

GETTING THE BEST TEACHERS IN OAKLAND'S CLASSROOMS

5 big findings every Oaklander needs to know

The National Council on Teacher Quality (www.nctq.org) recently completed a study called Teacher Quality Roadmap, looking at policies and practices in the Oakland Unified School District and their impact on teacher quality and student achievement. NCTQ identifies a number of tangible solutions, five of which are listed here.

This study is the first step in making change happen. The much more difficult work lies ahead and falls to the Oakland community to push for reform.

FINDING 1: The district needs to do a much better job hiring and assigning teachers.

THE CHALLENGE

Oakland's procedures for hiring and assigning teachers to schools delay the hiring of new teachers until late into the summer months, when many potential candidates have already found other jobs. Most problematic, however is that principals do not have final say over who works in their buildings; assignment of most transferring teachers is done by seniority.

THE SOLUTION

The district should revise its approach of "advisory matching" and negotiate with the teachers union to commit to "mutual consent" hiring in which principals are never required to accept a teacher who is not a good fit.

FINDING 2: The district's evaluation system is confusing and data are not used to drive decisions.

THE CHALLENGE

While Oakland principals should be commended for recommending more evaluation for nearly a quarter of the teachers they evaluate annually, the evaluation system is confusing, it fails to provide an overall sense of a teacher's effectiveness and it has no concrete actions that follow ratings.

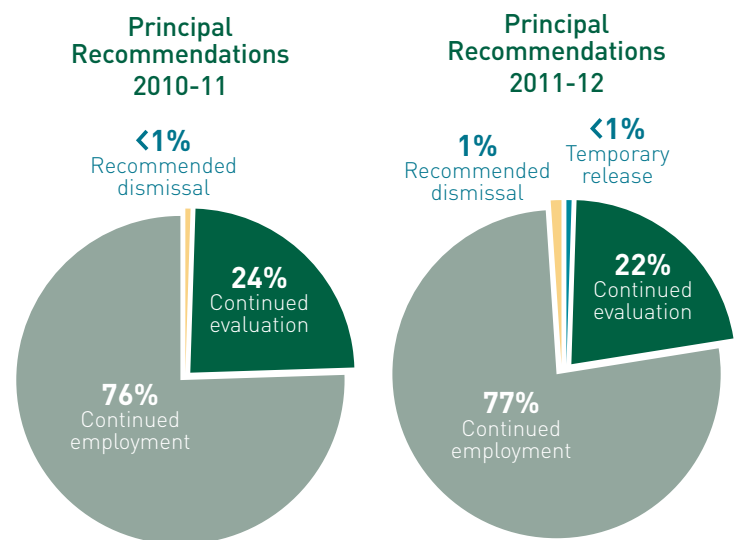
THE SOLUTION

- Provide teachers with specific feedback on the teaching standards that culminate in a summary rating with impact on their professional development options, employment standing and career advancement opportunities.
- Track what happens to teachers viewed by principals as ineffective, essential data for any district to use to hold its principals and itself accountable for good personnel management.

FINDING 3: Teachers need more meaningful feedback on their performance.

THE CHALLENGE

Given its teacher workforce of over 2,200 teachers, OUSD's dismissal rate suggests that teachers are not being held accountable for their performance. According to OUSD records, only five tenured teachers were dismissed between 2002 and 2011 for performance reasons. This is the lowest rate of dismissal NCTQ has seen in the districts it has studied.



Principals recommended more evaluation in nearly one out of every four evaluations completed in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

THE SOLUTION

- Make student performance the preponderant criterion on which teachers are evaluated. Standardized test results provide one source of evidence that students are learning, but there are others that districts can and must use since standardized testing does not occur in all grades and subjects.
- Develop a team of independent evaluators to validate principal evaluations and provide content-specific feedback on teacher instruction. These evaluators should be content experts and should serve the dual purpose of validating principal evaluations and assessing content-relevant instruction.
- Incorporate student voice into teacher evaluations. Carefully created student surveys have been found to correlate strongly with student outcomes and can be used as another measure of teacher effectiveness.

35 students a year x 180 days x 6 hours a day =
37,800 hours of observations



vs.

1 principal x 2 observations x 1 hour each =
2 hours of observations



Here are some examples of questions to use in student surveys of teacher performance:

1. My teacher in this class makes me feel that s/he really cares about me.
2. My teacher really tries to understand how students feel about things.
3. Students in this class treat the teacher with respect.
4. Our class stays busy and doesn't waste time.
5. My teacher has several good ways to explain each topic that we cover in this class.
6. In this class, we learn to correct our mistakes.
7. My teacher makes lessons interesting.
8. Students speak up and share their ideas about class work.

FINDING 4: The district needs to pay top teachers more.

THE CHALLENGE

Oakland is doing very little to nurture and support its next generation of teacher leadership. Like most districts, Oakland pays its teachers based on years of experience instead of how well they perform. Yet research tells us that a teacher with 20 years of experience is no more effective than she was when she had five years of experience.

THE SOLUTION

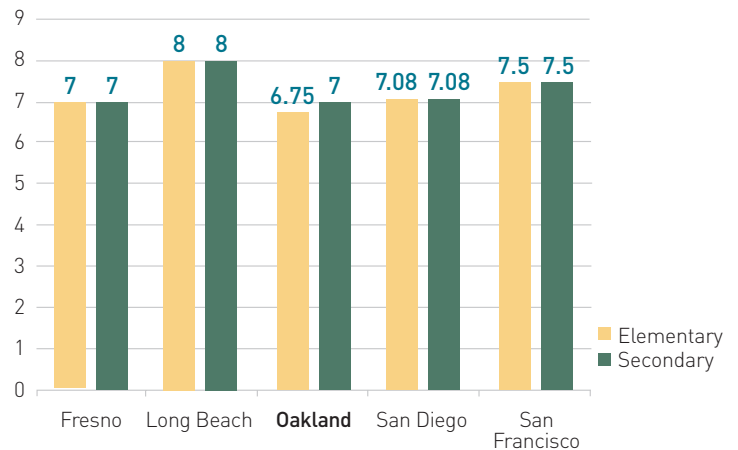
- Give high-performing teachers the chance to earn big raises at any point, regardless of how much experience they have. Teacher performance should matter more than longevity.
- Develop career ladder positions to allow qualified teachers to receive increased compensation for increased responsibility and leadership while continuing to teach students. These positions can provide needed coaching and feedback for peers while giving high-performing teachers an opportunity for career growth and higher pay without leaving the classroom.
- Link the largest raises to significant accomplishments, including the year in which a teacher earns tenure, provided tenure becomes a real milestone in a teacher's career and not an automatic decision.
- Offer higher salaries to the top teachers who consistently produce the greatest learning gains. Even a district that faces tremendous financial constraints can move toward such a system by recognizing outstanding teachers and placing them on a higher level of pay.

FINDING 5: Teachers need more time in the school day.

THE CHALLENGE

At 6 ¾ hours to 7 hours, Oakland's teachers' official workday is among the shortest in the state.

Teacher workday in hours



THE SOLUTION

Move toward an eight-hour contractual workday that is performed on-site. In the era of school accountability, when so much of a teacher's work involves interaction with others, teachers need to be at work on-site for a standard eight-hour day.

To find out how you can be involved in making change happen in Oakland, contact Marc Tafolla (marc@gopublicschools.org) with the Effective Teaching Coalition at 510-868-8800.



National Council on Teacher Quality

For more information visit us at www.nctq.org