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Information

Educator Preparation Committee

Update on the Local Solutions to the Shortage of Special Education Teachers Grant Programs

Executive Summary: This agenda item presents an update on the Local Solutions to the Shortage of Special Education Teachers grant program, one of five grant programs administered by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and provides the first round of data collected for Year One of the Local Solutions grant program.

Recommended Action: For information only

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Strategic Plan Goal

II. Program Quality and Accountability

- a) Develop and maintain rigorous, meaningful, and relevant standards that drive program quality and effectiveness for the preparation of the education workforce and are responsive to the needs of California's diverse student population.

Update on the Local Solutions to the Shortage of Special Education Teachers Grant Programs

Introduction

This agenda item presents an update on the Local Solutions to the Shortage of Special Education Teachers grant program, one of five grant programs administered by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (Commission), and provides the first round of data collected for Year One of the Local Solutions grant program.

Background

The Local Solutions to the Shortage of Special Education Teachers (Local Solutions) grants were included in the 2018-19 state budget to support the recruitment, preparation, and support of new special education teachers. Authorizing legislation provided a total of \$50 million for competitive grants to eligible local education agencies (LEAs) and provided up to \$20,000 per participating teacher to grantees to implement locally identified solutions to address the shortage of special education teachers.

On September 4, 2018, the Commission published the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Local Solutions grant, with applications due on October 30, 2018. The grant awards were announced on December 14, 2018, and forty-one LEAs were funded to implement the provisions required of the authorizing statute which include:

- Addressing teacher shortages in special education,
- Helping to recruit and support the preparation of more individuals in the teaching profession,
- Supporting the induction of educators into the profession, and
- Supporting the continued professional learning of credentialed special education educators.

This grant program allows eligible LEAs the opportunity and flexibility to design and implement local solutions to meet their needs for credentialed special education teachers. LEA grant recipients were required to use this grant opportunity to increase the supply of special education teachers by prioritizing strategies for identifying, recruiting, preparing, employing, and supporting newly-credentialed special education teachers and for assisting teachers who may be credentialed in another field who want to become credentialed special education teachers.

At the [April 2019 Commission](#) meeting, staff presented updates for two state funded grant programs administered by the Commission, Teacher Residency and Local Solutions. Because of the timing of the Commission meeting, the update for Local Solutions was limited and only included the list of grant recipients, the amount of funding for Year One for each LEA, and information related to the legislation-suggested local solutions the LEAs intended to provide to

special education teachers. This Commission agenda item provides the first full report of the implementation of the Local Solutions grant programs.

Initial Data Collection

As part of the RFP, Local Solutions grantees committed to gathering data each year over the life of the funding, through June 2023. The data in this agenda item reflects the first full year and a half of implementation of the Local Solutions grants. Funds were distributed in January 2019, and to provide time for grantees to fully execute their local programs, the first reporting period was moved from June 2019 to June 2020. Considering this revised timeline, grantees were given the opportunity to submit revised Year One budgets to reflect potential expenditures over this year and a-half implementation time period.

To analyze the impact of this state-funded grant program, staff requested data as outlined in the RFP in these areas:

- The number of teachers participating in each type of local solutions activities implemented in the project.
- The percent of funding allocated to all of the following types of activities, including the number of teachers participating in each type of activity:
 - Recruitment, including signing bonuses for newly credentialed teachers who earn an Education Specialist credential
 - Preparation, including teacher services scholarships and student debt payment
 - Induction
 - Professional learning
 - Teacher career pathways
 - Other pertinent activities implemented by the Local Solutions grantee
- Information regarding the effectiveness of the Local Solutions Grant Program in recruiting, developing support systems for, and retaining special education teachers, including but not necessarily limited to all of the following:
 - The reduction in teacher turnover rates for special education teacher within the grantee LEA
 - The number of special education teachers within the grantee LEA serving on intern credentials, permits, or waivers
 - Best practices found to be effective in implementing the program
 - Factors promoting or hindering program implementation
 - Lesson learned in order to inform future investments in this type of program

The results of data collected are described in the remainder of this item.

