

# Community Collaboration in Teacher Recruitment and Retention

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High quality instruction delivered by effective teachers is the key to student success. Hiring, developing and retaining good teachers are therefore the most important tasks of our public schools. The tasks of teacher recruitment and retention have traditionally been delegated to the human resource department within school districts, but leaving these critical responsibilities to a single office is no longer sufficient. The ability to find, support, and keep good teachers is a community challenge, which demands innovative solutions collaboratively developed by diverse stakeholders. In this brief Sherrie Reed highlights the efforts of four Northern California school districts to hire, develop and retain high quality teachers. Initiatives in these districts represent promising strategies to address the human resource challenges faced by school districts across California.



California's new accountability and continuous improvement framework relies on district and school leaders using multiple measures of school performance to identify where change is needed, and to monitor carefully the development, testing, and evaluation of improvement strategies over time. This process of continuous improvement requires that local leaders have access to research-based evidence and strategies that they can implement in their schools and opportunities to learn from one another about what works, under which conditions, and for which students. PACE's series of Continuous Improvement Briefs aims to support education leaders at all levels in learning how to improve the performance of their schools and students.

## Defining the Problem - Ensuring Quality Teaching is a Community Challenge

The quality of teachers is the single most important school-related factor in determining student outcomes. Yet, ensuring that every student benefits from quality instruction continues to be a struggle for local communities across the nation. Specifically, school districts are finding it more challenging than ever to recruit and retain high quality teachers.

The challenge of providing quality teaching is often framed as though it stems from a single cause and can therefore be solved by a simple policy. Under NCLB, for example, federal policy imposed stricter certification requirements for new teachers. Some states aimed to ensure high quality instruction by holding teachers directly accountable for student performance on assessments. State legislation and university policies provided financial incentives for academically talented students seeking a career in education.

In contrast, district leaders attribute their inability to hire and retain quality teachers to multiple causes, including an undervalued profession, a decline in teachers entering the profession and an increase in teachers leaving the profession after a few years, the inadequate preparation and support of teachers, and the specific economic factors associated with rural areas or high-cost urban centers.

### **An Undervalued Profession**

In recent decades, the teaching profession has suffered a loss of public esteem. Policy rhetoric often blames schools and teachers for failing to prepare students for current economic conditions. In addition, media reports highlight the demanding work and low pay for teachers. Together, these negative images of the teaching profession may lead fewer college graduates to choose a career in education.

### **Decline in Teachers Entering and Staying in the Profession**

In California, the demand for teachers has steadily increased since 2012, while the number of teachers entering the profession has declined since 2000. Moreover, many teachers who enter the field leave within the first five years.

Some education leaders attribute the resulting teacher shortage to the economic and lifestyle choices of prospective teachers. By itself salary is not the key determinant of teacher satisfaction and turnover, but the affordability and desirability of living in particular

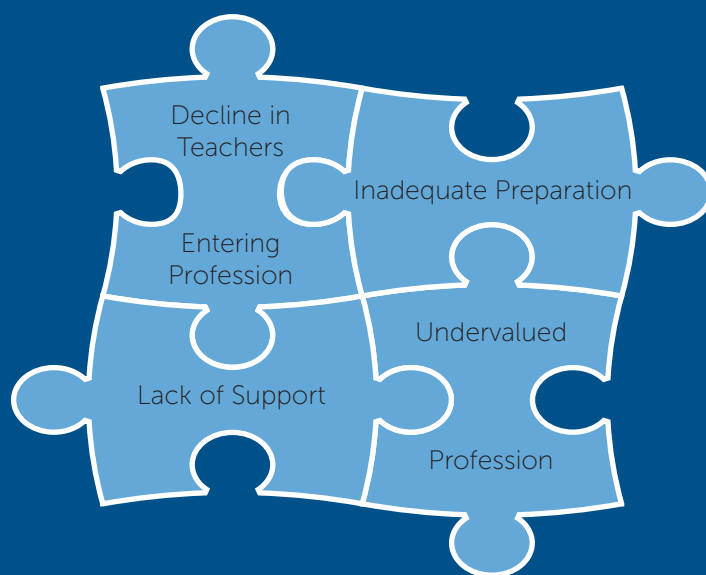
communities is a concern for many districts trying to recruit teachers. San Francisco Unified and Lindsay Unified both face the challenges of teachers unable to find suitable housing within the district. In San Francisco the affordability crisis deters potential candidates from moving to the city. In Lindsay employees often choose to live in larger communities nearby, in spite of long commutes.

