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# Building for the Future: Attracting and Retaining Great Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

Teacher Policy Team on Attracting and Retaining Teachers  
June 2013



**Educators 4 Excellence**

Los Angeles

“America’s future depends on its teachers. If you want to make a difference in the life of our nation...join the teaching profession. America needs you.”

—Barack Obama, President of the United States<sup>1</sup>

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# Preface

We've all heard the bleak statistics that highlight the many reasons droves of teachers exit our most challenging schools and the teaching profession. In Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the median career length at a school is less than three years.<sup>2</sup> It is true that the complexity and challenge of teaching in our most vulnerable schools can be daunting. But many of us teach because of—not despite—these great challenges. We choose to come to and stay in our schools to seize the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change lives, one classroom at a time.

As teachers, we have firsthand experience with the policy roadblocks that prevent many of us from staying longer in our schools. We have all, from time to time, struggled with our own decisions to stay in schools and a profession with deep flaws, but also profound promise. Many of us came from schools where over 70 percent of our staff would have been laid off due to budget cuts without a court order to protect our schools. We have all weathered budget reductions that leave us working to achieve more growth with far fewer resources and support. Some of us came from schools that had gone through every reform project our district had ever tried. So we came to this task knowing that the challenges against us are great and that silver bullets are rarely

real, but fixing teacher attrition is a non-negotiable priority.

As a team, we undertook a journey to explore the root causes of turnover, research solutions being piloted in other districts and here in Los Angeles, and create a set of tools that could be implemented in our schools and district. We did not set out to create a comprehensive policy prescription for teacher retention, because we know our schools are diverse communities that require diverse and customized solutions. We came together to dream big and to share some changes that would convince all of us—including the peers and members we surveyed—to stay and lead from our classrooms. We also collaborated in order to think practically about district realities and opportunities. The result is this toolbox for attracting, retaining and increasing the number of our most effective teachers. We believe that these tools should be used in concert with one another and as part of a broader strategy to tap into the potential of our students, teachers and leaders.

Our paper highlights key tools we believe directly address the root causes for turnover. These research-based resources are designed to inspire the perpetual pursuit of excellence in teachers and the students we proudly serve.

Dear Mayor of Los Angeles,

Our students live, learn, play, work, fail and succeed in this city—your city—and ensuring that they thrive is your job. But it is also our job as public school teachers. All too often we have seen our students' futures jeopardized by the actions and decisions of the adults in charge. All around our great city, we see our students cheated out of their constitutional right to an equal and high-quality education.

We are united by one belief: every child in Los Angeles deserves the best teachers possible. All children—regardless of their ZIP code—deserve access to schools filled with excellent teachers who collaborate, build school culture, engage with the surrounding community and serve as a stable force in their students' lives. But we see the reality: our current model simply doesn't empower and elevate the very teachers who are best able to serve our most vulnerable students.

Teachers, parents, community leaders and elected officials together must fight for our students. Our children need us to put their interests first and to make decisions about who teaches where while keeping student need at the forefront of the conversation. They need us to defend their right to an excellent teacher in every classroom. Most of all, they need us to model the bold and creative problem solving that is necessary and required in our public schools.

This is not just a fight for our students, but also for the brilliant educators we work with, our school leaders and the communities we serve. But we can't fight alone. This white paper provides you, our Mayor, with some clear strategies for attracting and retaining talented teachers in schools of great need and even greater potential.

Sincerely,

The E4E-LA Attracting and Retaining Teachers Policy Team

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# Building for the Future: Attracting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

*A Toolbox of Strategies by Teachers*

## ATTRACT

- School-based hiring protocol
- School Transformation Packages to attract effective leaders

## DEVELOP

- New teacher induction and mentoring
- Student-driven professional development for teachers

## RETAIN

- Community Engagement Grants for schools
- Administrator training on Smart Retention Strategies
- Achievement Awards for high-needs schools



# Section 1

## Attracting Teachers to Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Attracting Talent

The art of attracting and selecting the right people is a herculean task in any industry. This challenge is made all the more complicated in our public schools, which have historically struggled with great student needs and high turnover among teachers. All too often the public views teaching as a noble profession when, in fact, teaching is an ambitious and performance-driven mission. To accelerate change and achievement at our most struggling public schools, we must identify and hire “the right talent” to teach. All of the tools in this section of our toolkit speak to this important process of getting the “right people on the bus.”

### Why Schools Have Trouble Attracting the Right Candidates

- Unclear expectations for teacher performance in high-needs schools
- Lack of prestige across the teaching profession generally
- Lack of clear mission and vision for the role of teachers in turning around high-needs schools
- Workplace instability, low morale and undefined school culture caused by frequent teacher turnover
- Difficulty attracting experienced teachers to teach in hard-to-staff schools

### Current Problem

Where teachers choose to teach should be informed by student need, mission and cultural alignment, opportunities for new professional challenges and personal factors. Instead, it is often a rushed process, with over 10 percent of teachers hired after the first day of school.<sup>3</sup> The process is also antithetical to student need, with 16 percent of California teachers teaching outside of their area of expertise in low-income schools.<sup>4</sup> Principals have little say regarding which teachers enter their campus, and teachers have little knowledge of the campus itself. In all of this, schools are left struggling to build up a strong culture and track record of performance. This leaves students without the school stability, continuity and rigor required to accelerate their achievement.

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## Attracting Teachers to Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Hiring Toolkit Customized by Individual Schools

#### What This Tool Does

Our district should develop a “Hiring Toolkit” that can then be customized at the school site. We recognize that there are great examples of strong hiring practices used across various schools. To save time, money and the hassle of “reinventing the wheel,” the district can develop a Hiring Toolkit that offers templates, strategies and guidance that can be customized by each school. The Hiring Toolkit should include the following: protocol for establishing a diverse school-specific hiring committee comprised of many stakeholders; interview questions; guiding questions for evaluating teacher demo lessons; and customizable rubrics for evaluating candidates. The district toolkit can also be shared with local universities and colleges to guide the training offered to aspiring teachers and administrators.

A hiring protocol gives applicants a chance to test the school for a fit. This is important because teachers need clarity on a school’s culture, performance goals and work expectations. In providing clear expectations, schools can attract teachers who align with the school’s mission. A study from The New Teacher Project found that strong teachers are more likely to accept jobs with schools that have efficient application, screening and selection processes.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, how teachers are treated in the hiring process provides valuable insight into how teachers will be treated as professionals at the school site.

A school-specific hiring protocol provides flexibility for making informed hiring decisions. A customizable toolkit

will give schools a starting place for creating or formalizing a hiring process for ensuring candidate alignment with school mission, goals and culture. This can reduce teacher turnover in the future.

#### Measuring Success

**School Report Card:** If the whole school is involved in the hiring process, then the whole school should be held accountable for the results. School Report Cards should show evidence of improved hiring processes. For instance, the School Report Card could show the percentage of open positions filled before the start of school, as well as early retention rates.

**Administrator Evaluation:** While the hiring protocol is a collaborative process, administrators should be able to show evidence that there is a school-wide hiring protocol in place. This evidence can be collected as part of a multi-measured evaluation system for principals.

