Strengthening the Educator Pipeline Through Service Scholarships

California's Golden State Teacher Grant Program

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Executive Summary

California, like many states, has struggled to attract and retain teachers, especially in high-need schools and areas such as special education, math, science, and bilingual education. One important source of this shortage is an inadequate number of teacher candidates enrolling in and completing preservice teacher preparation, resulting in a growing reliance on substandard credentials over the past decade. Teachers with substandard credentials are less likely to stay in the profession and tend to be less effective than fully prepared new teachers.

An important barrier to expanding the teacher workforce is the cost of preparation. Given large increases in graduate education costs over time and California's already high cost of living, many teacher candidates struggle to afford the costs of attendance, which include all tuition and fees, books and materials, and living expenses. Statewide data from this study suggest that the cost of attendance for average teacher candidates ranges from approximately $32,000 in the California State University system to $54,000 in the University of California system. Private and independent institutions of higher education—enrolling almost half of all teacher candidates in the state—have widely varying costs, ranging from $14,000 to $86,000.

To help address California's educator shortages and offset preparation costs, state policymakers established the Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) Program, providing over $570 million to fund the program since 2020–21. Administered by the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), the GSTG Program provides teacher candidates and Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) candidates (i.e., those training to be school counselors, social workers, and psychologists) with an upfront grant as part of their overall student aid package to offset a substantial portion of their costs for pursuing a professional education program. In exchange, candidates commit to teach in a California priority school or California State Preschool Program for 2 years. A school is designated as a priority school if at least 55% of enrolled students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, are English learners, or are living in foster care. Recipients who do not complete their service requirement must repay the grant funds they received.

The parameters of the GSTG Program have changed over time: The maximum grant amount per candidate started at $20,000 in 2020 but was reduced to $10,000 in July 2024 as funding for the grant ran short, and the service commitment was reduced from 4 years to 2 years. The program also began prioritizing applicants with greater financial need when available grant funds became insufficient to support all eligible applicants.

This study tracks and analyzes statewide participation in the GSTG Program over the program's first 5 years and examines grant recipients' perceptions of program impacts. We use administrative data from CSAC that capture information on all GSTG recipients and data from a survey that CSAC administered in April 2025. This study also includes findings from interviews with six educator preparation programs (EPPs) with high GSTG uptake rates to identify effective strategies and challenges in implementing the grant.

Key Findings

The GSTG is a popular program that has supported over 28,000 aspiring educators. Over its first 5 years of implementation—from 2020–21 to 2024–25—the GSTG supported 22,851 teacher candidates and 5,812 PPS candidates. The number of recipients increased every year between 2020–21 and 2023–24 as eligibility expanded and visibility of the program increased. In 2023–24, when the GSTG was available to all teacher candidates, nearly half of California's new teacher candidates received a grant (45%). The GSTG was an important source of funding for PPS candidates as well.

The GSTG likely contributed to the 23% increase in the number of California-prepared teacher candidates who earned a preliminary teaching credential between 2022–23 and 2023–24. After the GSTG became available to all teacher candidates, there was a noticeable increase in the number of new preliminary credentials issued to teacher candidates who were prepared in-state. Survey respondents confirmed that the grant was important in their ability to complete their preparation and enter the profession.

The GSTG encouraged thousands of teacher candidates, especially candidates of color and career switchers, to pursue teaching and to work in high-need schools. Nearly three quarters of survey respondents said the GSTG was influential in their decision to pursue teaching, and two thirds said the grant was influential in their decision to teach in a high-need school. These perceived impacts were strongest among teacher candidates of color. Additionally, over 40% of GSTG recipients were over age 30, suggesting that the grant may be attracting career changers who may not have considered teaching as a viable career choice without this funding. The GSTG is also especially important for candidates who have limited access to other sources of financial aid, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and candidates pursuing a PPS credential to become a school counselor, social worker, or psychologist.

Most GSTG recipients have significant financial need, and these recipients reported that the grant enabled them to complete preparation. Nearly 4 in every 5 GSTG teacher candidate recipients were income-eligible for the federal Pell Grant, much higher than the one third of California undergraduates who received a Pell Grant in 2022–23. Survey respondents underscored the importance of the grant for completing preparation and easing their financial concerns. Nearly 60% of survey respondents indicated that they would have had to take out more student loans in the absence of the GSTG, and 42% indicated they would not have been able to finish their preparation without it.

GSTG recipients report teaching in high-need schools and hard-to-staff subjects. Survey results suggest that the GSTG Program is successfully recruiting new teachers into high-need schools and hard-to-staff subject areas in which the state has reported persistent shortages. Among survey respondents who are currently teaching, almost 9 in 10 reported teaching at a priority school, and almost all of these teachers indicated that they wanted to stay teaching at their schools after fulfilling their service obligations. GSTG recipients also reported teaching in high-need fields. Among surveyed recipients who are currently teaching, 38% indicated teaching special education, 33% reported teaching mathematics, and 30% reported teaching science (with some respondents selecting more than one teaching assignment), all fields that have been identified as shortage areas.

The GSTG is critical for meeting the financial needs of recipients, but the reduced grant amount will likely lessen its impact. A key goal of the GSTG is to substantially cover the cost of teacher preparation and enable teachers to begin their careers with little or no student debt. The original maximum award grant of $20,000 covered, on average, 80% of recipients' tuition fees and other living expenses that were not covered by other aid. As one education preparation program leader explained:

> Before the GSTG, we had 70% of our students taking out $20,000 or $30,000 [in loans] on average. When the GSTG was at $20,000, that covered almost all of tuition … [and] the number of students needing to borrow loans dropped to 10–15%. … It's been a huge game changer.

The reduction in the maximum grant amount in 2024, from $20,000 to $10,000, has resulted in more candidates having to seek additional funding or work, increase their reliance on loans, or delay their preparation plans. For GSTG recipients who were subject to the $10,000 award cap, only 47% of their unmet needs were covered by the grant; they were also more likely than those subject to the $20,000 cap to rely on loans and take on a job.

Policy Recommendations

These findings suggest that the Golden State Teacher Grant Program has been influential in supporting a large number of aspiring teachers and PPS candidates, especially candidates with high financial need and candidates of color, to enter the profession and to serve in high-need fields and high-need schools. There are several steps that California policymakers and practitioners can take to further strengthen the GSTG Program as well as related programs:

- **Ensure stability of funding and program administration.** The program received $50 million in new funding in the 2025–26 budget, a modest infusion to sustain the GSTG for 1 year. Given that there were nearly 7,500 GSTG recipients in 2024–25, $50 million may be insufficient to continue meeting the current demand from teacher and PPS candidates at the $10,000 maximum award level. After 5 years, the GSTG is widely known to the field, both among aspiring educators and the EPPs that prepare them. Stable long-term funding will allow the GSTG to continue making a strong contribution to California's supply of fully prepared educators. EPP staff also emphasized that multiyear funding and consistent program administration would enable them to promote and implement the program more effectively.
- **Benchmark funding to cover a substantial portion of teacher candidates' costs of preparation.** While many recipients noted that the GSTG was still a deciding factor in their decision to pursue teaching after the maximum award amount was reduced from $20,000 to $10,000, the policy change has weakened the program's ability to substantially cover candidates' financial needs, resulting in more recipients relying on loans or taking on a job during preparation. Policymakers can maximize the GSTG's impact by sustaining funding levels so that the grant covers a substantial portion of candidates' preparation costs. Even after accounting for other aid, GSTG teacher candidate recipients still have to cover, on average, $25,000 beyond what they and their families can afford to contribute.

- **Support program implementation in the field to ensure broad access to the GSTG, timely disbursement of funds, and high service fulfillment rates.** Uptake of the GSTG differs substantially, ranging from 0% in some EPPs to full uptake in others. Some EPPs, especially programs with limited financial aid staff, may benefit from additional support for navigating program changes, certifying eligibility, targeting outreach to prospective and current students, and disbursing funds in a timely manner. Given that some surveyed recipients reported difficulty in finding a job at an eligible school, local education agencies should be informed and engaged to be strong partners in ensuring that GSTG recipients are hired in a timely manner and placed in priority schools where they can fulfill their service commitment.

- **Apply lessons learned from the GSTG as the state implements other financial supports for teacher candidates, including student teaching stipends.** The 2025–26 state budget includes $300 million for the Student Teacher Stipend Program. This program will provide a $10,000 stipend for preservice candidates during the year in which they complete their student teaching or residency. Lessons from the first 5 years of the GSTG suggest this new program will benefit from being designed in collaboration with interest holders, communicated well to implementers, and maintained with stability over time. Communications can be facilitated by the teacher recruitment initiative funded in the 2025–26 budget and managed by the Kern County Superintendent of Schools. This initiative should integrate strong, direct communication to aspiring educators about the availability of the GSTG, along with the new Student Teacher Stipend Program.

- **Strengthen data collection to better evaluate the impact of the grant.** CSAC largely relies on voluntary reporting from EPPs and GSTG recipients to track credentialing and service fulfillment rates. A systematic approach to linking and analyzing data across CSAC, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), and the California Department of Education (CDE), such as through a data-sharing agreement among the three agencies, would improve long-term tracking of the GSTG's impact, as well as other educator workforce programs. With a linked data system, state agencies and researchers could identify GSTG recipients in the CTC credentialing and CDE staffing data, which enables them to track the credentialing, employment, and retention of GSTG recipients over time. Such data would also allow CSAC to track and provide support to recipients who may be struggling to obtain their credentials or complete their service commitment in a timely manner, reducing the likelihood of grant repayment, which could have significant consequences for the financial well-being of these recipients.

Introduction

"Changing careers to teaching felt impossible because I couldn't afford to return to school. Then I was introduced to the [Golden State Teacher Grant], which opened a door and helped connect me with the high-need school I currently work at and hope to remain in for many years."

— Golden State Teacher Grant recipient

Beginning in 2020–21, California devoted specific funding through the Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) Program to support teacher candidates in covering the cost of preparation. In exchange, candidates would commit to working in high-priority schools for several years. The goal was to help curb ongoing teacher shortages by recruiting, training, and retaining more diverse and better-prepared teachers, particularly those who would teach in high-need schools and high-shortage subject areas. Using administrative and survey data, this study tracks and analyzes statewide participation in the GSTG Program over the program's first 5 years and examines grant recipients' perceptions of the program's impacts on supporting their entry into the profession, completion of their credentialing, and decision to teach in a priority school. Additionally, this study includes findings from interviews with representatives from six educator preparation programs (EPPs) with high uptake rates of the grant to identify effective strategies and challenges in implementing the grant. The findings have important policy implications, both in California and nationally, as policymakers consider strategies to recruit, prepare, and retain a well-prepared, diverse educator workforce, particularly in high-need schools. For details about the data and methodology of this study, refer to Appendix A: Data and Methods.

California's Teacher Pipeline

A well-prepared and diverse pool of teachers is critical for student success. Yet California has long struggled with teacher shortages; the number of preliminary credentials issued each year to new teachers has not kept pace with the demand for qualified teachers. This has resulted in a growing reliance on substandard credentials over the past decade.[1] Teacher shortages have been more severe in certain fields and subject areas—such as special education, math, science, and bilingual education—and in high-need schools.[2] In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for teachers and other school staff has increased as schools work to address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. For example, there is an even greater need for school counselors to provide mental health supports and for additional teachers to provide extended learning opportunities to support academic recovery. Yet there are not enough teachers and counseling staff to meet these needs across the state.[3]

One important source of this shortage is an inadequate number of teacher candidates enrolling in and completing preservice teacher preparation.[4] Another source is difficulty retaining teachers, with an estimated 14% of California teachers leaving their schools each year.[5] Importantly, fully prepared teachers tend to be more effective and less likely to leave their school or the profession.[6] An analysis of California's new teacher workforce found that teachers with emergency-style permits or intern credentials were more likely to leave the state's workforce by the end of their third year (42% and 25% attrition

rates, respectively) compared with those who entered with preliminary credentials through traditional programs (20% attrition rate).[7] Hence, it is important to stem shortages by increasing the supply of well-prepared teachers.

Churn that can emerge from hiring underprepared teachers who are more likely to leave not only impacts student achievement but also increases the financial costs to districts as they work to recruit, hire, and train new teachers; this is estimated to be as high as $25,000 per teacher in a large district.[8] Importantly, the costs and consequences of teacher shortages disproportionately impact students of color and students from low-income families, who are more likely to attend schools contending with high turnover rates and chronic difficulties filling positions.[9]

> The number of preliminary teaching credentials issued grew by 23% in 2023–24 … reflecting a boost in California's capacity to produce fully qualified teachers.

In recent years, California has invested over $1 billion to address teacher shortages, which have been exacerbated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.[10] These investments may be starting to pay off: While the number of preliminary credentials fluctuated in the early years of the pandemic due to temporary waivers for teacher exams and disruptions in classrooms, the number of preliminary teaching credentials issued to individuals prepared in California grew by 23% in 2023–24, rising from 11,325 credentials in 2022–23 to 13,914 in 2023–24. This increase reflects a boost in California's capacity to produce fully qualified teachers following large state investments in teacher preparation. As we show later in this report, this increase in preliminary credentials issued to California-prepared teacher candidates is comparable to the number of additional GSTG awards granted in 2022–23, which suggests that the grant may be beginning to strengthen the state's teacher pipeline.

The Costs of Educator Preparation

One significant barrier to expanding the educator workforce is the high cost of preparation, especially for educators from underrepresented backgrounds.[11] Nationally, the average cost of graduate programs increased threefold from 2000 to 2020.[12] At the same time, federal financial supports have been stagnant or have dwindled. Notably, in 2011, Congress prohibited graduate and professional students from accessing the Federal Direct Subsidized Loan Program, which prevented interest accrual on these loans while these students were enrolled.[13] The federal Perkins Loan, a fixed-rate loan for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need, expired in 2017.[14] In 2025, federal Grad PLUS loans were eliminated, and loan caps were instituted for other types of loans, including graduate loans.[15] The federal TEACH grant—the only federal aid source focused on teacher candidates—has remained at $4,000 per year since the program was enacted in 2007.[16]

In California, the vast majority of educator candidates have already completed their undergraduate degrees and are enrolled in postbaccalaureate credential programs. Thus, most California educators must finance an undergraduate degree and a credential program. Before the introduction of the Golden State Teacher Grant, there were a few other state-funded scholarship and financial aid programs that could support teacher candidates studying at public institutions, including the Cal Grant, Middle Class Scholarship, and certain scholarship programs specific to the California State University (CSU) or

University of California (UC) systems.[17] All of these programs are need-based (i.e., teacher candidates must be eligible based on their demonstrated financial need), and not all educator preparation programs can receive these funds. Data show that California students relied substantially on student loans to finance their postsecondary education. In 2015–16, over 60% of all California undergraduates graduated with student loan debt, with much higher borrowing rates among Black and Pacific Islander students.[18] In 2020–21, an estimated one third of public school teachers in California reported still owing money on student loans used to pay for their undergraduate or graduate education.[19]

California's Golden State Teacher Grant Program

To help address California's significant teacher shortages, California policymakers established the GSTG Program, providing over $570 million to fund the program since 2020–21. Administered by the California Student Aid Commission, the GSTG Program provides teacher candidates and Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) candidates (i.e., those training to be school counselors, social workers, and psychologists) with an upfront grant as part of their overall student aid package to offset a substantial portion of their cost of preparation. In exchange, candidates commit to work for a certain period of time in a high-need school. This grant program was modeled after a number of other successful service scholarship programs, including a prior program in California, which have found success in increasing the recruitment and retention of more fully prepared teachers.[20]

Under the current program parameters, teacher candidates are eligible for the GSTG if they are enrolled in an approved, California-based program to earn their preliminary teaching credential or PPS credential through a student teaching or residency pathway.[21] They receive up to $10,000 toward their credentialing, including tuition and living expenses, in exchange for a service commitment to work in a California priority school or a California State Preschool Program for 2 years. A school is designated as a priority school if at least 55% of enrolled students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, are English learners, or are living in foster care.[22] In 2023–24, over two thirds of California's public schools were designated as a priority school (68%).[23] If recipients fail to complete their service requirement, they must repay the grant (at a prorated amount if they have partially completed the service commitment). Recipients have up to 6 years to obtain their credential and up to 4 years to fulfill 2-year service commitments and up to 8 years to fulfill 4-year service commitments.[24]

The parameters of the program have changed over time, shaped by both the source and the amount of funding available (see Table 1). The eligibility requirements have also changed. Initially, only candidates in special education received funding. The grant was then expanded to include candidates in all high-need subjects, and then to all teacher and PPS candidates. Most recently, intern teachers have been excluded from the grant.[25] The maximum grant amount started at $20,000 but was reduced to $10,000 per candidate in June 2024. (For more information, see The Evolution of the GSTG Program Over Time.)

