



ERStrategies.org



TEACHING

0.3%

Double investment in recruiting to expand your applicant pool by 50% while increasing the rigor of your selection criteria

The best way to ensure that your district has high-quality teachers is to hire them in the first place. Most districts do not invest enough in their teacher recruitment programs and hence fail to facilitate a selection and assignment process that allows school leaders to hire teachers with the right experience and capability for the job.

While hiring high-quality candidates is critical, providing growth opportunities and on-the-job training are also important factors in retention.

Workforce Management



TEACHING

0.6%

Invest in new, high-quality, vetted curriculum and assessments to support teachers in the transition to the Common Core and other, more rigorous instruction

A successful transition to more rigorous instruction (including the Common Core) requires many simultaneous investments across the district, some of which are technology infrastructure, professional development for teachers and principals, and curriculum.

Research has shown that not all curriculum labeled as “common core aligned” actually is. Before making an investment in new curriculum, teachers and curriculum developers should carefully vet the new materials.



TEACHING

0.1%

Use formative assessments to adjust instruction on a weekly basis

Frequent, low-stakes assessments can help teachers monitor student learning and adjust classroom strategies to meet specific and changing needs.



Additional testing does not in itself improve student performance.

Formative assessments must be used to actually adjust instruction and to help teachers learn what is working, so as to reduce the cycle of student-teacher feedback.

Job-embedded PD





TEACHING

1.4%

Add school-based expert support (e.g., instructional coaches) at an equivalent ratio of one coach per 10 teachers at all schools

Content-based expert support is an integral part of professional development. Effective support is job-embedded: in the classroom and during collaborative planning time. When teacher-expert ratios are too high, experts cannot provide the deep support necessary to help teachers improve.

Job-embedded PD



Neutral

TEACHING

0.2%

Implement job-embedded professional development in the lowest-performing 10% of schools

Job-embedded professional development is critical for improving teacher effectiveness. Three preconditions are necessary (but not sufficient) for job-embedded professional development:

- Collaborative planning time
- Sufficient expert support in meetings
- Weekly formative assessments



Keep in mind that although this represents a small percentage of students in the district overall, the positive impact on students in these schools can be high.

Turnaround



TEACHING

0.1%

Deny tenure to the lowest-performing 20% of probationary teachers

Strategic retention systems that identify, recognize, and create opportunities for your highest-performing teachers while identifying and supporting lower performers will accumulate more effective teachers over time, increasing overall teacher effectiveness across the district.

Some methods to increase differential retention include:



- Accurate and honest feedback
- Eliminating raises for low-performers
- Increasing retention for top performers when retention is low

Many districts that believe they are managing out large numbers of low-performing probationary teachers are surprised to discover that losses of high-performing probationary teachers more than offset these efforts, resulting in a large opportunity for improvement.

Workforce Management



TEACHING

0.1%

Ensure your best teachers know they are an asset to the school as the first step in increasing retention of top-quartile, non-probationary teachers at a rate 10 percentage points higher than the bottom 15% of non-probationary teachers

Strategic retention systems that identify, recognize, and create opportunities for your highest-performing teachers while identifying and supporting lower performers will accumulate more effective teachers over time, increasing overall teacher effectiveness.



This strategy is particularly effective when the probationary process is also structured to identify and manage out ineffective novice teachers prior to awarding tenure. While much of the national conversation has focused on forced removals, other methods to increase differential retention include:

- Accurate and honest feedback
- Eliminating raises for low-performers
- Increasing retention for top performers when retention is low

Many districts are surprised to find that their efforts to manage out low-performing probationary teachers are more than offset by losses of high-performing probationary teachers, resulting in a large opportunity for improvement.

Workforce Management





GROUP SIZE 1.2%

Reduce average English/language arts and math class sizes by six for 6th and 9th grades to support transition to middle and high school

Benefits from reducing class sizes have only been demonstrated in classes with fewer than 17 students in core academic subjects and in early/transitional grades. Rather than across-the-board class size reductions, consider transitional support to keep struggling students on track at a time when many are referred to costly special services.

Even class size reductions of one or two are very costly and should be carefully weighed alongside other options for small group instruction and teaching quality improvement. Consider alternative student grouping. Combining classes across grades or moving groups of students among teachers for different subjects can improve student learning even with a higher student-teacher ratio.

Time and Attention



GROUP SIZE 0.5%

Invest in bi-weekly 90-minute, small-group sessions for all students in the lowest-performing 10% of schools as a step toward personalized learning

The personalized learning strategy chosen should meet the needs of the students and align with the overall strategy of the school. They can also create opportunities for teachers to work more intensely with smaller groups of students.



Keep in mind that although this represents a small percentage of students in the district overall, the positive impact on students in these schools can be high.

