

Better HR Management Can Improve Our Schools

By Alan Macdonald and Susan Freedman

An educated, highly-skilled workforce is critical to the future of business in Massachusetts. Education Reform, begun in 1993, has helped our state make terrific strides, putting us at the top of many national rankings. But the persistent achievement gap between wealthy and low-income students, and between whites and racial minorities, threatens to undo this progress. AND WE KNOW FROM CONSIDERABLE RESEARCH THAT TEACHER QUALITY MAKES A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN STUDENT OUTCOMES.

IN FACT, studies show that high-quality teachers can help their students learn a year and a half's material in one academic year, while poorly-performing teachers only SEE 6 MONTH'S LEARNING GAINS IN THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME. That's a full year's difference in educational attainment BETWEEN THE STUDENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL TEACHER AND THE STUDENTS OF A POOR TEACHER—imagine the DIFFERENCE IN results for students, compounded over 12 YEARS OF SCHOOL.

Because this issue is so critical, the Massachusetts Business Roundtable has joined with more than 20 organizations as part of the Working Group for Educator Excellence, A STATEWIDE COALITION OF EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE. Business leaders don't always see eye-to-eye with teachers unions, but on this critical issue, we share a fundamental belief that all students deserve an excellent teacher in EVERY classroom.

THE LEADERSHIP OF successful business enterprises spend more than half THEIR time on personnel matters: recruitment, training and retention. Attracting and retaining the "A" players, and sharpening the skills of "B" players to move them up the ladder, is paramount. Keeping those "A" players requires training, mentoring and career development. In the business world, and in the education world, it's all about human resources to GET THE JOB DONE.

Lawmakers are coming onboard. State Education Committee Co-Chairs Marty Walz and Robert O'Leary have also recognized the importance of educator quality, and recently sponsored a forum for other legislators on the issue. After all, recruiting, mentoring and retaining teaching talent is perhaps the most important part of "education reform."

Review and evaluation is not meant for weeding out the under-performer, as much as it's meant to find the talented and motivated employee, and to provide resources and encouragement to allow the employee to advance and excel. We need to keep that talent in the classroom to fulfill the promise of providing the best education we can for our students.