Even with these changes over time, the GSTG offers a simple way for candidates to receive financial support throughout their training to offset the costs of tuition and living expenses. Unlike most other aid, the GSTG is available to students regardless of their family's financial status. The GSTG can also be used for a broader range of expenses than most other aid sources, and many students receive a portion of the grant to use for their living expenses if their tuition fees have already been paid or covered by other aid. As one candidate described, "The GSTG made it possible to pay all the expenses for me to be successful in my courses and placement. I wouldn't have been close to applying for my credential without it."

The Evolution of the GSTG Program Over Time

The Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) Program has evolved over time, shaped by both the source and amount of available funding. Table 1 outlines changes in the funding and eligibility requirements for the grant. The program was initially funded in the 2019–20 state budget with $89.8 million in onetime General Fund dollars. However, amid COVID-19-related fiscal uncertainties, funding for the GSTG was reduced to $15 million sourced from federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds. As a result, only teacher candidates in special education could receive the funds in the first year of the grant.

In 2021, the legislature allocated $500 million in onetime funds for the GSTG, with the intention of providing $100 million per year for the next 5 years. With this funding, the eligibility criteria for the grant were expanded to include all high-need fields and subject areas (including bilingual education, math, science, special education, multiple subject instruction, and transitional kindergarten). In 2022, eligibility for the grant was further expanded to include all teacher and PPS candidates. Because of the grant's popularity, funding began to run low in 2024.

To extend resources, the state prioritized applicants with the lowest income and assets, excluded interns from eligibility, and reduced the maximum grant amount from $20,000 to $10,000, while shortening the service requirement from 4 years to 2 years. The changes in program eligibility, requirements, and grant amounts over time have had ripple effects on implementation, as candidates, educator preparation programs, and the California Student Aid Commission adapted to these changes (see Program Uptake at Educator Preparation Programs: Learning From Leading Adopters).

Sources: California Department of Finance. (2019). *California State Budget Summary 2019–20*; California Department of Finance. (2020). *California State Budget 2020–21*; California Department of Finance. (2020). *California State Budget Summary 2020–21*; California Department of Finance. (2021). *California State Budget Summary 2021–22*; A.B. 132, § 29. (2021); S.B. 129, § 232. (2021); A.B. 181, § 97. (2022); S.B. 114, § 89. (2023); California Department of Finance. (2023). *California State Budget Summary 2023–24*; S.B. 153, § 92 (2024); A.B. 107 (2024); A.B. 123, § 6. (2025); Carver-Thomas, D., Leung-Gagné, M., & Jeannite, D. (2024). *Tackling teacher shortages: What we know about California's teacher workforce investments*. Learning Policy Institute.

Table 1. Funding and Eligibility Requirements of the GSTG

Year	Funds appropriated	Eligibility	Award amount
2020–21	$15 million in federal IDEA funds available through June 30, 2023	Education specialist candidates only	Up to $20,000
2021–22	$500 million onetime allocation from the state General Fund, available over 5 years through June 30, 2026	Teacher credential candidates in a high-need subject area[a]	Up to $20,000
2022–23	No new funding	All teacher credential candidates, as well as Pupil Personnel Services credential candidates (for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists)	Up to $20,000
2023–24	$6 million from federal IDEA funds to support special education teachers	Expanded list of qualifying educator preparation programs to include certain online programs; service commitment can be fulfilled in California State Preschool Program	Up to $20,000 ($10,000 for online programs)
2024–25	$1.5 million added from federal reimbursements	Interns not eligible as of July 2024; priority given to lower-income applicants	Up to $20,000 for applications submitted prior to July 2024 until $50 million cap is reached; up to $10,000 for submissions during or after July 2024 ($5,000 for qualified online programs)
2025–26	$50 million onetime allocation from the state General Fund	Interns not eligible; priority given to lower-income applicants	Up to $10,000 ($5,000 for qualified online programs)

Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Funds noted in the table do not include funds carried over from prior years.

[a] High-need subjects include bilingual education, math, science, special education, multiple subject instruction, and transitional kindergarten.

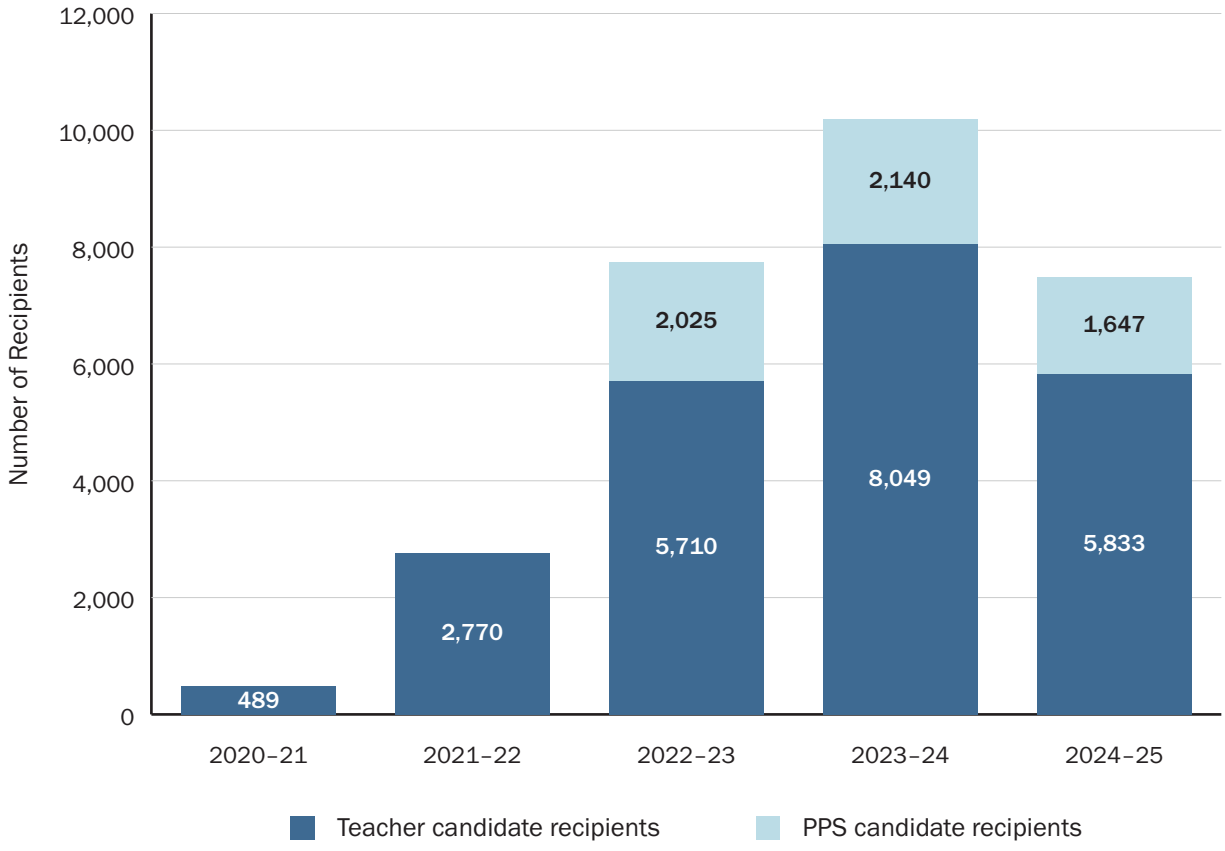
Sources: California Department of Finance. (2019). *California State Budget Summary 2019–20*; California Department of Finance. (2020). *California State Budget 2020–21*; California Department of Finance. (2020). *California State Budget Summary 2020–21*; California Department of Finance. (2021). *California State Budget Summary 2021–22*; A.B. 132, § 29. (2021); S.B. 129, § 232. (2021); A.B. 181, § 97. (2022); S.B. 114, § 89. (2023); California Department of Finance. (2023). *California State Budget Summary 2023–24*; S.B. 153, § 92 (2024); A.B. 107 (2024); A.B. 123, § 6. (2025); Carver-Thomas, D., Leung-Gagné, M., & Jeannite, D. (2024). *Tackling teacher shortages: What we know about California's teacher workforce investments*. Learning Policy Institute.

Who Does the Golden State Teacher Grant Support?

Large Numbers of Aspiring Educators

Over its first 5 years of implementation—from 2020–21 to 2024–25—the Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) Program has supported over 28,600 aspiring educators pursuing a teaching or Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential. As awareness of the GSTG has increased among candidates and educator preparation programs (EPPs) and eligibility criteria expanded over time, the number of recipients significantly increased. As shown in Figure 1, 22,851 teacher candidates and 5,812 PPS candidates have received a GSTG since the program's beginning. In the rest of this study, we focus primarily on GSTG's teacher candidates. For more details on PPS candidate recipients, see GSTG and the Pupil Personnel Services Pipeline.

Figure 1. Number of GSTG Recipients (Teacher and Pupil Personnel Services Credential Candidates)



Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant; PPS = Pupil Personnel Services.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant administrative data from the California Student Aid Commission.

In 2023–24, when GSTG was available to all teacher candidates, nearly half of California's new teacher candidates received a grant (Table 2). Because of the popularity of the grant, funding began to run out by 2024–25. Applications were paused for 60 days as policymakers decided on new legislation to stretch funds further. As a result of legislative changes, in July 2024, the maximum award amount was reduced from $20,000 to $10,000 and excluded interns from being eligible for the grant, which likely explains the drop in recipients that year.

Table 2. Percentage of New California Teacher Candidates Who Received the GSTG (2020–21 to 2023–24)

Characteristic	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	Total from 2020–21 to 2023–24
Eligibility	Special education teacher candidates	High-need subjects teacher candidates	All teacher candidates		N/A
Number of GSTG teacher candidate recipients	489	2,770	5,710	8,049	17,018
Percentage of new teacher candidates who received the GSTG	2%	14%	33%	45%	23%

Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Data from the 2024–25 school year is not shown due to limited statewide data on new teacher candidates. In 2024–25, 5,833 teacher candidates received the GSTG.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant administrative data and program-reported data from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing's accreditation data system.

Candidates With Greater Financial Need, Career Switchers, and Candidates of Color

Using administrative and survey data, we examined the characteristics of GSTG recipients, including their financial need, demographics, and institutions of study. We found that the grant was effective in reaching candidates who are typically underrepresented in the teacher workforce, including candidates with greater financial need, career switchers, and candidates of color.

Candidates With Greater Financial Need. While the GSTG did not specifically prioritize teacher candidates with greater financial need until July 2024, recipients over the first 5 years were primarily from lower-income backgrounds.[26] As shown in Table 3, our analysis of administrative data finds that nearly 4 in every 5 GSTG teacher candidate recipients (78%) were income-eligible for the federal Pell Grant and almost half of all recipients (47%) were income-eligible for the maximum Pell Grant. The latter are students with the highest levels of financial need. This number is much higher than the one third of California undergraduates (32%) who received a Pell Grant in 2022–23.[27] As shown in Figure 2, the share of GSTG teacher candidate recipients who are income-eligible for the Pell Grant was highest in 2024–25, when the state began prioritizing students with greater financial needs (79%), but still only marginally higher than the share in prior years.[28]

Table 3. Characteristics of GSTG Recipients, 2020–21 to 2024–25

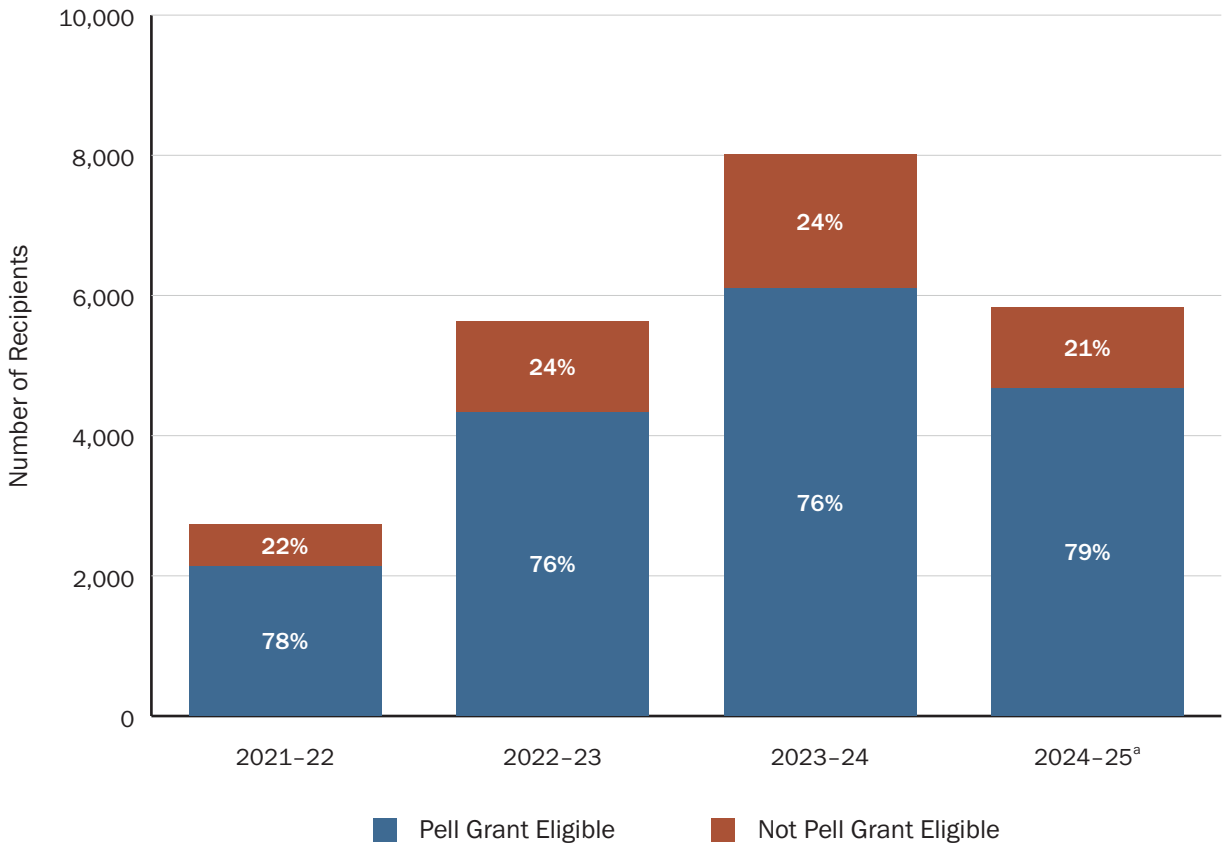
Characteristic	GSTG teacher candidate recipients
Total number of recipients	22,851
Gender	
Female	75.8%
Male	24.2%
Age	
25 and under	33.6%
26–30	25.4%
31–35	14.9%
36–45	17.1%
46–55	7.4%
Over 55	1.7%
Financial need[a]	
Not eligible for Pell Grant	22.4%
Pell Grant eligible	77.6%
Maximum Pell Grant eligible	47.0%
Home region	
Northern	4.2%
Bay Area	10.9%
Central	30.6%
Los Angeles	22.3%
Southern	32.1%
Institution type	
Local education agency	10.5%
Private or independent institution of higher education	53.8%
California State University (CSU) system	30.1%
University of California (UC) system	5.8%

Note: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant.

