

M. Delaware Talent Cooperative Study Summary

Delaware Talent Co-Operative: Retaining High-Performing Teachers in Delaware Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

Background

The Delaware Talent Cooperative has offered financial incentives for the highest-performing teachers to stay in and move into schools serving students (mostly from low-income communities) in the state. During the 2013-2014 school year, the Co-Op was implemented in 18 out of 49 eligible schools. The highest performing teachers in each school – those who were rated “Highly-Effective” on the state’s teacher evaluation system – were identified. These teachers were offered up to \$10,000, paid in equal installments over a two-year period, if they remained in one of the designated schools (*Retention Program*). Additionally, highly effective teachers across the state were eligible for transfer incentives of up to \$20,000 if they committed to transferring/working in participating schools (*Attraction Program*).

Operation Public Education (OPE) at the University of Pennsylvania was commissioned by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) to gather information on the implementation of the Delaware Talent Cooperative (“Co-Op”) and evaluate how the initiative influenced educators’ perceptions of educator evaluation, talent recruitment, compensation and career pathways, and, most notably, educator retention in the state’s high-need schools. This document summarizes key findings from OPE’s research conducted between January 2015 and May 2015.

Data Collection Methods

The research and data collection centered around three main questions:

- ***Participation.*** *Who participates in the Co-Op and what influences their decision to join the program?*

We examined how the characteristics of teachers participating in the Co-Op compared to other sub-groups of teachers and conducted focus groups with participating teachers and eligible non-participating teachers/principals to gather feedback on why they decided to join/not join the Co-Op.

- ***Implementation.*** *What have been the strengths and challenges associated with the implementation of the Co-Op?*

We analyzed two surveys on the implementation of the Co-Op, the first given by the DDOE in Fall 2014 and the second administered by OPE in May 2015. To complement this survey data, we conducted site visits in higher performing Co-Op schools.

- ***Outcomes.*** *Do teachers in Co-Op schools have different perceptions of evaluation systems or different rates of retention?*

We used survey data to investigate how teachers in Co-Op schools’ perceptions of educator evaluation compared to teachers in non-participating schools, as well as to the population of teachers in the state. We also examined how teacher retention in Co-Op schools compared to other types of schools in the state of Delaware.

Figure 1: Data Sources (Collected in the 2014-2015 Year)

<i>Quantitative</i>	<i>Qualitative</i>
✓ Fall 2014 Co-Op survey administered by DDOE (157 respondents)	✓ One focus groups with participating Co-Op Retention teachers (15 participants)
✓ Administrative data on teachers in the state of Delaware	✓ Two focus groups with participating and non-participating Attraction teachers (12 participants)
✓ Retention data on teachers in the state of Delaware	✓ Two site visits to high-performing schools with a combination of interviews and focus groups (total of 14 teachers and 7 leaders)
✓ Spring 2015 Co-Op survey administered by OPE (77 respondents – 29% response rate)	✓ Interviews with key stakeholders including current and former union leaders, DDOE leaders, participating and non-participating principals (11 participants)

PARTICIPATION:

Who participates in the Co-Op and what influences their decision?

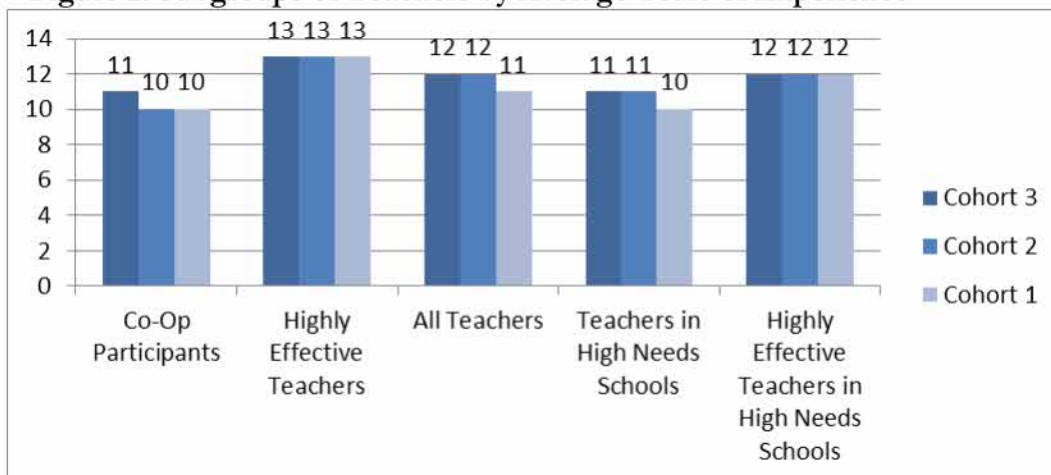
We analyzed the demographic data from Cohort 1 (2011-2012), Cohort 2 (2012-2013), and Cohort 3 (2013-2014) of the Talent Co-Op Retention Program. For each Cohort (and corresponding year of the Co-Op), we looked for differences between participating teachers and other groups of teachers on the following characteristics: age, gender, race, years of teaching experience, school level, and level of education. We compared participating teachers in the Retention Program to the following sub-groups of educators for each year of the Co-Op (2012, 2013, 2014). Due to the small number of participants in the Attraction Program of the initiative, we did not conduct quantitative analysis on these teachers.

