

EDUCATOR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

RESEARCH BRIEF

Key Findings in California



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ABSTRACT

This research brief investigates the successes, challenges, and recommendations around teacher recruitment and retention in California supported by grant funding. The participants involved are human resources administrators from county offices of education representing northern, central, and southern California. The interviews consisted of four research questions exploring the process of recruitment and retention specific to grant funding, strategies grant recipients applied for the use of grant funding, the effectiveness of the strategies, and any recommendations for potential repeat or new grant funding. Responses revealed eight distinct themes: cohorts, grant funding flexibility, partnerships and collaboration, teacher credential pathways, mentoring, data collection, virtual platforms, and grow your own programs. While participants described successes in the areas of teacher recruitment and retention as a result of grant funding, they also acknowledged challenges. Participants recognized several of the described challenges could be overcome with additional, significant, state investment in the recruitment and retention of new educators. These findings may have implications for potential repeat or new California grant funding to support teacher recruitment and retention.



INTRODUCTION

At the time of composition of this brief on educator recruitment and retention in California based on interviews of county offices of educator administrators across the state, EdJoin.Org (n.d.) listed 22,756 job postings in California and 13,056 job postings for a total of 26,281 job vacancies under the category teacher. For those human resource administrators deeply involved in the work of recruitment and retention of California teachers, and based on the interviews described in this brief, the hardest to fill areas within the over 13,000 vacancies are for special education, math, science, and bilingual teachers.

In addition to these hard to fill certificated teaching positions, schools, districts, county offices of education, and institutes of higher education (IHE), such as the Chancellor's Office of the California State University (n.d.), are also seeking diverse teacher candidates to reflect California's diverse student population. The demand for teachers in California continues to outpace the enrollment numbers in teacher educator preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2016). This brief highlights the experiences, successes, and recommendations of county office of education administrators in their efforts to recruit and retain educators in hard to fill areas through grant funding.

GRANTS BACKGROUND

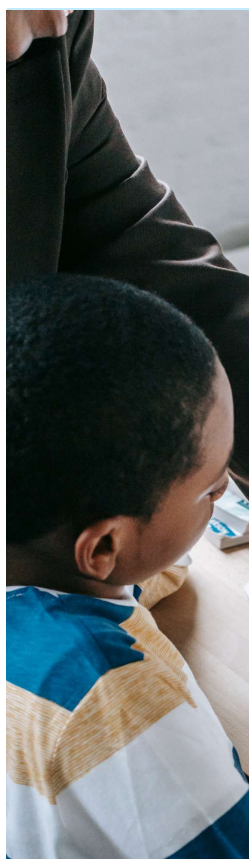
The number of graduates from traditional educator preparation programs are not able to fill all teaching vacancies. However, there are several successful grant-funded initiatives around the state of California which are successfully *growing their own* and creating *alternate pathways* to obtain a high need credential and fill a vacancy with a highly qualified teacher rather than with a provisional license.

The *California Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing Program* and *The Local Solutions Grant* are two state funded programs that have fostered a vertical alignment between schools, districts, county offices of education, and IHEs to not only recruit individuals into credential programs but also retain newly credentialed teachers beyond their two-year new teacher induction program years. *The California Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing Act of 2016* provides support for classified employees such as school aides or teaching assistants to obtain a bachelor's degree and teaching credential in the award of \$4,000 per year per individual. In the fiscal year 2018-19, fifty million dollars was appropriated from California's general fund to support *The Local Solutions Grant* providing one-time funds to local education agencies to develop, implement, or expand local programs to support the recruitment, credentialing, and retention of special education teachers.

The most recent California Budget May Revision for 2021-22 outlines additional funding under *Educator Preparation, Retention, and Training* for a diverse, well-prepared educator workforce specifying the support of classified employees through teacher pathways and local grow your own programs.

METHODS

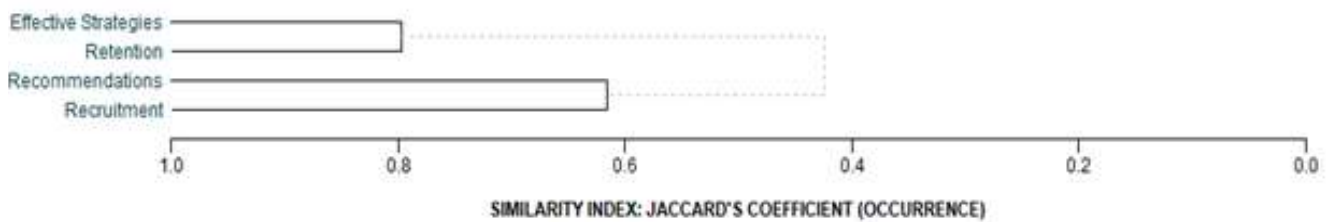
This investigation aimed to examine the impact grants such as *Local Solutions* has on human resources recruitment and retention. This qualitative study entailed interviewing eight administrators representing county offices of education in northern, central, and southern California. These county offices serve over 500,000 students, approximately 200 school districts, and employ 30,000 teachers. The participants agreed to a 30-minute interview and responded to four questions related to grant funding applications on strategies in the areas of recruitment, retention, and recommendations for future action. The research questions are:



- Describe the process of recruitment and retention specific to the grant funds received?
- Describe at least three strategies applied for the use of the grant funds received?
- How effective are these strategies, and what data do you use to assess effectiveness?
- What recommendations do you have for potential repeat or new grant funding related to recruitment and retention?

