

## CHAPTER 3. DISTRIBUTION OF UNDERQUALIFIED TEACHERS

### DISTRIBUTION

#### How are underqualified teachers distributed in California schools and districts?

- 24% of schools have no underqualified teacher, and another 15% have fewer than 5%. In contrast, 20% of California schools have more than 20% underqualified teachers—these schools, and the students in them, face serious problems.
- Students in low-performing schools with high percentages of poor, minority, and English language learner students—those students who need the most assistance—are most likely to have underqualified teachers.
- The problem of underqualified teachers is not isolated to a few large districts. Almost one in eight California districts have over 20% underqualified teachers across all of their schools.
- The distribution of underqualified teachers within a district varies, depending on size and diversity, but in larger districts there is typically a subset of schools with extremely high concentrations of underqualified teachers.

### COMPOSITION

#### Who comprise the population of underqualified teachers throughout the state?

- Some underqualified teachers are hired purposefully and strategically, because they are promising candidates or have special characteristics that match district priorities.
- Other underqualified teachers are hired as a result of shortages of credentialed teachers in certain subject areas, such as special education, bilingual education, math, and science.
- A third group of underqualified teachers are those who are hired because districts are desperate to fill classrooms and unable to find fully qualified teachers.

#### What is the impact of high concentrations of underqualified teachers on schools?

- Large concentrations of underqualified teachers negatively affect school and district functioning and undermine working conditions, teacher professional culture, and student learning.

### DISTRICT ACTION

#### What are the possibilities and limitations of district actions to reduce the number of underqualified teachers?

- Districts act to reduce the number of underqualified teachers by offering financial incentives, creating strategic partnerships with universities, developing district-based preparation programs, recruiting aggressively, and streamlining hiring practices.
- The effectiveness of these district strategies is limited by factors beyond a district's control, such as its location and its inherent attractiveness to teachers.
- In addition, although some districts may be successful at attracting qualified teachers, they often do so by siphoning such teachers away from other, less attractive surrounding districts.
- District action alone cannot overcome the core problem of a too-small pool of qualified candidates who are willing to work in the schools that need them most.

We have shown that many California classrooms are staffed by teachers who have not met the minimum state requirements for a teaching credential. In this chapter, we ask the basic question: which students are taught by these teachers? If these underqualified teachers were evenly distributed across the state, each California student would have an approximately 1 in 10 chance of being in a classroom with an underqualified teacher. Yet, as we will demonstrate in great detail, these teachers are concentrated in schools where students are in greatest need of high-quality instruction. Urban districts serving large numbers of poor and minority students are most likely to have high concentrations of underqualified teachers. In some schools, the problem is so severe that the majority of students attend class after class, year after year, without being taught by a qualified teacher.

We begin the analysis by examining how the current teacher shortage is distributed in schools throughout the state. We then examine which students are in classrooms and schools staffed by underqualified teachers. Next, we examine shortages at the district level and look at the distribution of underqualified teachers within some of the more heavily affected districts. Next, we step back and describe who the population of underqualified teachers are and their impact on schools, and examine the different reasons why they are hired. Finally, we examine district policies to reduce teacher shortages and the limitations of these policies.

### **Statewide Distribution of Underqualified Teachers**

We define underqualified teachers as those who hold an emergency permit, waiver, or intern certificate. These teachers do not hold a full credential for their particular teaching assignment and have not completed a teacher preparation program and/or other requirements for their teaching assignment.\*

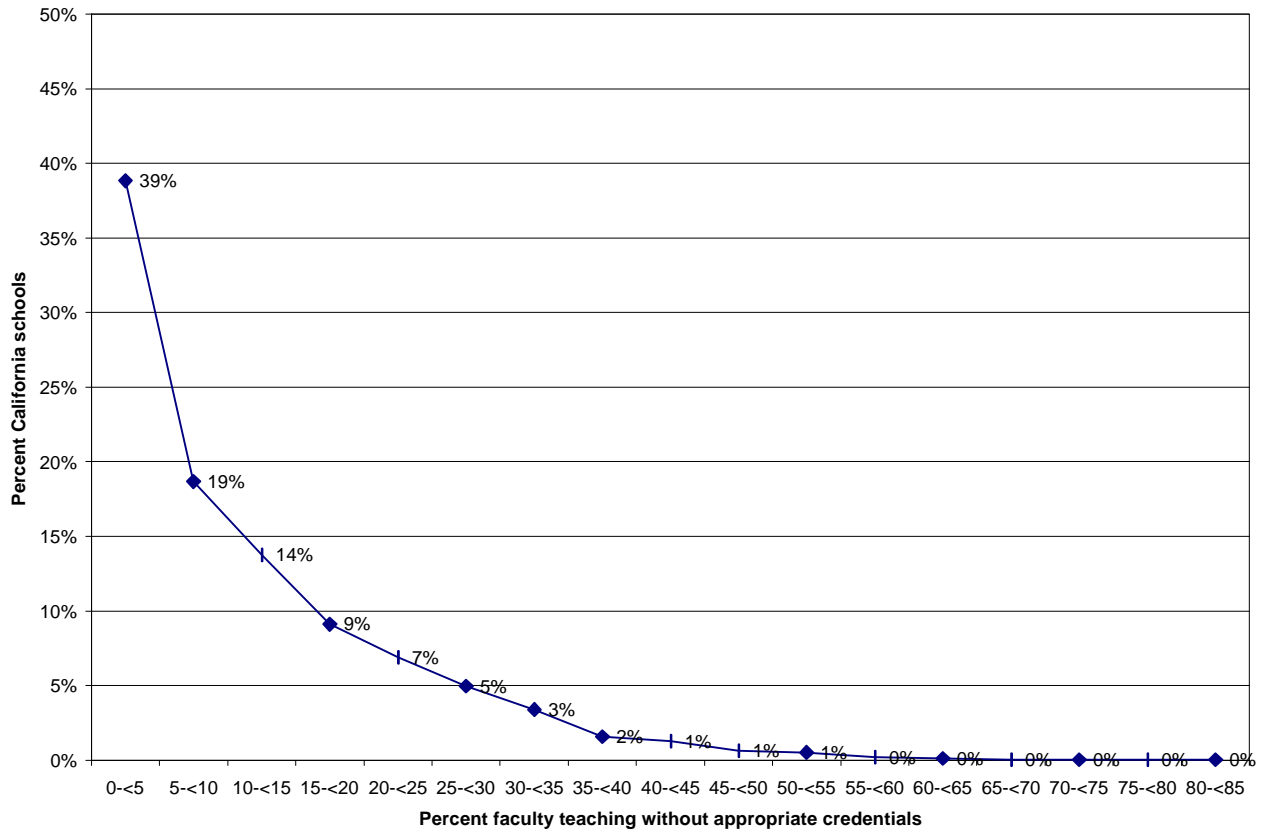
Figure 3-1 shows the statewide distribution of underqualified teachers. There are many schools with no or relatively few underqualified teachers. Nearly 40% of the schools in the state have fewer than 5% underqualified teachers; 24% have no underqualified teachers at all. These are the schools in which, from our case study work, the number of underqualified teachers is not overwhelming the overall work of the school. At the other extreme, nearly one-fifth of California schools have 20% or more underqualified teachers.† This subset of the most critically affected schools enrolls about 21% of all California students—over 1 million children in total.

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\* A small percentage of emergency permit holders have a regular credential but have added emergency certification to teach an additional subject area. From 1991-92 to 1996-97, this averaged from 4% to 9% of all single- and multiple-subject emergency permit holders.

† The analysis in Figure 3-1 (and subsequent analyses on the distribution of underqualified teachers) uses data from school year 1997-98 and does not include adult, vocational, or other alternative schools.

**Figure 3-1  
Statewide Distribution of Underqualified Teachers**



Note: There are one or two schools in each of the percentage categories above 65%. However, the schools in each of these categories constitute less than 0.5% and are represented as 0.0% in Figure 3-1.

Sources: CDE (1999); SRI analysis.<sup>1</sup>

As we will discuss later in this chapter, not all underqualified teachers are equally unprepared. There are some with relevant previous experience whom the school administration expects to be effective teachers despite their not having completed the requirements for their credential. Others are candidates who show exceptional promise or who meet particular district needs—many of these are teacher candidates who are close to finishing a preparation program. Others, however, are hired because administrators are desperate to fill classrooms and are unable to find qualified teachers.

