

The Misunderstood Teacher Shortage

Education Week blog, by [Walt Gardner](#) on December 2, 2016 7:24 AM

The best rebuttal to the argument that teaching in public schools is hardly as tough as depicted is the latest survey of school districts in California ("[California faces a looming teacher shortage, and the problem is getting worse](#)," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 1). The Learning Policy Institute found that 75 percent of 211 districts, which reflects the demographics of the state's 1,025 districts, reported difficulty filling positions. Low-income and rural areas were hit the hardest.

What I'd like to know is why this problem exists in the first place, not only in California but nationally, if public school teachers are well compensated for the work they do. The argument is that their total compensation amounts to roughly \$1.50 for every \$1 their skills could command in a private sector job ("[Public School Teachers Aren't Underpaid](#)," *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 8, 2011). In addition, they have two months off during the summer, and their work day allegedly ends at 3:00. And that does not include pensions, which are criticized for being far too generous. What a great deal!

Well, if so, then I repeat: Why is there a shortage? Shouldn't the total compensation package be enough to attract and retain enough college graduates to fill public school classrooms? I know exactly what critics are going to say. The shortage is only in certain fields. There is some truth to that. The physical sciences, math, and special education immediately come to mind. But I maintain that even if those fields were excluded, the problem would not significantly ease.

The reality is that teaching in public schools today is far more difficult than ever before in the history of this country. Teachers are required to perform on an unprecedented scale, and are made the scapegoats for all the ills afflicting society. Would paying teachers far more change the dismal picture? I remain highly skeptical. Teachers are not like other employees. They've never chosen the classroom as a lifelong career to become affluent. Of course they want higher salaries. But I doubt that alone would be enough. Combat pay has failed to solve the shortage in hard-to-staff schools.

I expect the shortage to become even more acute in the years ahead. Although voters have consistently rejected vouchers or their variants by overwhelming margins in referendums across the country since 1966, I doubt they are willing to do what is necessary to make teaching a truly coveted career.

Article source:

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/walt_gardners_reality_check/2016/12/teacher_shortage.html?cmp=eml-enl-eu-news2

Comment: I absolutely agree with the observations of this article. Even more concerning, teacher shortages and the resulting teacher quality issues relating to the unequal distribution of highly-effective teachers aggravates the student achievement gap. Providing “just-in-time” subject-specific instructional support and subject-specific mentoring teacher access to teachers with new assignments is the most practical, economical way of addressing the teacher recruitment, development and retention issues raised in this article. Such a program of support will not only will save hundreds of hours of prep time for teachers, but will better prepare them for their classroom assignments leading to improved student achievement. Such a program will demonstrate school leadership as well. Specifically, the instructional support materials in the *Expert Systems for Teachers* Series include everything a teacher typically needs to prepare for each day and for the entire school year, everything that doesn't come with a textbook: a pacing guide, detailed daily lesson plans, editable class lecture notes in Power Point form, complete labs and activities and editable assessments. The material can be used as is in the classroom or taken as a course through a participating university for credit toward license renewal with study guide and fees paid for state subject-area certification exams when necessary. Now with over 120 subject-specific titles in 17 subject areas, the *Expert Systems for Teachers* series (see the Teaching and Learning Foundation page at http://www.thetlf.org/TLF_Universities.html) serves schools in all 50 U.S. states and 87 countries.