

CARE-ED

California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education

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Barriers to Diversity and Justice in the California Teacher Pipeline: Analysis and Recommendations for State Policy Regarding the Teacher Candidate

Locally and nationally, teacher education continues to be a battleground of various interests and reform initiatives, made all the more confusing when rhetoric and the purported aims of reforms clash with reality. In a statement released earlier this month by Education Deans for Justice and Equity, over 350 deans and other leaders in colleges of education across the United States sounded the alarm on “Seven Trends in U.S. Teacher Education.”¹ Highlighting the lack of research basis for any of these so-called “reform” initiatives, as well as the growing body of research that documents the harmful impact that these initiatives are already exerting on the teacher workforce, the leaders call for a shift away from hyper-individualistic, market-based initiatives to reforms that more deeply tackle systemic injustices and democratic processes. Here in California, this clash between rhetoric and reality is no less salient, and is heightened as policies and reform initiatives that purport to build and strengthen the teacher workforce are accomplishing the opposite effect.

In this research brief, the California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education (CARE-ED), a statewide collaborative of educational researchers, analyzes barriers to advancing diversity and justice in teacher education. Rather than a focus on national policy trends or on curriculum and program design, we concentrate our analysis on policy levers at the state level, particularly regarding accessibility for and assessment of the teacher candidate. We conclude each section with recommendations for state policy and legislation.

Status and Trends of California’s Teacher Workforce and Pipeline

Nationwide, the student population of public schools has been over 50% students of color since 2014, but the teaching force has long been approximately 80% white,

as has the teacher-education profession; even the percentage of those who determine education policy (namely, local school board members and state legislators) are similarly about 80% white.² The difference that a more racially diverse teaching force makes is many-fold, including that well-prepared teachers of color are more likely to hold higher expectations for students of color, to utilize culturally relevant pedagogies and curriculums, to serve as cultural brokers with communities of color, to engage in critical discussions about race, and to challenge racial inequities in schools.³ Several studies have shown that students of color achieve better when their teachers are well-prepared and match their ethnic background.⁴ A predominantly white teaching force helps to maintain the racial gap in educational success.

In California, several overlapping trends in the teacher pipeline paint a dire picture of not merely a growing shortage of public-school teachers, but more pointedly, a growing shortage of teachers who reflect the diversity of our communities and who have the capacity to support all learners and advance equity and justice in education. According to recent data⁵, the current workforce is already too small and unstable for the needs at hand:

- California has the highest student-teacher ratio in the nation, at 24:1, compared to the national average of 16:1—but we know that in large urban districts across the state, those ratios are unevenly distributed with some classes over 36:1. We would need to hire 135,000 teachers just to equal the national average.
- The upcoming wave of retirements will significantly increase the shortage: 34% of teachers are aged 50 and older, and 10% are 60 and older. We knew this was coming: a 2005 study estimated that one-third of the teaching force would retire in the 10 years following, and that maintaining the student-teacher ratio of that time would require replacing 106,000.

- California’s recent recession and extensive budget cuts exacerbated the teacher shortage. We would need to hire 60,000 teachers just to return student-teacher ratios to pre-recession levels.
- Nationwide, 17% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years. Teacher attrition is especially high in poor, urban schools, where on average about one-fifth of the entire faculty leaves annually, which is roughly 50% higher than the rate in more affluent schools.

But rather than grow, the workforce is expected to shrink further in size and capacity:

- In the last decade, enrollment in teacher-education programs dropped by 75%.
- Since the early 2000s, the number of newly credentialed teachers annually has steadily declined, consistently falling far short of the number of vacancies.
- To meet the shortfall, the issuance of substandard credentials and permits has dramatically increased. In 2015-16, for example, California issued more than 10,000 intern credentials, permits, and waivers, which is more than double the number issued in 2012-13, and which is close to the number of full credentials issued. These authorizations to teach were granted to those who had not completed—or sometimes not even started—preparation for teaching. The greatest growth has been in emergency-style permits known as Provisional Intern Permits and Short-Term Staff Permits.

These trends negatively impact some groups more than others. By far, the schools most impacted by this compromised teaching force are the ones serving predominantly students of color, indigenous students, immigrant/refugee students, and students in high-poverty areas, as well as students in “high needs” fields like special education and bilingual education. Teachers, too, are disproportionately impacted, with a wave of policies and so-called “reform” initiatives to address teacher quality and the teacher shortage that serve to hinder rather than facilitate the diversification of the teacher pipeline and the preparation of teachers to advance equity and justice.