[a] Pell Grant eligibility is based on teacher candidates' Student Aid Index as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Many teacher candidates in California are not eligible to receive a Pell Grant, so this represents income eligibility rather than receipt of Pell Grants. 2020–21 was excluded when determining recipient financial need due to data quality issues. The Pell Grant eligible category includes candidates who were maximum Pell Grant eligible.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant administrative data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Figure 2. Percentage of GSTG Teacher Candidate Recipients Who Were Pell Grant Eligible



Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Pell Grant eligibility is based on teacher candidates' Student Aid Index as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Many teacher candidates in California are not eligible to receive a Pell Grant, so this represents income eligibility rather than receipt of Pell Grants. 2020–21 is excluded due to lack of data. GSTG recipients pursuing a PPS credential are excluded from the figure.

[a] Prioritization of grant awards based on financial need began in July 2024, using the Student Aid Index for GSTG applicants who were waitlisted.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant administrative data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Older Candidates. As shown in Table 3, just over 40% of GSTG teacher candidate recipients are over age 30. This suggests that the grant may be attracting new talent to the pipeline, including career switchers, who may not have considered teaching as a viable career choice without GSTG funding. As one survey respondent noted:

> Changing careers to teaching felt impossible because I couldn't afford to return to school. Then I was introduced to the GSTG, which opened a door and helped connect me with the high-need school I currently work at and hope to remain in for many years.

Further, a consistent theme in recipient survey responses was that the grant supported parents to pursue and complete teacher preparation. One candidate, for example, noted:

> As a working parent trying to balance family, work, and school, the grant provided essential support that allowed me to stay focused on my coursework and fieldwork without the added stress of how I'd afford tuition. It made the goal of becoming a teacher feel much more attainable and sustainable.

Parent survey respondents, including many who identified themselves as single parents, explained that they were able to use grant funding to cover critical family expenses, including childcare and housing, which made teacher preparation financially possible while also allowing them to continue to care for their children.

Candidates of Color. While administrative data do not include information on grant recipients' race or ethnicity, self-reported survey data suggest that the grant is reaching many teacher candidates of color. Among teacher candidate recipients who responded to the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) survey in 2025, over 7 in 10 (71%) identified as a person of color. In comparison, among all teacher candidates in the state between 2020–21 and 2023–24, approximately 57% of new teacher candidates statewide were people of color.[29]

Candidates Across Sectors. Just over half (54%) of GSTG teacher candidate recipients attended private or independent institutions of higher education, while 30% attended a program in the California State University (CSU) system; 10% attended a program sponsored by a local education agency (e.g., school district, county office of education, charter management organization); and 6% attended a program in the University of California (UC) system. Compared to the distribution of all new teacher candidates over the same time period, candidates in the CSU programs are relatively underrepresented among GSTG recipients, while candidates in private programs and local education agency programs are overrepresented.[30] The lower tuition of CSUs and the use of state financial aid that is only available in public institutions, such as the Cal Grants and the Middle Class Scholarship, may explain the lower uptake rates of the GSTG among CSU teacher candidates.

Candidates for Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credentials. In addition to supporting teacher candidates, the GSTG has also supported 5,812 recipients who pursued a PPS credential—about 20% of GSTG recipients overall. These are individuals who are training to become school counselors, social workers, or psychologists. These professional staff are critical to meeting the learning and developmental needs of all students as well as easing teacher workload. For more information on the importance of PPS staff and how the GSTG is supporting PPS candidates, see GSTG and the Pupil Personnel Services Pipeline.

GSTG and the Pupil Personnel Services Pipeline

National data show that California lags behind other states in the supply of Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) staff. Only 12% of California schools have a pupil-to-counselor ratio of at least 250:1, as recommended by the American School Counselor Association, compared to 19% nationally. As California has navigated the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting impacts—including increased mental health needs for students—the need for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists has become increasingly important.

Our study points to several key findings related to PPS candidates:

- GSTG is a particularly important source of funding for PPS candidates. For over a quarter of GSTG PPS candidate recipients (26%), the GSTG is their only source of financial aid. PPS credentials are only available at the postbaccalaureate level, and financial aid is typically more limited for postbaccalaureate students.
- The majority of GSTG survey respondents are pursuing a specialization in school counseling (67%), followed by school psychology (22%) and school social work (11%). Thirteen percent are also pursuing an added authorization on child welfare and attendance services.
- Over 4 in 5 PPS survey respondents (82%) identified as people of color, with the majority identifying as Hispanic (65%), followed by Asian or Filipino (7%) and Black or African American (5%). Just over three quarters (74%) are income-eligible for the Pell Grant and 41% are income-eligible for the maximum Pell award, the students with the highest financial need.
- Over 4 in 5 PPS survey respondents (84%) reported working at a priority school, and almost all of those respondents (90%) plan to remain working at a priority school or California State Preschool Program after fulfilling their service obligations.
- Nearly three quarters of PPS survey respondents (72%) reported that the GSTG was influential in their pursuing a career in pupil personnel services.
- Over 9 in 10 PPS survey respondents (93%) indicated that the GSTG was important in completing their program.
- Nearly three quarters of PPS respondents (73%) indicated that they would have taken out more student loans if they had not received the GSTG, while over a third (36%) said they would not have been able to complete their preparation without the grant.

Open-ended survey responses from recipients further highlight the importance of the grant in attracting them to their programs and supporting them to complete their preparation. Candidate comments included the following:

> The grant's assistance meant I could dedicate my time and energy to developing meaningful relationships with students, families, and staff, and to handling each case with the empathy and enthusiasm it deserved.
>
> [GSTG] allowed me to feel financially secure through my MA program, as most MA programs are either paid for out of pocket or via loans, which is a big factor that most people have to consider when applying to higher education overall.
>
> I dropped out of my PPS program in 2019 because I could no longer afford to pay out of pocket. I thought I was going to have to give up on getting this credential until I heard about the GSTG. I was looking into ways to finish the credential when I discovered the grant, and I was overjoyed to know I could finally finish. It was such a blessing. Without the grant I never would have finished.

Note: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant.

Sources: Learning Policy Institute. (2024). The state of the teacher workforce: A state-by-state analysis of the factors influencing teacher shortages, supply, demand, and equity [Interactive map]; Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant administrative and survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

What Is the Employment Status of GSTG Recipients?

The initial policy design of the Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) Program was to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers to serve in high-need fields and schools. GSTG survey data from teacher candidate recipients indicate that the program is meeting this goal.

As shown in Table 4, more than 4 in 5 GSTG survey respondents (84%) are currently teaching, including 67% who have completed their teacher preparation and 17% who are teaching while completing preparation (i.e., as an intern). Among the respondents who received the grant prior to 2023–24, almost 90% are currently teaching. Many of those who received the grant in 2023–24 and 2024–25 were still completing their preparation or just beginning to look for a teaching job at the time the survey was administered in April 2025.

Table 4. Employment Status of GSTG Teacher Candidate Survey Respondents

Characteristic	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	Total
Number of survey respondents	119	677	1184	1,032	125	3,137
Teaching while completing preparation program	1.7%	3.6%	10.7%	31.4%	52.8%	17.3%
Teaching and have completed preparation program	94.1%	87.2%	76.8%	46.4%	10.4%	67.0%
Hold credential but not currently teaching	1.7%	4.3%	6.1%	12.3%	8.8%	7.7%
Other	2.5%	5.0%	6.4%	9.9%	28.0%	8.0%

Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Of the 22,851 GSTG teacher candidate recipients, 20% (4,567) responded to the survey. This analysis only included the 3,137 survey respondents who answered this question regarding their employment status.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant teacher candidate recipient survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Taking Jobs in High-Need Schools and Planning to Stay There

Survey data indicate that the GSTG is strengthening California's ability to recruit and retain newly credentialed teachers in high-need schools. The early design of the GSTG Program required that recipients serve in a priority school (in which at least 55% of enrolled students are English learners, are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, or are living in foster care) for 4 years upon earning their preliminary credential. About two thirds of California's public schools (68%) qualified as a priority school

in 2023–24.[31] The GSTG allowed recipients with a 4-year service commitment up to 8 years to fulfill this service obligation.[32] Because the GSTG is still new—just 5 years into implementation—data on the overall rate of service fulfillment are not yet available. However, survey data indicate that almost all respondents are taking jobs in high-need schools and intend to remain there after they complete their service obligation.

Eighty-four percent of survey respondents noted that they are currently teaching. Among these respondents, nearly 9 in 10 (88%) reported teaching at a priority school, and a vast majority of recipients (91%) currently serving at a priority school indicated that they wanted to stay teaching at their schools after fulfilling their service obligations.[33]

> Nearly 9 in 10 survey respondents who were currently teaching reported teaching at a priority school, and a vast majority intend to stay at their schools after fulfilling their service obligations.

Among the small proportion of recipients who are currently teaching but not working in a priority school, many said they had not yet found a job at an eligible school, and almost a third intended to transfer to a priority school to fulfill their service requirement.[34]

A small percentage of GSTG respondents (16%) who have earned their credentials were not teaching, most often because they had not yet found a teaching job or because of personal reasons such as health or caring for family. Among these respondents, nearly all (80%) reported that they were either actively searching for a teaching job or were planning on searching for a teaching job in the future (13%). The timing of the survey—conducted in April, a time of year when many school districts were just launching their hiring processes for the next school year and had not yet made job offers—may partially explain why some respondents had not yet landed a job.

Teaching in High-Need Fields

Surveyed grant recipients are also teaching in hard-to-staff fields in which the state has experienced persistent shortages.[35] Among those currently teaching, nearly 4 in 10 survey respondents (38%) reported teaching special education. While comparable data on special education teachers statewide are not available, only 18% of new teacher candidates from 2020–21 to 2023–24 pursued an Education Specialist credential—and not all credential holders ultimately opt to teach in special education.[36] The percentage of recipients from 2020–21 who are currently teaching in special education was considerably higher than other years, consistent with the fact that only those seeking an Education Specialist credential were eligible for GSTG funds in that year.

Additionally, a substantial proportion of survey respondents reported teaching in mathematics (33%) and science (30%), much higher than the proportion reported in statewide data on teaching assignments of first- and second-year teachers (8% for math and 6% for science in 2022–23).[37] Finally, survey data suggest that even though the eligibility for the GSTG expanded to cover all subjects from 2022–23 onward, the GSTG continued to attract many teacher candidates who teach in these shortage areas (see Table 5).

Table 5. Current Teaching Assignments of GSTG Survey Respondents

Teaching assignment	Percentage of respondents
Special education (any subject)	37.7%
Bilingual (any subject)	5.4%
Self-contained	12.0%
English language arts	30.3%
English language development	18.2%
History/social science	24.7%
Math	33.3%
Science	29.9%
Arts	13.6%
Career technical education	1.8%
Physical education or health science	12.1%
World languages	2.0%
Other	4.8%

Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Because survey respondents may select multiple options, percentages do not add up to 100%. Thirty-eight percent of survey respondents indicated teaching in more than one subject or assignment. This survey question was only asked of recipients who indicated that they were currently teaching (n = 2,546).

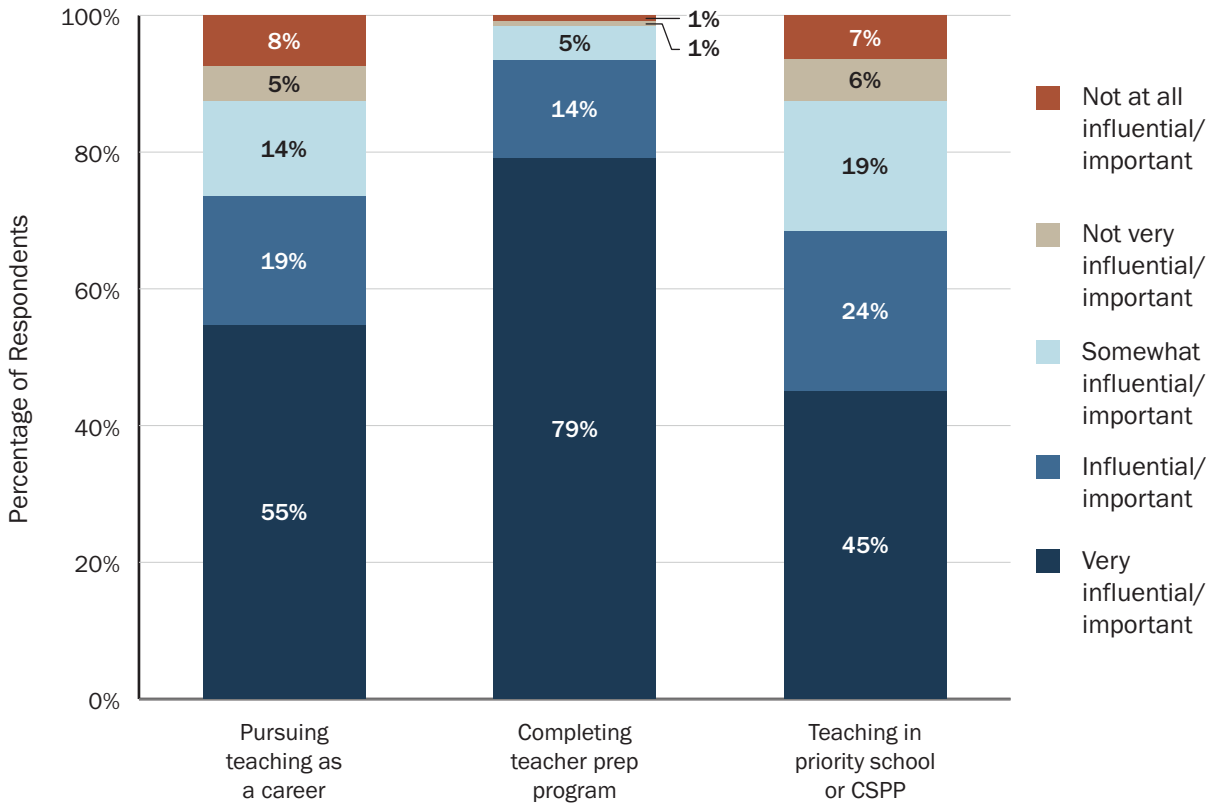
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant teacher recipient survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

What Do Recipients Say About the Impact of the Golden State Teacher Grant?