Personalized learning strategies may be most effective when they transform rather than supplement the traditional classroom experience.

Turnaround & Time and Attention



Neutral GROUP SIZE -1%

Increase average non-core class size in all grades by five

Benefits from reducing class sizes have only been demonstrated in classes with fewer than 17 students in core academic subjects. Outside of those parameters, increasing class sizes, even by a few students, can free significant resources without negatively impacting student outcomes.

 In elementary, you might accomplish this through combining three grade level classes into two sections of music, art, and physical education. This may require sharing those teachers across schools or using part-time special subject teachers.

Increasing average class size across the district will likely require larger increases in some schools and classes than others, depending on the distribution of classes and class sizes.



Neutral GROUP SIZE -1.8%

Increase average class size in 4th-12th grades by two

Benefits from reducing class sizes have only been demonstrated in classes with fewer than 17 students in core academic subjects and early/transitional grades. Outside of those parameters, increasing class sizes, even by a few students, can free up resources without negatively impacting student outcomes.

Increasing average class size across the district will likely result in larger increases in some schools and classes than others, depending on the distribution of current class sizes. School leaders need to carefully consider the composition of student needs in each class and how this matches teacher expertise. As class sizes rise, you may wish to invest in expert teachers for small-group instruction for core subjects and certain student groups.





TIME

0%

Provide double blocks of ELA and math for struggling students and students in transition grades (or consider reducing the length of elective blocks)

Many districts place struggling students into extra sections of math or English/language arts. Scheduling this additional time into a double block with one teacher extends instructional time and reduces the total number of students for whom the teacher is responsible. Some districts create additional time for core academic blocks by reducing the length of elective blocks.

Time and Attention



TIME

0.3%

Pay teachers for 90 additional consecutive minutes per week to be spent in effective collaborative planning

Research shows that teaching effectiveness improves when teams of teachers and expert coaches collaborate for 90+ consecutive minutes per week around ongoing student work and assessment data, then use this information to adjust instruction. Collaborative time will be even more important to support teachers as the Common Core or other more rigorous standards are implemented.



Many districts may be able to find this time at no cost by restructuring the master schedule. (E.g., Stack specials periods and/or pool students during electives to free core teachers for longer blocks of time for collaborative planning.)

Job-embedded PD



TIME

1%

Add 60 minutes of learning time to the school day in the 10% lowest-performing schools

Extended learning time can raise student achievement if it is targeted on core instruction with high-quality teachers who are expert in critical subject and instructional areas. Consider focusing this time to better meet the needs of your English learners, low income students, and foster youth students.



Keep in mind that although this represents a small percentage of students in the district overall, the positive impact on students in these schools can be high.

Extending learning time can be costly. Ensure that the schools in which you invest have leaders and teaching staff who can deliver high-quality instruction to struggling students.

Turnaround & Time and Attention



TIME

0%

Adjust teacher schedules so that teachers who share course content or students have the same free periods

Time for teachers to purposefully collaborate around instruction and student learning is an important driver of teaching quality and school improvement. Research shows that teaching effectiveness improves when teams of teachers and expert coaches can collaborate for 90+ minutes per week around ongoing student work and assessment data and use this information to continually adjust instruction.

Job-embedded PD





TIME

1.3%

Add three more days to the school year

To achieve short-term budget reductions in recent years, districts may have reduced the overall number of days students are in school. Reversing this may be a logical place to reinvest when funds are more plentiful.

This is a relatively high-cost option. If you have a long school year already, consider whether funds are better used in ways that specifically target the needs of struggling students.

Time and Attention



TIME

1.2%

Invest in two intervention specialists in each high school while repurposing an elective block to be a flexible intervention/enrichment block, focusing on math and ELA for struggling students

A dedicated intervention block where students are in flexible, skill-based groups of 10-17 ensures that there is adequate time for struggling students to get the help they need in core subjects.

Intervention blocks are most successful when teaching teams have dedicated time together to analyze data and regroup students— frequently— according to their needs. There should also be a clear set of guidelines and/or curriculum to support teachers in delivering coherent and high-quality intervention support.

This option would impact the breadth of electives students can take, so administrators will need to ensure all students can still meet graduation requirements.

Time and Attention



Neutral

SPECIAL EDUCATION

-0.2%

Reduce special education aides by rewriting IEP's to more flexibly provide 1:1 and small-group support

Research shows that special education students benefit from high-quality, content-based instruction. Special education aides have not demonstrated the same level of benefit. IEPs that identify each student's needs but provide flexibility in how that support is delivered can serve students more effectively.



This card assumes a 20% reduction in special education aides.



