



# GETTING DOWN — TO FACTS II —

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## Improving Teacher Practice

**Courtney A. Bell**

Educational Testing Service (ETS)

**Lucrecia Santibañez**

Claremont Graduate University

**Eric S. Taylor**

Harvard University

**About:** The Getting Down to Facts project seeks to create a common evidence base for understanding the current state of California school systems and lay the foundation for substantive conversations about what education policies should be sustained and what might be improved to ensure increased opportunity and success for all students in California in the decades ahead. *Getting Down to Facts II* follows approximately a decade after the first Getting Down to Facts effort in 2007. This research brief is one of 19 that summarize 36 research studies that cover four main areas related to state education policy: student success, governance, personnel, and funding.

This brief summarizes three *Getting Down to Facts II* technical reports on teacher preparation and evaluation in California:

**A System’s View of California’s Teacher Education Pipeline**

Courtney A. Bell, Rachel S. White, and Melissa E. White, September 2018.

**Teaching English Learners in California: How Teacher Credential Requirements in California Address Their Needs**

Lucrecia Santibañez and Christine Snyder, September 2018.

**Can Teacher Evaluation Programs Improve Teaching?**

Virginia Lovison and Eric S. Taylor, September 2018.

These and all GDTFII studies can be found at [www.gettingdowntofacts.com](http://www.gettingdowntofacts.com).

## Introduction

California has a keen interest in ensuring the effectiveness of the teachers in its classrooms. The quality of teaching affects student learning and has a lasting impact on students’ success in school and in the labor market. Improving the quality of teaching is a crucial linchpin in California’s efforts to address many of its pressing education challenges.

This brief takes up the dual topics of teacher preparation and teacher evaluation. Understanding both how well-prepared teachers are when they enter the classroom and how evaluation of practice during teachers’ careers can enhance their effectiveness gives policymakers options for better using these levers to create an effective teaching force.

### KEY FINDINGS

- The state’s teacher preparation system aligns with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTPs), but this high-level alignment masks variations in ground-level implementation.
- California’s disconnected information system constrains policymakers’ ability to improve the state’s teacher education system.
- Teachers of English learners (ELs) need specialized knowledge, dispositions, and practices to effectively teach this population of students; yet, new teachers in California are often not adequately prepared for the ELs in their classrooms.
- Carefully designed teacher evaluation and support systems have the potential to improve teaching effectiveness.

## Summary of Key Findings

### The state's teacher preparation system aligns with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTPs), but this high-level alignment masks variations in ground-level implementation

California has a two-stage credentialing system. Prospective teachers earn a preliminary credential, good for five years, upon completion of a set of requirements set by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). These include demonstration of basic skills and subject matter knowledge, a teaching performance assessment, and completion of a CTC-approved preparation program that includes both coursework and classroom-based field experiences. Teachers then have an additional five years to complete a CTC-approved induction program to earn a clear credential.

In addition to the standard teacher preparation pathway, California offers an intern pathway. Both district and university intern programs provide a route to a teaching credential that allows an individual to complete teacher preparation coursework concurrent with the first year or two in a paid teaching position. However, they must first complete 120 hours of preservice coursework.

In some instances, California allows emergency permits and waivers from the standard credential requirements. Permits are good for only one year, and waivers are typically for individuals teaching outside of their credentialed authorization(s). When interns and permit and waiver holders begin teaching K-12 students, they have not yet completed the full requirements for a preliminary certificate in the associated area. The number of teachers with these substandard credentials grew markedly from 2012-13 to 2016-17.

This study finds that California's teacher education system—including regulations, assessments, and policies—are aligned at a high level around the CSTPs. The CSTPs, which specify six domains of teaching practice, serve as the backbone for the state's teacher development system.

However, this high-level alignment masks variations in ground-level implementation. While the state has strong standardization regarding the specific knowledge candidates are responsible for prior to entering the classroom, it has less specificity and standardization regarding the precise teaching practices candidates are required to demonstrate. Institutional choices throughout California's teacher education pipeline (e.g., preparation programs' choice of course requirements and assessments) allow for variations in the specific teaching practices, topics, and in some cases, subject areas in which candidates must demonstrate their knowledge and teaching skills. These choices often shape aspiring teachers' learning opportunities, which can vary substantially.

