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Running on Empty

Right Focus, No Capacity

If there is a silver lining in California's chaotic policy atmosphere, it is the vigorous public conversation going on connecting the quality of the teaching force to our aspirations for our students.

The reality has sunk in that the single most important in-school variable determining whether students succeed academically is the quality of their teachers.

Policymakers and education leaders are looking in ways they never have at the relationship of teachers to the learning of students, the utility of teacher evaluation to strengthen the workforce, the link between seniority and teaching quality, and the assignment of effective teachers to schools that need them most.

It is the right conversation to have, but with California's disastrous budget climate, we can hardly celebrate the enhanced focus on teachers and teaching that we long have advocated. What we have instead is deep concern for the state's 6.2 million students, knowing that too few of them will have the effective teachers they need.

For more than a decade, the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning has been pushing elected officials, policymakers, opinion leaders and the wider community to understand the critical need to strengthen California's teaching profession. If we are serious about helping students succeed beyond high school, we need to ensure their teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills to make sure they do.

This is the 12th time we've produced an annual report examining the state's teaching force. We have relied upon solid research, thoughtful analysis and plain speaking. We've described who is teaching California's children, their qualifications to teach, and the professional support they need to improve their teaching but rarely get. We've described the wide gap between



“CALIFORNIA’S FISCAL CRISIS HAS SO SEVERELY DAMAGED THE PIPELINE FOR RECRUITING AND TRAINING NEW TEACHERS THAT THE QUALITY OF THE TEACHER WORKFORCE HAS BEEN PUT AT RISK FOR MANY YEARS TO COME.”



California’s academic expectations for its children and the reality students face in their schools. We’ve detailed how the state’s poorest children routinely get the state’s least prepared and most inexperienced teachers. We’ve helped policymakers understand the chasm between the data the state collects and examines on teachers and students and the data actually needed to make smarter decisions.

This is a summary of the full research report – *California’s Teaching Force 2010: Key Issues and Trends* – that is available free at www.cftl.org.

The good news is that California is paying attention to teaching and the critical relationship teaching quality has to how much – or how little – students learn. But, at the moment, the state essentially has little capacity to do what is required to build a teaching force able to meet the high professional standards set for them.

Instead, California’s fiscal crisis has so severely damaged the pipeline for recruiting and training new teachers, and for supporting existing teachers, that the quality of the teacher workforce is likely to be at risk for many years to come.

And these ruptures in the pipeline are happening just as California is going into a leadership transition. Beginning in January, the state will have a new governor, new superintendent of public instruction, and new members of the State Board of Education, along with a substantially new legislature. All of these policymakers are likely to hold strong views about dealing with California’s schools and teachers.

Chart 1

Where Students Are vs. Where They Need to Be

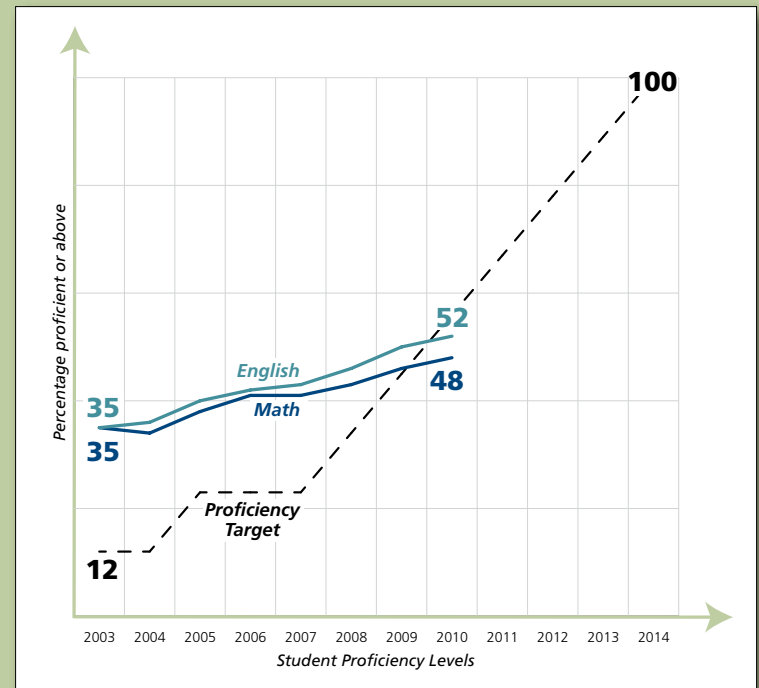
Triage Amid High Stakes

This year we spent considerable time conducting interviews in key school districts and with a number of universities that prepare California teachers. The results paint a relatively bleak picture.

