



# California Special Education Teacher Shortages Grow More Severe

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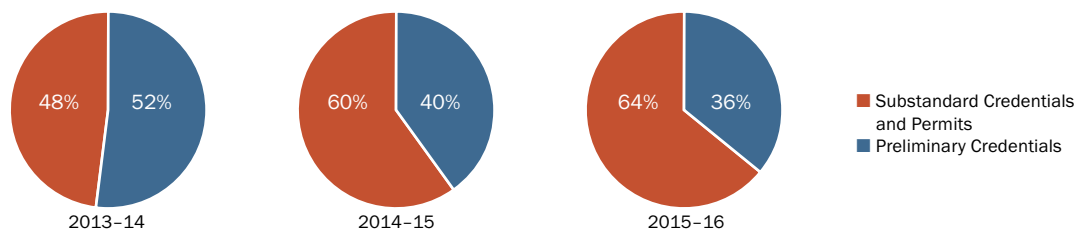
California schools have had persistent difficulties filling special education vacancies, but in the past two years, these shortages have skyrocketed, as evidenced by the growth of substandard special education authorizations. When schools struggle to fill a position with a qualified teacher, they often hire teachers who are still in training or who hold emergency-type permits without training.<sup>1</sup> Research has found that special education training significantly improves teachers' capacity to effectively teach students with special needs.<sup>2</sup> Special education teachers with more extensive pedagogical training and practice teaching are better prepared to handle key teaching duties, such as planning lessons, managing the classroom environment, fulfilling professional duties, and using a variety of instructional methods.<sup>3</sup> Those teachers who are not prepared to meet the needs of their students may contribute to classroom conditions that negatively impact student learning and well-being.<sup>4</sup>

## Special Education Teacher Workforce Trends

- **New, underprepared special education teachers outnumber those who are fully prepared 2:1.** No other major teaching field issues most of its new authorizations to underprepared candidates (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: New, Underprepared Special Education Teachers Outnumber Those Who Are Fully Prepared 2:1**

*Proportion of preliminary and substandard special education authorizations issued, 2013–14 to 2015–16*



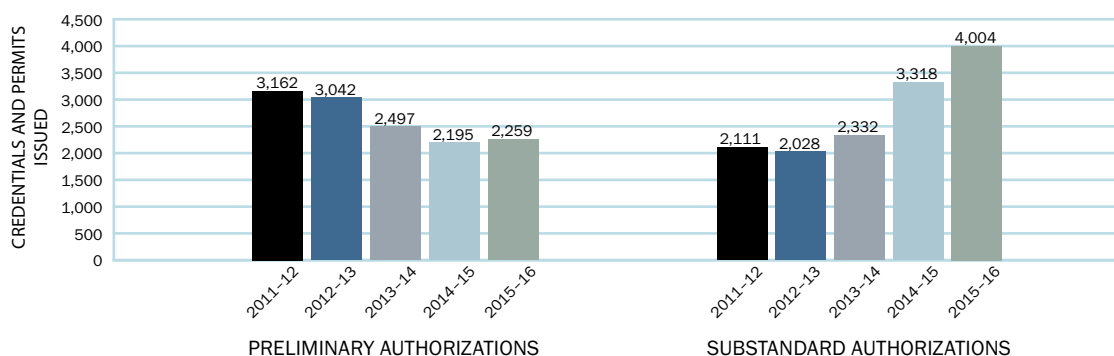
Source: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

- **Substandard credentials and permits nearly doubled between 2011–12 and 2015–16, while preliminary credentials to fully prepared teachers dropped 29%.** The annual pool of new special education teachers has increased by nearly 30% over the past two years, but these increases are being driven entirely by teachers on substandard authorizations (see Figure 2).
- **Over 1,700 underprepared special education teachers in 2015–16 were hired on emergency-style permits,<sup>5</sup>** which are issued to teachers with little to no preparation to teach.
- **Substandard credentials and permits are growing in every special education subspecialty, with the greatest increases since 2012 in the areas of moderate/severe disabilities, where they have more than doubled, and mild/moderate disabilities, where they increased by more than 60%.** These types of special education authorizations are needed to teach students with complex learning needs, including students diagnosed with autism, intellectual disabilities, and serious emotional disturbance.<sup>6</sup>
- **Shortages in special education are most likely to disproportionately affect English Learners, who are overrepresented in special education by nearly 30%, and Black students, who are overrepresented in special education by nearly 50%.<sup>7</sup>**

- **Researchers project that over a quarter of California’s special education teachers who were teaching in 2014 will retire by 2024, more than in any other subject area.**<sup>8</sup> In addition, in some counties, up to 86.5% may retire. With an aging teacher workforce and fewer qualified new special education teachers, special education shortages may become even worse in future years.

