



# **Victims of the Churn:**

The Damaging Impact of California's Teacher Layoff Policies on Schools, Students and Communities in Three Large School Districts

## **Report Summary**



The Education Trust–West

February 2011

Full report can be found at <http://www.edtrust.org/west/resources/publications>

# Summary

California's students, particularly its poorest students, need great teachers. Unfortunately, California's seniority-based teacher layoff system puts adult privileges over student needs. Newer teachers are laid off first, regardless of how well they do their jobs. This system is especially damaging to schools serving the highest numbers of low-income students, which are more likely than others to experience layoffs and mass personnel shuffling. Their students become victims of the churn.

*Victims of the Churn* focuses mostly on the numbers: how many teachers received notices; how many of those teachers were laid off; and to what extent, if any, did those cuts disproportionately impact the highest poverty schools (i.e., those in the top poverty quartile within their districts).

The report also discusses the troubling reality that the seniority-based layoff process that can exacerbate the impact of even a small number of layoffs. Because state law gives laid-off employees the right to "bump" more junior employees out of their positions, the layoff process can cause massive "churn" throughout a school system.

The report concludes with recommendations for policymakers, who must seek to reform the existing seniority-based layoff process.

## **Our data analysis resulted in two key findings:**

- 1** Pink slips far outnumber actual teacher layoffs
- 2** Students in high-poverty schools are more likely to lose their teachers

## **We also discuss an additional impact that is possible under current seniority-based layoff laws:**

- 3** “Bumping” can lead to additional staffing instability

In the districts we studied, pink slips outnumbered actual layoffs by more than four to one.

1

Pink slips far outnumber actual teacher layoffs

**Number of preliminary versus final layoff notices in three California districts**

|                  | Teachers Receiving Layoff Notices as of March 15, 2010 | Teachers Laid Off as of July 1, 2010 | Percentage of District Schools Affected by Final Layoff |
|------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| District A       | 1,059  | 335                                  | 32%   |
| District B       | 5,200  | 1,042                                | 20%   |
| District C       | 337  | 53                                   | 16%   |
| <b>ALL THREE</b> | <b>6,596</b>   | <b>1,430</b>                         | <b>22%</b>  |

Source: 2010 human resources data provided to Education Trust—West by three of California’s largest school districts.

1

Pink slips far outnumber actual teacher layoffs

Although popularly perceived as widespread, only half of the schools in the districts we studied experienced any layoffs at all.

**Schools that lost at least one teacher due to reductions in force (RIF)**

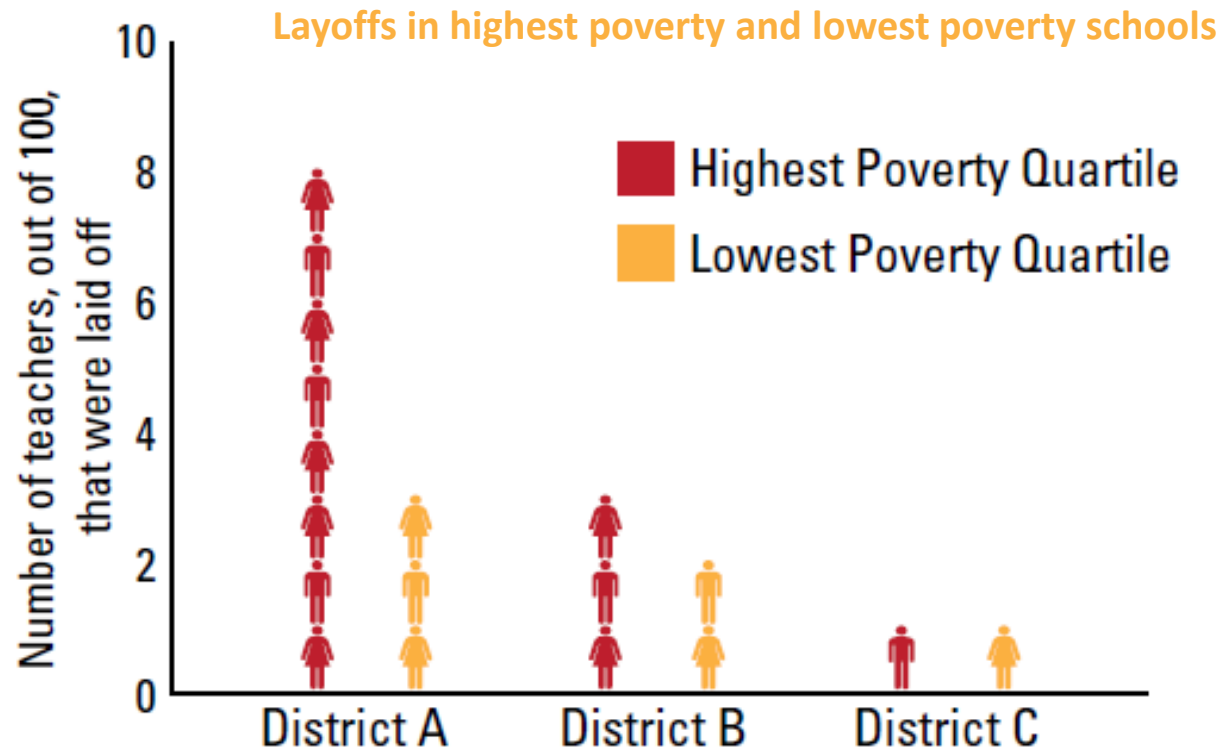
|            | Percentage of District Schools Affected by Preliminary Layoff Notices as of March 15, 2010 | Percentage of District Schools Affected by Final Layoff |
|------------|--|---|
| District A | 91%  | 79%   |
| District B | 75%  | 51%   |
| District C | 81%  | 26%   |

