

CENTERVIEW

Insight and analysis on
California education policy

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Progress At Risk: California's Budget and the Implications for Teaching Quality

We've seen the headlines. The state and national budget crises have resulted in radical cuts in funding for California schools. Overall reductions in the recently enacted state budget approximate 15%, with school expenditures decreasing from \$51.6 billion to \$43 billion in less than two years. One way policymakers tried to soften the blow to school districts was to afford them substantial flexibility in the use of school funding. Funding that was designated for certain students or uses can now be spent on "any education purpose." Now the scope and nature of education services for students and teachers, once connected to state requirements, are the subject of local discretion and collective bargaining agreements.

School districts immediately will be faced with a series of very tough decisions. Perhaps the most challenging and far reaching of these will relate to education equity and teaching quality. In this CenterView, we focus on issues and questions that are beginning to emerge for Californians as they struggle to offer students instruction necessary to meet our state's rigorous academic standards. There are no easy answers as policy makers, local educators and other school community members roll up their collective sleeves and work to mitigate the damage done to their schools by this budget crisis. But careful

monitoring of district response to cuts and adjustments in programs and personnel practices could supply information helpful to rebuilding and even strengthening California's public school system.

Progress in Peril

In recent years, California has made significant strides in addressing both education equity and teaching quality. The numbers of underprepared teachers have finally dropped to levels that existed prior to the introduction of class size reduction in 2006, when, virtually overnight, school districts hired nearly 20,000 new teachers. Many of those teachers were underprepared and most ended up in schools with high numbers of poor and minority students. After more than a decade of carefully designed teacher recruitment, retention and development initiatives, California has reduced the number of underprepared teachers by nearly 27,000. As a consequence of the budget crisis, these successful strategies are now at grave risk.

Q *Will state and local policy makers monitor progress toward education equity and address critical issues of teacher hiring, retention and distribution if necessary?*

Q *What steps might districts take to redress discrepancies should any arise?*

Large Numbers of Teacher Layoffs in 2009

California law requires local school districts to inform teachers, counselors, nurses and other school employees by March 15 that they could be laid off at the end of the school semester. The across-the-board budget cuts have pushed districts to issue layoff notices to more than 26,000 teachers.

Q How will state and local policy makers monitor the impact of teacher layoffs, particularly the impact on schools with the most challenges?

Q If reductions in staff continue to be necessary, how will local school boards target layoffs to try to avoid exacerbating shortages in hard-to-staff assignments or undermining the prospects for future hires?

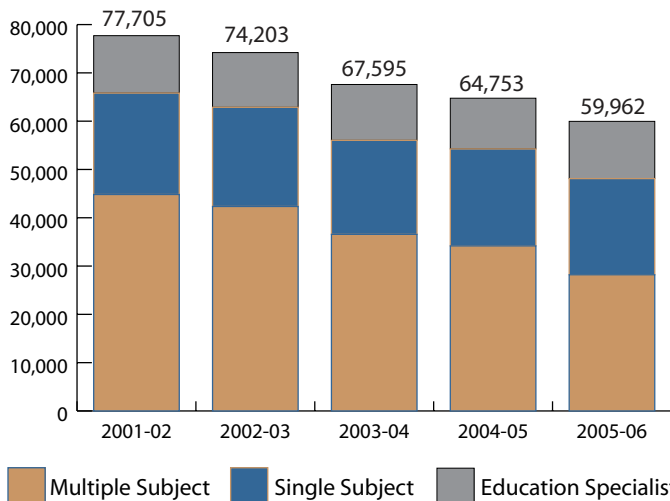
Disruption of the Teacher Pipeline

We know the impact of the layoff process can have a cascading and lasting effect on teacher workforce development. In the last five years, following prior rounds of layoff notices, the number of candidates enrolled in teacher preparation programs declined significantly. The most recent state budget reduces funding by 15% for state programs designed to prepare, support, and induct new teachers. With more teachers becoming eligible for retirement, deep cuts in teacher preparation may negatively impact the teacher pool and compromise new gains in student achievement.

Q What are the implications of budget cuts for state-wide efforts to provide fully prepared and effective teachers for all students?

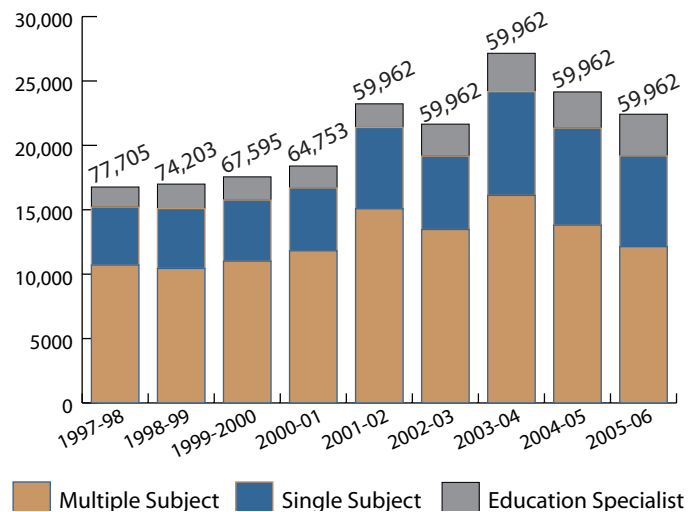
Q Will these cuts cause a long-lasting disruption of the teacher pipeline – the means by which California recruits, prepares and places teachers?

