

The Learning Policy Institute's Review of the LAO Analysis of the State Teacher Shortage and Recommended Actions

We welcome the very thoughtful analysis of teacher supply and demand conditions by the Legislative Analyst's Office. We agree with the LAO's analysis that the state's most immediate and pressing need is to address perennial teacher shortage areas (special education, science, and math – we would also add bilingual / English Language Development (ELD) teachers) and teachers who teach difficult to staff schools, especially those that serve high-poverty communities. We would argue further that it is essential to staff these needs -- which predominantly affect the most vulnerable students -- via the kinds of programs that bring in fully-prepared educators, whom research shows are twice as likely to stay in teaching, and ensure that those teachers are supported to stay in the classroom through strong mentoring and induction programs in their first years.

Meeting this goal of ensuring that our most vulnerable students are taught by fully prepared and supported educators means offering service scholarships or forgivable loans to recruit individuals into high-need fields and locations. It also means expanding effective models, like residency programs, that prepare and mentor them well for the specific challenges they will face. Evidence in [California](#) and [nationally](#) shows that residency graduates are viewed as highly effective, and they stay at much higher rates in urban schools than other recruits. The LAO suggests that service scholarships may be more effective than loan forgiveness programs. We agree that some service scholarship programs, like [North Carolina's Teaching Fellows](#), have been extremely productive in recruiting and retaining high-ability candidates in high-need fields. Evidence suggest that both approaches can be effective if selection strategies are properly targeted and accompanied by well-calibrated incentives. (We will be issuing a brief on this research in the coming week.)

We also agree that it is imperative that the state develop a longitudinal teacher database to track workforce trends and determine the effectiveness of workforce policies. We raised this issue in our report, as the current lack of data sharing between CTC and CDE makes it impossible to regularly estimate key labor market variables, such as the hiring of in-state teachers and rates of teacher attrition.

While we, too, believe that the market will begin to respond to the current shortages, we do not think that waiting for a market response will be sufficient. We note that the "natural market response" to shortages in the late 1990's was actually a huge influx of underprepared teachers (more than 40,000 on emergency permits and waivers at that time, plus thousands of others teaching while still in training). The "supply" of fully qualified teachers did not naturally meet demand; instead, the "demand" for fully qualified teachers was artificially dampened by neglecting the education of children in high-minority, high-poverty schools – who were frequently taught year-after-year by a parade of inexperienced, untrained teachers.

Changes occurred as the state enacted an ambitious set of policies to spur recruitment, subsidize preparation, boost salaries, and improve working conditions. Attention was reinforced by the Williams v. CA lawsuit and the federal requirement for "highly qualified teachers" under No Child

Left Behind. Many of these policies were ended some years later during the budget cuts that also dampened demand for teachers and grew class sizes to the largest in the country. We are now experiencing the lack of recruitment policies as the education system is rebounding.

We are mindful that California has some real challenges to address as a result of its budget cuts over the last decade, and some of these will require explicit policy strategies. The ability of districts to create better salaries and working conditions for teachers depends almost entirely on the full funding of the state funding formula, which will give poor districts (where shortages are most severe) a greater chance to catch up to others. It may also make the state somewhat more competitive in the nationwide quest for teachers – which will be a keen competition as shortages exist nationwide and are especially acute in some nearby western states. However, even when LCFF is fully funded, California will still be below the national average in school spending. This means that recruiters from other states that offer better teaching conditions and lower housing costs will continue to have an easy time luring California-trained teachers away. (On that point, we note that the number of newly credentialed teachers overestimates supply, because not all of those credential recipients enter teaching in California. Some go off to other states and others go off to non-teaching jobs. By one national estimate, the proportion of newly graduated teachers who enter the profession in the following year is about 75 percent.)

Another challenge includes the sharp cuts to the UC/ CSU system that caused many teacher education programs to shrink and others to close entirely over recent years. Program loss was especially pronounced in special education, where dozens of programs closed in recent years. Unlike some other states that use cost formulas to fund slots in state institutions of higher education by professional field, California tends not to target funding by field or in ways that account for actual program costs. That means that universities have few incentives to carry more expensive programs -- like those that require clinical training -- when funds are short.

Restoring these programs and planting new models – such as undergraduate preparation pathways that have been largely absent from the state since the Ryan Act moved teacher education to the post-baccalaureate level in 1970 – will require targeted funding for the public higher education system to re-grow teacher education enrollments. Competitive grants may be needed to start or expand effective program models, including those that begin in the undergraduate years, like the UC’s innovative math pathways and some especially successful special education programs in the CSU system and private colleges.

New models are most needed in math, science, and special education, which have continued to decline even as a tiny uptick in teacher education enrollments has begun – and could be effective if coupled with service scholarships or forgivable loans for candidates who will serve for several years. But the California Department of Education has listed almost every teaching field on the shortage list it sends to the U.S. Department of Education annually, so we should not be lulled into a sense of false security that the market will correct itself without strategic assistance. Policymakers will need to be watchful and vigilant for many years to evaluate and address the state’s needs until a healthy teaching market is well-established.

In that regard, we welcome the LAO’s research about additional strategies used across the



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country, such as signing or retention bonuses for well-qualified teachers in high-need fields and locations, including those with National Board Certification, and housing subsidy programs (including mortgage assistance) as an incentive for entering and staying in specific districts or schools. These and other approaches may prove important as we more fully understand what is needed and what works to guarantee well-qualified teachers for every California classroom.

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