing," United States Department of Education, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oep/pol/tsa.doc>.