As the percentage of underqualified teachers in a school increases, serious problems begin to arise. In schools with few underqualified teachers, these teachers tend to be hired for some desirable characteristics, and they are supported by a large portion of veteran teachers. In these schools, a limited number of children are affected by being in classrooms staffed by

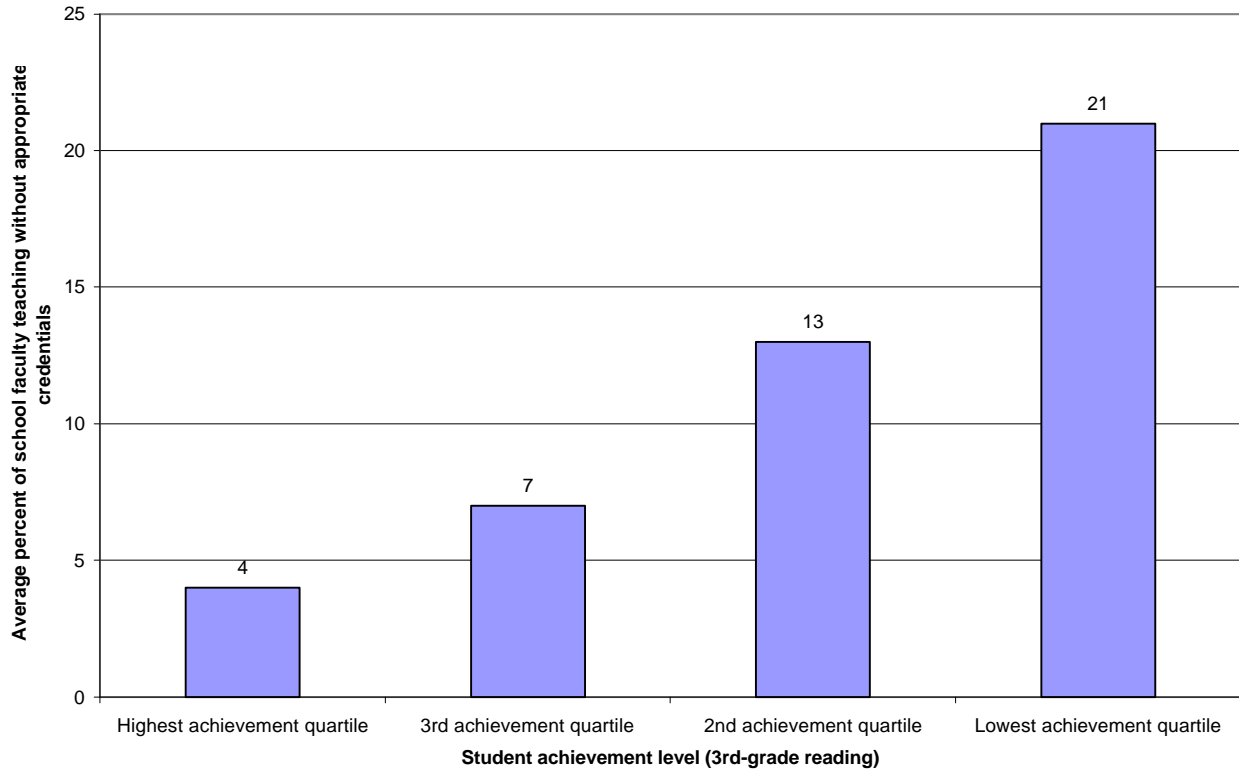
underqualified teachers. Although it is never appropriate for an underqualified teacher to lead a classroom, these teachers tend to complete their prep program and become fully qualified in a short period of time. In schools with high percentages of underqualified teachers, these teachers are more likely to have been selected just to fill classrooms, and there are fewer veteran teachers to provide support. More students are affected and for a longer period of time, since turnover is higher.

At some point, as the percentage of underqualified teachers grows, the school's overall functioning is impaired. The exact point at which this occurs depends on the strength of professional development and induction systems in the district and at the school, and the overall workplace support for adult learning opportunities within the school. However, we observed in case studies that schools with more than 20% underqualified teachers were hard pressed to provide adequate professional support to their entire faculty. These are the hard-to-staff schools in the state, those where a child's opportunities to receive the kind of instruction needed to meet the state standards are severely compromised. As noted above, one in five schools in the state fall into this category.

### **Maldistribution of Underqualified Teachers by Student Characteristics**

Who are the children most likely to be taught by an underqualified teacher? In short, they are the students who can least afford it—those whose achievement puts them at risk of school failure without effective intervention. Analysis of third-grade reading scores on the SAT-9 shows that schools where students are achieving at the lowest levels in the state—essentially those schools where students are still struggling to learn to read well in third grade—have, on average, five times as many underqualified teachers as high-achieving schools (Figure 3-2). Statewide, those schools with the highest achievement in third-grade reading have, on average, only 4% underqualified teachers. About 900 schools fall into this category. In contrast, those schools with the most poor students and the lowest achievement in third-grade reading have, on average, 22% underqualified teachers. Nearly a thousand schools in the state fall into this category. These are the schools, as we noted above, that are the most dysfunctional and the least likely to support student learning.

**Figure 3-2**  
**Average School-Level Underqualified Teachers by**  
**Third-Grade Student Achievement Level**

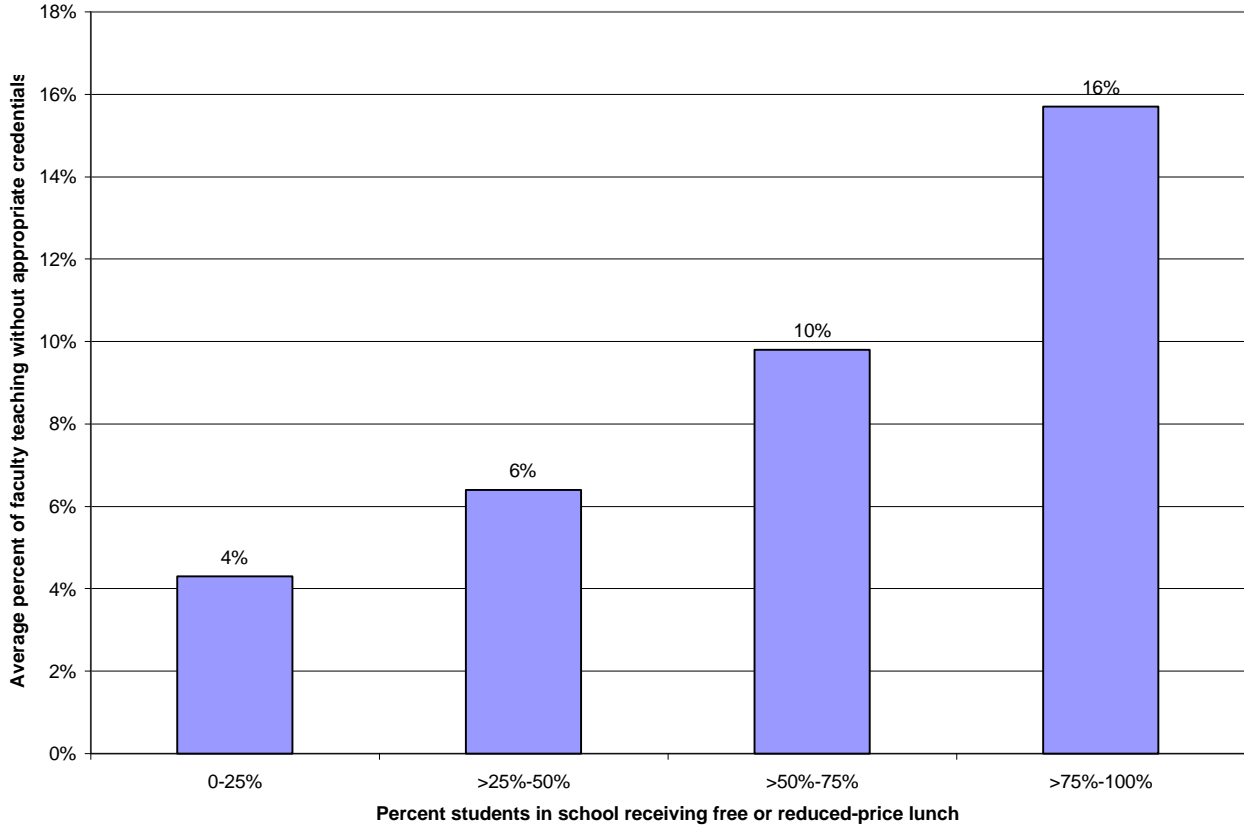


Sources: CDE (1999); CDE (1998); SRI analysis.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, the schools with the highest concentrations of underqualified teachers share other characteristics besides low achievement. These schools have more poor students, more minority students, and more students from homes where English is not the primary language. Such schools are concentrated to a greater degree in the state’s urban areas.

Schools with the highest percentages of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch (a proxy for the poverty level of the student population) also have the highest percentages of underqualified teachers. Figure 3-3 shows that schools with the highest student poverty levels have an average of 16% underqualified teachers on staff. This compares with just 4% underqualified teachers in those schools with the lowest student poverty levels. It is important to note that about 1,700 schools—nearly a quarter of those in California—fall into the highest poverty category.

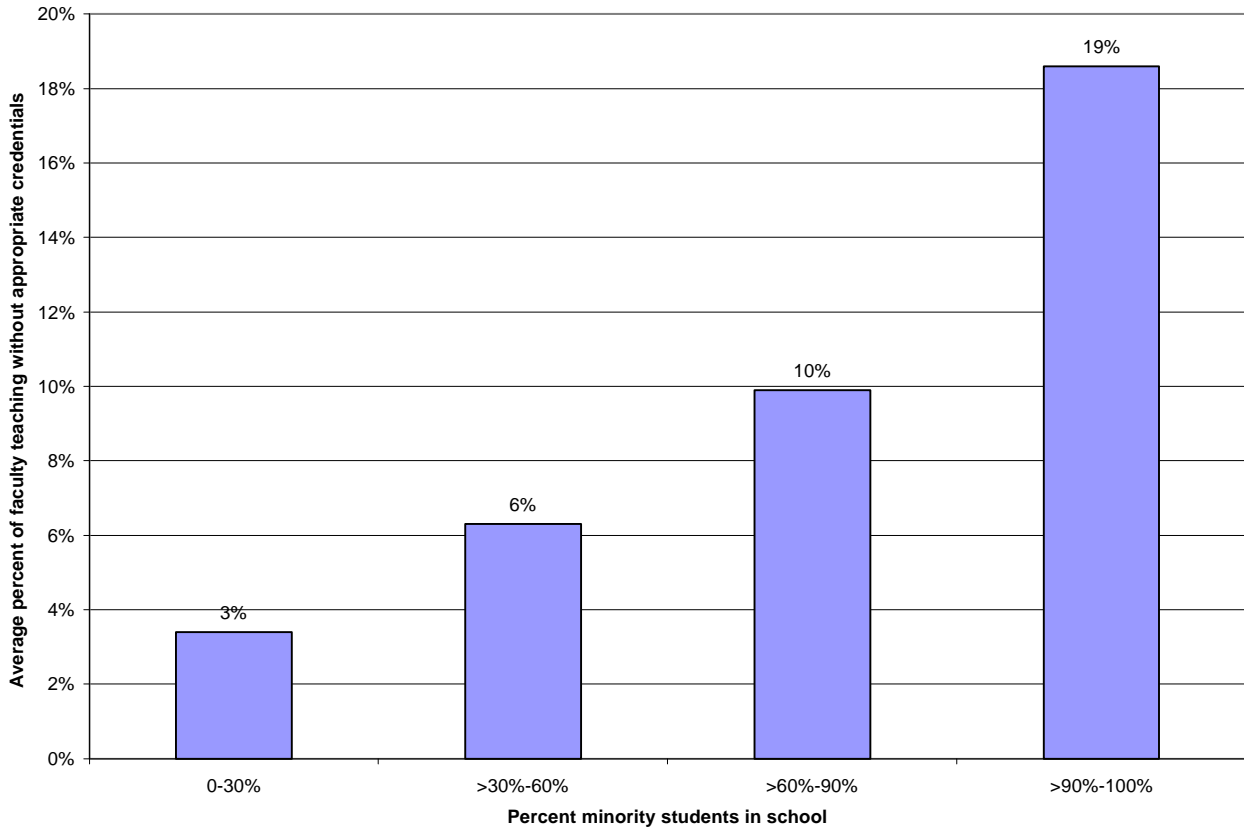
**Figure 3-3**  
**Distribution of Underqualified Teachers by Student Poverty Level**