Across the state, Californians are demanding more than ever of students. The state already had some of the highest expectations in the nation and has adopted the new national standards in math and literacy that aim essentially at college readiness for all high school graduates. At the same time, schools must make do with less. Consider:

- The state is spending less per student than it did a year ago, and spends less than most states despite being an expensive place to live and work.
- The state's teaching force is contracting, with about 11,000 fewer teachers than two years ago.
- Teachers who remain are facing larger student loads, additional duties, less time for instruction and planning, and, in many cases, less compensation.
- The fragile system for providing professional development to teachers is largely a relic of the past. The burden for professional growth is now on individual schools and teachers.

While there is a significant shortage of resources and support for California's education system, there is no shortage of arguments why education is more important than ever in a global economy that rewards knowledge and analytical skills. But California's students are not meeting today's challenges. On state tests, only about half of students score at least at the proficient level – 52 percent in English language arts, 48 percent in math. **(See Chart 1.)** Those numbers, however, mask substantial gaps between Asian and White students, who score higher, and African-American and Latino students, who score lower. And proficiency on those tests is far from an international standard.



Source: California Department of Education

“THE CUTS IN THE NUMBER OF TEACHERS RESULTED IN LARGE CLASS SIZES, SOMETIMES AS MANY AS 10 MORE STUDENTS PER CLASS.”

More than a third of high school students drop out before graduation, and six in ten of those who do graduate and go on to the state university system must take non-credit remedial courses.

While individual students pay a high price – often a lifetime price – for an insufficient education, the state also pays a high price – billions of dollars annually in lost economic benefits and higher rates of violent crime.

Harsh Cuts, More Coming

This is a tough time to be a teacher in California. Teachers are expected to do more, and do so with fewer resources. It is not hard to understand why many teachers feel under siege. What was traditionally seen as a secure and respected profession seems less so now.

Approximately 26,000 teachers received layoff notices last spring and the California Teachers Association reported that more than half – 14,000 – had not been rehired at the beginning of school in August. And in the near term, it is clear that as the budget crisis continues to deepen, more districts will be laying off teachers. Worse are the projections for next year when federal stimulus money is expected to run out and the hole will get deeper still.

In the districts we examined this year, the cuts in the number of teachers resulted in larger class sizes, sometimes as many as 10 more students per class, with more increases

anticipated next year. But the reductions also have taken a severe toll on the number of instructional assistants, counselors and others who deal in remediation and emotional or social supports for students. The result means that remaining teachers have more problems to deal with. As one administrator said:

“We reduced the number of intervention teachers, those hired to work with struggling students in English language arts and math. So what does that mean to the teacher? It means they will have to find different ways to meet the needs of those students. They still have the responsibility to educate that student, but it is left to them – we don’t have the resources to support them.”



“IT WILL BE CRITICAL TO EVALUATE TEACHERS ON A RANGE OF MEASURES OF THEIR TEACHING, INCLUDING STUDENT RESULTS, AND TO USE THOSE EVALUATIONS TO HELP TEACHERS GET BETTER AT THEIR JOBS.”



Evaluating Effectiveness

Beyond the additional workload are two concurrent conversations going on in California and nationwide – how to measure the effectiveness of teaching and the role seniority plays in staffing decisions – that will affect teachers across the state.

In California, like most states, almost all teachers are observed periodically by their principals, and almost all teachers are rated satisfactory or better, with little attention paid to the use of these data to improve their teaching. And in California, seniority largely determines how teachers are laid off in tough times – “last hired, first fired” – or how they can be reassigned to particular schools within a district.

