

JAN 10 2017 | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Barbara McKenna 831-588-4309
bmckenna@learningpolicyinstitute.org

Leading Education Policy Institute Encourages California to Include Teacher Quality Investments in New Special Education Funding Plan

Statement of Learning Policy Institute President Linda Darling-Hammond on California Governor Jerry Brown's Proposed Budget for Special Education

As a leading national institute conducting and communicating research to improve education policy and practice, the Learning Policy Institute applauds Governor Jerry Brown's proposal in this year's budget summary to study special education funding in the service of improving special education in California. As state leaders explore strategies for funding reform, we hope they will attend to the state's urgent need to build a supply of high-quality teachers.

Our [research](#) demonstrates that California has a [significant and worsening shortage](#) of qualified special education teachers. Right now, 75% of school districts report that they are experiencing such a shortage, and most of them say the shortages are worse this year than last. Special education is by far the worst area of shortage. The dearth of teachers is an even greater problem for communities of color and in low-income areas, where schools struggle to hire adequate numbers of prepared teachers in all areas.

A study we will soon release finds that because the shortage of these specially trained educators is so severe, most school districts have had to hire underprepared special education teachers with substandard credentials. We found that, for the 2015-2016 school year, only about a third of new special education teachers had a preliminary credential designating them as fully prepared. Nearly two-thirds—4,000 teachers—entered the field without the benefit of full preparation, including 1,759 who are teaching with what are essentially emergency credentials. No other major teaching field issues most of its credentials to underprepared candidates.

Not only are unprepared teachers ill-equipped to meet the complex demands of students with special needs, they are more likely to leave their assignment and the profession than colleagues who enter the classroom fully prepared. If California is committed to implementing higher standards for learning so that all students are prepared to succeed in school and life, it will be critically important to ensure an adequate and stable workforce of special education teachers with the requisite skills and training.

Over the coming year, as the state engages stakeholders and investigates new approaches to funding special education, it will be important to evaluate what investments in training and education programs are needed to ensure that all of the state's special education teachers are

well-prepared to serve their students, and what kind of inducements are needed for greater numbers of talented and committed people to enter the field.

[Research](#) demonstrates that teachers' preparation in special education has a strong effect on their students' achievement. Without investments in teacher quality, funds can be spent unwisely on a revolving door of new hires who leave at high rates, and on more costly supports for students made necessary by the lack of adequate teaching.

Governor Brown's proposal is an important first step toward a more productive system of special education in California. We trust it will ultimately take into account the most important element of that system—its teachers.

###

About the Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.