

California public school system faces massive teacher shortage

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California is facing a massive shortage of 50,000 teachers going into the 2022–23 school year. After more than a decade of budget cuts and the promotion of charter schools, educators are experiencing sharply declining pay and conditions, leading thousands to quit the profession or move elsewhere for more affordable living conditions. In the 2020–21 school year, the total number of full-time equivalent teachers in the state was 274,759. Of this amount, 46,434 teachers were either uncertified or certified in a subject other than what they were teaching.

Children with special needs are the top victims of this deficit. In the 2020–21 school year, 28,985 teachers were authorized to teach those with disabilities, but the majority required exemptions to teach. Only 43.5 percent had Preliminary and Clear Credentials, which require a minimum of 5 years experience, basic skills requirements and training in teaching. Only 52.1 percent of teachers for students with either hearing or visual Impairments were fully credentialed.

One of the largest school districts in the state, Oakland Unified, had nearly one-third of its classes taught by teachers without full certification. California has filled the gap with limited permits, such as Provisional Internship, Short-Term Staff, Variable Term Waivers and Substitute permits. These give schools exemptions to state credentialing requirements.

Substitute teachers are also in short supply and the state has turned to hiring more unqualified teachers. In Sacramento, where teachers struck in March against low wages and understaffing, roughly a quarter of students had no permanent teacher. The lack of substitute teachers meant that on any given day nearly 3,000 students across the district did not even have an adult for their class and had to sit with other classes without teachers in their school's cafeteria or

auditorium.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly painful for teachers. The Democratic Party-controlled state legislature, Governor Gavin Newsom and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, with the cheer-leading of the teachers unions, recklessly pushed a return to in-person instruction in the middle of the pandemic.

Forced into crowded in-person classes without proper personal protective equipment or adequate ventilation, staff as well as students contracted COVID-19, with many dying or developing Long COVID. Over 9 million Californians have officially been infected with COVID-19, representing 11 percent of all cases in the United States, and 9,130 have died, roughly 9 percent of nationwide deaths. Among children, 1,467,721 youth up to the age of 17 have officially been infected in the state and 72 have died.

The drop in living standards, the stress of the risks of in-person education during the pandemic and long hours (the average teacher in the US works a 50 hour workweek) combined to cause a significant uptick in early retirements, moves out of state and abandonment of the teaching profession. One out of 10 school districts in California have yearly turnover rates of 25 percent or more.

Nationwide, college graduates are turning away from teaching careers due to the atrocious conditions educators face. Even before the pandemic, training programs were experiencing dramatic declines in enrollment. Between 2011 and 2019, the last year with completed nationwide data, the number of bachelor degrees in education dropped over 21 percent. The trend accelerated during the pandemic, with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education reporting that one in five institutions saw an

enrollment decline of 11 percent or more in both 2020 and 2021.

The California Department of Education has launched the California Center for Teaching Careers to recruit more teachers, but the shortage is caused by deliberate policies of the Newsom administration. Rather than improve the school system, the state seeks to dilute its educational standards. Any influx of new teachers will be inexperienced and hired by schools in the deepest state of crisis with the largest vacancies. Many will quickly burn out and quit. For school districts, subs and new hires are a financial bonus. Both groups earn less and receive less benefits than experienced full-time instructors.

The downward spiral accelerated with the “Great Recession” of December 2007 to June 2009. This crisis was triggered by the Federal Reserve turning a blind eye to the risky speculation of financial institutions, leading to the debacle of subprime mortgages and a collapse of stock prices. The recession led to budget cuts across the United States, with layoffs of teachers and cuts to school programs.

California’s Legislative Analyst’s Office investigated the impact of the “Great Recession” versus previous recessions. Twice as many jobs were lost compared to the 1990–91 downturn and four times as many compared to the 2001 recession. The recovery also took two and three years longer, compared to those previous crises respectively.

The National Council on Teacher Quality surveyed 41 school districts nationwide. They concluded that in the four years following the market crash, salary increases were one-third to one-half of pre-recession levels. Of the districts studied, 80 percent had a pay freeze or cut in at least one of those years. Southern California’s Long Beach teachers averaged 1.8 percent yearly salary increases between 2008–12 as inflation grew 2.75 percent yearly for the same period.

California school districts have not recovered, deferring maintenance, laying off staff and closing schools. Now dozens of state districts are facing financial ruin and a state takeover, which will only lead to more cuts. Teacher pay over the last two years has sharply declined with an 11.8 percent rate of inflation for this period. The leading teachers unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), have refused

any strike action against budget cuts, school closures and layoffs.

The only benefactors of the recession were the Wall Street firms that were given \$787 billion by the Obama administration. The administration bragged about funds for school construction and preschool programs, health care subsidies and a middle-class tax cut. The final stimulus package reduced all of that and added a \$70 billion tax break for upper-income families. As for the criminals who brought on the crash, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, Citibank, JPMorgan Chase and Morgan Stanley dished out \$90 billion in executive compensation and bonuses.

In order to defend their living standards, massively expand public education and fight to end the COVID-19 pandemic, educators across California must break with the Democrats and the rotten union leadership and join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, which is working to unite educators, parents and students with the broader working class across California and internationally. Fill out the form below to get involved!



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