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A Review of State Teacher Policies: What Are They, What Are Their Effects, and What Are Their Implications for School Finance?

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Getting Down to Facts

A research project designed to provide California's policymakers and other education stakeholders with comprehensive information about the state's school finance and governance systems, and lay the groundwork for a conversation about needed reforms. The project was made possible by grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, and the Stuart Foundation.

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For the full text of the author's research report and the other studies in this project, see: **www.irepp.net**

For background on California's school finance system, see: **www.californiaschoolfinance.org**

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California, like many states, is making an effort to engineer high-quality teaching by implementing policies at every juncture of the teacher's professional life: from preparation programs to recruitment, from licensure to retirement. For each key policy area, this report addresses three questions:

1. What policies has California enacted?
2. What policies have other states enacted?
3. What is known about the effects of these policies on teacher quality or student outcomes?

Summary of Key Findings

The authors identified eight broad policy areas related to the teaching profession: preservice (preparation); licensing and certification; tenure; professional development, including performance evaluation; incentives for recruitment, retention, and assignment; salary structure; teacher associations; and teacher retirement. This summary provides a brief overview of these policy areas in California and of available research on their effects.

Preparation and licensing: State policies define requirements, but there is little research to judge effects

The 15-member California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) largely shapes the design and structure of this state's teacher preparation programs through its program standards, professional standards, and teacher performance expectations. Based on these standards, each of the state's 98 accredited teacher preparation programs is reassessed by CCTC every five to seven years. CCTC identifies low-performing programs and publishes pass rates on various teaching examinations for graduates of each institution. These policies are consistent with the majority of other states.

The CCTC also establishes requirements for credentials and permits, and there are multiple types of each, including alternative certification (see the box on page 2). Recent policies have reduced course-work requirements for teaching candidates while requiring demonstration of subject-area competency.

There is little evidence on the effects of preservice education requirements, and that which does exist is mixed. There is strong evidence, however, that preservice requirements affect the pool of potential teachers. Intern routes with reduced preservice course work tend to attract a larger pool of candidates. While there is much to learn about which requirements improve teaching and which deter good teachers from entering the classroom, the evidence so far suggests that policies that address preservice requirements can have substantial impacts.

Tenure: California's tenure decisions occur earlier than in most other states

Tenure policies detail how teachers transition from probationary status to having due

Study Methods

The researchers conducted a review of research on teacher policies and used state statutes and regulations as the primary source of data, supplementing this information with:

- National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification's (NASDTEC) *Knowledgebase*;
- Education Week's *Quality Counts 2005*;
- State websites; and
- State policy summaries created by the Education Commission of the States.

The full report also provides a brief overview of the teacher labor market in California and of the most recent state policy actions related to teachers.

California Teaching Credentials and Requirements

California has both multiple-subject and single-subject credentials.

Requirements for the Preliminary Teaching Credential, which is valid for five years:

- A bachelor's degree in a subject other than professional education;
- Completion of a CCTC-approved teacher preparation program, including student teaching and specific course requirements;
- Passage of the CBEST, a test of basic skills;
- Demonstration of specific subject-matter knowledge (depending on the credential) through testing or course work;
- Teachers who received their training in other states can qualify through various options.

Requirements for the Professional Clear Credential, which must be renewed every five years:

- Holders of the Preliminary Teaching Credential must progress to a Professional Clear Credential within five years by earning a National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) certification, completing a CCTC-approved induction program or, in limited cases, by meeting other requirements.

Internship credentials are available for those who complete a CCTC-approved alternative-route program, and the state also has three forms of special permits that enable districts to temporarily employ teachers who are not fully credentialed.

process rights with regard to their employment. Tenure laws have three main components: tenure requirements, reasons for dismissal, and a process for appeals. California is one of 10 states that award tenure after two years. The state's education statute specifies valid reasons for dismissal of tenured teachers, including "unsatisfactory performance" which, like other permitted reasons, is not specifically defined. State policies in California also specify teachers' due process rights and seniority rights in case of layoffs.

The authors found no published research on the effects of tenure policies on recruitment, retention, teacher quality, or student achievement. They did cite strongly held opinion in California, however. Many principals view tenure laws as a barrier to improving teaching in their schools, though 50% say they would only dismiss one or no teachers, and 25% would dismiss just two. Because there is some evidence that principals can identify poor teachers, redefining valid reasons for dismissing teachers could help schools and districts in maintaining teaching quality.

