

INEQUITABLE STAFFING

The Hidden Barrier to School Transformation

The Problem

Highly qualified and experienced teachers are not placed equitably in schools across Los Angeles Unified School District (LA Unified). Instead, high-need schools struggle to attract and retain the most qualified and experienced teachers. This is a systemic problem. In the most extreme cases, LA Unified will assign “must-place” teachers to high-need schools that have vacancies, even though neither the teacher nor the school think it’s a good match. In order to avoid this outcome, schools and teachers often make a variety of compromises that are not in the best interest of students.

The Remedy

The research is clear: teachers are game-changers in the lives of their students. Since teachers can have a huge impact on students’ lives, we need to ensure that our most vulnerable students have access to the most qualified teachers in the district. LA Unified has an opportunity to remedy this problem by giving underserved, high-poverty schools the hiring flexibility and increased supports teachers in these schools need.

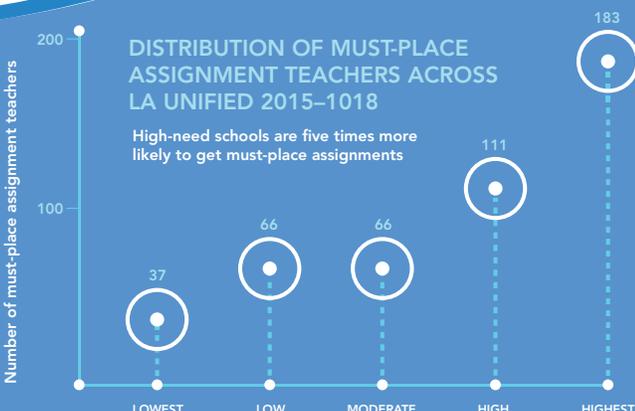
Must-Place Assignments: the Tip of the Iceberg

The general practice in LA Unified is that the district hires teachers, and then schools compete to attract those teachers who are under contract. Teachers compete for positions and are selected by schools based on mutual consent—when both parties agree it’s a good match. But in some cases the district places a teacher at a school even though neither the teacher nor the school’s leaders think it’s a good match. This is called a must-place assignment, also referred to as “forced placement” or “mandatory assignment.”

Must-place teachers are less likely to be successful and much more likely to turn over than teachers who have chosen the school in turn. What’s worse, they are five times more likely to be placed in highest-need schools. Why is this? Because highest-need schools often struggle to attract and retain teachers, they are more likely to have vacancies close to the start of school. And since the district has teachers under contract who need a job placement, they are under pressure to assign them to our highest-need schools. This is not good for the school, the teacher, or the students, and it needs to stop.

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



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

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

FEW QUALIFIED CANDIDATES

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

RETENTION IS AN ISSUE

No extra incentives or supports provided to aid teacher retention

NO OUTSIDE HIRING

Limited candidate pools and no external hiring outside of LA Unified

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.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STAFFING BARRIERS AT HIGH NEED SCHOOLS

FEW QUALIFIED CANDIDATES

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

Beneath the Surface

High-need schools hire from very limited options

Must-place assignments are just the tip of the iceberg. High-need schools go to great lengths to avoid must-place assignments, so they often settle for teacher hires who are less than perfect for their schools. The candidate pool for teacher hires at high-need schools is typically very limited, as teaching at high-need schools is challenging and there are no extra incentives or supports provided. In many cases schools are required to hire from lists of existing LA Unified teachers, which further limits the candidate pool. For high-need schools it is not atypical to have only one or two LA Unified teachers apply for a position, so schools hire from a position of very limited choice. There are still many great teachers who are hired in circumstances like this, but it makes it much less likely than if there was a larger, more competitive candidate pool.

The result is that high-need schools are much less likely to hire and retain qualified teachers who are a good fit for the school. This has huge impact on the stability and quality of teaching at high-need schools.

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What Can Be Done?

There is good news

Over the last several years, the District has worked to address the hiring challenges faced by high-need schools, including the “Close the Gap” resolution in June 2018, which allowed high-need schools to hire external candidates instead of being limited to a district list. We recommend four policies which would continue to improve teacher hiring and retention at high-need schools, and which would not require any change to state law or the teacher contract:

1. Continue the commitment to allow high-need schools to hire any qualified candidate — inside or outside the system — without restriction.
2. Enhance staffing support at high-need schools, such as advance hiring before last-minute vacancies arise and expanded early hiring.
3. Protect high-need schools from must-place assignments — assign must-place teachers to schools with more capacity to support them.
4. Provide additional supports for teachers at high-need schools, like increased planning time, residency programs, and social-emotional supports.

These recommendations are a cost-effective first step to quickly remove staffing barriers facing high-need schools in Los Angeles. These changes, when taken together, would have a significantly positive impact on high-need schools, their current and future teachers and their students. We look forward to working with LA Unified to make them a reality.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Urge LA Unified to take action on the recommendations above and continue to support high-need schools in hiring and retaining great teachers.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Check out the Resources section of the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools’ website for a policy paper that provides more details.