#### Caveats and Considerations

Recognizing the limitations on early hiring, the district and state will need to provide schools with timely data on student enrollment, budget and teacher transfers to facilitate appropriate hiring and decision-making. (See our Call to State Leaders on page 14.)

The accountability metrics for the school and administrator also need to ensure that school leaders are involving multiple stakeholders, including parents and community, in the hiring process.

**“When I graduated from college, I had a sense that my professors were disappointed that I had not selected a more ‘prestigious’ and ‘valuable’ career path. But teachers shape the development of our nation’s next generation of leaders—what could be more valuable?”**

—Joshua Thomson, high school science, Da Vinci Science High School



How important is the following to attracting and retaining great teachers?

## School-specific hiring protocol



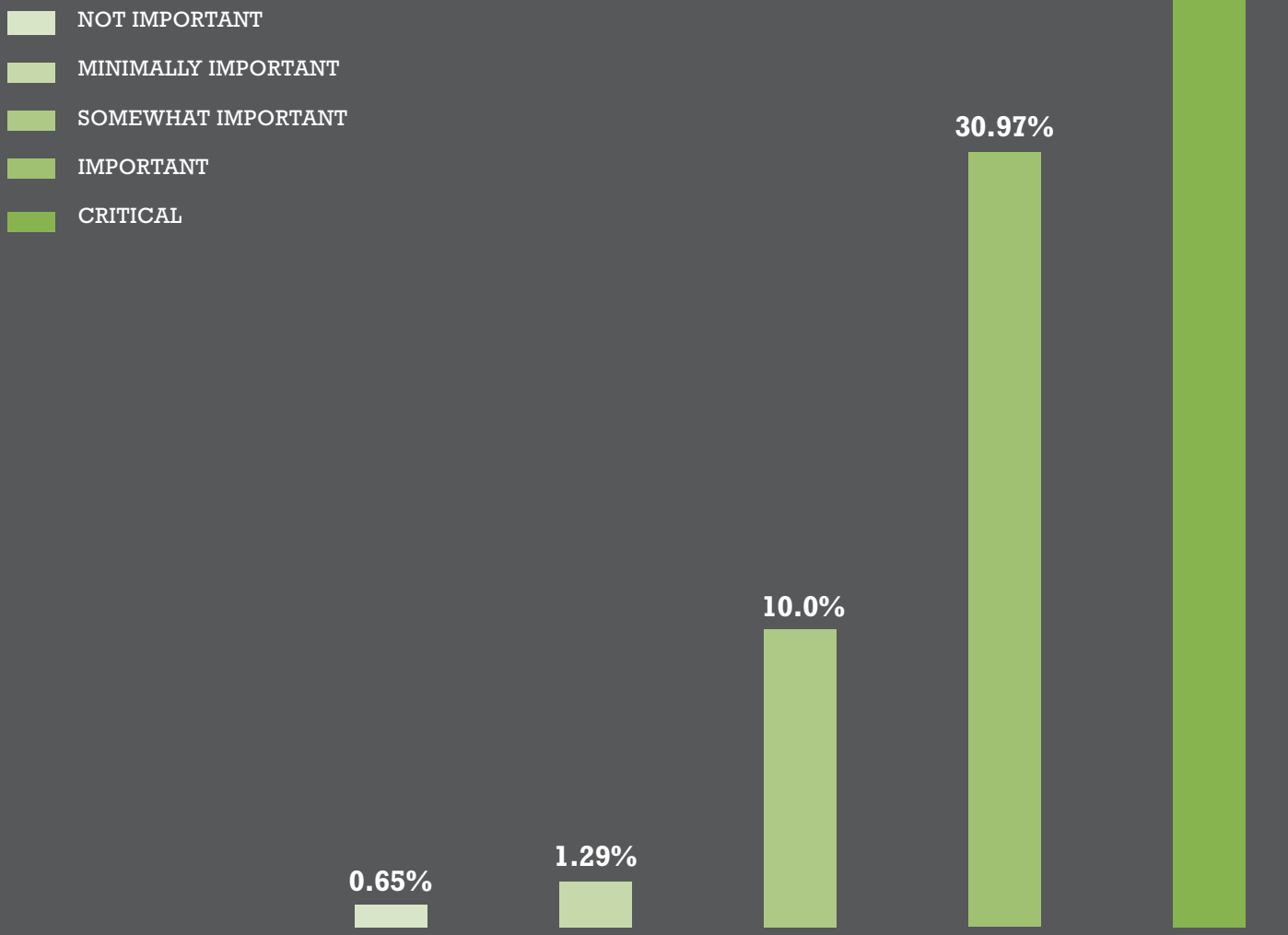
(310 respondents)

Educators 4 Excellence. "Attracting and Retaining Teachers." Teacher Survey. May 2013.

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How important is the following to attracting and retaining great teachers?

## Placement of highly effective school leaders at high-turnover schools



(310 respondents)  
Educators 4 Excellence. "Attracting and Retaining Teachers." Teacher Survey. May 2013.

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## Attracting Teachers to Hard-to-Staff Schools Transformation Packages for Effective Administrators

### What This Tool Does

Our district can offer effective school administrators a “School Transformation Package” in their efforts to lead high-needs schools. Teaching and leading in our highest-needs schools is an honor and a privilege. Our methods of recruitment and selection should reflect this. A School Transformation Package offered to leaders should include clear district supports, autonomies and financial incentives. Effective administrators should be identified based on a multi-measure evaluation system in line with the framework developed by LAUSD and the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA). It should include student growth and teacher development and retention, among other factors. The recruitment and selection process should include the voices of teachers, parents and the community.

Providing school leaders with a package of supports and autonomies will encourage administrator retention. A survey of administrators found that the areas in which they face significant challenge—teacher retention, budget, and curriculum and instruction—are also the areas over which they feel they have little or no control.<sup>6</sup> In order for our principals to serve as instructional leaders, they must be given autonomy and responsibility to lead.

Strategically recruiting effective leaders to high-needs schools directly promotes retention of our most effective teachers. Our highest-performing teachers desire to work at schools where there is a high level of administrative support. Effective leaders can establish a school environ-

ment that allows teachers to get assistance in areas of need, through professional development and collaboration. In a study of the District of Columbia Public Schools, one-quarter of high-performing teachers cited a lack of administrative support in their development as their primary reason for leaving.<sup>7</sup>

### Measuring Success

**Administrator Evaluation:** As part of each school leader’s evaluation, we recommend that teacher retention be considered as a necessary component in assessing leader performance. We should look at retention rates for all teachers, and specifically for those deemed effective.

**Local Superintendent Evaluation:** Local superintendents should ultimately be held accountable for ensuring that the most effective school leaders are recruited to the highest-needs schools.

### Caveats and Considerations

To attract and retain our highest-performing school leaders at our highest-needs schools, the district must develop a multi-measure evaluation system for identifying and leveraging our strongest school leaders.

As the district implements policies to attract and retain the best leaders, it must simultaneously collect data on school leader quality and school performance. This data will enable our district to make informed decisions about school needs as well as the retention, compensation and other incentives offered to leaders.

