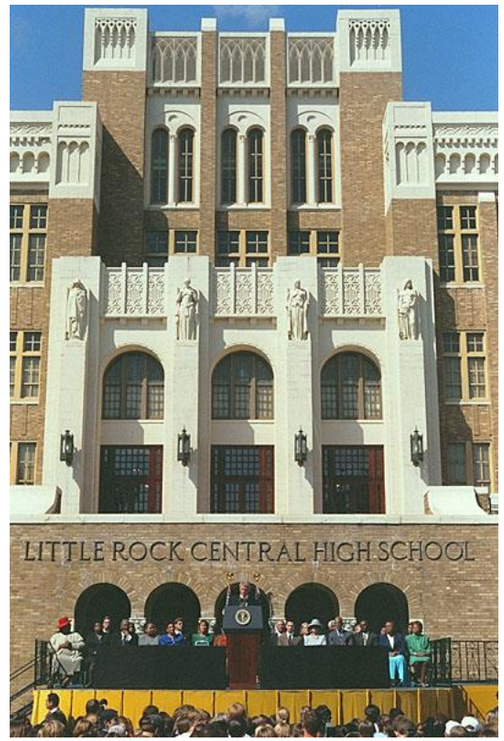

Little Rock School District Central Office and Human Capital Review

Prepared for Arkansas Department of Education

By Urban Schools Human Capital Academy

April 2019

Arkansas Department of Education

Leadership Support Service

Little Rock School District

USHCA

Best People Best Results

Urban Schools Human Capital Academy

Overview

- Background and Project Methodology
- Current State and Key Findings
- Recommendations
- Next Steps

Background and Project Methodology

USHCA Background

Established in 2011, the Urban Schools Human Capital Academy (USHCA) is a national nonprofit helping urban districts become great managers of teacher and principal talent. USHCA develops, supports, and networks human capital leaders in urban school districts to drive measurable improvement in teacher and principal quality. Through a range of services, we help transform a district's human capital management function into a more strategic and integrated component of a district's overall approach to improve student achievement.

USHCA has worked in over 30 urban districts across the United States.

The Academy

We deliver a cross-district, dynamic learning experience for HR and human capital leadership teams in urban school districts to address mission-critical issues such as recruitment, retention, principal and teacher quality over a 3-year partnership.

Capacity Building

We design and deliver customized workshops and training sessions to build school system human capital leadership for a variety of K12 organizations and roles.

Consulting

We leverage our network of experts to provide targeted, in-depth services to support the implementation of human capital strategies, including HR assessments, benchmarking, coaching, process improvement and toolkit development.

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The State Commissioner of Education requested that the Urban Schools Human Capital Academy (USHCA) provide a high-level review of the organizational structure of the central office and a more in-depth assessment of the functionality of the Human Resources department.

Review Component	What we looked for
Understand the current state of the Central Office organization and the core Human Capital functions	• Do the district's functions best support schools' efforts to drive student achievement? • What is the best central office structure to provide maximum services and support schools.
Assess processes and procedures that affect Central Office service delivery and Human Capital	• Are current processes and procedures designed for staff to provide high quality customer service in an accurate, efficient, and timely manner?
Assess data integrity, management, and decision-making efforts around key human capital data	• How reliable is the data that is integral to supporting the district's human capital efforts, drives decision making, and supports day-to-day operations?
Identify a set of recommendations to inform strategic focus and attention	• Where should the district focus their strategic planning and execution efforts?

This review addressed the following goals:

- Identify an effective central office leadership structure that supports improved student growth and achievement, with a focus on effective management of principals as well as the delivery of a strong curriculum/instruction/assessment approach
- Provide information and understanding of the work to support talent management strategies and to understand human resources and identify the strengths and gaps in functionality and its capacity to implement an effective human capital strategy

Review Methodology

Along with reviewing documents, USHCA met with the following teams and stakeholders:

Team	Stakeholders	
Human Resources	Interim Chief Human Resources Capital Officer Director of Certified Staffing (by phone) Employee Relations Specialist	HR Administrative Assistant HR Assistants
Senior Leadership	Superintendent Deputy Superintendents Chief Operating/Financial Officer	Student Services Senior Director Communications Director
Academic	Chief Academic Officer Early Childhood Director	Testing Director
Operations and Support	Director Child Nutrition Director of Maintenance Health Services Coordinator Director of Finance and Accounting (by phone)	IT Director Safety and Security Director Transportation Director
Principal Focus Group	Elementary (3) Middle (3)	High (3)
Teacher Focus Group	Elementary (3) Middle School (2)	High (1)
Union	Union Leadership (3)	
Advisory Board	Board President	

What Drives Our Work?