Participation in Local Solutions Activities

For the Local Solutions grant program, grantees were required to report the total number of participants, the distribution of participants across local solution activities and the amount of funds expended for the local solutions activities.

As of June 30, 2020, grant recipients report 3,658 unique participants in the Local Solutions grant program in Year One (January 2019 through June 30, 2020). Table 1 lists the fifteen local solutions activities suggested in authorizing legislation, and reflected in the RFP, and shows the distribution of participants across local solutions activities and related expenditures. It is important to note that any number of the unique participants could participate in one or more of the listed local solutions activities. For example, a single participant may have been at a recruitment fair, then might have benefited from tuition assistance, and finally might have received a signing bonus upon hire. In the overall total, this individual is counted once; in the table below, the individual is counted as many times as they received support from the Local Solutions Program.

Table 1: Local Solutions Grant Program Activities: Number of Participants and Funds Expended

Locally Identified Solutions	# of Participants per Activity	Funds Expended
Identifying, recruiting, and preparing new special education teachers and/or preparation costs for teachers credentialed in other areas interested in becoming special education teachers	1750	\$ 1,344,860
Assisting special education candidates with tuition	533	\$ 2,485,928
Preparation costs of special education candidates to complete an integrated undergraduate program of preparation for an Education Specialist credential	46	\$ 48,242
Preparation costs of classified personnel to earn an Education Specialist teaching credential	139	\$ 300,762
Assisting newly credentialed special education teachers with student debt payment *	177	\$ 972,570
Living stipends for newly credentialed special education teachers	20	\$ 88,647
Signing bonuses for newly credentialed special education teachers*	77	\$ 1,165,612
Induction for special education teachers	399	\$ 871,248
Teacher service scholarships*	92	\$ 402,406
Service awards	31	\$ 8,406
Preparing mentor/master teachers to support new special education teachers	586	\$ 1,210,839
Professional Learning Communities	462	\$ 447,263
Teacher career pathways	120	\$ 271,183
Other locally identified solutions	230	\$ 713,777
Totals	4661	\$ 10,331,743

*Required four-year service commitment

Identifying, recruiting, and preparing new special education teachers and/or preparation costs for teachers credentialed in other areas interested in becoming special education teachers garnered the most participants. Not unexpectedly, tuition assistance, student debt payment, and preparation costs for classified employees were provided to a significant number of individuals and as a result, are areas where the most funds were expended. The next largest areas of expenditure that were not direct monetary support for participants were for Induction programs, professional learning communities, and the preparation of mentors/master teachers, who are instrumental to the success of support programs for educators.

Demographic Data of Local Solutions Participants

Local Solutions grant recipient LEAs are required to gather and report demographic data related to number of participants by race and ethnicity, and as a result of AB 677 (Chap. 744, Stats. 2017), demographic data related to gender, and sexual orientation is also required. The data presented in the following tables is the data submitted by LEA grant recipients and was self-identified by program participants. Not all LEA grantees reported all of the required data; and not all Local Solutions program participants provided the self-identified demographic data. As a result of reviewing and extracting data from these first year reports, it has become evident that finding ways to support grantees with data collection would be valuable technical assistance for Commission staff to provide to grantees, and will be added for Year 2.

Number of Participants by Race and Ethnicity

For the June 30, 2020 report deadline, LEA grantees reported the number of participants in the Local Solutions grant program by self-identified race and ethnicity, as indicated above. Table 2 reports race and Table 3 reports ethnicity data of Local Solutions teacher participants.