- **Highly Effective Teachers.** All teachers in the state of Delaware who were rated Highly Effective on DPAS-II
- **All Teachers.** All teachers in the state of Delaware
- **High Needs Teachers.** All teachers in high needs schools
- **Highly Effective Teachers in High Needs Schools.** All Highly Effective teachers teaching in high needs schools

Who participates in the Co-Op?

- **Co-Op Retention teachers are younger and less experienced than other sub-groups of teachers.** Co-Op teachers tend to be younger and less experienced than other sub-groups of teachers with the exception of other teachers in high needs schools. However, their years of experience are lower than other highly effective teachers in high needs schools.

Figure 2: Subgroups of Teachers by Average Years of Experience



The Co-Op also has a disproportionately high number of secondary teachers compared to other sub-groups of teachers, which is likely due to the composition of schools participating in the Co-Op. There were no other significant differences between Co-Op teachers and other subgroups of teachers.

Why do they participate?

Participating teachers shared the following reasons for their participation in the Co-Op:

- ***Additional compensation.*** Many teachers indicated that the compensation aspect of the Co-Op made it possible for them to pursue and stay in positions in lower paying schools or districts. Though compensation was not the primary driver of decisions, teachers felt that the stipend was helpful and appreciated the extra compensation.

✓ *“I think the elephant in the room is money. I mean, nobody wants to talk about it, but there are surrounding states that pay better.” (Retention Teacher)*

- ***Recognition for high-performing teachers.*** Teachers reported that the Delaware Talent Cooperative recognized achievement in high needs schools, and many teachers saw compensation as a reward for their hard work within their schools.

✓ *“It was recognizing and valuing great teachers, because I came from a school where I worked 12 hours a day at home, at school, and yeah I am highly effective in my observations but you go home at the end of the day but no one recognizes it and no one seems to value it, and I was at the point where I didn't want to teach anymore. I was burned out and I was done so it was nice to, even in a letter, have someone be like we do value you in this state, we do recognize that you are working hard and to now be somewhere where it is recognized still. I think that's working.” (Attraction Teacher)*

- ***Opportunities to share best practices with other high-performing teachers.*** Teachers reported that the Delaware Talent Cooperative provided them with a unique and valued opportunity to interact with – and learn from – other high-performing teachers across the state.

✓ *“...what I really got out of the-Co-Op was I sat around a table with really good teachers, talking education... I was hoping we would have more interaction and group activities.” (Retention Teacher)*

Why don't they participate?

The teachers that did not join the Co-Op Attraction Program cited security in their current job as the reason for not opting into the program. Security included concerns about tenure and compensation, as well as concerns over teaching a different population of students.

- **Security.** Teachers shared that they were comfortable in their current jobs. Several worried about whether they would maintain their tenure status if they moved to a new district or be able to maintain the same level of compensation.
 - ✓ *"If I leave my district and go on to another district, do I start over? What happens with my tenure? You know? That was a big concern... I'm in my district. I felt safe. But to be completely honest with you, I did not feel safe going into another district not knowing what was going to happen to me after two years." (Attraction Teacher)*
 - ✓ *"When we work in Delaware, 70% of our salary comes from the state. 30% comes from local funds. What happens if when you leave a school district and work for a charter school, you're only earning the state amount. I would have lost 30% of my income making that move." (Attraction Teacher)*

Principals whose schools did not participate in the Retention program cited perceptions of equity and community as the reason why the Co-Op was not implemented in their respective schools.