Professional development: California's policies have focused on beginning teachers

State policies regarding professional development can detail requirements for induction and mentoring programs, continuing education, and teacher performance evaluations.

California invests in professional development for beginning teachers, which appears to help keep teachers in the profession

California invests in beginning teacher-support programs that aim to help teachers transition from their preparation programs into the profession. The state funds and has set standards for the quality and effectiveness of two-year teacher induction programs, which are delivered through districts, districts partnering with universities, and county offices of education. Each new teacher is assigned a mentor who provides support and assesses performance. Beginning teachers must complete this program to be eligible for their professional credential. California is one of 27 states that require an induction program and one of 14 states that provide release time away from the classroom for mentors and/or beginning teachers. There is some evidence that mentoring and induction programs help keep teachers in the profession.

All teachers are required to continue their professional development

In California, all teachers are expected to complete a minimum of 150 clock hours of "professional growth activities" every five years. State policy specifies the areas of teacher practice eligible for credit and the types of activities. The state sponsors some professional development programs, and others are locally controlled. Most states have a similar requirement.

There is substantial evidence that while some professional development and more formal education can improve teacher effectiveness, the acquisition of generic credits as specified in California does not. For example, teachers with master's degrees are, on average, no more effective than those without. However, teachers who participate in some sustained professional development closely linked to the work they do in their classrooms do, on average, become more effective.

Beyond state guidelines, teacher evaluation is left to districts

Like most states, California has state guidelines for teacher evaluation but leaves the design and implementation of evaluation systems to the districts. Probationary teachers must have an annual evaluation, while those who have passed the probationary period must be evaluated at least every other year. Experienced teachers who have previously received high performance ratings can be evaluated every five years. Similar to 11 other states, California requires that teacher evaluations incorporate measures of student performance, though not necessarily test score gains. The state offers no guidance regarding who should conduct teacher evaluations.

In theory, school districts in California can dismiss tenured teachers with poor evaluations. But little is known about teacher evaluation procedures, the evaluation clauses in teacher contracts, or how these affect teacher assessment and career trajectories. Principals in California, on average, say that they find it more difficult to dismiss ineffective teachers than do principals in other states.

Incentives: Teachers respond to wage incentives, but little is known about the effects of specific programs

Some incentive systems target the problem of teacher supply by recruiting teachers at the beginning of their career or by inducing them to stay in teaching, including delaying retirement. Other incentives are designed to improve teachers' skills or encourage them to take on challenging assignments.

California has created several programs that provide incentives for teaching in low-performing schools. However, these efforts to attract and retain teachers have been severely curtailed by funding cuts—about $150 million in 2003–04. Two remaining programs offer student loan assumption for teachers in high-priority schools and for teachers who are credentialed in critical subject areas, such as math and science. There are also incentives for veteran teachers to mentor interns in low-performing schools, bonuses for National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) who teach in high-priority schools, and incentives for teachers who postpone retirement, such as the potential to increase their monthly benefit when they retire.

Overall, the evidence suggests that teachers do respond to these types of incentives. However, the research on the effectiveness of specific programs is sparse and the findings are mixed. State efforts in this area would benefit greatly from additional research, including cost-benefit analyses on the full array of incentives.

Salary structure: Teachers' compensation in California is based largely on local collective bargaining

Teacher salaries are a district-based decision in California. The state guarantees collective bargaining rights, with the result that unions help define the final compensation package that a teacher receives.

California districts each have a single-salary schedule for teachers

California has a minimum salary level for all teachers ($34,000), though this is not binding in most districts. In a collective bargaining process, districts then develop a salary schedule for teachers based on years of experience and educational attainment. Some districts add bonuses based, for example, on teachers' field of teaching, education, and experience. A 1999 state effort to institute school-level performance bonuses to teachers was funded for just one year (2001), though the law remains on the books.

The single-salary schedule, for the most part, treats all schools within a district in the same way and results in teachers choosing schools based solely on working conditions. Because teachers, on average, express preference for higher-scoring students, this policy disadvantages schools with the lowest-performing students. The salary structure also treats all specializations equally, making it difficult to attract teachers in highly desired subject areas or those with special training—particularly to schools with difficult working conditions.

The research on alternatives provides little guidance

Nationally, typical salary structures do not include incentives based on teacher performance. The research to date is not clear on the benefits of these incentives, but the evidence does show that designing and monitoring an effective system for "merit pay" is difficult.