Policies and “Reform” Initiatives that Harm California’s Teaching Force

A number of state policies and initiatives embody or reinforce barriers to strengthening the teacher workforce. Two are highlighted below.

(1) The financial cost makes teacher education unaffordable to, and/or with long-term burdens on, students from low-income backgrounds. The growing national attention on the student debt crisis highlights a number of problems with higher education: tuition is skyrocketing, public investment in higher education is declining (measured by the percentage of operating budgets that comes from public tax dollars), and the portion of costs that are covered by need-based scholarships has dwindled as student loans balloon in number and size, as do the rates of default and the related scale of fraud by lenders. Education has increasingly become framed and treated as a commodity, rather than a public good, and teacher education takes this one step further.

Additional to the tuition, fees, and course-related expenses that are typical of higher education are various certification-specific costs, often borne by students, that may include fees and expenses related to mandatory entrance (“basic skills”) tests; subject-specific tests; performance assessments; legal and medical requirements (like finger printing, background checks, medical clearances, immunizations); task- and product-tracking and storage, like online portfolios; other course materials (like tablets or laptops); transportation to schools; and student-teaching for several months full-time or near-fulltime without income, and for many, without the time and ability to work part-time elsewhere. Teacher education not only expects that students have the financial capacity to live without income for months, but also demands that they pay what can amount to well over \$1000 in the fees listed above (in addition to tuition), all in preparation for a career with low salary, high rates of burnout and turnover, possible large student debt, and a job-satisfaction rate that has plummeted nationwide in recent years.

We recommend that the state legislature and the Department of Education develop and implement a comprehensive funding program to make teacher education not merely affordable, but incentivized, particularly for prospective teachers of color.

Minnesota recently passed legislation that would provide student teachers with a living stipend while they are student teaching. Federal and state funds allow for scholarships and loan-forgiveness for candidates who go on to teach in certain high-needs schools and fields. Some colleges of education provide funding to cover some of the aforementioned expenses, while others partner with districts to waive tuition. A comprehensive funding program for California would expand on and systematize such reforms.

(2) The mandated high-stakes assessments lack a sound research basis and disproportionately filter by race. Across the country, one “reform” trend is for states to regulate teacher-education programs through assessments that purport to offer quality control of teacher candidates, including standardized tests as prerequisites for admission or advancement (entrance exams), and performance assessments as culminating products (edTPA), and in some instances have been raising the passing scores needed on national or state-specific tests in order to “raise the bar.”

(2a) The Example of Entrance Exams. Here in California, as a prerequisite for applying for candidacy, students must first pass the general preparedness test, the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), and then the subject-specific battery of tests, the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET), both administered by and profitable to Pearson Education, Inc. Pearson earns millions from the state, but individual candidates generally pay out-of-pocket: It costs \$150 to take the CBEST and \$300-\$400 to take the CSET, and if the candidate does not receive a passing score, then for each section to be retaken, an additional \$100. In some fields and institutions, additional tests are mandated.

Such tests have not been proven by research to produce a higher quality teaching force; they are not valid and reliable in predicting teacher quality; but they do disproportionately filter out students of color because of the racial gap in scores between white students and students of color in general.⁶ This gap is not surprising, given the decades of research on cultural and racial bias (i.e., Eurocentrism and white normativity) in standardized testing. And, while teachers of color are needed in all fields and grade levels, they will be in particular demand as more high schools across California require Ethnic Studies coursework, given that teachers of color bring life experiences that support effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy.⁷

We recommend that California end the requirement that candidates pass the CBEST and CSET, and instead:

- *Provide models for how institutions are effectively using a variety of more authentic criteria (including previous university coursework, supervisor evaluations of work in schools and/or community settings, and experience addressing issues of diversity and justice) to determine eligibility for program entrance and completion.*
- *Support institutions in developing and implementing their own criteria and process for ensuring that diversity and justice are at the heart of admissions.*

Earlier this year, Illinois removed “basic skills” tests as program-entrance requirements, with parallel initiatives in Indiana, New York, and a growing number of states. California should follow suit.