- **School Community.** One principal shared that the district did not enter the Co-Op because there were concerns that only teachers in tested subjects would be eligible. Though this practice has changed in recent years, the principal had not been aware of the change or involved in the decision-making process. Another principal reported that the idea of the Co-Op was insulting to some staff. This principal felt it undermined the idea that all teachers contributed to student success and thus, had the potential to disrupt a positive school climate.

IMPLEMENTATION

What have been the strengths and challenges associated with the implementation of the Co-Op?

Strengths

Teachers cited the following factors as contributing to successful implementation:

- **Professional Development.** Although there was some critical feedback from teachers that attended professional development in the early years of the Co-Op that it was too rudimentary, teachers in more recent cohorts reported that the professional development helped them establish leadership roles in their schools.
 - ✓ *"We had a really good project that we are taking back to our school and hopefully we will try to implement at some point." (Retention Teacher regarding a team project developed during the three day conference)*
- **Team Building and Goal Setting.** Some teachers expressed that the Co-Op helped them clearly identify goals and became a rallying point for teacher improvement. Teachers were motivated to work and grow as a team in order to meet learning goals for their students. They noted that having a clear target helped them stay focused, though they were always motivated to do their best in the classroom.

✓ *"I think it kind of brought a lot of us together in a sense. I feel like it really made me feel like part of the team." (Retention Teacher)*

- **Feedback.** Teachers in the two high-performing Co-Op schools we visited cited the importance of quality feedback. The quality of feedback also emerged on the survey as the most important factor influencing teachers' perceptions of the Co-Op's impact.

✓ *"What you really want is professional feedback. I'm a career educator so I wouldn't mind a shot in the arm. It's all about continued growth." (Retention Teacher)*

Figure 3: Teachers' Perceptions of Helpfulness of Co-Op Components

	Not Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful
Additional Compensation	3.2%	6.5%	32.3%	58.1%
Professional Development	17.7%	22.6%	35.5%	24.2%
Opportunities to collaborate with other highly effective teachers	14.5%	21%	33.9%	30.6%

***Note: N=77 teachers who completed end of year survey**

Challenges

- **Communication.** The initial design team focused on the development of the Co-Op, but did not have a clear plan for how the program would be communicated to districts, schools, and teachers. Consequently, most teachers agreed that there was some initial confusion when they were introduced to the program and some felt ambushed by the demands of the program. Teachers expressed that expectations and scheduling should be laid out more clearly in advance.

✓ *"It would be nice for [Co-Op expectations] to be really clear; this is what it is, this is what you need to do, this is what you needed, this is what's expected of you." (Retention Teacher)*

- **Possibility of Divisiveness in Co-Op Schools.** While teachers in some schools felt the Co-Op had a positive impact on team-building, other teachers expressed concerns with the negative stigma associated with the Co-Op. In some schools, teachers expressed that they felt they could not talk about Co-Op membership with other teachers, making the atmosphere divisive.

✓ *"For whatever reason, in education, the idea of an attraction incentive is looked at negatively... it definitely does not create a nice feeling in a building. There's a lot of closed door meetings with only those people and we try not to talk about it to people that we know didn't get it." (Attraction Teacher)*

- **Inconsistent and Unfair Standards for Selection.** Many felt Co-Op selection standards were unfair. The complaints about equity varied on a school basis, but generally teachers felt the standards were inconsistently applied. Several teachers complained that leadership set the bar unrealistically high, therefore excluding teachers that made tremendous gains.

✓ *"It was extremely difficult and I feel like it was partially the money part too, because some people made it by one kid, and some people didn't make it by one kid. So is there really that big of a difference between the teachers? No, of course not. So why couldn't we do something that would be just rewarding everyone across the board? Like if you have a really good English department, why not just reward everyone? It just didn't feel fair." (Retention Teacher)*

Figure 4: Teachers' Perceptions of Co-Op Communication, Criteria, & Community

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The information I received about the Co-Op when I joined, provided me with an understanding of the program	6.5%	19.4%	8.1%	62.9%	3.2%
The expectations for my participation in the Co-Op are clearly defined	4.8%	12.9%	17.7%	56.5%	8.1%
The criteria for selecting members of the Co-Op is fair	12.9%	25.8%	19.4%	33.9%	6.5%
I feel comfortable talking about the Co-Op with other teachers at my school	8.2%	18%	24.6%	41%	8.2%

**Note: N=77 teachers who completed end of year survey*

OUTCOMES

Do teachers in Co-Op schools have different perceptions of evaluation systems or different rates of retention?