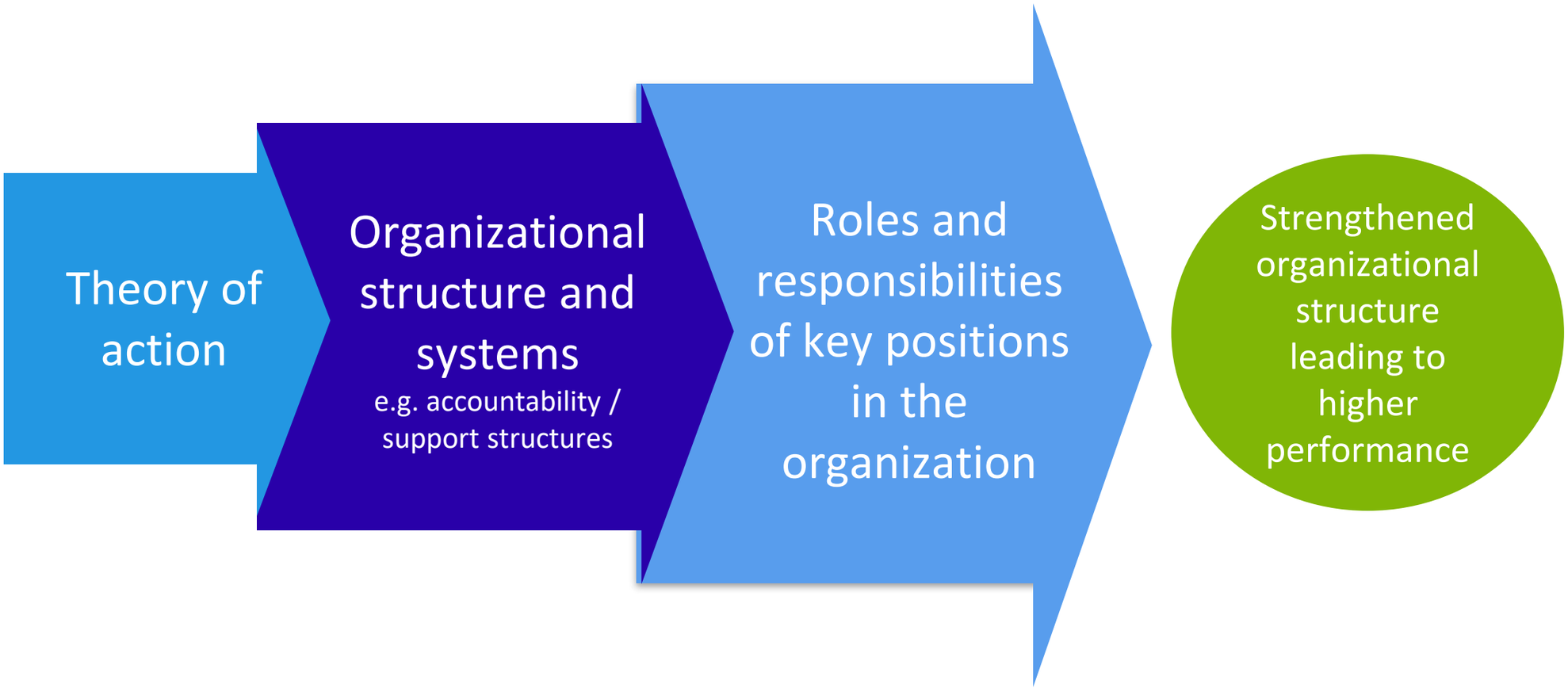
A strong commitment to student achievement with an effective educator in every classroom and leader in every school; enabled by a focus on:

Best Practices	**Understanding the Role of the Central Office and Tracking Human Capital Trends and Emerging Practices** • Keeping abreast of latest research findings • Tracking and collecting data from USHCA network
Data	**Rigorous tracking and leveraging of key human capital metrics** • Measures progress toward goals and objectives • Provides direction and focus in support of planning
Strategic HC Management	**A comprehensive approach to strategic human capital management that focuses on the "Right Work"**
Execution: Strategic HR	**Supporting HR divisions and teams to move from compliance/transactional work to strategic and supportive work**
Focus on the Key Customer	**Principals are "responsible for translating district management actions that become what teachers experience as human capital management. Thus, the principal is a key link in district strategic talent management effort."[1]**

Background and Project Methodology

Effective Organization to optimally deliver and support teaching and learning [Key Design Considerations]

The Theory of Action guides organizational systems & structures and defines the roles and responsibilities in the organization

