



## Special Education a Second Chance for Pink-slipped Teachers

By Katy Murphy  
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**OAKLAND** — Eric Bankston, a corporate salesman-turned-physical education teacher, had a moment of doubt when a pink slip arrived in the mail last spring, informing him that his position at Pinole Middle School might be cut.

"It leaves you asking yourself, What do I do now?" he said.

With some encouragement from his colleagues, the answer came to him: He would go into special education. A year later, the 37-year-old Oakland resident is teaching at the same West Contra Costa County school with many of the same kids — just in a different field.

Bankston is part of a new, statewide push to bring pink-slipped general education teachers into special education, an area with chronic staffing shortages. On Wednesday, the California Teacher Corps announced that the state's alternative teacher certification programs would work with school districts to provide special education training to teachers subject to layoffs.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell touted the initiative as a way to counter "the chilling effect on our teacher pipeline" caused by the state budget crisis.

"It's a win for everybody," said Catherine Kearney, president of the teaching corps. "The teacher keeps the job, the students have a passionate, committed teacher, and the district doesn't have to go out and recruit when they already have talented people."

Kearney noted that California's alternative certification programs already are preparing special education teachers — 3,500 last year alone, by her organization's count. Now, she said, some of those programs are creating a fast track for general education teachers who are pursuing a special education credential.

Bankston is earning his certification through a Sacramento State satellite program offered at a local tutoring center.

Like others on the alternative certification track, he immediately began teaching full-time, earning a paycheck while tackling his course work in the evenings.

Before he was recruited by his colleagues at Pinole Middle School, he said, "I hadn't given special education a thought."

Then he realized some of his favorite PE students had learning disabilities.

"I said, 'You know what? I can do this. My heart is in this. I want to be part of the solution, and I'm giving it a shot.' "

Bankston said he would recommend this path to others who are in the same position; more than 23,000 teachers received notices in March that they might not have a job in the fall, according to the California Teachers Association.

Unfortunately, he said, he was one of them. Once again, the new teacher received a pink slip from the school district.

Bankston said he's been assured that he'll have a job somewhere in the district, though he won't know for sure until his pink slip is rescinded.

"The question is where," he said. "I want to be at Pinole Middle School."

To learn more about alternative certification programs in your area, go to [www.cateachercorps.org/programs](http://www.cateachercorps.org/programs).