



March 27, 2019

Assemblymember Jose Medina
Chair, Committee on Higher Education
Legislative Office Building
1020 N Street, Room 173
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: AB 1623 (Rivas) as introduced – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Medina:

As classroom teachers and Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows, we are writing to express our support for AB 1623, which would establish the Golden State Teacher Grant Program, to award grants to students in educator preparation programs with their commitment to teach in a subject area impacted by the teacher shortage for at least four years.

AB 1623's approach is a smart strategy adding to an arsenal of tools to help address the state's teacher shortage. As recent surveys have shown, districts have experienced acute teacher shortages, especially in mathematics, science, and special education, with 80% reporting a shortage in the most recent survey.¹ We can see the shortage also manifesting itself in the increase in the number of waivers and permits being issued where there are no appropriately credentialed teachers available. The number of waivers and permits nearly quadrupled between 2012 and 2017, with nearly 8,000 issued in 2016-17, as reported by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

The Learning Policy Institute has reported that shortages are most severe in special education, mathematics and science. Shortages are also emerging in bilingual education since voters passed Proposition 58. Research has shown the long-term positive impacts on English Learners in well-implemented bilingual programs. However, well-implemented bilingual programs require well-prepared teachers. The targeted investment of AB 1623 can help mitigate this growing bilingual teacher shortage.

Another factor in the growing teacher shortage is pay and attracting new educators into the profession. Teachers earn about 30% less than other college graduates. We have seen how this can be discouraging to some to enter the profession, as it is difficult to imagine paying off their student debt. AB 1623 proposes a reasonable approach to draw more teachers into the profession and directing them to the fields where there is the greatest need. Previous programs that have provided similar grants to teachers willing to teach in shortage areas, like the Governor's Teaching Fellowship, have been shown to be effective in recruiting and retaining teachers in the areas where they are most needed.

¹ "Teacher Shortages in California: Status, Sources and Potential Solutions," Getting Down to Facts II, September 2018, Technical Report.

We believe that AB 1623 can also begin to help address another problem facing California's teaching workforce - a lack of diversity. While only 25 percent of California's students identify as white, more than 60 percent of our teachers do.² This gap between students and teachers of color is problematic because numerous studies show that teachers of color have profound and positive impacts on the learners they serve, regardless of students' race or ethnicity.³ By reducing barriers to entry into the profession, AB 1623 can help to draw more teachers of color into the pipeline.

While we recognize that the disciplines identified in AB 1623 represent the most acute shortages, research has also shown that when there are shortages, it is often the schools serving the most vulnerable students that are affected the most. We think the Committee should also consider prioritizing these grants to teachers serving in schools serving our historically disadvantaged students.

As classroom teachers, we have experienced firsthand the financial challenge of surviving on a beginning teacher's salary. And as our low-income students and students of color are the ones who are disproportionately hurt by our teacher shortages, we need to do whatever we can to end this cycle. The relief provided by this service grant can be the extra incentive some of our most talented Californians need to propel them on this path. AB 1623 is one piece of the puzzle. We hope that California invests in bringing new talented educators into the profession with AB 1623 and that we couple this with an investment in ensuring that every new teacher has a high quality mentor through their induction process.

We are pleased to support AB 1623 and hope to continue to work with the author to ensure it can reduce barriers for our best and brightest to enter and stay in the teaching profession.

If you have any questions about our position, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our names and email addresses are below.

Sincerely,



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² EdData: Education Data Partnership. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ed-data.org/state/CA>

³ Dee, T. (2004). Teachers, race and student achievement in a randomized experiment. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 86(1), 195–210.



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CC: Members of the Assembly Higher Education Committee
Assemblymember Robert Rivas