

# BENEATH THE SURFACE:

Ensuring LA schools have equitable access to educators



## PARTNERSHIP

FOR LOS ANGELES SCHOOLS

## Executive Summary

The research is clear: teachers are game-changers in the lives of their students. Unfortunately, in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LA Unified), as in most public school systems across the country, there are few incentives or supports to ensure that schools serving students with the greatest needs have an equal opportunity to attract and retain the most highly qualified and experienced teachers. Indeed, from 2015–2018, highest-need schools<sup>1</sup> in Los Angeles have been assigned hundreds of teachers who were unable to find a position anywhere else. More broadly, thousands of teaching positions at highest-need schools have been filled in circumstances where the school only had access to one or two qualified applicants. The result is that highest-need schools are much less likely to hire and retain qualified teachers who are a good fit for the students they serve.

This document outlines concrete steps that LA Unified can take to improve access to great teaching candidates at schools serving highest-need communities. We recommend that the District start by changing the hiring rules to better support highest-need schools. This means: 1) Reaffirming the commitment to allow the highest-need schools to hire any qualified candidate without restriction; 2) providing highest-need schools with enhanced staffing support; and 3) protecting highest-need schools from “must-place assignments,” whereby a candidate who has been unable to find a position elsewhere is assigned to a school without input from school staff. While these recommendations would not be sufficient to address every barrier facing students at our highest-need schools, they can make an immediate difference and do not require modifications to state law, changes to the collective bargaining agreements with the District’s labor partners, or tens of millions of dollars to implement.

Changing hiring rules would be even more impactful if combined with more fundamental changes to make teaching at highest-need schools more attractive, sustainable and effective. We need stronger pipelines to attract teachers, particularly teachers of color, to teach in schools where the need is greatest. We also need to increase support for teachers at highest-need schools by giving them time to plan and collaborate more deeply with their colleagues. By changing how teachers work, plan, and learn together, we can ensure that the extra challenge associated with serving highest-need students is balanced by the extra support necessary to be successful. This model could be piloted at a small group of highest-need schools with an

<sup>1</sup> On April 10, 2018, LA Unified released an updated Student Equity Need Index (“SENI 2.0”), which categorized schools into different categories of need based on a variety of demographic, academic, social-emotional, and community factors. Schools serving the greatest amount of student need are called “highest-need,” while schools serving the next greatest amount of need are called “high-need.” It is these categories we refer to when using the terms “highest need” or “high need” throughout this paper.

additional investment that would be equivalent to a rounding error in the District's \$8 billion dollar budget.

In the absence of proactive policies such as these to level the playing field for highest-need schools, we know that the distribution of highly qualified and experienced teachers is not even, fair, or equitable. Instead, teachers with the most qualifications and experience will be concentrated in schools with a higher proportion of affluent and white students, and tens of thousands of black and brown students will be denied a chance to develop to their full potential.

## Low Performing and High-Need Schools Are Less Able to Attract Successful Candidates

All of the District's roughly 650 traditional neighborhood schools, however different their circumstances, must compete each hiring season under the same general hiring restrictions.<sup>2</sup> Most notably, these restrictions often preclude hiring candidates from outside of the District, based on the supply and demand of teachers with specific credentials. If external candidates are prohibited, schools must either attract a teacher already at another school, or hire from a "pool" of displaced teachers whose position was closed at their prior school. Schools which have superior facilities, better reputations, and student populations with fewer challenges tend to fill their vacancies very quickly, whereas schools serving the District's highest-need communities struggle to compete.

As a result, although the hiring rules are equal, hiring outcomes are not. As set forth in more detail in this document, across the entire LA Unified school system, schools serving our city's highest-need communities have the least choice when filling a vacancy, and often have no choice at all. High-need schools must sometimes accept whichever candidate is assigned to them. In our experience supporting a network of the District's highest-need schools, the more choice a school has, in terms of a broader pool of candidates to choose from, the more likely the school is to find a successful candidate who will be able to achieve good outcomes for students.