### **Inadequate Preparation**

Among those who enter the teaching profession, many are ill equipped for the demands of the classroom. Lindsay Unified approaches learning through a performance-based, personalized approach that is highly differentiated for each student. The district finds it difficult to recruit teachers who are prepared to work in this setting. Other districts fill vacancies with teachers who are earning credentials through alternative pathways. Some of these teachers have as little as six weeks of training, and find themselves unprepared for the many demands of teaching.

### **Lack of Support for Improvement**

In addition to inadequate preparation, teachers often lack the professional support necessary for improvement and success. Teachers are frequently isolated in classrooms without the benefit of mentoring, collegial relationships, or formal collaboration. Although teacher induction programs are widespread, they are often focused on compliance rather than support for improved teaching.



## ***Testing the Solutions - Securing Quality Teachers Demands Innovation***

Efforts to ensure students receive the highest quality instruction from dedicated teachers now and for the long-term take many forms. The recently launched California Teacher Education Research and Improvement Network is a collaborative effort between the University of California, the California Department of Education, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the California State University system that aims to improve teacher preparation through research and policy recommendations. To encourage academically talented young people to enter the teaching profession and develop their skills as educators, University of California President Janet Napolitano allocated over a half million dollars for scholarships to support students enrolled in one of the University of California's graduate-level teacher education programs. The California Legislature is considering financial incentives to entice more citizens into the teaching profession through the proposed Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act of 2017 that would provide personal tax credits for the cost of teacher credential programs and an exemption from state taxes on income earned from teaching.

In addition to these statewide efforts, school districts are addressing the challenges of teacher recruitment, development and retention head-on in their local communities. With multiple strategies that go beyond the traditional activities of human resources departments, local districts are testing homegrown strategies and programs to fill vacancies, develop quality instructors and retain satisfied teachers.

**“ The degree to which you involve community stakeholders is the indicative of the importance of the issue.**

***Jaime Robles***  
***Executive Director of Human Resources***  
***Lindsay Unified School District***

### ***Engaging Stakeholders***

A community challenge demands a community response. Teachers, parents, students, staff, business owners, universities and colleges, and local policy-makers must work together with a focus on the mission of the district, like the districts profiled here.

## ***A Collaborative Community Solution: San Francisco Teacher Residency***

The San Francisco Teacher Residency (SFTR) is a non-profit organization that offers aspiring educators the opportunity to help transform lives and communities in San Francisco through the teaching profession. The partnership between San Francisco Unified School District, United Educators of San Francisco, Stanford University, University of San Francisco, San Francisco State University, AmeriCorps, Community Initiatives, National Center for Teacher Residencies and 100Kin10 engages stakeholders across the community to solve the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention. The program recruits from the local community. The program offers aspiring teachers financial incentives, including paid internships while earning a teaching credential, tuition discounts, loan forgiveness, housing stipends and guaranteed jobs for graduates. With the goal of improving academic achievement and social-emotional development for historically underserved students in San Francisco's public schools, the program provides community-centered professional development and ongoing mentoring as well.

[www.sfteacherresidency.org](http://www.sfteacherresidency.org)

### ***Collaboration through Collective Bargaining***

Collaboration between district leadership and collective bargaining units provides the foundation for innovative recruitment, retention and evaluation strategies. San Juan Unified School District and San José Unified School District, along with their Teachers Associations, exemplify this collaboration. These districts hire superintendents who want to work with the union. Union members encourage each other to elect representatives who care about the quality of teaching and student outcomes. Both sides solicit feedback to drive change, reform and innovation, and then report how feedback is integrated in decision-making.

