



American Youth
Policy Forum

AYPF/CHSE DISCUSSION GROUP

Ensuring the Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers

February 20, 2014

Washington, D.C.

This discussion group, organized by the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) and the Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE), concentrated on the equitable distribution of effective teachers across the country by focusing on the three levels of implementation – district, statewide, and federal level policies. This information-exchange was the second in a series of conversations that will feature educational issues of interest to the civil rights community. Participants in this, past, and future discussions include staff from AYPF, CHSE and their partner organizations representing the civil rights community, and other education reform organizations.

The goal of this discussion group was to inform the group on varying policies and practices that address equitable distribution of effective teachers so that students in schools with the highest need are supported during their educational journey to postsecondary success and civic engagement. The event also strengthened relationships and encouraged learning across organizations, all with the aim of promoting equitable policy change for communities and students of color.

Welcome and Introductions

This event is the second of five discussion groups focused on preparing every high school student for college and career success. Rufina Hernandez, Executive Director of CHSE, explained that CHSE's work as a coalition of civil rights groups, comprised of ten organizations¹, supports this goal and through federal advocacy efforts aims to ensure them for every student.

Overview: The Challenges and Opportunities of Ensuring Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers

Sonja Santelises, Vice President for K-12 Policy and Practice at the Education Trust, set the context for the day's discussions by reviewing the background and issues surrounding equitable distribution of effective teachers. Santelises focused on several areas that remain a challenge in ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers:

- *Challenge of Recruitment and Preparation Programs for Teachers and Principals*

¹ CHSE's partner organizations include: National Urban League, National Council of La Raza, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Leadership Conference Education Fund, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, League of United Latin American Citizens, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Alliance for Excellent Education, National Indian Education Association, and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.



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Santelises highlighted the difficulty in recruiting teachers for high needs populations and the role that school leaders play in recruiting highly effective teachers. Highly effective teachers will want to work for highly effective school leaders, even if they are working in high stress environments. Programs like the Urban Teacher Center, which is a preparation program in Baltimore and Washington DC, are designed to prepare teachers for schools that may be high stress but offer effective support and school leadership.

- *Assignment of Teachers in High-Poverty, High Minority Schools*
Data on “teacher churn” has often found that high-poverty, high minority schools have more “novice” teachers². There are often great disparities in teaching experience across schools in the same district and those disparities can be linked to poverty levels. However, the assignment of novice teachers also depends on the overall supply and demand of teachers as well as the local hiring situation. While we have a basic understanding of these disparities, there is also concern regarding the accuracy of data, which has varied by state.

The time when teachers are hired also plays a role in assignment of teachers. Policies at the district and state level have varying effects and can be targeted at different effort levels and times. For example, a high needs district hiring during a certain season or a district operating on a school-based budget with a longer wait time can dissuade teachers from working in those schools even if that district was their first choice.

- *Induction and Mentoring of Teachers*
Teachers vary in what types of needs they have so programs must recognize that supports and mentoring must be far more personalized than a standard one-size-fits-all approach. Offering personalized support and mentoring allows teachers to improve quicker by building on their strengths and addressing areas for improvement. There also needs to be better identification of a teacher’s progress so that mentors can provide assistance and support targeted to each teacher’s needs.
- *Professional Development of Teachers, Including Cultural Competency*
Teachers must have access to ongoing and meaningful professional development in addition to instruction in the early stages of their career, particularly if the teacher is in a new environment and may need guidance adjusting to the school culture and varied student backgrounds.
- *Retaining Teachers through a Strong School Culture*
Teachers improve and remain with their schools longer when administrators make an effort to grow their teachers through ongoing professional development and support. Principals should ask themselves, what supports are embedded in the environment and are they easily accessible?

² A novice teacher is defined here as a teacher who has one to three years of experience.



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- *Challenges of Moving Teachers Across Schools and Districts*

If a school or district is trying to attract specific teachers, usually only one incentive is not enough. Teachers look for several qualities when choosing a school, such as the school climate, learning and leadership opportunities available, and career matches. While financial incentives are widely recognized, Santelises suggests that school administrations should be focused on addressing this range of more nuanced incentives.