In the following sections we examine the amount of choice that schools have when making a hire. First, we examine the distribution of "must-place assignment" teachers across the district from 2015 to 2018. Second, and of even more importance for the overall system, we assess the district's

<sup>2</sup> As noted in more detail on page 9, the District has implemented some practices to specifically improve staffing outcomes at highest-need schools, including the Reed Investment Schools program, which includes a suite of interventions to attract and retain principals and teachers at 37 of the District's highest need schools.

highest-need schools' ability to attract qualified candidates by assessing the conditions under which Partnership schools filled each of their vacancies during this same time period.

## Highest-need schools receive many more “must-place assignments,” which are much less likely to be successful

Must-place assignments are made when a school is unable to fill a vacancy and a candidate has been unable to find a position by a specified date. Our experience shows that must-place assignments are less likely to be successful and stable at a school than candidates hired through the mutual consent of both the teacher and the school.

There are many reasons why teachers who are assigned to a school without mutual consent are not often successful. First, when the school and teacher do not choose each other, there is less likely to be an aligned vision or a shared set of expectations about what teaching and learning will look like in the teacher's classroom. This is a critical aspect of a school's normal teacher selection process.

Second, as candidates who are successful in finding their own positions are removed from the available candidate pool, those remaining at the end of the hiring period are those who have been perceived by schools to be less attractive candidates. In some cases, candidates interview feverishly before assignment deadlines and are still unable to find a position, while others avoid interviewing at all since there is no obligation on the part of displaced teachers to seek their own assignment. While some strong candidates no doubt remain in the pool at the deadline for must-place assignments, candidate quality declines as the pool shrinks. A survey conducted of LA Unified principals found that nearly 75% of principals “rarely” or “never” found a teacher who was a good fit for their school from the list of “must-place” teachers.<sup>3</sup>

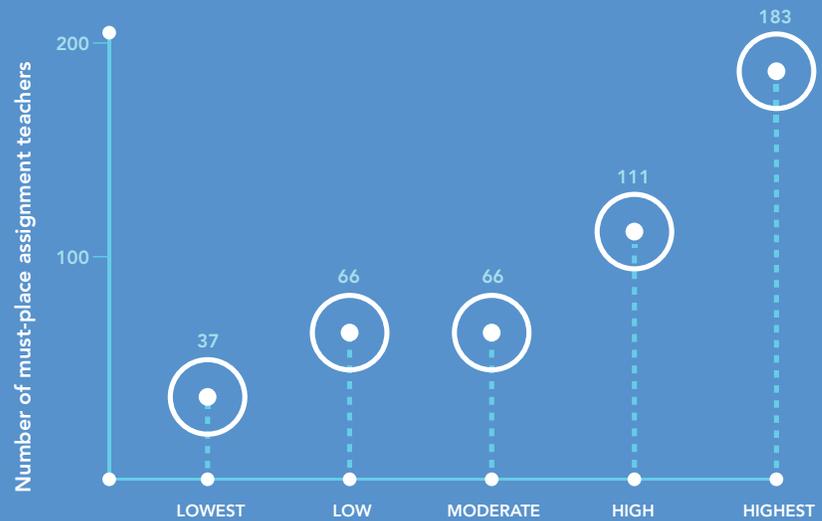
Finally, must-place assignment teachers do not stay in their positions as long as teachers hired through mutual consent, causing continued staffing instability at school sites. According to LA Unified, only 40% of teachers who had been mandatorily assigned in 2015-16 remained at their school site for one year or more.<sup>4</sup> A significant number of these teachers left their school sites mid-year, which presents a profound obstacle to learning for the impacted students and a huge

<sup>3</sup> Teacher Quality Roadmap: Improving Policies and Practices in LAUSD, National Council on Teacher Quality, 2011, pg 7.

<sup>4</sup> “Update Regarding Displaced Teachers,” LA Unified Informative, Human Resources Division, Nov. 18, 2016.

### DISTRIBUTION OF MUST-PLACE ASSIGNMENT TEACHERS ACROSS LA UNIFIED 2015 – 2018

High-need schools are five times more likely to get must-place assignments



School need categories are based on rankings in the Student Equity Need Index (SENI 2.0) that refer to such factors as income, academic, social-emotional and community factors.

