



Annual Report on Teaching Profession Shows Strains of Recession

By Tom Chorneau
Tuesday, December 14, 2010

California's teacher development system is "eroding" at a time when expectations for the state's 6.2 million students are rising and demands for a well-trained workforce are accelerating, according to a report released Monday from the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning.

In its annual report on the status of the teaching profession in California, the center warns that the teaching workforce is contracting just as student enrollment is starting to grow. With extreme budget restraints prompting widespread teacher layoffs, fewer young people are entering the profession while nearly a third of the state's current teachers are approaching retirement age.

"Teachers today are being expected to do much, much more with far, far less," said Margaret Gaston, the center's president said in an interview. "Teachers are operating under increased scrutiny and with increased responsibility that's creating tension in the system. Adding to the strain is the fact that there are fewer ancillary staff to provide assistance to their students."

The report, produced with support from WestEd, SRI International and both the University of California and the California State University, found that the state's ongoing problem of too many "novice" teachers being located at low-performing schools – continues to persist.

Researchers found that novice teachers account for 10 percent of the faculty at low-performing schools, compared to just 5 percent at schools performing in the highest quartile.

The overall number of teachers in California has fallen from 310,361 in 2007-08 to 299,666 in 2009-10 – the lowest number in a decade.

With the contraction, however, the center found that the number of novice or underprepared teachers has also dropped significantly. The number of first and second year teachers dropped from 36,000 in 2007-08 to just over 18,000 in 2009-10.

Enrollees in teacher preparation programs have also fallen dramatically from more than 75,000 in 2001-02 to fewer than 45,000 in 2007-08.

As has been reported, this comes as student enrollment is set to grow in California – as much as 7 percent through 2020.

One focus of the report was on the pressing need for better longitudinal data on both students and teachers.

The authors noted the governor's October veto of money for the ongoing development California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System will likely also push back until next year the start date for building the companion data system for teachers.

Gaston said the decision will hurt schools.

"This is not the time to eliminate a source of information upon which important decisions can be made," she said.

In reaction to the center's report on the disproportionate number of novice teachers found in low-performing schools, an advocate for alternative certification programs said the finding was not surprising – nor was it necessarily bad news.

"We target those schools and recruit committed and skilled content experts who come into teaching with an interest in giving back to the students," said Catherine Kearney, president of the California Teacher Corps.