**“We need to treat our school leaders like champion coaches: give them support, demand the best and give them the power to truly lead.”**

—Estevan Leyva, high school humanities, Benjamin Franklin High School

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## Attracting Teachers to Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Not Just for Teachers: Benefits for Our District, Students and Community

#### Benefits for the District

Reduces attrition rates among principals and teachers, which reduces cost of retraining.

Increases autonomy for strong leaders—especially in terms of hiring—allowing the district to expend fewer resources on oversight.

Allows the district to learn from and expand upon best leadership practices delivered by administrators and teacher-leaders.

#### Benefits for the Students, Schools and Community

**Students:** Giving administrators greater autonomy and flexibility allows them to set the culture of expectations at their school, which directly affects the education experience of each individual student.<sup>8</sup>

**Administrators:** Greater autonomy allows administrators to make a thoughtful decision about the school they choose to lead based on where they can have the most impact, rather than simply where they will face the fewest barriers. The earlier hiring timeline creates a wider talent pool and allows schools to find candidates who are aligned with the school mission and vision.

**Parents and Family:** Involving parents in the school's hiring process reaffirms their vital role in the school and promotes ongoing involvement.

**Public:** Involving the community in the hiring process for teachers and administrators will promote the investment of community members in the mission and performance of the school. Additionally, bringing in a new school leader is effective in turning around the school only if the leader is actually free to do something different. A School Transformation Package gives the new school leader that freedom.

## We Need Our State Leaders To...

Allow schools to make hiring decisions and retain talent based on the mutual fit of skill and effectiveness, personality and purpose.

We recognize that there are many state policy barriers that could prevent school leaders from effectively turning around their campuses. Chief among these barriers is the policy of “forced placement” in the California Education Code.<sup>9</sup> The policy prevents schools from getting the “right people on the bus.”

Currently, schools are permitted to use two factors in their hiring decisions: credential and seniority. We propose that our district and schools increase the talent pool for staffing by considering a much wider range of factors, including culture and mission fit, evidence of student growth and particular areas of expertise, along with years of experience and credentials. We cannot shackle school leaders by limiting their access to the broad array of teaching talent that exists in our state and expect these leaders to turn around struggling schools.



# Section 2

## Developing Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Development

Even with the “right people on the bus,” our district and schools must work to ensure the continued development and growth of educators throughout their careers. This is particularly true at hard-to-staff schools, where teachers face a variety of challenges not present at other sites. All of the tools in this section of the toolkit address the task of growing the teachers who have chosen to take positions in the classrooms and schools that need them most.

### Why Hard-to-Staff Schools Have Trouble Developing Teacher-Leaders

- Teacher isolation and burnout caused by lack of meaningful collaboration and support
- Undefined school culture caused by workplace instability
- Lack of preparation to teach the specific groups of students teachers are serving
- Lack of depth in professional development due to constant influx of novice teachers and failure to differentiate support
- Lack of data or information on challenging areas for teachers and students

### Current Problem

Far too many systems in teaching communicate that there are only two levels of effectiveness: satisfactory and unsatisfactory. This concept of career growth is binary and fails to tap into the lofty aspirations and ambitions that drive great teachers to teach. Teachers aspire to be much more than satisfactory and need evaluation, tenure and professional development processes that inspire excellence and innovation. We tell our students they should be constantly growing and learning, and as teachers, we should expect the same for ourselves. Teachers come into teaching with a range of experience and skill levels. All of us can and should have the opportunity to grow.

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## Developing Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Student-driven Professional Development

#### What This Tool Does

Our schools should be empowered to use data to craft professional development that speaks directly to student and teacher needs. Our schools should be given the tools and training to analyze the data and work as a team to create professional development tailored to student and staff needs.

School-specific professional development encourages a culture of collaboration. Once the data is dissected and examined, the staff can come together and craft professional development to address challenges and build on strengths. This process decreases isolation and keeps communication open between teachers.

School-specific professional development is more efficient. When schools have the freedom to set their own professional development goals and agendas based on student and teacher need, they can directly address holes in expertise amongst their own staff. This would avoid wasting time and energy on professional development that might not be relevant. For example, while some schools may break down the data and see that their English language learners are struggling with reading comprehension, another school may need to look at a breakdown by learner type to see that kinesthetic learners are being underserved.<sup>10</sup>

#### Measuring Success

**Administrator Evaluation:** Administrators should be able to show evidence of implementing professional development that is based on data and collaboratively established by teacher-leaders and administrators. We should also look for evidence of student growth in a few key areas selected as a goal based on student data.

**Teacher Evaluation:** Part of teacher evaluation should entail setting professional development goals based on student data and showing evidence of meeting those goals throughout the year.

#### Caveats and Considerations

Data-driven professional development is the tool, but student achievement is the ultimate goal. Therefore, schools should be held responsible for the outcomes rather than the process. This also means that we will need to collect more information from teachers throughout the year on the effectiveness of their professional development. To truly provide data-driven and customized professional development, the district and our schools will need to begin seriously investing in technological improvements.