Table 2: Number of Participating Teachers Self-Identified by Race

Race	# of Participants Self-Identified
American Indian or Alaska Native	30
Chinese	14
Japanese	7
Korean	8
Vietnamese	5
Asian Indian	13
Laotian	2
Filipino	36
Black or African American	118
Hawaiian	1
Guamanian	2
White	963
Multiracial	79

Race	# of Participants Self-Identified
Decline to state	509
Total	1787

Table 3: Number of Participating Teachers Self-Identified by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	# of Participants Self-Identified
Hispanic or Latinx	561
Not Hispanic or Latinx	1026
Total	1587

Of the data reported for race and ethnicity, over half self-identify their race as White (53 percent); the total of all other races, including Multiracial, equaled 17 percent. Over a quarter of reporting participants (28 percent) chose the option “Decline to state” and 35 percent self-identified as Hispanic or Latinx.

Number of Participants by Gender and Sexual Orientation

For this reporting period of the Local Solutions grant program, participants were asked to self-identify gender and sexual orientation; reporting of participants’ gender and sexual orientation is required by AB 677 (Chap. 744, Stats. 2017). Table 4 reports gender and Table 5 reports sexual orientation of Local Solutions teacher participants who provided this data.

Table 4: Number of Participating Teachers Self-Identified by Gender

Gender	# of Participants Self-Identified
Male	235
Female	1179
Nonbinary	0
Decline to state	352
Total	1766

Table 5: Number of Participating Teachers Self-Identified by Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	# of Participants Self-Identified
Heterosexual/Straight	489
Gay/Lesbian	15
Bisexual	7
Not sure	73
Decline to state	896
Total	1480

Of the data reported for gender and sexual orientation, 13 percent of the Local Solutions participants who provided data self-identify as male, 66 percent as female, and 19 percent declined to state. Regarding sexual orientation, 33 percent of the participants who provided data self-identified as heterosexual, one (1) percent as gay/lesbian, 0.4 percent as bisexual, five (5) percent indicated not being sure of their sexuality, and 60 percent declined to state.

Effectiveness of the Local Solutions Grant Program

The intent of the authorizing legislation for the Local Solutions grant program is to provide funding to LEAs for the recruitment, preparation, and support of new special education teachers. For Year One (January 2019 through June 30, 2020) data collection, program leaders were asked to provide a short narrative response to questions regarding turnover rates; teachers serving on intern credentials, permits, or waivers; effective program practices; factors that hindered full implementation; and lessons learned. Following is a selection of themes that appeared in the narratives provided by grantees for each of these areas.

Turnover Rate and Special Education Teachers Serving on Intern Credentials, Permits, or Waivers

Though it is still very early in the administration of the Local Solutions grant program, anecdotes of retention and minimizing teachers on Short Term Staff Permits (STSPs) and Provisional Intern Permits (PIPs) have emerged during data collection for Year One. All program leaders noted that the Local Solutions grant had a positive effect on retaining teachers or they have reported that reaching this goal is clearly in sight with time during the duration of the grant.

The following is a sample of responses from grantees regarding turnover rates and teachers on intern credentials, permits, or waivers:

- “From the 2018-19 school year to the 2019-20 school year, we had an almost 50 percent reduction in turnover, from 13 positions to seven (7) positions. Teachers on intern credentials reduced from seven (7) in 2018-19 to five (5) in 2019-20.”
- “The Local Solutions Grant has been able to help us incentivize new credentialed special education (SPED) teachers so that we do not need as many intern or provisional teachers. “
- “The turnover rate for SPED teachers has been slightly reduced and we are on a downward trend. Since 2018-19 we have had fewer SPED teachers leave the district but the real win for the LEA is that the number of SPED teachers who were non-reelect has decreased dramatically! And as we start this next school year, due to the intense focus and tremendous efforts of the Local Solutions Grant mentors, administrators, and Cabinet-level leaders, we are starting this school year fully staffed!”

Effective Program Practices

Throughout the data reports and emails received with the data reports, grantees expressed overwhelming enthusiasm and gratitude for the Local Solutions grant program and the opportunities the funds have provided to improve the number and quality of special education

teachers. Many programs have already identified promising practices such as signing bonuses, tuition reimbursement/payment, and strong mentoring programs that are already improving special education in the grantee LEA.

