

The California State University

TEACHER PREPARATION: Helping to Close the Achievement Gap



CSU

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Partnership for Success

The California State University prepares over half of the state's new teachers, and we are committed to preparing these teachers to succeed with all students. We prepare individuals who are equipped to deal with the many challenges students face inside and outside the classroom. We have devoted this issue of our publication series on teacher education to highlight the CSU's role in preparing teachers to work with students who are considered to be "at risk" in academic achievement, and who can be a part of the effort to close the achievement gap among California's students.

Charles B. Reed
Chancellor, The California State University



I applaud the leadership and foresight of Chancellor Reed and the California State University (CSU) System for identifying and actively addressing the critical need to prepare the CSU's aspiring teachers to be effective and successful in any classroom setting. As addressed here, this includes the ability to implement the necessary pedagogical strategies to address the individual and varied instructional needs of California's highly diverse preschool through grade twelve student population.

Teachers choose to be teachers because they believe they can make a difference. While feeling prepared for the inherent challenge of effective teaching, many struggle when placed in schools or classrooms where many, if not all, of their students must transcend any number of factors or disadvantages that, in turn, have been associated with California's pervasive achievement gap. The CSU's role in preparing its aspiring teachers to successfully work with such "at risk" students will go a long way in improving teacher retention, a problem many districts face when their newer, less experienced teachers become discouraged early on in their promising careers and, as a result, become ultimately at risk of leaving their chosen profession.

Not only is the content of this teacher preparation issue invaluable to our aspiring teachers, the implementation of its tenets is essential if we, as a state, are to succeed in providing an equal opportunity for all our students to obtain a quality education that is both rigorous and relevant so they are prepared for the future academic and 21st century workforce endeavors of their choosing.

Finally, I am proud to partner with Chancellor Reed and the CSU in working with my P-16 Council, to research and further develop recommended solutions for closing California's pervasive achievement gap.

Sincerely,

Jack O'Connell
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



Who are California's "at risk" students?

California's students today are challenged by a diverse array of variables that can affect learning. Too often the hidden factors that interfere with student success in school are left unaddressed.

As part of its central mission, the California State University prepares the majority of California's teachers for public K-12 schools. And while not every classroom includes students who struggle with all of these issues, every school in the state has pupils who are faced with some of these challenges. That is why all CSU teacher education programs provide valuable preservice experience in classroom settings where such challenges exist, and novice teachers are trained to work effectively with all students to help them overcome barriers to learning and achievement.

Among the many factors that interfere with school success and academic achievement are:

- Language learning
- Poverty
- Special learning needs
- Gaps in basic skills
- Low expectations
- Truancy/delinquency
- Unsafe school environment
- Personal health needs
- Family instability

Teacher Preparation to Increase Student Achievement

In recent years, many studies have shown that the most important variable in student success is a well-prepared and capable teacher. The CSU is proudly preparing teachers to work with all students, at all levels, with the goal of reducing the achievement gap and helping students reach their unique potential. To that end, CSU campuses have a dedicated program of study to address barriers to student success.

Language Learners—The needs of English language learners are addressed at all levels of teacher preparation, from identifying beginning English learner needs, to determining when students are fully proficient. Teacher candidates at the CSU are prepared to ensure that all students have an opportunity to participate in lessons that are engaging, meet standards, and provide the skills necessary for success. For example, teachers help students who do not speak English to comprehend text by providing graphic organizers and other alternate instructional approaches.

Poverty—CSU teacher candidates are taught to help minimize the effects of poverty on school achievement by establishing lending libraries within the classroom, providing additional time to complete assignments, encouraging students to spend more time in the school computer lab, and facilitating afterschool homework clubs. In this way, students who come from backgrounds where there may be fewer resources are not shortchanged and are able to participate more fully.



Special Needs—In all CSU programs, classroom teachers are given tools, strategies, and skills to address the diverse learning needs of all students. Candidates learn several approaches for providing instruction that is hands-on; makes use of pictures, objects, and equipment; and uses technology to improve learning. When assessing students, teachers can use alternative techniques, including having the students draw, demonstrate, orally describe, or write the answers to questions to ensure that each student has an opportunity to show what they have learned.

Standards-Based Curriculum—Every CSU teacher preparation program focuses on preparing new teachers who can plan and teach lessons in alignment with the state Academic Content Standards, designed to help students learn and achieve at high levels. Candidates are prepared with various instructional strategies to ensure

that all students have a chance to participate in standards-based lessons that provide interesting ways to learn concepts. Student teachers are encouraged to use computer programs, materials at various reading levels, and resources that integrate English language arts with science, social studies, art, and music.

How Teachers Make a Difference

If teachers are to help close the achievement gap, they must maintain high expectations for all students. Teachers must also understand effective strategies to help students overcome barriers to learning, and have the opportunity to practice in a guided setting. All of the CSU's Schools and Colleges of Education offer unique and innovative programs to prepare teachers to work with at-risk students in California's K-12 schools. Here are several examples of specialized preparation programs in the CSU.

California State University, Dominguez Hills Transition to Teaching Program

The Transition to Teaching (TTT) Program at CSU Dominguez Hills is an alternative teacher certification model to recruit, prepare, place, and support highly qualified teacher candidates to teach mathematics, science, and special education in hard-to-staff secondary schools in the Los Angeles and Lynwood Unified School Districts. The majority of teacher candidates who participate actually attended the schools where they will be teaching, and live in the communities that are served by the school. The candidates earn their credentials in a one-year, tuition-free program. The program is field-based, and includes a three-year support structure, subject matter coaches, classroom observations, and required coursework.

A hallmark of the program is placing highly qualified teachers in the neighborhood schools where they grew up—teachers who understand the social, language, and learning needs of the students they will be serving. The model contributes to increased teacher retention, because teachers learn firsthand how to create a successful classroom in a particular diverse setting, share a cultural background with their students, and understand the communities in which they work.



California State University, Chico Adapted Physical Activity Specialist Program

Preservice and teacher candidates in the Chico area participate in a variety of fieldwork and student teaching experiences in alternative settings (such as the Autism Clinic, Special Olympics, BE:WEL Wellness program for adults with disabilities, and KIDS:PLAY to assist with motor activities for children with disabilities). These experiences help to prepare CSU teachers for the rigors of adapted physical education services for a wide range of students. Additionally, teacher candidates seeking an adapted physical activity specialist credential participate on interdisciplinary teams to be fully

teams to be fully prepared to serve a wide range of students with disabilities. The curriculum is based on the most current research, and includes extensive practical experiences at both the preservice and credential level. Candidates have experiences with children in an adapted physical education setting, which involves implementing individualized programs to meet the specific needs of the disabled students they are teaching.

In addition, the program has instructor training in aquatics programs for individuals with disabilities, which includes activities, sports, and games, qualifying CSU students for the Special Olympic coach's certification in aquatics.

California State University, Stanislaus

The Transitional Learning Center Collaboration

At CSU Stanislaus, the campus has a partnership with the Transitional Learning Center (TLC) for homeless and foster children. Preservice teachers complete a field assignment at the TLC to learn how to create a caring, nurturing, and positive environment for children most in need. The TLC is a school for children in transition, and includes a strong academic program in literacy and mathematics, a standards-based curriculum, and extensive counseling services. The center works with CSU Stanislaus, the San Joaquin County Office of Education, and Saint Mary's Interfaith Community Services to serve foster, homeless, and shelter children.

Through this collaboration with local community and education services, CSU Stanislaus teacher candidates receive valuable experience in addressing the multiple needs of one of the most at-risk populations for academic failure. In turn, TLC students receive additional services, comprehen-

sive evaluations, and interventions, which are not always possible in the traditional school setting.

Humboldt State University

East Bay Conservation Corps Charter School Internships

At Humboldt State University, many of the teacher candidates live in the local rural areas surrounding the campus. To be prepared to teach in a more urban setting, the HSU School of Education has formed a partnership with the East Bay Conservation Corps (EBCC) so that multiple subject credential candidates have the opportunity to intern at the EBCC K-5 Charter School, a small, diverse Oakland elementary school that specializes in integrating the arts



and service learning into all aspects of the curriculum. The EBCC Charter School serves approximately 200 multicultural students and provides student teachers with the experience of working with urban students from families that are ethnically, socioeconomically, and religiously diverse.

Teaching to Make a Difference

Recent studies show that new teachers are more likely to stay in the profession if they are better prepared to teach in the most challenging school environments. One such report, *A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All Students Learn*, by Dr. Ken Futernick, Director of K-12 Studies at the CSU Center for Teacher Quality, found that 81 percent of the teachers surveyed said they entered the profession because *they wanted to make a difference for children and society*.

The report makes a series of recommendations for improving teacher retention in California that are based on practical ideas that are effective and efficient, and can make a difference.

The report is available at:

http://www.calstate.edu/teacherquality/documents/possible_dream_exec.pdf



To make real progress in reducing the achievement gap among California's students, we all must work to ensure that every student has access to a teacher who is well prepared to address the many challenges of today's learning environment. The California State University is among the leaders in meeting that challenge for the state. Our campuses are committed to helping provide all students with the opportunity to learn, to achieve at the highest levels, and to leave high school fully prepared for college or career choices.



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