(2b) The Example of Performance Assessments. In the past, California allowed programs to choose from up to four performance-assessment instruments; however, as it is the edTPA that has come to spread and dominate across the nation, and remains in wide use in California, we focus our analysis on the edTPA. There is some empirical research on the validity of this assessment, but there is also empirical and anecdotal evidence that, when used with high stakes, it over-determines the curriculum (“teaching to the test”) and decreases the racial diversity of the population that passes, all while contributing to corporate profits.⁸ Although proponents of the edTPA, and TPAs in general, may argue that the assessment should align with state standards and program goals, and should be as formative as it is summative, the reality is that the sheer volume of work required, when combined with its high stakes, results in some students focusing singularly on performing and producing what would be reviewed positively. Tests, after all, can be more a measure of how well you perform “success” than how smart, talented, skillful, or capable you are, thereby reducing indicators of preparedness to a strategic performance that has little to do with one’s capacity to embody the values most dear to that profession.

The pressure to perform success is heightened by how the edTPA is reviewed. The predecessor to today’s edTPA involved evaluation by locally hired reviewers, but today, Pearson hires external, anonymous reviewers, who may be unfamiliar with the student, program, and context, with compensation as low as \$20 per evaluation, thus warranting skepticism about the value, credibility, and validity of such reviews. Ironically, a tool meant to professionalize teaching can serve to de-professionalize teacher education by dislocating program faculty from the most significant of evaluative stages. This dislocation suggests a hidden curriculum that what really counts as teaching is what can be most easily performed and read (by external observers) as quality teaching, thus privileging already normative notions of teaching.

The ability or inability of the edTPA to disrupt normative notions of teaching has long been at the heart of debate among teacher educators about whether its design and rubrics do or do not attend to the situated and relational nature of teaching; do or do not align with and privilege Eurocentric, patriarchal, colorblind, colonial, neoliberal, and corporate ideologies and histories embedded in schools and universities; and do or do not

diminish the emotional, controversial, and contradictory nature of teaching towards democracy and social justice, which can easily be misinterpreted as poor classroom management or lesson planning. Of course, no assessment is without limitations, and on the flipside, we recognize that some of our colleagues have found the edTPA to be of use in a variety of ways and wish to continue using it.

We recommend that California end the mandate of teacher performance assessments as the culminating, high-stakes assessment, and as such:

- *Divorce the edTPA, and any TPA, from all high-stakes decision making, offering it merely as one of many available tools for formative assessment.*
- *Discontinue mandating the edTPA, or any TPA, as an expense on students that profits Pearson.*
- *Encourage treating the edTPA, and any TPA, in a way that cultivates both technical preparedness (to pass) and scientific skepticism (about its limitations), which is not unlike the ways that we prepare teachers to teach their own K-12 students to view paradoxically the tests that dominate their schooling experience.*
- *Provide models for how institutions are effectively using a variety of holistic and developmental criteria (including coursework, field experience, critical self-analyses, and integration of research and theory on issues of diversity and justice) to determine eligibility for initial certification.*
- *Support institutions in developing and implementing their own criteria and process for ensuring that diversity and justice are at the heart of assessments.*

Conclusion: From Individuals to Systems

In this era that is dominated by neoliberal ideology, much of the rhetoric about the problems in teacher education—and education in general—focus narrowly on individual performance, outcomes, and accountability. Even in this brief, the focus thus far has been on policies that seek to measure individuals rather than the systems in which they operate, but both are important in efforts to strengthen the teacher workforce.

Therefore, our overall recommendation is to shift the focus of policy and reform from individuals to systems, and in doing so, for California to lead the nation in targeting not merely individual preparedness to teach, but the systemic injustices that have long plagued our schools and universities and that are far more forceful in driving the enduring problems in education.

The problem with cost, for example, is not merely that some individuals do not have the resources to pay; rather, the larger problem is that education has increasingly become seen as a commodity, justifying the disinvestment by the public sector by hyping the entrepreneurialism that purports to level the playing field. The problem with the whitening of the teacher force is not merely that we have yet to identify effective recruitment strategies; rather, the larger problem is that education has a long history of serving the interests of white supremacy and colonialism, and their legacies continue to color countless aspects of universities, from admissions to advising, from curriculum to employment, from climate to community relations. Even when it comes to accreditation: the problem is not whether institutions are meeting the goals that they have identified, which may or may not be embedded in communities, and may or may not center diversity and justice; rather, the problem is whether institutions are identifying and advancing goals related to diversity and justice, and are working in solidarity with schools and communities to build the capacity of the larger system in which universities operate to do so.

