

Prepared Testimony for Hearing on Teacher Equity
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The mal-distribution of teachers across schools and courses hurts poor and minority students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. In my university researcher role, I have studied school district expenditures across hundreds of districts in dozens of states for over a decade. In tracing funds from different governmental units all the way down to schools and classrooms, my colleagues and I have unearthed a pervasive mal-distribution in teachers across schools and classrooms. Here are the highlights of our findings:

Teachers who teach in schools with more poor and minority students are paid less than teachers who teach in schools with more wealthy, white students, in the same districts.

While they are both paid off the same salary schedules, very often teachers in high poverty, high minority schools have lower salaries because they have fewer years of experience or fewer graduate credits. While high cost teachers congregate in the most affluent schools, the highest poverty schools have a more difficult time drawing in the best teacher candidates. Often, new teachers start their career at a high-poverty school and, as they gain experience and move up the pay scale, will transfer to a more affluent school.

The result, school districts routinely spend a larger share of state and local funds intended to support basic instruction on schools with fewer poor students. Since in most districts the way resources are deployed to schools is via the staff allocations, the result is that schools with lower salaried teachers receive fewer state and local public funds.

Salary differences across schools are indicative of other differences that likely map to effectiveness. While experience and graduate credits are not by themselves good predictors of quality, there is reason for concern. Schools with lower salaried teachers also have:

- a. Fewer teacher applicants per opening. While more affluent schools have dozens or more applicants for each vacancy, the highest poverty schools typically have only a few. Schools with fewer applicants have a smaller talent pool from which to select teachers.
- b. Higher turnover. Teachers tend to leave higher poverty schools at higher rates, ensuring a steady stream of new teachers. Higher turnover means fewer relationships between teachers and families, fewer teacher mentors for new teachers, and greater induction implications for school leadership.

- c. Increased turnover during seniority based layoffs. When the highest poverty schools have more junior teachers, their teacher receive more pink slips creating more turnover as teachers are reassigned around the district.

Some of these same patterns also play out among teachers across courses inside high schools. In research on a sample of high schools from different parts of the country, teachers teaching higher level honors or AP classes consistently earned more than those teaching remedial or regular courses. In our sample, remedial and regular classes served disproportionately higher percentages of poor and minority students, and thus the same mal-distribution patterns applied.

Several district policies and practices contribute to the mal-distribution of teachers inside districts and schools:

- Teacher salary schedules that do not reflect to workload, school or student needs, course topic, etc.
- Seniority rights for transfer and layoffs.
- Seniority preferences honored among courses inside high schools.
- District budget and allocation practices that are driven by teachers, not students. By ignoring the effect of salary on expenditure differences across schools, current resource allocation and accounting practices allow for such inequities.
- Comparability provision in Title I. While this provision demands that districts allocate state and local funds equally across schools before accepting federal funds, the provision permits the exclusion of inequities in teacher salaries.

There are many remedies that districts could pursue (and some are in practice in a few districts), but local politics serve as a formidable barrier in most.

Thank you.