

Nonprofit President Says Teacher Shortage Not as Serious as Unions Say

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Teachers unions and their allies have long said that there is a serious nationwide teacher shortage, but according to skeptics, the shortage is neither as serious nor as widespread as the unions have said.

A wide range of solutions to the alleged shortage have been proposed, including hiring teachers from foreign countries and creating “grow your own” teacher programs for school districts, which proactively recruit teacher candidates from local communities to teach in those communities’ schools.

One solution the unions strongly oppose, however, is the one advocated by Larry Sand, president of the nonprofit California Teachers Empowerment Network. Sand has rejected the claim that there is a nationwide teacher shortage. Instead, he said that research points to a shortage in only a few areas.

In an interview with The Epoch Times, Sand mentioned a report by the California Department of Education, which states that in California, there is only a shortage of teachers in the areas of math, science, and special education. According to Sand, there is a simple solution to this problem: Pay teachers more to teach subjects that need more teachers.

Sand argued that because a college graduate with a degree in math or science can earn more by going into a private field, few will become public educators, so they need to be offered more compensation.

Sand also advocates a model known as pay for performance (PFP), where higher-performing teachers are paid more. Sand said this incentivizes teachers to perform better while also attracting the best and brightest to teaching.

Currently, most teachers are paid with a “step increase” model, in which they earn a bit more each year they work.

The unions strongly oppose these proposals.

“[Unions] see teachers as assembly line workers, ‘widgets,’ as it were, meaning there are no good teachers and no bad teachers; there are just teachers doing their job, therefore they should all be paid the same,” Sand said.

“The way teachers are treated by the union, it’s terrible, and it’s a forked-tongue situation, because the unions love to talk about treating teachers as professionals. What do all professionals have in common? They are paid more when they do good work, not because they were on the job for one more year,” he said.

A PFP policy was implemented in the Newark School District in 2012, but it was eventually canceled due to efforts by the local teachers union.

“This contract removes the last vestiges of corporate reform from the district ... [and is a] message to our enemies that your evil is not welcome in Newark or any other public schools,” wrote John Abeigon, president of the Newark School District, in a note to union members announcing the new contract canceling PFP.

When claiming there is a teacher shortage, unions often cite a study by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI). In the study, EPI researchers Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss reported that statistics like a shortage of 20,000 schoolteachers in 2012 were far too low to begin with and have gotten much worse.

Garcia and Weiss also found a shortage of qualified teachers. According to their study, one third of teachers nationwide do not have an education background in the main subject they teach. Furthermore, more than 20 percent of teachers have less than five years of teaching experience, and about 9 percent are teaching without the usual state certification.

In an [article](#) for the California Policy Center that calls the shortage into question, Sand cited research by the late Andrew Coulson of the Cato Institute.

Coulson wrote in 2015: “Since 1970, the number of teachers has grown six times faster than the number of students. Enrollment grew about 8 percent from 1970 to 2010, but the teaching workforce grew 50 percent. There are a LOT more public school teachers per child today, so how can districts and states still claim to be facing ‘teacher shortages’?”