When we are looking systemically, and we point to the whitening of the teaching force, or the racial gap in educational success, or the financial inaccessibility of higher education, we begin to see them less as signs that education is failing, and more as signs that education is succeeding, doing exactly what it was designed to do. After all, schools and universities were not initially created for all, and have always functioned to sort, socialize, and maintain social inequities, even as they simultaneously seed transformation, revolution, and liberation. Our challenge, then is not merely to tinker with how individuals function in this system; rather, our challenge is to change the system, to dig deeply into the paradoxical ways that injustices have long shaped countless aspects of our universities (and countless aspects of the systems around universities, including well-intentioned policies and legislation) even as we work in those very institutions toward cross purposes.

These, then, are the aspects of universities in general, and teacher education in particular, that warrant the greatest attention by legislation, policy, and reform. And we, as leaders, practitioners, and scholars of teacher education throughout California, stand ready to work with policy makers to develop, enact, and assess such reforms.

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Contributing authors include Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath, Rick Ayers, Margarita Berta-Ávila, Nick Henning, Cynthia Lewis, Ann Schulte, Christine Sleeter, Miguel Zavala, and Kevin Kumashiro.

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CARE-ED, the California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education, is a statewide collaborative of education researchers that aims to speak as educational researchers, collectively and publicly, and in solidarity with organizations and communities, to reframe the debate on education. <http://www.care-ed.org>

Notes

¹ Education Deans for Justice and Equity. (2019). *Seven Trends in U.S. Teacher Education, and the Need to Address Systemic Injustices*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved October 10, 2019 from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/seven-trends>.

² National Education Policy Center. (2019, October 1). *White Fragility: What It Looks Like in Schools [Newsletter]*. Retrieved October 9, 2019 from

<https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/newsletter-thomas-100119>.

³ Kohli, R. (2009). Critical race reflections: Valuing the experiences of teachers of color in teacher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2), 235-251; Sleeter, C., Neal, L., & Kumashiro, K. (Eds.). (2014). *Diversifying the teacher workforce: Preparing and retaining highly effective teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.

⁴ Easton-Brooks, D. (2019). *Ethnic matching: Academic success of students of color*. Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield; Egalite, A. J., Kisida, B., & Winters, M. A. (2015). Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement. *Economics of Education Review*, 45, 44-52; Redding, C. (2019). A teacher like me: A review of the effect of student-teacher racial/ethnic matching on teacher perceptions of students and student academic and behavioral outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(4), 499-535.

⁵ Darling-Hammond, L., Furger, R., Shields, P., & Sutchter, L. (2016). *Addressing California's Emerging Teacher Shortage: An Analysis of Sources and Solutions*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved October 9, 2019 from

<http://www.learningpolicyinstitute.org/addressing-ca-teacher-shortage>.

⁶ Education Deans for Justice and Equity. (2019). *Seven Trends in U.S. Teacher Education, and the Need to Address Systemic Injustices*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved October 10, 2019 from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/seven-trends>.

⁷ Tintiango-Cubales, A., Kohli, R., Sacramento, J., Henning, N., Agarwal-Rangnath, R., & Sleeter, C. (2015). Toward an ethnic studies pedagogy: Implications for K-12 schools from the research. *The Urban Review*, 47(1), 104-125.

⁸ Cochran-Smith, M., Carney, M. C., Keefe, E. S., Burton, S., Chang, W. C., Fernández, M. B., Miller, A. F., Sánchez, J. G., & Baker, M. (2018). *Reclaiming accountability in teacher education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Signatories

The following 132 leaders, practitioners, and scholars of teacher education in California endorsed this statement. Affiliations are provided for identification purposes only.

Contact Person: Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath, Assistant Professor and Coordinator, University of San Francisco
Contact Person: Rick Ayers, Associate Professor, University of San Francisco

Annie S. Adamian, Assistant Professor, CSU Chico
Nancy Aguilar, Coordinator, CSU Los Angeles

