



California Teacher Shortages: A Persistent Problem

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In the fall of 2016, a survey¹ of 211 school districts in the California School Boards Association's Delegate Assembly revealed that they are experiencing alarming rates of teacher shortages. Approximately 75% of surveyed districts report having a shortage of qualified teachers for the 2016–17 school year. Over 80% of these districts say that shortages have worsened since the 2013–14 school year (see Figure 1). As one district administrator noted, “I believe the worst is still to come. ... [I]n the end, the students lose.”

While teacher shortages are concentrated in districts serving high-need students, large majorities of all kinds of districts are experiencing shortages.

- 83% of districts serving the largest concentrations of low-income students report having shortages, compared to 55% of districts with the fewest.
- 83% of districts with the largest concentrations of English learners report having shortages, compared to 64% of districts with the fewest.

Shortages are greatest in the areas of special education, math, and science.

Of the districts reporting shortages:

- Nearly nine in 10 districts report shortages of special education teachers.
- A majority of districts report shortages of math (58%) and science (57%) teachers.
- More than one-third of districts report shortages of elementary teachers.
- 14% of districts report shortages of bilingual teachers, a number likely to increase because of the passage of Proposition 58.

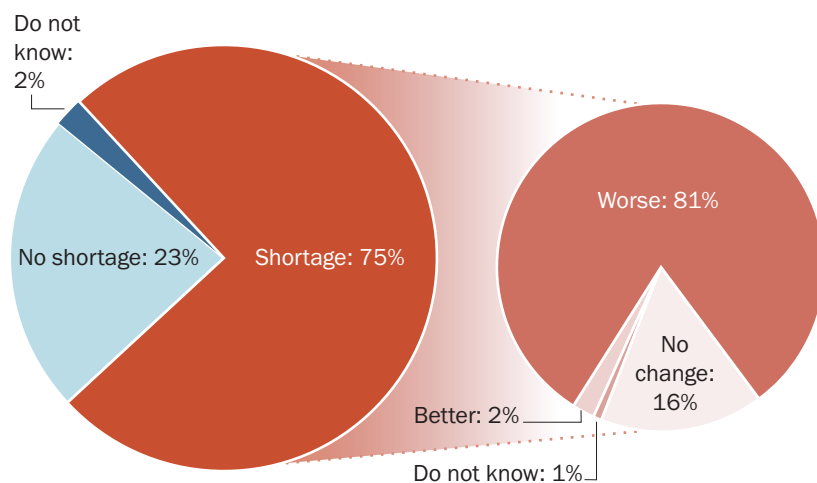
Districts are experiencing shortages for a variety of reasons, with the most commonly reported cause being a shrinking supply of newly credentialed teachers.

- 79% of the districts that reported shortages say that they are experiencing shortages because of the shrinking supply of newly credentialed teachers.
- Other frequently cited explanations for shortages include teachers retiring (54%), teachers leaving the district (34%), reductions in class size (32%), and a high cost of living (29%).

Figure 1
Teacher Shortages Are Getting Worse

Percent of Districts Reporting Shortages

Percent of Districts With Shortages Reporting Change in Shortages



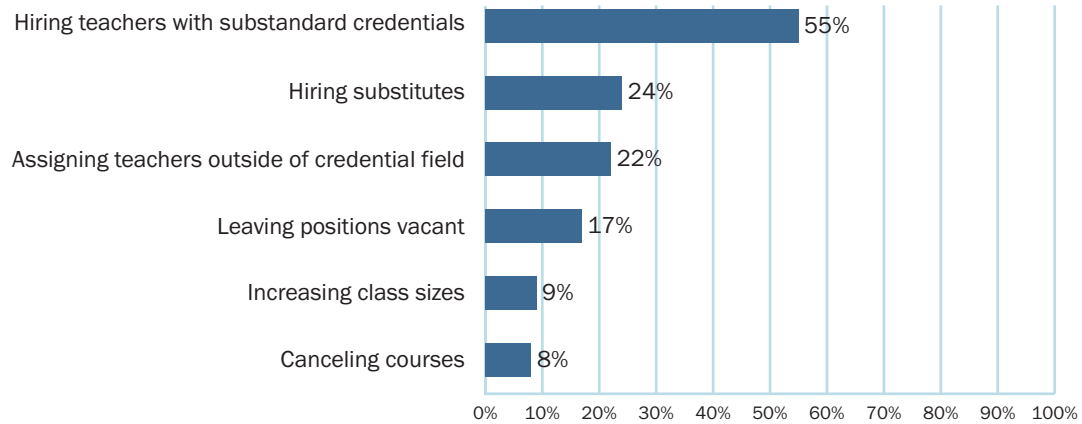
Of districts that report having trouble filling their vacancies, nearly two-thirds are unable to staff all positions with teachers who have full credentials in the appropriate subject area or grade level.

- 55% of districts with shortages report that they are hiring teachers with substandard credentials.
- Districts are also hiring substitutes at high rates (24%), assigning teachers to positions outside of their credential field (22%), leaving positions vacant (17%), increasing class sizes (9%), and canceling courses (8%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

How Are Districts Filling Vacant Teaching Positions?

Percent of districts with shortages that used the staffing solution to fill vacant positions



Districts report adopting a variety of strategies to recruit and/or retain qualified teachers. These strategies include policies and practices that affect teachers’ preparation and pathway into the profession, compensation, hiring and management, and working conditions. Districts most frequently cite the following policies:

- 72% of districts are working with teacher preparation programs to coordinate student teaching placements, and 62% of districts are working with teacher preparation programs to communicate hiring needs.
- 56% of districts are developing differentiated roles for teacher leadership opportunities, and 53% of districts offer additional compensation for this increased responsibility.

Districts alone cannot solve teacher shortages—there are just not enough qualified teachers to go around. With an inadequate statewide supply of teachers, districts must compete with each other to staff their classrooms. Even when districts are successful in recruiting teachers, they often cannot hold on to them. High-poverty districts report teacher turnover as a reason their districts are facing shortages twice as often as low-poverty districts. The state needs to consider investments in evidence-based teacher recruitment and retention strategies to increase the overall supply of qualified teachers in California, particularly in subjects and schools with persistent shortages. At the same time, districts need to evaluate their local contexts to determine what local policies will be most effective to recruit and retain competent, committed teachers.

Endnote

1. The California School Boards Association (CSBA) and the Learning Policy Institute partnered in 2016 to create and administer a survey of district-level leaders. The CSBA’s Delegate Assembly represents 244 of California’s 1,025 school districts. Our sample includes 211 unique districts that fully completed the survey—representing a response rate higher than 84%. The sample generally reflects the demographics of California’s districts. For a more comprehensive description of the survey and the findings, please see the full brief: Podolsky, A. and Sutchter, L. (2016). California Teacher Shortages: A Persistent Problem (brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/California_Teacher_Shortages_Persistent_Problem_BRIEF.pdf.