SPECIAL EDUCATION

-0.2%

Reduce special education placements by 5% by addressing over-identification

Some districts have classified significantly higher percentages of students as requiring special education services. Early intervention programs and alternative approaches to supporting struggling students in general education settings can reduce such inappropriate placements.

This card assumes an investment in a Response to Intervention (RTI) program that includes providing at least some 1-1 and up to 1-5 tutoring for struggling students, especially those in the bottom half. This combined with good instruction can reduce the percentage of students who get a label as someone with a disability by 50%, which is a huge cost savings.



Neutral SPECIAL EDUCATION -0.6%

Bring special education class sizes from 70% to 75% of target size

Special education class sizes that are lower than district targets and Individual Education Plan (IEP) requirements drive up costs and can result in funding inequity across schools without significantly improving student performance.



Neutral CAREER PATH & COMPENSATION 1%

Give \$10K stipend to your top 15% contributing teachers, who are taking on leadership roles and work in hard-to-staff subjects and schools as a first step to revising job and compensation structure

Current compensation systems reward experience and education levels, neither of which are highly correlated to improved performance. Instead, compensation can be restructured to leverage your strongest teachers to serve as coaches, to improve overall teaching effectiveness.



Findings are mixed on the impact of various “performance-based” teacher pay approaches. Compensation system redesign should be undertaken carefully, motivating contribution and performance at all levels.

Keep in mind this example is illustrative only, Comprehensive compensation reform should link rewards to increased performance and contribution at all levels. Since proposed changes impact compensation or career path, it is critical to work collaboratively with teacher unions.

Turnaround



Neutral CAREER PATH & COMPENSATION 0.8%

Provide a 2% across-the-board teacher salary increase

Across-the-board salary increases are often encouraged as a way to increase investment in instruction but they are almost always a less strategic choice.

Raising teacher salaries to attract and keep strong contributors is critical but should be done in the context of a job and compensation redesign. This is an expensive choice and will likely not yield desired improvements in teaching effectiveness.



+ CAREER PATH & COMPENSATION 0.9%

Extend the reach of the most effective teachers: For the top 10% of teachers, increase the number of students on the teachers' rosters by 20%

Increasing the number of students taught by the most effective teachers has the potential to produce immediate gains in student outcomes.



An increase in the number of students on a roster may require additional funding in the form of increased pay or stipends, but may also provide opportunities to free up teaching staff and offset those costs.

Before expanding the number of classes or raising class sizes for effective teachers, districts must consider issues of compensation and long-term retention. When proposed changes impact compensation or career path, it is critical to work collaboratively with teacher unions.





CAREER PATH & COMPENSATION -0.1%

Replace raises for unsatisfactory or developing teachers with investments in professional development

In many districts, teacher and employee contracts provide yearly “step” increases based on years of service, with no link to effectiveness or contribution. Teachers that have been rated unsatisfactory should not receive these raises until their performance has improved. Consider coupling this with investment in the teacher evaluation system.

Keep in mind this is a step on the way toward restructuring the teaching job where rewards link to contribution. In addition, adjustment to teacher contracts may involve negotiating with the union.



Neutral

CAREER PATH & COMPENSATION -1%

Freeze salary step increases for one year for all employee contracts

Most teacher and employee contracts provide yearly “step” increases based on years of service. These increases plus Cost of Living Adjustments create a double increase in long-term salaries with no link to effectiveness or contribution.

Some districts would require a waiver from the state to implement freezing steps.



LEADERSHIP 0.6%

Add school leader staff to double the time available for teacher evaluation and support

High-performing schools provide principals with time and support to evaluate staff, provide instructional leadership, and manage resources and operational issues. This will be especially important with the implementation of Common Core or other more rigorous standards.

 This can be accomplished by adding teacher leaders or school administration to reduce the number of evaluations each is responsible for.

Actual student impact will be less if you do not also choose to invest in professional development for principals for high-quality teacher evaluation as well as invest in a teacher evaluation and data system.



LEADERSHIP 0.1%

Offer 20% higher principal salaries at the 10% lowest-performing schools to attract top talent

A strong leader, who creates a culture of achievement, attracts high quality teaching and staff, and engages the community, is a critical success factor for turning around low performing schools. Offering financial and other incentives can make the challenging work conditions in low-performing schools more attractive to the strongest school leaders.

 Keep in mind that although this represents a small percentage of students in the district overall, the positive impact on students in these schools can be high.

Salary increases alone are likely not enough to attract the best leaders to the neediest schools and may not be the most significant factor in their decision. Consider other incentives as well, such as more flexibility in hiring, staffing, scheduling, and instruction.

Turnaround





LEADERSHIP

0.1%

Provide principal professional development based on individual needs (could include Instructional Leadership, evaluating teachers, supporting teachers in the move to more rigorous standards, etc.)