The following is a sample of responses from grantees regarding effective program practices:

- “The funding for debt relief has been, by far, the greatest positive of the grant because it has created a new energy and focus for our teachers, allowing them to enlarge their professional capacity. The most effective practices have been one-on-one mentoring and ongoing training, especially in the areas of co-teaching in the “least restrictive environment” and social-emotional learning and support.”
- “A focus group of program participants participated in the Demonstration Summer Academy. At the academy, special education teachers were able to collaborate with their peers in professional development, observe Summer Academy teachers, explore implementation of meaningful inclusion, and gain new ideas for teaching and learning. Teachers observed coaching models with a focus on inclusion and explored the use of quality curriculum with differentiation strategies. They received training in the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and co-teaching strategies. Participants developed a foundational understanding of these approaches, as well as ideas for implementation in their own classrooms.”
- “Having assigned mentors has been a huge support. While new teachers have multiple layers of support from other teachers to administrators, the targeted mentors that were assigned to this group proved to have great success. The mentor training which really helped the mentor’s role of provided guidance and support while building independence was essential.”

Factors Hindering Full Implementation

COVID-19 has been a significant factor hindering implementation of many Local Solutions programs. Program leaders noted having to cancel professional development events, difficulty with recruiting because of travel restrictions, and testing centers being closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Beyond the effects of the pandemic, other hindrances that programs reported included challenges with finding individuals interested in becoming special education teachers, lack of qualified mentor teachers in special education, and difficulties with communication across large programs.

The following is a sample of responses from grantees regarding hindrances to full implementation of the Local Solutions grant program:

- “The remote location of multiple participating districts hindered full implementation because finding special educators is still challenging. Also, for smaller, remote districts it was difficult to find the time to administer local solutions. However, now that implementation of the first year is complete, it will be easier to be proactive and fully understand the benefits of tapping into the program.”
- “While we would like to have 15-20 candidates in our program each year, finding quality mentor placements quickly becomes a limiting factor as well. Because of our historic turnover rates in special education, and high number of new teachers or teachers on

waivers/intern credentials, we have a limited number of experienced mentors. That first year working with and learning from a quality mentor is a critical part of our program that we would not want to sacrifice. As we build and retain more quality special education teachers, we will be able to increase the size of our cohorts.”

- “A hindrance was the difficulty in hiring two (2) full-time, well-qualified Teachers on Special Assignment (TSA). Fortunately, we were able to hire one (1) full-time TSA at the start of the school year. We were not able to find another full-time TSA but was fortuitous enough to find a part-time TSA towards the middle of the year. Both will continue next year, and the hope is to increase the part-time TSA’s FTE if the schedule allows. “

Lessons Learned about the Implemented Local Solutions Program

Local Solutions grantees indicated many lessons learned and made connections between that which was proposed in the approved grant proposals and the reality of the day-to-day work related to local solution activities inside and outside the COVID-19 context.

The following is a sample of responses from grantees regarding lessons learned related to implementing the Local Solutions grant program:

- “Whereas general education and special education operated separately before, the two must now work together to integrate practices, procedures, and policies. Coordination is key to maximizing use of resources and achieving outcomes. This means two programs successfully merging to meet the needs of all students. Tough and tricky.”
- “The District has learned that with individualized levels of support, training, and modeling that our new special education teachers feel less stressed and more supported by the District. As a result of this high level of support the district has a higher rate of retaining these new teachers. The district needs to continue to develop their relationships with local universities that have teacher preparation programs. We need to share with them the needs that we see within our new teachers so that they can address it in their preparation programs.”
- “The greatest lesson has been the gratitude from the participants for the opportunity. Reducing the institution of higher education (IHE) high cost of obtaining a credential and instead creating an affordable pathway with a supportive program, enabled the special education teacher demographics to begin to mirror the student population demographic of our partner districts. Some of the candidates were parents in the communities we serve.”

Next Steps

Staff will continue to provide technical assistance to all Local Solutions grantees, with an increased focus on data collection, and will provide regular updates to the Commission regarding this state-funded grant program. A final report is due from the Commission to the Department of Finance and the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2023.