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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 four grant programs administered by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and provides the data collected for Year Two (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021) 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 four grant programs administered by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (Commission), and provides the data collected for Year Two (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021) 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.

In September 2018, the Commission published the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Local Solutions grant. The grant awards were announced in December 2018, and 41 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 [October 2020](#) Commission meeting, staff presented the data from Year One of the Local Solutions grant programs.

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 Year 2, July 2020

through June 2021, which is the second full year of implementation of the Local Solutions grants.

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; and
 - 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 all of the following:
 - The reduction in teacher turnover rates for special education teacher within the grantee LEA;
 - The reduction in educators serving on intern credentials, permits, or waivers;
 - Best practices found to be effective in implementing the program;
 - Factors hindering program implementation; and
 - Lessons 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, 2021, grant recipients reported 2,048 unique participants in the Local Solutions grant program in Year Two (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021). Table 1 lists the fifteen local solutions activities suggested in authorizing legislation and reflected in the RFP. It also shows the distribution of participants across local solutions activities and related expenditures. It is important to note that many participants were served by more than one of the listed local solutions activities. For example, a participant may have been at a recruitment fair, then benefited from tuition assistance, and finally 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 2020-21 Participants and Funds Expended

Locally Identified Solutions	Number 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	1,073	\$ 1,582,311
Assisting special education candidates with tuition	618	\$ 3,567,700
Preparation costs of special education candidates to complete an integrated undergraduate program of preparation for an Education Specialist credential	13	\$ 33,074
Preparation costs of classified personnel to earn an Education Specialist teaching credential	97	\$409,488
Assisting newly credentialed special education teachers with student debt payment *	126	\$ 868,115
Living stipends for newly credentialed special education teachers	49	\$123,392
Signing bonuses for newly credentialed special education teachers*	115	\$1,192,998
Induction for special education teachers	317	\$919,426
Teacher service scholarships*	83	\$242,925
Service awards	23	\$ 191,096
Preparing mentor/master teachers to support new special education teachers	435	\$781,635
Professional Learning Communities	331	\$441,780
Teacher career pathways	158	\$152,963
Other locally identified solutions	167	\$639,477
Total	3,605	\$11,146,389

*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; other locally identified solutions that all included support structures for new special education teachers unique to each LEA; 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 the 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.

Number of Participants by Ethnicity and Race

As of June 30, 2021, 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 ethnicity data of Local Solutions teacher participants.

Table 2: Number of 2020-21 Participants Self-Identified by Ethnicity and Race

Ethnicity and Race	Number of Participants Self-Identified	Percent
Hispanic/Latinx (of any race)	517	25%
American Indian or Alaska Native	29	1.5%
Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Laotian, Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong)	162	8%
Black or African American	99	5%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Guamanian, Samoan, Tahitian)	9	0.5%
White	867	42%
Two or more races	96	5%
Decline to state	268	13%
Total	2,047	100%

Of the data reported for race and ethnicity, one quarter of Local Solutions participants self-identify their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latinx. Forty-two percent report their race as White; the total of all other races, including Multiracial, equaled 20%; and 13% of reporting participants decline to state their race or ethnicity.

Number of Participants by Gender and Sexual Orientation

As of June 30, 2021, LEA grantees reported the number of participants in the Local Solutions grant program by self-identified gender and sexual orientation. Table 3 reports gender data and Table 4 reports sexual orientation data of Local Solutions teacher participants.

Table 3: Number of 2020-21 Participants Self-Identified by Gender

Gender	Number of Participants Self-Identified	Percent
Male	381	19%
Female	1,393	70%
Nonbinary	8	0.5%
Decline to state	210	10.5%
Total	1,992	100%

Table 4: Number of 2020-21 Participants Self-Identified by Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	Number of Participants Self-Identified	Percent
Heterosexual/Straight	1,129	58%
Gay/Lesbian	34	2%
Bisexual	14	1%
Other	9	0.5%
Not sure	182	9.5%
Decline to state	566	29%
Total	1,934	100%

Of the data reported for gender, there has been an increase in the numbers and percentages of Local Solutions participants who identified as male (235 → 381, 13% → 19%) and nonbinary (0 → 8, 0% → .5%), but the majority who provided data self-identify as female; a little over 10% declined to state their gender. Regarding sexual orientation, over half of the participants who provided data self-identify as heterosexual/straight while more than a quarter of participants declined to share this data.