Sources: CBEDS (1999); SRI analysis.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Figure 3-4 shows that schools with more than 90% minority students have, on average, 19% underqualified teachers on staff. This group consists of more than 1,300 schools, or about 19% of all California schools. Schools with the fewest minority students have, on average, only 3% underqualified teachers. Similar patterns exist for limited English proficient (LEP) students, who typically are from minority groups and poor families.

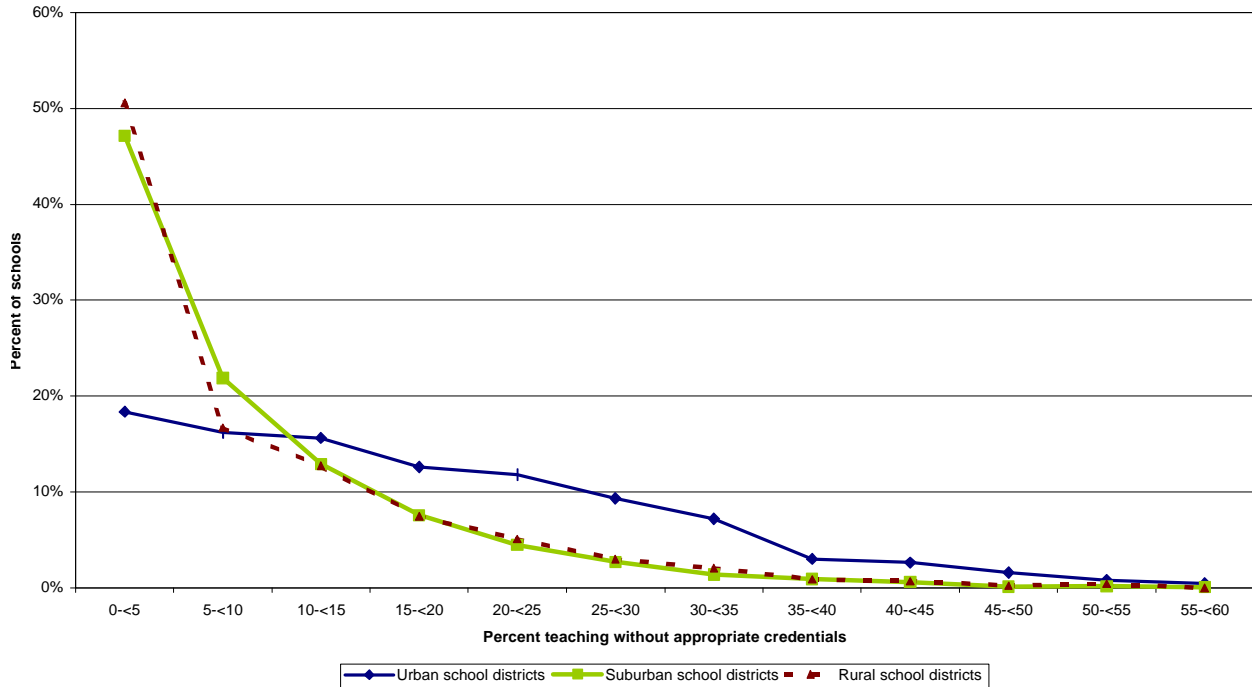
**Figure 3-4**  
**Distribution of Underqualified Teachers by Percent Minority Students**



Sources: CDE (1999); SRI analysis.<sup>4</sup>

The distribution of underqualified teachers also varies by a number of school-level characteristics, including the urbanicity of the school site and the demographics of the student population. Overall, urban areas face more severe shortages than suburban and rural areas. Compared with the statewide average of 12%, urban schools had, on average, 17% underqualified teachers in 1997-98. Rural and suburban schools each had approximately 8% underqualified teachers. As Figure 3-5 shows, the distribution of underqualified teachers in rural and suburban districts is similar to the statewide distribution, with about half of schools having fewer than 5% underqualified teachers. In contrast, only about 18% of urban schools have fewer than 5% underqualified teachers. Even worse, 37% of urban schools have more than 20% underqualified teachers in their classrooms.

**Figure 3-5  
Comparison of Distribution of Underqualified Teachers by Urbanicity**



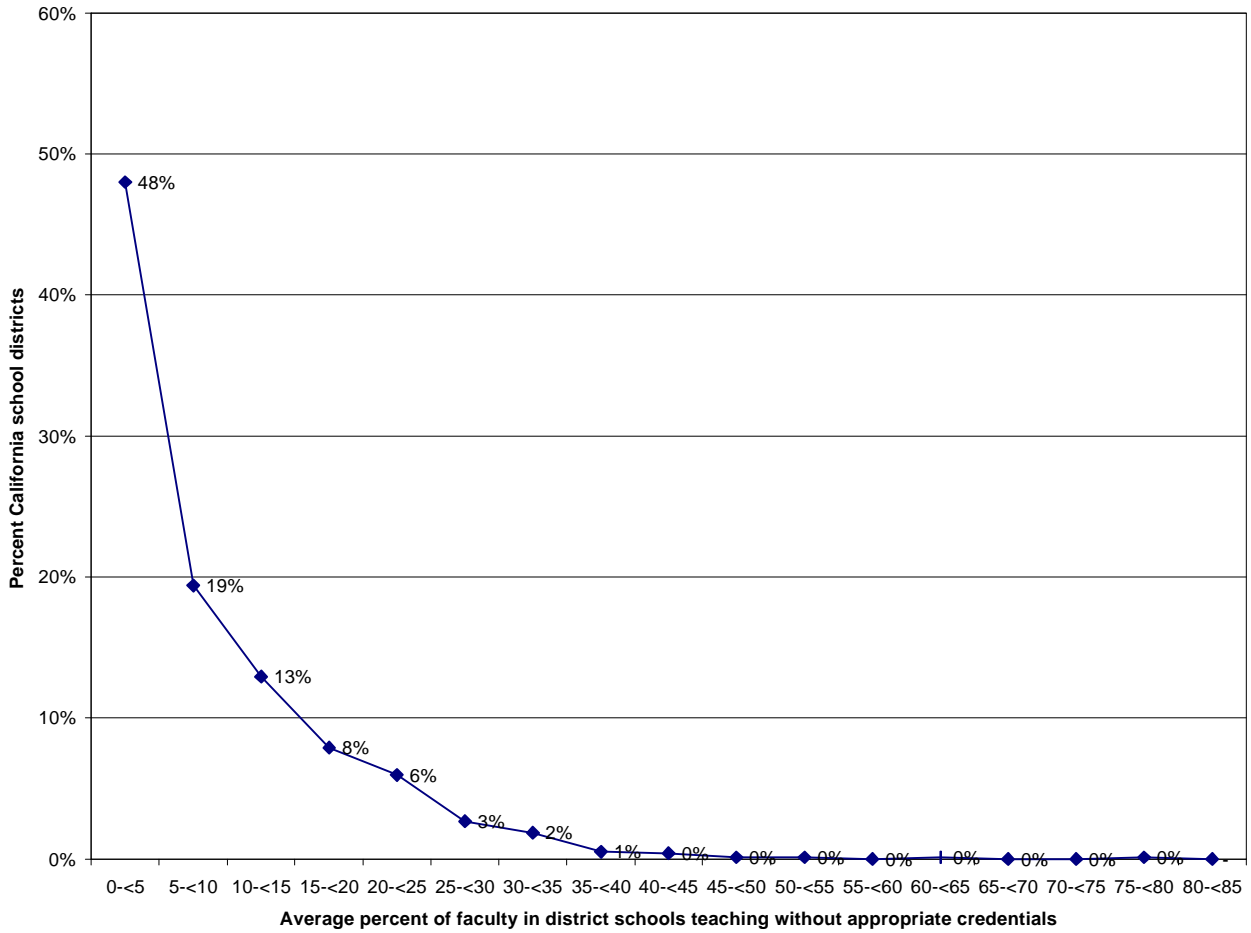
Sources: CBEDS (1999); SRI analysis.<sup>5</sup>

These numbers make a compelling case: those students who currently are struggling in school and who are most likely to come from homes where, for economic and linguistic factors, parents are unable to compensate for poor schooling opportunities, are the least likely to be getting a high-quality instructional experience. In short, those students who are currently least likely to meet the new state standards are receiving the least help and therefore will be the most likely to fail to meet the new state graduation requirements in the future.

