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Program Increases Ranks of Minority Teachers in California

**BY The Latin American Herald Tribune
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SAN DIEGO – California, where minorities make up 70 percent of K-12 students but nearly two-thirds of teachers are white, has launched a program to redress that imbalance by giving would-be educators the chance to obtain certification on the job.

The program, implemented by the California Teacher Corps, is focused on teacher candidates with professional experience and specific studies that will be of use in the classroom.

Catherine Kearney, president of the CTC, told Efe that part of her recruiting strategy is to work with organizations that are active within the same community.

“That way we can bring teachers into the classroom that not only have a lot in common with their students but have the commitment to stay in the schools,” she said.

She said 25 percent of teachers being trained in the program were Hispanics during the 2010-2011 school year, in comparison with 17 percent in traditional certification programs.

The program has provided California with around 55,000 new teachers over the past seven years.

The CTC was founded in 2009 to recruit college-educated professionals looking for a second career teaching in schools that present special challenges, particularly in the areas of mathematics, science and special education.

According to Kearney, hiring teachers from minority groups ought to be a state priority, despite economic and budget woes, since their work can help improve students’ results in standardized exams.

“A report from the Center for American Progress said that students of color work better if they also have teachers of color instructing them,” Kearney said.

One achievement of the CTC project is that close to 50 percent of the new teachers it certifies are from minorities, plus it trains 50 percent more men than other programs.

Admission to the program isn’t easy, Kearney said, since candidates must pass exams that measure their core capabilities in reading, writing and math, as well as take tests that rate their competence in teaching specific subjects.

Other requirements include actively working with a public-school district in the subjects for which they wish to obtain their certificate, which is initially granted them for two years as substitute teachers in general education and for three years in special education.

During this time, the candidates must continue taking an active part in the program, working with mentors and completing all their courses, for which they will receive a preliminary certificate valid for five years, during which time they will take additional classes to obtain full certification.

This process offers advantages both for the candidates and for school districts, according to Kearney, since it has a rate of retention of close to 70 percent after five years while meeting the need for teachers in both rural and urban areas.

The main advantage for teacher candidates is that they can get straight to work in the classroom. EFE