

CENTER VIEW

Insight and analysis on
California education policy

NOVEMBER 2009

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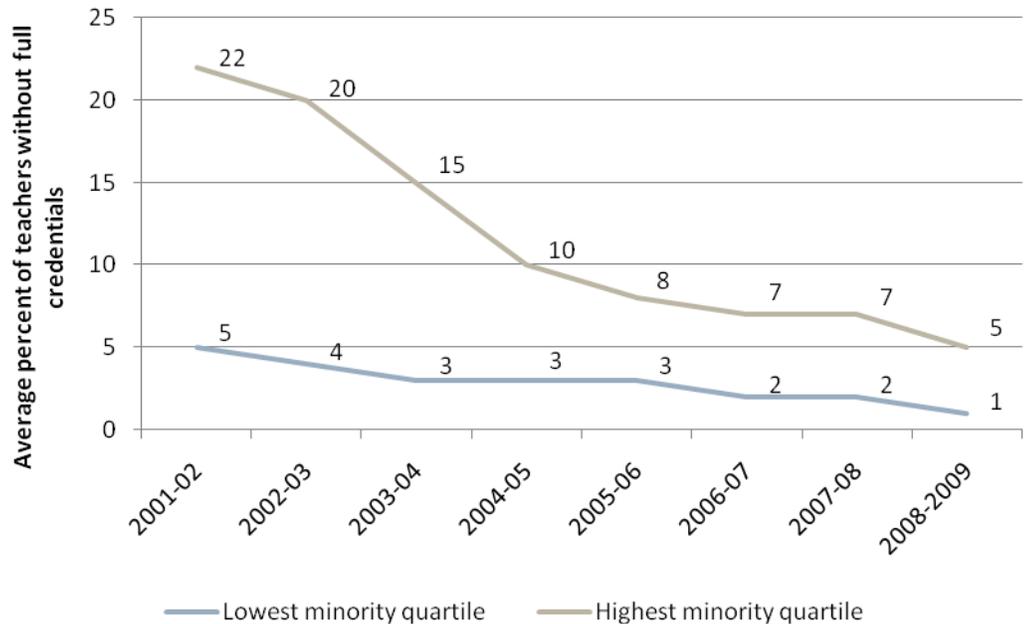
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Equity and Excellence in Education

Improvement in teacher distribution, but inequities persist

California has made significant strides in reducing the numbers of underprepared teachers in the state’s schools. In 2000-01, more than 20% of California schools had 20% or more underprepared teachers—those who have not yet completed requirements for even a preliminary teaching credential. In 2008-09, only 3% of schools in the state had 20% or more underprepared teachers. Further, the gap in the percentage of underprepared teachers in high- and low-minority schools has steadily narrowed. But despite these improvements, students in high-minority schools are still five times more likely to have an underprepared teacher than their peers attending low-minority schools (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Underprepared Teachers in Schools with the Highest and Lowest Percentages of Minority Students, 2000-2001 to 2008-2009



Similarly, students in low-performing schools are more likely to have underprepared teachers than their peers in high-performing schools. In 2009, California 6th graders in the lowest achievement quartile are three times more likely to have had an underprepared teacher during elementary school. And the odds of them having more than one underprepared teacher in their elementary years are ten times greater than those of students in the highest achievement quartile.

Intern teachers—those who are assigned as the teacher of record while completing a preparation program at the same time—are a significant subset of underprepared teachers. Looking closely at just this group of underprepared teachers we see that they are distinctly maldistributed, with the greatest percentage assigned to low-achieving schools and relatively few teaching in schools in the highest achievement quartile (Figure 2).