A range of education reformers and political officials, including President Obama and Governor Schwarzenegger, have pushed to evaluate teachers based partly on the test scores of their students and to use such evaluations to determine whether their teaching is effective. While the debate over evaluations connecting teachers to the progress of students could be a rich addition to improving instructional practice for many, it has quickly devolved into a much narrower focus on how to fire the least effective few.

In both of its unsuccessful applications for federal “Race to the Top” dollars, California proposed new teacher evaluation systems based on multiple measures of teaching including

linking teachers to student test scores. The Legislature passed a new law removing prohibitions against such a linkage at the state level. The political interest in the subject is palpable.

But beyond politicians and reformers, the demand for more useful evaluations also comes from teachers themselves, who complain they get no constructive information from them to improve their teaching. Indeed, California's evaluation system is four decades old, offers little practical feedback to help teachers, and rates almost all teachers as satisfactory, with little consideration as to whether their students are meeting academic standards.

Our 2007 report found that neither teachers nor principals found the current system helpful as a means of improving instruction. And, in the current debate, leading measurement experts are urging caution in tying a teacher's effectiveness solely to student scores on state tests. The tests, they say, were not designed for evaluating teachers and there is simply too much potential for error and unintended consequences.

The big question in California will be how to evaluate teachers and provide them with meaningful feedback that is tied to improving their practice, in addition to removing the ineffective ones from the classroom. The lesson we draw from research and experience is that it will be critical to evaluate teachers on a range of measures of their teaching, including student results, *and* to use those evaluations to help teachers get better at their jobs.

The Ruptured Pipeline

It is a hard and complex task for California policymakers to help guide the teaching profession with skill. In part, they have little control over a damaged economy that has played havoc with school budgets. And, in part, they don't have good statewide data on either students or teachers.

To help them, we typically provide a number of data-rich charts describing the percentages of those who are prepared to teach, or who are teaching out of their field of expertise; or examinations of where inexperienced teachers are assigned compared to levels of student poverty. This year, partly as a result of Governor Schwarzenegger's veto of support for both teacher and student information systems, data aren't available and the state is paying a price for its absence.

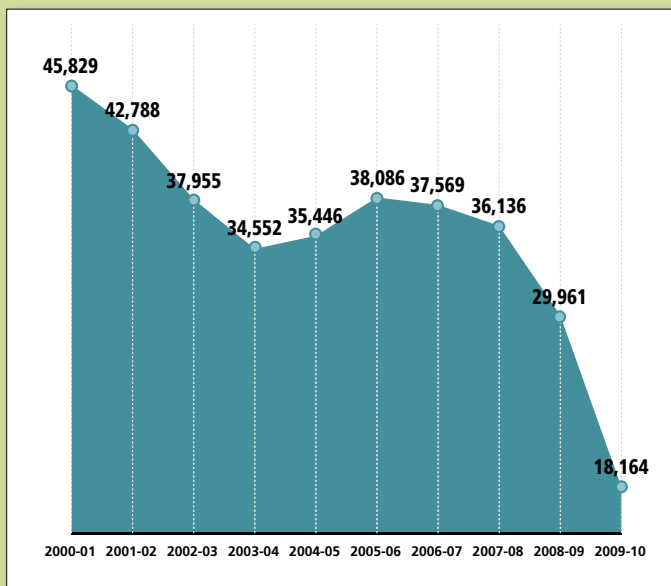
In 2009, the national Data Quality Campaign began looking at the way each of the 50 states collects and uses data on students and teachers and identified 10 key indicators. California was one of only five states that hadn't fulfilled criteria for any of the 10 indicators. California's new teacher data system, called CALTIDES, has stalled and the student data system, called CALPADS, has been long delayed.