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. The legislation also requires that every participant who received a teacher service scholarship, signing bonus, or student debt payment shall agree to teach at a school within the jurisdiction of the grant recipient and work as an education specialist serving a caseload of pupils who receive special education services in a special education setting for four years. Participants have five years to fulfil the four-year service commitment. Table 5 reports the hiring data of these participants. It is important to note that some participants received funding in more than one of the listed local solutions activities. For example, a participant may have

received a student debt payment as well as a signing bonus. In the table below, these individuals are counted as many times as they received support from the Local Solutions Program.

Table 5: Number of 2020-21 Participants on Track to be Hired by the Grantee LEA

Types of Fund(s) Received	Actual Number of Participants Receiving Fund(s)	Number of Participants on Track to be Hired by the LEA	Number of Participants NOT on Track to be Hired by the LEA
Teacher Service Scholarship	517	504	13
Signing Bonus	123	120	3
Student Debt Payment	123	120	3
Total	763	744	19

Of note, 98% of Local Solutions participants who received one or more of these three types of financial support are on track to be hired. Commission staff has contacted all the programs who employed the 19 recipients not on track to be hired to offer support on reminding participants that they have five years to fulfill the four-year commitment and/or on tracking them in their employment as an education specialist within California but outside the grant funded LEA.

For Year Two data collection, program leaders were also asked to provide a short narrative response to questions regarding turnover rates; 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 Reduction of Educators Serving on Intern Credentials, Permits, or Waivers

Local Solutions program leaders were asked to provide anecdotal evidence on how the implementation of the grant has reduced the LEA's turnover rate as well as the number of educators teaching with intern credentials, permits, and waivers. The overwhelming majority of program leaders noted that the grant had a positive effect on retaining teachers and reported that reaching this goal is clearly in sight with time during the duration of the grant.

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

- Our smaller, more rural districts report Local Solutions funding has somewhat reduced the turnover rate. Our larger district reports turnover has greatly been reduced due to Local Solutions funding. One Executive Director of Special Education shared "This year I have only one opening in mild/moderate special education and zero in moderate/severe teaching positions. I was also able to hire an Adaptive Physical Education Teacher. It [the grant] is outstanding!" All districts report funding has somewhat reduced the number of special education teachers serving on intern credentials, permits, or waivers. As we head into year 3 of the grant, we anticipate more of these employees will be completing

preliminary preparation programs and transitioning out of being assigned on an intern credential, permit, or waiver.

- [Our district] currently has 55 special education teachers. Nine of the special education staff are currently on intern credentials, permits, or waivers. Last year, there were a total of 28 special educators working on less than a full credential. Thanks to the Local Solutions Grant program, we have been able to entice more of our current staff to pursue their education specialist credential, have added a few additional members to our team, and have provided mentors to help assist our participants along the way.
- The turnover rate for special education teachers in this LEA has been significantly reduced. This year, one teacher was non-reelected, but was able to procure subsequent employment within a neighboring district that is part of our service area. While there are far fewer special education teachers within this LEA serving on permits or waivers, several special education teachers are continuing to teach on intern credentials. Due to the CTC's COVID-19 flexibilities, we had more applicants than previous years who were intern-ready to start the 2020-21 school year. In starting the year on an intern credential, these teachers were able to receive exemplary support from their field supervisors, support providers, and instructors. This level of support is often lacking for those educators on various permits and was extremely vital to the success of a school year unlike any we have ever experienced. As the flexibilities were extended, our number of pre-service applicants into our special education intern program greatly increased as well. We believe there will be several new interns teaching within this LEA for the 2021-22 school year as well.

Effective Program Practices

In the narrative comments included in annual reports and emails received with the 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 are sample responses from grantees regarding effective program practices:

- The most effective practices for recruitment include the signing bonus and tuition assistance incentives. These additional funds attract special education teachers to vacancies and are especially beneficial for rural districts and more difficult to staff low incidence specialties. The Community of Practice has been a consistent line of direct support and collaboration for educators during an exceptionally difficult time. Participants report appreciation of sessions and connecting with facilitators and colleagues.
- As previously stated in last year's annual report, the in-person, real-time coaching has been reported to be the most effective part of the new teacher support program, especially this year when most other elements of the program were greatly modified or eliminated (i.e., PLCs, ongoing clinics for new teachers). Over 95% of new teachers polled stated that they felt that coaching provided them with vital emotional support on

top of help developing good instructional practices and relationships with colleagues and supervisors.