Figure 1

barrier to stability for the entire school. **Thus, a must-place assignment in one year is likely to be followed by a vacancy in the following year, resulting in a chronic cycle of instability.**<sup>5</sup>

Given the negative outcomes associated with must-place assignments, it is important to understand how must-place assignments are distributed through the district. Perhaps even more importantly, the presence of must-place assignments is a warning sign indicating that a school needs additional district support to successfully attract and retain highly qualified and experienced teachers. Our analysis of must-place assignments across LA Unified over the past three years reveals a few persistent trends:

- Using the District’s revised Student Need Index (SENI 2.0), the District’s “Highest-Need” schools received a disproportionate amount of must-place assignments. Highest-need schools received approximately 40% of all must-place assignments, nearly 5 times the percentage of must-place assignments at the District’s “Lowest-Need” schools.

<sup>5</sup> Over the 2015-2018 period, a must-place assignment resulted from a school having a vacancy on one of two deadlines: the end of the prior school year (early June), and then again shortly before the start of the upcoming school year (early August). In a typical hiring cycle, schools may hire eligible teachers for their anticipated vacancies during the spring, including from the pool of displaced District employees. Shortly before the close of the school year in early June, the District assigns displaced teachers remaining in the “displaced teacher pool” to schools that have a matching vacancy. This is not a mutual consent hire, so the teacher and principal do not meet in advance of the teacher’s first day on the job. Then, during the summer as new vacancies arise, schools have approximately seven weeks to fill their vacancies through mutual consent. This is typically the time of year when many content areas become “closed” to external candidates who are not yet employed by the District, and the pool of available candidates dries up. See Figure 1. The two weeks before school begins in August constitute a second and final must-place assignment window, when any remaining displaced teachers are placed into any remaining vacancies.

- Must-place assignments are more likely at schools with lower academic performance.<sup>6</sup> Schools in the bottom 10% of the district based on results on the end-of-year state assessments were 5.6 times more likely to receive a must-place assignment as schools in the top 10% of the district based on academic performance.
- Must-place assignments are more likely in certain geographic areas, and specifically in the neighborhoods of South LA, Watts, and areas adjacent. These areas tend to serve a higher concentration of “highest-need” and “high-need” schools.
- Struggling schools were much more likely to receive multiple must-place assignments in a given year. Schools in the bottom 10% of academic performance were more than six times more likely to receive two or more must-place assignments any given year when compared to the top 10% of schools.

This data presents a clear conclusion: higher-need and lower-performing schools are systematically disadvantaged in the competition for teaching talent. This makes sense, as without any countervailing policies to support these schools (as discussed in more detail on page 9), teaching at a highest-need school can be a much more stressful and difficult job than teaching at a school in a more affluent community. As a result, these schools do not always have adequate access to the highly experienced and qualified teachers who are necessary to improve academic outcomes of our city’s most vulnerable children.

It should be noted that there are some positive trends. First, the number of must-place assignments has declined significantly each year, as the District’s long-term displaced teacher pool has been reduced.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the concentration of assignments at the District’s highest-need schools had a modest reduction in 2017-18.<sup>8</sup> Despite these improvements, however, it is clear that low-performing and highest-need schools are still unable to attract and retain the highest qualified and most experienced candidates their students need.

<sup>6</sup> For this analysis, we used schools’ average Smarter Balanced English Language Arts scores to divide schools into performance deciles by level (elementary schools compared to elementary schools, middle to middle, and high to high).

<sup>7</sup> Prior to the re-implementation of the must-place assignments policy for the 2015-16 school year, teachers who were unable to find any school willing to hire them were not assigned into vacancies but rather retained in the displaced teacher pool, and were assigned as substitute teachers or other duties. This policy caused the displaced teacher pool to grow, which led to an abnormally high amount of must-place assignments in the 2015-16 school year.

<sup>8</sup> Data regarding mandatory assignments for the 2018-19 school year is not yet available. However, we are optimistic that the data will continue the trend of fewer must-place assignments and less concentration in schools serving high-need communities.

### 5x MORE MUST-PLACE ASSIGNMENTS AT HIGHEST-NEEDS SCHOOLS

Also referred to as “forced placements,” these teachers are less likely to stay in their jobs for a full school year

### FEW QUALIFIED CANDIDATES

High-need schools often have only one or two teacher candidates for open positions

### RETENTION ISSUES

No extra incentives or supports provided to aid teacher retention

### RESTRICTED HIRING

Limited candidate pools and no external hiring outside of LA Unified

Figure 2

## The impacts of hiring challenges are much more widespread than must-place assignments alone

While the impact of a must-place assignment on students and a school community is significant, must-place assignments are not the only negative staffing outcome for highest-need schools. From 2015-2018 there were approximately 500 must-place assignments across the entire district. If the experience of the Partnership schools is typical of highest-need schools across the District, the District’s 278 high-need schools chose approximately 2,500 teachers to join their schools during this period, which amounts to three teachers per school per year.