Source: 2010 human resources data provided to Education Trust—West by three of California’s largest school districts.

The highest poverty schools in the districts studied were more likely to sustain the burden of staff layoffs than the lowest poverty schools.

2

Students in high-poverty schools are more likely to lose their teachers



Source: 2010 human resources data provided to Education Trust—West by three of California’s largest school districts.

A school in the top poverty quartile in the districts we studied is 65 percent more likely to have a teacher laid off than a school in the bottom poverty quartile, with significant variation from district to district.

2

Students in high-poverty schools are more likely to lose their teachers

Relative risk of a highest poverty school being affected by a layoff

| District A | District B | District C | All Three Districts |
|------------|------------|------------|---------------------|
| 2.69       | 1.56       | 1.05       | 1.65                |

**READ:** In District A, a school in the highest poverty quartile is 2.7 times as likely as a school in the lowest poverty quartile to have a teacher cut through the reduction-in-force process.

Some schools, many that are significantly low-income, were heavily impacted by the layoffs.

Schools where 15 percent or more of certificated staff were laid off

|            |           |                    |               | Student Population |        |                          |
|------------|-----------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------|--------------------------|
|            | School    | School Type        | 2010 RIF Rate | African-American   | Latino | Free/Reduced Price Meals |
| District A | School 1  | Elementary         | 23%           | 19%                | 73%    | 100%                     |
|            | School 2  | Elementary         | 19%           | 22%                | 67%    | 85%                      |
|            | School 3  | Elementary         | 19%           | 22%                | 40%    | 79%                      |
|            | School 4  | Alternative High   | 17%           | 14%                | 72%    | 76%                      |
|            | School 5  | Elementary         | 16%           | 12%                | 84%    | 94%                      |
|            | School 6  | Middle             | 16%           | 22%                | 63%    | 87%                      |
| District B | School 7  | Middle             | 39%           | 2%                 | 96%    | 99%                      |
|            | School 8  | Continuation High  | 33%           | 3%                 | 94%    | 82%                      |
|            | School 9  | Middle             | 27%           | 27%                | 72%    | 98%                      |
|            | School 10 | Continuation High  | 25%           | 30%                | 69%    | 78%                      |
|            | School 11 | Elementary         | 22%           | 29%                | 70%    | 90%                      |
|            | School 12 | Elementary         | 21%           | 5%                 | 7%     | 4%                       |
|            | School 13 | High               | 20%           | 3%                 | 97%    | 100%                     |
|            | School 14 | High               | 20%           | 2%                 | 92%    | 78%                      |
|            | School 15 | Elementary         | 20%           | 4%                 | 81%    | 96%                      |
|            | School 16 | Middle             | 19%           | 32%                | 68%    | 99%                      |
|            | School 17 | High               | 19%           | 2%                 | 91%    | 95%                      |
|            | School 18 | Charter Elementary | 17%           | 3%                 | 10%    | 10%                      |
|            | School 19 | Elementary         | 15%           | 2%                 | 91%    | 95%                      |
| District C | School 20 | Small High         | 25%           | 1%                 | 53%    | 57%                      |

