Introduction

In July 2014, the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) announced that it would require all 50 States to develop equity plans to ensure that all students have access to excellent educators. These plans must analyze and define the problem of inequitable access to effective teachers and outline strategies to address identified equity gaps. This paper provides examples of strategies that State and district leaders could implement to address inequitable access, based on analysis of their equitable access data. Readers should also refer to the companion piece to this document: “Promoting More Equitable Access to Effective Teachers: Problems and Root Causes.” The companion piece will help States define the problem of inequitable access to effective teachers and establish its root causes.

One of the most pervasive truths in the American public education system is that great teachers transform lives. Highly effective teachers change the life trajectory of their students, regardless of those students’ backgrounds. And although teachers are the single greatest school-based factor affecting student achievement, high-need students often have less access to the most effective teachers. For a variety of reasons, effective teachers are more likely to work with students from more affluent families. These two conditions place high-need students in a double bind: those most in need of the life-transforming results of great teaching are least likely to get it.

Policy leaders and practitioners have referred to this set of concerns as students’ inequitable access to effective teachers, a term that we will shorten to inequitable access for the purposes of this paper.


4 “High-need students” means students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, who attend high-minority schools, who are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, who have been incarcerated, who have disabilities or who are English language learners (from Race to the Top Executive Summary. https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf).


Throughout this brief we will use the “inequitable access” language because the driving concern is ensuring that high-need students get the instruction they need to succeed.

In December 2013, a group of experts representing education organizations, research centers on labor economics, corporate human resource departments, the military and the health industry came together in the District of Columbia to strategize about how States and districts can further address the issue of inequitable access to effective teachers. This brief explores both the root causes of inequitable access and the strategies the group identified to address this problem.

The strategies collectively are not a blueprint for solving the problem of inequitable access. Rather, the ideas they embody provide a starting point for States and districts to think creatively about how they might address the challenge. The paper assumes that strategies developed and implemented with the engagement of educators enjoy the greatest likelihood of success.7

Further, the strategies do not assume that the number of great teachers will forever be static and that States and their partners simply should more equitably distribute this fixed number of teachers across schools and districts, creating winning communities that gain effective teachers and losing communities that must suffer their loss. Rather, the objective of the strategies is to help States identify ways to improve teaching in high-need classrooms. These strategies include increasing the supply of effective teachers, ensuring the ongoing professional development of teachers so they move from good to great, helping districts staff schools strategically, providing resources to compensate excellent teachers, holding district and school leaders accountable for ensuring equitable access to effective teachers and providing flexibility to school leaders to staff their schools with effective teachers.


**Root Causes of Inequitable Access**

Before States can address the problem of inequitable access, they might engage educators and other stakeholders in an examination of why inequitable access occurs. Among several leading factors, inequitable access appears to be a result of the initial placement and subsequent movement patterns of effective and ineffective teachers. In terms of initial placement, novice teachers teach low-performing students at greater rates than experienced teachers,8 and novice teachers at high-poverty schools do not develop as quickly or as much as novice teachers at low-need schools.9 When teachers transfer from one school to another, they generally move into schools that serve students who are from higher-income families and are higher-performing than the students they leave behind. Furthermore, teachers who work in schools with more disadvantaged students are more likely than other teachers to leave their school districts or transfer to lower-needs schools within their districts.10 Teacher mobility and attrition exacerbate the issue of inequitable access when effective teachers leave and ineffective teachers stay in high-need schools.

At the December 2013 convening, experts focused on these root causes related to placement and movement and generated strategies to address them (see Appendix II for a matrix of strategies and the root causes they address). The root causes include:

- Ineffective leadership. Strong leaders attract and retain talent. Principals of schools that retained high numbers of highly effective teachers were more likely to clearly communicate high expectations and make teachers feel supported. They also were less likely to tolerate ineffective teaching.11


9 Tim Sass et al., Value Added of Teachers in High-Poverty and Lower-Poverty Schools (2010).

10 Dan Goldhaber et al., Teacher Career Paths, Teacher Quality, and Persistence in the Classroom: Are Public Schools Keeping their Best? (2010).

• **Adverse working conditions.** Working conditions for teachers encompass issues such as teacher workload, parent involvement, student conduct, school safety, school location and the quality of school leaders and colleagues. Teachers at low-performing schools are much less satisfied with working conditions (32–45 percent) than their colleagues in high-achieving schools (70–82 percent).