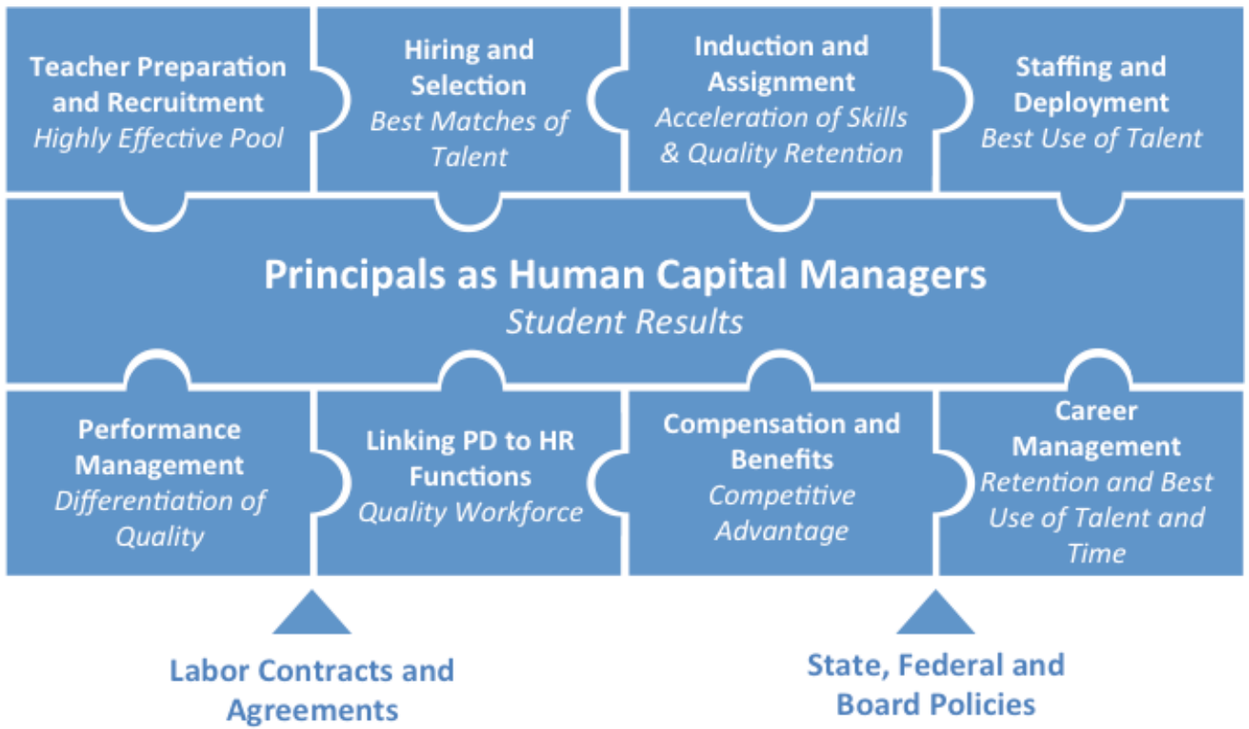


Background and Project Methodology

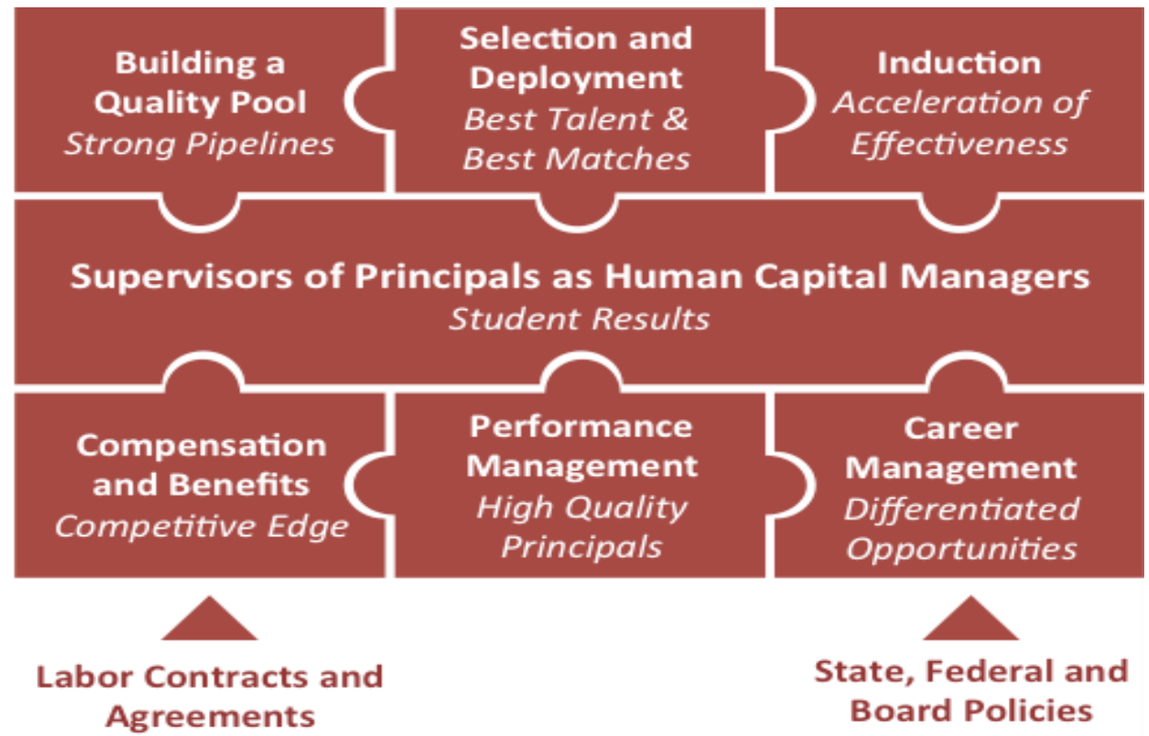
Strategic Human Capital Overview

Teacher and Principal Puzzle Pieces– "The Right Work"

Teacher Puzzle Pieces



Principal Puzzle Pieces



Key Tenets of Strategic Human Capital

- Teacher and principal effectiveness are the first and second (respectively) most important factors in driving student achievement

- Within most education systems, the processes that strive to improve educator quality and effectiveness are often disconnected, creating disjointed and conflicting initiatives that lead to inefficiencies and the draining of resources from schools….