Following this overview of the challenges and needs for ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers, participants then learned about the policies states have in place during a discussion period. While the issue of equitable distribution of effective teachers has been a problem for decades, current policies are making the situation worse in some areas. For example, there is concern about policy alignment between teacher incentive efforts and new teacher evaluation systems. As many teacher evaluation systems are still in flux as they begin to incorporate student achievement as a measure, district performance pay or other teacher incentive programs do not necessarily align with these evaluation systems. This is happening as the Common Core State Standards begin to take effect, potentially meaning far more difficult standards for measuring effective teaching and thus making it more difficult to find effective teachers.

Statewide Efforts to Ensure Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers

Anne Marie Fenton, Program Director of Assessment at the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GPSC), discussed Georgia's mandatory plan for each district to have an education equity plan with indicators. Fenton began her presentation by explaining the role of the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH), which is comprised of seven³ alliances including the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. The mission of AEAH is to strengthen collaboration among public, business, and nonprofit agencies and organizations to achieve Georgia's education priorities through collaboration, innovation, and achievements. The three goals of the Alliance of Education Agency Heads are:

1. Increase the percentage of students reading at grade level by the completion of third grade.
2. Increase the percentage of graduates from high school and postsecondary institutions prepared for the demands of college, workplace, a global economy, and responsible citizenship.
3. Increase the percentage of effective teachers and educational leaders.

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission is currently striving to make the teacher certification process more in-depth for state-approved programs. The induction certificate for teachers will reflect what year each novice teacher is currently in. This can help

³ Alliance of Education Agency Heads' alliances include: Georgia's Department of Education, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, University System of Georgia, Technical College System of Georgia, Georgia Student Finance Commission, Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and The Governor's Office of Student Achievement.



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districts determine which teachers to hire, as well as which teachers most likely will need additional assistance. Districts find this tool helpful to ensure that there is subject matter expertise in the classroom.

Georgia Professional Standards Commission is also focusing on revamping their data systems to reflect equity. Every Georgian district is required to have an equity plan, Equity Technical Assistance (ETA), with indicators, which are peer reviewed before being submitted to the state. The GPSC has updated the sharing format to an in-trust online equity plan, Project EQ, which is made accessible for other schools and the public. Examples of how equity can be improved include development in principal placement, as good principals are the key to acquiring and keeping good teachers; cultural competence; peer equity reviews; and better measurement of classroom level effectiveness. The top two concerns in Georgia from the most recent EQ were support for high-need learners and the need for more equal distribution of highly effective teachers.

District-Level Programs to Ensure Equitable Distribution

Ann Blakeney Clark, Deputy Superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, explained both her role in the equitable distribution of teachers in her district and the method Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools chose to use for the teacher reconfiguration. Julie Severns, Ed.D, Assistant Superintendent of Professional Learning for Fresno Unified School District, discussed the work her district has done to assist with equitable distribution of teachers and continued professional development.

Ann Blakeney Clark, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Ann Blakeney Clark described how Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) focused on the problem of equitable distribution of teachers. When she first started working with teachers, Clark asked them what would incentivize them to leave one school to go to another school. Most teachers responded that a great leader would be the primary draw away from their current school, followed by the absence of toxic teachers, principal flexibility, and compensation. Clark indicated that once these incentives are in place strategic staffing becomes unnecessary. Strategic staffing, a practice that allows school districts to choose specific highly effective teachers and principals to relocate for the purposes of improving lower performing schools, becomes less necessary when effective incentives are in place. For example, after five years of offering incentives that teachers requested CMS has moved from strategically staffing seven schools to only needing to strategically staff one school. Strategically staffing principals should also be a priority since a principal's effect and involvement with a school's dynamics are integral with how teachers perform. Principals who were strategically staffed were chosen because of their excellent leadership skills, and interpret their tap from the district to move to a higher needs school as an honor comparable to teacher of the year.