Thus, we view the distribution of 500 must-place assignments as the “tip of the iceberg,” which, while visible above the waterline, is only a small part of the teacher hiring challenges that high-need and lower-performing schools face. The number of hires made reluctantly, the number of positions filled by the only available candidate, and the number of positions which were closed because a qualified candidate could not be found, are all invisible in a dataset which describes only must-place assignments.

In an effort to better understand how much choice schools have when hiring teachers for an upcoming school year, we have analyzed the hiring conditions that existed at the time of each

TEACHERS SELECTED AT 18 PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS WITH INSUFFICIENT OR NO CHOICE<sup>9</sup>

2015 – 2018

	2015–16		2016–17		2017–18	
<b>A. Full Choice</b>	13	19%	51	58%	24	32%
<b>B. Restricted Choice</b>	14	14%	5	6%	22	29%
<b>C. Insufficient Choice</b>	31	44%	24	27%	28	37%
<b>D. No Choice</b>	12	17%	8	9%	1	1%
<b>Total Hires</b>	70		88		75	
<b>Total Insufficient/No Choice</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>39%</b>

Figure 3

teacher hire at Partnership network schools over the 2015-18 hiring seasons. While we only have access to this data for Partnership schools, this analysis will likely apply to highest-need schools across the District, as the Partnership schools operate under the same hiring constraints as all other LA Unified schools.

We divided teacher hiring environments into four categories:

**A. Full Choice**

This category means no hiring restrictions were placed on the credential needed (hiring was “open”) and the school had a choice of several qualified candidates. This hiring environment is more common early in the hiring season (i.e., before June 1).

**B. Restricted Choice**

This means hiring was “closed” to candidates outside of LA Unified , but nonetheless the school had a choice of several qualified candidates. In other words, only LA Unified employees were eligible to be hired for the role but there was still meaningful competition for the position.

<sup>9</sup> Based on Partnership data tracked during the 2015-18 period.

<sup>10</sup>Schools may be unable to attract sufficient candidates for many reasons, including because the position was closed to external candidates, the reputation of the school site, because the role required a rare credential (e.g., Physics), because the position opened late in the hiring process (after June 30), or because the school was seeking multiple candidates with the same credential all at once (e.g., a need for three 6th grade teachers at one site).

### C. Insufficient Choice

In this case, schools' choices of candidates were even narrower. When schools have to select from just one or two qualified candidates, neither of whom may have met the school hiring committee's preferred bar for performance, we call that Insufficient Choice.<sup>10</sup>

### D. No Choice

This means that the school did not have opportunity to interview candidates, or the available candidates were not considered to be qualified for the role (e.g. candidates did not pass school's interview, demo lesson, or reference check process), resulting in a must-place assignment by the district. This has been most common, though not exclusively, in credential areas "closed" to external candidates, such as Social Studies and English, which have frequently been "closed."

Figure 3 shows the distribution of teacher hires made in Partnership schools over the past three hiring seasons (excluding midyear hires, which will almost always be made in an "insufficient choice" environment because almost all qualified candidates have secured a position for the school year). Thanks to increased focus and capacity to successfully recruit at our schools, as well as case-by-case protections provided by LA Unified's Human Resources team, we have seen a decline in the number of "No Choice" hires made at Partnership schools since 2015-16. However, there is still a continuing trend of Restricted Choice and Insufficient Choice hires being made every year, which is likely even greater at highest-need schools which have not benefited from the extra flexibility and supports provided to Partnership schools.

