

**Teacher Preparation in
California and the Nation:
An Evaluation Brief by the
California State University**



**Special Report of the
First Systemwide Evaluation of Teacher Education Programs
California State University
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Introduction: Origins and Purposes of the CSU Evaluation

For several years, 21 campuses of the California State University (CSU) made extensive changes in teacher preparation programs to produce larger numbers of well-qualified new teachers for public schools in California. In 1998 the CSU Board of Trustees embraced these efforts in a systemwide policy entitled *CSU's Commitment to Prepare High Quality Teachers*. Three years later, after making additional program changes, the 21 CSU Deans of Education decided to find out how well the programs were progressing toward the goals of productivity, excellence and equity in teacher preparation. In 2001 the Deans initiated the first Systemwide Evaluation of Teacher Education Programs in the University's history. A central purpose of the evaluation was to provide information that the Deans and other campus leaders could *use* in making further improvements in teacher education programs. Rather than viewing evaluation as a one-time need, the Deans initiated an ongoing process that will *annually* provide new and updated evaluation data about the quality and effectiveness of teacher education programs.

CSU Evaluation Questions and Answers

The CSU Deans of education drafted questions about teacher education program quality and effectiveness. A key focus of the questions was to find out how well the CSU is preparing teachers to implement the academic standards of the State Board of Education. Based on a stratified random sample of all graduates of credential programs in 1999-2000, CSU located the graduates who were K-12 teachers in 2000-01. The Chancellor's Office received anonymous, confidential, candid answers from 1,408 teaching graduates or 50.3 percent of the teaching sample. CSU also invited the school-site supervisors of these teaching graduates (most of whom were principals) to answer the evaluation questions. A total of 1,186 administrators answered the questions anonymously, confidentially and candidly, for a 45.3 percent return. Due to the sampling procedures and the response rates, the findings of the evaluation accurately describe the preparation of all credential program graduates in the "class" of 1999-00, which consisted of 10,512 newly-prepared teachers.

CSU Evaluation Assumptions and Limitations

The evaluation design assumed that one full year of service as a K-12 teacher provides a valid experiential basis for judging the quality and effectiveness of the teacher's prior preparation. A second assumption was that the effectiveness of a new teacher's preparation can be assessed validly by the beginning teacher and by the teacher's principal or other school-site supervisor. The evaluation conclusions are based on the considered judgments of two groups of professional educators: (1) first-year teachers who had experienced CSU preparation first-hand, and (2) school principals and other site-based administrators who supervised the CSU teaching graduates. The CSU Deans are preparing to expand the scope of the evaluation, subject to the availability of sufficient funding, to include (3) direct observations of the teaching practices of CSU graduates and (4) valid evidence of CSU impact on the academic achievements of K-12 students, but these data elements could not be included in the present study. The purpose of this *evaluation brief* is to compare the CSU System findings with those of a similar national study by a federal agency.¹

¹ For a summary of the CSU evaluation findings, contact the Office of the CSU Chancellor at (916) 278-4582 or (510) 763-3943 or by e-mail at dwright@calstate.edu.