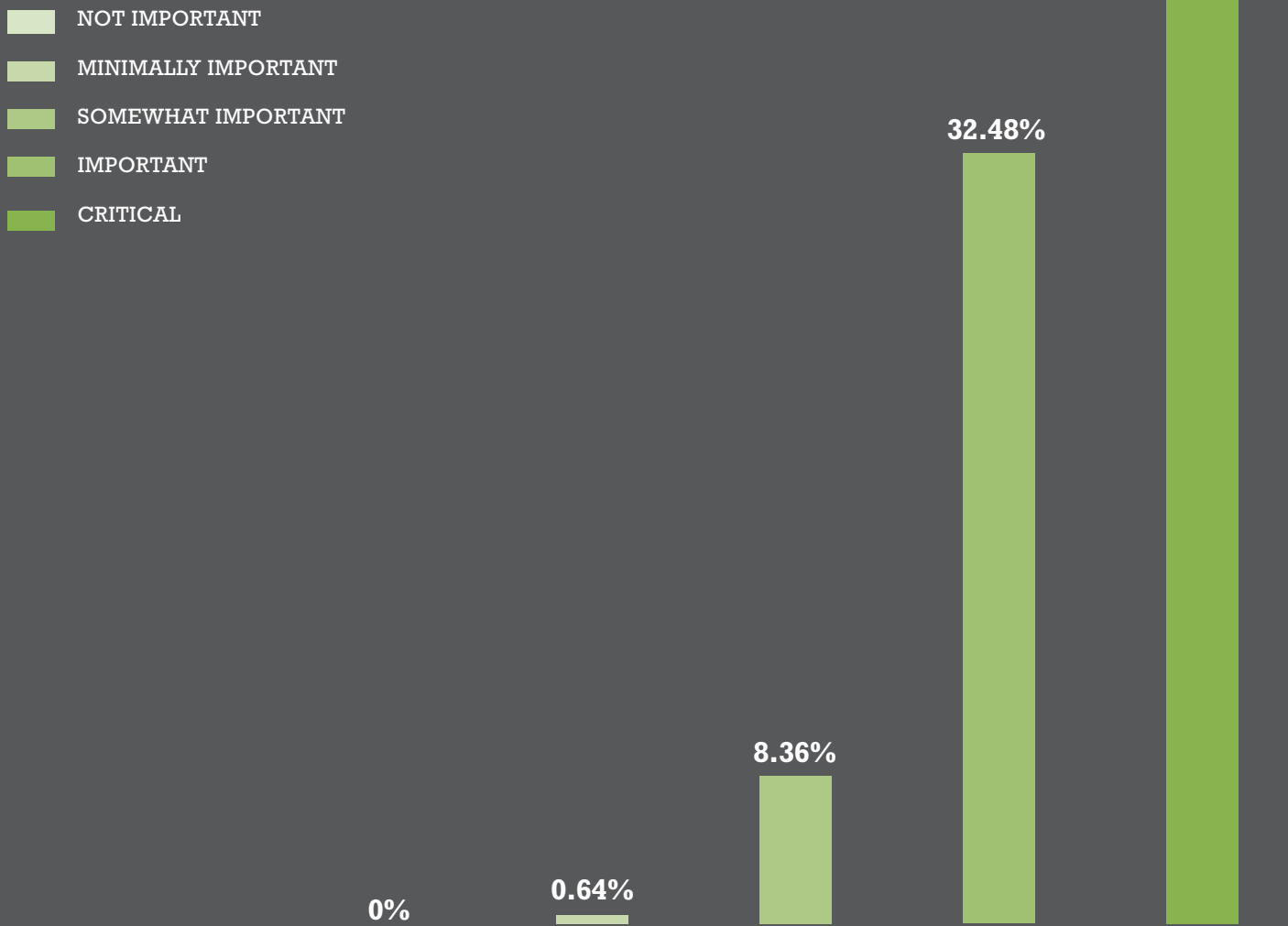
**“There is a lot of talent in our schools. With increased flexibility, schools could support the needs of their particular staff members, allowing good teachers to become great teachers.”**

—Riley Vaca, high school English, Camino Nuevo Charter High School

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How important is the following to attracting and retaining great teachers?

**Professional development based on student need and established collaboratively at the school site**



(310 respondents)  
Educators 4 Excellence. "Attracting and Retaining Teachers." Teacher Survey. May 2013.



## We Need Our State Leaders To...

Provide a strong framework for evaluation that captures the nuances of teacher performance and growth over time.

If we expect teachers and administrators to set rigorous goals for professional development, we must also provide metrics to capture their growth over time. Currently, our state law has set a low bar for teacher evaluations. There is no state framework, and the vast majority of districts have only two categories: pass or fail.

We need our state to set a minimum of four bands of effectiveness to better capture our growth and range of development as educators. This will push local districts toward a more nuanced and thoughtful system for evaluating teacher growth, identifying expertise and promoting teachers as leaders.

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## Developing Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Induction Program with an Emphasis in Ongoing Mentoring

#### What This Tool Does

Our District can ensure that all new teachers, regardless of school site, receive adequate support and mentorship in the early stages of their careers. School sites should develop a school-specific induction program with a focus on ongoing mentoring.<sup>11</sup> While LAUSD's Educational Service Centers<sup>12</sup> should keep schools accountable for results, the schools themselves should have discretion over selecting trainings, matching mentors and mentees, and identifying hiring needs.

High-quality induction and mentoring services can retain teachers past those first few difficult years. Having a strategically assigned mentor can help reduce the feeling of isolation and keep the teacher engaged at the school site.<sup>13</sup> In Hillsborough County, Florida, a comprehensive mentoring and induction program increased the retention rate of first-year teachers from 72 percent to 95 percent.<sup>14</sup>

Providing flexibility at the school level enables schools to find the best possible fit for mentors and mentees, and to create a relevant induction program. Administrators and teacher-leaders who have led the new teacher through the hiring process will best know how to match this new hire with a complementary mentor. They will also be able to craft a package of professional development and training options that are particular to the school. These might include trainings on Common Core implementation, technology, community outreach and curriculum alignment.

#### Measuring Success

**Administrator Evaluation:** In addition to examining overall retention rates of highly effective teachers, we should look specifically at retention rates of teachers in their first few years. We should also consider teacher feedback surveys on the quality of the induction program. These surveys should be distributed to both the induction program participants and providers.

**Mentor Evaluation:** A piece of the mentors' evaluation should be based on feedback surveys from participating teachers and retention rates of their mentees.

**Academic Performance Index:** The district as a whole should be held accountable for its retention rates of teachers identified as effective or highly effective, as well as teachers in the first five years, since the majority of teachers are leaving during this critical timeframe.

#### Caveats and Considerations

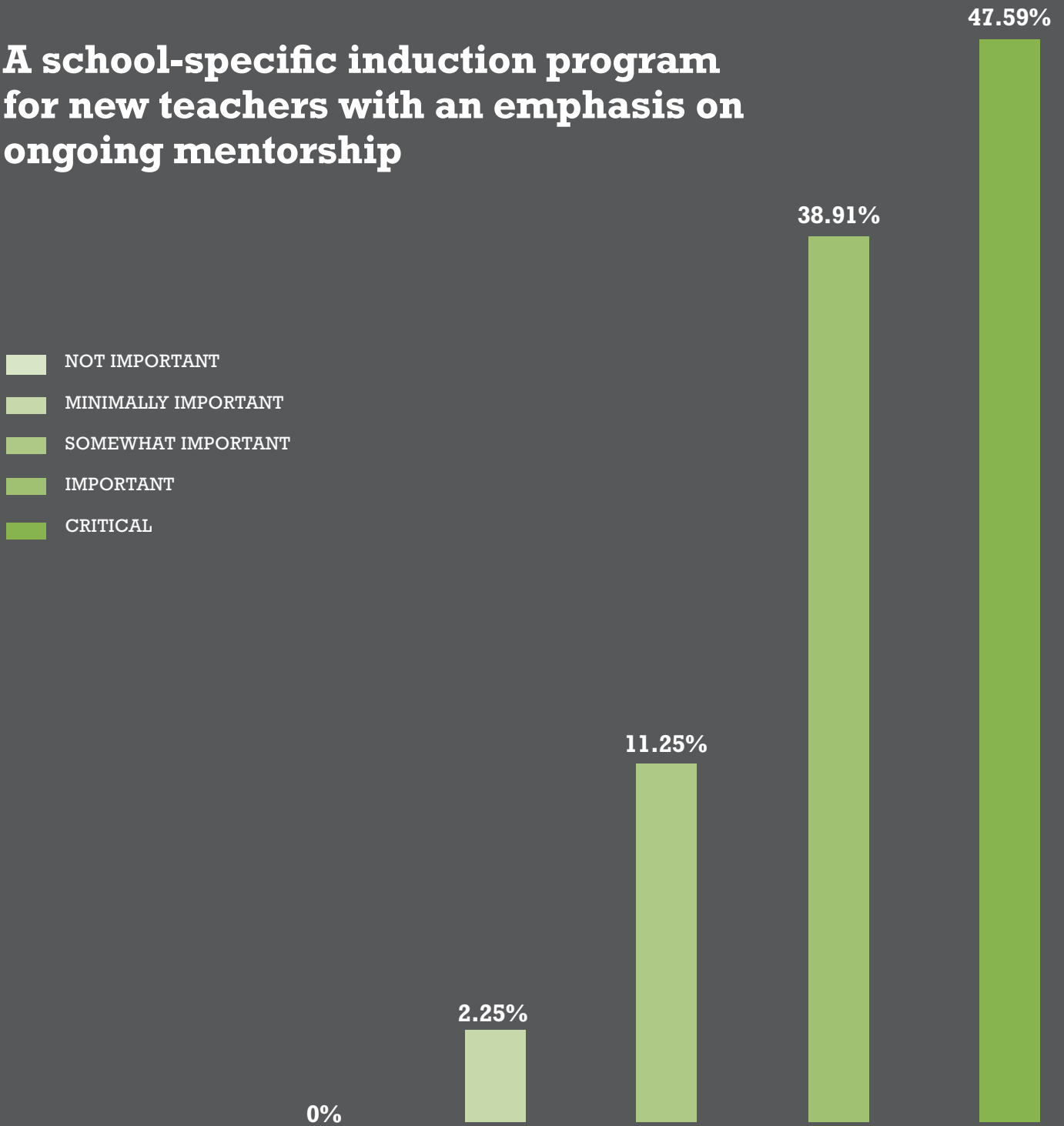
Mentors and all those who lead an induction program need to be supported and evaluated in those roles. This is separate from their support and evaluation as teachers. Our district's talent management division will need to work collaboratively with teacher-leaders on the ground to develop a differentiated rubric and evaluation for mentors, mentees and other induction program participants.