• **Lack of upward mobility.** Few options exist for high-performing teachers who want to take on new challenges in their careers without leaving the classroom. Teachers who had lower job satisfaction were more likely than their more satisfied colleagues to report being at least somewhat interested in taking on additional classroom responsibilities (56 percent versus 43 percent).

• **Inadequate compensation.** Most teacher compensation systems are "lockstep," privileging years of experience and educational attainment over outcomes. Highly effective teachers are twice as likely as ineffective teachers to cite dissatisfaction with compensation as a reason for leaving.

• **Effectiveness-blind human capital management.** Many schools and school districts retain their best and least effective teachers at similar rates, despite the fact that schools have a three in four chance of replacing a low-performing teacher with a new hire who will be more effective immediately. There is also little connection between seniority-based layoffs and effective teaching.

• **Productivity of peer teachers.** Teachers who transfer schools tend to go to a school where the average teacher quality is similar to their own. In other words, high-performing teachers go to schools where the average teacher is high-performing, while poor performers go to schools where the average teacher is low performing.

While there are others, the root causes outlined above provide a starting point for State conversations to identify strategies to address the issues of teacher placement and movement to promote more equitable access to effective teachers. Once States have identified equity gaps and their root causes, they can choose strategies that will address the most pervasive gaps. States may also want to explore different strategies in different regions across the State, depending on what the root cause analysis reveals.

### Strategic Options for States

High-performing teachers tend to move to schools in which administrators and colleagues recognize and reward excellent teaching, in which teachers feel safe and productive and in which their peers are, on average, at least as effective as they are. Many teachers who plan to leave the classroom could be convinced to stay, and many factors driving them to leave are within the school leader’s control. States can play a critical role in fostering positive working conditions and generating incentives to ensure that effective teachers are working with the students who need them the most.

#### Promote Strategic Staffing Initiatives Within Districts

Create a strategic plan for workforce planning.

Many States and districts do not plan for future vacancies by implementing strategies to attract the right candidates to fill those vacancies in both the near and long term. States can collect data—and help districts do so as well—on the performance of the current teacher pool, the perceptions of teachers and principals in high-poverty schools, the historical

---


15 Ibid.


17 Li Feng and Tim Sass, *Teacher Quality and Teacher Mobility* (2011).

18 More information on the root causes of inequitable access can be found in the RSN publication *Promoting More Equitable Access to Effective Teachers: Problems and Root Causes* (in publication).

19 Dan Goldhaber et al., *Teacher Career Paths, Teacher Quality, and Persistence in the Classroom: Are Public Schools Keeping their Best?* (2010).
retention and attrition rates, broader labor market trends, the rate of growth of the student population, the source and number of teacher candidates and school and district budgets. States can then analyze how each of these data points varies by grade level, subject area and types of schools and communities. These data will provide a basis for States to create an overarching workforce plan that they co-develop with educators for staffing their schools over the long term. The quality of the plan, however, will ultimately depend on the quality of the evaluation data generated by districts and in particular the accuracy of its teacher ratings.

Differentiate roles and titles for high-performing teachers and extend their reach.

Districts and States around the country are in the process of engaging teachers in new, innovative strategic ways in the development of career pathways at least in part based on teacher effectiveness. District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has implemented the Leadership Initiative for Teachers (LIFT), a five-stage career ladder that provides successful teachers with opportunities to advance inside the classroom while earning recognition and additional compensation. Giving teachers increased responsibilities based on their performance both publicly acknowledges their effectiveness and allows school and district leaders to use them in smart ways to improve the effectiveness of other instructors. These leadership opportunities are already commonly available in all school districts and in many schools; for example, teachers typically volunteer or are nominated to serve as a school’s point of contact for district academic initiatives, hold positions on school-based instructional leadership teams, coach and mentor developing teachers or contribute to district curricular development teams. DCPS LIFT coordinates these teacher leadership opportunities at the district level in an effort to ensure that they are available only to teachers who demonstrate effectiveness at increasing student achievement.

Furthermore, flexible school models employ creative ways to use effective teachers’ time to give more children access to excellent teachers, including alternating digital instruction and in-person instruction and implementing teacher teams led by master teachers. These models promote teamwork, teacher leadership and professional development, and some models allow for part-time work, reduced hours, flexible schedules and working remotely. In Charlotte, NC, four schools participating in Project L.I.F.T. (Leadership and Investment for Transformation) are implementing new school models that include new teacher roles that extend the reach of excellent teachers with opportunities for increased pay. There is early evidence that these flexible school models and opportunities for teacher leadership are appealing to prospective candidates. In the spring prior to the opening of the remodeled schools, 708 applicants from 24 States applied for a total of 19 positions.