**Figure 2: Trends in Special Education Teacher Supply**

Preliminary and substandard authorizations issued, 2011–12 to 2015–16



Source: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Teacher shortages across the state significantly impact the already-limited supply of qualified special education teachers. In the past two years, schools have seen a sharp increase in the number of underprepared special education teachers entering the field, which can undermine student achievement and well-being while creating much greater turnover, because such teachers leave at higher rates. Solving the teacher shortage requires more than an influx of new teachers. New teachers must also be well-prepared, well-mentored, and well-supported so that they stay in the profession and contribute to a long-term solution.

As we describe in our report on California teacher shortages,<sup>9</sup> strategies to accomplish this can include service scholarships that support training for those who will teach in high-need fields for several years; one-year residency programs that train teachers in apprenticeships linked to credential coursework and mentoring in urban or rural districts where they pledge to stay and teach; and incentives to keep strong teachers in high-need fields who would otherwise retire.

## Endnotes

1. Sutchter, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
2. Feng, L., & Sass, T. R. (2013). What makes special-education teachers special? Teacher training and achievement of students with disabilities. *Economics of Education Review*, 36, 122–134; Nougaret, A.A., Scruggs, T.E., & Mastropieri, M.A. (2005). Does teacher education produce better special education teachers? *Exceptional Children*, 71(3): 217–229; Sindelar, P. T., Daunic, A., & Rennells, M. (2004). Comparisons of traditionally and alternatively trained teachers. *Exceptionality*, 12, 209–223; Boe, E., Shin, S., & Cook, L.H. (2007). Does teacher preparation matter for beginning teachers in either special or general education? *Journal of Special Education*, 41(3): 158–170; Brownell, M.T., Haager, D., Bishop, A.G., Klingner, J.K., Menon, S., Penfield, R., & Dingle, M. (2007, April). *Teacher quality in special education: The role of knowledge, classroom practice, and school environment*. Paper presented at the annual meeting for American Education Research Association, Chicago, IL.
3. Boe, E., Shin, S., & Cook, L.H. (2007). Does teacher preparation matter for beginning teachers in either special or general education? *Journal of Special Education*, 41(3): 158–170. Nougaret, A.A., Scruggs, T.E., & Mastropieri, M.A. (2005). Does teacher education produce better special education teachers? *Exceptional Children*, 71(3): 217–229.
4. Mohr, W.K. & Anderson, J.A. (2001). Faulty assumptions associated with use of restraints with children. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 14 (3): 141–151.
5. About 1,700 special education Provisional Intern Permits (PIPs) and Short-Term Staff Permits (STSPs) were issued in 2015–16.
6. Education specialist instruction credential. (2016). Sacramento: Commission on Teacher Credentialing. <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/cl808ca.pdf> (accessed 12/14/17).
7. In 2015–16, Black students made up approximately 8.7% of students enrolled in special education and 5.8% of total student enrollment (California Department of Education DataQuest, accessed 12/27/16). In 2012–13, English learners made up approximately 27.8% of students enrolled in special education (California Task Force on Special Education 2015 Report) and 21.6% of total student enrollment (California Department of Education DataQuest, accessed 12/27/16).
8. Fong, A.B., Makkonen, R., & Jacquet, K. (2016). *Projections of California teacher retirements: A county and regional perspective*. (REL 2017–181). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs> (accessed 12/7/16).
9. Carver-Thomas, D. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Addressing California’s growing teacher shortage: 2017 update*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

For the full report, go to [learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ca-teacher-shortage-2017-update](http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ca-teacher-shortage-2017-update).