**“I know it’s important to make a safe and welcoming environment for my kids from day one, and I love that my school did that for me.”**

—Lucie Zuniga, high school English and drama, EcoAcademy High School

How important is the following to attracting and retaining great teachers?

**A school-specific induction program for new teachers with an emphasis on ongoing mentorship**



(310 respondents)

Educators 4 Excellence. "Attracting and Retaining Teachers." Teacher Survey. May 2013.

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## Developing Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Not Just for Teachers: Benefits for Our District, Students and Community

#### Benefits for the District

Frees up time and resources of district personnel by decentralizing and localizing induction programs and professional development.

Reduces time and resources spent on unnecessary or repetitive professional development.

Decreases new teacher attrition rates and related costs of replacement and retraining.

Leverages school-level leaders to create and share best practices internally.

#### Benefits for the Students, Schools and Community

**Students:** Ensures that every student has access to a high-quality and well-supported teacher whose professional development is driven by the students' unique needs and academic growth goals.

**Administrators:** Reduces the burden of constantly creating professional development and supporting new teachers by leveraging the talent and expertise of teachers.

**Parents and Family:** Ensures that professional development is tailored to the needs of the community the school is serving.

**Public:** Increases efficiency by ensuring that dollars are spent addressing specific school needs. Additionally, investing public dollars in a high-quality induction and mentoring program has long-term returns. For every \$1.00 invested, schools gain \$1.50 in future savings on reduced turnover and retraining.<sup>15</sup>

A photograph of two men in a meeting. The man on the left has dark hair and glasses, wearing a light blue shirt. The man on the right is bald with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark blue sweater over a white collared shirt. They are both looking towards the right. In the background, other people are seated at tables, some holding papers or water bottles.

# Section 3

## Retaining Great Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

**Retention** An outstanding teacher can change a child's life. A single high-quality teacher can increase a student's lifetime earnings by over \$50,000.<sup>16</sup> In addition to other factors, a great teacher reduces the likelihood of teen pregnancy, drug use and other negative behaviors.<sup>17</sup> And there are a number of these incredible educators in our hard-to-staff classrooms in Los Angeles every day. It is imperative that we not only attract great new teachers and develop them, but that we also identify and strategically retain these individuals.

### Why Schools Have Trouble Retaining Great Teachers

- Lack of reward and recognition for excellence
- Lack of support from administrators
- Lack of training on how to engage communities and families
- Undefined school culture caused by workplace instability

### Current Problem

Teacher churn is not merely a problem involving teachers who no longer want to teach. More new teachers leave their posts to teach in another school or district than to leave the profession altogether.<sup>18</sup> Teachers' job satisfaction and decisions to stay are directly tied to their working conditions and their feelings of autonomy and purpose.<sup>19</sup> In order to keep our great teachers in the classrooms that need them the most, we must reduce the systemic barriers that can leave teachers and school leaders feeling powerless or isolated. Then, we must create an environment that recognizes and rewards these individuals for their achievements.

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## Retaining Great Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Administrator Training on Smart Retention Strategies

#### What This Tool Does

Our district should train administrators on easily implementable “Smart Retention Strategies.” Actions as simple as public recognition of accomplishments or even one-on-one acknowledgement of high performance can double the length of time highly effective teachers choose to stay in the classroom.<sup>20</sup> Administrators should be given training around these and other research-based strategies for improving morale, motivation and retention, and be held accountable for the results as part of their evaluations.

Focusing retention strategies on our strongest teachers improves student outcomes. A high-performing teacher on average produces five to six more months of student achievement per year than a low-performing teacher.<sup>21</sup> Focusing retention strategies on those teachers contributes directly to increased student achievement.

Focusing retention strategies on our strongest teachers sets administrators up for a more distributive leadership model. One potential strategy for retention is to offer leadership roles to highly effective teachers. If administrators are trained in identifying and leveraging these roles, their workload will be lightened and they can focus their

time on the development of their staff. This strategy will also help build more sustainable schools by creating internal pipelines for developing “homegrown” leaders at the school site.

#### Measuring Success

**Administrator Evaluation:** After the district provides appropriate training and support, administrators should show evidence in their evaluation of improvement in retention of effective and highly effective teachers.

**Administrator Surveys:** In order to ensure effective training, administrators should submit surveys reporting on the usefulness of the training they receive around smart retention strategies. These surveys and ratings should be incorporated into the training provider’s evaluation.

#### Caveats and Considerations

Rethinking the administrators’ roles and encouraging them to be instructional leaders will take more than professional development on retention strategies. While this tool is an important one, it should be implemented as part of a wider strategy to support and develop our school leaders through ongoing mentorship and coaching.