Teacher Evaluation

OPE analyzed the DPAS-II implementation survey given to all teachers in 2013-2014. The survey uses a scale of 1 to 4 and reviews school perceptions of different aspects of DPAS-II. The survey results included data aggregated at the school level (N=232). Of those schools, 18 schools were Co-Op schools and 47 were high needs schools. We compared Co-Op schools to other high needs schools and all schools.

We grouped questions into the following scales to streamline interpretation of the results:

- **Fairness** – teachers' perceptions of whether the system was fair and equitable
- **Observation** – teachers' perceptions of the fairness of the observation components of DPAS-II
- **Student Growth** – teachers' perceptions of the fairness of the student growth component of DPAS-II
- **Implementation** – teachers' perceptions of the consistency and quality of DPAS-II implementation

Across all DPAS-II survey measures, Co-Op teachers consistently rated DPAS-II implementation higher than other schools. However, it is impossible to discern whether Co-Op participation led to successful DPAS-II implementation or if Co-Op schools had more effective implementation prior to participation.

- **Significant differences in Perceptions of Fairness and Student Growth.** In particular, teachers in Co-Op schools had better perceptions of the overall fairness of the DPAS-II system and the accuracy of student growth measures (Measures A, B, and C).

Figure 5: Teachers' Perceptions of DPAS-II (Aggregated at the School Level for 2013-2014 Year)

	Co-Op Schools	High Needs Schools	All Schools
Fairness			
Fair and Equitable. The system is fair and equitable	2.60	2.41	2.42
Student Growth			
Measure A. Measure A is a good indicator of my teaching effectiveness	2.55	2.20	2.23
Measure B. Measure B is a good indicator of my teaching effectiveness			
Measure C. Measure C is a good indicator of my teaching effectiveness			
Student Improvement. Can be judged fairly and equitably			

**Note that the Student Growth measure was a scale of the 4 listed questions*

Teacher Retention

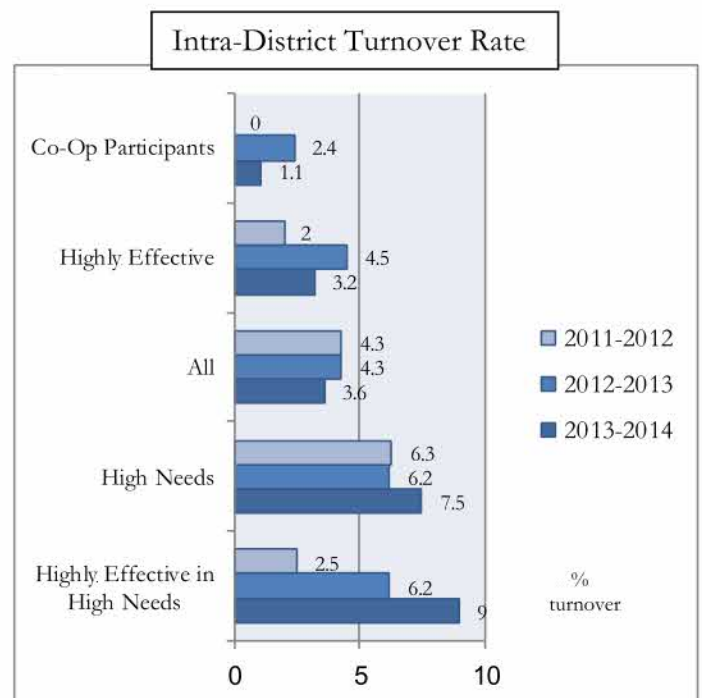
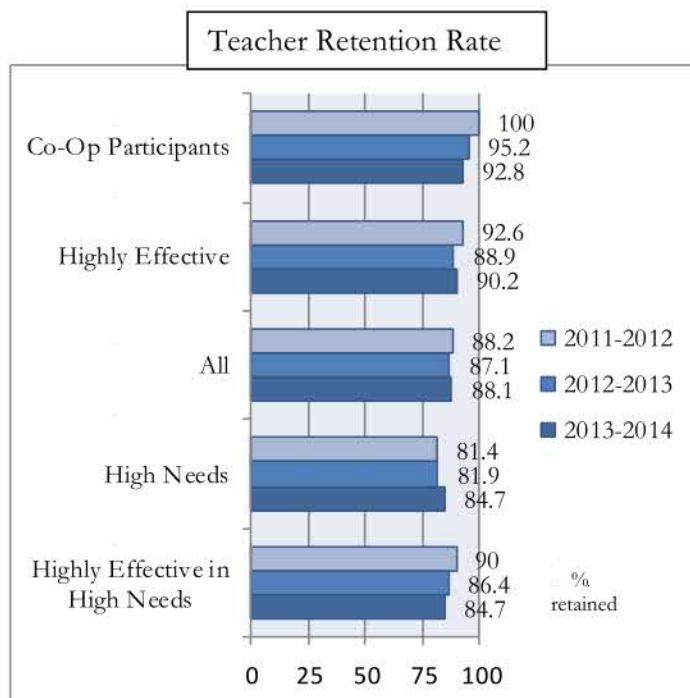
- **Level of administrative support, school culture, and compensation are most important factors.** Overall, teachers reported in both surveys and focus groups that the three most important factors influencing their decision to stay teaching in their school were: administrative support, school culture, and compensation.

