

PUBLIC IMPACT



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Syracuse Schools Join National Initiative to Extend the Reach of Excellent Teachers
High-Need Schools Will Implement Opportunity Culture Models
to Reach More Students with Excellent Teachers and Pay Teachers More, Sustainably

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.—With leadership from its teachers, the Syracuse City School District, New York’s fifth-largest district, will implement new staffing models in struggling schools in 2014–15 to extend the reach of its excellent teachers and their teams to more students, for more pay, within budget.

Four of the district’s highest-need schools will choose and implement these new “Opportunity Culture” models, in collaboration with Education First and Public Impact. Public Impact created the core models that schools will tailor to fit their needs. Education First has extensive experience facilitating collaborative change in district schools.

Syracuse’s schools face a host of challenges as they implement the five-year “[Great Expectations](#)” strategic plan, in their mission to become the most improved urban district in America. More than three-quarters of Syracuse students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches; about one-quarter of Syracuse families live in poverty, compared with the state average of about 10 percent—and more than 44 percent of children under 18 live in poverty. System leaders know great teachers are the key to changing the odds for these students, and paying them more and letting them lead while teaching is essential to attract and keep them in Syracuse.

“Joining with our teachers to make these changes is exciting,” said Superintendent Sharon Contreras. “We’ve all seen smart new initiatives come and go with grants. It’s time to create more teacher leadership opportunities and pay teachers more for the long haul.”

Education First, which will take the lead in assisting Syracuse, is a national education policy and strategy firm that strives to improve public education by helping leaders innovate, think bigger, and achieve more on behalf of students.

Public Impact’s work in Syracuse grows out of its [Opportunity Culture](#) initiative, launched in 2011. In its quest to reach all students with excellent teachers by 2025, the Public Impact team published [school model summaries](#) and [detailed models](#) that use job redesign and technology to extend the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students, for more pay, within budget—without forcing class-size increases. Most of the models add significant time for teaching teams to collaborate, plan, and improve during school hours and make paid career paths possible for all teachers, not just the best. In fall 2013, Public Impact Co-Directors Emily Ayscue Hassel and Bryan C. Hassel updated their Opportunity Culture vision in [An Opportunity Culture For All: Making Teaching a Highly Paid, High-Impact Profession](#).

Excellent teachers—those in the top 20 to 25 percent—are the ones who, on average, help students make a year and a half worth of learning growth annually and excel at developing students’ higher-order thinking skills. Students who start out behind need excellent teaching consistently to catch up, and students in the middle need the same to advance toward rising global standards.

In an Opportunity Culture, excellent teachers are accountable for every student’s learning, and these teachers and their teams earn more for reaching more students. Good, solid teachers work side by side with outstanding peers, who can set a high standard for learning and help whole teams excel. Pilot schools in other districts in the Opportunity Culture initiative received about 30 applications for every open reach-extension position in 2013–14. Schools may find these higher-paying models especially effective for recruiting and retaining excellent teachers and teams in hard-to-staff schools and positions, such as STEM teaching.

The Syracuse district received a “Strengthening Teacher and Leader Effectiveness” grant from the New York State Education Department to help with implementation and transition costs of the Opportunity Culture models. The district will not need grants to continue the pay supplements for teachers.

Each pilot school has created its own school design team, led by teachers and some school administrators, to select and adapt the Opportunity Culture job models to fit each school’s needs, or to create their own models. Each school’s design will meet a set of guiding principles established by the district, based on Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture principles (shown in the box at right).

The models include, for example:

- **Multi-Classroom Leadership.** A multi-classroom leader is an excellent teacher who leads a team. The “MCL” stays in the classroom as a teacher; is accountable for the team’s teaching and the outcomes of all the team’s students; sets the methods and materials used; and collaborates with and develops the team.
- **Time Swaps:** When a school uses Time Swaps, students work as little as an hour per day online, mastering basic skills, or offline on projects or individual work, to master basic skills. This frees teachers’ time to reach more students and focus in-person instruction on personalized, higher-order learning. Teachers also gain planning and collaboration time.
- **Elementary Specialization:** In this model, a teacher who has demonstrated excellence in one subject or subject pair (for example, math and/or science, or language arts and/or social studies) teaches just those subjects, with support from other teachers and paraprofessionals.

<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunity Culture Principles</p> <p><i>Teams of teachers and school leaders must choose and tailor models to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reach more students with excellent teachers2. Pay teachers more for extending their reach3. Fund pay within regular budgets4. Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development5. Match authority and accountability to each person’s responsibilities

“These models respect teachers and help them deliver for kids. We’re just setting the stage for great teachers to lead their schools toward excellence,” Bryan C. Hassel, Public Impact’s co-director, said. “Teachers choose the school models they think will work best for their schools, and can work with principals to adjust the models as teachers work with them.”

Education First will guide the Syracuse school teams using materials on OpportunityCulture.org. The firm has broad experience in school reforms focused on great teaching, as well as in engaging educators in the changes that impact them, and has contributed to design process guidance the district will use.

“We’re looking forward to working with teachers and other leaders in Syracuse to see how teachers lead the way in making their schools better for everyone—students and teachers both,” said John Luczak, principal at Education First.

For more information, please visit www.OpportunityCulture.org. To arrange an interview with Public Impact’s co-director, Dr. Bryan C. Hassel, contact Anne Halstater at Anne_Halstater@publicimpact.com; 919.357.5519.

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About Public Impact

Public Impact is a national organization whose mission is to dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on students who are not served well. We are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. We are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, and on-the-ground consultants who work with leading education reformers.

Learn more about an Opportunity Culture on OpportunityCulture.org. The website also provides [tools](#) – all free—for school design teams, and related [publications](#).

About Education First

Education First is a national, mission-driven strategy and policy consulting firm with unique and deep expertise in education improvement and reform issues. We work closely with policymakers, advocates, and practitioners to design and accelerate ambitious plans in college and career readiness, college completion, STEM strategies, and effective teaching, and we specialize in developing bold policies, planning for implementation, and building widespread, bipartisan support and understanding for change. Learn more at education-first.com.