### **Distribution of Underqualified Teachers within Districts**

Although concentrations of underqualified teachers are found most often in schools with large percentages of poor and minority students, they are not limited to a few large districts. Many districts are struggling with high concentrations of underqualified teachers. As Figure 3-6 shows, nearly half the state’s school districts (48%) have fewer than 5% underqualified teachers (and 23% have no underqualified teachers at all). However, 12%, or one in every eight California school districts, have more than 20% underqualified teachers.

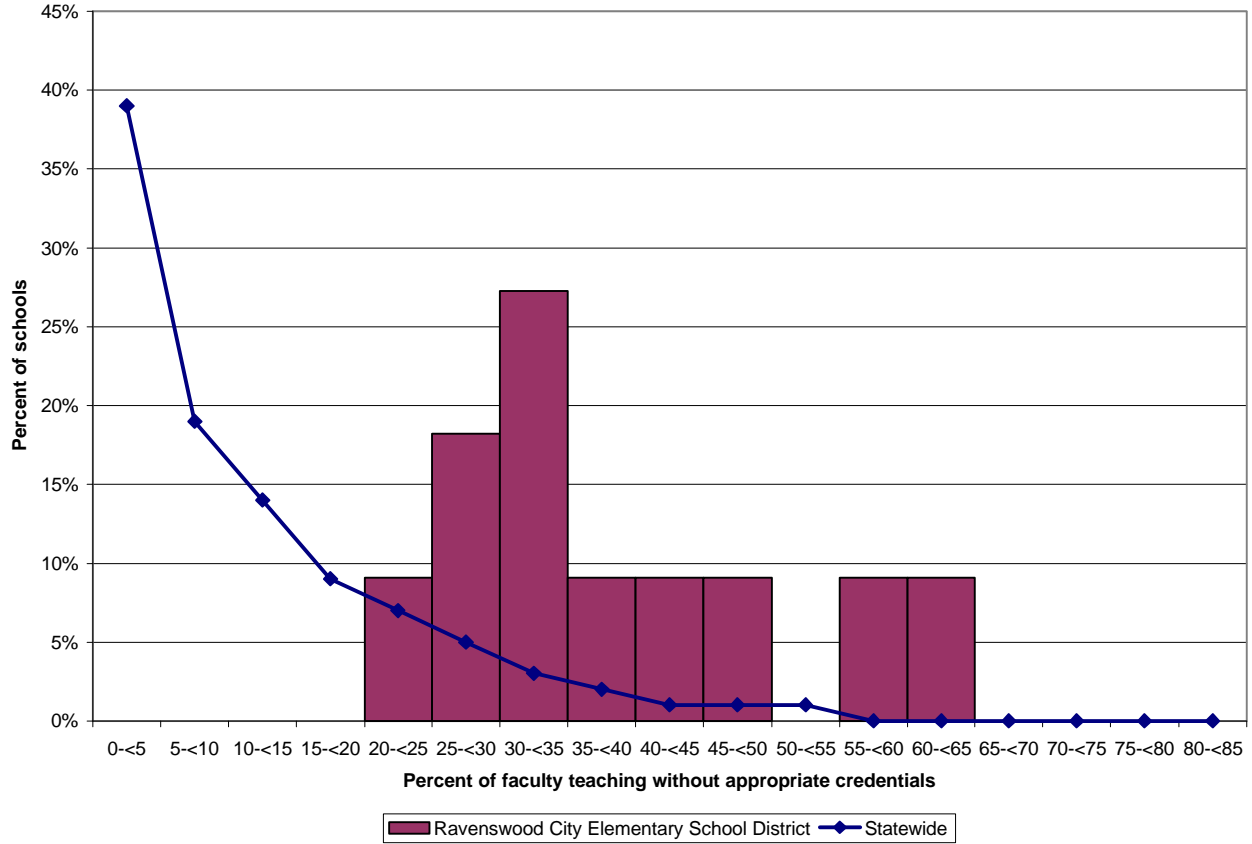
**Figure 3-6  
Distribution of Underqualified Teachers in California School Districts**



Sources: CDE (1999); SRI analysis.<sup>6</sup>

Within districts with high concentrations of underqualified teachers, how teachers are distributed depends on the degree of diversity among district schools. In a geographically small district where all schools have similar economic and racial makeup, the concentration of emergency teachers is likely to be similar across all schools. For example, Ravenswood City Elementary School District in East Palo Alto has 11 schools located in a relatively compact geographic area. Schools in this district have an average of 38% underqualified teachers, and the distribution is relatively narrow. As Figure 3-7 shows, all Ravenswood schools have more than 20% underqualified teachers. Some Ravenswood schools are in worse shape than others—two have more than 50% underqualified teachers—but none have escaped the problem.

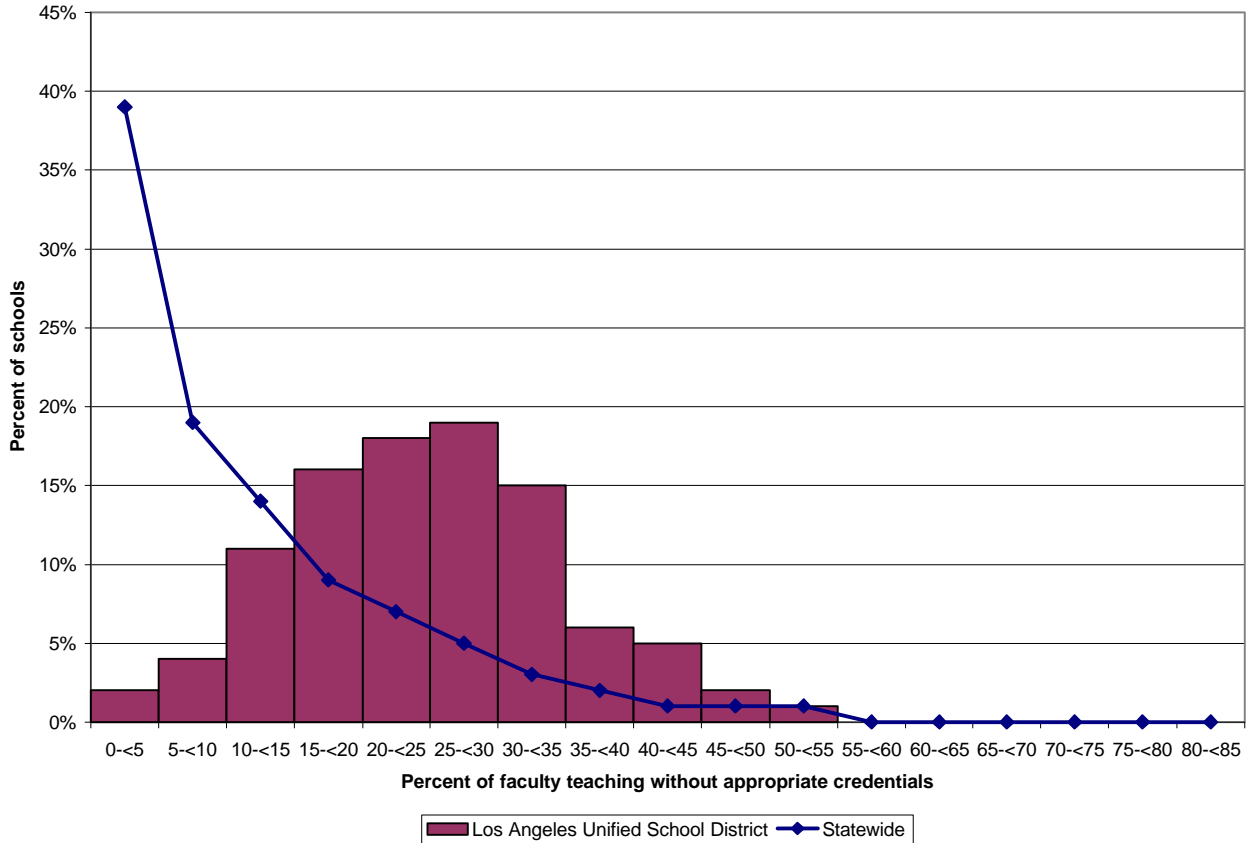
**Figure 3-7**  
**Comparison of Distributions of Underqualified Teachers Statewide and in Ravenswood City Elementary School District**



Sources: CBEDS (1999); SRI analysis.<sup>7</sup>

In large districts with greater economic and racial diversity among schools, the distribution is broader. In Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), for example, the district average is 25% underqualified teachers, but, as shown in Figure 3-8, this average is composed of schools on both ends of the spectrum—some schools have very few underqualified teachers, while others have more than 50%. Fully two-thirds of LAUSD schools have more than 20% underqualified teachers, creating serious problems at both the school and district levels. As at the state level, an overall percentage in a large district can mask extreme cases and an overall inequitable distribution.

**Figure 3-8  
Comparison of Distributions of Underqualified Teachers Statewide and in  
Los Angeles Unified School District**



Sources: CDE (1999); SRI analysis.<sup>8</sup>

### Who Are Underqualified Teachers?

Underqualified teachers, by definition, do not hold the appropriate credential for their teaching assignment. Beyond that common characteristic, however, these teachers vary considerably in their preparation to teach. In this section, we describe what kinds of individuals are hired to teach without appropriate credentials and why.

#### Promising Candidates

Many districts, whether they are facing shortages or not, will hire underqualified teachers strategically to secure the employment of particularly promising candidates. The Selma Unified School District is an example of a district that uses the emergency credentialing process to hire promising candidates. Although they have 400 to 500 applications each year for around 35

teaching positions, Selma officials report that they sometimes recruit strong candidates that have not yet completed their credential program. This is a strategic choice rather than a last-resort option. The underqualified teachers they hire are typically candidates they know well, who have demonstrated strong teaching skills in their student teaching assignments, and who come highly recommended by preparation program faculty. Often, these candidates have completed their coursework but have not yet finished their student teaching.