Important to Decisions to Pursue Teaching, Complete Preparation, and Teach in a Priority School

Survey data suggest that the GSTG Program has been effective in attracting teacher candidates, supporting them through preparation, and recruiting them to high-need schools. Nearly 3 in 4 (74%) respondents said the grant was influential or very influential in their decision to pursue teaching. More than 9 in 10 respondents (93%) said it was important or very important for making it through preparation, and more than two thirds (69%) said the grant was influential or very influential in incentivizing them to teach in a priority school (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Recipients' Perceptions of GSTG Impacts on Their Decisions to Pursue Teaching, Complete Preparation, and Teach in a Priority School



Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant; CSPP = California State Preschool Program.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant teacher candidate recipient survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

As shown in Figure 4, 17% of respondents indicated that they would not have entered teaching in the first place, and more than 40% said they would not have completed their preparation, suggesting that if the funding were no longer available, the educator pipeline could be negatively impacted. Recipients with higher financial need were more likely than those with lower financial need to report that they would not have completed their preparation without the grant (45% vs. 37%, respectively).

GSTG also helped offset teachers' debt burden, a factor that causes later stress and attrition.[38] Research suggests that loan burdens can deter aspiring teachers from entering the profession, especially those from underrepresented and low-income backgrounds. Loan debt can also limit access to the high-quality preparation programs that help retain teachers in classrooms. Because teachers are generally paid a lower salary than college graduates in other careers,[39] loans are especially burdensome for teachers, and their monthly repayments take up a higher proportion of their salaries compared to their peers.[40] More than 1 in 5 educators work additional jobs because of loan debt,[41] which contributes to increased teacher burnout.[42] Research also finds that teachers with multiple jobs and larger student loans have higher turnover rates.[43] As shown in Figure 4, the GSTG was important for reducing recipients' reliance on loans. Most respondents (59%) said they would have taken out more student loans if it were not for the grant.

Open-ended survey responses reinforce these overall findings, suggesting that the grant was important to candidates' decisions to pursue teaching, complete preparation, and teach in a priority school. Many recipients noted that the grant enabled them to pursue teaching and to do so sooner than they could have otherwise. Candidate responses included the following:

> I would not be able to go to school, become a teacher, and afford basic living costs without this grant. With this grant, I am now in year 3 of teaching. … I am about to clear my credential, and I have earned a master's degree."

> I've worked in education for 7 years. Without the GSTG I would not have pursued teaching.

> [GSTG] allowed me to start the process of achieving my dream. It would have been years for me to save up the money to complete the program without it.

Recipients also noted that the grant allowed them to focus on preparation and student teaching, which helped them to feel better prepared as a teacher and to complete preparation in a timely manner. One open-ended response on the survey read, "I probably would have needed to take many years to complete the program while also working, and I might not have made it through."

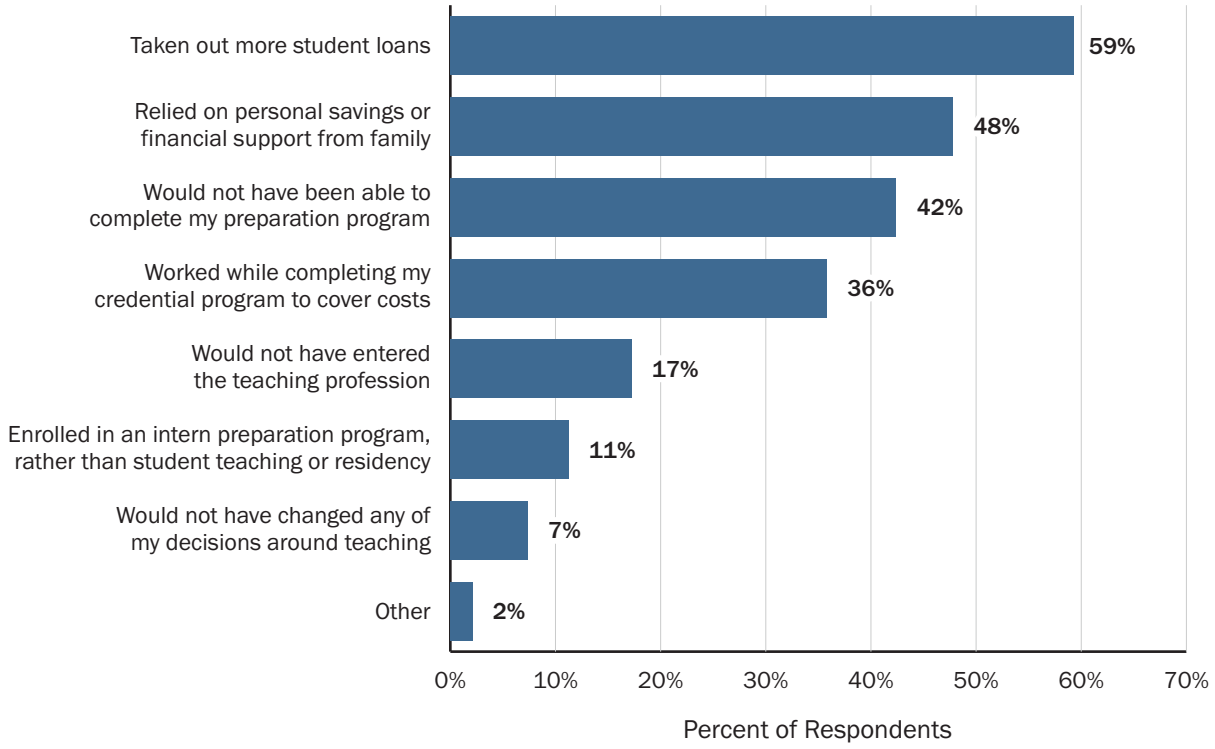
Relatedly, EPP staff at multiple programs also mentioned that because the GSTG can be distributed in multiple disbursements, rather than a single lump sum, it was helpful in keeping students enrolled in their programs. As a staff member at Teachers College of San Joaquin noted:

> [The GSTG] also helped with retention because, with the Golden State Teacher Grant, there is an expectation of being in good standing and being a current teacher preparation candidate to get the second disbursement. Without having that type of aid, it's easier for folks to drop out.

Open-ended responses to the survey also emphasized the integral role that the grant played in incentivizing and enabling respondents to teach at a priority school. Candidate responses included the following:

> The Golden State Teacher Grant inspired me to give back to priority schools like the ones I was brought up in.
>
> [GSTG] opened my eyes to schools which I did not initially look at when applying for jobs. It made me fall in love [with] working [in a] school with a high population of students who are in need.
>
> [GSTG] gave me the support to work at a small school district that has low funding compared to larger school districts.
>
> It is so influential for me. Cost aside, I would not have chosen to serve in a high-priority school if it paid the same as well-ranked schools without the GSTG.

Figure 4. What Respondents Say They Would Have Done if They Had Not Received the GSTG



Note: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Because survey respondents may select multiple options, percentages do not add up to 100% across categories.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant teacher candidate recipient survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Used for a Range of Financial Needs While Completing Preparation

In interviews, staff at educator preparation programs (EPPs) consistently noted the positive impact of the Golden State Teacher Grant Program on teacher candidates. It was described as "essential," "life-changing," and "critical." EPP staff noted that the grant reduced the need for students to take out loans. According to staff at California State University, San Bernardino:

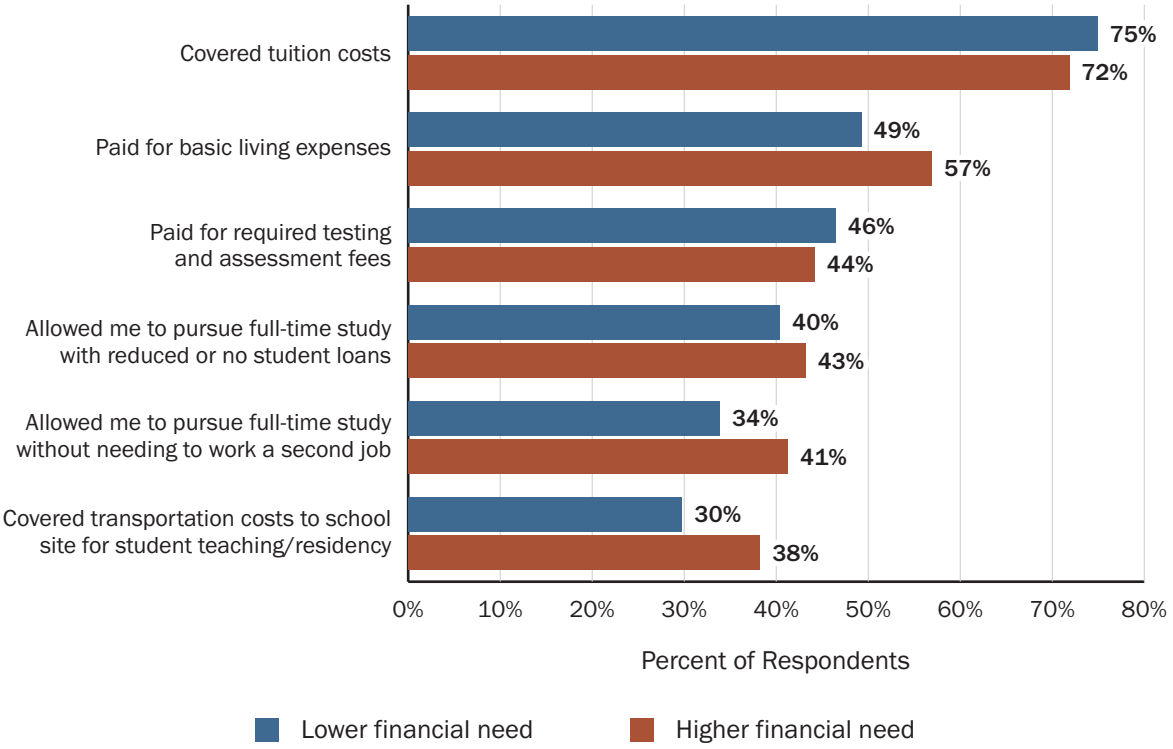
> The [Golden State Teacher Grant] is definitely a determining factor to [students] attending the credential program. … A lot of our students would not be attending if they didn't get it.

Cost can be a critical factor in the decision to enroll in teacher preparation, especially for teachers from underrepresented backgrounds who typically carry more debt throughout college.[44] Entering the teaching profession can be an expensive endeavor. In addition to tuition, teacher candidates have to cover living expenses (which are particularly high in California), costs associated with student teaching (such as transportation fees and unreimbursed expenses for the classroom), and exam and credentialing fees. Many aspiring teachers who pursue strong preparation programs with extended, often unpaid, clinical experiences are not able to support themselves financially without taking out loans and/or working.[45] Prior analyses using national data have found that beginning teachers, Black teachers, and special education teachers in particular are more likely to rely on loans to support their preparation.[46]

Our analysis finds the GSTG is helping candidates pay for the different costs of preparation, including tuition, living expenses, transportation costs, and testing and assessment fees (see Figure 5). While the vast majority of survey respondents—regardless of financial need—are relying on the grant to pay for tuition, recipients with higher financial need (i.e., those income-eligible for the maximum Pell Grant award) are more heavily relying on the grant to cover other expenses beyond tuition. Grant recipients with higher financial need are more likely than recipients with lower financial need to use the grant to cover basic living expenses (57% vs. 49%), as well as to pay for transportation costs to complete their student teaching or residency (38% vs. 30%). Notably, recipients with higher financial need were also more likely to report that the grant allowed them to pursue full-time study without needing to work a second job (41% vs. 34%).

Figure 5. How GSTG Survey Respondents Used the Grant, by Financial Need

How did funding provided by GSTG support you during your teacher preparation program?



Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Respondents with lower financial need are those who are not income-eligible for a Pell Grant (n = 1,819); respondents with higher financial need are those who are income-eligible for the maximum Pell Grant award (n = 1,253).

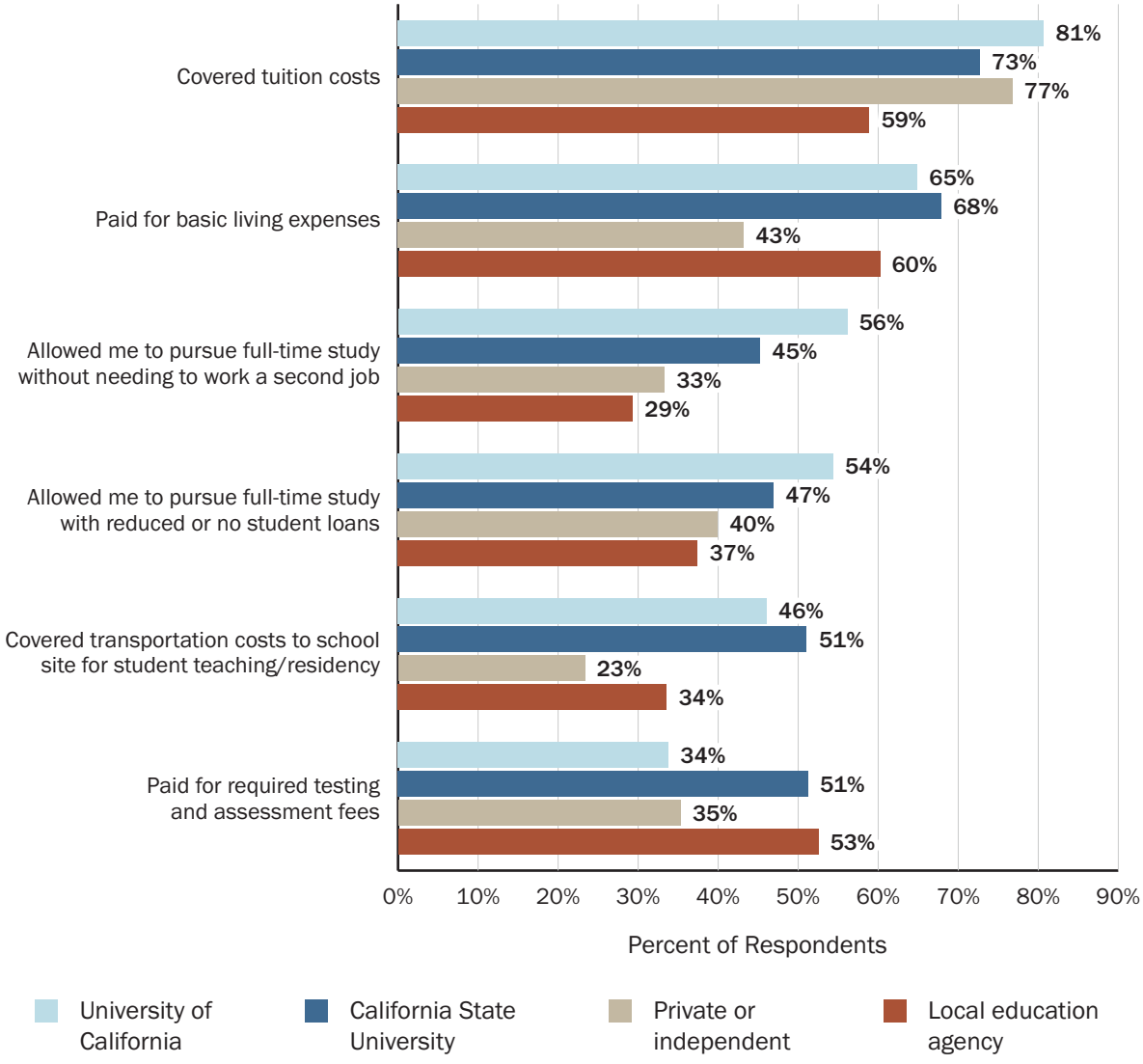
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant teacher candidate recipient survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Recipients also used GSTG funds differently depending on the type of institution they attended. As shown in Figure 6, most recipients used the grant to cover tuition. This is not surprising because institutions typically deduct any outstanding charges (such as tuition) owed to them before releasing remaining funds to candidates to cover other expenses. Notably, recipients in public institutions were much more likely than those in private programs to use GSTG funds for expenses beyond tuition, such as basic living costs and transportation to school sites during preparation. Compared to students in private institutions, students attending public institutions have more access to state financial aid that also help to cover tuition costs. This enables them to have more GSTG funds available for non-tuition expenses once tuition is covered. About half of respondents in public institutions reported that the grant enabled them to pursue full-time study with reduced or no student loans and without needing to work a second job, compared to about a third of respondents attending private EPPs.