Deeper analysis of these results reveal several consistent trends:

- Despite the extra supports provided by the Partnership, which included two full-time employees who support school site hiring for 18 Partnership schools in addition to District support, nearly half of all hires at Partnership schools (45%) were made in an environment where the school had little to no choice in determining who would come teach at their campus. Assuming that this trend is typical of highest-need schools across the District, it is likely that more than 1,000 teachers were hired at high-need schools in a hiring environment which offered virtually no choice among candidates from 2015-18 alone.<sup>11</sup>
- Even among the Partnership's group of 18 high-need schools, hiring challenges were concentrated at a small handful of the Partnership's highest-need schools. Some 55% of our "Insufficient" or "No Choice" hires were made at just three particularly high-need schools.

<sup>11</sup>Total insufficient choice + no choice at Partnership schools:  $104/233 = 45\%$ . It should be noted that while we only have this information for the Partnership network of schools, the results are likely to be similar for highest-need schools outside the Partnership network who did not benefit from the additional supports and advocacy the Partnership provides. If we apply 45% to an estimated 2,500 teacher hires at high-need schools, we estimate over 1,000 were hired with insufficient choice.

- During the last three school years, hiring was most difficult at middle schools. The Partnership's four middle schools had 52% of all of the Partnership's Insufficient/No Choice hires, despite accounting for fewer than 25% of the Partnership's schools.
- When we review the distribution of Insufficient/No Choice by the communities we serve, Watts saw the greatest negative impact (54% of all Insufficient/No Choice hires were in Watts schools) followed by South Los Angeles (30% of all Insufficient/No Choice hires were in South LA schools). This trend mirrors the pattern we see in terms of communities whose students' have the greatest social-emotional needs, exposure to violence in the community, and overall levels of trauma.

Individual school-site factors play an important role in determining staffing outcomes, and with strong leadership and excellent systems, highest-need schools can go a long way toward overcoming their disadvantages in the competition to attract and retain top talent. Some Partnership schools that found it virtually impossible to recruit staff as recently as 2015 are now able to attract many candidates for any vacancy that arises. However, in the current system, which treats all schools as essentially the same from a staffing and recruitment perspective, the margin for error at highest-need schools is very small. A cut to the school's budget, a transition of the school's principal, layoffs, or any number of obstacles which routinely arise for schools can all threaten to undermine progress and adversely impact the ability of highest-need schools to be competitive in the teacher hiring market, whereas these obstacles may present only a small bump in the road for schools serving more affluent communities.

And indeed, this is exactly what the data shows. It is not true that every highest-need school has multiple must-place assignments or is unable to successfully recruit staff. However, it is undeniable that across the district, high-need and lower-performing schools face greater challenges and are more likely to have must-place assignments and other staffing challenges. Without systemic policies which would allow highest-need schools to more effectively compete with higher-performing schools and schools in more affluent communities, highest-need schools will almost certainly continue to attract a limited pool of teacher candidates and will struggle to perform.

## The Experience of the 'Reed' Investment Schools

In April 2014 the District implemented a new intervention strategy to support 37 persistently underperforming schools across LA Unified. These schools, referred to as Reed Investment Schools, were chosen as part of the settlement of a 2010 lawsuit seeking to protect high-need schools from significantly disproportionate teacher layoffs (due to seniority-based layoffs in which new teachers

<sup>12</sup>The Partnership participated in the *Reed* lawsuit and subsequent settlement and five Partnership schools participated in the Reed Investment program.

are let go first, some schools had upwards of 60% of their staff receive layoff notices, while others did not lose a single teacher).<sup>12</sup>

On balance, the Reed Investment schools, which received a package of additional staff members and other supports costing approximately \$500,000 per year, have achieved steady growth in several key academic and social-emotional metrics, which has matched the District's overall average rate of growth over the last five years. In some respects, this growth is evidence of the program's success, as most Reed Investment schools have not fallen further behind and many have started to close achievement gaps with the rest of the district. However, this growth is not the transformational progress that all hoped the Reed schools would have.

Upon closer investigation, we see the impact of staffing constraints identified throughout this paper. Just as the Reed program was implemented, the District restarted its "must-place" policy to assign teachers to schools without mutual consent. During the 2014-18 period, at the ten Reed Investment schools which had flat or declining academic outcomes, there were 34 must-place assignments and a further 23 teachers chosen from must-place lists with only a minimum amount of school choice.