Teacher pensions are part of state policy

Retirement benefits are a significant portion of a teacher's compensation package in any state. The vast majority of states, including California, operate mandatory defined benefit (i.e., pension) plans. Participants in California's program can augment their benefits with contributions to a tax-deferred savings plan. Teachers here are eligible for full benefits once they have at least 30 years of service and have attained the age of 50; or have at least five years of service and are at least 60 years of age.

The question of a state-level salary schedule is sometimes raised in California. The authors know of no studies assessing the impact of this salary approach on student achievement. Opponents say districts should retain some control over salaries as they are in the best position to know community needs, while proponents say that districts cannot bargain effectively and give away too many resources. A California survey shows that superintendents are evenly split over the two options: district versus state control.

Teacher associations: Collective bargaining scope and processes are specified in state policy in California

While teacher unions operate in every state—and states are often categorized as either having or not having collective bargaining—the actual political landscape is quite nuanced. Since 1975 California state law has authorized collective bargaining rights for teachers and required that the results of collective bargaining be detailed in a legally binding contract. The law also stipulates that contracts can be valid for up to three years and that school boards and unions must return to the negotiating table once the contract expires.

The scope of bargaining must include "wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment." The latter are defined as:

- Health and welfare benefits;
- Leave, transfer, and reassignment policies;
- Safety conditions;
- Class size;
- Teacher evaluation procedures;
- Organizational security;
- Grievance procedures;
- The layoff of probationary certificated school district employees; and
- Alternative compensation or benefits for employees adversely affected by pension limitations.

In addition, the impact of educational programs and policies adopted at the state level (i.e., class size reduction, beginning teacher induction) must be negotiated prior to local implementation. Upon the request of either party, the following must also be negotiated: disciplinary action (other than dismissal) for nonprobationary teachers; procedures for layoffs of nonprobationary teachers necessitated by insufficient funds; and additional compensation or salary schedules based on criteria other than years of training and experience.

Over the years, the scope of representation has periodically been altered. In 2002 a bill was narrowly defeated in the state Legislature that would have expanded the mandatory topics of negotiation to include "the selection of course content, curriculum, textbooks, and instructional materials, and the development and implementation of local educational standards, professional development plans, and parent involvement programs." A bill that passed in 2006 placed restrictions on teacher-transfer rules that gave more control over the teacher hiring process to some local school sites.

The teachers' unions in California are particularly powerful, bargaining not only for salaries, benefits, and working conditions, but also lobbying for bills and influencing the election of school boards. A long series of studies demonstrate that unions, and teachers' unions in particular, increase worker pay and benefits. The evidence on the effects of unions and union strength on student outcomes is much less clear. While some studies find a positive association, others suggest that unions' efforts to increase salaries force a trade-off with other productive inputs, thus decreasing achievement and increasing dropout rates.

Authors' Conclusions

The authors draw a number of conclusions from their review of state policies and research in the field:

- While states have implemented a slew of teacher policies, they have systematically evaluated very few of them. If this approach does not change, policymakers will be in no better position to learn from experience in the future than they are today.
- The current structure of salary schedules presents several problems. First, it tends to treat all schools in a district in the same way, which results in working conditions determining the appeal of a school. Because teachers tend to favor teaching in schools with high-scoring students, this disadvantages schools with lower-achieving pupils. Perhaps even more problematic, current salary structures treat all specializations in teaching equally, making it more difficult to attract teachers to fields such as science and math.
- While there are many advocates for basing teacher salaries on the learning of their students, currently such systems are difficult to implement effectively.
- There is substantial evidence that while some professional development and more formal education can improve teacher effectiveness, generic credits do not. Thus, current policies that require master's degrees or a given number of education credits appear misguided.
- Teacher tenure in California occurs earlier in teachers' careers than it does in most states. While the authors have no evidence concerning the effects of early

tenure, there are indications that it is problematic for districts and schools in the state.

In considering specific policy approaches, it can be useful to think more broadly about the role of the state in the teacher workforce. Perhaps the outstanding issue in state teacher policy is the degree to which the state should intervene in determining the allocation of teacher resources within districts and schools, as opposed to just coordinating across districts. The direct involvement of the state in within-district resource allocation could be beneficial if the state has:

- Better information than school or district leaders about what policies and practices would benefit students;
- A greater ability to regulate the implementation of policies and practices that would benefit students; or
- Goals for students that are more in keeping with residents' goals than those of school districts.

Having more information with which to assess the extent to which a state role is warranted would put California in a much better position to design and implement policies that work to attract, develop, and retain effective teachers.

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