Recipients at local education agencies, almost all of whom are intern teachers earning a full salary, are less likely to rely on the GSTG for tuition (which is typically deducted from their paychecks) and more frequently report using the funds to cover basic living expenses, testing and assessment fees, and transportation costs to school sites. Because most interns work full time and earn a teacher's salary, they are less likely than recipients at other institutions to report that the grant allowed them to pursue study without needing to rely on a job or student loans.

Figure 6. How GSTG Survey Respondents Used the Grant, by Institution Type

How did funding provided by GSTG support you during your teacher preparation program?



Note: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant teacher candidate recipient survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

In survey responses, many GSTG recipients emphasized just how crucial the grant was in covering preparation costs and living expenses. Candidate responses included the following:

> I was able to use some [of the grant money] to pay a deposit for an apartment when I was homeless. It helped relieve a lot of stress and made it so I could focus on teaching.

> The GSTG really came through for me when I was going through a financial crisis. There was no other option for me other than to take out more student loans. It's provided me gas money to go to my fieldwork hours and school.

Importantly, the GSTG has outsized impact on candidates who have limited access to other sources of financial aid. Over a quarter of GSTG recipients (27%) did not receive any other financial aid. The GSTG fills a critical gap for some potential candidates, as it is the only funding available for most individuals who have received Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which provides temporary protection from deportation and work authorization to eligible undocumented immigrants who were brought to the country as children.[47] Candidates earning their Pupil Support Services credential also have little or no access to financial aid and depend more heavily on the GSTG.

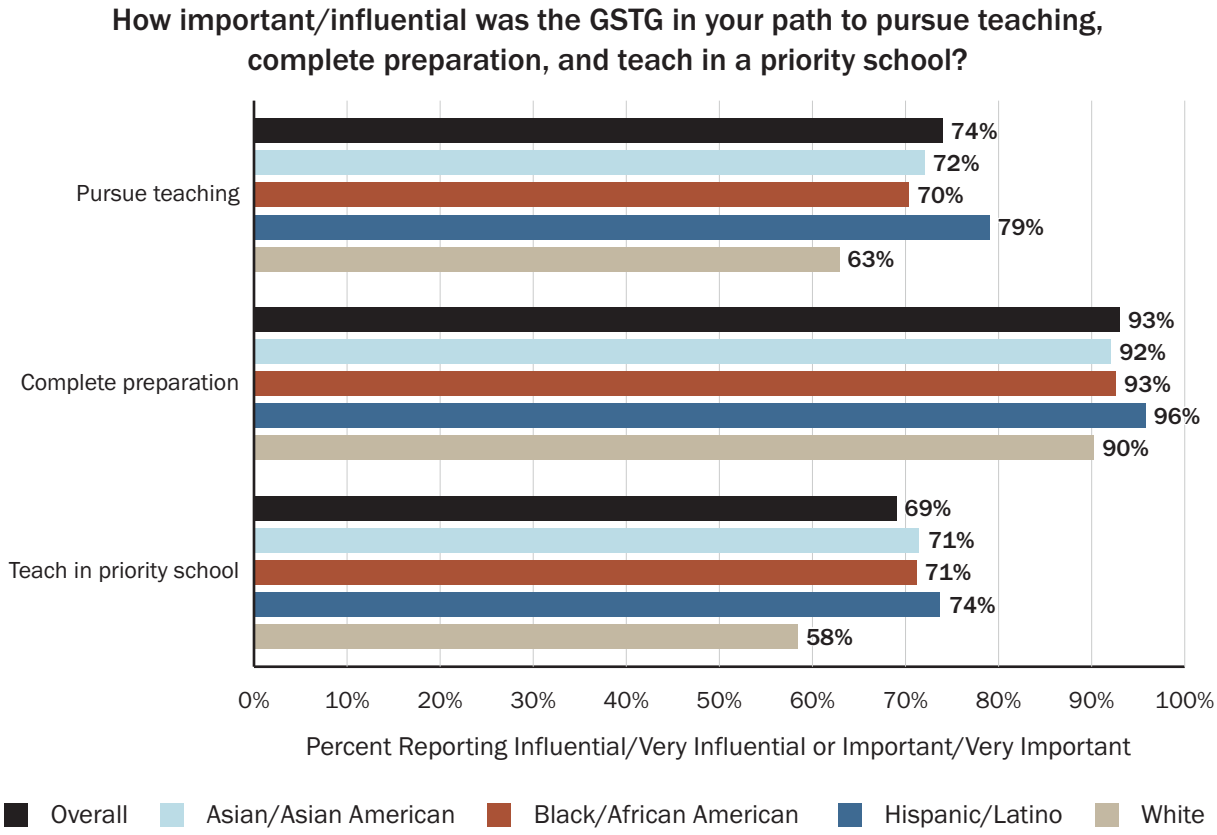
Meaningful Impact on Teacher Candidates of Color

While the grant was important to all recipients, GSTG teacher candidates of color who responded to the survey were most likely to report that the grant influenced their decisions to enter the profession, complete preparation, and teach in a priority school, as indicated in Figure 7. This points to the potential impact of the grant on increasing the supply of diverse and well-prepared teacher candidates in priority schools. One Latina GSTG recipient with higher financial needs describes the importance of the grant for her decision-making:

> Coming from a low-income family, the financial burden of pursuing a teaching credential felt overwhelming. I had already taken out loans during my undergraduate studies and was hesitant to take on more debt. … At the time, I was working as a teacher assistant and truly loved being in the classroom, but I didn't see a realistic path forward. Receiving the Golden State Teacher Grant gave me the support I needed. … Thanks to the grant, I am now teaching.

These findings are consistent with the extensive literature reflecting that financial aid can be especially critical for teachers from underrepresented backgrounds. Prior research shows that Black teachers and Latino/a teachers are more likely to rely on loans to support their preparation.[48] Further, Black, Latino/a, and Asian American students are more likely than their White peers to report that their student debt limited their choice of educational institutions.[49] Black educators accrue the most loan debt, with surveys of teachers finding 1 in 5 Black educators owing more than $105,000 in student loans.[50] Studies interviewing Black and Latino/a teacher candidates have found that financial support is essential for supporting them to complete their teacher preparation.[51] Preparation models that offer stipends for teacher candidates, such as teacher residencies, have also been shown to attract more teachers from underrepresented backgrounds and produce more effective teachers.[52]

Figure 7. GSTG Teacher Survey Respondents' Perceived Impact of the Grant, by Race and Ethnicity

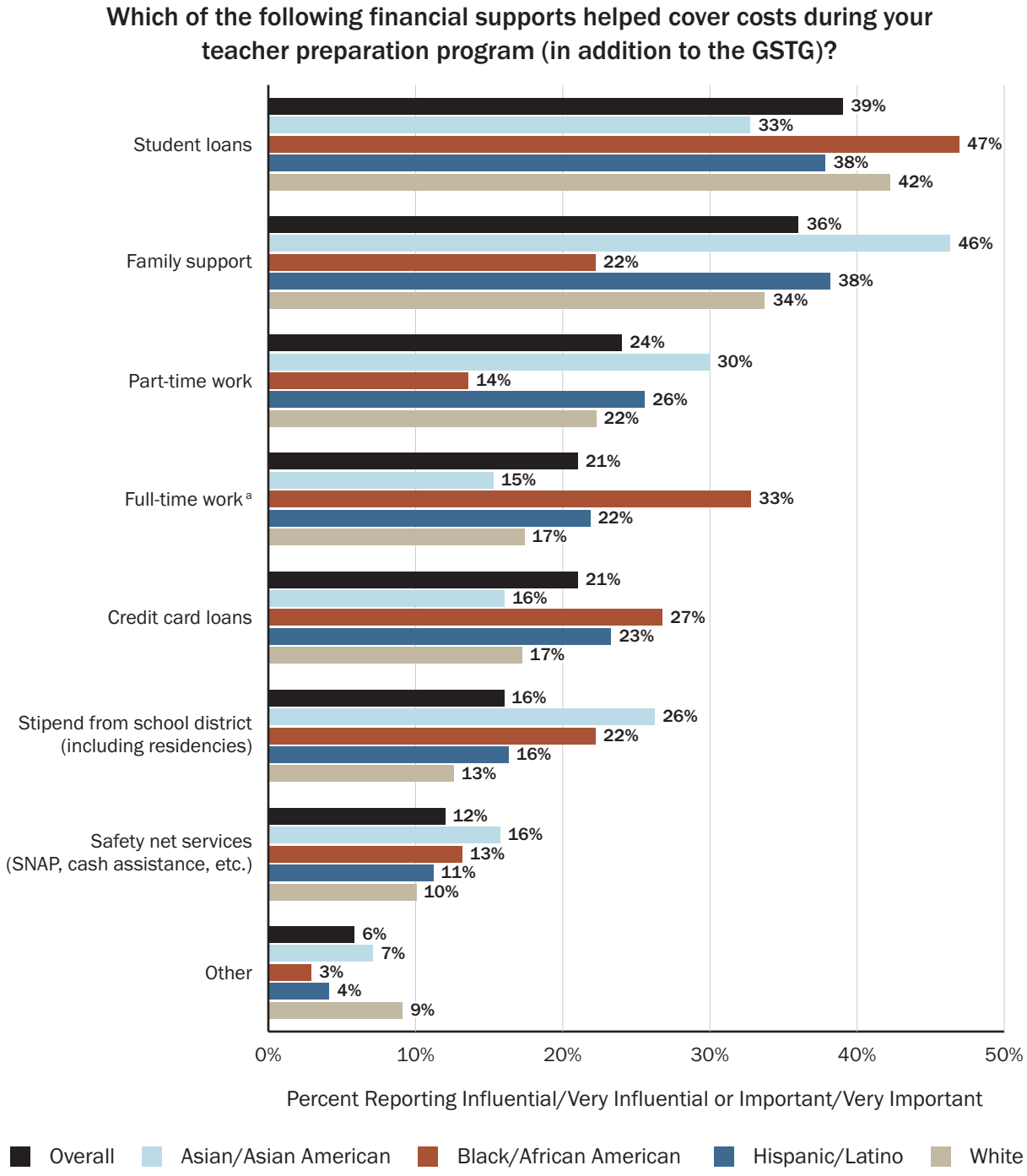


Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Numbers represent the percentage of respondents who reported that the grant was "influential" or "very influential" to their decisions to pursue teaching and teach in a priority school, as well as the percentage who reported the grant was "important" or "very important" for their ability to complete their teacher preparation.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant teacher candidate recipient survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Even with the grant, survey results indicate that many recipients still had to rely on other sources of income to cover costs, and this was especially true for recipients of color. As shown in Figure 8, 1 in 5 survey respondents reported working full time (21%) and nearly a quarter worked part time (24%). Additionally, 4 in 10 took on student loans (39%), and 21% relied on credit card loans. Black teacher candidates were most likely to report engaging in full-time work (33%) and relying on student loans (47%) and credit card loans (27%) to support their preparation. Without the grant, it could be especially difficult for these teacher candidates to make it through preparation.

Figure 8. Additional Financial Sources GSTG Survey Respondents Use to Fund Their Preparation, by Race and Ethnicity



Note: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant.

[a] Because we are interested in additional funding sources of income to support preparation, we excluded interns for this analysis, as they earn a full-time salary as a teacher.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant teacher candidate recipient survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Critical for Meeting Financial Needs and Reduced Amount Will Likely Lessen Impact

Research finds that financial aid is more effective when it offsets a meaningful portion of teacher candidates' preparation costs.[53] A key goal of the GSTG is to substantially cover the cost of teacher preparation and enable newly credentialed teachers in high-need schools to begin their career with little or no student debt. By design, the program offers a financial incentive to candidates who commit to serve in high-need schools for a period of 2 to 4 years[54]—and is thus both a recruitment tool and a retention tool.

A key goal of the GSTG is to substantially cover the cost of teacher preparation and enable newly credentialed teachers in high-need schools to begin their career with little or no student debt.

One important metric in analyzing how well the GSTG is meeting this purpose is understanding the proportion of financial need met by the grant. This is a function of the cost of attendance of pursuing a credential at a preparation program (including tuition and cost of living) and the amount of financial aid that a teacher candidate receives prior to getting the GSTG.

Cost of attendance and unmet need vary based on the institution and individual circumstances of teacher candidates (see Understanding Financial Aid). Teacher candidates who do not qualify for in-state tuition or who have more dependents tend to face a higher cost of attendance. As shown in Figure 9, the average cost of attendance for a typical teacher candidate who is female, age 25–30, and with average income and assets is approximately $32,000 at California State University (CSU) programs, considerably lower than what it would cost for them to attend local education agency–based programs ($43,000), University of California (UC) programs ($54,000), and private programs ($47,000). At private programs, which collectively enroll almost half of all teacher candidates in the state, the cost of attendance for a typical teacher candidate varies widely, ranging from $14,000 to $86,000.[55]

Understanding Financial Aid

Cost of attendance encompasses all the expenses of attending a preparation program. The California Student Aid Commission defines this as including tuition, books and materials, food, transportation, housing, and personal expenses. Cost of attendance can vary among candidates at the same institution due to variations in their individual circumstances.

Student Aid Index (SAI) is an index that is generated from information a student provides in their federal Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form or the California Dream Act Application (CADAA), including their personal and family income and assets. Formerly known as Expected Family Contribution, the SAI reflects how much a student and their family are expected to contribute toward their cost of attendance.[a]

Unmet need is the amount of cost a student still has to cover prior to receiving the GSTG, but accounting for any other aid the student receives. Unmet need is calculated by subtracting the Student Aid Index and non-GSTG aid (federal, state, and local gift aid) from a student's cost of attendance.[b]

GSTG award amount is the sum of a student's unmet need and their SAI, as the GSTG can be used to cover an individual's expected contribution toward the cost of attendance. Individuals with unmet need plus SAI equal to or exceeding the award cap (currently $10,000; previously $20,000 before July 2024) receive the maximum award amount.

Percentage of unmet needs met by the GSTG is calculated by dividing an individual's GSTG award amount by their unmet need prior to the GSTG being awarded, capped at 100%.[c]

Note: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant.

