

Representing faculty
and classified workers in
public and private schools
and colleges, from early
childhood through higher
education

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California Federation of Teachers

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Topics:

Funding
Leadership
Personnel

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Getting From Facts to Policy

Problem Statement

California education is facing an uncertain future. California must build its capacity to educate students and improve their achievement. The education system is not adequately funded. Meaningful new funding must be introduced into the system if we are to have the tools for the improvement of public schools. Ample funding is needed to recruit and retain quality teachers, administrators, and support staff. Increased funding is needed to provide quality training, mentoring, and professional development for all education personnel. Administrators' leadership skills must be improved, as they are an essential part of the teaching and learning conditions in a school. Districts have difficulty recruiting and retaining quality teachers. There are many qualified teachers in California, but many do not wish to teach in our schools. Teaching and learning conditions are a problem, especially in our hard-to-staff schools. Our system needs the best teachers and leaders. Where are we going to get them and how can we keep them in the profession? Education is not the only entity involved in supporting student achievement. The responsibility for improving student learning does not begin and end at the schoolhouse door. Other problems such as poverty, inadequate housing, lack of health care and quality early childhood care and education contribute to many students' lack of success. Society must also be accountable.

Policy Issues and Recommendations

Funding

Money does matter. California school districts spend significantly less and receive less revenue than do districts in other states. California has fewer teachers per student and fewer administrators per student than in other states (Loeb, Grissom, and Strunk, 2007). School districts cannot be expected to meet performance standards without sufficient funding. The current system is unfair in that districts that serve the poor and English language learners do not receive enough funds to successfully educate their students. This situation is worsened in districts that are in high-wage labor markets (Duncome and Yinger, 2007). The current system of school finance appreciably under funds districts with the highest needs. To improve student outcomes could require as much as \$1.5 trillion (Imazeki, 2007). To meet the rigorous California standards, instruction should differ from its current form. Class sizes should be reduced, time should be used more strategically, more specialists should work with small groups, and more quality professional development should be available. All this takes a great increase in spending (Chambers, Levin, and DeLancy (2007). California needs to increase school funding by at least 40 percent to help all students reach high academic standards. This funding needs to be adequate and equitable and any changes to the school finance system must ensure that no student or school loses current resources.

Leadership

California administrators are not as well prepared as those in other states. Many have not participated in internships or had access to mentoring or coaching, nor have they participated with teachers in professional development. California school leaders are less likely to regularly engage in

evaluating and supporting teachers. California needs to reinstitute the discontinued nationally recognized California School Leadership Academy (CSLA). CSLA offered training for beginning and veteran principals, teacher leaders, and school leadership teams. Principals need mentoring and coaching opportunities. If we truly want to raise student achievement we need to make investments in leadership development (Darling-Hammond and Orphanos, 2007). It is the principal who is in a position to ensure good teaching and learning in a school. Principals are seen as central to supporting powerful teaching and learning for all students. But current leadership training does not prepare principals for their job in schools. Leadership development should be a major reform strategy. The many responsibilities of principals can distract them from their most important task, assuring quality instruction. The implementation of quality leader preparation programs and professional development is complex and costly, but necessary to produce skilled education leadership (Darling-Hammond, LaPoint, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen, 2007). A substantial relationship exists between leadership and student achievement. There are more than 20 specific leadership responsibilities correlated with student achievement, including culture, order, discipline, resources, visibility, communication, input, relationship, and flexibility (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003). We need to start to think of leadership as teaching. Both good teaching and leadership require moving to where the learner is, listening to the learner and engaging with the learner (Barkely, 2005). The best leadership programs recruit candidates that are known to be strong teacher leaders, has a coherent curriculum that is based in practice, and focuses on improving student learning. There are many field-based experiences for the candidates that are integrated into the coursework. Principals need added support during their first few years. These programs are expensive but the cost is a good investment in the quest to improve student achievement (Olson, 2007). Leadership is at the core of improving working conditions in schools. States should examine the preparation, induction, and continuous support of school leaders and ensure that all principals understand the important role of teacher working conditions and have the knowledge and skills to make their schools places where all teachers want to work and students can learn. States should also consider the possibility of making teacher working conditions measures part of the evaluation process for school leadership across the state. (Emerick, Hirsch, and Berry, 2005)

Personnel

Teacher quality is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement. The quality of teaching is determined by the environment in which teachers work. Policies aimed at attracting and retaining effective teachers need to both recruit capable people into the profession and provide support and incentives. Teachers are motivated by working with students, helping them learn, and making a contribution to society, and systems must be in place to support them in these tasks (OECD, 2005). Improved teacher working conditions make the job “doable” by ensuring adequate resource staff; manageable class sizes; and a safe, supportive environment. Basic working conditions in high-poverty, low-performing schools are often far worse than any professional should be asked to tolerate, and it is hardly surprising that such conditions are a major cause of high teacher turnover in many schools. State investments in class-size reduction efforts, reductions in teaching load (particularly for new teachers), time for planning, and time to work collaboratively all seem logical places to start (Emerick, Hirsch, Berry, 2005). Supportive working conditions encourage the retention of teachers. Positive and supportive leadership by principals is important to teachers. Principals should recognize teacher accomplishments and support teachers as experts in instruction and learning. Teachers need to be involved in determining the structure and content of professional development. Districts and schools

should ensure that teachers have the material resources to implement standards-based curriculum. When teachers are given adequate time to prepare, are respected as professionals, and are properly supported, they are more likely to stay in the profession (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2007).