In today's schools we ask our principals to play many roles— Chief Instructional leader, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer and more, but most districts provide very little professional development for principals. The most effective professional development is tailored to individual needs and is job-embedded.



LEADERSHIP

0.1%

Replace the lowest-performing 10% of principals

Effective instructional leaders are critical for implementing and sustaining school-level change. Removing ineffective principals can open the door for many possible interventions that are contingent upon effective leadership.



Principals should be evaluated holistically, including factors such as their ability to provide instructional leadership, recognize talent and differentiate teachers in their evaluations, staff and schedule strategically, and provide targeted professional development to their teachers and the school context in which they have been operating.



Neutral

TIME

-0.2%

Replace school-provided after-school programs with programs provided by community groups

Eliminating after-school programs is a popular way to save money. Communities may be able to preserve part or all of their programs by partnering with community organizations that are funded through other channels.



Before eliminating after-school programs, consider their role in academically supporting and engaging at-risk students.



EFFICIENCY

0.8%

Invest in the technology you need across the district to support the needs of new assessments and curriculum

Many districts do not have the technology infrastructure needed to fully support online assessments. Consider making an investment across the district to make technology more robust and up-to-date to meet not just new assessment requirements but the needs of today's students.



The transition to the Common Core or other new standards requires many simultaneous investments across the district— from technology infrastructure to professional development for teachers and principals to curriculum.



Neutral

EFFICIENCY

-0.5%

Close or consolidate under-enrolled schools to increase district utilization from 85% to 90%

Districts with under-enrolled schools can likely free significant resources by closing those schools and moving students to fill empty spaces in the remaining schools. This savings takes into account the money required to physically close a school.



This may not be appropriate for very small districts.

Educating parents and the community on the trade-offs between school closures and other investments while ensuring there are high-quality schools in which to enroll displaced students can make the difficult politics of school closings easier.



Neutral

EFFICIENCY

-0.8%

Reduce extra spending on very small schools by 25% by changing staffing models and funding formulas

Districts can reduce extra costs by enabling more flexibility to combine staff roles, use untraditional providers, and group students creatively. Districts can also support schools by providing example staffing and scheduling models.



This may not be appropriate for very small districts.



Neutral

EFFICIENCY

-0.1%

Reduce central office and district overhead by 10%

Revisiting central office functions, restructuring work content and processes, automating clerical tasks, and taking advantage of electronic information and data systems can yield cost savings.



Consider investing in data systems to streamline functions and access to information.



Neutral

EFFICIENCY

-0.3%

Reduce school-based administrative and clerical staff by 10%

Take advantage of technology and the restructuring and automation of clerical tasks to reduce administrative costs in schools.



Neutral

EFFICIENCY

-0.3%

Reduce transportation costs by 10%

Changing walk zones and routes can result in significant savings. Changing program placement, school choice and assignment policies can reduce net transportation costs.



This may not be appropriate for very small districts.

Consider program and school access, quality and cost when changing school choice or assignment parameters.



Neutral

EFFICIENCY

-0.6%

Reduce school-based non-instructional staff (e.g., counselors, custodians, administrative) by 20%

Focus resources on core instruction by cutting back or eliminating non-instructional services, or by finding other ways to provide these services.



Before cutting, consider whether opportunities to provide these services more cost-effectively using new models or outside partners exist.



Neutral

EFFICIENCY

-2%

Reduce the cost of employee benefits by 10%

Employee benefits typically account for over 20% of total district expenditures. Replacing expensive and unusually generous one-size-fits-all packages with a menu of benefit options and increasing the employee level of contribution can yield significant savings.



Adjustment to teacher contracts may involve negotiating with the union.



EFFICIENCY

-0.5%

School closure: Close lowest-performing 10% of schools over five years, while removing the lowest-performing 20% of teachers in those schools from the district teaching pool

Closing failing schools and moving the faculty and students to higher-performing situations can generate a significant improvement in student outcomes, particularly when conditions allow for the removal of the least effective teachers. When such schools are very small or under-enrolled, it can also save money.



Teacher removals should not be limited to only low-performing schools; teachers must receive equitable treatment regardless of school or assignment.

Educating parents and the community on the trade-offs between school closures and other investments while ensuring there are high-quality schools in which to enroll displaced students can make the difficult politics of school closings easier.



Neutral

EFFICIENCY

-0.7%

Reduce facilities and maintenance costs by 10%

Outsourcing services, deferring maintenance expense, or consolidating purchasing contracts with other city departments or neighboring districts can reduce F&M costs.

Outsourcing services, deferring maintenance expense, or consolidating purchasing contracts with other city departments or neighboring districts can reduce F&M costs.



WILDCARD

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WILDCARD

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