- ….however, when organized to align and complement each other, an integrated talent management system can drive significant improvements in educator quality, thereby leading to gains in student achievement

- A coherent system with rigorous standards and performance-based accountability will:
  - Foster a culture of continuous improvement through shared learning and feedback loops
  - Enable data-driven decision making
  - Create a more flexible and nimble organization that can better react to unanticipated challenges as well as proactively avoid recurring issues and obstacles

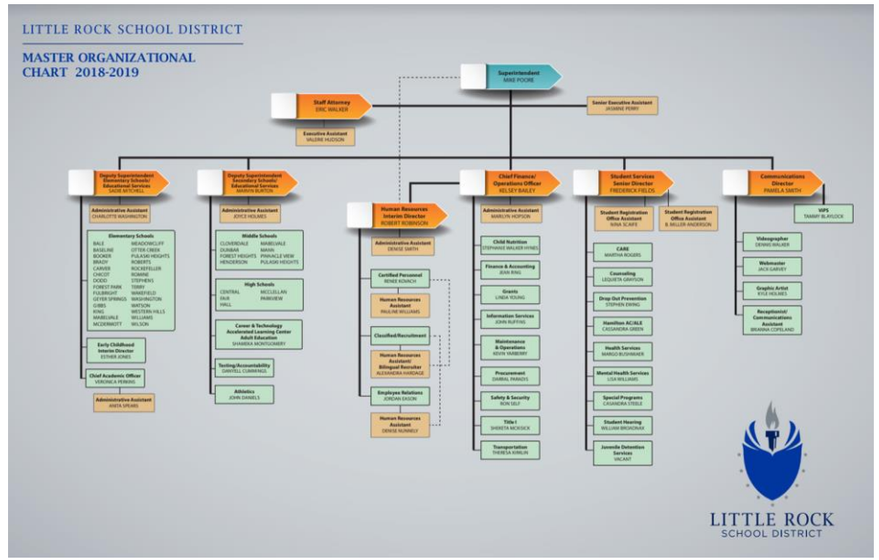
Current State:
Central Office Organization

There are Several Strengths Identified with LRSD's Current Organizational Structure

COMMITMENT: The superintendent and central office leaders are committed and have an unwavering focus on improving the education and lives of children of Little Rock.

SYSTEMS:
Position control safeguards have been implemented and appear to be working well.

The implementation of Power School and efinance has aligned the financial and payroll systems with the state.



RELATIONSHIPS: Positive district and Union relationship and have worked together during this very challenging time.

SCHOOL SUPPORT: There is a District Instructional Leadership Team that is organized by school needs and provides differentiated services.

SUCCESSION: There is a leadership development program that has been successful in developing an internal pipeline for school-based leaders.

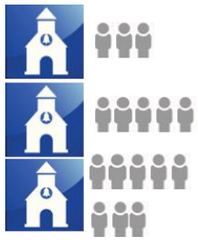
CLIMATE: The High Reliability School approach and multi-year focus on DuFour /PLC/Solution Tree provides a foundation to improve school culture.

Even with many strengths to build on, there are significant challenges that hinder LRSD's strategic efforts

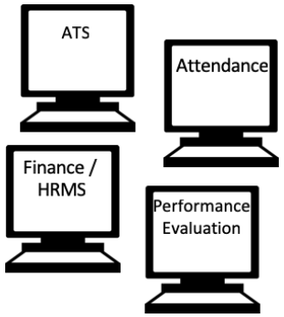
Loss of over $37M in desegregation funding (~ 6% of overall budget)

No Teacher Pay increase for the past 5 years

Revolving leadership – Six Superintendents in the past 10 years
High leadership turnover rate in hard to staff schools
Pathway and timing of return to local control unclear



Inconsistent staffing allocations and vacancy tracking practices
Manpower reports are not always reliable



Disparate systems and technology limit the district's ability to leverage data to drive decision making and support key operations and procedures

Lack of clear policies and procedures for key functions and areas

Pockets of promising initiatives that are isolated or lack alignment

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Key Central Office Design Questions

School Improvement

- How are principals supported as instructional leaders?
- How are curricular, instructional, and assessment materials and methods selected, implemented, and evaluated?
- How are TESS and assessment data used for goal-setting, planning and prioritizing PD?

Educator Development

- How are all teachers supported in becoming effective teachers?
- How is PD differentiated to meet the needs of each school and support the instructional leadership of principals?
- What pathways are available for aspiring teacher-leaders and administrators?

Principals & Schools

HR & Operations

- How are principals supported as human capital managers?
- What resource allocation information (budget, position control, applicants) is available to principals 24/7?
- Which Ops functions work directly with principals and which work only through principal-managers?

Data & Metrics

- What student and staff data are readily available to principals and their managers?
- How are these data used for on-going planning and school improvement?
- How standardized is the annual school planning process?

