



Denver Public Schools



From the Office of the
Superintendent

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Dear Principals:

As you know, over the last couple of months, we have been engaged in discussions with principals, our teachers' union representatives and policymakers regarding the practice of forced placement of teachers. As we have discussed, I believe the practice is wrong. It is bad for our students, our teachers and our schools. The principle of mutual consent in hiring is a fundamental one in any organization and particularly so in schools because successful schools are so mission-driven. As you have repeatedly told me, having all professionals in your building fully committed to the school's shared culture, mission and values is critical to the school's cohesion, growth and success. To forcibly place teachers who by definition do not want to be at a particular school or are not being asked to teach there undermines the formation and development of these successful shared cultures.

In addition, forced placement is of great concern because it disproportionately impacts our highest-needs schools. If we are going to close our achievement gaps and dramatically increase our graduation rate – moral imperatives that I know everyone in this district is deeply committed to -- we cannot allow forced placement to continue to disproportionately impact our students in poverty who are most at risk of not graduating from high school.

The best answer here clearly is to have a mutual consent staffing process for all our teachers in all our schools. We have been engaged in discussions with DCTA and state lawmakers with the goal of reaching a collaborative solution that ends forced placement, while providing maximum support and opportunity for teachers who are displaced from a particular building. These discussions have not produced any consensus, but we remain open to ideas that could lead to a collaborative solution.

This is not an issue about "good" or "bad" teachers or about trying to play the blame

game. We all know good teachers who have been RIB'd (Reduction in Building) as a result of program or enrollment changes. At the same time, every year we hire over 500 external teachers. And our principals have been clear about their desire for experienced teachers in their buildings. Our goal is to help teachers find a job through the voluntary hiring cycle, so that we do not have to resort to forced placement.

We also recognize the important role that our systems and practices play in reducing the number of teachers not able to find voluntary placements. Over the last couple of years, we have taken significant steps to improve our hiring systems to allow for more transparent and open hiring. Where, in the past, teachers RIB'd had a very limited and rushed internal cycle, the hiring cycle is now open for multiple months. Likewise, we have reduced the number of forced placements through the elimination of loopholes such as the designation of certain positions as annual assignment or the ability of teachers to vacate their current position before securing an alternative position. And, we have provided schools with intensive training on attracting and selecting the best candidates.

However, we still hear emphatically and passionately from principals, teachers, parents and community leaders that the forced-placement process continues to undermine these critical hiring and staffing practices.

While we will continue to engage DCTA and state lawmakers to attempt to end the practice, we need to act this year to limit the disproportional impact of forced placement on our highest-needs schools. As we have discussed, it is our intention not to force place any teachers in our red schools, i.e., those in the Accredited on Probation category on the School Performance Framework. These schools work with many of our highest-needs students and have the greatest need to be protected from the practice. In addition, for the same reasons, we will seek to limit forced placement in our Title I schools such that these schools are no longer disproportionately affected.

The net effect is that our non-Title I schools will receive a higher proportion of forced placements than in past years. This is likely to result in significant limitations on hiring in our non-Title schools, including restrictions on both internal and external hiring in any subject areas in which placements will need to be made. We will be doing whatever is possible to minimize the impact on schools by closely monitoring RIB process and will do all we can to facilitate voluntary hiring of teachers who are RIB'd. We will have a better sense of what restrictions will be necessary in the coming weeks as we get more information on the number of vacancies throughout our schools and the number of tenured teachers who are RIB'd.

We recognize the concerns that many of you in our non-Title schools have with these changes. I want to be emphatically clear that I recognize the challenges that all our

schools – Title and non-Title -- face and the fundamental importance of building and maintaining cohesive cultures in all our schools and offering a high-quality education to all of our students. This is not in any way to undervalue the extraordinary work our non-Title schools do or the moral imperative we have of educating all our students. It is simply a deep concern that we cannot continue to disproportionately impact our neediest students and schools if we are to reach our shared goals.

Attached with this email are revised guidelines from the Department of Human Resources regarding the changes to the staffing cycle necessary to implement this policy. If you have questions or concerns, please let your IS, your HR School Partner, Ana or me know.

Thank you.

Best,

Tom