Number of Enrollees in Teacher Preparation Programs, 2001-02 to 2005-06



Note: Figure includes individuals enrolled in district intern programs.

Number of New Preliminary Credentials Issued, 1998-99 to 2006-07



Tough Decisions

Current budget figures released by the state don't tell the whole story. In order to avoid additional education cuts, voters must pass a set of bond measures in a special election scheduled for May 19 of this year. Even if all of the budget-related measures pass, California schools are still at risk. For the next four and a half years, school boards may transfer to general purposes funding originally targeted to mentor novice teachers, strengthen teaching, and assess teaching practice. Clearly, school districts throughout the state are entering uncharted territory with budget and administrative timetables demanding prompt and decisive action. State and local policymakers continue to be faced with legal, moral and education imperatives relative to equity and quality. There are no simple prescriptions for addressing these challenges as local school districts go into survival mode.

Q In the ensuing four years, to what extent will local districts be able to maintain support for strengthening teaching quality, especially in those schools that continue to struggle?

Q Will state and local policy makers monitor this decline and report its effects?

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The Critical Importance of Education Data

Along with the suspension of categorical programs comes the curtailment of evaluation of the effects of these programs. But now that reporting requirements – including those targeted toward education equity – are on hold, measures to support students' academic success, keep the public abreast of progress toward educational goals, and inform decision-making may be compromised.

The Center has long encouraged the creation of state student and teacher data systems that allow data-driven decisions in local school districts, schools, classrooms and in the State Capitol (see the CenterView: California's Emerging Teacher Data System at www.cftl.org). California has had to consistently rely on federal funding to develop and implement education data systems. The stimulus package signed into law by President Obama offers California up to \$20 million to improve its education data systems.

Q Will state and local education policymakers take advantage of new federal funding to ensure that educators, parents, the public have access to essential data on student outcomes and education services?

Fewer Teachers, Larger Classes

For more than a decade the state has provided districts with extra funds to maintain small class sizes in grades K-3 and in grade 9. The new budget provides districts much more flexibility in this regard. Ironically, the inequities initially produced by the class size reduction program may be redressed if teachers with several years of experience who are facing layoffs move to schools where vacancies still exist. However, history shows that faced with layoff, many teachers leave teaching or the state and may never return.

Q Should class sizes in grades K-3 and 9 be increased to save funds and mitigate reductions elsewhere?

Q And if so, will the state and school districts continue to offer incentives for teachers to serve where students need them the most?

Alternative Teacher Compensation and Supporting Teaching Quality

The federal stimulus package makes \$200 million available nationally for innovative compensation strategies tying educator pay to factors other than seniority and education level. This grant program is intended to develop performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools. States, local education agencies, charter schools, partnerships (including nonprofit agencies) are eligible to apply.

Given the ongoing fiscal crisis in California, it may be difficult for local education agencies to take advantage of this opportunity; however, some California districts have already begun to implement alternative compensation strategies and may want to expand their efforts with federal funds. The opportunity for partnerships with nonprofit agencies may allow others to begin this work. Provisions in Senate Bill 1209 (Scott, 2006) allow bargaining for additional compensation to address teacher willingness to serve in hard-to staff schools, to participate in high quality professional development, and foster student achievement.

Q To what extent will districts and teacher bargaining units take advantage of federal funds to explore and implement some form of pay-for-performance?

Q In what ways will these new approaches to compensation change the face of preparation, recruitment, assignment and persistence rates of teachers?

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The Center View

Since first reporting on the status of California’s teacher workforce in 1998, the Center has been concerned with education equity and quality teaching. Through both good and lean years, the state has made strides in addressing teacher shortages, demand for more and better prepared math and science teachers, the need for mentor support for novices who have not yet qualified for a preliminary teaching credential, and other essential policy challenges. We continue to argue that the best use of state and federal funds is in ensuring that every child has a fully prepared and effective teacher, because excellence in teaching is the one variable beyond family that holds the greatest promise for raising students’ academic achievement. But now efforts to ensure both equity and quality are at risk.

There is no question that schools and districts face a crisis that is certain to change the way many, if not most, of California’s children are educated. But we also view this period as a way to shake loose some old assumptions that have not served our students well, replacing them with approaches that focus more directly on improvements in teaching and learning. It is absolutely essential for state and local policymakers and educators to carefully monitor the impact of the budget crisis, and this year’s budget provisions, on California’s longstanding goals of:

- Addressing education inequity;
- Attracting and retaining teachers with the knowledge, skills, disposition and ability to offer all students opportunities to meet California’s very high education expectations; and
- Strengthening teaching quality by systematically addressing a disjointed, fragmented system of teacher development.

An essential tool in ensuring both equity and quality involves developing and using a comprehensive data system to afford policy makers, educators, parents and the public the information they need to monitor continuous improvements in teaching and learning for all students.