Clark also discussed challenges that arise when strategically staffing schools. . One challenge is to take a broader look across the school district, not just in schools, to ensure



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equitable distribution of teachers. Also, leadership and leadership style should be considered when moving principals and teachers to new locations to make sure that the best fit is made for each school. Once the new staffing occurred, Clark spoke of the importance of supporting the staff in various ways, such as treating all calls like 9-1-1 calls, encouraging autonomy, and showcasing excellence.

Because Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools set an ambitious growth target of more than a year's worth of student growth in one year, the district was strategic in deciding which principals and teachers would be placed in low-performing schools. . Even though some teachers and principals were hard working and dedicated, they were not moved to new schools because they lacked the skills to advance student growth so aggressively. CMS provides principals who are strategically staffed a ten percent salary increase that remains until their retirement. Teachers who are strategically staffed receive \$10,000 extra during their first year, \$5,000 extra during their second year, and \$3,000 extra for their third through fifth years. During their most recent strategic staffing CMS posted seventeen leadership positions as available and they received 742 applications from around the nation. CMS looks for candidates who not only have licensure but also leadership skills, which is why they accepted support and recommendations from North Carolinian schools, business, and South Carolinian schools. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has this type of flexibility with their teacher and principal hires in part because they do not have collective bargaining agreements.

Julie Severns, Ed.D, Fresno Unified School District

Julie Severns discussed her work with Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) during the current overhaul of their administrative program the '[Skillful Leader Project](#).' Fresno Unified School District was on the brink of being taken over by the state when the new superintendent began in 2005. Since then it has been Severns' duty, in a newly created position, to work with the district and its partner California State University, Fresno to help overhaul an administrative program that prepares school leaders for future positions in FUSD through a more rigorous training that realistically teaches what administrators should expect to encounter while working in FUSD schools. In 2006, as a part of this program, a new model was used to help principals observe and evaluate teachers' instructional strategies on a more consistent basis. At first, teachers had a mixed response to the new model because they were not used to administrators in their classroom to observe them at arbitrary times. Another large shift was that the observations were tied to the state standards. However, over the last five years this model has continued to develop and has led to ongoing collaboration between the Skillful Leader Project and Fresno Unified schools.

The [Skillful Leader Project](#) has improved the flow of information between the California State University, Fresno and the Fresno Unified School District, which allows the content and instructional experiences of current leaders to be incorporated into the curriculum of the program. In this way, new administrators are exposed to possible challenges and solutions before they apply for a position.



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Question and Answer

During the question and answer period, participants addressed issues of state involvement with districts, the different needs of urban and rural districts, the difference in strategically staffing a high school versus an elementary school, and thoughtful deployment of professional development.

- *State Involvement*

For Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, state policy has not helped or hindered what they are doing at the district level since most of their funding is tied to Elementary and Secondary Education Act: Title II – Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals. Severns responded that Fresno Unified School District is in a similar situation, that Title II and other funding is very helpful with this work but state policy does not have much of an impact. However, FUSD is still managing a setback caused by teacher layoffs, stalling the relocation of teachers to the three lowest performing schools.

- *Different Needs of Urban and Rural Districts*

Clark explained that if there is not a supply of principals for a certain area, (e.g. in rural areas) then developing a principal pipeline is a great place to start. She rationalized that principals may not need to be assistant principals first, as they can circumvent this step if they have close experience with administration and have been in a cohort program, such as [TEACH Charlotte](#) and [New Leaders](#). Clark also discussed that while she has been pushing for strategically staffing principals across North Carolina, it might be better to start with strategically staffing superintendents. However, she mentioned that it can be difficult to attract a 'rock star' superintendent to a rural area with a small number of schools in the district and very high rates of poverty.

- *Difference in Strategically Staffing a High School Versus an Elementary School*

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools tend to strategically staff more high schools than elementary schools because teacher turnover is greater in their high schools. Fresno Unified School District strategically staffs both their high schools and elementary schools but in different ways. FUSD's high schools have been able to have smaller, targeted groups of strategically staffed teachers while the elementary schools have not been as targeted in their process.

