



# Teacher-Quality Checklist for School Districts

Many districts struggle with multiple—and often incompatible—data systems for tracking payroll, collecting teacher evaluations, recruiting and hiring. Aligning these systems and annually assessing where your district stands is the first step towards developing a smart human capital strategy.

The following checklist outlines the goals, data and questions a district should have in mind while assessing progress.

## GOAL: HIRE TEACHERS AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.

The earlier new teachers are hired and transferring teachers secure new assignments, the more time schools and teachers have to plan for the new school year. Furthermore, the earlier districts hire teachers, the more competitive they are in attracting top candidates.

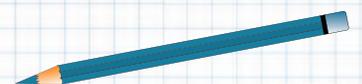
One challenge in hiring teachers early is that many districts have a poor grasp of where vacancies will occur, largely because retiring and non-returning teachers often wait until the last minute to announce they are leaving. This makes it difficult for principals to anticipate and respond to vacancies. One solution is to implement early notification deadlines and to incentivize teachers to notify the district of their plans before the spring transfer and hiring season begins.

### DATA THAT NEED TO BE COLLECTED TO INFORM PRACTICE

### KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK USING THE DATA

-  The offer date for all new teachers hired for the current school year
-  Number of teacher applicants who applied each month
-  Number of vacancies posted each month
-  Number of early contracts offered to new teachers and offer dates
-  Resignation and retirement notification dates
-  Exit surveys of teachers transferring from one school to another and surveys of teachers leaving the district

- What percentage of vacancies was filled by the last day of one school year?*
- How many vacancies were there on the first day of school?*
- How many teachers were hired in the month prior to the first day of school?*
- How actively is the district recruiting teachers in the spring?*
- Are late notifications of teacher resignations and retirements delaying the ability of schools to post vacancies?*
- What other factors contribute to late hiring?*





**GOAL: HIRE DIVERSE AND TALENTED TEACHERS AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE DISTRIBUTED EQUITABLY THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT.**

Although there are many facets of a “good” teacher, research points to the particular value of academic ability. Teachers with high test scores on both college-entrance and basic-skills exams, as well as those who graduate from competitive colleges and universities, tend to yield better results than do lower-achieving colleagues in the classroom. Research also points to the value of having a workforce whose ethnic and/or racial backgrounds are similar to those of its students, particularly for African American students.

The distribution of effective teachers is also of concern. In many districts, the most effective teachers are concentrated in the schools with the least need. While teacher experience on the whole is a poor proxy of teacher effectiveness, districts should ensure that schools serving low-income students are not staffed with a disproportionate number of first- and second-year teachers.

**DATA** THAT NEED TO BE COLLECTED TO INFORM PRACTICE

-  Percentage of teachers hired who are black or Hispanic
-  Percentage of total workforce that is black or Hispanic
-  Three-year teacher turnover rates at each school
-  Years of teacher experience at each school
-  Seniority of each teacher at each school
-  Undergraduate institutions of all teachers, including new hires
-  Number of new hires with content-related experience

**KEY QUESTIONS** TO ASK USING THE DATA

*How closely does the diversity of the teacher workforce reflect the diversity of the student body?*

*How are inexperienced teachers distributed among schools?*

*Do all schools have comparably low proportions of inexperienced teachers (first- and second-year) on staff?*

*Is the district hiring teachers who were themselves good students?*





**GOAL: GIVE PRINCIPALS AS MUCH AUTHORITY OVER HIRING AS IS POSSIBLE.**

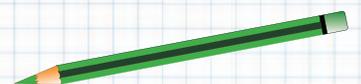
Giving principals authority over hiring helps facilitate better matches between teachers and schools. Research shows that how well a teacher fits her school's environment accounts for a quarter of her effectiveness. This so-called mutual consent approach to hiring can also reduce the inequitable distribution of teachers across schools, making teacher performance, not seniority, the key factor in hiring teachers.

