

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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***NCTQ Questions “National Teacher Shortage” Narrative, Releases Facts to Set the Record Straight***

There has been lots of discussion recently about a new national teacher shortage, much of it driven by local media coverage reporting on the challenges faced by some school districts. These local stories not only seem to capture the nation’s imagination but they also play into our worst fears of schools opening everywhere with classrooms unstaffed. Because we lack sufficient national supply and demand data, the whiff of a teacher shortage gains traction too easily and at almost predictable intervals. Without sound data, whom are we to believe?

The truth is, according to the limited national data that exist, and by patching together some state data, there really is not an overall deficit of trained teachers. Some school districts are struggling, but claims that these struggles have recently worsened are anecdotal, not based on any real data. As a nation, we continue to face finite shortages of teachers in specific subjects -- especially special education and STEM fields. And our rural schools continue to struggle to keep filling their leaky buckets, as do most schools serving challenging populations.

Why does it matter that this lack of teachers is specific to subjects or locales, rather than national? Because how people define the problem affects how we solve it. When states and districts acknowledge that shortages are limited to certain fields and locations, we can begin targeting solutions.

Much of the current concern derives from local problems magnified by reports like a 2016 Learning Policy Institute paper warning of a 100,000+ plus annual teacher shortage by 2018. But the facts do not justify its conclusions. Here is what the available data do show:

**There is not a national teacher shortage across the U.S. any more than there is one labor market for teachers in the United States.** In fact, it is hard to argue that there even 50 labor markets. What we have are unfilled teacher jobs in some subject fields and in some locations. For instance, there are vacancies in [Detroit](#), [Oklahoma](#), and parts of [California](#). But this is not a national trend; rather it is the result of local conditions, issues, and choices. For instance, in California, the number of available teachers statewide exceeds the number of projected openings, but these teachers for hire are not always in the right fields or communities, and one of the most affected shortage areas—the Bay Area—has the highest cost of living in the United States.

The [US Department of Education](#) reports shortages on the state level with nearly all states citing vacancies in math, science, and special education. But there are many other teaching fields where only a few states have unfilled jobs, such as general elementary education (13 states). Also, the perception of widespread shortages is in part an artifact of how this report presents the data. When a state lists a subject area as having insufficient teachers, it does not say what percentage of schools have unfilled openings in that area.

**There are additional data that contradict the teacher shortage narrative.** For instance:

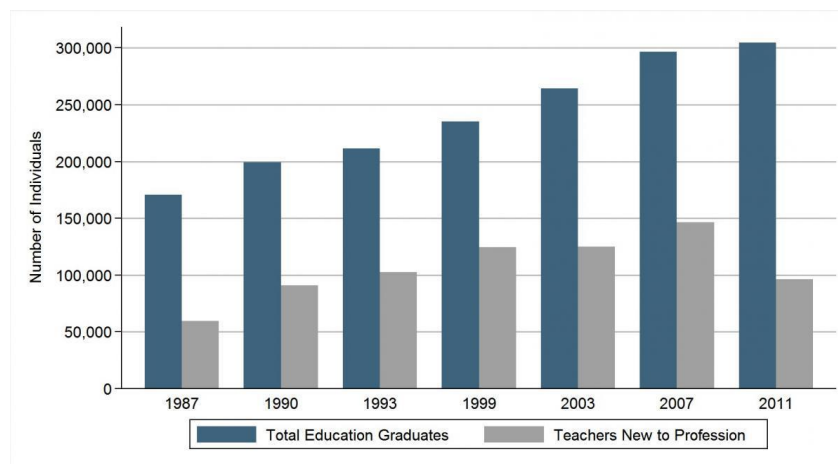
- **Our public school teacher workforce is growing.** Newest NCES data (<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017072.pdf>) estimate that there were over 3.8 million public school teachers in the 2015-16 school year - an increase of 13 percent (about 400,000) in four years. If there was a teacher shortage, it would be really hard for districts to successfully expand their workforce.

Meanwhile, NCES projected that the number of public school students would increase by less than 2 percent from 2011 until 2015.

([https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_208.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_208.20.asp)). Instead of a shrinking teacher workforce, data show an expanding one that far outpaces student increases. More research is needed to interpret this finding - and we can expect more detailed data from NCES this winter.

- **Nationally, far more teachers graduate than can be hired.** Although there is some evidence that the number of teachers graduating from teacher training programs has dropped in the last few years, more than enough teachers graduated in the recent past to fill current shortages.

