

SI&A Cabinet Report

Teacher Corps supplies districts with committed teacher interns

By Allen Young
September 22, 2009

Despite the fact that sweeping layoffs have left thousands of teachers across California without jobs this school year, a new ally has joined recovery efforts for the teaching workforce with a plan to bring 100,000 highly-qualified teachers to state public schools by 2020.

The California Teacher Corps is a newly created umbrella organization spanning 70 mid-career teacher recruitment and placement programs scattered throughout California.

The corps gives school districts their pick from a pool of industry and business professionals on route to getting their teaching credentials. The interns do, however, arrive at schools carrying a valid No Child Left Behind “highly qualified” designation as administered by the state Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

“We have an army of committed, talented individuals who left their jobs and said ‘let me serve,’” said Catherine Kearney, president of the California Teacher Corps. “Those people are most prepared and we are lucky to have them step up and serve the kids that need them the most.”

Although Kearney plans to establish new programs wherever there is need, she said the Corps places special emphasis on getting incoming teacher interns in historically underserved areas, whether they are rural districts or inner city.

Kearney said the corps efforts will benefit California as it competes in the federal ‘Race to the Top’ grant program. The heavily sought after grant, which will award state’s up to \$1 billion, is based on several criteria including improving teacher effectiveness, equitably distributing qualified and effective teachers, and supporting low performing schools.

“Teachers in alternate route programs are committed to serving in the hard-to-staff schools,” said Kearney. “More than 80 percent of our teachers stay in the districts they start in after five years.”

The corps has already received support from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Education Secretary Glen Thomas. “I applaud the California Teacher Corps for its leadership and commitment to improving public education in California,” said Thomas in a statement.

“The organization’s mission builds on Gov. Schwarzenegger’s efforts to recruit the best and brightest teachers into our classrooms.”

Over half of the teaching interns are ethnic minorities, said Kearney. The ideal candidate has a “strong desire to serve their community, deep content knowledge and the ability to take charge of a classroom immediately.”

“We look for mature individuals,” she said.

The applicant must also have no legal barriers that would deem them unfit to work with children and also show deep knowledge in their subject area of interest.

Once approved, the intern goes out to look for available job openings in districts. Both the Corps member certification program and the district provide the incoming intern with support, said Kearney. The district provides a veteran teacher, usually an individual working on the same site, to oversee the intern, a process that can entail classroom observation for an average of two hours per week.

The internship program provides a support hotline that interns can call during business hours, although Kearney said it isn’t used too often.

Most of the 70 alternative certification programs are affiliated with county offices of education, charter management organizations, and colleges and universities. While the applicant qualification process is universal to all programs, selection criteria may be region-specific.