The idea that we can improve teaching quality by increasing the supply of new teachers is misreading the problem. The problem is not finding enough teachers to do the job; the problem is keeping them in our schools. The costs of high teacher turnover are both financial and human. At-risk schools spend scarce resources on teacher turnover. A better investment would be in teacher retention programs (Barnes, Crowe, and Schaefer, 2007). As teacher quality is key to student success, there is an issue as to whether teacher pay is sufficient to attract and retain quality teachers. Teachers earn significantly less than comparable workers and the wage disadvantage has grown substantially of the last ten years. The decline in teacher pay seems to coincide with trends in teacher quality (Allegretto, Corcoran, and Mishel, 2004). Compensation packages, although less cost effective than professional programs, are an important component of teacher retention. Teachers in districts with higher salaries are less likely to leave public school teaching or to transfer between districts. BTSA has enjoyed positive results, but funding for Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) has been drastically reduced. Because of the cost effectiveness of these programs, policymakers should allocate additional funding for PAR and BTSA (Reed, Rueben, and Barbour, 2006). PAR programs have the potential to transform probation into a period of professional induction in which novices continue to learn their craft. As a result of PAR, new teachers, who receive concentrated support, are more likely to remain in the profession long-term. There is generally strong support for these types of programs. Teachers and principals can now focus more intensely on multiple aspects of teaching, make better and more consistent use of data, and make clearer connections between teaching and student achievement (Koppich, 2004). Critics of unions often overstate their obstruction or misplace the blame. In many districts principals have substantial discretion in hiring and assigning teachers. Union presidents usually defend teachers only when their due process rights have been abridged. Local unions have undertaken programs to improve teacher quality. A considerable number provide PAR or PAR-like programs (Johnson, Donaldson, Munger, Papay, and Qazilbash, 2007).

In high-achieving countries teacher preparation and induction is fully subsidized and salaries are competitive with other professions. We need an aggressive national policy on teacher quality and supply like the Marshall Plan. The federal government should establish service scholarships for undergraduate and graduate programs of teacher preparation. Recruitment incentives are needed to attract and retain qualified, experienced teachers in hard-to-staff schools. There should be support for improved teacher preparation. Mentoring for all beginning teachers should be provided. In California BTSA has been successful, but needs to be upgraded to support our better-prepared teachers. Continuing recruitment efforts without the support of new and experienced teachers are like pouring water into a leaky bucket. A Marshall Plan for Teaching could help ensure that the US could place well-qualified teachers in high-need schools and give all students an opportunity to learn (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Districts should review existing policies to make sure they do not impede the transfer of accomplished teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Targeted incentives and options should be developed for individuals and groups of teachers interested in moving to hard-to-staff schools. Teachers unions have successfully negotiated contract language, incentives and supports to guarantee that teachers with proven records of student success are able to teach in schools district-wide. Teaching and learning can thrive only in schools where safety is guaranteed, trust developed and the stage properly set for learning. When the necessary resources are in place and implemented properly, and when staff are trained to move forward

with instruction to assist students in achieving at their highest levels, recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools will be much less difficult (AFT, 2007). By building a career ladder for classroom teachers, schools can deliver what the new teachers want—both a supportive work environment while they are new and opportunities to grow once they have more experience. With career ladders that formalize roles such as mentors, master teachers, curriculum developers, or professional development planners, schools can be organized so that novices have a well-integrated support system with many colleagues to turn to, and veterans have options that will challenge them without removing them from the classroom completely. Ideally, school districts and teacher unions will collaborate to create these career ladders and help schools become supportive workplaces that foster new teachers' success. Such schools have dramatically less attrition among new teachers (Johnson, 2006).

Special education teachers are most likely to leave special education because of inadequate system supports as well as an all-too-often hostile teaching environment created by parents and student advocates. They also leave because of too little time for the complex and constantly changing IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) they are required to write. Many leave because of dysfunctional professional relationships with their colleagues in general education. The specific challenges of the retention of special education teachers must be assessed and addressed by reducing the burdens of IEPs and other paperwork, cultivating better collegial supports for special educators, and the expansion of programs that support novice special educators. Teaching conditions for all teachers must be assessed locally and regularly. Student funding should be elevated to at least adequate levels. School bureaucracy must support rather than impede teaching. School leadership must be focused on instructional quality and high-quality teaching and learning conditions. Statewide standards should be established for school teaching and learning conditions (Futernick, 2007). In 2002, CDE's Professional Development Task Force put forward ten recommendations. Few of them have been implemented. Quality education depends on a quality staff of educators, administrators, and support personnel. To make teaching and school administration attractive careers salaries must be increased, there should be multiple pathways into teaching and school leadership, and schools with high-need students should be enabled to attract and keep well-qualified teachers and administrators. To provide teachers and leaders with the skills they need to improve student learning a statewide infrastructure for career-long professional development that supports educator learning and school improvement must be built, this high-quality professional development must reach teachers and administrators in high-need communities, and the preparation, induction, and ongoing support of school leaders should be improved. To create the conditions that allow teachers and school leaders to succeed, site leadership must be reconfigured to enable the principal to serve as an instructional leader and the development of teacher leaders who can coach and mentor others has to be supported, and schools should be redesigned so that they can focus on student and teacher learning. Transforming an array of policies and practices into an increasingly coherent system will take time. While policymakers must take immediate action on priority issues, their actions must be part of a long-term strategy. Evaluation and refinement of existing policies, together with bold progress in new areas, will be needed (California Department of Education, 2002).

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