

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01 AM ET MAY 16, 2019

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NEWS

Students of Color Show Extraordinary Levels of Academic Achievement in Some California School Districts

Teacher Qualifications Emerge as Major Predictor of Student Achievement in New Report

In some California school districts, students of color are reaching extraordinary levels of academic achievement—defying trends and exceeding the performance of students of similar backgrounds in other districts across the state. A new report by the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) examined which districts have excelled at supporting the learning of students of color as well as White students, taking into account their socioeconomic status. The report also looked into the practices in these districts to see what might be making the difference and found that teacher qualifications are the most significant school-related predictors of student achievement, as measured by California’s new assessments in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.

The new report, [*California’s Positive Outliers: Districts Beating the Odds*](#), finds that the proportion of teachers holding substandard credentials—such as emergency permits, waivers and intern credentials—is significantly and negatively associated with student achievement for all students. In 2017–18, the Teacher Credentialing Commission authorized more than 12,000 substandard permits and credentials, representing half of the entering workforce in that year. These underprepared teachers are disproportionately assigned to schools serving the largest shares of students of color and students from low-income families throughout the state.

In addition, teachers’ average experience in the district is positively associated with achievement for African American and Latino/a students. These findings spotlight the impact that the state’s shortage of qualified teachers has on student achievement, particularly in districts where unprepared teachers are disproportionately assigned to schools serving the largest share of students of color and from low-income families.

“The research finds that providing students with qualified, fully-prepared teachers is a critical component for raising student achievement,” said LPI Researcher and Policy Analyst Anne Podolsky, who was lead author on the report. “Fully prepared teachers are also 2 to 3 times less likely to leave the profession early. Thus, solving shortages depends on making preparation more affordable and incentivizing teachers to enter the fields and communities where they are

most needed. Effective strategies include teacher residencies, supports for classified staff to earn credentials, and forgivable loans that underwrite teachers' preparation."

The report was authored by Podolsky, LPI President Linda Darling-Hammond, RAND Associate Policy Researcher Christopher Doss, and Stanford Professor Sean Reardon. They analyzed the performance of African American, Hispanic, and White students across California's 435 school districts with at least 200 African American or Hispanic students and 200 White students on the new California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress in ELA and math from 2015–17 (the first years the test was in place).

From this group, they identified 167 positive outlier districts where Hispanic and White students achieve at higher than predicted levels relative to their socioeconomic status and 48 districts where African American and White students achieve at higher than predicted levels. Using regression analysis, LPI then determined the most important within-school factors associated with achievement. Teacher credentials and experience were at the top.

"Despite persistent achievement gaps throughout much of the state—and the nation—students of color and students from low-income families in these positive outlier districts are beating the odds and achieving at higher levels than their peers of similar socioeconomic background in the rest of California," said Reardon. "Our research aims to identify these districts so that researchers can uncover the strategies associated with their success."

In August, LPI will release a series of case studies that take an in-depth look into seven of the positive outlier districts. These case studies will examine the local policies and practices that appear to be contributing to the districts' success in leveraging the state's updated standards, funding, and accountability systems to support students in meeting California's academic standards. The districts to be studied include Chula Vista Elementary, Clovis Unified, Gridley Unified, Hawthorne Unified, Long Beach Unified, San Diego Unified, and Sanger Unified school districts.

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Editor's note: San Diego Unified School District Superintendent Cindy Marten is able to speak to reporters about her perspective as a superintendent and about the practices in that district that the report discusses. To speak with her, please contact Maureen Magee, Director of Communications, San Diego Unified School District: (619) 725-5578 (O), (619) 381-7930 (M), mmagee@sandi.net.

About the Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and

federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.