Improve the Supply of Teachers to High-Need Schools

Create teacher residency programs in high-need schools.

Evidence suggests that teachers who have had an opportunity to engage in instructional practice (for example, student teaching) during their teacher preparation are significantly more effective than those who have not. In light of this, States and districts might offer teacher candidates the opportunity to work as teacher residents for a year in a high-need school, where they earn their certification, an advanced degree and/or a guaranteed teaching position if they receive a rating of effective by the end of their residency year. Teacher residents would be paid—perhaps at a lower rate than a fully certified teacher—and mentor teachers would have the opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity. Once in a classroom of their own, these residents would have the training to continue serving high-need students.


Recruit college students to teach in high-need schools through loan repayment.

In the final year of a teacher candidate’s preparation program, the candidate would complete his or her student teaching at a high-need school alongside a mentor who has received a rating of effective or highly effective, so he or she might gain the experience, comfort and skills needed to effectively teach in a high-need school. School or district staff would observe and evaluate the teacher as if he or she were a regular teacher. If the candidate receives a rating of effective, he or she would become eligible for loan repayment from the Federal and State governments that would require him or her to commit to teach in a high-need school for a certain number of years. A model for this type of program is the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration. The program provides loan repayment and scholarships to physicians in exchange for service in high-need areas, particularly rural communities. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid currently forgives education loans of up to $17,500 for teachers who teach in high-need schools for five consecutive years. By contrast, NHSC participants receive up to $50,000 for two years of service at NHSC-approved sites. To attract college students who demonstrate the potential to become highly effective teachers to the highest-need schools but who may not want to commit to five years in the classroom before they begin teaching, States might consider offering scholarships and loan repayments whose amounts they base on the number of years of service.

Establish performance contracts with high-performing teacher preparation programs.

Under this strategy, States and districts would grant exclusive rights to high-performing teacher training programs to provide teacher candidates for certain districts or schools. The renewal of these performance contracts would be contingent upon the programs producing candidates who earn ratings of at least effective by the end of their first year of teaching, incentivizing lower-performing teacher preparation programs to modify their training as needed to produce more effective teacher candidates. This would be a shift from the current program approval process in most States, which do not hold programs accountable for teacher performance using student achievement data.

Establish effective peer cohorts.

To address many of the root causes of inequitable access, districts working with teachers and principals would often create opportunities to implement hiring and placement practices to permit teams of teachers who have demonstrated effectiveness to move into high-needs schools together. These turnaround teams would agree to remain together for a number of years, recognizing that change takes time. As part of its Strategic Staffing Initiative, Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) Schools sends effective principals and teachers together as a team to low-performing schools in the district. Early evaluations of the program show that, on average, growth in student achievement in Strategic Staffing schools exceeded the district average, results that were particularly impressive given that student performance had been declining in the years prior to Strategic Staffing.22 The Turnaround Teacher Teams Initiative at Teach Plus recruits, selects and trains cohorts of highly effective, experienced teacher leader teams to turn around low-performing schools in cities such as Boston and Washington, D.C. Schools with Turnaround Teacher Teams have demonstrated significant student achievement gains compared with their peer turnaround schools.23

Improve Management of Human Capital

Change teacher placement policies that prevent smart hiring and retention.

In many districts, principals are required to hire tenured teachers in their district who have volunteered to leave their current school assignment or been excessed. Because predominantly low-income

22 Aspen Institute, Strategic Staffing for Successful Schools: Breaking the Cycle of Failure in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (2010).
23 Teach Plus (2014)
schools typically have higher vacancy rates than other schools, they often face the brunt of forced placement policies. Furthermore, State statutes requiring seniority-based layoffs present a significant statewide barrier to equitable access because they force teachers out of the classroom in the event of declining student enrollment or budget reductions without regard to performance. As a result, some highly effective but less experienced teachers lose their jobs. States and districts might revise provisions that require forced placement of teachers in favor of a policy of mutual consent between teachers and principals, and replace seniority-based layoff policies with those that are performance-based.

