

Teacher Hiring, Transfer and Evaluation in

San Francisco Unified School District

San Francisco attracts excellent teachers to teach in its public schools – but it squanders its own successes by waiting until too late to hire these teachers, by forcing some current teachers into schools without consent, and by operating an ineffective teacher evaluation system.

Introduction

In the winter and spring of 2008, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) partnered with San Francisco Unified School District 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:

- Review of the teachers contract between the United Educators of San Francisco (UESF) and SFUSD
- Analysis of teacher staffing and evaluation data from the district
- Online surveys of principals, teachers and teacher applicants (952 teachers, 89 principals, and 1,440 teacher applicants responded to the survey, with response rates of 31 percent, 79 percent, and 32 percent, respectively).
- Interviews with district leadership and principals

TNTP’s analysis reveals that schools struggle to build and maintain strong instructional teams under current SFUSD policies and practices. The analysis points to four specific areas of significant concern: late teacher hiring, forced placements, ineffective evaluations, and retention difficulties. Collectively, these challenges result in a system in which the most important factor in student success – teacher quality – is taken for granted.

Findings

Late hiring: San Francisco is able to attract a large applicant pool of prospective teachers, but loses quality candidates who grow frustrated with a late hiring timeline.

One of three new teachers in SFUSD is not hired until August. By the end of the summer, top candidates from an initially large applicant pool have accepted jobs with other Bay Area districts that hire earlier. Fully 3 of 4 principals report having lost a desirable candidate because they could not make a timely offer. Furthermore, the district’s delayed hiring timeline – due to internal transfers that must occur first, delayed budget estimates and late teacher retirement notifications – appears to be out of compliance with state law.

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Forced placements: Teachers and principals sometimes have no say in teachers’ school assignments, to their shared frustration.

The analysis highlights the importance of respecting the consent of both teachers and schools in *all* teacher placements. Nine in 10 teachers favor “mutual consent” staffing policies, but some “consolidated” teachers (those whose positions have been eliminated due to budget cuts or program changes) are still slotted into open positions. Despite overwhelming support for a move to mutual consent, lingering forced placement practices have required most SFUSD schools to accept teachers they did not want or who were not a good fit—hampering their ability to form effective instructional teams.

Only 17% of principals agree that current hiring and transfer processes allow them to build the best possible instructional teams.

Ineffective evaluations: Evaluations are ineffective at assessing performance, improving instruction and dismissing poorly performing teachers.

In SFUSD, less than 1 percent of teachers are rated “Unsatisfactory” during the evaluation process. SFUSD’s teacher evaluation system, which assigns 86 percent of teachers one of the top two ratings on a five-point scale, fails to identify poor performance or recognize excellence. Fewer than half of teachers think their evaluators helped them improve their instruction. Instead of supporting or dismissing poor performers, principals often pass them from school to school – more than half report “consolidating” a teacher or encouraging a teacher to transfer on the basis of poor performance.

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Retention difficulties: The district struggles with retention, and many teachers cite HR services and administration as a factor in their decision to leave.

Two of every five teachers in SFUSD plan to leave the district in the next five years, and many of these teachers will continue teaching elsewhere. Although pay, benefits, and cost of living are the most commonly-cited reasons for this attrition, 36 percent of teachers cite HR services and administration as a factor in their decision to leave the district. The district appears to face the greatest challenges in retaining English and Special Education teachers, and Chinese and African American teachers.

43 percent of unhired applicants to SFUSD never received a response from the district.

Recommendations

To address these challenges and provide all San Francisco students with the high-quality teachers they deserve, SFUSD should adopt 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 – both external and internal – simultaneously for any vacancy. 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 satisfaction and reduced teacher mobility.
- **Effective evaluations.** Overhaul the teacher evaluation system, building a new system around the primary goal of helping teachers to improve their instructional performance.

- **Focus on retention.** Expand and improve communication and services from Human Resources, especially for teachers at high risk for attrition.

About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a national nonprofit dedicated to closing the achievement gap by ensuring that poor and minority students get outstanding teachers. Founded by teachers in 1997, TNTP partners with school districts and states to implement scalable responses to their most acute teacher quality challenges. TNTP recruits and trains thousands of exceptional new teachers annually, supports school principals in staffing their classrooms, provides teacher certification in high-need subjects, and documents the policy barriers that keep students from getting the teachers they need. Since its inception, TNTP has trained or hired approximately 33,000 teachers, benefiting an estimated 4.8 million students nationwide. It has established more than 70 programs and initiatives in 28 states and published three seminal studies on urban teacher hiring and school staffing. This year, its clients include school districts in 26 cities, including Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Memphis, St. Paul, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, San Antonio, and Washington, DC, among others. For more information, please visit www.tntp.org.