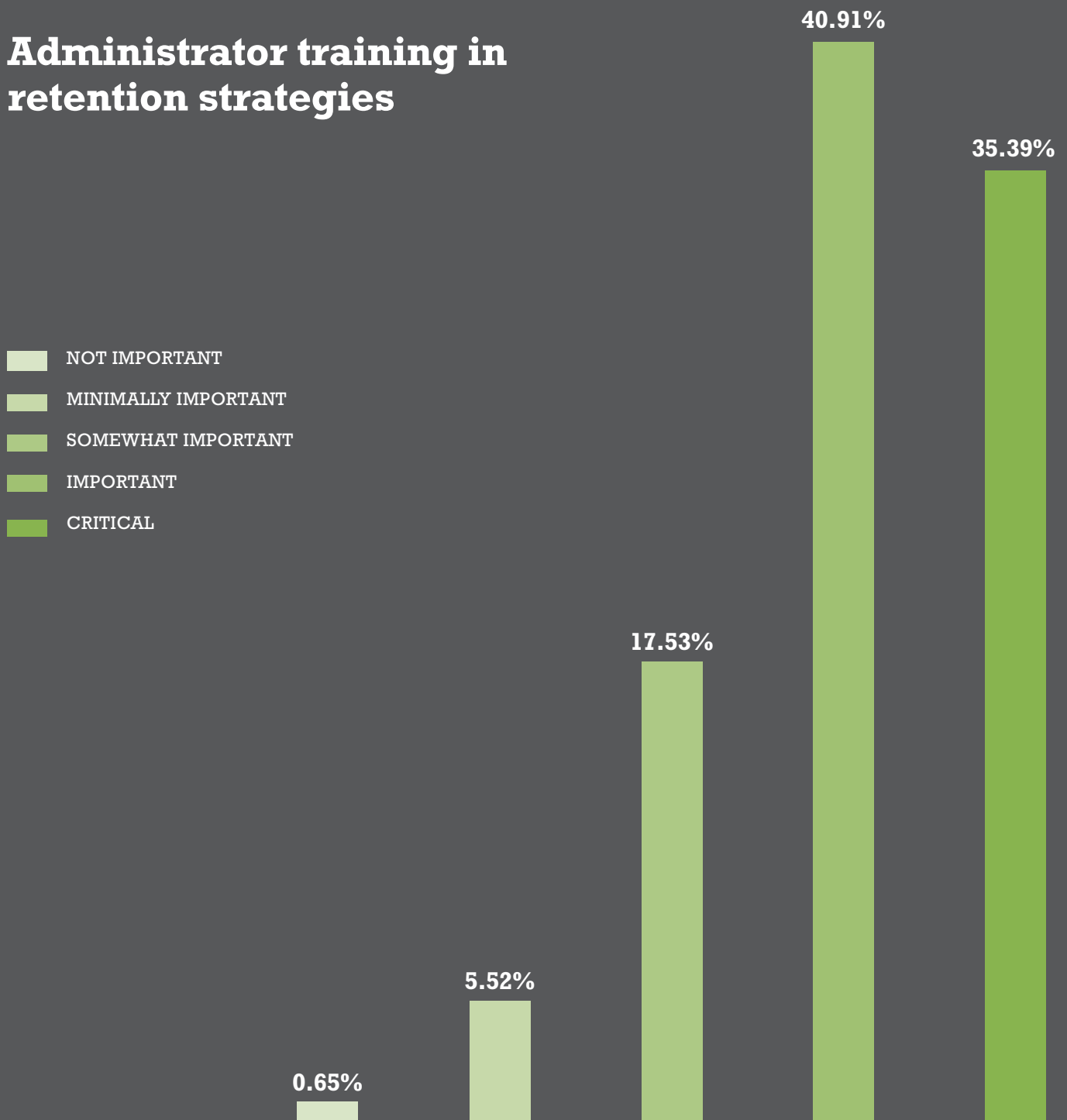
**“When great teachers want to stay at a school, when they are made to feel valued and supported, they will do just about anything for their students. Those are the people we want and need to keep.”**

—Laurie Walters, kindergarten, NOW Academy

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How important is the following to attracting and retaining great teachers?

## Administrator training in retention strategies



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(310 respondents)

Educators 4 Excellence. "Attracting and Retaining Teachers." Teacher Survey. May 2013.

## We Need Our State Leaders To...

**Move to a model of performance-based retention.**

When budget cuts force reductions in staff, school and district leaders must make difficult layoff decisions. In California, schools are not permitted to consider anything other than seniority in all but a few special situations. This is informally referred to as a policy of “Last In, First Out” in the California Education Code.<sup>22</sup>

We propose that our state move to a model of performance-based retention. While we cannot prevent every budget shortfall, we can empower our school leaders in those moments to make decisions that put the needs of students first. Retention decisions should be based on a multi-measure evaluation, in addition to years of service and credentials.

**Reform the tenure process to restore the concept of tenure as a meaningful professional milestone.**

Just as in any career, not everyone who enters teaching will or should stay in the profession for a lifetime. The current California tenure law grants permanent status to any teacher who has received “satisfactory” ratings for two consecutive years.<sup>23</sup> In a system that rates over 98 percent of teachers “satisfactory,” this in turn means over 90 percent of teachers are reaching permanent status.<sup>24</sup>

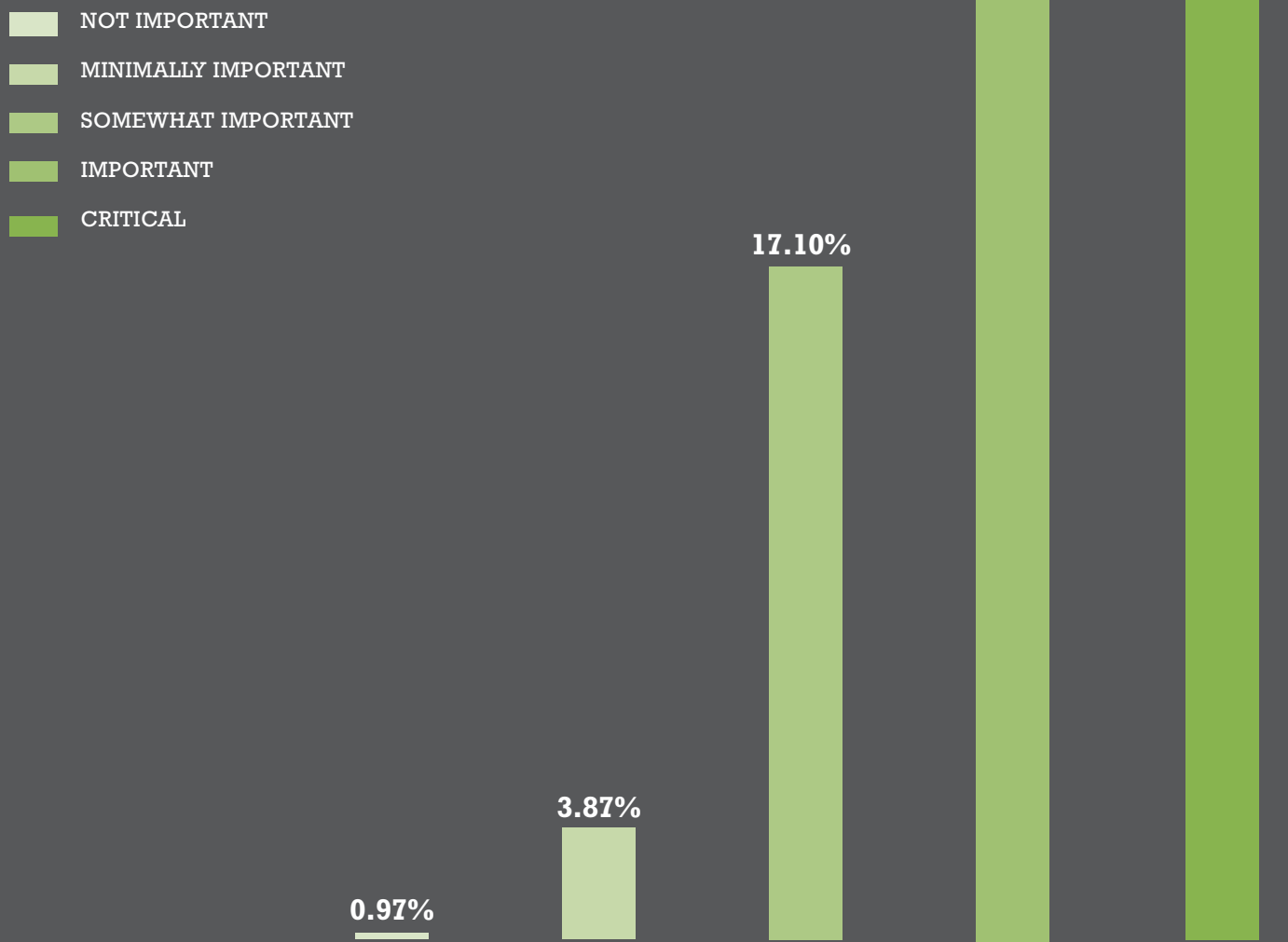
We propose that our state redefine the tenure process to be based not simply on years of service, but on a collectively agreed-upon set of achievements. This should include multi-measure evaluations, reviews by colleagues and evidence of ongoing professional growth. This process may happen at different points in a teacher’s career, but should be far enough out to give both school leaders and teachers a chance to show improvement, or exit the profession gracefully.