But even without precise data, it is possible to tell that California's pipeline for recruiting, training, inducting, and supporting teachers is badly ruptured. While many of the headlines of today are about teachers being laid off, the headlines of tomorrow could be about another teacher shortage like the state saw in the late 1990s, when it had more than 40,000 underprepared teachers leading classrooms. Consider:

“ ... THE HEADLINES OF TODAY ARE ABOUT TEACHERS BEING LAID OFF, THE HEADLINES OF TOMORROW COULD BE ABOUT ANOTHER TEACHER SHORTAGE... ”

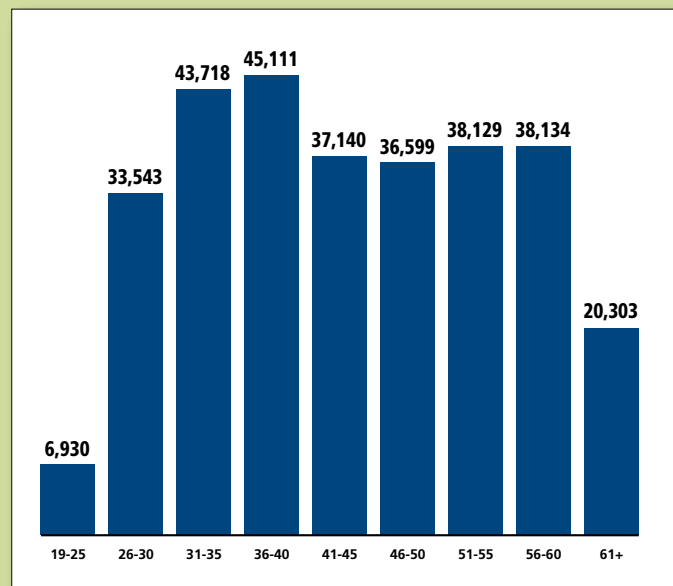
- While student enrollment is expected to turn upwards soon, the teaching force is declining substantially, down from about 310,000 teachers two years ago to slightly fewer than 300,000 last school year. The drop in the number of novice teachers is even more dramatic. *(See Chart 2.)*
- Baby boom generation teachers are retiring at increasing rates, and about one-third of the state's teachers are more than 50 years old. *(See Chart 3.)*

Chart 2
Number of First- and Second-Year Teachers



Source: California Department of Education

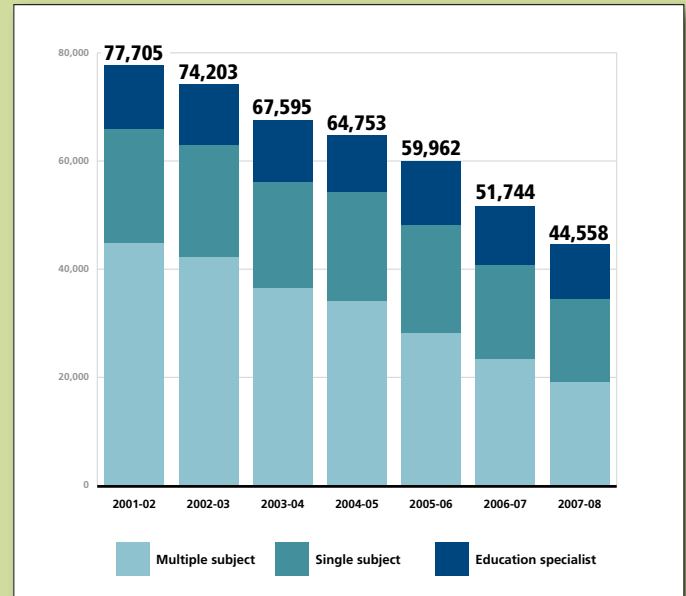
Chart 3
Age Distribution of California Teachers