To put these numbers into perspective, this means that approximately 7% of LA Unified's must-place assignments over this three-year period were concentrated on just these 10 schools. When one considers that these schools were specifically chosen for intervention because they were already struggling before they received these must-place assignments, we can begin to understand why even the extra staff members and other supports provided by the Reed Investment program were not sufficient to show academic improvements at these schools. By contrast, where Reed Investment schools did make progress and began to close historical achievement gaps, the number of must-place assignments was only half as much on a per school basis.

## LA Unified Can Enact Policies Today Which Will Improve Outcomes for High-Need Schools

As demonstrated by the District's own experience over the last three years, there are policies that the District could enact now which would improve hiring outcomes and thus increase student performance at highest-need schools across the city. We suggest several such policies below.

While not all aspects of these policies may be possible in all circumstances, and some may require a longer-term horizon to implement, these policies do not require any changes to the

collective bargaining agreements with the District's labor partners, modifications to state law, or tens of millions of dollars to implement. We are confident that a sustained commitment to helping highest-need schools attract and retain the most qualified and experienced teachers is the best strategy to dramatically improve outcomes at persistently underperforming schools.

### **1. *LA Unified Should Provide Highest-Need Schools With Hiring Flexibility and Accelerated Timelines***

Restrictions prohibiting hiring external candidates disproportionately disadvantage highest-need schools, which tend to rely most on new and out-of-district teachers. In order to level the playing field and prevent restricted hiring environments and a concentration of must-place assignments at schools that are already struggling, these schools need more hiring flexibility and accelerated timelines which will allow them to begin hiring earlier. Research shows that teachers hired earliest in the hiring season tend to be more effective, and that school districts that have long processing timelines often lose the best candidates.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

- Allow all highest-need schools to hire candidates regardless of existing restrictions (that is, if a credential area is otherwise closed to external hires, allow the highest-need schools to select from external as well as internal candidates). This policy was enacted by the District in the "Close-the-Gap" resolution passed by the LA Unified School Board in June, 2018 and helped to improve hiring conditions at Partnership schools during the 2018-19 hiring season. LA Unified is beginning implementation of this recommendation now, but this policy needs to continue to be implemented with full fidelity in order to see long-term impact on student outcomes.
- Move the District's budget development timeline up by two weeks, from roughly March 15th to March 1st, and then prioritize highest-need schools to begin the hiring process earlier than other schools. Set earlier deadlines by which current LA Unified teachers need to submit plans to retire, resign, and transfer, so principals have a clear view into which vacancies they need to fill for the coming year.
- Host priority hiring fairs for highest-need schools that allow principals and candidates to meet face-to-face early in the hiring season. Offer "Early Contracts" to high-potential candidates who commit to teach at a highest-need school, even if they would otherwise not be hired due to their credential area being closed to external hires. LA Unified has expanded priority hiring for high-need schools in the last three years, and this policy should be codified and further supported.

<sup>13</sup>TNTP. "Missed Opportunities." (2003)

## 2. *Highest-Need Schools Should Be Provided With Enhanced Staffing Supports*

Highest-need schools serve students with greater challenges, and have higher turnover and more vacancies. The best way for schools to avoid being left without qualified candidates and/or receiving a must-place assignment is to not have any vacancies to start with. Supporting schools to retain their teachers, particularly first- and second-year teachers who are the most vulnerable, is a fundamental step toward building stable schools.

### Recommendations:

- “Flexible hiring.” Allow high-need schools to hire in advance of anticipated vacancies in the spring, when many highly-qualified candidates are available, knowing that high-need schools are very likely to have vacancies arise in the late summer and during the school year, when it is almost impossible to fill a vacancy. If a late vacancy does not arise, the extra staff member can be a resource to support struggling teachers, provide planning time, or teach a classroom in the place of a substitute teacher.
- Differentiate staffing levels for critical social-emotional staff such as counselors, psychiatric social workers, pupil services and attendance counselors, nurses, and psychologists for the highest-need schools so that more services get to the students and families who need them most. This will make teaching in highest-need schools more attractive and allow for improved recruitment and retention. Further, these schools should be provided with enhanced flexibility to attract and retain qualified candidates and staff, potentially including the ability to offer signing or retention bonuses.
- Develop and/or centralize supports for teachers at the District’s highest-need schools. Retention strategies developed for highest-need schools could include hiring additional Teacher Quality Specialists who offer coaching and support to the District’s brand new teachers, developing a system for principals to set and disseminate retention targets, and providing small amounts of extra funding for teachers at highest-need schools to purchase additional supplies for their classrooms.<sup>14</sup>