Far from being unhappy with such hires, Selma often makes special efforts to hire them. One teacher candidate credits the district superintendent with working “fervently” with the university to construct a special program for him to teach and get his credential at the same time. The district made special efforts to prepare and support him and even arranged for him to observe a well-known master teacher for 6 weeks in another district’s year-round school before he entered the classroom. The district was impressed with the candidate and also delighted to find a male Latino interested in teaching elementary school. Rather than hold off and risk losing him to another district, Selma used the emergency process to hire him immediately.

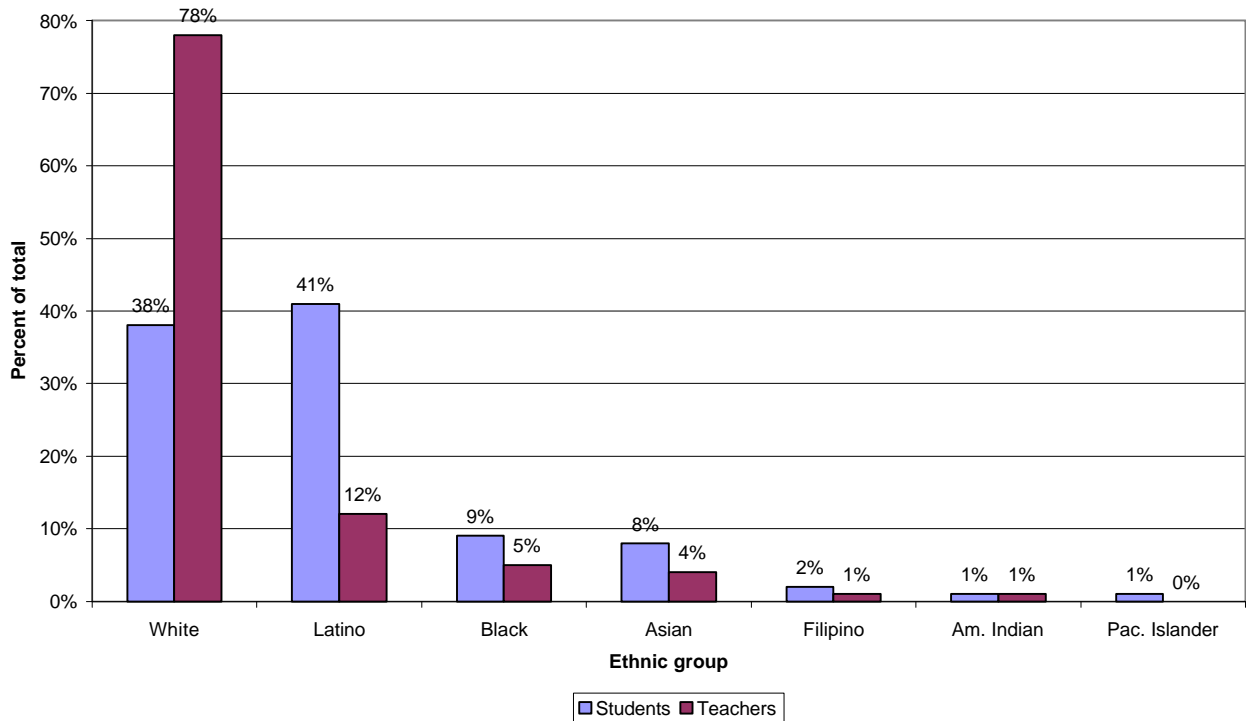
Elk Grove Unified School District is another district where promising candidates are hired before they earn their credentials. In Elk Grove, these candidates are often part of the district’s Teacher Education Institute (TEI), a teacher preparation program run by the district in conjunction with San Francisco State University. TEI participants are well known to district officials and school principals. When openings occur during the school year, the most promising candidates are offered full-time teaching positions while they finish their coursework. Here again, the district is in control of the situation and is able to distribute these teachers evenly across the district so that no schools are overwhelmed with large numbers of underqualified teachers. Despite the fact that Elk Grove is the second-fastest-growing school district in the country, almost 90% of its schools have fewer than 10% of their teachers in the underqualified category.

A variation on the promising candidate is the case of the well-qualified teacher who does not happen to have a credential. In these rarest cases, the emergency teacher has developed outstanding teaching skills and strong content knowledge without the assistance of a traditional preparation program. For example, one district we visited had hired a native French speaker with an advanced literature degree from France to teach high school French. She had no appropriate credential, but was viewed by the districts as well qualified to teach high school French literature.

### Candidates Who Fill District Priorities

Many districts hire underqualified teachers as a way of meeting a particular school or district priority, such as ethnic diversification of their faculty. As Figure 3-9 shows, there is a statewide mismatch between the ethnic makeups of the student population and the teaching force, leading many districts to make diversification a hiring goal. Because of the shortage of credentialed teachers of color, these districts may hire underqualified candidates to better match the demographics of their student bodies.

**Figure 3-9  
California Student and Teacher Ethnicity, 1997-98**



Source: CDE (1998).<sup>9</sup>

Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, for example, typically has thousands of applicants for open teaching positions. However, the current teaching force and credentialed applicant pool are primarily white. As part of their commitment to fostering greater diversity and equity in all areas, the district encourages (but does not require) schools to hire people of color on emergency credentials. As in Selma, these hires tend to be people who are known to the district. Similarly, San Francisco Unified School District tries to hire a diverse teaching force and will hire people of color on emergency credentials to achieve this goal. The district's goal is to reduce the percentage of emergency credentials in the district (currently about 7%), but district

staff acknowledge that they may never eliminate them completely because doing so would run contrary to their goal of diversification.

From the district perspective, the flexibility to hire a small number of promising candidates before they are lured away to another district is a useful tool in a tight labor market. The drawbacks are that such hires often require additional support that the school may not have the capacity to provide. Taking a teaching job brings immediate income, but also an overwhelming challenge. From the student's perspective, hiring an underqualified teacher means the difference between having a trained teacher and having an untrained teacher for a full year. Although the district may benefit from this type of strategic hiring in the long run, students suffer in the short run.

### **Teachers Who Fill Shortage Areas**

Many underqualified teachers are hired as a result of shortages of credentialed teachers in certain subject areas. As has been the case for decades, teachers in certain areas—such as bilingual education, special education, science, and mathematics—continue to be in especially short supply.

According to district-predicted hirings for 1998-99, the largest area of reported need is in self-contained classrooms,<sup>10</sup> driven primarily by the demands of the K-3 class size reduction program. Table 3-1 lists the number of teachers that districts expected to hire in each subject and special area for 1998-99.

**Table 3-1**  
**Estimated Number of Teacher Hires:**  
**Areas with Highest Need (1998-99)**

Teaching Area	Number of Predicted Hires	Percent of All Expected Hires
Self-contained	7,843	38
Bilingual education	3,175	15
Special education	2,858	14
Mathematics	1,133	6
English/drama	1,149	6
Life science	810	4
Social science	722	4
Physical science	618	3
Foreign language	522	3

Source: CDE (April 1998).<sup>11</sup>

**Special Education Teachers.** In 1997-98, nearly 8,000 emergency permits and waivers were issued to education specialists and resource specialists—leaving over one-third of special education staff in these categories without proper credentials.<sup>12</sup>

In 1997, the CTC adopted regulations that changed the requirements for special education credentials, in part as a response to the shortage of special education teachers. The new requirements, which teacher preparation programs are currently phasing in, provide more flexibility for special education teachers coming from out of state. They also eliminate the requirement that special education teachers first earn a multiple- or single-subject credential before earning a special education credential. Instead, general education and special education coursework is now integrated into a single credential program. The changes also allow for more flexibility in assigning teachers to teach students with different types of disabilities in a range of instructional settings (e.g., special day classes, special schools, resource rooms). However, given the large number of special education teachers without proper credentials, it remains to be seen whether these steps will be adequate to address the need.

**Bilingual Teachers.** Despite the passage of Proposition 227, many districts maintain classrooms in which teachers need a Bilingual Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development credential. As Table 3-1 shows, 15% of districts' anticipated new hires for 1998-99 were for teachers with bilingual credentials.

The San Diego Unified School District case is illustrative of the bilingual education and special education teacher shortage. The district is able to hire a fully credentialed teacher for every regular K-6 classroom and enjoys a lower overall percentage of underqualified teachers than the state average. However, the district struggles to find credentialed bilingual and special education teachers and is forced to hire underqualified candidates for these positions. San Diego has roughly 400 teachers with emergency permits, about 90% of whom are in bilingual and special education classrooms. In addition, about 60 out of the 88 teachers in the district's internship programs are in the bilingual internship program.

**Teachers of Math, Science, and Other Subject Areas with Shortages.** Traditionally, mathematics and science have been recognized as subject areas lacking sufficient numbers of teachers. Math and science are the subjects with the largest numbers of single-subject emergency permit holders. According to the California Department of Education, in 1997-98, approximately 22% of all single-subject emergency permits and waivers were issued in the area of science, and 21% were in mathematics.<sup>13</sup> Disaggregated data indicate that almost all counties in the state request science and math emergency permits.<sup>14</sup> Table 3-1 shows that 13% of the anticipated new hires for 1998-99 were math and science teachers.