**DATA** THAT NEED TO BE COLLECTED  
TO INFORM PRACTICE

-  Evaluation ratings for past two years (interim and summative) of all excessed teachers
-  Number of teachers identified for excessing each year; number/percent of excessed teachers hired by principals vs. the number/percent of excessed teachers placed by HR (and their assignments) each year related experience

**KEY QUESTIONS** TO ASK USING  
THE DATA

- Are excessed teachers disproportionately being placed in high-poverty schools?*
- Are principals using excessing as a way to pass off underperforming teachers?*
- How much authority do principals have in selecting who works in their schools? Can principals ever refuse the assignment of a teacher, or does HR ever force place teachers into schools without the principal's approval?*





**GOAL: IMPROVE TEACHER ATTENDANCE.**

Poor teacher attendance has a profound impact on student achievement, school culture and district finances. One study found, for example, that 10 teacher absences in one year has the same impact on student achievement as placing a new teacher, instead of a more experienced one, in the same classroom. While teachers should be able to take leave whenever they are sick, abuse and overuse of sick leave is a real problem in many schools.

**DATA** THAT NEED TO BE COLLECTED  
TO INFORM PRACTICE

-  Average/total number of absences at each school (broken out by type of leave used, e.g., sick, personal, etc.)
-  Percentage of absences occurring on a Monday or Friday at each school (should not be more than 50 percent)
-  Average/total number of days teachers are absent due to professional development at each school
-  Cost of sick leave buyback for teachers each year; total number of teachers who qualified; payout for each teacher

**KEY QUESTIONS** TO ASK USING  
THE DATA

*Is there any pattern with attendance? Are schools serving higher percentages of poor or minority students more likely to have higher rates of teacher absences?*

*Is there any correlation between teacher experience and their leave usage?*

*Does the sick leave buyback program appear to have any impact on reducing teacher absences?*

*How often are teachers away from the classroom due to professional development? Can these workshops be scheduled after school, during the summer or on Saturdays so that students do not miss valuable instructional time?*





**GOAL: RESTRUCTURE TEACHER PAY TO REWARD EFFECTIVENESS, ENCOURAGE TOP TEACHERS TO TAKE ON TOUGH ASSIGNMENTS AND FILL SHORTAGE POSITIONS.**

In most school districts teacher pay is based on two factors that bear little relation to effectiveness in the classroom: experience and coursework. Although transparent and easily administered, this form of pay does little to attract and reward the most effective teachers. As much as 20 percent of a teacher’s salary is tied to additional coursework, even though research shows it has little impact on teacher quality. In addition, it often takes teachers more than 20 years to reach the highest pay, longer than in most professions.

**DATA** THAT NEED TO BE COLLECTED TO INFORM PRACTICE

-  Data on any financial incentives to attract new hires or teachers to hard-to-staff schools, subjects
-  Line item expense for tuition reimbursement each school year (and/or the number of teachers reimbursed)
-  Surveys of new and/or transferring teachers to learn more about the reasons why they chose the district and the school where they currently work

**KEY QUESTIONS** TO ASK USING THE DATA

*How long does it take teachers to reach the highest step on the salary schedule? Is the length of time it takes to reach their top pay competitive with surrounding districts? Does this impact retention?*

*Do financial incentives draw new teachers to the district and top teachers to hard-to-staff schools?*

*How much is the district spending on tuition reimbursement and incentives for master’s degrees? How could this money be better spent?*

*How do beginning, middle and lifetime salaries and earnings of the district’s teachers compare with surrounding school districts?*

*Are there ways to make the district more competitive in attracting and keeping effective teachers, without the high cost of across-the-board increases?*





**GOAL: HOLD TEACHERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR PERFORMANCE.**

Teacher evaluations can play a key role in shaping a teacher’s career, helping weak teachers become proficient and good teachers become excellent. Evaluations are the first step in assessing the strength of a workforce.

While districts often consider many factors in teacher evaluations, the most important is a teacher’s ability to improve student learning. Unfortunately, many evaluation instruments used by districts, some of which are mandated by states, are structured so that teachers can earn a satisfactory rating without showing evidence that they have sufficiently advanced student learning. Evaluation instruments should combine objective and subjective measures, including the important insights gained through classroom observation, and rely on no single measure alone.