Production and Hiring of Teachers New to the Profession (Selected Years)



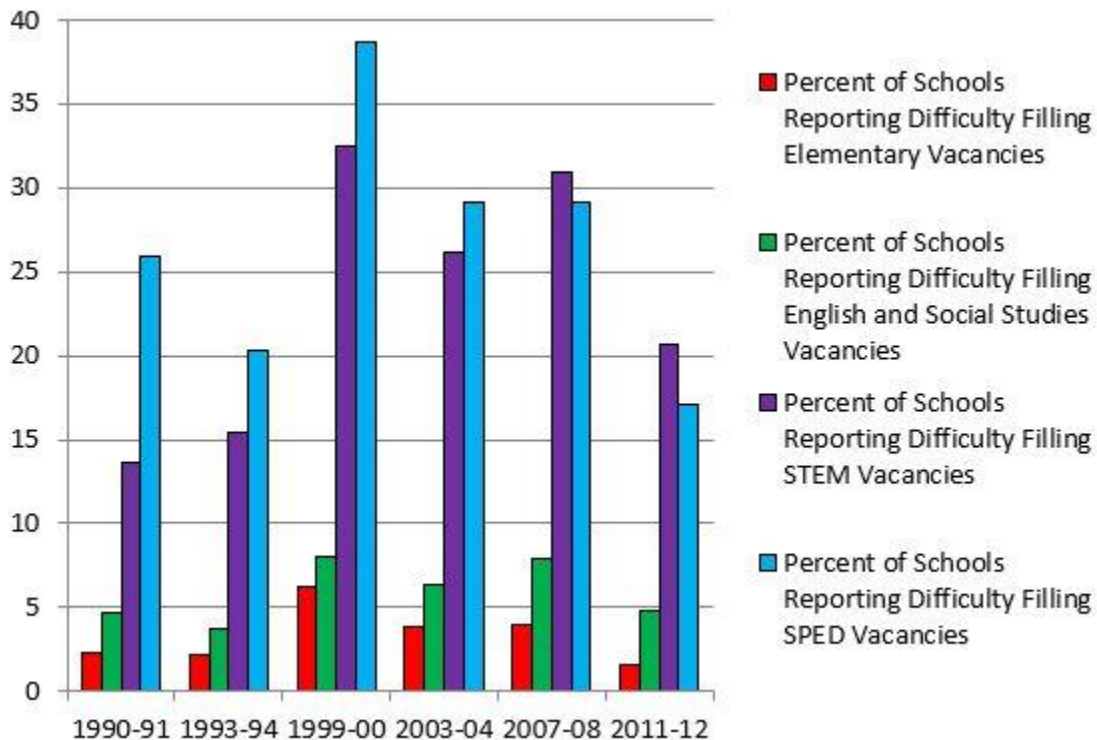
Source: Calder Teacher Shortage Explainer, Figure 2 (2016)

<http://www.caldercenter.org/missing-elements-discussion-teacher-shortages>

Instead of a national teacher shortage, districts face a mismatch between teacher graduates and schools' hiring needs. America's teacher training programs prepare too many teachers in fields with a surplus of teachers, such as elementary education, while training too few in the fields where schools most desperately need teachers such as math, science, and ESL.

Research compiled by the Calder Center (<http://www.caldercenter.org/missing-elements-discussion-teacher-shortages>) shows that "the demand for STEM and SPED teachers has been far greater than the demand for Elementary, English, and Social Studies for several decades."

Percentage of Schools Reporting Difficulty Filling Vacancies within Specific Disciplines



Source: Calder Teacher Shortage Explainer, Figure 3 (2016)

- Teachers in math and science fields can make substantially more money in non-teaching jobs.** The average full-time teacher salary in public schools in 2015 was \$58,064. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_211.50.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_211.50.asp) By contrast, according to Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce, workers who majored in computers, statistics, and mathematics had an average salary of \$76,000 in 2015 while those who majored in the physical sciences averaged \$65,000. So it is not surprising that schools have trouble finding and retaining teachers with these highly-paid specialties. (<https://cew-7632.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Economic-Value-of-College-Majors-Full-Report-web-FINAL.pdf>)

## **SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT:**

Our nation has open teaching positions that need to be filled by trained teachers. This is not a new national crisis but rather one America has been living with for years due to our unwillingness to adopt more strategic pay approaches. With rare exceptions, states have also shown no interest in limiting the number of teacher candidates their institutions can accept in some teaching fields to bring down the numbers nor in encouraging candidates to consider other teaching areas in shorter supply.

Teacher shortages are largely a product of local conditions, requiring local solutions. For example, until the state of Oklahoma pays its teachers more, it will struggle to fill positions, but solving its problem does not require us to raise teacher pay everywhere. Detroit suffers because its schools are so challenging. No solution will solve its problem until we address these local environments.

The teaching field does not need solutions that set us back, like lowering teacher standards, hiring long-term substitutes and handing out emergency teacher certifications. There has been a mad rush by states to adopt these sorts of solutions.

**Instead, to fully understand the nature of teacher supply and demand trends, it is incumbent upon the nation, states, and school districts to collect better data and put these data into an historical context.**

States and districts should be able to identify the number of new teachers trained in each subject, how many graduate and do not end up teaching (because we know that nationwide, 50 percent of candidates do not end up in teaching jobs), where candidates apply for jobs, how many vacancies are open in each subject, and where these vacancies are located.

In the absence of strong data systems that can pinpoint the broken points along the teacher pipeline, states and districts will continue to look for band-aids without resolving the underlying problems and the very real shortages which are not new but have gone on now for decades.

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To schedule an interview with Kate Walsh, President of NCTQ, please contact Eric Duncan at (202) 393-0020 ext. 130.

### ***About the National Council on Teacher Quality:***

The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan research and policy group, committed to modernizing the teaching profession and based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. We recognize that it is not teachers who bear responsibility for their profession's many challenges, but the institutions with the greatest authority and influence over teachers. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org).