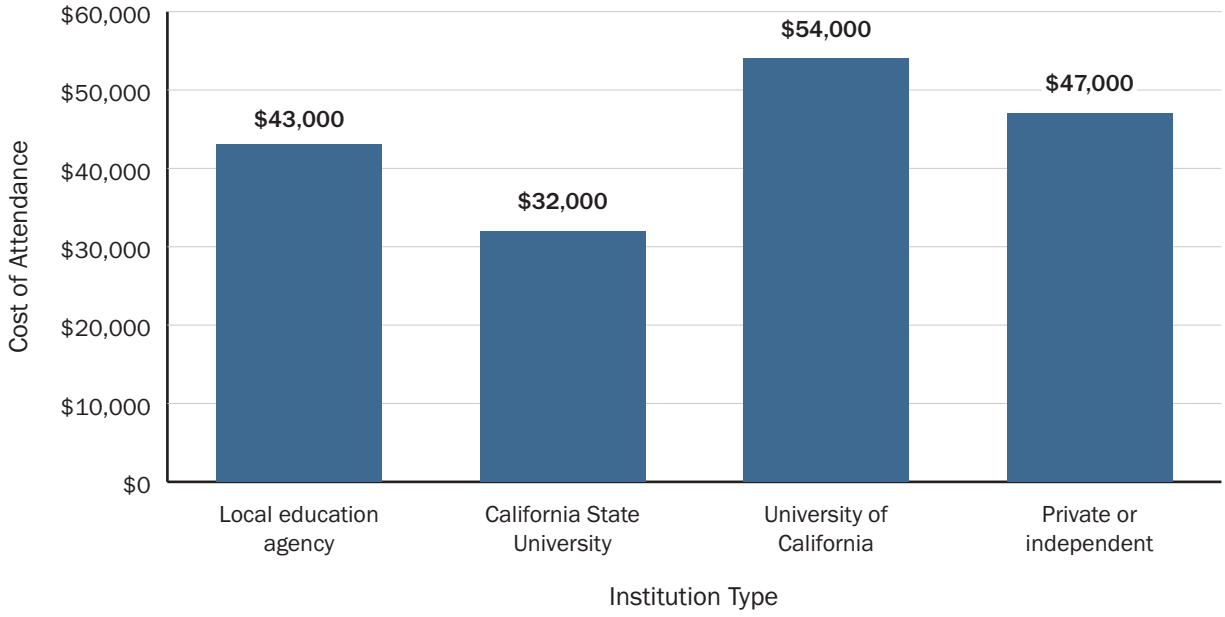
[a] Beginning in 2024–25, the Student Aid Index (SAI) replaced Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The SAI is largely similar to EFC; both are an index derived from an individual's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. On both, a higher value indicates lower financial need. The SAI expands the lower bound of the EFC from 0 to -1,500, with -1,500 representing individuals of highest financial need.

[b] For purposes of calculating unmet need, all negative SAIs are considered as 0. A teacher candidate's institution of study reports to the California Student Aid Commission the amount of other aid the candidate receives. This may include loans; however, loans can be replaced or reduced by the GSTG. Federal Student Aid, U.S. Department of Education. *How financial aid is calculated*.

[c] Since the GSTG can be awarded to cover a student's SAI (their expected contribution toward the cost of attendance), there are cases in which the GSTG award amount is greater than the unmet need. In these instances, we consider the recipient's needs to be fully met, and their percentage of needs met is considered to be 100%.

Source: California Student Aid Commission. (2022). *2021–222 Student Expenses and Resource survey: Insights brief*.

Figure 9. Annual Cost of Attendance for a Typical GSTG Recipient (2025 dollars)



Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Amounts are in 2025 dollars, adjusted using the Consumer Price Index. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand. A typical teacher candidate is 26–30 years old, female, and has average financial need (Student Aid Index = 5,680).

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant administrative data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Table 6 shows the unmet need of GSTG recipients by recipient characteristics and institution type. A teacher candidate's unmet needs can vary widely; however, on average, the unmet need of GSTG recipients is $25,200 before receiving the GSTG. Unmet need is higher among teacher candidates with greater financial need and among those who are enrolled in educator preparation programs outside of the CSU system. CSU recipients tend to have lower unmet need; this is likely due to lower tuition fees at CSUs as well as the availability of state financial aid such as Cal Grants and the Middle Class Scholarship, which are only available for certain teacher candidates in a California public institution.[56] The lower unmet need among CSU teacher candidates may partially explain the lower uptake rates of the GSTG among CSU campuses.

Overall, the proportion of unmet need covered by the GSTG is lower for teacher candidates with greater financial need (those who are income-eligible for the maximum Pell Grant) compared to candidates with less financial need (those who are not income-eligible for Pell). The difference was larger prior to legislative changes to prioritize the grant for teacher candidates with greater financial need beginning in July 2024 (74% vs. 92%). The gap was substantially reduced, but still present, after grants were prioritized based on financial need (46% vs. 50%).

Table 6. Proportion of Needs Met by the GSTG, by Financial Need and Institution Type

Recipient characteristic	Unmet need prior to receiving the GSTG for all recipients (2021–22 to 2024–25)	Percentage of needs met after receiving the GSTG	
		$20,000 maximum award; no prioritization of grant	$10,000 maximum award; grant prioritization based on need
Overall	$25,200	80%	47%
Financial need[a]			
Not eligible for Pell Grant	$14,800	92%	50%
Pell Grant eligible	$25,000	81%	49%
Maximum Pell Grant eligible	$29,900	74%	46%
Institution type			
Local education agency	$26,100	50%	30%
Private or independent institution of higher education	$29,300	67%	42%
California State University (CSU) system	$15,100	95%	60%
University of California (UC) system	$38,700	57%	34%

Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Unmet need amounts are in 2025 dollars, adjusted using the Consumer Price Index. 2020–21 is excluded due to data quality issues. *N* = 20,984, with 19,053 teacher candidate recipients (91%) under the $20,000 maximum award policy and 1,923 recipients (9%) under the $10,000 maximum award policy. Under the $10,000 maximum award policy, candidates with higher financial need are prioritized to receive the grant.

[a] Pell Grant eligibility is based on teacher candidates' Student Aid Index as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Many teacher candidates in California are not eligible to receive a Pell Grant, so this represents income eligibility rather than receipt of Pell Grants. The Pell Grant eligible category includes candidates who were maximum Pell Grant eligible.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant administrative data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Our analyses of unmet need suggest that the maximum award amount of the GSTG matters, and that reducing the grant from $20,000 to $10,000 had a negative impact on the program's overall ability to support candidates' financial needs. As shown in Table 6, recipients subject to the $10,000 award cap had a much lower proportion of needs met (47%, compared to 80% under the $20,000 cap).[57] The difference is especially stark among those attending CSUs, where the GSTG was able to cover almost all unmet need (95%) prior to the award cap, but the percentage of needs met dropped to just 60% for students under the $10,000 maximum award policy.

Survey data suggest that the reduction in the maximum grant amount in 2024 resulted in more GSTG recipients needing to work or take out loans. According to EPP interviews, the initial $20,000 award covered a substantial portion of recipient tuition and expenses, making a significant difference in student loan borrowing. One EPP leader at Alder Graduate School of Education noted:

> Before the GSTG … we had 70% of our students taking out $20,000 or $30,000 [in loans] on average. When the GSTG was at $20,000, that covered almost all of tuition. … The number of students needing to borrow loans dropped to 10 to 15%. … So it's been a huge game changer for what it means to be able to do a teacher prep program.

Individuals who were subject to the $10,000 maximum award amount were more likely than those under the $20,000 cap to rely on loans (43% vs. 38%), part-time work (36% vs. 29%), and full-time work (20% vs. 16%) to cover preparation costs and living expenses.[58] This suggests that reducing the award amount may force candidates to seek additional funding, limiting the time they can dedicate to preparation and also increasing their financial stress. Some recipients noted challenges resulting from the reduction, including delays in their credentialing by a year and increasing their reliance on loans. As one survey respondent wrote:

> [When the GSTG was cut from $20,000 to $10,000] … all of a sudden I had to find $10,000 somewhere else, in the middle of taking over a class full time, working a second part-time job already, and trying to make the most of the residency. … Many of my classmates had to quit or defer, and I myself had to take out a loan in order to stay in my program.

Nonetheless, in interviews and open-ended survey responses overall, EPP staff and recipients appreciated receiving the grant and noted that even at the lower award level, the GSTG was the deciding factor in their decision to pursue a teaching credential.

Program Uptake at Educator Preparation Programs: Learning From Leading Adopters

Despite the multiple changes in program parameters over time (see The Evolution of the GSTG Program Over Time), the process of applying for and receiving a Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) has remained fairly straightforward, offering candidates financial support up front to offset the costs of tuition and living expenses as they go through preparation. Candidates can apply for the grant prior to being accepted into an educator preparation program (EPP). EPP programs then verify the enrollment status of the candidate and determine the award amount based on their cost of attendance as well as other aid that the student receives. The GSTG can be used to cover tuition and fees, living expenses, and the portion of costs that financial aid programs usually expect individuals

and their families to contribute. Unlike most other aid, the GSTG is available to students regardless of their family's financial status, although as of July 2024, applicants with the lowest income and assets are prioritized for funding. Institutions can request funding from the California Student Aid Commission at the beginning of every academic term or as a lump sum for the year. EPPs typically receive the money within 2 to 8 weeks of the request and then disburse funds to grantees.

Based on our analysis of administrative data from the California Student Aid Commission and California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the percentage of teacher candidates who apply for and receive the Golden State Teacher Grant varies greatly by institution. The average uptake rate by institution is roughly 36%, but it ranges from 0% in some EPPs and local education agencies to nearly 100% in others. For example, among the 53 approved EPPs sponsored by private or independent institutions of higher education, 9 had more than 75% of new candidates receive a GSTG between 2020–21 and 2023–24, while 24 had less than 25% receive the grant during that period.

We interviewed EPP leaders from six programs with relatively higher GSTG uptake rates to learn more about their approach to implementing the grant. They described several strategies they use to promote the grant. First, these EPPs notify students about the grant early and often, starting from the moment a student expresses interest in the program. Students can learn about the GSTG through multiple channels, including college information sessions, conversations with faculty and staff, financial aid information packets, and the EPP's social media. EPPs also provide resources to support students through the application process, including support sessions and informational flyers with step-by-step instructions.

Several EPPs noted that they do targeted outreach to students who have not applied for the grant, as well as students with high financial need who would especially benefit from the funding. One leader from Alder Graduate School of Education noted: "We track all the candidates and see who's applied, who hasn't applied. And if they haven't applied, then we [send] follow-up emails." This approach likely contributes to Alder's high uptake rate of the GSTG and its students' reduced reliance on loans. A recent study on Alder found that between 2018–19 and 2022–23, a time period during which the GSTG was implemented, the percentage of Alder residents taking out federal loans for their teacher preparation fell from 72% to 26%, and the average federal loan amount fell from $27,000 to $10,000.

EPP leaders also spoke about challenges they encountered when implementing the grant, which can result in a delay in funds disbursement and potentially limit the impact of the grant. Notably, uncertainty about the continued availability of GSTG funding as well as changes in eligibility have made it more difficult for EPP program staff to use the GSTG for candidate recruitment. Staff at some programs have been hesitant to introduce the grant to potential students because they were not sure funds would be available. As Shireen Pavri, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Educator and Leadership Programs at California State University, noted:

> It's taken a while for us to get the word out more widely. … The legislature has, on a regular basis, changed the criteria. … Keeping up with all of these changes, it takes some time [to] get the word out to our students. If we had multiyear funding, we'd be able to do a much better job with consistent [messaging]. But I think now pretty much most of our students know about it. We use it in our outreach and recruitment materials. But again, it becomes [challenging]. We don't want to bring [students] in under false pretenses.

EPP leaders also indicated that additional eligibility requirements created administrative burdens for their staff who need to certify eligibility, leading to delays in candidates receiving the funds. With the exclusion of interns from the grant, some EPPs reported intentionally delaying their processing of the GSTG altogether to avoid misawarding the grant because their candidates sometimes switch from preservice to intern programs.

Another challenge is the interaction between the GSTG with other financial aid that teacher candidates receive, such as the Middle Class Scholarship (MCS) that is automatically applied to income-eligible undergraduates at a public institution. Because both the GSTG and the MCS are awarded depending on the amount of other aid received, when a student receives one grant, the other is lowered. EPP staff said grant recipients have had to return money in the past due to overawarding of financial aid.

One promising shift in implementation as a result of legislative changes was creating stability for GSTG recipients in the definition of what counts as a "priority school" for purposes of satisfying the service commitment. Legislation has clarified that a GSTG recipient can use the most recent priority school list that is available when they seek employment, and that, once hired, service at that school will continue to meet the service requirement even if the school drops off the "priority school" list in the future.

Overall, despite some implementation challenges, program staff and financial aid officers repeatedly noted the benefits of the program and expressed appreciation for the supports offered by the California Student Aid Commission staff in administering the program. The words of one CSU leader captured sentiments we heard from many: "This is a pivotal source of funding for our students."

Sources: Learning Policy Institute interviews with educator preparation program staff; S.B. 114, § 89. (2023); Yun, C., Fitz, J., Nakajima, T., & Mauerman, C. (2025). *Educating for equity: Alder Graduate School's teacher residency*. Learning Policy Institute.

Key Takeaways and Policy Recommendations

Our findings overwhelmingly indicate that the Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) Program offers an important source of funding that is encouraging educator candidates to enter the profession, helping them support themselves during preparation, and incentivizing them to teach in high-need schools. Over the first 5 years of its implementation (2020–21 to 2024–25), the GSTG has supported more than 22,500 teacher candidates and 5,500 Pupil Personnel Services candidates (i.e., those training to become school counselors, social workers, psychologists). The number of recipients increased every year between 2020–21 and 2023–24 as eligibility expanded and visibility of the program increased. In 2023–24, when the GSTG was available to all teacher candidates, nearly half of California's new teacher candidates received a grant (45%). Thus, the GSTG likely contributed to the 23% increase in the number of California-prepared teacher candidates who earned a preliminary teaching credential between 2022–23 and 2023–24.

An incredibly popular program, the GSTG has served thousands of teacher candidates, especially from backgrounds that are historically underrepresented in teaching. Interviewed staff at educator preparation programs described the GSTG funds as "essential," "life-changing," and "critical" for serving their candidates. In particular, our findings indicate how the following groups have benefited from the GSTG:

- **Candidates of Color.** More than 7 in 10 (71%) of surveyed GSTG recipients identified as people of color, and these candidates were especially likely to report that the grant encouraged them to pursue teaching and teach in a priority school.
- **Candidates With High Financial Need.** Nearly 4 in every 5 GSTG teacher candidate recipients were income-eligible for the federal Pell Grant, and survey results indicate that the GSTG especially helped candidates with higher financial needs pay for basic living expenses, cover transportation costs to their school site, and pursue full-time study without needing to work a second job.
- **Career Switchers.** More than 40% of GSTG recipients were over age 30, suggesting that the grant may be attracting career changers who may not have considered teaching as a viable career choice without this funding.
- **Candidates With Limited Access to Other Sources of Financial Aid.** Over a quarter of GSTG recipients (27%) did not receive any other financial aid. The GSTG fills a critical gap for some potential candidates, as it is the only funding available for most Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. Candidates earning their Pupil Support Services credential also have little or no access to financial aid and depend more heavily on the GSTG.

GSTG has encouraged thousands of candidates to enter careers in high-need schools and subjects. Nearly three quarters of survey respondents said the GSTG was influential in their decision to pursue teaching, and two thirds said the grant was influential in their decision to teach in a high-need school. Among survey respondents who are currently teaching, almost 9 in 10 reported teaching at a priority school, and almost all of these teachers indicated that they wanted to stay teaching at their schools after fulfilling their service obligations. GSTG recipients also reported teaching in high-need subjects. Among surveyed recipients who are currently teaching, 38% indicated teaching special education, 33% reported teaching mathematics, and 30% reported teaching science (with some respondents selecting more than one teaching assignment).

Finally, GSTG awards offer critical financial support for teacher candidates and, combined with other sources, create the opportunity for debt-free preparation. Nearly 60% of survey respondents indicated that they would have had to take out more student loans in the absence of the GSTG, and 42% indicated they would not have been able to finish their preparation without it. The original maximum award of $20,000 covered, on average, 80% of recipients' tuition fees and other living expenses that were not covered by other aid; this dropped to 47% after the maximum award was reduced to $10,000 in July 2024. The reduction in the maximum grant amount has resulted in more candidates seeking additional funding or work, increasing their reliance on loans, or delaying their preparation plans. The $10,000 award still offers meaningful financial support, especially when it can be combined with other forms of state or federal aid.

These findings point to several steps that California policymakers and practitioners can take to further strengthen the Golden State Teacher Grant Program as well as related programs meant to financially support teacher candidates:

- **Ensure stability of funding and program administration.** The program received $50 million in new funding in the 2025–26 budget, a modest infusion to sustain the GSTG for 1 year. Without ongoing funding, this important program will not be able to continue. Given that there were nearly 7,500 GSTG recipients in 2024–25, $50 million may be insufficient to continue meeting the current demand from teacher and Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) candidates at the $10,000 maximum award level. After 5 years, the GSTG is widely known in the field, among both aspiring educators and the educator preparation programs (EPPs) that prepare them. Stable long-term funding will allow the GSTG to continue making a strong contribution to California's supply of fully prepared educators. EPP staff also emphasized that multiyear funding and consistent program administration would enable them to promote and implement the program more effectively.

- **Benchmark funding to cover a substantial portion of teacher candidates' costs of preparation.** Prior research on teacher service scholarship and loan forgiveness programs suggests that, when the financial benefit meaningfully offsets the cost of professional preparation, these programs can successfully recruit and retain high-quality professionals into the high-need fields and schools where they are most needed.[59] While many recipients noted that the GSTG was still a deciding factor in their decision to pursue teaching after the maximum award amount was reduced from $20,000 to $10,000, the policy change has weakened the program's ability to substantially cover candidates' financial needs, resulting in more recipients relying on loans or taking on a job during preparation. Policymakers can maximize the GSTG's impact by sustaining funding levels so that the grant covers a substantial portion of candidates' preparation costs. Even after accounting for other aid, GSTG teacher candidate recipients still have to cover $25,000, on average, beyond what they and their families can afford to contribute.

- **Support program implementation in the field to ensure broad access to the GSTG, timely disbursal of funds, and high service fulfillment rates.** Uptake of the GSTG differs substantially, ranging from 0% in some EPPs to full uptake in others. Some EPPs, especially programs with limited financial aid staff, may benefit from additional support navigating program changes, certifying eligibility, targeting outreach to prospective and current students, and disbursing funds in a timely manner. Given that some surveyed recipients reported difficulty in finding a job at an eligible school, local

education agencies should be informed and engaged to be strong partners in ensuring that GSTG recipients are hired in a timely manner and placed in priority schools where they can fulfill their service commitment.

- **Apply lessons learned from the GSTG as the state implements other financial supports for teacher candidates, including student teaching stipends.** The 2025–26 state budget includes $300 million for the Student Teacher Stipend Program. This program will provide a $10,000 stipend for preservice candidates during the year in which they complete their student teaching or teacher residency.[60] The program complements the GSTG Program by subsidizing the costs of teacher preparation during the most time-intensive portion of teacher preparation. Together with the current GSTG Program, it can provide up to $20,000 to subsidize the cost of teacher preparation for candidates, which our study found was an amount more effective for meeting candidates' needs. Lessons from the first 5 years of the GSTG suggest this new program will benefit from being designed in collaboration with interest holders, well communicated to implementers, and maintained with stability over time. Communications can be facilitated by the teacher recruitment initiative funded in the 2025–26 budget and managed by the Kern County Superintendent of Schools.[61] This initiative should integrate strong, direct communication to aspiring educators about the availability of the Golden State Teacher Grant, along with the new Student Teacher Stipend Program.
- **Strengthen data collection to better evaluate impacts of the grant.** The California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) largely relies on voluntary reporting from EPPs and candidates to track credentialing and service fulfillment rates, and administrative data on GSTG recipients do not include recipient race or ethnicity because this was not required by legislation. A systematic approach to linking and analyzing data across CSAC, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and the California Department of Education, such as through a data-sharing agreement among the three agencies, would improve long-term tracking of the GSTG's impact, as well as other educator workforce programs. With a linked data system, state agencies and researchers could identify GSTG recipients in the CTC credentialing and CDE staffing data, which enables them to track the credentialing, employment, and retention of GSTG recipients over time. Such data would also allow CSAC to track and provide support to recipients who may be struggling to obtain their credentials or complete their service commitment in a timely manner, reducing the likelihood of grant repayment, which could have significant consequences for the financial well-being of these recipients.

This study overall suggests that the Golden State Teacher Grant Program has been critical for enabling tens of thousands of educators to enter the profession with fewer loans and to serve in high-need schools and subject areas. Findings from this study also suggest several steps to further strengthen the Golden State Teacher Grant Program as well as related programs—such as the new Student Teacher Stipend Program—meant to financially support teacher candidates. Ensuring long-term funding for the GSTG such that it offsets a meaningful portion of preparation costs, supporting program implementation, and improving data systems will allow the GSTG to meet its full potential to increase California's supply of well-prepared and diverse teachers who are more likely to remain teaching in high-need schools.

Appendix A: Data and Methods

This study tracks and analyzes statewide participation in the Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) Program over the program's first 5 years and examines grant recipients' perceptions of the impacts of the program on supporting their entry into the profession, completion of their credentialing, and decisions to teach in a priority school. As the parameters of the GSTG Program have changed over time—notably, changes to eligibility as well as a reduction in the maximum award amount—this study tracks trends over time to see whether participation in the grant shifts with these policy changes. Additionally, this study includes findings from interviews with six educator preparation programs (EPPs) with high uptake rates of the grant to identify effective strategies and challenges in implementing the grant. The findings have important policy implications both in California and nationally, as policymakers consider strategies to recruit, prepare, and retain a well-prepared, diverse educator workforce, particularly in high-need schools.

Data

Data From the California Student Aid Commission

For this study, the Learning Policy Institute obtained two datasets from the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC): an administrative dataset of 28,663 GSTG recipients who received the grant from 2020–21 to 2024–25 and survey data from 6,026 GSTG recipients that CSAC collected in spring 2025. Table A1 summarizes the information included in both datasets.

Table A1. Data Included in Each California Student Aid Commission Data Source

Characteristic	Administrative data	Survey data
Recipient demographics		
Gender	x	x
Year of birth	x	
Race/ethnicity		x
Home county	x	
Student Aid Index/Expected Family Contribution	x	
GSTG award		
Eligibility status	x	
GSTG award amount	x	
GSTG amount paid	x	
Preparation		
Institution name	x	
Most recent credential		x
Pathway/Specialization		x
Cost of attendance (tuition and living expenses)	x	
Aid received in addition to the GSTG	x	

Characteristic	Administrative data	Survey data
Employment		
Grade(s) taught		x
Subject area(s) taught		x
Years as teacher of record		x
Working in an eligible California priority school or California State Preschool Program (CSPP)		x
Years teaching at a priority school or in a CSPP		x
Plans to work in a priority school or in a CSPP after service obligations		x
Reasons for not teaching		x
Reasons for not teaching at a priority school or CSPP		x
Plans to transfer to a priority or CSPP		x
Perceived impact of the GSTG		
Importance of the GSTG in completing preparation program		x
How candidates used money from the GSTG during preparation		x
Influence of the GSTG as an incentive to work in a priority school or CSPP		x
What candidates would have done without the GSTG		x
Additional financial supports GSTG recipients relied on to cover preparation costs		x
Ways in which the GSTG made a difference (open-ended question)		x

Notes: GSTG = Golden State Teacher Grant. Both sources of data include GSTG recipients from 2020–21 to 2024–25.
Source: Golden State Teacher Grant administrative and survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

CSAC Administrative Data

The CSAC administrative data contain information on all GSTG recipients from 2020–21 through 2024–25, as of April 2025. The data, originally with 46,523 observations, include individuals who were initially marked ineligible for the grant but later became eligible, as well as individuals who were eligible for the grant but ultimately declined to receive it. For our analytic sample, we dropped individuals who declined the grant and only kept the first year a recipient received the grant. Our final analytic sample consisted of 28,663 GSTG recipients from 94 institutions across teacher candidate and Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) candidate recipients.

The administrative data include recipients' demographic information, including gender, birth year, and county of residence. However, it does not contain information on recipients' race or ethnicity. The data also include information on the recipients' financial need as measured by Student Aid Index/Expected Family Contribution. Student Aid Index/Expected Family Contribution is calculated with information a student provides through the federal Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California

Dream Act Application form and is used to determine a student's eligibility for financial aid, including their personal and family income, assets, and household size.[62] The administrative data also include information on the EPP that the recipient attends, the type of credential they are pursuing (teaching or Pupil Personnel Services), and their program completion and credentialing date. The dataset also includes recipients' financial information, including their cost of attendance, amount of other financial aid received, unmet need (which is the difference between their cost of attendance and other aid received), and the amount of GSTG awarded and disbursed.

CSAC Survey Data

In April 2025, CSAC collected its own data about GSTG recipients' experiences via two surveys—one sent to recipients who had been pursuing a teaching credential and the other to recipients pursuing a PPS credential. The surveys were sent to all GSTG recipients via an individualized link that allowed the data to be linked to CSAC administrative data. CSAC received valid responses from 4,567 recipients pursuing a teaching credential (20% response rate) and 1,459 recipients pursuing a PPS credential (25% response rate). We removed survey responses from 138 individuals from our analyses because, according to the administrative data, they responded to a survey that did not match the credential they were pursuing.

Data collected by the surveys included demographic information, including race and ethnicity, gender, credential type, and credential year (if applicable). GSTG recipients who indicated they were teaching were asked the grade, the subject, whether they were teaching in a California priority school or a California State Preschool Program (CSPP), and how many years they have taught in a priority or CSPP school. The survey also asked respondents about the perceived impact of the GSTG grant, such as the extent to which the grant was influential in their decision to pursue a career teaching and work in a priority school. The survey data also collected information on what the recipients used the grant for and what they would have done if they had not received the grant.

The survey allowed respondents to provide open-ended responses to multiple-choice questions and included open-ended questions, such as the ways in which the GSTG grant made a difference to recipients. For the complete survey, see Appendix B: Golden State Teacher Grant Survey. Table A2 presents the demographic characteristics of GSTG recipients represented in the administrative dataset (population data) as well as those who responded to the survey. Overall, survey respondents look largely similar to the population of GSTG recipients. However, respondents in both teacher and PPS surveys were slightly more likely to identify as female and were older than GSTG recipients in the administrative data. Among those pursuing a teaching credential, survey respondents were more likely to attend a California State University and less likely to attend a private institution, compared to the administrative dataset.

Table A2. Basic Descriptives of Golden State Teacher Grant Recipients in the Administrative and Survey Data

Variable	Teacher credential recipients		Pupil Personnel Services credential recipients	
	Administrative data	Survey data	Administrative data	Survey data
Number of recipients	22,851	4,567	5,812	1,459
Gender				
Female	75.8%	79.5%	83.1%	86.8%
Male	24.2%	20.5%	16.9%	13.2%
Age				
25 and under	33.6%	30.2%	34.9%	33.1%
26–30	25.4%	22.3%	31.2%	30.6%
31–35	14.9%	14.2%	15.6%	15.7%
36–45	17.1%	21.0%	14.0%	14.7%
46–55	7.4%	9.9%	3.9%	5.4%
Over 55	1.7%	2.3%	0.4%	0.5%
Financial need[a]				
Not eligible for Pell Grant	22.4%	24.6%	25.9%	30.3%
Pell Grant eligible	77.6%	75.4%	74.1%	69.7%
Maximum Pell Grant eligible	47.0%	45.0%	40.9%	38.0%
Home region				
Northern	4.2%	5.0%	2.4%	2.5%
Bay Area	10.9%	11.8%	8.3%	9.3%
Central	30.6%	31.1%	29.6%	28.2%
Los Angeles	22.3%	22.6%	26.1%	26.2%
Southern	32.1%	29.6%	33.6%	33.7%
Institution type				
Local education agency	10.5%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Private or independent institution of higher education	53.8%	48.5%	73.7%	72.9%
California State University	30.1%	32.7%	24.9%	25.8%
University of California	5.8%	5.3%	1.4%	1.2%

Notes: Both sources of data include GSTG recipients who received a grant between 2020–21 and 2024–25.

[a] Pell Grant eligibility is based on teacher candidates' Student Aid Index as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Many teacher candidates in California are not eligible to receive a Pell Grant, so this represents income eligibility rather than receipt of Pell Grants. 2020–21 was excluded when determining recipient financial need due to data quality issues. The Pell Grant eligible category includes candidates who were maximum Pell Grant eligible.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Golden State Teacher Grant administrative and survey data from the California Student Aid Commission.

Other Existing Datasets

To enable comparisons between GSTG recipients and teacher candidates or new teachers statewide, this report references a few other datasets. First, we use descriptive data from the California Department of Education's Teaching Assignment Monitoring Outcomes Data to understand the subjects taught by beginning teachers. We also use data provided by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing from its Accreditation Data System, which provides information reported by EPPs on new teacher candidates. We use the accreditation data to provide descriptive characteristics of new teacher candidates, including their demographic information, institution type, and credential type. We also used these data to calculate proxy uptake rates for the GSTG by comparing the total number of GSTG recipients in a given institution to the total number of new teacher candidates reported by that institution.

Interview Data

To supplement the administrative and survey data, we interviewed relevant staff from EPPs to learn more about implementation and their perceived effects of the GSTG. We purposefully selected a subset of institutions that had higher uptake of the GSTG Program and that represented a range of institution types. To calculate a proxy for program uptake, we compared the number of total new teacher candidates reported by a program between 2020–21 and 2023–24 to the number of GSTG payments submitted to that institution. We selected institutions in which at least half of the new teacher candidates likely received a GSTG. Staff from the following institutions participated in interviews:

- Alder Graduate School of Education
- California State University, Fresno
- California State University, San Bernardino
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of Redlands
- Teachers College of San Joaquin

Across these institutions, we interviewed 12 preparation program leaders, financial aid officers, deans, and other staff who worked on the administration of the GSTG. In addition, we interviewed a representative from the Office of the Chancellor for the California State University (CSU) system, given the larger proportion of candidates enrolled in CSU preparation programs.

The interview protocol included questions on the educator preparation program's approach to recruitment and financial aid, the main sources of financial support for candidates within the program, the perceived impact of the GSTG, the implementation of the GSTG, and how the institution promoted the GSTG to its candidates.