## 3. *LA Unified Should Protect the Highest-Need Schools from Must-Place Assignments and Enact Policies to Make Them More Successful*

In the cases where teacher recruitment has been unsuccessful or vacancies become open too late in the summer, LA Unified does need to assign teachers in order to ensure there is a qualified teacher in every classroom on the first day of school. We recommend safeguards to

<sup>14</sup>The District is currently implementing an approach which provides differentiated resources to 37 highest-need “Investment Schools,” at an annual cost of approximately \$500,000 per school. While this program has had success increasing student academic performance, reducing turnover rates, and increasing retention of junior teachers, the District has announced that the Reed Investment School program will end after the 2018-19 school year.

ensure that the teachers being assigned have the potential to be a good fit with the school and, if a best-fit candidate is found by the principal, that the principal and originally-assigned teacher can amicably part ways.

**Recommendations:**

- Schools with the highest needs should be exempt from must-place assignments altogether. In recent years, the District has prevented teachers who have been displaced for multiple years from being assigned to a high-need school, and provided for “temporary” mandatory assignments which allow schools some flexibility. These practices should be continued for schools which are not exempted from must-place assignments altogether.
- Must-place assignments, when necessary, should be made to lower-need schools with more capacity to support them. To make this support more realistic, teachers who are unable to find a position through mutual consent could be assigned to lower-need schools as an additional resource who can work as a floating substitute, conduct intervention, or reduce class size. If any vacancy arises at the school in the following year, this additional teacher should then be assigned to the school to fill the vacancy. Thus, if the teacher is not effective, the principal would have the incentive and time to provide necessary coaching and support before that teacher becomes a permanent member of the school staff.
- Do not make more than one must-place assignment per school in a given year.

**4. *LA Unified Should Pilot New Staffing Models to Better Support Teachers in Highest-Need Schools***

The recommended changes to hiring rules outlined here can make an immediate difference for students in highest-need schools. However, in order to change the fundamental drivers of inequitable staffing outcomes, LA Unified must support teachers at highest-need schools differently. We recommend piloting new staffing models to make teaching in highest-need schools more attractive, sustainable and effective. While these recommendations would require a greater investment of resources than those described above, this program could be piloted at a small group of particularly highest-need schools at a total cost of less than \$10 million annually.

**Recommendations:**

- Build stronger pipelines into teaching in highest-need schools, with residency programs and other programs specifically designed to attract teachers of color and bolster teacher staffing in highest-need schools.

- Structure more time in the school day for collaborative planning by having teachers teach fewer periods, allowing teachers the time needed to build strong teams and prepare strong lessons.
- Establish new teacher leader positions to lead professional learning communities (PLCs) and support collaboration, planning, observation and co-teaching.
- Pilot innovative social-emotional and well-being retention supports to teachers at highest-need schools.

## Conclusion

In the last decade, LA Unified has made great progress to raise graduation rates and reduce suspensions across the board, including at its “persistently underperforming schools.” That LA Unified has been able to do this in the midst of a deep recession and an environment of declining enrollment is impressive, and should be celebrated. However, with the introduction of Common Core and associated assessments, it is clear that dozens of schools across the District are not adequately preparing students for college and career.

At those schools which have not made progress in improving academic outcomes, and those schools which have progressed but not yet achieved transformative success, we believe that the biggest barrier is the ability to attract and retain successful teachers. Even at Partnership schools, which have extra resources and staffing support, highest-need schools face an uphill competition when it comes to attracting and retaining the best talent.

Given the current funding and other political realities we face, we regretfully acknowledge that it is outside of the power of LA Unified - or any school system - to completely remedy all the impacts of poverty and suppression of opportunity experienced by our highest-need communities. However, we believe that the recommendations above, if adopted with an unwavering commitment, would contribute to meaningful progress toward breaking the vicious cycle that has doomed so many schools to “persistent underperformance” for decades. We look forward to further engaging in these efforts with LA Unified, community and labor partners, philanthropic leaders, and all of the hard-working individuals at our schools as we address these challenges together.



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