
Teacher
Quality
Roadmap

&
Improving
Policies and
Practices in
LAUSD

About this study

This study was undertaken on behalf of the 672,000 children who attend school in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

About NCTQ

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a non-partisan research and policy organization committed to restructuring the teaching profession, led by our vision that every child deserves effective teachers.

Partner and Funders

This study is done in partnership with the United Way of Greater Los Angeles and a coalition of groups including, Parent Organization Network, Families in Schools, Alliance for a Better Community, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Los Angeles Urban League and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. Additional funding for this study was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The NCTQ team for this project

Emily Cohen, *Project Director*

Priya Varghese, *Policy Analyst*



Executive Summary



This study looks at the policies and practices shaping teacher quality in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It is part of a series of analyses by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) in select school districts across the nation.

Not unlike students in other urban districts in this country, far too many LAUSD students are underperforming academically. LAUSD's graduation rate hovers just below 60 percent and only 11 percent of 4th grade students scored proficient in reading on the "nation's report card," the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The sheer size of LAUSD is reason enough to view its prospects for reform daunting. Add to that mix the state's extreme financial turmoil and it becomes even harder to envision a successful turnaround strategy. Yet the resolve to alter the district's course is strong and genuine, energized by the arrival of a new school superintendent and a community that is determined to move beyond rhetoric to action.

Fortunately, there appears to be considerable common understanding of what it is going to take to achieve reform, that above all else the district will require a strong workforce of educators. What's needed is essentially an army of teachers and school principals who are prepared to do things quite a bit differently than they have been done for many years.

This report focuses on district policies and practices in five key areas impacting the quality of the teaching force: teacher assignment, evaluation, tenure, compensation and work schedule.

1. Teacher Assignment

As the past few years have brought significant downsizing (the result of state budget cuts and declining student enrollment), the work rules surrounding teacher assignment have proved particularly disruptive to LAUSD. Contractual requirements force principals to hire teachers from the “priority placement” list and give more senior teachers preference in deciding which classes they will teach. Furthermore, as state law mandates that layoffs be conducted in order of reverse seniority, some schools lost large portions of their staff in layoffs over the past two years, while other schools were left untouched.

Primary recommendations for LAUSD

- Change the teachers’ contract so that performance is a factor in deciding who will go when positions must be cut.
- Give principals final say over who works in their buildings.
- Educate principals working in low performing schools on California Education Code 35036, which gives them the right to refuse force placements.

Primary recommendations for the California legislature and the State Board of Education

- Permit districts to dismiss displaced teachers who are unable to secure a new assignment after one year.
- Allow performance to be used as a factor in determining which teachers will be laid off.
- Give all principals the right to refuse a teacher placement, not just principals in the lowest performing schools and not just in cases when teachers are seeking a voluntary transfer, as the law now allows.

2. Evaluation

LAUSD is in the process of revising its evaluation policies, having recognized that a strong evaluation system will help teachers improve their craft and serve as a tool to inform staffing and compensation decisions. One of the major changes planned is to incorporate objective evidence of student learning into the evaluation tool. Another evaluation policy that needs to be confronted by district officials is the relative infrequency in which teachers are evaluated (only once every other year for tenured teachers). Moving to more frequent evaluations will require a change in the contract to allow others, in addition to principals, to evaluate teachers.

Primary recommendations for LAUSD

- Make student performance the preponderant criterion on which teachers are evaluated.
- Develop a team of independent content experts to evaluate instruction and provide content-specific feedback.
- Ensure that every single teacher is evaluated every single year.



Primary recommendations for the California legislature and the State Board of Education

- Require annual evaluations for all of the state’s teachers.
- Remove the requirement that allows only those with an administrator’s license to perform teacher evaluations.

3. Tenure

In recent years LAUSD has made tenure a more meaningful designation by requiring principals to actively approve a teacher for tenure, not just allowing it to occur automatically after a teacher completed two years in the classroom. Unless the state changes its policies, however, district efforts will only go so far as California mandates that teachers be granted tenure after only two years of teaching. As tenure carries with it a nearly \$2 million investment in combined salary, benefits and pension for a single teacher, districts need more time—and information—to make this serious decision.

Primary recommendations for LAUSD

- Hold a tenure review to decide whether to award tenure.
- Make performance the primary factor on which teacher tenure is decided.
- Provide a substantial raise when teachers earn tenure.

Primary recommendations for the California legislature and the State Board of Education

- Extend the probationary period for teacher to earn tenure from two years to at least four years.

4. Compensation

LAUSD currently spends 25 percent of its annual teacher payroll (\$519 million) to compensate teachers for completing graduate coursework, though there is little research finding that such coursework adds to a teacher’s effectiveness. As completing additional coursework is the primary way to earn additional compensation in LAUSD, it is not surprising that two thirds of LAUSD teachers currently qualify for the highest pay grade, all having taken enough graduate coursework to qualify for *three* master’s degrees. LAUSD’s resources would be better spent on making salaries more competitive for top-performing teachers and recruiting such teachers to hard-to-staff schools and subjects.

Primary recommendations for LAUSD

- Phase out salary differentials for earning course credit.
- Offer higher salaries—not bonuses—to the top teachers who consistently produce the greatest learning gains.

5. Work Schedule

The work schedule for LAUSD teachers does not provide enough opportunities for teachers to collaborate with peers and plan for lessons. Contractually, the LAUSD teacher work day is eight hours long, but because there is no requirement that these hours are fulfilled on-site, the policy fails to facilitate teacher collaboration. Furthermore, the combination of budget cuts, furlough days and teacher absences short-changes students on learning time.

Primary recommendations for LAUSD

- Make it clear that teachers need to work on-site for eight hours a day.
- Require that teachers notify a school level administrator prior to being absent.

As this analysis is meant to serve a practical purpose, offering clearly articulated steps that the district might take alone, jointly with the teachers union, or that it might lobby for in the California state legislature, we do not focus on the enormous cultural obstacles LAUSD faces. Changing the professional culture may in fact be more important than any written policy, contract provision or law. However, as we have found elsewhere, professional practices often become embedded in written policy. The first signal that a district or state intends to do things differently is to change policies. What then follows requires a sustained commitment to a new culture of practice, not just from the superintendent and the school board at the helm, but from teachers and principals on the front lines.

**This report is available online at
www.nctq.org/p/publications/nctq_laUSDExecSumm.pdf**



National Council on Teacher Quality

1420 New York Avenue, Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20005
Tel: 202 393-0020 Fax: 202 393-0095
Web: www.nctq.org

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