### ***Partnerships with Colleges and Universities***

Partnerships with universities are critical in addressing teacher recruitment and retention challenges. Across the highlighted districts, university students participate in district activities as observers and learners, volunteers, interns, and student teachers. San Francisco Unified School District, in particular, is working in collaboration with local universities to recruit and retain teachers and to study teacher needs, identify potential solutions to recruitment challenges, and provide opportunities for teacher development and support.

**“ We want San Juan to be a place you go to become a really good teacher!**

*Shannan Brown  
Teacher, San Juan Unified School District  
President, San Juan Teachers Association*

### ***Innovation in Recruitment***

Successful recruitment depends largely on encouraging interest in the field of education through career development. This starts with developing a positive view of the teaching profession and continues by building interest in the profession through high school courses of study and community engagement. Our sample districts are engaged in the following strategies:

#### ***Develop Careers in Education Pathways***

Lindsay Unified School District created a Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway to encourage high school students' interest in a career in education. They keep in touch with graduates as they pursue their college degrees and encourage them to return to their home community upon graduation from a teacher credential program.

#### ***Build In-House Teacher Credential Programs***

San Francisco Unified School District built an in-house teacher credential program, approved by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The district recruits potential teachers from classified staff, paraprofessionals and substitute teachers already serving in the district. The program is lower-cost than traditional college-based programs and often allows participants to maintain district employment. Internal candidates are more likely to be established members of the local community, and may also be more likely to reflect the ethnic diversity of the community.

#### ***Consider Candidates with Intern Credentials***

Some districts are reframing their selection process to include potential candidates who have not yet obtained a teaching credential. Candidates may apply for intern credentials and begin serving students while participating in a formal teacher preparation program. When considering intern candidates, Lindsay Unified School District looks for specific character traits, such as determination, perseverance, flexibility, openness to feedback and desire to collaborate as indicators of future effectiveness, rather than just for credentials.

### ***Innovation in Retention***

Just as successful recruitment demands efforts that go beyond traditional human resource activities, teacher retention requires well-coordinated teacher development and evaluation efforts. Our panelists all agree that keeping teachers in the field of education requires suitable living conditions, supportive work environments and leadership opportunities. Collectively, they describe the following strategies as effective tools of retention, some of which overlap with recruitment strategies.

**“ What really matters in teacher evaluation is openness to feedback and flexibility.**

*Jennifer Thomas  
President, San José Teachers Association*

#### ***Recruit from the Local Community***

Recruiting teachers from the local community decreases the challenge of retention for some districts. Candidates from the local community are accustomed to local housing, childcare and transportation costs, have established support structures such as family, friends, and caregivers, and are more likely to continue residing in the community long-term.

#### ***Support Teachers at All Levels***

The panelists all agreed that retention of effective teachers is primarily a function of support. Induction programs need to support the core act of teaching, not compliance. To support teachers, full-time consulting teachers in San Juan Unified spend at least one hour per week with each new teacher to support growth. New teachers observe veteran teachers with an instructional coach for learning purposes. San Juan Unified surveys teachers about their needs and designs professional development opportunities to address shared needs, a strategy echoed by the other districts.

#### ***Provide Leadership Opportunities***

San José Unified School District provides mid-career professionals with opportunities to serve in leadership roles that recognize teacher strengths, assets and contributions to the learning community. Teachers may serve as model or consulting teachers for new teachers. Others may serve as a master teacher leader, leading district initiatives for up to three years before returning to the classroom. Each of these opportunities includes a stipend in addition to the teaching salary.

### *Redesigned Teacher Evaluation*


Teacher evaluation systems, if designed to support teachers in continuous improvement, also serve as an effective tool for retention. Some districts are redesigning teacher evaluation systems with this goal in mind. San Juan is aligning evaluation standards to state and district induction programs, as well as to National Board standards, to make evaluation more meaningful and useful for teachers. San Juan combines evaluation with tiered support for teacher improvement. In Lindsay School District, supervisors are trained in providing relevant feedback grounded in evidence. In San José, evaluation for improvement is embedded throughout the district culture and instructional priorities. Our panelists emphasize that such redesign of teacher evaluation systems requires commitment from both district management and collective bargaining units.

