
Differentiating Roles, Re-assigning Staff, and Aligning Staff Competencies with School/Student Needs

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

It is important that teachers and other staff be assigned to classes and to schools whose needs are appropriately aligned with their professional competencies. Doing this serves two purposes. First, it makes teachers more content in their profession, lowering mobility and attrition. According to the 2000-2001 Teacher Follow-up Survey, 40% of public school teachers who moved to a new school did so for an opportunity for a better teaching assignment (Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004). Second, it helps to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have equal access to experienced, highly qualified teachers, a situation that currently is often not the case (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006; Imazeki & Goe, 2009).

At the minimum, all teachers should be assigned only to classes within their area of licensure or otherwise demonstrated area of expertise. Teachers with foreign language or other unique skills should be strategically assigned to work with students and in communities where their skills and knowledge are needed. Ideally, teachers in their first years on the job should be assigned a lighter workload in terms of numbers of classes, fewer administrative duties, lower class size or student load, and a lesser concentration of students with special needs or behavioral problems (Johnson et al., 2004). This approach will give new teachers time to hone their skills and improve their effectiveness before they are solely responsible for a large group of students. To make successful assignments, building leaders should examine the backgrounds, evaluation findings, and track records of each member of the school faculty and thoughtfully and collaboratively construct the school schedule to match teachers with the classes or course sections in which they (and their students) are most likely to be successful. Adjustments and corrections may need to be made mid-year, but these can be minimized if initial teacher assignments are conducted strategically with an eye to student learning results.

Moreover, the unique skills of all staff should be recognized and maximized through the use of collaborative teamwork that allows teachers to learn from and build off of each other's competencies. For example, the Generation Schools model rearranges teachers' assignments and incorporates team-based planning to bring shared expertise to teaching activities (Silva, 2009). As staff advance in experience and expertise, their roles should be differentiated to reflect their skills, knowledge, and career goals, and accomplished teachers should be recognized and provided with continual learning experiences. Teacher leadership positions, including mentors, instructional coaches, and school administration, should be available to interested and skilled educators. Where possible and when desired, these positions should provide leaders with the option of advancing their careers while also maintaining some classroom teaching responsibilities.

Finally, the needs of students should be the first priority of districts when assigning teachers. While local collective bargaining rules may require seniority-based placements as the priority, principals and district leaders should bear in mind that assigning inexperienced teachers to the most challenging classrooms or schools is likely to negatively impact student learning as well as the retention of the less experienced teaching staff. Teachers who consistently fail to help students learn should be removed from the classroom. Districts can facilitate this process by negotiating expedited performance-based dismissal processes, particularly in low-performing schools, and supporting school leaders by advising them on effective dismissal procedures and providing an intervention team to assist with the dismissal process (Kowal, Rosch, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009). In addition, districts should actively facilitate, through incentives and other measures, the assignment and re-assignment of staff to ensure that the needs of students and schools can be met by the various roles, responsibilities, and competencies of the staff employed. The success of differentiating roles and making appropriate teacher assignments should continually be evaluated for their impact on student achievement.

Action Principles

For District

1. Review alignment between teacher assignment and licensure area and ensure that, at a minimum, all assignments are within licensure areas or teachers otherwise demonstrate their expertise in the subject in which they are assigned.¹
2. Assign novice teachers to classes appropriate for their experience level.
3. Provide a variety of formal teacher leadership positions that do not require leaving the classroom.
4. Actively re-assign teachers to ensure that at-risk students are not disproportionately taught by inexperienced or ineffective teachers, providing transfer incentives if needed.
5. Provide teachers an active role in the design and implementation of strong induction and mentoring programs.
6. Provide teachers opportunities to become peer coaches and/or facilitators of staff development.
7. Capitalize on the problem solving and data analysis skills of special educators/consultants to lead/facilitate team meetings.
8. Carefully consider staff's unique competencies and assign them to positions where these skills are.
9. Evaluate the success of assignment decisions.

References and Resources

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- National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2007). *America's challenge: Effective teachers for at-risk schools and students*. Retrieved from <http://www.tqsource.org/publications/NCCTQBiennialReport.php> (see in particular, Chapter 5: Emerging Strategies and Practices to Improve Teacher Quality in At-Risk and Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subject Areas).
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¹At the minimum, the essential criteria for highly qualified teacher (HQT) status must be attained: (1) a bachelor's degree or better in the subject taught; (2) full state teacher certification; and (3) knowledge in the subjects taught.