- *Thoughtful Deployment of Professional Development*

Clark suggested that it is useful to help principals understand that teachers generally can be categorized into four quartiles, based on performance and that their support of the teachers should depend on which quartile they fall into. For example, a principal may want to provide very different professional development and support to the 'irreplaceables' (top 25 percent) compared to the other quartiles. Severns admitted that they were further behind than CMS in establishing a similar



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system; however, FUSD is clear as a system on what sites are able to provide professional learning. Fresno Unified School District also creates opportunities that are teacher driven so that they know what opportunities are available, and FUSD provides feedback loops so that the district can be notified of what is and is not working in their schools. Clark closed the question and answer section of their presentation by reiterating that nominating and recruiting teachers and principals to special opportunities yields more positive results than hoping that a teacher or principal simply finds a program on their own. Clark said that being nominated for a position can be a powerful message that can motivate great leaders to continue to do transformative work in a new setting.

The Role of the Federal Government

The Honorable Catherine E. Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education, discussed the Department of Education's (USED) plans to address the equitable distribution of effective teachers and solicited the feedback of participants on the issue. Lhamon emphasized that USED has prioritized this issue and that Race to the Top has promoted an equity agenda.

Lhamon explained that in order to equalize opportunity for all students, we must have a clearer understanding of the teaching profession; what is the current profile of teachers across the country? How well prepared are they and are they effective? She highlighted the value of having teachers that are culturally competent and well trained to deal with all students, including English Language Learners. In order to do this effectively, districts and states must identify strategies for building capacity, filling gaps, and developing strategies to bring more effective teachers to high need schools.

Lhamon closed her presentation by describing USED's proposed fifty-state strategy that will be implemented in lieu of incorporating requirements regarding equitable distribution of effective teachers into the renewal process for flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA flexibility). She explained that part of the fifty-state plan is to learn what does and does not work from districts' experiences. While we know that many States and districts are doing hard work on these issues, some in response to federal programs such as Race to the Top and ESEA flexibility, we also know that the problems remain. USED seeks to support States and districts balance the goals of improving equitable distribution and identifying effective as well as ineffective teachers, and is thinking about ways to address the potential unintended consequences of taking strong action to improve equitable distribution.

Lhamon also expressed the need for ongoing support to continue this work. USED's fifty-state strategy on equitable distribution of teachers is still being developed and during whole-group discussion, she asked participants for their insights into strategies to promote equitable distribution.



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Question and Answer

During the question and answer period, participants addressed issues of defining equitable access, understanding what support the USED offers, collaborating with Tribal Nations, and the USED's fifty-state plan.

- *Enforcement of existing law*

When asked about the role that the civil rights community can play in putting pressure on this issue, Lhamon stated that they can support USED's ongoing efforts to enforce existing law. The Office of Civil Rights has been addressing complaints that are shared with them and releases the findings of these complaints on its website. While the investigations include a suggestion of what tools or strategies can be used to solve the problem, educators that were not involved in the complaint do not always find the information easily digestible, so it would be helpful if the civil rights community could help promote this information to others struggling with this issue.

- *Data transparency*

The Department of Education aims to be transparent and present data that can be used by the public. However, as a nation, we have yet to come to a common definition of effective teaching. The lack of one common definition or even fifty state definitions has complicated efforts to provide data on this issue. USED has provided data on school and district-level indicators, such as teacher absenteeism and certification, but additional data is still lacking.

- *Leveraging funds to support districts*

Lhamon discussed striking a balance between the carrot and stick in addressing this issue. While enforcement and data transparency are necessary, USED has also provided additional funding to address inequities. They have implemented policies such as Race to the Top (Rttt) and the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF). Race to the Top's intention is to develop/support teachers and leaders, use evaluations with student growth data for feedback and improvement, and track results of teacher preparation and professional development. Rttt also encourages school interventions in the lowest performing schools and reforming district conditions to ensure that disadvantaged students have equal access to effective teaching. The Teacher Incentive Fund uses high quality evaluations and effectiveness data to inform both compensation and equitable distribution choices. TIF also aims to attract, retain, and develop teachers in persistently lowest performing schools. USED has been working hard to hold grantees accountable and monitoring how closely their spending of federal dollars matches their initial application.

