

SI&A Cabinet Report

Underprepared teachers still concentrated among minority schools

By Tom Chorneau
Thursday, November 19, 2009

While California continues to make progress in reducing the number of underprepared teachers in public schools, a new report from the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning shows students enrolled in inner-city schools are far more likely to receive instruction from someone that is not fully credentialed.

The center's report noted that in the 2000-01 school year, nearly a quarter of California schools had 20 percent or more underprepared teachers — defined as anyone who have not yet completed requirements for even a preliminary teaching credential.

Last year, only 3 percent of schools in the state had 20 percent or more underprepared teachers.

That said, the center found that students in schools with high percentages of minority enrollments were five times more likely to be taught by an underprepared teacher than their peers attending low minority schools.

A similar ratio was found among students in the state's lowest performing schools when compared to those enrolled in California's highest performing schools.

They also found that today, sixth-graders enrolled in the state's lowest achievement quartile are three times more likely to have had an underprepared teacher sometime during elementary school, according to the center — a frequency that is 10 times greater than those of students in the highest achievement quartile.

The center specifically called out the high percentage of underprepared teachers that are categorized as 'interns,' those who are hired by a district as the teacher of record but is still engaged in completing their preparation program.

The analysis found that the greatest percentages of interns are working at low-achieving schools and relatively few teaching in schools in the highest achievement quartile.

While the observation has been made before, it comes as a legal dispute over interns is being fought out in federal court.

Advocates for low-income communities want the courts to overturn federal regulations allowing participants in alternative certification programs to be considered 'highly qualified'

under the No Child Left Behind Act.

While the center's data would seem to boost the arguments from the activists, supporters of alternative pathways said it's wrong to assume that teachers in an intern program are not good at their job.

"Defining content experts and mid-career professionals as underprepared is misguided at best," said Catherine Kearney, director of the district intern program at San Joaquin County and also president of the California Teacher Corps – a newly formed statewide group that represents alternative certification program.

"Under their definition, people like Colin Powell – if he wanted to teach history – he'd be underprepared," she said.

Kearney also noted that a large number of the graduates from alternative certification programs choose to go to the lowest-achieving schools because that's where they are most needed.