Source: California Department of Education

Chart 4

Number of Enrollees in Teacher Preparation Programs



Source: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

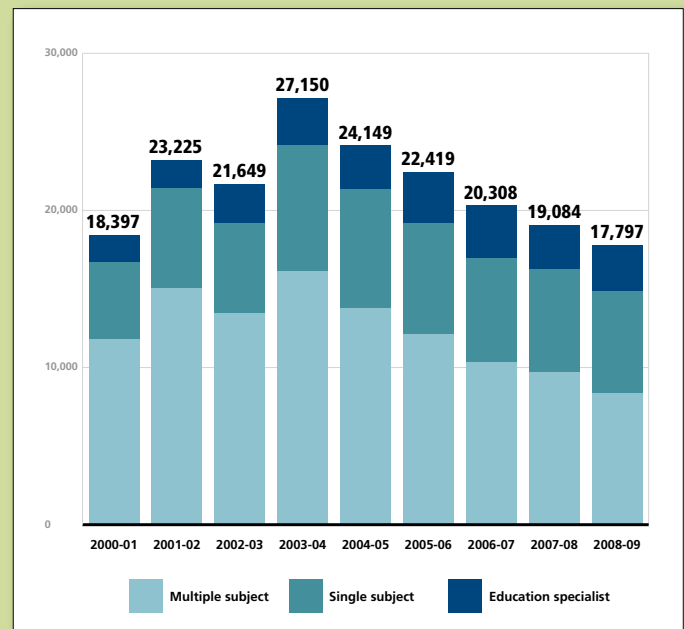
- The pool of prospective teachers has declined dramatically. The number of enrollees in teacher preparation programs in California has dropped by nearly half in the last seven years, from more than 75,000 to fewer than 45,000. And the number of new teaching credentials issued by the state is similarly down. *(See Charts 4 and 5.)*
- The state has cut repeatedly already lean professional development funds. Widespread reductions in district funding for training are limiting the support for teachers at all stages, from new teachers in need of mentoring to veterans needing help with instructional improvements.

As our interviews showed, these are not conditions that can be turned around quickly even if the state had money to do so. It will take time to draw more people into the pipeline, to ratchet back up the capacity of the universities to train new teachers, and to rebuild a professional development infrastructure. As a California State University administrator said:

"It is going to take a long time to bring enrollment in teacher preparation back. It is going to be really tough to get people back into the teacher pipeline and we are going to need them."

Chart 5

Number of Teaching Credentials Issued



Source: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing



Equity

One of the hallmarks of our reports has been a close look at the inequitable distribution of novice teachers. While we saw improvements over the years, we consistently found that students in low-income communities routinely faced the least experienced, least prepared teachers.

We believe that the budget cuts have exacerbated the problems, that the shortages are likely to have disproportionately affected students in the least affluent schools and districts. These schools, which also have higher proportions of novice teachers, are likely to be those most affected by the emphasis on seniority-driven policies. California is one of 14 states that require layoffs, if they occur, to be based primarily on seniority. In practice, many of the lowest performing schools, places that have more novice teachers, are seeing more teacher turnover – more disruption – as a result of budget-induced layoffs.

This past spring, the American Civil Liberties Union won an injunction preventing Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) from disproportionately laying off novice teachers at three middle schools. LAUSD proposed a settlement this fall that would limit the layoffs at schools with high concentrations of novice teachers, but could cause more senior teachers to lose jobs at other schools.

These disputes are almost exclusively over the jobs of adults. But the state must play a substantial role in ensuring that the students who most need good teachers are not overlooked in the process.



“WE ARE SURE THAT CALIFORNIA STUDENTS WON'T MEET THE STANDARDS THAT HAVE BEEN SET FOR THEM IF WE DON'T SUPPORT THEIR TEACHERS.”

Conclusion

We are heartened by the increased public focus on teachers and effective teaching. We have concerns about ensuring that teachers are evaluated fairly using a number of measures, including results for students. And we particularly want to make sure that the focus of evaluations is much more about providing teachers with support to help them improve their teaching rather than just firing the weakest few.

We are sure that California students won't meet the standards that have been set for them if we don't support their teachers with highly effective professional development and working conditions that allow them to succeed.

The ultimate understatement may be to say these are tough times in California. There are no easy answers, and too few resources to invest in our students and the adults who teach them.

But invest we must or soon risk facing the same circumstances that placed our most vulnerable students a decade ago in schools with the least prepared and experienced teachers.

Recommendations

We recommend that state and local policymakers...

- ✓ Establish an equitable, adequate and simplified K-12 school funding formula that provides for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning.
- ✓ Stop the erosion of California's teacher development system to ensure every student benefits from quality teaching.
- ✓ Immediately restore the statewide student (CALPADS) and educator (CALTIDES) data systems.
- ✓ Provide a well-prepared, effective and caring teacher for each and every student.

For more detailed recommendations, please see our full research report available on our website: www.cftl.org.



Teaching and California's Future

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The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning

Working to improve education for all students by strengthening the teaching profession



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