**Employ strategies to retain effective teachers and remove those who are ineffective**

Differential retention acknowledges strong performance by effective teachers, implies that school leaders understand and value good instruction and can identify and utilize their best teachers and removes ineffective teachers from the classroom to make room for more effective teachers. District and school leaders can employ a number of tactics to encourage high-performing teachers to stay in or move to the classrooms that most need them and the persistent low performers to leave the classroom. To monitor the effectiveness of these strategies, States and districts could track school-level retention data by teacher performance, and principal managers could use these data to drive conversations with principals about how they are encouraging their best teachers to stay and counseling out low performers. DCPS, which has invested in this strategy, retains 88 percent of its highly effective teachers but keeps only 45 percent of low performers, which is significantly less than other districts.

**Place proven leaders in high-need schools**

Many districts currently install new school leaders—or those without a track record of effectiveness—in their highest-need schools. Instead, they might consider hiring veteran school leaders with proven track records for vacancies at high-need schools and providing them with incentives and other resources to which they would not otherwise have access so they would consider the placement a reward for their performance. For example, providing school leaders with increased autonomy in a high-need school or creating a school leadership career pathway that promoted principals into high-need schools might attract and retain talent, both at the school leader and teacher level.

**Hold District and School Leaders Accountable for Teacher Distribution**

Establish longitudinal data systems to track which students get which teachers

In most States, evaluation systems are very new, and States may not yet know what the distribution of effective teachers is, much less the extent of the inequitable distribution of teachers. It is important first and foremost for States to collect data over time on student access to effective teachers. Multiple data points are necessary to understand the full picture, including data on student demographics, student achievement, teacher ratings distributions (including summative and component-level scores), teacher years of experience and teacher attrition. Recent efforts to improve data systems at the State level allow officials to more easily understand the characteristics of students who are assigned to teachers at every performance level. Having these data available will help States identify problem spots and discuss them with districts. It will also help States to continuously update their strategic work plans and adjust course where necessary. As States work with districts to collect teacher evaluation distribution data and analyze their specific equitable distribution challenges, it will be important to consider the potential unintended consequences of this reporting and whether there is a disincentive for school and district leaders to be accurate and honest in identifying their low performers.

---


Hold principals accountable for distribution of teacher quality through principal evaluation

As States begin to overhaul principal evaluation systems, they can begin to incorporate metrics around human capital management, including the retention of highly effective teachers and the attrition of ineffective ones, as well as the distribution of effective teachers within the school building. Principals’ managers could then be trained on how to analyze this data and support principals in retaining their best teachers, letting their poor performers go and assigning the strongest teachers to the highest-need classrooms. Hillsborough County (FL) Public Schools includes the retention of teachers at the effective level or higher as a metric in their principal evaluation system. DCPS has recently begun to incorporate this metric on its school report cards (see an example), which contain the set of measures to which principals are held accountable by their supervisors and by the school community.

Compensate Excellent Teachers and Leaders in High-Need Schools

Offer teachers differential pay

The job of a teacher in a high-needs school is often more demanding than in a low-needs school. In general, teachers in high-need environments must be able to address a wider range of achievement levels, learning styles and student behavior. Under a system of differential compensation, teacher pay would reflect this difference. States or districts can institute a performance bonus system for teachers who earn a rating of effective or higher in hard-to-staff schools. Jurisdictions can also use an annual salary differential as an incentive to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. The U.S. Department of Education introduced the Talent Transfer Initiative to provide high-performing teachers in seven districts with $10,000 to move to a low-performing school, which has shown promising results in terms of raising student achievement and improving teacher retention in those schools. DCPS provides substantial increases in base salaries for teachers who receive a rating of highly effective at least two years in a row, and highly effective teachers who work in the lowest-performing schools in the district can receive additional bonuses totaling $25,000 per year. However, research and experience show that pay alone has generally not been adequate to incent highly effective teachers to move to high-need schools. This strategy, if implemented, must be coupled with other solutions to be effective.

Conclusion

Research has consistently produced evidence that, no matter how teacher effectiveness is measured, students in high-poverty schools have less access to great teachers than their counterparts in affluent schools. New evaluation systems are producing data that allow leaders in State education agencies, the policymaking and advocacy communities and among the teacher, principal and central office administrator corps to see more clearly than ever before the extent of the problem at every level of education, and to take joint responsibility for addressing the issue and monitoring progress toward improved distribution rates.