Maldistribution 2009: Bad Odds for Kids Who Need Better

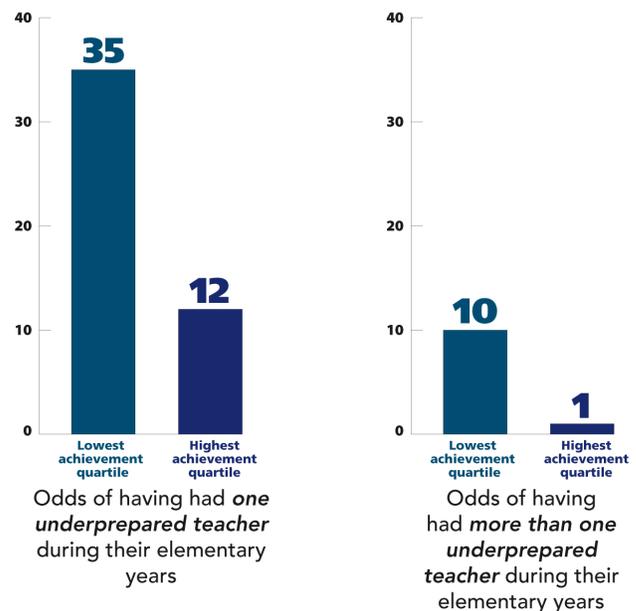
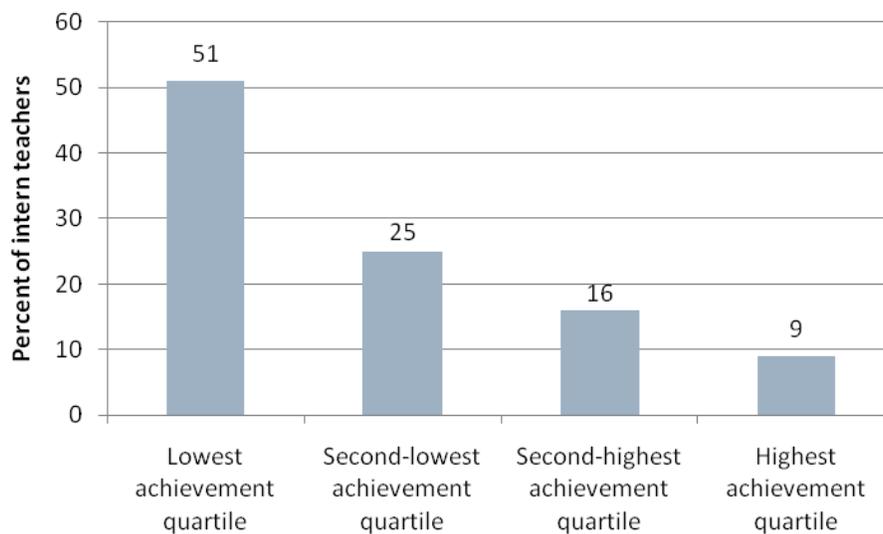


Figure 2: Distribution of Interns by School-level API, 2008-09



The data displayed above demonstrate what has been known for quite some time—the students who need well prepared and effective teachers the most are the least likely to get them.

Problems with Supply

Complicating matters are data that show we may be facing trouble on the horizon. The number of individuals pursuing teaching as a profession continues to drop. Figures 3 and 4 reveal the number of enrollees in teacher preparation programs has declined for the past six years and the number of those earning a teaching credential has declined for the last five.

Figure 3: Number of Enrollees in Teacher Preparation Programs, 2001-02 to 2006-07

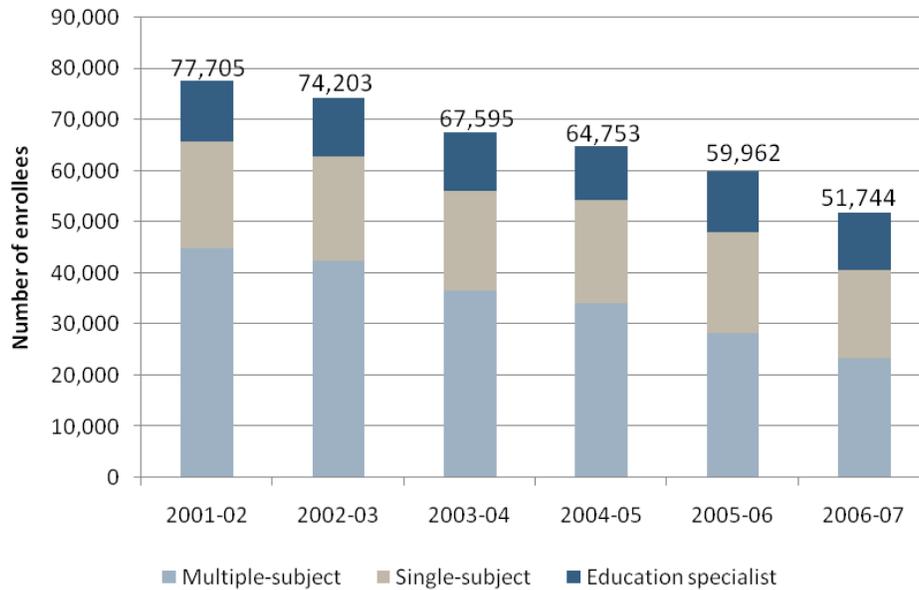
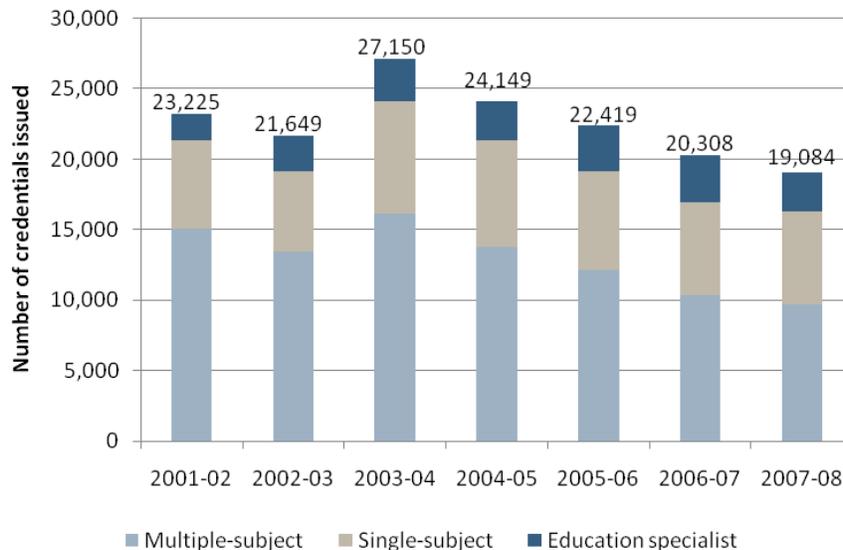