The interview recordings were transcribed, coded manually, and used Provalis ProSuite (2021) text analysis software to determine trends and emerging patterns in the transcripts. The participants' names were kept confidential. All information provided in this brief is presented in aggregated form and anonymous to respect the participants' privacy. Based on the axial coding results, participants were focused on providing recommendations for recruitment, and explaining which strategies have worked effectively for retention efforts.

The following figures show the category agglomeration and similarity index and the most prevalent themes within those categories.



Eight distinct overarching themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Grant Funding and Flexibility:** Critical to the development and success of recruitment and retention efforts
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Create opportunities for partnerships across schools, school districts, county offices, and institutes of higher education (IHE)
- **Cohorts:** Build communities of new recruits to generate a sense of belonging and peer network
- **Teacher Credential Pathways:** Innovate and incentivize, find new avenues for teacher credentialing
- **Mentor Support:** Provide new recruits with a trained mentor and extending the mentor/mentee program beyond the induction program
- **Data Collection:** Develop data collection, analysis processes and systems to monitor retention and take action (i.e., diverse candidates prematurely exiting the system)
- **Virtual Platforms:** Establish online portals and hubs with information on how to obtain a credential and where to apply. Be present on social media. Provide online assistance, learning management systems, and courses. Offer a forum, for example, for new special education teachers in rural settings.
- **Grow Your Own/Second Career Candidates:** Find the talent in your own organization, parents, and community. Recruit from within and those interested in teaching as a second career. Everyone is a recruiter in the community.

RECRUITMENT

While the interviews revealed several unique teacher recruitment strategies, the underlying theme across grant recipients is *strong partnerships and collaboration* between school districts, county offices of education, and institutes of higher education (IHE). According to participants, strong collaboration around teacher recruitment is based on established partnerships across and within regions. Partnerships between school district principals, human resources administrators at the district and county level result in exceptional relationships and focused efforts in recruiting existing non-credentialed school personnel into credentialing programs. Understanding the backgrounds and interests of second-career professionals who are interested in obtaining a teaching credential in their area of expertise also results in new teacher candidates.



Strong collaboration around teacher recruitment based on partnerships vertically aligned from school sites to district, county, and IHEs, are currently resulting in systems across organizations to support non-traditional credentialing pathways. Collaboration and partnerships thanks to grant funding are resulting in the recruitment of current classified school employees and second-career professionals interested in obtaining a teaching credential in a high need category such as math, science, special education, and bilingual education.

Recruiting from within one's own educational community is referred to as *growing your own*. In order to successfully recruit these two categories of candidates, local educational agencies described their collective focus and community outreach from speaking at local school board meetings to broadcasting on social media about the opportunities for grant supported training and coursework towards a teaching credential.

In addition to strong collaborations and partnerships around recruitment for hard to fill positions such as the sciences, math, special education, and bilingual education, participants also described the shift to *virtual platforms* to recruit and communicate with potential candidates. The shift to virtual hubs for recruitment has extended each organization's reach beyond their own communities, counties, and even state. Participants expressed a desire to not only recruit for hard to fill positions but to also diversify their teacher candidates. Recruiters' newfound confidence in using platforms such as Zoom for recruitment events is enabling recruiters to broaden their recruitment efforts by facilitating virtual events.



Virtual platforms will allow grant participants to amplify their recruitment efforts and broaden their reach as long as grant funding continues to support the numbers of new teacher candidates in their pursuit of a California credential. Participants shared successful recruitment efforts, and named specific recruitment challenges such as:

- finding diverse candidates
- high cost of living across California
- child care availability for teacher candidates
- carrying over student debt from undergraduate coursework
- difficulty in attending teaching preparation courses while maintaining a full-time job

Participants described innovative incentives to recruit teacher candidates like supplementing or providing child care while candidates are in teacher preparation courses. Additional ideas were shared to recruit teachers, such as highlighting the benefits and pension opportunities for teachers. Overall, participants stated the recruitment of teacher candidates will require creative and collaborative strategies from sites, to districts, to county offices of education.

RETENTION

The mentoring of new teachers as well as credential candidates, even online, was the retention strategy recurrently mentioned by participants. Not only was mentoring mentioned, rather a system of mentorship was described, providing training on how to mentor new teachers for the participating coaches. Grant funding supported additional years of mentoring for new teachers beyond the state required two years of mentoring during the induction period. County administrators attributed retention in high-demand areas like special education to individualized mentoring beyond the two years of induction.