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How important is the following to attracting and retaining great teachers?

## Strengthening community partnerships with schools



(310 respondents)

Educators 4 Excellence. "Attracting and Retaining Teachers." Teacher Survey. May 2013.

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## Retaining Great Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Community Engagement Grants for High-Needs Schools

#### What This Tool Does

Our district should create a pot of grant money that incentivizes community partnerships that are focused on boosting retention and driving student achievement. Individual schools would apply for grant money to fund programs or positions based on school need. Schools would need to identify the community partners they wish to engage, as well as the strategies, program and metrics for success, and tie these factors to teacher retention and student achievement.

Individualized grants will enable schools to tailor a community outreach plan that matches school need and culture. Schools will vary across Los Angeles in their approach to engaging community. For example, an elementary school may find that a Parent Academy fills a need for parent involvement, while a science magnet may wish to build better partnerships with local technology companies to move to a Linked Learning model. The district can use the process to collect and synthesize best practices to share with future applicants. However, schools should maintain the right to design a program to meet their needs.

Encouraging community involvement through Community Engagement Grants will likely improve working conditions for teachers and boost teacher retention. One of the drivers of turnover of highly effective teachers is the feeling of helplessness and isolation.<sup>25</sup> Encouraging an investment in a school site by parents and community can help address some of the factors that teachers may feel are beyond their control or impeding their ability to make additional progress with their students. The partnerships will also allow them to create relationships with experts in fields that are outside of their expertise, but vital to their students' growth. For example, there are many non-profits focused on strengthening parent engagement in schools, and there are businesses that can show students a direct link between their school and future careers.

Community Engagement Grants can build on partnerships already in place and make new partnerships easier to create. Los Angeles has a long history of community activism and involvement in our public schools. Programs like the Youth Policy Institute, L.A.'s Best, Los Angeles Education Partnership and others regularly partner with schools to provide additional services and supports. Both non-profit and business communities can help fund grants to implement programs in partnerships with local schools.

#### Measuring Success

**Gathering Data:** The District should measure gains in student achievement as well as teacher retention at each school receiving a Community Engagement Grant in order to gauge effectiveness and look for replicable programs.

**Community Grant Renewal:** In applying for continued funding, the school should report on results in terms of student growth and other metrics as laid out in its original proposal.

#### Caveats and Considerations

- In order to maintain the integrity of the grant fund for high-needs schools, the district will need to determine a threshold for schools to qualify for and receive grant funds. This threshold should be based on student need as well as teacher retention rates.
- The district will need to establish a process for reviewing and awarding grants that is inclusive of educators and other stakeholders.

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## Retaining Great Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Achievement Awards in High-Needs Schools

#### What This Tool Does

Rewarding the decision to teach in high-needs schools celebrates teachers' grit and success. Teachers who choose to work in the classrooms and positions that are most difficult to fill and produce great results for students should be compensated accordingly. An American Federation of Teachers poll found that 88 percent of teachers agreed that pay should be differentiated for teachers who serve in hard-to-staff schools.<sup>26</sup>

Rewarding excellence in high-needs schools directly benefits students. Tying additional compensation not simply to entering a high-needs school, but to staying there and producing results for students, places student achievement first. Teachers in other districts have seen outsized gains in both reading and math proficiency among high-needs schools that implemented similar programs.<sup>27</sup>

#### Measuring Success

Teacher Evaluation: Teachers must show strong evidence of student growth in their evaluations in order to receive the Achievement Award.

Academic Performance Index: As our state reconsiders how to measure school and district performance, it should include student growth and improvement in teacher retention rates specifically in high-needs schools.

#### Caveats and Considerations

Although this toolkit is a set of potential strategies that are by no means comprehensive, this strategy in particular cannot and should not be implemented in isolation. Research shows that simply handing out bonuses for entering the school will not attract the best possible candidates, as teachers consider a wide range of other factors beyond pay when contemplating a new position.<sup>28</sup>

We recommend strongly that this strategy not be undertaken without also granting greater autonomy in hiring and a more robust system of evaluation and support.