Teachers who receive negative evaluations need help and guidance on how to improve instruction. Improvement plans should focus on performance areas that connect directly to student learning and should outline deficiencies, define specific actions that will address these deficiencies and describe how progress will be measured. While there is no ideal length of time for an improvement plan to last, limiting its length ensures that student performance is given priority and that multiple classes of students are not assigned to a teacher with a record of weak performance.

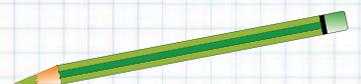
**DATA** THAT NEED TO BE COLLECTED TO INFORM PRACTICE

**KEY QUESTIONS** TO ASK USING THE DATA

-  Number of teachers with an unsatisfactory evaluation rating
-  Number of teachers each year who were evaluated; which schools have not turned in evaluations
-  Number of teachers who were placed on an improvement plan in each of the past two years
-  Number of teachers dismissed; contracts not renewed in the last school year

*Are principals holding teachers accountable for their performance? Do principals give a full range of ratings within each school, or is the principal giving all teachers roughly the same rating?*

*How efficient is the intervention and dismissal timeline? How long does it take to remove an ineffective teacher from the classroom?*





### GOAL: SUPPORT NEW TEACHERS.

More support at the beginning of teachers' careers may ease their transition and improve retention. Unfortunately, a "survival of the fittest" mentality prevails in many schools; figuring out how to successfully negotiate unfamiliar curricula, discipline and management issues and labyrinthine school and district procedures is considered a rite of passage. New teachers often receive the most difficult schedules, more than two subjects to prepare for or the most challenging students.

But simply assigning a mentor is insufficient. A quality induction program includes mentoring as one strategy for addressing the myriad needs of a new teacher, especially during the initial four to six weeks of her career, but this should not be the only source. During a teacher's first two to three years, additional supports should be available, such as grade-level seminars with other teachers, occasional release time to observe outstanding teachers and collaborative planning time with master teachers.

## DATA THAT NEED TO BE COLLECTED TO INFORM PRACTICE

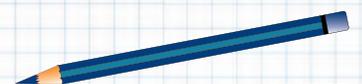
-  Number of new teachers assigned a mentor in the current school year
-  Experience and grade level of mentor selection; number of mentors selected
-  Survey results of new teachers' experiences
-  Number of new teachers attending district professional development

## KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK USING THE DATA

*Are all new teachers assigned a mentor?*

*How competitive is the selection process for mentors? Are mentors effective teachers? Are mentees satisfied with the mentor-relationship experience?*

*Are new teachers taking advantage of the district's professional development? If not, what are the reasons?*





**GOAL: MAKE TENURE MEANINGFUL.**

The process that awards teachers tenure should be taken more seriously than it usually is, and tenure should only be awarded to teachers who have consistently shown effectiveness and commitment. Tenure represents a \$2 million investment in a teacher. Even though states determine the minimum time period for tenure eligibility, this does not mean that districts cannot make the process more meaningful. Evidence of effectiveness, rather than time served, should be the preponderant (but not the only) criterion for making tenure decisions.

Research suggests that one way to boost student achievement is to deny tenure to the bottom performing 25 percent of teachers eligible. (Currently, on average, just 12 percent of those eligible are denied tenure.) The impact on student achievement would be the equivalent of reducing class size across-the-board by five students per class—a far more costly strategy.

**DATA** THAT NEED TO BE COLLECTED  
TO INFORM PRACTICE



Number of provisional teachers eligible for tenure each year; number of provisional teacher contracts not renewed each year

**KEY QUESTIONS** TO ASK USING  
THE DATA

*Are principals actively deciding whom to award tenure?*

*Is the district actively weeding out teachers during the probationary period?*

*What process would raise the stakes on earning tenure, so it would serve as a more meaningful benchmark?*

*Is earning tenure associated with a big increase in pay?*