Figure 6: Most Important Factors Influencing Teacher Retention

	% indicating in top 3 factors
Administrative Support	71%
School Culture	54%
Compensation	38%
Resources	32%
Input into Decision-Making	27%
Level of Autonomy	27%
Professional Community	24%
Student Behavior	19%
Professional Development	10%
Level of Parental Support	5%

***Note: N=77 teachers who completed end of year survey**

- **Higher rates of retention among Co-Op teachers than other sub-groups of teachers.** Co-Op teachers tended to return to the same school at a higher rate than all other sub-groups of teachers. When Co-Op teachers did leave their school, they had lower rates of intra-district turnover, meaning they were less likely to stay teaching in the same district. 50% of surveyed teachers shared that they were more likely to stay teaching at their school because of the Co-Op.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Clearly communicate the purpose & expectations of the Co-Op

Teachers were more likely to be invested in the Co-Op if they did not view it solely as additional compensation, but instead as part of a comprehensive program designed to recognize and support professional growth. Additionally, teachers who understood the Co-Op expectations were more likely to have positive perceptions of the program's impact. When leaders communicate with current and prospective Co-Op teachers, they should emphasize the purpose behind the program and set clear expectations for the requirements at the beginning of the year. To support these practices, DDOE and district leaders should provide principals with communication training on messaging the value and structure of the Co-Op.

Focus on the perceived fairness & usefulness of performance measures

Teachers' perspectives of the Co-Op were influenced by their perceptions of the accuracy and fairness of the evaluation system. Many teachers were concerned about the subjectivity associated with the observation measures, in addition to the attainability of the student growth measure. As a result, some teachers believed the Co-Op created a divisive culture in their school, which made them reluctant to discuss their participation. Leaders should ensure that teachers understand the performance measures and offer specific feedback to help them improve their instructional practice. In turn, DDOE and district leaders should provide principals with training on expectation setting and feedback, as well as facilitate opportunities for them to share best practices around building school culture with other leaders.

Recognize teachers' and schools' differentiated needs

Teachers identified a variety of factors driving their decision to stay teaching in their school. While compensation was one of the most important factors, most teachers shared that the level of administrative support and school culture were even more critical, and others felt that factors such as level of involvement and autonomy were most relevant. The prospective Attraction Program teachers we interviewed had an entirely different set of concerns, focused around job and financial security. DDOE and district leaders should consider creating differentiated tracks and offerings within the Co-Op, which can be better customized to meet teachers' and schools' varying needs.

Provide opportunities for ongoing collaboration

Teachers appreciated the opportunity to connect and share teaching methods with other high performing teachers in the state. They reported that learning directly from their peers was the most inspiring aspect of the program and challenged them to continue developing their practice. However, Co-Op meetings were infrequent, and it was often challenging for teachers to travel across the state to attend. DDOE leadership should consider developing informal networks that would allow Co-Op teachers to connect with other participating teachers throughout the year (e.g., affinity groups, online discussion forums, twitter chats).

Re-engage key stakeholders in the process

Since the design of the Co-Op, there has been turnover in key leadership positions at the state level, which has made it challenging to ensure all stakeholders have similar context and share the same vision for the program. To be successful and sustainable over time, stakeholder engagement needs to be a dynamic and iterative process. DDOE leadership should create a Co-Op working group (similar to what existed in the initial design phase) composed of key stakeholders (e.g., state and union leadership, participating principals and teachers) to revisit the goals of the Co-Op and refine the structure and programming moving forward.