National Study of Teacher Preparation in the United States

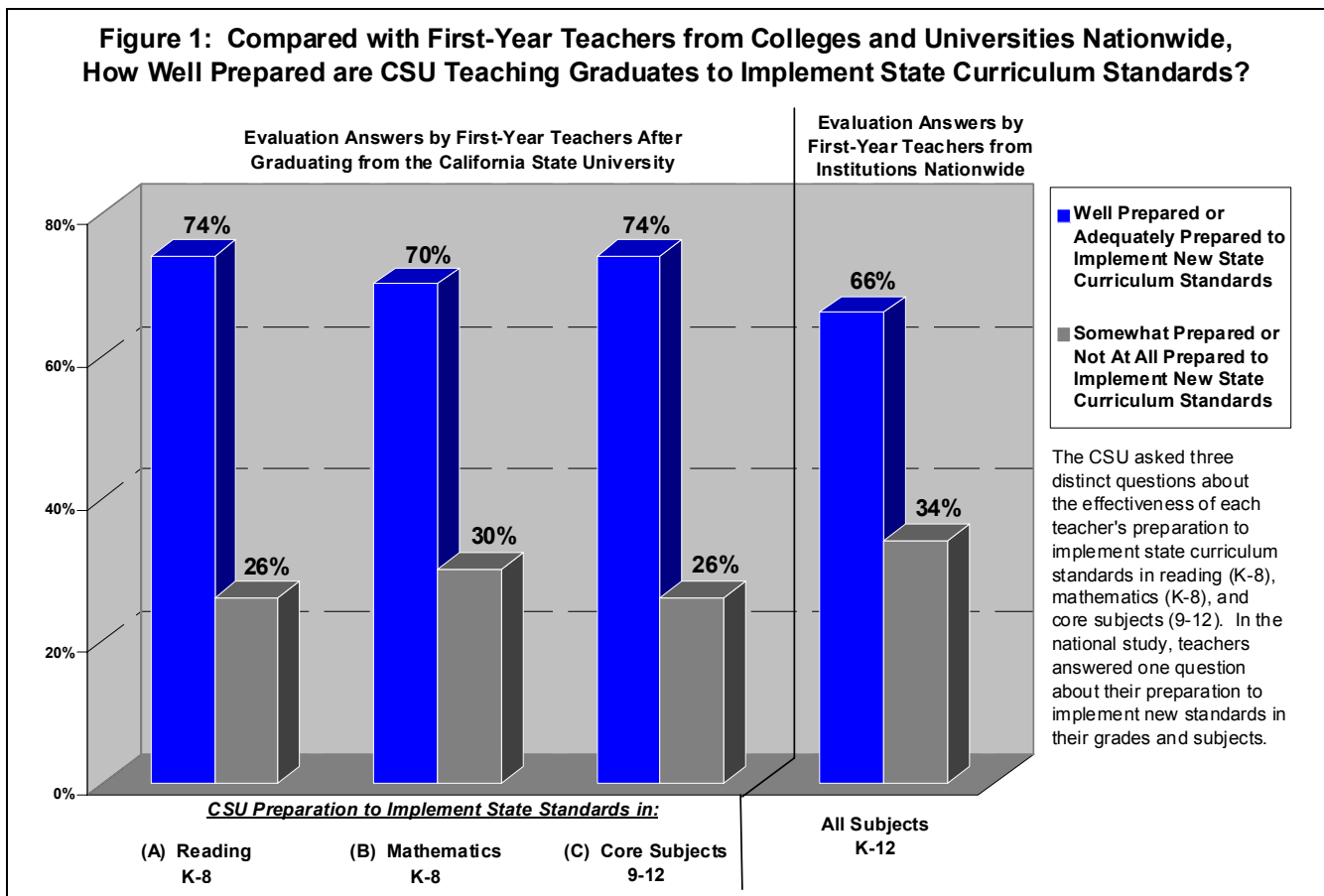
In 2000 the National Center for Education Statistics surveyed the nation's teachers "to provide a national profile on . . . teacher preparation and qualifications" (NCES, *Teacher Preparation and Professional Development: 2000*, Washington D.C.). Questionnaires were mailed to a nationally representative sample of 5,253 public school teachers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Among the topics examined was the effectiveness of each teacher's preparation for several aspects of classroom teaching. While NCES did not ask teachers to name the institutions where they completed their initial professional preparation, the federal agency maintained that the randomly-selected sample yielded national estimates of the effectiveness of teacher preparation. In a secondary analysis of these data requested by the CSU, NCES examined the responses of *first-year teachers* who had participated in the national study (Bernard Greene, NCES, personal communication, 2001).

The CSU's purpose in reviewing the nationwide findings among first-year teachers was to establish benchmarks for judging its own level of effectiveness as reported by CSU teaching graduates. CSU focused on the portion of the national survey in which teachers were asked: "How well prepared do you feel to do the following activities in the classroom?" Of the nine classroom activities in the NCES survey, five were similar but not identical to questions that CSU had asked its own graduates who were also first-year teachers. NCES' response options ("very well prepared," "moderately well prepared," "somewhat well prepared" and "not at all prepared") were similar but not identical to those used by CSU ("well prepared," "adequately prepared," "somewhat prepared" and "not at all prepared"). The two sets of evaluation findings are contrasted below.

Preparation to Implement New State Curriculum Standards: CSU Preparation Compared with Institutions Nationwide

NCES asked each teacher about the effectiveness of her/his preparation to "implement state or district curriculum and performance standards" in the subjects taught by that teacher. CSU asked its first-year teaching graduates in grades K-8 about the effectiveness of their preparation to "teach reading-language arts and mathematics according to California State Content Standards for my grade(s)." CSU also asked first-year teachers in grades 9-12 about the effectiveness of their preparation to "teach my subject area according to the State Curriculum Framework and Content Standards for my grade level(s)." The similarities between the NCES questions and the CSU questions were sufficient for the nationwide findings to serve as benchmarks to assess the standards-based preparation of new teachers in the CSU. On the following page, Figure 1 shows the results of this comparison. For standards-based reading instruction in K-8, for teaching standards-based mathematics in K-8, *and* for teaching core subjects according to state standards in grades 9-12, larger proportions of first-year CSU graduates were "well prepared" or "adequately prepared" than were first-year teachers in NCES' national sample (who described their preparation to implement state standards without specifying their grades/subject areas). These differences were strong in the preparation of first-year teachers for K-8 mathematics instruction (a four percent difference), but were even stronger in K-8 reading and 9-12 core subjects (each with an eight percent difference). The CSU evaluation has revealed several areas in which CSU preparation must continue to improve in behalf of K-12 school effectiveness in California. The national results indicate that recent CSU improvements have already placed this University's teacher preparation programs at the forefront of nationwide changes in the preparation of teachers.

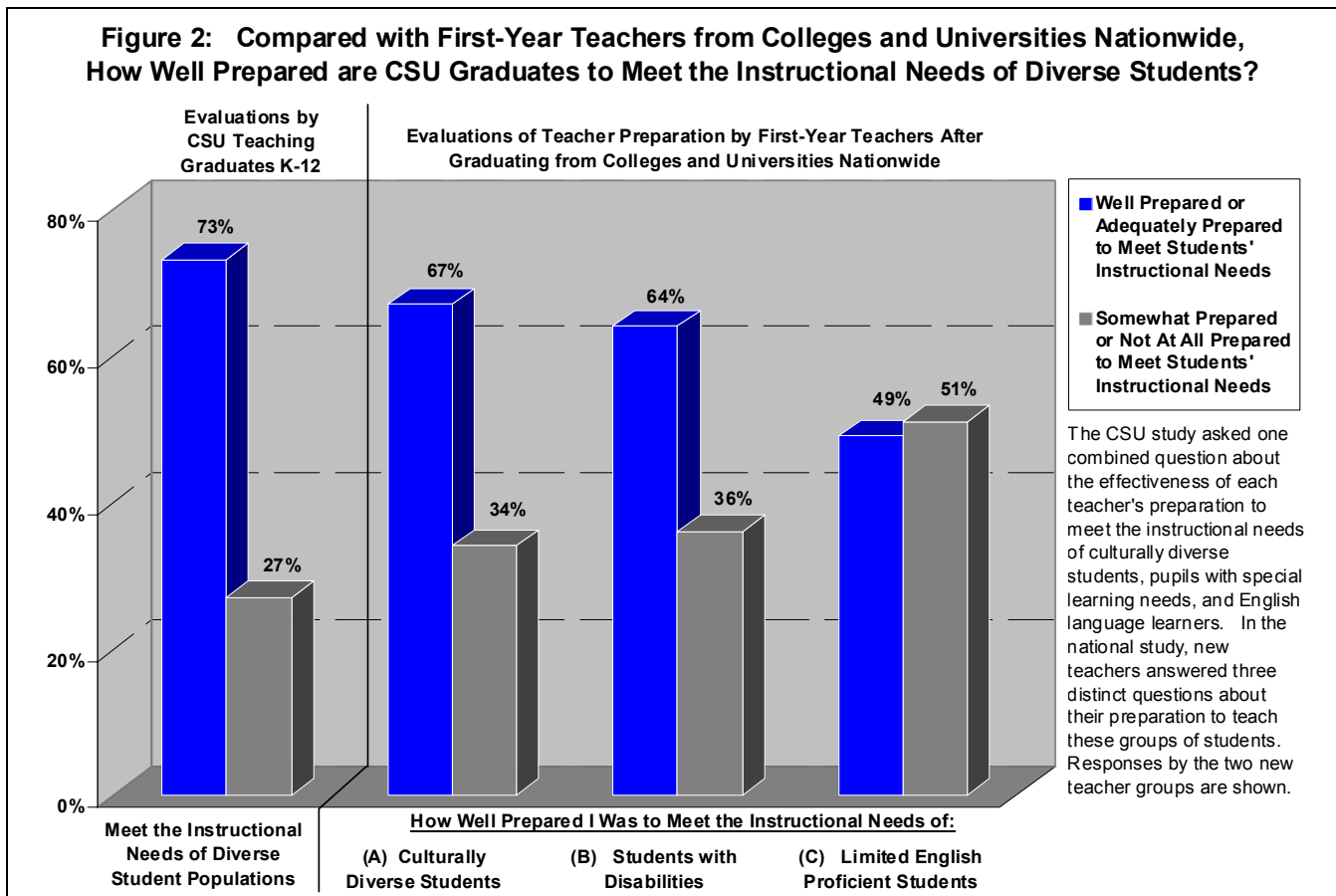
Figure 1: Compared with First-Year Teachers from Colleges and Universities Nationwide, How Well Prepared are CSU Teaching Graduates to Implement State Curriculum Standards?



In a question related to (but not portrayed in) Figure 1, NCES asked teachers nationwide how well prepared they were to “use student performance assessment (e.g. method of testing, applying results to modify instruction).” Similarly, CSU asked its first-year teacher-graduates how well prepared they were to “use basic techniques for assessing and assisting my students in reading and math so they can meet State Standards.” Whereas 69 percent of the national sample of first-year teachers felt “very well prepared” or “moderately well prepared” in these critical teaching skills, the comparable proportions for CSU’s teaching graduates were 68 percent among first-year teachers in grades K-8, and 64 percent among first-year teachers in grades 9-12. To support student achievement of state standards, CSU preparation for standards-based *instruction* exceeds the national benchmark (see Figure 1) but CSU preparation for *assessing and assisting individual students* so they can meet curriculum standards falls somewhat below the national benchmark, especially in the preparation of teachers for grades 9-12.

Preparation to Meet the Needs of Diverse Students: CSU Preparation Compared with Institutions Nationwide

The National Center for Education Statistics asked three distinct questions about teaching to student diversity. Nationwide, teachers evaluated their preparation to (1) “address the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds,” (2) “address the needs of students with limited English proficiency,” and (3) “address the needs of students with disabilities.” CSU used a combined question in which graduates evaluated their CSU preparation to “meet the instructional needs of a diverse student population including English language learners, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and students with special learning needs.” Together with the similarities in response options (above), the two sets of questions were sufficiently alike for the NCES results to serve as bases for appraising the CSU findings. Such an appraisal can be seen in Figure 2. As was the case in Figure 1, this analysis is limited to first-year teachers in NCES’ national sample. New teachers who graduated from institutions throughout the United States reported being substantially better prepared to “address the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds” than to “address the needs of students with disabilities,” while being much less prepared to “address the needs of students with limited English proficiency.” Reports of being “very well prepared” or “moderately well prepared” to address the



needs of these three student groups were provided by 67 percent, 64 percent and 49 percent of the first-year teachers, respectively. Among the CSU graduates who were also first-year teachers, a larger proportion (73 percent) reported being “well prepared” or “adequately prepared” to address the multiple needs of the three student groups who were described in a combined question. If we assume the CSU graduates were assessing their overall preparation for addressing the needs of the three student groups described in the question, their reports indicate the CSU is providing this preparation more effectively than are institutions throughout the nation. This finding does not erase or diminish the need for CSU campuses to continue to make substantive improvements in preparing teachers for student diversity. It does suggest, however, that these campuses are somewhat ahead of national improvements as a result of reforms recently initiated by the California State University.