While there are many opportunities to improve the central office organizational structure, LRSD should focus on the following areas related to Meeting the Needs of Schools:

CURRENT STATE	IMPLICATIONS
School-based staff consistently reported that the central office is not set up, organized or oriented to support their work	Lack of timely and quality support to schools can affect teaching and learning as Principals and administrative staff are focused on problem resolution and not instructional priorities
Both school-based and district staff report that there is very little cross-functional collaboration to address the district's major challenges; work is primarily done in silos	Creates an environment where there are isolated pockets of strategic work where long-term systemic implementation is limited due silos

Focus areas related to Workforce Growth and Development: :

CURRENT STATE	IMPLICATIONS
Professional development roles are dispersed with no coordination or alignment.	PD quality and impact vary widely which can affect retention and student learning
Professional development offerings do not line up with the district's academic priorities, do not build staff expertise over time and are not differentiated. There have been new systems rolled-out and there are numerous compliance trainings.	Veterans, new staff, alt cert, career changers all have unique development and support needs; misaligned PD and one-size-fit-all approaches have minimal impact and wastes valuable resources
No process for identifying the current level of performance or development needs of employees.	Inability to identify specific professional development needs by competency or skill sets hinders the districts ability to maximize PD investment return on investment (ROI)

Focus areas related to Span of Control:

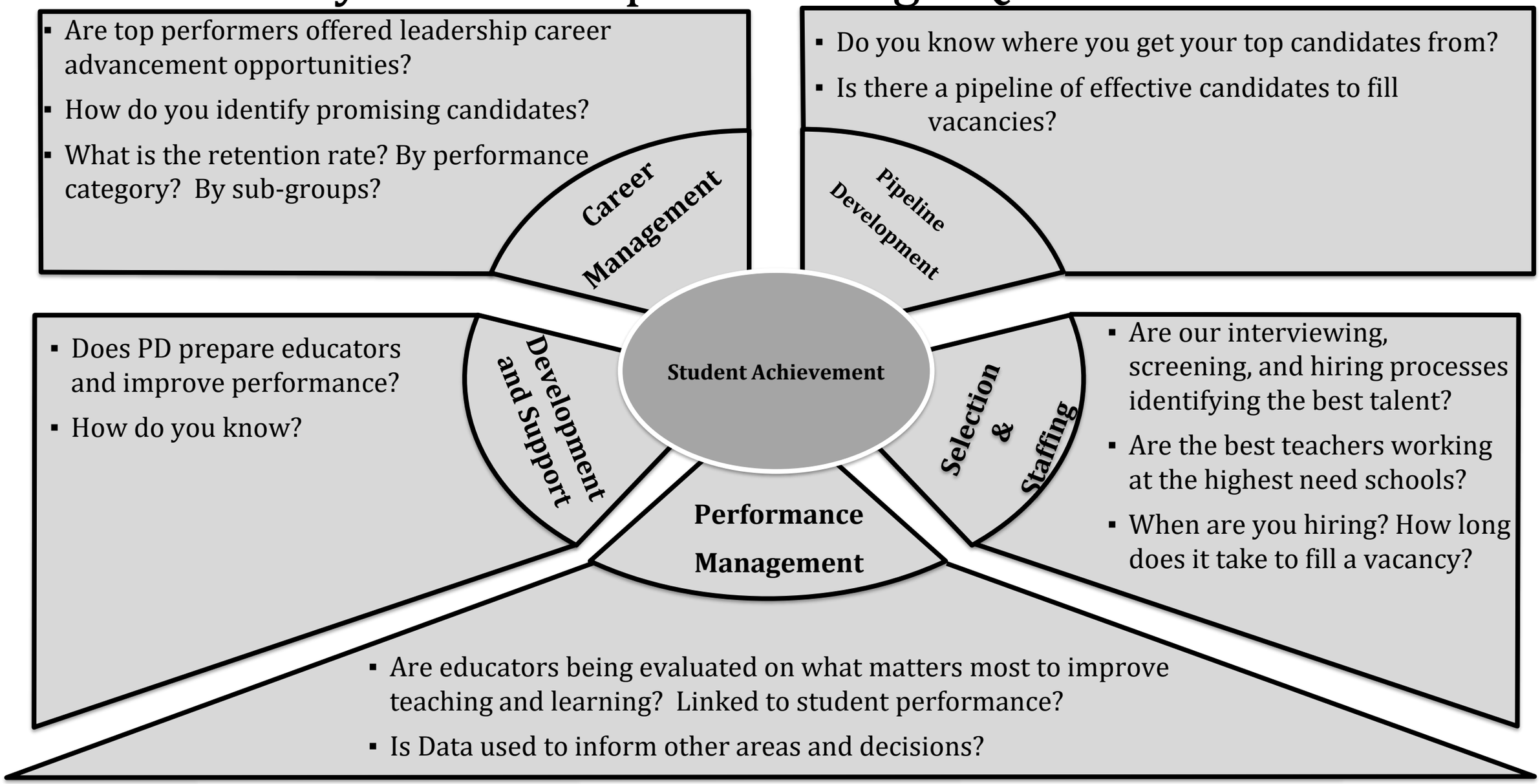
CURRENT STATE	IMPLICATIONS
Most Chiefs and Senior Directors are responsible for wide-ranging and disparate scopes of work weakening the quality of supervision	With the lack of standardized processes, cross department collaboration, and strong talent to support succession planning, senior leaders have a significant level of responsibility as they supervise and coordinate teams and functions. This situation hinders senior leaders' capacity to focus on strategic priorities and "big rocks".
The Deputy Superintendents(2) do not have adequate time to spend in schools developing principals as instructional leaders and is responsible for significant additional duties	Ideal span of control for principal supervisors range from 10 to 25 schools depending on the complexity and level Optimally supporting principals requires a full- time focus

Focus areas related to the Lack of Standard Procedures and Processes:

CURRENT STATE	IMPLICATIONS
Although some processes are codified (staffing allocations), they are inconsistently implemented	Leads to inconsistent execution and interpretation of policies and procedures which can create more "work" for central office to rectify in the future
School-based staff reported that they often do not know who to call at the central office to find support or address a problem	With the lack of clarity on key contacts for problem resolution coupled with span of control issues, schools are over burdened as they cannot find timely and quality support Central office typically works in reactive mode
Metrics are not used across LRSD to drive, measure and improve performance	Performance data are a key foundation to driving and sustaining organizational excellence; minimal use of data for planning and operational support contributes to misaligned strategic execution and inefficient use of resources

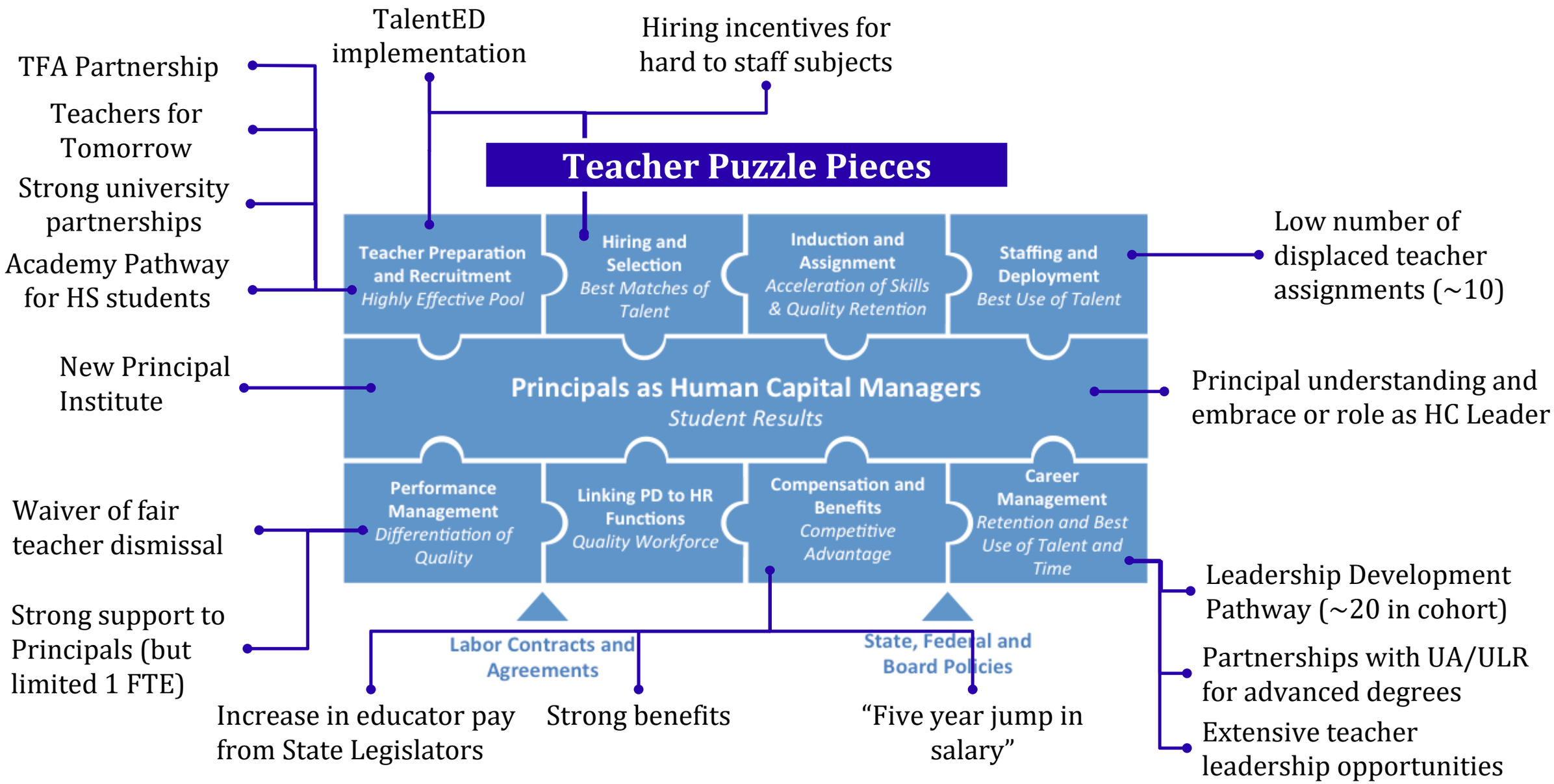
Current State Findings
Human Capital Assessment

Key Human Capital Strategic Questions



Note: Data collection and supporting analysis of LRSD performance across all areas were not readily available.

In several Teacher Puzzle Pieces, LRSD has significant strengths to build on



Mindset Shift: HR Must be Customer and Service Focused

- Connect talent to school strategy
- Differentiate and target services
- Develop strong HC managers

- Offer evaluation and PD services
- Data-driven
- Responsive customer service
- Streamlined processes

- Get paid on time
- Process leaves
- Keep accurate data

Where we want to be: HC Mgmt.

Where we are today: HR Mgmt.

LRSD is making progress in their strategic human capital efforts; however, there are still areas to address.