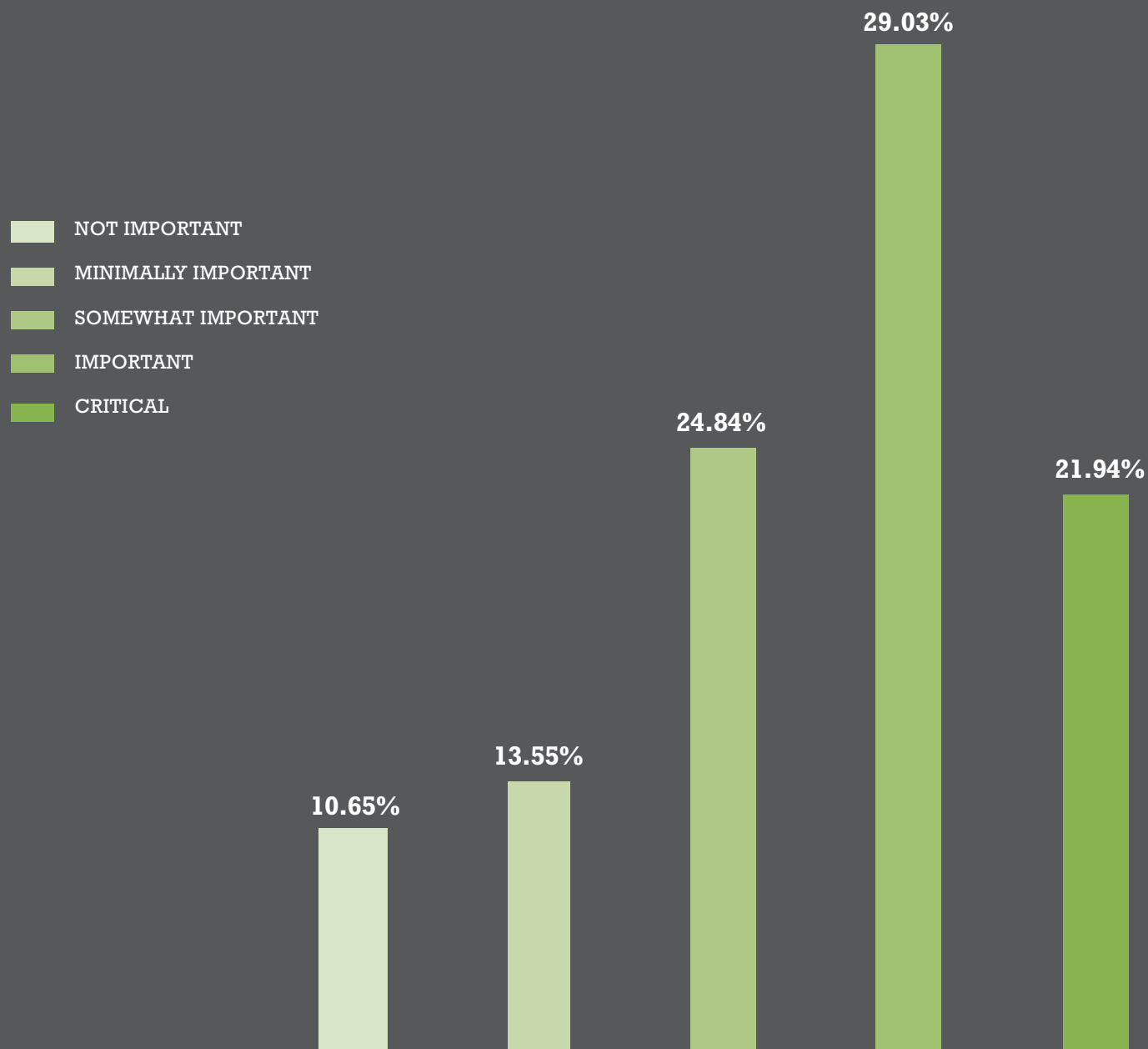
**“Feeling like part of a team, working towards directly addressing your students’ needs, and having the autonomy to make these decisions can go a long way in providing the incentive to stay in the profession.”**

—Jeff Austin, high school government and economics, Social Justice Humanitas Academy

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How important is the following to attracting and retaining great teachers?

## Pay increases for those achieving strong student results at high-needs schools



(310 respondents)

Educators 4 Excellence. "Attracting and Retaining Teachers." Teacher Survey. May 2013.

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## Retaining Great Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

### Not Just for Teachers: Benefits for Our District, Students and Community

#### Benefits for the District

Expands access to high performers who have a greater impact on student achievement.

Reduces costly teacher turnover.

Encourages community investments at the school level by allowing schools and community members to create community engagement projects.

#### Benefits for the Students, Family and Community

Students: Student achievement improves when fewer high-performing teachers leave the classroom.<sup>29</sup>

Administrators: School leaders can receive increased training and support around smart practices for retention.

Parents and Family: Community involvement provides more avenues for parents to access the school and teachers, as well as community services.

Public: Opening the school to the community gives the public an opportunity to strategically invest where they see need.

# Conclusion

We can make no wiser investment than in the teachers leading and inspiring our students, who will be our future voters, citizens, caretakers and leaders. Therefore, we are not merely asking our schools, union and district to invest more deeply in attracting and retaining great teachers. We are ultimately asking our entire city—including its current and future leaders—to invest in attracting and retaining talent in our classrooms.

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## Appendix: Tools by Policy Level



**School School Hiring Protocol:** Adapt the district-created protocol to fit the school culture, mission and vision and find the best candidates

**Student-driven Professional Development:** Provide professional development that is based on student need and created collaboratively by administrators and teacher-leaders

**Induction and Mentoring Program:** Provide a strong induction program for new teachers, as well as ongoing mentoring for all teachers, in hard-to-staff schools

**School-based Community Engagement Grants:** Apply for funds from the District with a specific plan for engaging the local community to benefit both students and teachers



**District School Hiring Protocol:** Create a toolkit for schools to use and adapt at the school site

**School Transformation Packages:** Provide highly effective principals with a package of autonomies, district supports and financial incentives in order to encourage and reward their decision to lead high-needs schools

**Induction and Mentoring Program:** Provide training and ongoing support for mentors

**Administrator Training in Smart Retention Strategies:** Provide training and ongoing support for administrators in evidence-based, low-cost retention strategies

**School-based Community Engagement Grants:** Allow schools to apply for funds specifically to engage with the local community

**Ongoing Changes to Pay Structure:** Provide "Achievement Awards" to teachers who choose to stay in and have significant success with students in hard-to-staff schools



**State Mutual Placement:** Allow administrators to consider experience, credentials and other factors, like culture fit and past performance, in making hiring decisions

**Multiple Bands of Effectiveness:** Provide a strong framework for teacher evaluations that sets a minimum of at least four bands of effectiveness

**Layoff Policy:** Move to "Performance-based Retention," allowing school districts to consider experience, credentials and other factors like past performance in making worst-case, layoff decisions

**Tenure Process Reform:** Restore tenure as a meaningful professional milestone



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## Appendix: E4E-LA Process and Methodology

### Identifying Our Policy Focus

E4E-LA held more than 20 focus groups with roughly 150 teachers who teach in our district schools and polled E4E members to identify the most important and impactful policy issues.

### Reviewing Research

The Teacher Policy Team met for several months to review research on different national attempts to address teacher attraction and retention as well as local strategies being proposed or piloted by UTLA, LAUSD and local charter networks. Additionally, the Teacher Policy Team held conversations with leaders from LAUSD, The Education Trust–West and other national experts.

### Conducting Local Research

The Teacher Policy Team conducted over 120 peer and administrator interviews to gather critical stakeholder feedback. We also conducted a survey of over 300 teachers and school leaders, including E4E-LA members and non-members, to understand the most essential strategies for attracting and retaining great teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

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For far too long, education policy has been created without a critical voice at the table--the voice of classroom teachers.

Educators 4 Excellence (E4E), a teacher-led organization, is changing this dynamic by placing the voices of teachers at the forefront of the conversations that shape our classrooms and careers.

E4E has a quickly growing national network of educators united by our Declaration of Teachers' Principles and Beliefs. E4E members can learn about education policy and research, network with like-minded peers and policymakers and take action by advocating for teacher-created policies that lift student achievement and the teaching profession.

Learn more at **[Educators4Excellence.org](http://Educators4Excellence.org)**.