Many districts also experience difficulty recruiting secondary-level teachers of English, social studies, and physical education—subjects that are not typically recognized as shortage areas. In 1997-98, approximately 15% of all single-subject emergency permits and waivers issued were in the area of English, 10% were in social science, and 10% were in physical education.<sup>15</sup>

Another result of subject area shortages at the secondary level are teachers who teach “out of field,” that is, do not hold degrees in the subject area they teach. Some of these teachers, however, have demonstrated subject matter competency in the process of obtaining single-subject credentials, either by completing coursework or by passing appropriate tests. These people hold valid credentials for their teaching assignment despite not having a degree in their subject area.

Other teachers are certified to teach in one subject area but teach additional or different subjects out of their field because of shortages at their school. These teachers do not have degrees in the subject they are teaching nor have they demonstrated subject matter competency. Technically, teachers should hold an emergency credential for any class in any subject in which they have not proven subject matter competency. It is believed, however, that schools widely underreport the practice of credentialed teachers' teaching out of field, making it very difficult to approximate the scope of the problem.<sup>16</sup>

SRI survey results show that 40% of all single-subject teachers do not have a major or minor in the subject area of their main teaching assignment. This number includes credentialed teachers who have demonstrated subject matter competency and those who have not, as well as teachers holding emergency permits.

### **Filling Classrooms**

For many districts, the only type of underqualified teachers hired hold many promising characteristics. However, for some districts—or at least for some schools in those districts—the need to simply fill classrooms is the main reason for hiring large numbers of underqualified teachers. At the beginning of this chapter, we described 20% of California’s schools as having 20% or more underqualified teachers. In these schools, large numbers of underqualified teachers typically have been hired because administrators can find few qualified teachers to fill any open positions. It is in these schools that students encounter the most serious hurdles to student learning.

LAUSD illustrates how the problem of hiring underqualified teachers to fill classrooms can escalate uncontrollably. The district has faced teacher shortages for many years, but in recent years the number of underqualified teachers has grown dramatically. As shown in Table 3-2, one-quarter of all LAUSD faculty are currently working on an emergency permit, waiver, or intern credential. More alarming, however, are figures for new hires. Table 3-3 shows that 75% of new teachers hired for the 1998-99 school year did not have regular teaching credentials.

**Table 3-2  
Qualifications of LAUSD Teachers, 1994-1998**

	<b>Preliminary or Professional Clear Credential</b>	<b>Emergency Permit, Waiver, or Internship Credential</b>
1994-95	88%	12%
1995-96	88%	12%
1996-97	83%	17%
1997-98	79%	21%
1998-99	75%	25%

Source: Los Angeles Unified School District (1999).

**Table 3-3**  
**Qualifications of First-Year LAUSD Teachers, 1994-1998**  
**(Includes New Hires Only)**

	<b>Preliminary or Professional Clear Credential</b>	<b>Emergency Permit, Waiver, or Internship Credential</b>
1994-95	40%	60%
1995-96	47%	53%
1996-97	31%	69%
1997-98	26%	74%
1998-99	25%	75%

Source: Los Angeles Unified School District (1999).

### **Issues in Understanding the Different Types of Underqualified Teachers**

Not all underqualified teachers are the same. Some teachers may be effective without having gone through a full teacher preparation program, but we have no data to suggest that these are not simply rare exceptions. Many teachers are filling shortage areas—like special education—where the skills needed for the job and the working conditions are such that current compensation formulas cannot attract sufficient numbers of qualified candidates. In these cases, students are likely to suffer. Other teachers are seen as quite promising or as filling specific district criteria. In these cases, schools and districts often express gratitude at being able to have hired them. But again, the end result is some period of time when students are being taught by a less than fully trained teacher. It is especially problematic that districts are seeking to hire young ethnic minority candidates before they have completed their degrees—putting these individuals in the difficult situation of teaching full-time while continuing their education.

In almost all cases, then, individual students and classrooms are likely to be negatively affected by having underqualified teachers. We showed earlier in this chapter that schools with more fully credentialed teachers have higher test scores. Another study has shown that even after controlling for the poverty level of the students, the qualifications of math teachers in a school significantly predict schoolwide test scores in math.<sup>17</sup> Our case studies showed that the detrimental impact on school culture and student learning is more dramatic in schools where there are large numbers of underqualified teachers. We turn to this issue next.

## The Impact of High Concentrations of Underqualified Teachers

Case studies show that having a high percentage of underqualified teachers in a given school can create problems throughout the entire school community. The lack of qualified teachers becomes the primary personnel issue, year after year. Desperate to fill classrooms, these schools must hire from pools of untrained applicants. Often, these are the very schools suffering from overcrowding and the difficult working conditions that follow.\* The lack of mentors, overcrowded buildings, year-round schedules, and assignments to the most challenging classes all conspire against even the most well-meaning emergency-credentialed teacher. Many new teachers in these schools leave after a short time, opening up slots that inevitably must be filled with more underqualified teachers. The stability and reputation of the schools suffer, making it even more difficult to attract qualified teachers and making schools unable to pull themselves out of their hiring crisis.

In addition to exacerbating poor teacher retention rates, high concentrations of underqualified teachers can erode professional development for the entire faculty. Resources for professional development are necessarily redirected to the underprepared teachers, and credentialed teachers have fewer professional development resources available to them. In addition, high concentrations of emergency permit teachers quickly exhaust the pool of potential mentor teachers. As more positions are filled by untrained teachers, the overall level of professional expertise in the school drops too low to move the school in a positive direction. Survey findings, discussed more extensively in a later section, show that teachers in schools with many underqualified teachers (21% or more) collaborate less than their counterparts in schools with few underqualified teachers.

In addition to depleting a school's capacity to provide professional development, high concentrations of underqualified teachers can damage the working environment simply by eroding teachers' sense of professionalism. As one credentialed teacher said, "It's an embarrassment that anyone can walk in and get a teaching job. The lack of professionalism blows my mind. The discrepancy between trained and untrained teachers is huge." In addition, teachers point out, having students that were previously taught by untrained teachers makes the instructional aspect of their job more difficult. As another veteran teacher said, "We all pay for it if an emergency teacher flounders all year."

Of course, the most distressing aspect of high percentages of underqualified teachers is the negative impact on students. Veteran teachers in such schools are frank about what they see in

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\* Working conditions in overcrowded schools and their impacts on professional learning communities are discussed more extensively in Chapter 6.

the classrooms of their underqualified colleagues. One teacher at an LAUSD middle school with more than 25% underqualified teachers said, “On a scale of 1 to 10, new [underqualified] teachers are doing a 1.5. They come with no experience. They’re bombing.” Another teacher from the same school reported that an outsider would be shocked by a visit to the classrooms of many of the underqualified teachers. “They just aren’t doing anything in those classrooms.”

In some schools, the shortages are so severe that classes are staffed by a revolving door of long-term substitutes. For example, one middle school math teacher in a year-round school reported serving as a substitute during off-track time because the school was unable to fill a position. By the time this teacher offered to fill in for the month, the class had been staffed by 17 different teachers.

#### **INSIDE PERSPECTIVE**

Fifteen percent of the teachers at Jones High School lack appropriate credentials. The school has a hard time attracting and keeping new teachers. For example, last year the school hired 5 new science teachers for a department of about 25, and not even half of the department has been there for over 5 years. In the math department, two or three positions remain unfilled. As one veteran teacher on the hiring committee reported, “Almost all applicants do not have teaching experience, and those who do have experience raise suspicion, like ‘Why is this person transferring after 10 years experience?’ Basically, we interview people and try to decide which one is most likely to survive...the district has to take what it can get to fill teaching positions.”

Teachers also report that the professional culture and working conditions are lacking. “Teachers at this high school rarely talk about teaching, and neither does the administration. ...I can’t recall the last time the science department sat down and discussed practices or what we’re teaching.”

The impact on student achievement is devastating. As one teacher reported, “There is some learning going on, but a combination of things contribute to low student achievement. There are many inexperienced teachers who don’t know how to present material in a way that will cause learning to happen. Many have had to develop strategies just to survive in the classroom, some of which are probably harmful to learning. ... There’s also a lack of motivation on kids’ part. ... It is really hard to get some kids to do homework. I see a few reasons for this. One, when you have a bad teacher, you’re not motivated to do anything. Also a lack of basic skills in reading and math really hurts kids in other subjects. ... I used to feel like things were improving, but I’m more cynical now. Unless something drastic happens, nothing will change. Every year, I say it can’t get worse, but then it does.”

## Reasons Why Schools and Districts Have High Numbers of Underqualified Teachers

Concentrations of underqualified teachers can result from many factors that vary from district to district. One of the primary reasons is that many hard-to-staff schools have terrible working conditions where no well-qualified professional would want to work. As discussed more extensively in Part II, overcrowding, lack of adequate facilities and space, and weak or nonexistent professional support create extremely difficult and undesirable workplaces. Because they are in high demand, qualified teachers go elsewhere. Schools find themselves with many open positions to fill and few qualified applicants to choose from.

In addition to the problem of working conditions, the difficulty of these jobs is rarely reflected in the salaries offered to teachers who fill them. As shown in Table 3-4, when asked why they chose the district they work in, nearly half of teachers name pay scale and benefits as the most, second most, or third most important reason. Teachers in high-poverty, high-minority districts name it as an important reason even more often. Districts—especially those with poor working conditions—must compete not only with neighboring districts but with other professions for the teachers they want.

**Table 3-4**  
**Reasons Teachers Choose the District They Teach In**

	<b>Percent of Teachers Ranking Reason as Most, 2nd Most, or 3rd Most Important</b>
How close to home	59
Pay scale/benefits	48
Assignment available	40
Previous experience with district	33
Positive reputation of district	33
Support for new teachers	30
Challenge of particular assignment	16
Safety of school/community	11

Source: SRI statewide teacher survey.