While there are many opportunities to improve talent, LRSD should focus on the following areas:

Strategically Maximize Talent

CURRENT STATE	IMPLICATIONS
• Recruitment and retention efforts are not driven by a strategic plan that leverages key data to drive focus; i.e. hiring forecasts, recruitment and hiring yield by initiative or source.	With the lack of a plan, staff efforts and alignment of resources are not aligned, optimized, or focused to best support recruitment and retention efforts; minimal tracking of recruitment impact limits the ability to identify and recruit from key sources
• Filling teacher vacancies: ▪ Late hiring (July/August) ▪ Late resignations (with no mitigating policies) late budget allocations, and forced placement timing hinder early ▪ Low number of early offers (~10 / year) ▪ Varying perspectives on quality and quantity of teacher hiring pools ▪ Lack of specific supports and strategies to support hiring and retention for high need schools ▪ Teacher focus group shared negative hiring experiences ▪ Lack of a referral program to attract and identify talent ▪ Applicant data is not purged – candidates from two years ago are still active	• Hiring efforts would improve through early offers and mitigating late resignations • Forced placements happen when applicant pool quality is optimal and limits Principal autonomy to identify the best candidate • Principals will "hide" vacancies to avoid the displaced teacher process • High Need Schools face significantly greater challenges in hiring and retaining talent; teachers are transferring to lower need schools • Cumbersome application and hiring process causing the loss of candidates • Referral programs can improve recruitment and selection efforts

While there are many opportunities to improve talent, LRSD should focus on the following areas: *(continued)*

CURRENT STATE	IMPLICATIONS
• Low Performers ▪ Despite greater flexibility with evaluation procedures, low number of teachers removed for performance ▪ Relatively low number of teachers on improvement plans (less than 10)	• Despite the added flexibility, the inability to remove low performers can severely hamper the district's human capital efforts • Low # of teachers on improvement plans limits the opportunity to support and drive professional growth for teachers that need it the most
• New Teacher Support ▪ Interviews described a decrease in the quality of the mentoring and induction program; mentors may not be in the same building or subject ▪ For alt cert new teachers, balancing work with meeting the certification requirements is difficult	• Lack of supports for new teachers can adversely affect retention efforts • Differentiated supports for new teachers from traditional programs, alt cert, career changers is critical to support growth
• Leveraging data for decision making and support: HR's efforts and capacity to strategically leverage data was not clear based on the interviews	• Data is a bedrock lever to drive strategic human capital work • Data should be leveraged to inform strategic planning and direction, monitor current progress, and support key customers in their efforts to hire, retain, and develop their staff

In addition, LRSD should focus on the following areas to improve their level of service and support to key customers:

Deliver Effective Services

CURRENT STATE	IMPLICATIONS
• HR is not optimally structured to provide strategic and proactive support to Principals ▪ Primary HR support and problem solving (non employee relations issues) to principals and school chiefs handled by Chief or Director of Certified Staffing (48 schools and programs -- 30 elementary, 7 middle, 5 HS, 6 other programs) ▪ HR Assistants (4) are focused on administrative tasks and transactions	• The ability to provide proactive and strategic support is hindered with the current organization and makeup of the department
• Manual processes and Disparate Technology/Systems : ▪ Paper intensive processes including manual handoffs and signatures ▪ Delays in hiring process due to manual tracking and inconsistent communication efforts ▪ Non-integrated systems and applications	• Use of paper-based forms contribute to inefficient processes as well as an increased probability of errors • Disparate systems hinders the ability to accurately track key information and support operational procedures

In addition, LRSD should focus on the following areas to improve their level of service and support to key customers:

Meet Basic Needs

CURRENT STATE	IMPLICATIONS
• Payroll timing and accuracy • Contracts are posted late due to late agreements with unions and late verification of student enrollment	• Interviews indicated that the hiring and onboarding process may lead to payroll errors affecting timing and accuracy • Not paying employees in a timely and accurate manner will directly affect morale and retention
• Contracts are due May 1 but have been issued six 10 months late	• Late contracts can also affect morale and retention efforts • Potential for resignations without abiding by 30 day rule due to lack of contracts
• Vacancy tracking • Position management process is not used by HR to verify position funding stream	• Despite recent implementation of position control function, interviews indicated that accurately tracking vacancies is difficult due to disparate systems, inefficient processes and procedures, and staff mishandling

Recommendations

Central Office Organization

High Level Recommendations

1. Create stability in the Superintendent and other Chief roles.
2. Reduce the span of control and scope of work of central office leaders to ensure that each function is well-managed.
3. Design and implement structures and systems to supervise and provide differentiated support to principals and schools.
4. Make the growth and development of educators the highest priority of the central office after student achievement
5. Streamline processes, remove barriers , eliminate silos and ensure that everyone is working toward the common goal
6. Foster a culture of trust, respect and challenge to increase risk-taking and innovation

