
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | NOVEMBER 2009

Teacher Hiring, Transfer and Evaluation in

Los Angeles Unified School District

An ineffective teacher evaluation system, late-summer hiring and forced placement of teachers prevent Los Angeles schools from building effective instructional teams.

Introduction

In the spring and summer of 2008, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) partnered with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to investigate the impact of the school district's policies and practices on the ability of schools to build and maintain strong instructional teams. TNTP's analysis included the following components:

- Analysis of teacher staffing and evaluation data from the district;
- Online surveys of principals, teachers and teacher applicants (3,663 teachers, 245 principals, and 500 teacher applicants responded to the survey, with response rates of 10 percent, 30 percent, and 33 percent, respectively);
- Review of the teachers contract between United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and LAUSD; and
- Interviews with district leadership and principals.

TNTP's analysis reveals that under current LAUSD policies and practices, schools struggle to build and maintain strong instructional teams. Analysis of teacher and principal surveys and human resources data point to five specific areas of significant concern.

Findings

Late hiring: LAUSD recruits year-round and generates a high-quality applicant pool. However, hiring tends to happen late, which results in the loss of quality candidates and leaves some principals reporting that they do not have the applicants they need.

One in three new teachers in LAUSD is not hired until July or August. Although districts should complete the bulk of hiring by May 1 in order to capture the highest-quality candidates, in the past few years, the district has received almost half of its applications for teacher vacancies by May 1 but has made only 18 percent of its job offers by that date. Although 90 percent of principals are satisfied with the quality of applicants recruited by LAUSD, this hiring delay causes top teacher candidates to accept jobs with other districts that hire earlier.

61% of principals have lost a desirable candidate because they could not make a timely offer.

Forced placements: Most teachers are hired through mutual consent of teachers and principals, and these placements are generally successful. However, LAUSD's displacement process often results in compulsory placements that satisfy neither teachers nor principals.

Nine in ten teachers favor “mutual consent” staffing policies, but many teachers are still placed into positions without their input or that of the receiving principals. Despite overwhelming support for a move to mutual consent, lingering “must-place” and “priority list” practices in Los Angeles have required the majority of LAUSD schools to accept teachers they did not want or who were not a good fit—causing widespread teacher dissatisfaction and hampering schools’ ability to form effective instructional teams. Los Angeles is the only one of the three largest US school districts that does not require the consent of both teachers and principals in all teacher placements.

Poor customer service: Improved communication from LAUSD HR with both external applicants and internal transfers has the potential to sharply improve stakeholder satisfaction.

Thirty-one percent of unhired teacher applicants report never having received a response from LAUSD, and many cite frustrations with the clarity of the application process. Likewise, displaced teachers have difficulty navigating the transfer process, with 52 percent expressing dissatisfaction with support and communication from HR during the process.

Ineffective evaluations: Teachers and principals convey mixed messages about the effectiveness of the evaluation process; currently, almost all teachers are rated as meeting expectations, so principals pass along poor performers through the displacement process.

Less than 1 percent of teachers are rated “Below Standard,” while the remaining 99.3 percent receive “Meets Standards” ratings. As such, the ratings lack meaning and ignore differences in teacher effectiveness, preventing schools from recognizing excellence, providing useful professional development, and remediating or dismissing consistently poorly performing teachers. Instead, many principals pass poorly performing teachers from school to school: 62 percent of principals – including 82 percent of middle school principals – report “displacing” a teacher or encouraging a teacher to transfer on the basis of poor performance. One in three principals has non-renewed a poorly performing teacher’s contract only to find that teacher hired later by another LAUSD school.

99.3% of teachers are given an evaluation rating of “Meets Standards.”

Inequitable attrition: A significant subset of LAUSD teachers plans to leave the district in the next few years, especially from high-poverty and low-performing schools.

Two in five current teachers plan to leave the district in the next few years. At LAUSD’s highest-poverty and lowest-performing schools, planned attrition is especially high, with many teachers citing salary, cost of living or administrative support as reasons for leaving.

Recommendations

In June of 2009, LAUSD created a Teacher Effectiveness Task Force. The Task Force, led by California State Board of Education President Ted Mitchell, is charged with making recommendations to improve teacher quality in the district. To address the above challenges and to provide all students with the excellent teachers they need and deserve, The New Teacher Project recommends that the Task Force and LAUSD consider the following set of reforms to policy and practice.

- **Earlier hiring.** Move up the hiring timeline and prioritize high-quality new teachers by allowing consideration of all teacher candidates for any vacancy rather than delaying external hiring until internal placements are completed. Facilitate speedier HR communication with applicants and transferring teachers.
- **Mutual consent placements.** Establish a system of “mutual consent” hiring, in which principals and teachers must agree that each placement is a “fit.” In Chicago and New York, among other cities, this has increased teacher and principal satisfaction with the school staffing process.
- **Improved HR communication.** Develop a “customer service” plan to improve communication with applicants and transferring teachers, integrated with real-time online vacancy information.
- **Effective evaluations.** Overhaul the teacher evaluation system, building a new system around the primary goals of meaningfully differentiating teachers based on their effectiveness improving student academic growth and helping teachers to improve their instructional performance.
- **Focus on retention of highest-performers.** Create a strategic labor-management task force that will be held accountable for improving retention of high-performing teachers in LAUSD, particularly in high-poverty schools and shortage area subjects. This group will identify at-risk teacher populations and spearhead targeted interventions.

About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) helps school districts and states fulfill the promise of public education by ensuring that all students—especially those from high-need communities—have excellent teachers. A national nonprofit organization founded by teachers, TNTP recognizes that although teachers matter more than any other school factor in student success, the nation’s education systems are not aligned with the goal of an effective teacher in every classroom. In response, TNTP develops customized programs and policy interventions that enable education leaders to diagnose their teacher quality challenges and find, develop and keep great teachers. Since its inception in 1997, TNTP has recruited or trained approximately 33,000 teachers—mainly through its highly selective Teaching Fellows™ programs—benefiting an estimated 4.8 million students. TNTP has also released a series of acclaimed studies of the policies and practices that affect the quality of the nation’s teacher workforce, most recently including *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (2009). Today TNTP is active in more than 25 cities, including Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, New York and Oakland, among others. For more information, please visit www.tntp.org.