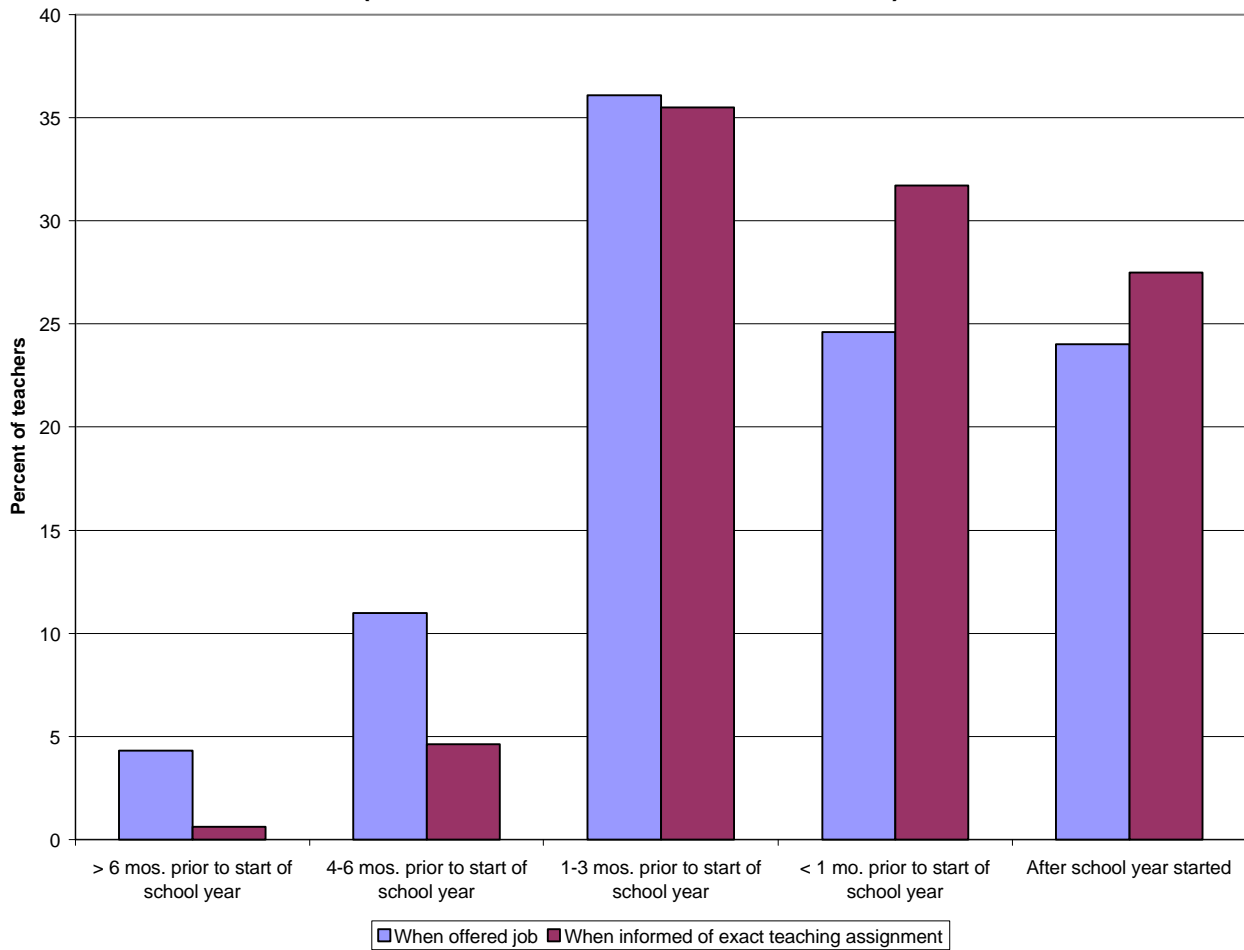
Related to working conditions is the location of a school—many schools with large proportions of underqualified teachers are located in areas considered undesirable to teachers. California does not have one large labor market for teachers; instead, there are multiple regional labor markets. When teachers are asked why they chose the district they currently work in, a

majority report that proximity to home is an important reason, as shown in Table 3-4. This result is consistent with previous findings that show that teachers choose schools close to their current homes and that a majority limit their job search to a 25-mile radius.<sup>18</sup> These findings imply that teachers are generally not willing to relocate or commute great distances to take a teaching job. Typically, a qualified teacher living in Humboldt County is not going to pack up and move to Compton, even if he or she were hired early and paid slightly more than in a position in her local district.

A second aspect of location is the particular neighborhood a school is located in. Although we know that teachers generally limit their job search in terms of area, these findings do not imply that teachers will take *any* job that is near their home. Within a local market, schools may be competing with nearby schools that are in more affluent areas and perceived as safer or “nicer.”

A third reason why schools or districts may have a high number of underqualified teachers is that they do an inadequate job of recruiting and hiring teachers. As Figure 3-10 shows, many teachers are hired and given their teaching assignments very late. One-quarter of California teachers hired in the past 5 years were offered their job less than 1 month before the start of the school year. Nearly another quarter were offered their teaching job after the school year had already started. Figure 3-10 also shows that teachers are, on average, not informed of their exact teaching assignment for some time after they are hired. Because teaching assignment is a key factor in teachers’ employment decisions, this fact further handicaps “late” districts.

**Figure 3-10**  
**When Teachers Are Hired and Informed of Exact Teaching Assignment**  
**(Of Teachers Hired in the Past 5 Years)**



Source: SRI statewide teacher survey.

Some district officials complain that they hire late because they are not sure of their budgets until the state passes its budget. More frequently, districts are slow to hire because of requirements that experienced teachers get first choice of open positions. In large districts, clumsy central office bureaucracy and an ambiguous division of recruiting and hiring responsibilities between schools and the central office can result in slow hiring.

In San Diego, as in many districts, the union contract requires that job openings be posted and that teachers with seniority be given an opportunity to bid on them. If a senior teacher takes a new position and vacates the old one, that job must be posted. The resulting chain reaction can cause late openings.

In LAUSD, several factors combine to create a tangled, inefficient hiring process. The district must abide by the Rodriguez court decree, which attempts to equalize funding across the district. According to the decree, schools that have many experienced teachers must hire a less expensive beginning teacher if a vacancy opens. Large schools with many beginning teachers are supposed to have priority for those experienced teachers who are looking for jobs. (In reality, there often are no experienced teachers who apply for such positions, and the district must hire emergency teachers for these openings.) Another mandatory hiring consideration is whether the applicant is minority or nonminority and how the person's employment will affect the ethnic distribution of a particular school's staff. The district also must take into account whether another teacher has priority for a vacancy, according to the union agreement. By all teacher accounts, the amount of "red tape" generated by the hiring process makes the entire process impersonal, unpleasant, and full of roadblocks. Although clearly not the sole source of the teacher shortages in the district, the cumbersome hiring procedures do not help.

Interestingly, the timing of teacher hiring overall shows no relationship to the poverty level of the school, the percentage of minority students in the school, or the number of emergency teachers in the school. This finding indicates that districts with high percentages of emergency teachers are not, on average, hiring later than other districts with low percentages of emergency teachers. However, reports from teachers indicate that districts may be doing an inadequate job of hiring relative to their particular hiring needs. In other words, districts that know they are likely to have many open positions *need* to recruit aggressively and hire early to have a chance of getting qualified teachers. More desirable districts can afford to hire later and still manage to fill their positions with credentialed teachers.

Of course, for any given school or district, it is unlikely that there is one reason to explain a high concentration of underqualified teachers. In reality, it is likely that more than one factor is operating, clouding the question of who or what is responsible for the problem. One thing that is clear is that to attract good, well-qualified teachers, schools must offer an attractive package of nearly all of the following: good working conditions, good salaries, a smooth hiring process, and a desirable location. Schools lacking a desirable location, in particular, need other ways to be attractive. Below we discuss what districts can do to make themselves more attractive to teachers and reduce the number of underqualified teachers. Next, we discuss those problems that are bigger than the district unit and beyond the district's scope of control.

## **What Districts Can Do to Reduce the Number of Underqualified Teachers**

Districts can and do take action to improve their recruitment and hiring practices in an effort to reduce the number of underqualified teachers. Whereas many districts suffer severe shortages of teachers year after year, some—with similar demographics—succeed in attracting credentialed teachers. Proactive districts' actions range from offering financial incentives to building “pipelines” into the districts with preparation programs to more aggressive recruitment combined with a streamlined hiring process. In this section, we describe effective district recruitment and hiring strategies, as well as some of the challenges and constraints districts face in implementing them.

### **Financial Incentives for Teachers**

Districts can offer various financial incentives to compete with neighboring districts for new teachers. El Centro and Selma are both semirural districts that offer comparatively high pay scales and are able to attract and hold qualified teachers. Selma purposefully has designed its pay scale to be high for the first few years and plateau somewhat in subsequent years. The district believes that once teachers begin working in the district, they are likely to stay. Signing bonuses are another variation on this strategy. Anticipating shortages, Elk Grove offered \$2,500 signing bonuses to attract new teachers in 1999. In addition, many districts try to attract experienced teachers by offering full salary credit for most or all years of previous experience outside of the receiving district. LAUSD now accepts up to 12 years of outside-district experience on the district's pay scale; Elk Grove accepts 10 years of experience.

As we discussed earlier, teachers report that salaries are one consideration in their selection of a teaching position. Unfortunately, our research does not indicate what level of salary would be sufficient to attract qualified teachers to hard-to-staff schools. However, it is clear from our case studies that, at the very least, a combination of financial incentives and dramatically improved working conditions is required to address the crisis.

