



Invest In and Retain Teachers and Leaders to Create a Culture of Learning and Support

THE ISSUE

Research shows that 16 percent of teachers in California left the profession or the state in recent years, and teachers in difficult to staff subject areas¹ are harder to retain. Schools in rural areas experience higher turnover rates than schools in urban and suburban areas.² Moreover, more than 250,000 California students are in schools without a teacher of their same race.³ This can lead to a lack of structure and stability for students, making it hard to foster a positive learning environment that promotes academic success.

AN APPROACH

Investing in faculty and staff, particularly educators of color, is one important way to cultivate a positive culture of learning and help students feel seen, heard, and reflected in their teachers, and graduate college and career ready. Students of color with a same-race teacher earn higher GPAs, spend more time on homework, and believe strongly that they can attend and succeed in college.⁴ This promising practice action guide highlights how schools and districts invest in professional learning opportunities and pathways for growth, that provide the structure and stability to support students to succeed academically.



HOW & WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

Creating an environment where teachers and leaders within schools feel valued and supported is an important aspect of ensuring students graduate college and career ready. Several schools we visited attributed much of their success to investing in faculty and staff and offering promotions within the district when leadership opportunities became available. **Whittier Union High School District** not only offers competitive salaries that are significantly higher than surrounding districts, but also has a positive relationship with the labor union. The district and the union regularly engage in meaningful conversations about compensation and professional learning opportunities and together they work to ensure that the district takes care of the people who take care of students. This includes offering robust professional learning opportunities during the school year and summer breaks that are specific to teachers' needs. Further, instead of inviting outside technical assistance, Whittier Union looks for expertise within the district and creates space for shared knowledge and ideas among colleagues. When they seek opportunities outside of the district, Whittier Union looks to large education conferences, such as the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE), and invites faculty and staff to attend.

Much like Whittier Union, **Culver City High School** also looks to expertise within the school and invites faculty and staff to lead professional learning opportunities. Practices such as this one allow teachers and counselors to take leadership roles without leaving their current positions, and signal that their knowledge and experience are valued. Faculty and staff also participate in professional learning communities (PLCs), instructional rounds where they observe classrooms, and create SMART goals that become their focus for the year, thereby fostering a positive culture of adult learning.

Similarly, faculty and staff at **Sanger High School** participate in teacher driven professional learning communities. Utilizing their late-start block schedule, teachers meet in PLCs every Thursday morning to discuss pedagogical practices, common assessments, and classroom management strategies. Some teachers have even incorporated the PLC model as part of their pedagogy and have students participate in PLCs to learn from one another. What makes Sanger's model distinct is the district's policy of having administrators learn alongside teachers and implementing Sanger Academic Achievement Leadership Teams

(SAALT). In SAALT, administrators from every school visit each other's sites and offer constructive feedback specific to their goals. Through these practices, Sanger Unified helps create a culture of continuous learning where everyone (faculty, staff, and students) is included and supported.

All three sites have low teacher and administrative turnover, which they attribute to the practices described above. These low turnover rates help provide structure and stability for students. In fact, most school and district leaders at Whittier Union, Culver City, and Sanger started as teachers within the district, so they have carried their expertise to their new roles and share a collective vision for success. It is clear that faculty and staff feel a strong connection to the community and are deeply committed to helping students succeed academically.

¹ Special education, mathematics, science, bilingual education, and world languages.

² Getting Down to Facts II: Teacher Shortages in California: Status, Sources, and Potential Solutions https://www.gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII_Report_Darling-Hammond.pdf

³ The Education Trust-West (2019) <https://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/edtrustmain/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/11/04215628/ETW-Seen-Hear-Reflected-TOC-Infographic-Nov-19.pdf>

⁴ Joel Mittleman, "What's in a Match? Disentangling the Significance of Teacher Race/Ethnicity," June 2016, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2796150>.

Guiding Questions for Advocacy

- 1** What supports does your district/school have in place to retain and recruit teachers and counselors of color?
- 2** In your district/schools, what professional learning opportunities are available to educators, counselors, support staff, and administrators? Are these differentiated by needs/wants?
- 3** Does your district/school offer educators, counselors, and support staff the opportunity to lead professional learning meetings? If so, how are opportunities made available?
- 4** When leadership opportunities become available, does your district/school launch an internal search before looking for talent outside of the district?
- 5** How would you describe your district/school's relationship with labor unions?



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