Both States and school districts play a role in ensuring that evaluators assess teacher performance accurately, an important prerequisite for the successful implementation of strategies to provide access to effective teachers more equitably. However, the degree to which States and districts can address root causes of inequitable access and the roles that they will each play in doing so will vary by jurisdiction. In some cases, it may be more appropriate for districts to drive policy changes that address these challenges directly, while States may use their authority and financial resources

The most effective approach will be one that combines several of the strategies that in total address the variety of reasons that teachers leave the classroom and the root causes of inequitable access.

to create the right incentives to encourage districts to improve access to effective teachers. In other instances, States may be able to implement policies to tackle these issues statewide.

Given that labor markets for teachers transcend local boundaries, States and districts will need to work together to address the problem of inequitable access. Effectively engaging educators in problem-solving, solution building and strategy implementation will spread commitment and responsibility for success across the teacher, principal and central office administrator corps and lead to the continuous improvement and greater effectiveness of these strategies.

The strategies in this brief offer States, districts and their educators a menu of options to address inequities in access to excellent teachers that they have identified through their data and root cause analysis. The most effective approach will be one that engages educators and combines several of the strategies outlined in this publication. Multiple approaches to the problem smartly employed will show teachers who have demonstrated effectiveness or the potential to be effective that States, districts, schools and school leaders value them and want them to teach the students who need them most. The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders has developed a *Moving Toward Equity Toolkit*\(^\text{27}\) that contains additional strategies and resources for States as they complete their equity plans.

\(^\text{27}\) Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, *Moving Toward Equity Toolkit* (2015).
Appendix I: Expert Convening on Equitable Distribution

On December 17, 2013, the Reform Support Network convened a cross-sector group of experts in human capital management and educator effectiveness to engage in the following activities:

- Discuss the problem and root causes of inequitable distribution of effective teachers
- Develop fresh ideas for equitable distribution practices and policies
- Apply these new strategies to explore practical solutions using the Tennessee context

Session participants included experts in teacher quality, educational inequity, corporate human resources, labor economics and human capital management in education, the military and the health industry. Representatives from the Tennessee Department of Education attended the convening to help ground the discussion in the context of Tennessee’s teachers and students. In advance of the session, participants read an overview of the issue of inequitable access, including the root causes and strategies that have been implemented in States and districts thus far to address those root causes.

Over the course of the day, the experts developed a set of strategic options for States to pursue to ensure that their most disadvantaged students have equal or greater access to excellent teachers.

Participants

Experts

Jane Hannaway, Director, National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research

Crystal Harmon, Vice President, Strategy & Operations, TNTP

Kati Haycock, President, Education Trust

James Hosek, Senior Economist, RAND

Tammy Johns, Founder and CEO, Strategy & Talent

Susan Kelliher, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Albemarle Corporation

Tim Sass, Professor of Economics, Georgia State University

Harry Spence, Court Administrator of Massachusetts Trial Court, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Doug Staiger, John French Professor in Economics, Dartmouth College

Molly Steffen, Recruitment Manager, Caterpillar

Tennessee Department of Education

Sylvia Flowers, Executive Director, Educator Talent, Tennessee Department of Education

Tony Pratt, Deputy Director, Office of Research and Policy, Tennessee Department of Education

Aneesh Sohoni, Chief of Staff, Teachers and Leaders, Tennessee Department of Education

Reform Support Network

Phil Gonring, Principal, Education First

Bill Horwath, Consultant, Education First

Sarah Johnson, Manager, ICF International

Kate Sullivan, Analyst, Education First

U.S. Department of Education

Joiselle Cunningham, Teacher Ambassador Fellow, U.S. Department of Education

Brad Jupp, Senior Program Advisor, U.S. Department of Education

Aaron Pinter-Petrillo, former Content Lead, U.S. Department of Education
### Appendix II: Strategic Options – Root Causes Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Root Causes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffective Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Strategic Staffing Initiatives within Districts</td>
<td>Give teachers opportunity to do what they do best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve the Supply of Teachers to High-Need Schools</td>
<td>Cohort members take on leadership positions within the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Management of Human Capital</td>
<td>School leader provides growth opportunities to effective teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold District and School Leaders Accountable for Teacher Distribution</td>
<td>Retaining effective teachers is an expectation of school and district leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensate Excellent Teachers and Leaders in High-Need Schools</td>
<td>Pay leaders with a track record of effectiveness for strong performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This publication features information from public and private organizations and links to additional information created by those organizations. Inclusion of this information does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any products or services offered or views expressed, nor does the Department of Education control its accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness.