
NEWS

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District survey underscores struggles and highlights potential solutions to California's teacher shortage crisis

Teacher shortages leave districts with high rates of vacancies, relying on underprepared teachers and substitutes, increasing class sizes, and assigning teachers outside of their areas of training. Some promising practices might inform state policy and aid teacher recruitment and retention.

PALO ALTO, CA—A new survey of California school districts reveals that the state's teacher shortage has reached alarming levels, with 75% of surveyed districts indicating there are too few qualified teachers to fill their teaching vacancies. And most districts say the shortages are getting worse.

Districts say these shortages are driven by a declining supply of teachers, ongoing retirements, and high turnover. Although districts with higher populations of low-income and English learner students are getting hit the hardest, the crisis is affecting districts of all kinds. To address these shortages, many districts are hiring teachers with substandard credentials or leaving positions vacant. Most surveyed districts report they cannot find qualified math, science, and special education teachers, and more than one-third are experiencing shortages of elementary teachers—usually an area of surpluses.

The survey findings are detailed in a new brief, *California Teacher Shortages: A Persistent Problem*, released today by the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) and the California School Boards Association (CSBA). The survey was completed by representatives from 211 school districts in the CSBA's Delegate Assembly—a sample that generally reflects the demographics of California's approximately 1,025 districts—to gain an understanding of the problem and to surface strategies that could potentially be effective in addressing the teacher shortage crisis.

"Recent research by LPI and many others makes it clear that there are mounting teacher shortages across the nation. In California, these shortages are impacting districts serving low-

income and English learner students the hardest, but even affluent districts are struggling to recruit and retain high-quality teachers,” said Linda Darling-Hammond, President and CEO of LPI and Professor Emeritus at Stanford University. “LPI and CSBA’s collaboration has enabled us to hear directly from district leaders who are on the front lines of this crisis, including many who are struggling to serve their students well in the face of shrinking ranks of qualified teachers and swelling class sizes. Addressing this crisis effectively is going to take research-based teacher recruitment and retention strategies supported by the state and adapted to each district’s specific needs.”

“In order to provide all California students with a high-quality education that prepares them for college, career, and civic life, we have to provide our schools access to a deep and diverse pool of effective teachers,” said CSBA President Chris Ungar. “Teacher quality is the in-school factor most closely linked to academic achievement, so in order to give our students the education they deserve, California must do a much better job of attracting, developing, supporting, and retaining teachers.”

Survey Findings

Subject area shortages: The most highly impacted subject area is special education, with nine out of 10 districts (88%) reporting shortages. Also highly impacted are math (58%) and science (57%). Fourteen percent of districts with shortages report not having enough bilingual teachers. This shortage will likely increase because of the passage of Proposition 58, which allows for bilingual education within California public schools.

Student impact: Teacher shortages impact all students. And while more significant shortages were reported by districts serving the largest concentrations of high-needs students—low-income students, English learners, and students of color—most districts, regardless of demographics, report experiencing shortages.

Location: While teacher shortages are reported more frequently in cities (87%) and rural areas (82%), shortages are also substantial in towns (72%) and suburbs (69%).

Grade-level shortages: Shortages occur at all grade levels, but the problem is worse in upper grades, with 60% of middle school districts reporting shortages and 62% of high school districts reporting the same. The shortages are lower in elementary schools (37%) and early childhood programs run by school districts (15%).

Causes: Districts are experiencing shortages for a variety of reasons, with the most significant reported cause being a shrinking supply of newly credentialed teachers, a problem cited by 79% of districts. Other frequently cited explanations for shortages include teacher retirements (54%), teachers leaving the district (34%), reductions in class size (32%), and the high cost of living (29%). High-poverty districts report teacher turnover as a reason their districts are facing shortages twice as often as low-poverty districts.

District Strategies for Addressing Teacher Shortfalls

Districts are struggling to address the shortages, and 55% report that they are hiring teachers with substandard credentials. They are also hiring substitutes at high rates, assigning teachers to positions outside of their credential field, leaving positions vacant, increasing class sizes, and canceling courses. At the same time, almost all districts are developing and implementing policies that seek to address shortages in more positive ways. It remains to be seen how successful various strategies will prove to be. Among the strategies:

Teacher preparation and pathways: Ninety-three percent of districts report adopting teacher preparation strategies, including collaborating with teacher preparation programs to coordinate student teacher placements and to share news of job opportunities; developing teacher leadership opportunities within their schools; and creating or expanding residencies and "grow-your-own" pathways into the profession for paraprofessionals, high school students, and district volunteers.

Financial strategies: Seventy-four percent of districts are adopting financial strategies. Districts most frequently report providing additional compensation for teachers who assume leadership roles. In addition to raising salaries, some districts are adding stipends for teachers in high-need fields, offering signing bonuses to new teachers, or removing salary caps for experience. A few districts offer loan forgiveness or service scholarship programs.

Personnel management: More than half of districts report adopting personnel management strategies. Strategies include offering job sharing and paid maternity/paternity leave, moving up hiring timelines, supporting staff to participate in recruitment fairs, developing systems for tracking teacher turnover, and conducting exit interviews to better understand the reasons for teacher turnover.

Working conditions: More than one-third of districts use retention strategies that include mentoring for new teachers, additional professional development for all teachers, and common planning time for teacher teams. Many of the working conditions strategies are aimed at supporting high levels of teacher collaboration.

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About the Learning Policy Institute

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

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About the California School Boards Association

CSBA is a nonprofit association representing nearly 1,000 k-12 school districts and county offices of education throughout California.

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