- New Teacher Academy, which is offered in July for these teachers, has proven to be a powerful training. These teachers are receiving training prior to their contracted days giving them a head start on their assignment. Without this opportunity they would not have had support to really focus on the essential components of early success for their classroom. Through planning, class management, curriculum training, classroom setup and learning their support methods it has proven valuable.
- We have trained special education teachers that have been at their school site for the last two years. These teachers know their students and can build relationships with them and their families.

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/social distancing policies, and exam testing centers being closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Other hindrances that programs reported included challenges with finding individuals interested in becoming special education teachers and the myriad impacts of the pandemic on teachers' personal lives.

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

- COVID-19 and the related shutdowns have hampered our ability to engage in large-scale active recruitment events.
- The District continues to struggle with recruiting general education teachers who have a multiple subjects/single subjects credential to complete a Mild/Moderate credential. The COVID-19 Pandemic forced all teachers to rethink the delivery of instruction in a virtual environment, thus also making recruitment a challenge. University programs have been rigid in their academic offerings/locations which create barriers for full-time teachers to complete a special education credential. The district sees a disconnect with university requirements of teachers to fulfill their student teaching expectations. Although the State of California has advocated for an "inclusive model" of instruction for special education students (to the degree possible), some universities are requesting student teaching can only take place in a special day class. The new recommended inclusive model of instruction is a co-teaching environment. Our district has increased our inclusive practices and has less opportunities for SDC type experiences for student teachers.
- Our staff have endured a great deal of personal trauma and difficulties working and learning during the pandemic. This has hindered full engagement in their pursuits in order to focus on more high priority needs in their personal and professional lives.
- While the best efforts were put forth to support the best practices mentioned above, COVID hindered progress in fully realizing the program's goals, particularly in-class practices that help cultivate a teacher's skills, confidence, and effectiveness. Another challenge (again, largely due to COVID) has been in making the appropriate connections

to further develop the "grow your own" model -- e.g., building the education pathway within the district and with [the local] community college. And, a final obstacle has been the inability to go out and meet individuals or speak to groups (in person) to present the needs and opportunities in special education.

Lessons Learned

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 are sample responses from grantees regarding lessons learned related to implementing the Local Solutions grant program:

- The greatest lesson learned is the importance of talking through a plan for how the funds will be used with each district prior to the beginning of the school year. We did that at the start of 2020-21, and the grant was much easier to administer this year.
- It is better to give signing bonuses to credentialed special education teachers and pay it out yearly to maintain that they stay employees with our district.
- Recruiting/training/supporting exemplary Special Education teachers as instructors, mentors, and supervisors is really critical. We have found that students rely heavily on their cohort for support and resources, so it is extremely important that we help develop a collaborative team of new teachers - both to support them while in the credential program and when they are in the classroom. Distance learning was really challenging for both teachers and students and in some cases, services were interrupted. We must be ready to support students and teachers with emotional and academic needs in the fall.
- The continued gratitude from our participants for the opportunity and support that programs such as Local Solutions provide is an invaluable asset to our community. Reducing the high cost of obtaining a credential through an institution of higher education and 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. Not all teacher candidates were able to access Classified Employee Grant funds and this gave them a similar relief. The other lesson we continue to learn and experience is the benefit of a strong collaborative relationship with our partnering districts. We are able to assist them with prepared candidates to interview for open positions. At the same time, they reach out to us to inquire if we have a possible match for their positions with any of our Intern Preservice candidates who are close to becoming intern eligible. This has helped our districts hire credentialed teachers that move to a preliminary credential with Induction Program support. We are able to provide a cost-effective support program of 4-5 years for teachers as they are beginning their career. Districts are also not burdened with a high cost from support and development of their special education teachers and teacher leaders fulfilling the mentor teacher or support provider role.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to provide technical assistance to all Local Solutions grantees, with a 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.