### California's disconnected information system constrains policymakers' ability to improve the state's teacher education system

Beginning teacher preparation is especially important to low-income students, students of color, and low-achieving students because the schools these students attend have disproportionately high shares of new teachers. Yet, there is sparse systematic information on beginning teachers' teaching capabilities. The state has little information about the specific teaching practices novices have mastered when they are granted their initial credential. As a result, policymakers and educators in institutions that are part of the

partnership, or pipeline, that contributes to teacher preparation do not have the data they need to diagnose problems and inform improvement efforts.

Moreover, the state has little information that might provide insight into the relative capabilities of teachers trained through different pathways. Do traditional preparation programs produce more or less effective teachers and under what circumstances? Are out-of-state teachers as effective as teachers prepared in state? Answers to these questions are crucial to policy determinations about how California should be preparing new teachers and strengthening all pathways.

California also lacks a statewide database that connects institutions that participate in preparing teachers. No system links universities that teach content knowledge to preparation programs that teach pedagogical skills and induction programs that mentor beginners. Absent such a database, the state has no way of determining whether some pathways or institutions are doing their part to prepare teachers to meet the needs and requirements of their students.

Finally, California does not maintain publicly available data that either provide insight into the nature of the supply side of the teacher labor market (e.g., how teachers progress through the preparation pipeline) or allow ongoing monitoring of the dynamics and trends associated with teacher retention. The state has a role to play in monitoring and ensuring the adequacy of the supply of teachers across participating institutions and over time. Currently, California has insufficient data to fulfill this responsibility.

### Teachers of English learners (ELs) need specialized knowledge, dispositions, and practices to effectively teach this population of students; yet, new teachers in California are often not adequately prepared for the ELs in their classrooms

California has the highest proportion of English learners in the United States, and these students are more likely to be taught by early-career teachers. Teachers of ELs need specialized knowledge, dispositions, and practices to effectively teach this population of students. Given the state's demographics, many new teachers in California are likely to encounter classrooms with multiple ELs at various levels, raising the stakes for teacher preparation to ensure newly credentialed teachers are prepared for the demands of teaching ELs. These teachers need to know how to use information about language proficiency for instructional decisions, how to differentiate by language proficiency level and organize instruction for ELs and non-ELs in the same classroom, and how to work with families to support EL academic progress. California teachers may not be receiving adequate training in the specialized knowledge and practices they need.

As of 2004, all teachers trained in the state receive an EL authorization embedded in the preliminary credential. The embedded EL authorization means that EL student needs and outcomes are addressed throughout teacher credentialing in California. However, while teaching ELs is a prevalent theme in preliminary credential programs, there is little assessment to ensure that new teachers are able to work effectively with ELs in their classrooms. Moreover, induction lacks a clear focus on ELs.

Induction, required to earn a clear credential, is highly personalized, flexible, and teacher-driven. Candidates and their mentors jointly decide the candidate's goals. Thus, induction's impact on teaching ELs varies to the degree that teachers, or their mentors, elect to emphasize this aspect of preparation. Moreover, while all mentors receive some training, training specifically to mentor beginning teachers to teach ELs is not mandated. Thus, it is not clear the extent to which this kind of skill development is part of all mentors' repertoires.

Finally, the decision to grant a clear credential is based on growth toward the chosen goals, not demonstrated proficiency. As long as teachers complete all assignments, meet with their induction mentors, and show some progress in the standards, they will earn clear credentials. Whether these teachers are actually proficient teaching ELs is an open question.

## Carefully designed teacher evaluation and support systems have the potential to improve teaching effectiveness

Teacher evaluation in California is a district responsibility. The [Stull Act](#) provides a common framework for evaluation, but leaves it to districts to develop their own systems. As a result, evaluation systems across the state reflect considerable variety. A number of these systems incorporate practices that hold promise for improving teaching effectiveness.

