

Education Week



Push For Home-Grown Rural Talent Hits California

By Mary Schulken
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A year-old non-profit that recruits alternative-certification teachers in California has announced it will refocus attention and resources on developing homegrown teachers for the state's rural, high-need schools.

"Rural schools need people who understand the traditions and want to stay," said Catherine Kearney, president of the [California Teacher Corps](#). "We're targeting need in a way that's become especially urgent in this economy."

Kearney said the teacher corps will put new emphasis on building partnerships with school districts, including reconnecting with those already served and reaching out to others.

"Rural communities in California are experiencing their own unique education challenges," Kearney said. "The California Teacher Corps will make it a high priority to work with these districts to increase their talent pipeline by recruiting and training teachers directly in their communities."

That approach mirrors a nationwide trend *Education Week* reported on in [this story](#) examining an emerging homegrown-talent pipeline in rural schools.

Recruiting teachers from inside communities and retaining talented teachers are especially critical factors for California's rural schools, Kearney said.

"A key part of success is understanding that there are people in that community who have deep roots and who want to give back," she said. "Those kids deserve a talented, committed adult who will stick with it."

While California is not thought of as a particularly rural state, it has a large number of students—300,000—the federal describes as rural. Many of those are in 251 districts in California's agricultural central valley, which runs the length of the state. Others, said Kearney, are in tiny mountain, desert, and Pacific coast communities.

"We have single-school districts and we still have one-room schools in California," she said.

The [2009 report "Why Rural Matters"](#) by the [Rural School and Community Trust](#), offered this snapshot of [California's rural students](#): More than half are minorities, one of four is an English-language learner, and 46.6 percent live in poverty.

The California Teacher Corps works with some 1,000 school districts, of which more than a quarter are in high-need, high-poverty communities. Of the 70 programs the corps operates in the state, 50 percent are directly serving rural districts that have difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers, said Kearney.

The Teacher Corps includes alternative teaching certification programs in the state, which pay dues that support the corps' work. It trains second-career teachers and those with subject-area expertise to work in hard-to-staff schools. Its goal is to place 100,000 high-quality teachers in California's communities by 2020.

One example of a Teacher Corps' program is California State University's CalStateTEACH project, a field-based digital teacher preparation program designed specifically for teachers unable to attend a campus-based teacher preparation program. It uses web and technology tools such as video conferencing, Flip cameras and Skype to train teachers in the classroom.

Another example, said Kearney, is the Tulare County Office of Education, which the Teacher Corps has nicknamed the "e-harmony" of teacher recruitment programs. It serves communities such as Kings, Fresno, Northern Kern and Tulare counties in the Central Valley. Tulare recently combined recruitment with certification in order to closely match recruits with specific district needs.

The teacher corps looks for non-traditional teacher recruits and focuses heavily on converting para-professionals—teacher's aides—to full certification.

"Our recruits are not 22 years old," Kearney said. "They have come from other careers, they are older and more mature."

New teachers get intensive, follow-up support from mentors and a 24-hour hotline. Retention is especially important, said Kearney.

"That swinging door is not at the heart of rural communities," she said.