Analyses

Secondary Analyses

This study relied primarily on descriptive methods to analyze the CSAC administrative and survey data, disaggregating results by year, race and ethnicity, and financial need. Using the administrative data, we constructed the following data variables:

Financial need is calculated using the Student Aid Index or Expected Family Contribution variable (SAI/EFC) included in the administrative dataset.[63] We categorized individuals as income-eligible for a Pell Grant if their SAI/EFC was below the threshold for Pell Grant eligibility for that year, and we categorized individuals with SAI/EFC of 0 or lower as income-eligible for the maximum Pell Grant award.[64]

Unmet need is calculated by subtracting the Student Aid Index and non-GSTG aid (federal, state, and local gift aid) from a student's cost of attendance. Unmet need is adjusted to 2025 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

Percentage of unmet needs met by the GSTG is calculated by dividing an individual's GSTG award amount by their unmet need (prior to the GSTG being awarded). Since the GSTG can be awarded to cover a student's SAI (their expected contribution toward the cost of attendance), there are cases in which the GSTG award amount is greater than the unmet need. In these instances, we consider the recipient's needs to be fully met, and their percentage of needs met is considered to be 100%.

Institution type was generated by sorting institutions into local education agency, University of California, California State University, and private or independent. We conducted the sorting by cross-checking the name of the institution with its categorization on the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing dashboard.[65]

Age of recipient was calculated by subtracting their birth year from the year of grant application.

Region was generated by categorizing recipients' county of residence into five California regions: Northern, Bay Area, Central, Los Angeles, and Southern.[66]

Flag for recipients subject to the $10,000 maximum award policy. We flagged recipients who applied for the GSTG in 2024–25 with unmet need exceeding $10,000 but were only awarded $10,000. Because data on application dates were unavailable, we could not fully identify all recipients subject to the $10,000 cap, including those whose full unmet need was still covered under the new policy.

Estimating Cost of Attendance by Institution Type

Cost of attendance is determined by factors at three levels: the individual level (such as immigration status, number of dependents), institution level (such as tuition, cost of housing in the institution's location), and state level (other types of financial aid available in a particular year). In addition, individuals often select institutions based on their financial circumstances. For example, an individual with greater financial burdens may choose a lower-cost option, such as a California State University. To enable unbiased comparisons across institution types, we estimated cost of attendance for the average GSTG recipient. This approach isolates differences at the institution level and removes variation due to individual circumstances. Additionally, we included year fixed effects to account for statewide trends and unobserved factors in any given year.

Prior to estimations, we adjusted the SAI/EFC and cost of attendance to 2025 dollars using the Consumer Price Index. We then conducted linear regression analyses using cost of attendance as the dependent variable and using recipient characteristics (age, gender, SAI/EFC, institution type) as independent variables, as well as year fixed effects. For categorical variables (age, gender, and institution type), we used the most common category as the base group (female, age 25–30, California State University,

respectively), so the intercept of the regression represents the estimated cost of attendance for this group. After producing the estimates, we adjusted the intercept by adding the coefficients for the other institution types (local education agency, University of California, and private or independent) to obtain estimates for all institution types.

Qualitative Data Analyses

The responses to open-ended survey questions were analyzed separately for teacher and PPS candidates using a grounded approach, using inductive coding to identify initial thematic codes.[67] Next, we used deductive coding to sort responses, while initial thematic codes were refined iteratively. Finally, using the same approach, survey responses were analyzed separately for teacher candidates who received a $10,000 GSTG award but whose financial need was greater than their award amount. In addition, we analyzed responses to multiple-response questions that included an "other" option. These questions had few responses and tended to be more factual in nature than based on perception. For example, respondents may have listed the names of grants they received in addition to the GSTG. For these questions, we recorded each unique response into a comprehensive list.

Interview data were analyzed by organizing responses based on broad, predetermined categories. The research team also identified emergent themes that came out in the interviews and selected quotes that illustrated these themes.

Appendix B: Golden State Teacher Grant Survey

This appendix provides the survey the California Student Aid Commission administered to all GSTG recipients in April 2025. This survey was provided to teacher candidates; a parallel survey that included largely similar questions was provided to Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) candidates.

Thank you for taking our survey! You are receiving this survey because you received a Golden State Teacher Grant. Your input would be invaluable in helping California policymakers assess the future of this grant. This survey should only take about 5–7 minutes to complete.

1. Current status

1.1 What type of teaching credential do you currently hold?

a. Intern credential [go to 1.2]
b. Preliminary or clear teaching credential [go to 1.2]
c. I don't hold a credential; I am currently enrolled in a credential program [go to 3.1]
d. I don't hold a credential; I am currently NOT enrolled in a credential program [go to 1.6]
e. Other: _____ [go to 3.1]

Only for intern credential and preliminary teaching credential holders:

1.2 Which year did you obtain your most recent teaching credential? _____

1.3 What best describes your current teaching and credentialing status?

a. I am currently teaching while completing my preparation program [go to 2.1]
b. I am currently teaching and have already completed my preparation program [go to 2.1]
c. I hold a teaching credential but am not currently teaching [go to 1.4]
d. Other: _____ [go to 3.1]

Only for intern credential and preliminary teaching credential holders who are NOT teaching:

1.4 You indicated that you completed teacher preparation but are not currently teaching. Why are you not currently teaching? [Please select all that apply.]

a. I could not complete the requirements for my preliminary credential
b. I could not find a teaching job that worked for me
c. I decided to pursue a different career
d. I have personal or life reasons for not pursuing a teaching position right now (e.g., health, pregnancy/childcare, caring for family)
e. I am pursuing further studies related to education
f. Other: _____

1.5 Do you plan to pursue a teaching career?

a. Yes, I am actively searching for a teaching job
b. Yes, I will be searching for a teaching job in the future
c. No
d. Unsure

[Go to 3.1]

Only for GSTG recipients who withdrew from their prep program:

1.6 You indicated that you are not currently enrolled in your teacher preparation program. Why are you not currently enrolled? [Please select all that apply.]

a. Difficulty completing coursework
b. Difficulty completing the clinical experiences
c. Difficulty completing required exams (e.g., CBEST, CSET, RICA, TPA)
d. Change in interests
e. Financial reasons (e.g., could no longer afford to attend)
f. Other personal reasons unrelated to the program
g. Other (please specify): _____

1.7 What would support you to return to your preparation program? [Please select all that apply.]

a. Increased financial support
b. Support with meeting program requirements (e.g., coursework, exams)
c. Support with clinical experience (e.g., mentoring)
d. Applying to a different teacher preparation program
e. I do not plan to return to my preparation program
f. Other (please specify): _____

[Go to 3.1]

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2. Teaching (Only for GSTG recipients who are currently teaching)

2.1 What grade level(s) are you currently teaching? [Please select all that apply.]

a. Preschool or other pre-kindergarten
b. TK
c. K–3
d. 4–5
e. 6–8
f. 9–12

2.2 What subject area(s) are you currently teaching? [Please select all that apply.]

a. Special education (any subject)
b. Bilingual (any subject)
c. Self-contained
d. English language arts
e. English language development
f. History/social science
g. Math
h. Science
i. Arts (e.g., fine art, dance, drama, media arts, music)
j. Career technical education
k. Physical education or health science
l. World languages
m. Other: _____

2.3 How many years have you taught as a teacher of record, including this school year? _____

2.4 Are you currently teaching in an eligible California priority school? *A priority school is a CA TK–12 public school with more than 55% of pupils classified as English learners, living in foster care, or eligible for free or reduced-price meals.*

a. Yes [Go to 2.6]
b. No [Go to 2.5]
c. Unsure [Go to 2.5]

2.5 Are you currently teaching in a California State Preschool Program (CSPP)?

a. Yes [Go to 2.6]
b. No [Go to 3.1]
c. Unsure [Go to 3.1]

2.6 How many years have you taught in an eligible California priority school or California State Preschool Program, including this school year?

2.7 Do you plan to remain teaching in a California priority school or California State Preschool Program after fulfilling your 4-year service obligation?

a. Yes [Go to 3.1]
b. No [Go to 3.1]
c. Unsure [Go to 3.1]

Only for those not teaching in a priority school/CSPP:

2.8 Why are you not currently teaching in an eligible California priority school or California State Preschool Program? [Please select all that apply.]

a. I could not find a job at an eligible school
b. I decided that I did not want to teach at an eligible school
c. I found a higher-paying job
d. I moved out of state
e. Other: _____

2.9 Do you plan to transfer to an eligible priority school or California State Preschool Program within the next 2 years?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Unsure

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3. Preparation (For all survey respondents)

3.1 Which of the following best describes the kind of clinical experience you had or are having during your preparation?

a. Intern in a program where I served as teacher of record while taking courses for my credential
b. Student teaching with a cooperating teacher
c. Resident for a full year of co-teaching with a residency mentor teacher while taking coursework and receiving a stipend from a partner district
d. Other: _____

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4. Impact of the GSTG (For all survey respondents)

4.1 How influential was the Golden State Teacher Grant as an incentive to pursue teaching as a career?

a. Not at all influential
b. Not very influential
c. Somewhat influential
d. Moderately influential
e. Very influential

4.2 How important was the Golden State Teacher Grant funding for your ability to complete your teacher preparation program?

a. Not at all important
b. Not very important
c. Somewhat important
d. Important
e. Very important

4.3 How did the funding provided by the Golden State Teacher Grant support you during your teacher preparation program? [Please select all that apply.]

a. Covered tuition costs
b. Paid for basic living expenses
c. Covered transportation costs to school site for student teaching/residency
d. Paid for required testing and assessment fees
e. Allowed me to pursue full-time study without needing to work a second job
f. Allowed me to pursue full-time study with reduced or no student loans
g. Other: _____

4.4 How influential was the Golden State Teacher Grant as an incentive to pursue teaching in a priority school or California State Preschool Program? *A priority school is a CA TK–12 public school with more than 55% of pupils classified as English learners, living in foster care, or eligible for free or reduced-price meals.*

a. Not at all influential
b. Not very influential
c. Somewhat influential
d. Influential
e. Very influential

4.5 Which statement best describes what you would have done if you did not receive the GSTG? [Please select all that apply.]

a. I would not have entered the teaching profession.
b. I would have taken a job as a teacher while enrolled in an intern preparation program, rather than student teaching or residency.
c. I would have taken out more student loans than I would have otherwise to finance my teacher preparation.
d. I would have relied on personal savings or financial support from family to finance my teacher preparation.
e. I would have worked while completing my credential program to cover costs.
f. I might not have been able to complete my preparation program.
g. Not receiving the GSTG would not have changed any of my decisions around teaching.
h. Other: _____

4.6 In addition to the Golden State Teacher Grant, which of the following financial supports helped pay your tuition and living costs during your teacher preparation program? [Please select all that apply.]

a. Residency stipend or other stipend from school district
b. Full-time work
c. Part-time work
d. Student loans
e. Credit card loans
f. Family support
g. Safety net services (e.g., SNAP, cash assistance)
h. Other: _____

4.7 In what ways did the Golden State Teacher Grant make a difference for you? [Open-ended question]

4.8 What additional comments do you have about the Golden State Teacher Grant? [Open-ended question]

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5. Respondent demographics (For all survey respondents)

5.1 Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Prefer not to say

5.2 What is your race? [Please select all that apply.]

a. American Indian or Alaska Native
b. Asian
c. Black or African American
d. Filipino
e. Pacific Islander
f. White
g. Other: _____
h. Prefer not to say

5.3 What is your gender?

a. Male
b. Female
c. Nonbinary
d. Other
e. Prefer not to say

Endnotes

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24. California Education Code § 69617 (2025).

25. Interns for a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential are still eligible for the GSTG.

26. To measure the financial needs of teacher candidates, we determine a teacher candidate's Pell Grant eligibility using their Student Aid Index, which is calculated based on information a student provides through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, including personal and family income and assets. We use Pell eligibility solely as a reflection of a teacher candidate's financial circumstance. Although an individual may meet the income criteria for a Pell Grant, they might still be ineligible to receive the grant for other reasons, such as their immigration status and/or institution of study. These individuals are still considered "Pell Grant Eligible" for the purposes of this report as an indicator of greater financial need.

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28. The California Student Aid Commission prioritizes students with greater financial need when available grant funds become insufficient to support all eligible applicants. In 2024–25, there was a $50 million award cap for GSTG awards with a $20,000 maximum award amount. Because of the large number of applicants, CSAC prioritized applicants with greater financial need to receive the $20,000 award, and those with lower financial need were awarded grants with a $10,000 cap.

29. Learning Policy Institute analysis of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing's Accreditation Data System data on new teacher candidates. In this analysis, 39% of new candidates were identified as Latino/Hispanic, 34% as White, 8% as Asian, 5% as multiracial, 4% as Black or African American, <1% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and <1% as American Indian or Alaska Native. Nine percent were missing information on race and ethnicity. For more on the Accreditation Data System, see California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2025). Annual data submission. https://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/program-accred/annual-data-submission

30. Over the same period, 45% of all new teacher candidates were enrolled in private or independent programs, 43% in CSU programs, 6% in UC programs, and 5% in local education agency programs. This comes from a Learning Policy Institute analysis of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing's Accreditation Data System data on new teacher candidates. For more on the Accreditation Data System, see California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2025). Annual data submission. https://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/program-accred/annual-data-submission

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32. As of July 2024, the service commitment was cut in half when the maximum grant amount was reduced from $20,000 to $10,000. GSTG recipients now commit to a 2-year teaching obligation in a high-need school within 4 years of earning their preliminary credential. Higher Education Budget Trailer Bill. A.B. 123. (2025).

33. Teacher candidates can also fulfill their service commitment by teaching at a California State Preschool Program (CSPP). However, only three survey respondents reported teaching at a CSPP, suggesting that the GSTG may not be effective in drawing teachers into teaching preschool. This could be because CSPP teachers generally get paid less than TK–12 teachers. See Muruvi, W., Powell, A., Kim, Y., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2024). *The economic well-being of early educators in California. Early educator well-being series*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CA-economic-wellbeing-2024-1.pdf (accessed 08/17/2025).

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54. When the maximum grant award was reduced from $20,000 to $10,000 in July 2024, the service commitment was reduced from 4 years to 2 years.

55. Cost of attendance is represented in 2025 dollars. The range reflects the 5th to 95th percentile of costs for an average teacher candidate. For details on the methodology for this analysis, see Appendix A.

56. California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2025). Teacher Candidate Funding Explorer [Database]. https://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/roadmap-to-teaching/tools-for-credentialing/teacher-candidate-funding-explorer (accessed 10/02/2025).

57. The decline in proportion of needs met may not correspond to the drop in maximum award for several reasons. These include the new policy that prioritizes grants for those with greater financial need that was implemented concurrently with the grant reduction, as well as potential shifts in who applies for and receives the grant. For example, individuals with greater financial need may decide not to pursue teacher preparation due to the reduction of the grant amount.

58. Because we are interested in additional funding sources of income to support preparation, we excluded interns for this analysis as they earn a full-time salary as a teacher.

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63. Beginning in 2024–25, the Student Aid Index (SAI) replaced Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The SAI is largely similar to EFC; both are an index derived from an individual's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. On both, a higher value indicates lower financial need. The SAI expands the lower bound of the EFC from 0 to -1,500, with -1,500 representing individuals of highest financial need.

64. The federal government awards Pell Grants by subtracting the Expected Family Contribution/Student Aid Index from the maximum Pell award amount each year. As such, students with EFC/SAI that is lower than the maximum Pell award amount each year would be "income-eligible for Pell Grant"; i.e., they would receive some amount of Pell Grant. Additionally, students with EFC/SAI that is 0 or lower would be "income-eligible for maximum Pell Grant"; i.e., they would receive the maximum Pell award amount that is available that year. Federal Student Aid. (n.d.). *Federal Pell Grants*. https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell?sk=GGLLKBrand

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