## **Recommendations - Promising Solutions for Quality Teaching**

Considering the perspectives and promising practices presented here, recommendations emerge for how districts across California may approach the challenge of ensuring high quality instruction for all students.

### **Promote Interest in Teaching Careers**

Educators should promote an improved perception of the profession and broad interest in educational careers. By speaking positively about their career choice, the inherent satisfaction of working with young people, and the non-monetary benefits of a teaching career, educators may improve public perceptions of their profession. Districts may also help to develop a future teacher workforce through opportunities for secondary school students to serve as teacher assistants in younger grades and formal career pathways in high school.

 **Develop a Teacher Pipeline**  
Districts should develop a pipeline of teacher candidates through partnerships with local universities, recruitment of community members, and in-house credential programs. By partnering with local universities, districts may host aspiring teachers in their field experiences and

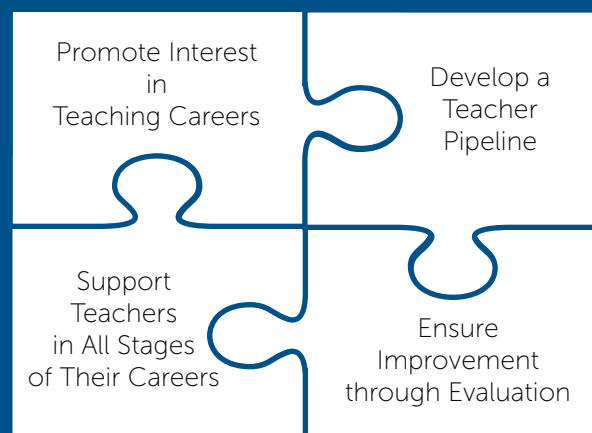
showcase their schools as future workplaces. Districts may recruit teacher candidates from existing classified staff, substitute teachers, parents, volunteers and community members, and offer low-cost teacher preparation programs housed in local schools.

### **Support Teachers in All Stages of Their Careers**

Districts need to support teachers in all stages of their careers through professional development focused on teacher-identified needs and leadership opportunities. Struggling teachers are often isolated, and lack knowledge about how to improve their practice. Meaningful support helps them connect with other teachers and learn strategies for their own growth through non-threatening means. Strategies for delivering support may include coaching and mentoring, formal collaboration, professional learning communities and teacher selected professional development. In addition, teacher leadership opportunities provide recognition for exemplary teachers, allow veteran teachers to share their experience and expertise, and foster collegiality.

### **Ensure Improvement through Evaluation**

Districts must implement evaluation systems centered on growth and improvement. Well-designed teacher evaluation systems should be an extension of teacher support and professional development, where improvement is the primary focus. Teachers may then view evaluation as an opportunity to receive feedback and develop goals for growth.



## Conclusion

Recognizing the important role that quality teaching plays in their communities, districts in Northern California are developing innovative strategies for hiring, developing and keeping teachers. Most importantly, they are throwing out the idea that teacher recruitment and retention is the responsibility of a district human resources department. Instead, district leaders view quality teaching as a community challenge and are approaching the challenge with multiple strategies and the support of local stakeholders. By developing an interest in education careers within the local community, supporting teachers in continuous improvement and aligning evaluations with the principles of support and improvement, districts are hopeful that they will develop teachers dedicated to the district mission and committed to remain in the profession.

## PACE Continuous Improvement Publications

PACE. **2020 Vision: Rethinking Budget Priorities Under the LCFF.** 2014

Tom Luschei. **Educating California's Disadvantaged Children: Lessons from Colombia.** 2017

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Jorge Aguilar, Michelle Nayfack, Susan Bush-Mecenas. **Exploring Improvement Science in Education: Promoting College Access in Fresno Unified School District.** 2017

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