### **Strategic Partnerships with Universities**

Some districts foster close partnerships with universities to help create a pipeline of new teachers into their schools. One example of a formal approach is Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District's partnership with UCLA's Center X. This partnership places Center X students in Santa Monica schools and, in turn, helps the district work toward its goal of diversifying its teaching staff. Informal efforts in Selma include fostering strong personal connections with local IHE faculty to get names of promising candidates and approach them directly. In LAUSD and

other districts, principals actively seek student teachers to work in their schools, in order to have a good chance to hire them.

### **District-Based Preparation Programs**

The number of district-based preparation programs is growing, in part, because these programs are tailored to district needs and serve as pipelines into the district's schools. Elk Grove's Teacher Education Institute (TEI) graduates about 80 teachers each year and places most of them in district schools. San Francisco also has a district-based preparation program and is expanding the program during the 1999-2000 school year. In addition, district internship programs are growing in response to the need to hire underqualified teachers. District officials see these programs as effective ways to deal with shortages and build a cadre of teachers likely to stay in their district. All 1,100 participants in LAUSD's District Intern program teach full-time while they are enrolled in the program. These district interns can earn a teaching credential after 2 years without having to pay tuition.

### **Aggressive Recruitment**

One of the ways districts have successfully increased the flow of new teachers into their schools is through aggressive recruitment efforts. Our survey findings bear out the importance of formal and informal district recruitment efforts. Forty-one percent of teachers hired in the past 5 years say that the school district assisted them in finding their current job. Thirty-seven percent report that word of mouth served the same function. Districts like New Haven—which has a stellar reputation for attracting high-quality teachers—have pioneered the use of technology to conduct out-of-state interviews and receive resumes via e-mail, as well as sophisticated marketing and recruitment strategies that mirror those in the business world. Elk Grove has formed a district advisory committee for recruitment. Selma, a smaller district, has a targeted strategy of directly approaching candidates whom district staff have heard about through IHE faculty. In addition, Selma makes the most of routine job fairs by doing preliminary interviews on the spot and immediately following up with promising candidates.

### **Streamlined Hiring**

Despite the problems of late state budgets and union contracts, some districts manage to make early hiring decisions and beat out competing districts for teachers. In Selma, for example, the district surveys its teachers in February to determine which jobs will be open the following year and which teachers want to change teaching assignments. Once open positions are identified, the district tries to fill them immediately. Typically, all jobs are filled by June, far ahead of neighboring districts that finish their hiring processes around August. Similarly, Elk

Grove completes its transfer phase by March and does a hiring round then and again in May, and then actively continues to offer contracts through October. San Diego has an aggressive out-of-state recruiting campaign and goes to several key college and job fairs annually. Given the large number of teachers it must hire each year and wanting to avoid hiring delays, the district offers hundreds of contracts in the spring, before knowing which particular schools have openings.

### **What Districts *Cannot* Do (Alone) to Reduce the Number of Underqualified Teachers**

In Chapter 2, we discussed teacher supply in terms of people with credentials who are willing to take the jobs available, given the current working conditions and salaries offered. We distinguished between this pool of people, which is too small to fill all the teaching positions available, and the larger supply pool—that is, individuals who have credentials but are currently unwilling to take the available jobs. The district policies discussed above, though successful in the eyes of the district, are limited in their reach. Even if all districts implemented the strategies described above, they probably would not solve the statewide problem of too many underqualified teachers. In reality, these district policies probably are drawing a teacher from the smaller pool into one school rather than another, rather than drawing in a new person who would not otherwise be in the teaching workforce. Consequently, proactive districts that are successful in recruiting qualified teachers often do so at the expense of neighboring districts.

The El Centro School District illustrates how an attractive, proactive district can “cream” qualified teachers from the local labor pool. The town of El Centro is the largest in Imperial County and is considered a good place to live, especially compared with the surrounding communities. The schools have a good reputation for treating teachers professionally and paying them well. The fact that El Centro is able to attract and hold the best teachers in the Imperial Valley contributes to its strength and ultimately to its attractiveness. By contrast, the surrounding districts are weak and lose their best teachers almost immediately—a process that makes them less attractive to good teachers. The size of the local pool of teachers who are willing to take jobs at the salaries offered and in the conditions offered is limited. Thus, as Table 3-5 illustrates, El Centro is able to meet its hiring needs with qualified teachers, but nearly all the other districts in Imperial County are struggling to do the same. As the superintendent of the Imperial County district of Westmorland Union Elementary explained, “Our biggest challenge is retaining staff. It’s very difficult for us to keep teachers, even though our pay scale is relatively high, and we give up to 12 years of credit. Nine teachers out of 25 on our staff are new, and this happens to us *every* year.” This district, like El Centro, is trying to attract and retain teachers with the resources it has. However, its strategies are not as powerful as El Centro’s, and they certainly are not powerful

enough to reach beyond the limited number of people willing to work under current conditions and salaries.

**Table 3-5  
Underqualified Teachers in Imperial County School Districts**

<b>District</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Average Percent Underqualified Teachers, 1997-98</b>
Brawley Elementary	4	11
Brawley Union High	1	22
Calexico Unified	7	9
Calipatria Unified	4	23
Central Union High	2	14
El Centro Elementary	11	3
Heber Elementary	1	10
Holtville Unified	4	19
Imperial Unified	4	13
Magnolia Union Elementary	1	20
McCabe Union Elementary	1	0
Meadows Union Elementary	1	12
Mulberry Elementary	1	38
San Pasqual Valley Unified	3	27
Seeley Union Elementary	1	20
Westmorland Union Elementary	1	31

Sources: CBEDS (1999); SRI analysis.<sup>19</sup>

Even El Centro has difficulty recruiting and holding high school teachers, particularly in math and science. The primary reason is that teacher candidates must travel outside the Imperial Valley to do the coursework necessary for secondary specialties. This smaller pool of potential teachers are frequently lured away from El Centro to more lucrative and appealing positions in San Diego, for example. This is another example of the “creaming” effect, except that qualified teachers are siphoned in the opposite direction—away from El Centro, rather than toward it.

To avoid the process of merely shuffling around a too-small pool of teachers who are willing to take available jobs, California cannot simply produce more and more teachers without attention to working conditions and salaries. For years, the teacher preparation system has

produced many more credentialed teachers than the number that actually take jobs. We believe that, given current working conditions and salaries, the supply of candidates who are willing to take jobs will never match or exceed the number of jobs available. Therefore, strategies that do not reach deeper into the larger supply of teachers, all those in the state who hold a teaching credential, are ineffective for making significant changes beyond the district unit.

Instead, the production of teacher candidates must be coupled with efforts to improve the jobs they are expected to take and the compensation they are offered. Although districts—El Centro, for example—can work toward this goal to some degree, as well as do their part to tighten recruitment and hiring efforts, they cannot bear the burden of fixing the state’s teacher crisis. Districts’ actions may in many cases aggravate the problem of too many underqualified teachers, but the problem is bigger and beyond the district unit. Districts—be they small or large, rural or urban—do not have the financial or human resources to fix working conditions enough or increase salaries enough to reach deeper into the larger supply of credentialed teachers. At best, they may siphon a few teachers away from another district.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> California Department of Education (CDE), Educational Demographics Unit. (1999). School-level teacher certification data compiled by special request. SRI analysis.
- <sup>2</sup> Teacher data from CDE. (1999). Student achievement data from CDE (1998) STAR reports research files Sacramento, CA: Author. Retrieved in 1999 from the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) databases on the World Wide Web: [http://star.cde.ca.gov/star98/research\\_index.html](http://star.cde.ca.gov/star98/research_index.html). SRI analysis.
- <sup>3</sup> CDE (1999). SRI analysis.
- <sup>4</sup> CDE (1999). SRI analysis.
- <sup>5</sup> CDE (1999). SRI analysis.
- <sup>6</sup> CDE (1999). SRI analysis.
- <sup>7</sup> CDE (1999). SRI analysis.
- <sup>8</sup> CDE (1999). SRI analysis.
- <sup>9</sup> CDE, Educational Demographics Unit. (1998). *Number of teachers in California schools by ethnic group, 1981-82 through 1997-98 and Enrollment in California public schools by ethnic designation, 1981-82 through 1998-99*. Sacramento, CA: Author. Retrieved in 1999 from CBEDS demographics reports on the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/>.
- <sup>10</sup> CDE, Educational Demographics Unit. (1998, April). *Teacher shortage and demand: School year 1997-98*. Sacramento, CA: Author. The total need reported by districts does not match our estimate of total teacher need. This is in part because districts are estimating future hires, rather than reporting actual numbers, and in part because we calculate the need for credentialed teachers only and therefore count all positions filled by emergency permit, waiver, and internship credential holders as unfilled.
- <sup>11</sup> CDE (1998, April).
- <sup>12</sup> Emergency permit data from Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). (1999). *Totals of credentials granted fiscal year 1997/98*. Sacramento, CA: Author. Waiver data from CTC. (1998, August). *Analysis of approved credential waiver requests, 1997-98*. Sacramento, CA: Author. Total staff data from CDE, Educational Demographics Unit. (1998). *Course listing enrollment and staff in California public schools, October 1997*. Sacramento, CA: Author. Retrieved in 1999 from CBEDS demographics reports on the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/>
- <sup>13</sup> CDE (1998, April).
- <sup>14</sup> CTC. (1998, May). *1996-97 Annual report: Emergency permits and credential waivers*. Sacramento, CA: Author.
- <sup>15</sup> CDE (1998, April).
- <sup>16</sup> CTC. (1999). Personal communication.
- <sup>17</sup> Fetler, M. (1997, January). Where have all the teachers gone? in *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 5(2).
- <sup>18</sup> Tierney, D. (1994). *A study of the employment patterns of graduates of California teacher education programs and the employment decisions of a selected sample of California school districts*. Sacramento, CA: CTC, Professional Services Division.
- <sup>19</sup> CDE (1999). SRI analysis.