

CENTER VIEW

Insight and analysis on
California education policy

MAY 2010

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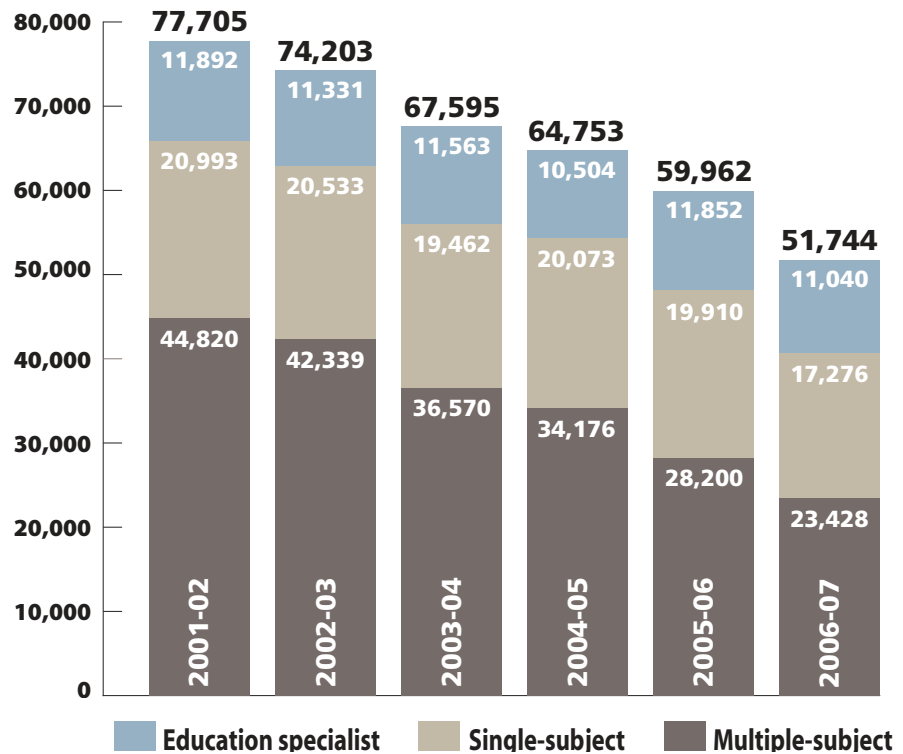
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Who will be Left to Teach?

Pink Slips + Retirements = Empty Classrooms

When March 15 rolls around each year, districts, schools and teachers are sent into a frenzy of planning, anticipating, and dreading the annual distribution of pink slips. This year, 26,000 pink slips were issued¹ — last year there were 26,500 pink slips issued by the March deadline. Given the magnitude of budget cuts and resulting teacher layoffs, it comes as no surprise that there has been a steep decline in the number of individuals preparing to become teachers. In 2001-02 there were well over 77,000 enrollees in preparation programs, but by 2006-07 that number had dropped by more than 25,000 candidates. Of course these numbers translate to fewer first- and second-year teachers in our schools. In just one year, 2007-08 to 2008-09, nearly 6,500 fewer novice teachers remain on the job.

Enrollees in Teacher Preparation Programs



1. 26,004 pink slips were issued to CTA members by the March 15 deadline. Since then, some have been rescinded. The data file used for this document includes a total of 23,327 pink slips that were still in play as of April 16, 2010.

Market forces? Maybe, but let's consider what lies ahead for California schools and why the downstream effect of current budget decisions matter. Although we might have expected the baby boom retirement wave to slow due to economic uncertainties, so far our teachers are right on track to retire at the average age of 61. This means over the next seven to ten years we will have to replace nearly 100,000 teachers — or about one-third of the workforce — due to retirement alone. But there's more: after years of flat or declining enrollment at the elementary level, schools across the state can expect to see 170,000 new elementary students come through their doors in the next five years.

Pink Slips: Drilling Down

When we take a closer look at the issuance of pink slips, we see that certain regions of the state are harder hit. Looking strictly at the numbers of teachers receiving pink slips, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Orange counties account for about 12,500 pink slips — over half of those still in play. Yet WestEd has estimated that those four counties will need to hire over 24,000 teachers by 2015-16 due to increased retirements and the expected influx of new students.²

And small counties are being hit too. When looking at the number of pink slips issued in comparison to the size of a county's teacher workforce, counties issuing the highest percentages of pink slips are also projected to face some of the greatest demands for new teachers. For example, both Sutter and Yuba counties have issued pink slips to 15% of their teacher workforce, yet they are projected to need to hire the equivalent of 68% and 54% of their workforce, respectively, by the 2015-16 school year.³ Forced by the state's budget crisis, districts in these counties are reducing their numbers of novice teachers at the same time they stand poised to need teachers based on the projected growth in student enrollment and looming teacher retirements.

Witnessing the pain experienced by eager young teachers losing their jobs, or the tragedy of packing more students into a classroom than it can comfortably hold should be motivation enough to find a better way to address the state's economic woes. The current rash of layoffs most certainly will harm morale and, even more important, the downstream effect of pink slipping on the teacher development system is already evident, leading one to wonder who will be left to teach in those classrooms as the expected wave of elementary students washes through?



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2. White, M.E., and Fong, A.B. (2008). *Trends in California teacher demand: A county and regional perspective* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2008–No. 057). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.
 3. Ibid.

The Center View

We understand the difficulty of dealing with the immediate budget crisis while responsibly planning for the future. And currently, the demand for teachers has been reduced by using a number of cost cutting strategies, including increasing class size, closing schools and eliminating certain courses. But the need for new teachers remains on the horizon. And when the economy improves and school districts are once again able to staff adequately and appropriately, the pool of available teachers will be significantly compromised due to the effects of today's pink slipping. Therefore, we encourage policymakers to:

- Realign the budget processes between the state and its public school districts by developing a more reliable timetable that relieves districts from basing initial staffing decisions on early revenue and expenditure estimates that result in unnecessary layoff notices, harm morale, hamper planning and drive prospective teachers from the profession;
- Remove the cap on preparation programs throughout the California State University system so that all qualified applicants can pursue teacher training; and
- Put into place flexible incentive programs, sensitive to regional market demands, that encourage teachers to take assignments where they are needed most, including high-need schools and shortage areas like special education, mathematics and science.

The state must live up to its promise to provide a high quality teacher in every classroom: too many of California's students are still struggling to learn. But in order to deliver the quality education our students deserve, we must get off this budget roller coaster and find a stable, long-term solution to education funding. The stakes could not be higher — the education provided to the students of today will determine California's future.

Note: Data related to current layoff notices were made available through the California Teachers Association and references only CTA membership. Layoff information for California Federation of Teachers members is not included in this data set.