Additionally, new teachers in mentoring programs, along with their coaches, often form a larger network of support which county offices are building through *virtual online communication* programs like Zoom and learning management systems like Canvas. Focused efforts on eliminating feelings of isolation, either figuratively or geographically, are supported through online meetings, online platforms, and digital hubs. Grant funds have enabled county offices of education to build support networks with trained mentors and access to digital platforms reachable by all participants, whether they are local or in rural settings such as reservations.

Mentors have also been able to provide a social-emotional component for new teachers via online platforms during the distance learning of the pandemic years. Participants attribute strong retention rates to meaningful, individualized mentoring as well as the development of community and a sense of belonging for teacher candidates and new teachers.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Based on the participants' feedback, it is evident county offices of education are becoming increasingly innovative and strategic regarding recruitment and retention. Grant funding has been crucial to supporting novel technological approaches such as *virtual portals and job fairs*, active *social media* presence, implementation of *learning management systems*, and well-designed *recruitment websites*.

These successful strategies have attracted thousands of potential candidates, but more are still needed. As one participant managing a virtual portal indicated, “We can confirm that 1,528 of those candidates secured employment as a result of our efforts.”





All participants emphasized building community among new teachers and having clear and responsive communication across organizations as effective retention strategies. Forming *cohorts of new teachers* supported by *mentors* and county offices of education have yielded encouraging results. It is essential for new recruits to feel they belong to the organization; especially, those from minoritized and diverse backgrounds. As one participant stated,

“It’s just that ability to chat with each other to feel like they have a group and they’re all going into this field together. They can talk about the challenges.”

This finding on mentoring mirrors the “Provide quality mentoring and induction for all beginning teachers” noted in the Learning Policy Institute (2018, p. 2) brief on addressing California’s teacher shortage. These prolonged relationships appeared to have increased educators’ social capital and diminished the sense of, as Putnam (2000) points out, “bowling alone,” particularly during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that the pandemic added pressure and stress to an already high-stress profession. Consistent and transparent *communication* is another factor in the success of retention undertakings. Check-ins with new recruits, grant participants, and all stakeholders involved keep everyone connected and updated. One participant stated they reach out at least four times a year to each new teacher. Another key strategy shared by participants was generating *alternative ways* for candidates to obtain their *teaching credentials*. For example, a few county offices of education have created a classified employee teacher training program. A participant conveyed that these types of programs are “strong, because normally, districts are selecting candidates that they want to grow their own and they move through the pathway earning their credential.” In general, all participants agreed that having proper *data collection*, analysis and monitoring is an essential strategy to follow recruitment and retention progress. As one participant explained,

“We directly go to the data, what it is telling us before we make a decision, and then share it with all stakeholders, so we don’t do anything without having some kind of substance behind it to make the move.”

Conversely, several participants also agreed that there is room for improvement and would like to learn how others in the same field are collecting and using data. Collaboration across grant recipients is one area that participants were curious and interested in learning more about from peers. Most importantly, there was a consistent message across all interviewees; without the current grant funding, these and other effective strategies may not be able to continue.

DEMONSTRATED NEED FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Overwhelmingly, the county offices of education participants described the urgency to receive additional grant funding to not only maintain recruitment and retention strategies but to scale up the efforts. Thanks to grant funding, county offices have been able to institute partnerships, collaborative efforts, and systems around recruitment of local classified staff, professionals seeking a second career in teaching, as well as extend mentoring to new teachers beyond two years. As one participant emphasized,

"We're at a point right now, where we don't have the luxury of reinventing the wheel. Because that always takes three to five years. I think now it's time to scale up the work we've done"

RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants from the county offices of education each had more than twenty years of service in education, and their common recommendation was the need to nurture and support new teachers. Additionally, participants spoke to the unique time we are in as we all recover from the pandemic and reflect on the role teachers and educators fulfilled in the daily lives of students, families, and communities. As the recruitment and retention of teachers is considered now and in years to come, participants spoke with urgency about bolstering their current systems of communication, collaboration, and community to foster highly effective, diverse teacher candidates for hard to fill positions such as special education, math, science, and bilingual classrooms.

With the hope for continued funding, participants also spoke to the need for flexible funding to support candidates in individualized ways and to be able to provide local incentives. Additional funding ideas for teacher candidates and new teachers included unique local housing mortgages, student loan forgiveness, stipends for longevity, and data collection systems to monitor retention effectiveness. Several participants also described educator grants as a morale boost as teachers feel valued by the state and community when they are invested in. One participant shared,

"I think that there are many districts and counties that are aware that the teacher shortage is this storm that is brewing, and I think now is a really critical time because they're very consumed by the recovery of the pandemic, and now is the time that we feel we would like to really see a campaign for teachers as heroes, because there have been many, many heroes during this time. And we see it as a great opportunity to elevate the field."

Overall, the participants expressed gratitude and accomplishment in their collective efforts to recruit and retain teachers in their local areas. However, acknowledging the work that remains at each local level and the teaching vacancies to fill was prevalent in each discussion. Grant funding in support of local recruitment and retention efforts is a means to mitigate California's teacher shortage.

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