Figure 4: New Preliminary Teaching Credentials Issued by IHEs, 2001-02 to 2007-08



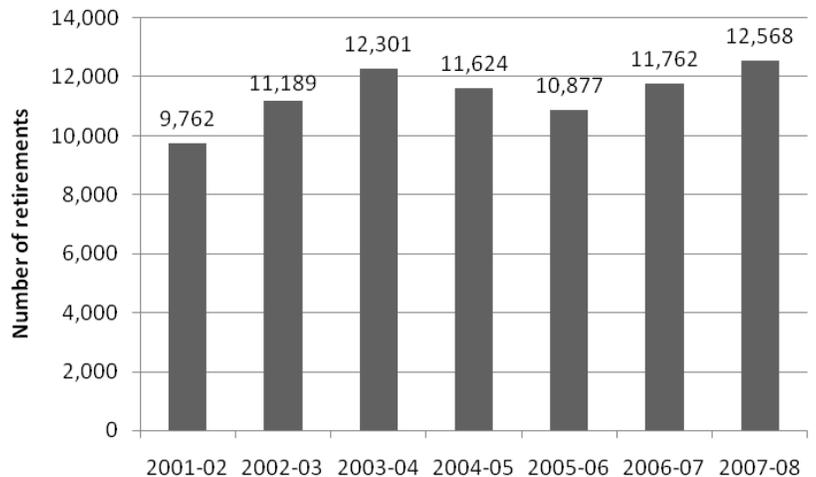
The reasons for these concurrent drops are numerous. College and university preparation programs have faced a series of budget cuts resulting in decreased acceptance rates for qualified teacher applicants. Programs such as the Governor’s Teaching Fellowship, designed to encourage potential teachers to complete their preparation prior to taking a teaching job, were eliminated, despite research demonstrating the program’s success in promoting equity in access to fully prepared teachers.¹ In addition, the threat of teacher layoffs historically has resulted in fewer individuals pursuing teaching. This year, in the wake of both budget cuts for teacher preparation programs and teacher layoffs, we expect another precipitous drop in enrollments. These trends are particularly troubling as teacher retirements have increased over the last three years (Figure 5).

1. Steele, Jennifer L., Murnane, Richard J. and Willett, John B. *Do Financial Incentives Help Low-Performing Schools Attract and Keep Academically Talented Teachers? Evidence from California* (March 2009). NBER Working Paper Series, No. 14780. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1359476>

Based on the age distribution of the current teacher workforce, the number of retirees will continue to increase. There are approximately 97,000 teachers eligible for retirement in the next decade. We know from our early reports that when teacher shortages expand, underprepared teachers are more highly concentrated in the neediest schools.

It is also important to note that the California teacher labor market is regional and typically teachers do not choose to teach in settings unfamiliar to them or in subject matter areas for which they have not been prepared. Further, research shows that teachers who live in one part of the state are not likely to take jobs in another. Current economic conditions may force change in these patterns, but historically it is unlikely that a teacher who lives in the Central Valley, for example, would be willing to accept a position in an urban school in Southern California. Based on the inequities already present in California schools and the looming threat to an adequate supply of teachers, there is valid reason for concern that greater maldistribution will occur in the near future.

Figure 5: Number of California State Teachers' Retirement System (CALSTRS) Membership Retirements, 2001-02 to 2007-08



The Center View

Data indicate that measures put into place over the last few years to address the maldistribution of underprepared teachers are clearly working. However, the current budget crisis and the decrease in the numbers of those entering teaching put at risk those improvements. Inequities persist. Recognizing that challenges are still on the horizon, it is imperative that state policymakers remain focused on the problem. Specifically, we recommend that policymakers:

- Monitor the impact of budget cuts with regard to access to fully prepared teachers for all students, particularly students in low-performing schools. Further, monitor the impact of “categorical flexibility” on the viability of programs designed to encourage equity in teacher distribution while promoting teaching quality, including the Certificated Mentor Program, Assumption Program of Loans for Education (APLE), and the Enhanced Intern Program.
- Restore incentives for aspiring teachers to become prepared prior to assuming a teaching position, targeting those willing to serve in challenging school settings.
- Increase teacher recruitment efforts in regions of the state that have chronic shortages of fully prepared teachers as well as those predicted to lose significant numbers due to retirement.

By putting into place a set of policies aimed at reducing inequities in its public school system, California has made significant progress in providing opportunities for each and every child to learn from a fully prepared and effective teacher. However, the current budget crisis has put this progress in jeopardy. In order to ensure educational equity across all schools and districts, the state must not lose its focus on or reduce its effort to strengthen the teacher workforce. Students’ academic success will depend on it.