Summary and Discussion of the Small Group Discussions: Implications for Policy and Advocacy



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Rita Pin Ahrens, Senior Policy Analyst at the Campaign for High School Equity, had the group discuss and brainstorm ideas for the Department's fifty-state plan. The following are several ideas that emerged from the discussion.

- *Measuring Teacher Effectiveness*

Participants expressed concern about a realistic approach to measuring teacher effectiveness. In the absence of clear measures of teacher effectiveness, they felt it is difficult to understand where there are good teachers. This can have negative consequences for districts and schools when they are held accountable for poor performance. The loss of federal funds as a result of this can potentially harm the schools with the neediest children.

- *Importance of Principals*

The importance of an effective principal was a key concept that was mentioned throughout the day and echoed by participants. Providing strong principals and leadership attracts teachers to schools and helps create a culture that is inviting for staff and students.

- *Sharing Data and Experience*

Participants felt that states should be encouraged to measure teacher effectiveness outcomes and to share this data with their students' families as well as other states. There was a suggestion that the Department of Education provide a one-page informational handout that instructs readers on how to use the CRDC data once it is released and encourages conversation not only within districts but across them as well.

- *Promoting Partnerships*

It was suggested that national organizations or groups should partner with either higher education or USED to help foster better relationships and assist with dissemination of information. One specific suggestion was for the Department of Education to partner with the National Parent Teacher Association or the YMCA which could inform their members when complaints are resolved.

- *Teacher Supports*

The groups seemed exasperated that equitable distribution of effective teachers has been an issue for so long and struggled to find an answer to why this is still a problem. There were some suggestions on how to incentivize teachers to teach in low-performing or low-income schools:

- Provide general support for new teachers, similar to the structure that Teach for America (TFA) offers.
- Expand loan forgiveness for teachers who teach in higher needs schools.
- Encourage conversations with the community so that they are involved with the conversation on how to attract effective teachers to their community.
- Find a way to make the teaching profession more prestigious.



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- Incentivize payments to relocate effective teachers to high need areas.
- Compose examples of best practices and solutions gathered from solving complaints on the USED website.

These were the main thoughts and suggestions that arose during the discussion related to supporting and disseminating the Department of Education's fifty-state plan.

Summary and Discussion of Next Steps

As the day's discussion drew to a close, Loretta Goodwin, Senior Director, AYPF. summarized the main topics that had been discussed throughout the day. Accessible data was an important aspect that was brought up during the different panels. Goodwin reminded the participants that we had heard from Georgia for a state's point of view and from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Fresno Unified School District for two examples of a district's viewpoint on equitable distribution of effective teachers. Teacher and principal support were discussed at great length and credited as a main reason why an educator would agree to be strategically placed. Lastly, Goodwin reviewed the role of the Department of Education and she reminded participants to reach out to the USED representatives with any suggestions for the fifty-state plan.

Participants shared resources to understand how to measure and review the equitable distribution of effective teachers. See the following:

- [Statute on Equitable Access to Effective Teachers: Florida](#)
 - This website links to the Florida Senate online page for Section 1012.2315 of a 2013 Florida Statute.
- [Georgia Alliance of Education Agency Heads](#)
 - GAEAH brings together partners across the education field to ensure that the percentage of effective teachers and education leaders increases.
- [My PSC: Georgia Professional Standards Commission](#)
 - The Georgia Professional Standards Commission is working to help Georgia educators and applicants for educator certification achieve their certification goal.
- [Project EQ](#)
 - Project EQ is Georgia's online resource for sharing and collaborating on the development and implementation of initiatives that try to ensure access to equitable educational opportunities
- [Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education: Teacher Equity Profile](#)
 - The OCR has developed a data snapshot focused on teacher equity. This profile highlights statistics related to teachers and counselors across the country and in individual states.