**Rubric-based observations:** In a system that includes this evaluation component, classroom observations are conducted multiple times each year using a rubric, or scoring guide, that details teaching practices to be measured and translates levels of effectiveness into evaluation scores. Rubrics can create clear, shared expectations by describing what effective teaching looks like in practice. Research in the Cincinnati and Chicago school districts provides evidence that using rubric-based observations can improve teaching effectiveness by enhancing long-term teacher learning.

**Direct connections between evaluation results and strategies for improvement:** After a teacher receives an evaluation rating, how does she know where and how to focus improvement efforts? One answer may lie in systems that help teachers target improvement strategies to identified areas of need. Long Beach—in addition to a post-evaluation conference between the teacher and evaluator where improvement strategies are discussed—uses software (the myPD program) to help teachers create and implement individualized learning plans. Improvement focuses on practices from the CSTPs. The software analyzes a teacher’s performance and suggests specific resources, such as professional development courses or videos of demonstrated teaching practice. Evidence about the efficacy of this approach for improving teaching is still emerging, but this thoughtful practice bears watching.

In districts such as Poway and San Juan that employ a peer assistance and review (PAR) program, teachers receive targeted one-on-one assistance in the form of observations (often conducted based on detailed rubrics), feedback, and support. A specific element of support involves tailoring suggested strategies to teachers’ performance reviews. These programs, because of their intensity, usually aim to support teachers most in need, though they can be expanded to other teachers as well.

**Multiple measures:** Evaluation systems can combine various measures to achieve an evaluation rating. These measures may include some combination of rubric-based observations and targeted strategies for improvement as well as student survey results and value-added scores derived from students’ scores on standardized tests. The Los Angeles Unified School District adds another measure, the principal’s subjective assessment. Principals consider all evaluation measures—including classroom observations and contributions to student outcomes—to reach a final evaluation score, but are provided with no formulaic calculation of measures. Subjective evaluations, such as an individual teacher’s particular job responsibilities, can incorporate data not usually captured by more objective measures. But subjective evaluations have the potential to introduce principal bias into the results. Los Angeles’ district-provided guidelines mitigate against this possible impact.

**Consequences attached to evaluation ratings:** Evaluation ratings can carry positive or negative consequences including, on the positive side, public recognition, bonuses or salary increases, promotion, or additional responsibilities. On the negative end, consequences can mean termination or postponement or denial of tenure.

Long Beach, San Bernardino, and San Francisco offer bonuses based in part on evaluation results. San Bernardino withholds salary advancement to teachers whose evaluation ratings repeatedly are low. Currently, the evidence for a pay-for-performance approach is mixed. A study of the federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) showed some improvement in student test scores among teachers who received monetary rewards; other studies have shown no effect.

Because under California law districts cannot elect to extend the time to tenure, termination remains a possible result of a poor evaluation rating. In peer review districts, such as San Juan and San Jose, teachers whose ratings are low are placed in the PAR program and offered intensive assistance. If ratings do not improve, the district can move for termination.

Using evaluation to improve teaching effectiveness offers districts an important means to enhance the quality of their teaching force. Evidence from a variety of evaluation programs points to both promises and challenges of evaluation choices.

## Conclusion

Effective teacher preparation and evaluation systems designed to enhance teaching quality are two policy tools California can use to develop a more accomplished teaching pool. Both of these approaches show promise. The lack of data following prospective teachers into teaching, and then following teachers while teaching, makes it difficult to evaluate new innovations in these areas. However, research from other states provides evidence that regular teacher observations—combined with supports for improvement in identified areas of need—can lead to teaching improvement and learning gains for students.

## Lead author biographies

*Courtney A. Bell is a principal research scientist at Educational Testing Service and is a former high school teacher and teacher educator. She studies measures of teaching quality and their use in policy, research, and practice contexts.*

*Lucrecia Santibañez is an associate professor at Claremont Graduate University. Her research focuses on policies and programs to improve teaching and learning for vulnerable populations in the United States and abroad.*

*Eric S. Taylor is an assistant professor at Harvard University. He studies the economics of education, with a particular interest in employer-employee interactions between schools and teachers—hiring and firing decisions, job design, training, compensation, and performance evaluation.*