2

Students in high-poverty schools are more likely to lose their teachers

Source: 2010 human resources data provided to Education Trust—West by three of California’s largest school districts & California Department of Education 2009-10

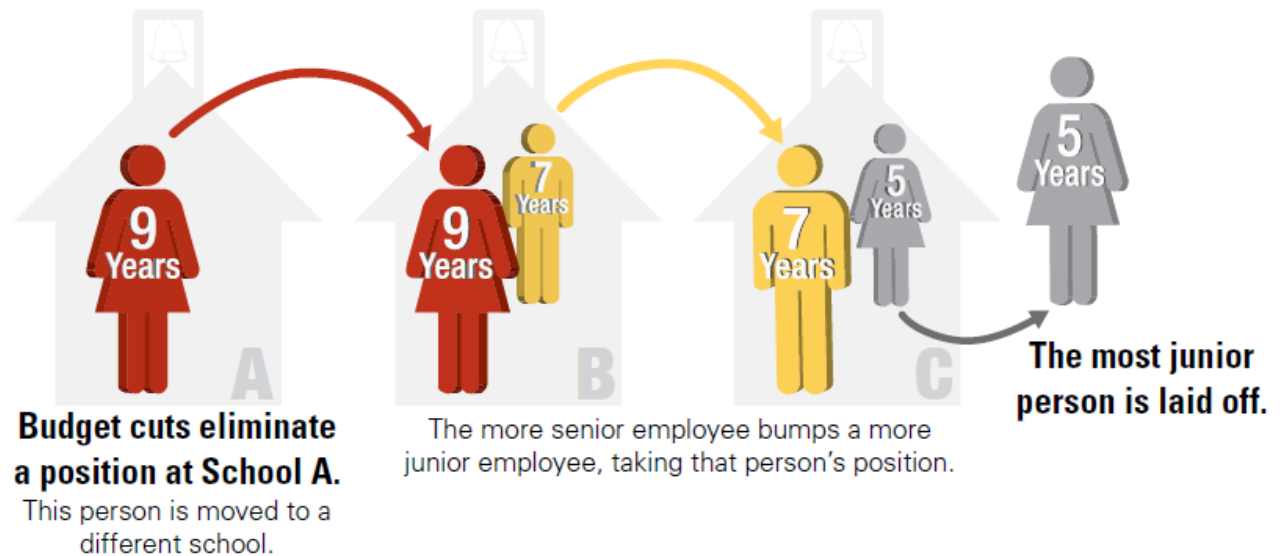


3

“Bumping” can lead to additional staffing instability

Because state law gives laid-off employees the right to “bump” more junior employees out of their positions, the layoff process can cause massive “churn” throughout a school system as staff are shuffled around.

Example of how one reduction in force can lead to churn in multiple schools



# Our Recommendations

1. Repeal state law requiring districts to use seniority as the sole criteria for layoffs.
2. Strengthen the protections for high-poverty schools from the disproportionate impact of layoffs and the churn caused by bumping.
3. Require districts to develop robust evaluation systems that determine teacher and principal effectiveness.
4. Provide school districts with the flexibility to use the results of evaluations to make staffing decisions with instructional effectiveness as the focus.
5. Extend the preliminary layoff notification date.
6. Collect and report teacher layoff data.

**Maintaining a focus on teacher quality.** Some of our recommendations suggest developing, and using, measures of teacher effectiveness. Why?

- Years of teaching experience matter, but ample evidence suggests that a veteran teacher is not necessarily a better teacher.
- District leaders seeking to make staffing decisions based on measures of teacher quality are currently prevented from doing so by state law.