Recommendations

Human Capital Assessment

Human Capital Best Practices Overview

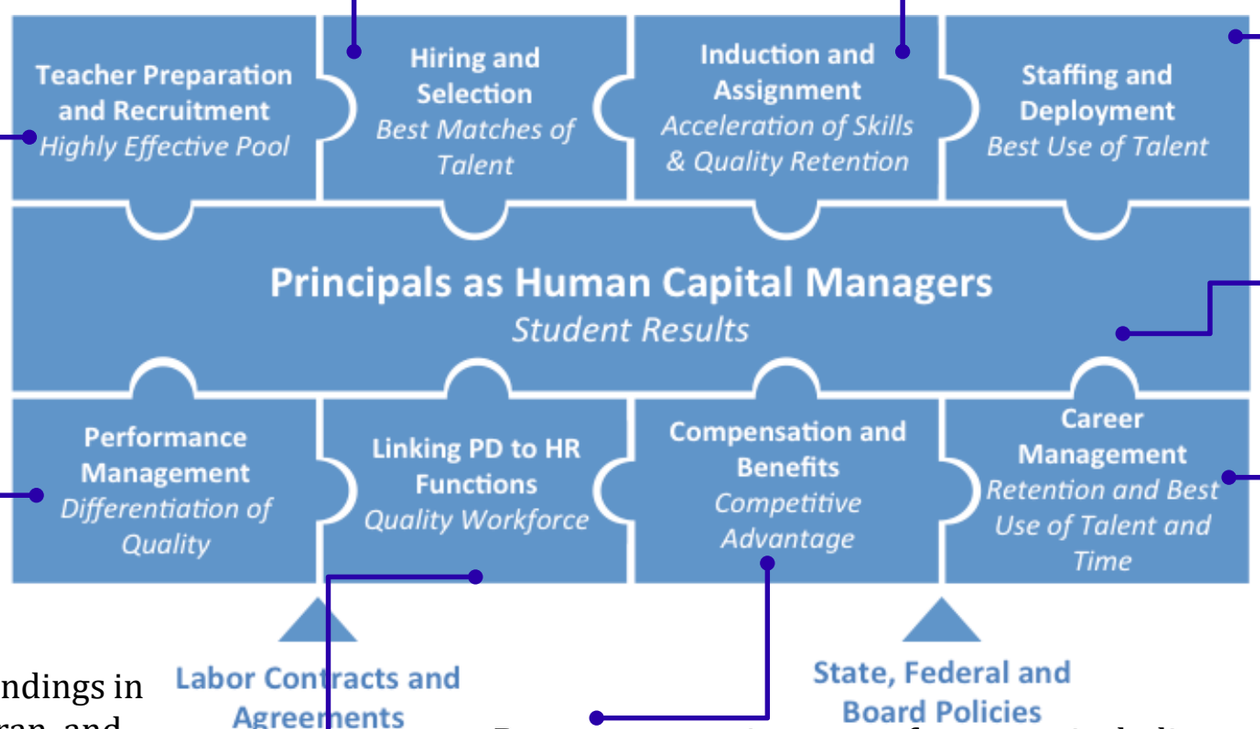
Based on forecasted need, build a pool of high quality candidates from robust recruitment pathways that will yield a cohort of new educators who are highly effective and motivated

- Drive early hiring with supports for principals to identify, select, and match talent
- Efficient hiring and onboarding to drive employee satisfaction

Robust mentoring and induction programs with formal structures and supports for teachers and principals that matches mentors by grade and/or subject

- Hiring and Staffing policies based on performance and mutual consent
- Ensure equitable distribution of highly effective teachers to high need schools

Teacher Puzzle Pieces



- Provide high levels of customer service to principals in their human capital efforts
- Provide comprehensive human capital data to Principals and assists them in analyzing that data and in making informed decisions

- Provide a fair and comprehensive system using multiple measures with a differentiated system of supports focused on growth
- Leverage results and findings to inform other HC decisions

- Provide differentiated opportunities to aspiring principals/teachers
- Creates individualized retention plans utilizing multiple incentives and career opportunities for highly effective teachers

- Align PD based on evaluation findings in support for aspiring, new, veteran, and low performers
- Monitor and measure PD effectiveness

Base compensation on performance, including student achievement; freeze salaries of low-performers; fast-track salary increases for high-performing newer teachers; and decouple compensation tied to PD and advanced degrees

To best support the effort to improve educator quality each area should align and inform decision making within each component through Feedback Loops and Information Integration

High Level Recommendations

1. Implement early and proactive planning to target and attract high quality recruits
2. Improve the quality of the applicant pool and streamline application efforts
3. Develop recruitment messages that align with and reflect the district's and community's core values
4. Drive policies and processes to enable earlier hiring of teachers and principals
5. Employ equitable distribution practices to analyze the distribution of teachers based on teacher effectiveness measures to ensure that high need schools are staffed with effective teachers and support personnel
6. Incorporate evaluation results and other teacher quality measures in all key human capital decisions including retention, development, and promotion activities
7. Improve proactive and strategic talent management support to principals
8. Identify clear metrics and goals for the department/teams/individual roles that align with the district's overall goals and overall talent management objectives

Next Steps Discussion and Reflection

Proposed High-level Actions

- Prioritize recommendations based on impact & complexity
  - Identify phasing and timelines
  - Assign owners and collaborators using a RACI framework
- Support implementation by strategic data use
  - Assess and improve data integrity, user experience and access
  - Create reports, dashboards and templates for strategic data use by leaders
  - Develop discussion and facilitation guides for principal managers to use with principals to improve analysis, planning, and monitoring
- Central Office & HR Organizational Design
  - Identify key roles and responsibilities with attention to span of control
  - Determine alignment and coordination of key functions and initiatives
  - Design explicit systems and processes to drive horizontal & vertical cross-functional work