Roberta Ahlquist, Professor Emerita, San José State University

Ursula Aldana, Assistant Professor, University of San Francisco

Peter Alter, Associate Professor and Chair, Saint Mary's College of CA

Josephine Arce, Professor, San Francisco State University

Elizabeth K. Baker, Professor of Practice, Mills College

Michael K. Barbour, Associate Professor, Touro University California

Nicoleta Bateman, Professor and Chair, CSU San Marcos

Ann Berlak, Instructor (retired), San Francisco State University

Margarita Berta-Avila, Professor, Sacramento State University

Mikela Bjork, Assistant Professor, University of Redlands

Gilda Bloom-Leiva, Professor, San Francisco State University

Allison Briceno, Assistant Professor, San José State University

Rebeca Burciaga, Associate Professor, San José State University

Colette Cann, Associate Dean and Professor, University of San Francisco

Sarah Capitelli, Associate Professor, University of San Francisco

Rhianna Henry Casesa, Assistant Professor, Sonoma State University

Ethan Chang, Postdoctoral Fellow, UC Santa Barbara

Fred Chapel, Core Faculty, Antioch University

Thandeka K. Chapman, Associate Professor, UC San Diego

Brian Charest, Assistant Professor, University of Redlands

José Cintrón, Professor, CSU Sacramento

Erica Colmenares, Assistant Professor, CSU Chico

Anaida Colon-Muniz, Professor and Director, Chapman University

Cindy Cruz, Associate Professor, UC Santa Cruz

Jaye Darby, Lecturer, UCLA

David Donahue, Professor, University of San Francisco

Alison Dover, Associate Professor, CSU Fullerton

Kitty Kelly Epstein, Professor, Holy Names University

James Fabionar, Assistant Professor, University of San Diego

Pete Farruggio, Former Lead Instructor, UC Berkeley Extension

Joan Fingon, Professor, CSU Los Angeles

Denise Fleming, Professor and Coordinator, CSU East Bay

Chuck Flores, Assistant Professor, CSU Los Angeles

Elena Flores, Professor Emerita, University of San Francisco

Oona Fontanella-Nothom, Assistant Professor, CSU Los Angeles

Annamarie Francois, Executive Director, UCLA

Tricia Gallagher-Geurtsen, Instructor, UC San Diego

Mónica G. García, Associate Professor, CSU Northridge

Suzanne García-Mateus, Assistant Professor and Director, CSU Monterey Bay

Ron Glass, Professor, UC Santa Cruz

Noah Asher Golden, Assistant Professor, CSU Long Beach

Karen Grady, Professor, Sonoma State University

Judith Green, Distinguished Professor Emerita, UC Santa Barbara

Margaret Grogan, Dean and Professor, Chapman University

Anne Hafner, Professor and Director, CSU Los Angeles

Laura Hallberg, Assistant Professor and Lead, University of the Pacific

Barbara Henderson, Professor and Director, San Francisco State University

Nick Henning, Associate Professor, CSU Fullerton

Soleste Hilberg, Director, UC Santa Cruz

Nikola Hobbel, Professor, Humboldt State University

Betina Hsieh, Associate Professor, CSU Long Beach

Sarah Ives, Associate Professor, CSU Sacramento

Luz Casquejo Johnston, Assistant Professor, Saint Mary's College of California

Rebecca Joseph, Associate Professor, CSU Long Beach

Lara Kassab, Assistant Professor, San José State University

Susan Katz, Professor, University of San Francisco

Denise Kennedy, Associate Professor, Cal Poly Pomona

Kim Knowles-Yanez, Professor, CSU San Marcos

Kevin Kumashiro, Independent Scholar

Aja LaDuke, Assistant Professor, Sonoma State University

Amanda Lashaw, Lecturer, UC Santa Cruz

Heather Lattimer, Dean, San José State University

Darlene Lee, Faculty Advisor, UCLA

Terry Lenihan, Professor, Loyola Marymount University

Cynthia Lewis, Professor and Chair, UC Santa Cruz

George Lipsitz, Professor, UC Santa Barbara

Miguel G. López, Associate Professor, CSU Monterey Bay

David Low, Assistant Professor, CSU Fresno

Heather Macias, Assistant Professor, CSU Long Beach

Roxana Marachi, Associate Professor, San José State University

Jamie Marsh, Assistant Professor, CSU Los Angeles

Danny C. Martinez, Associate Professor, UC Davis

Allison Mattheis, Associate Professor, CSU Los Angeles

Jennifer McCormick, Professor, CSU Los Angeles

J. Cynthia McDermott, Regional Director, Antioch University

Peter McLaren, Distinguished Professor, Chapman University

Gerri McNenny, Associate Professor, Chapman University

Patricia Mitchell, Professor Emerita, University of San Francisco

Theresa Montaña, Professor, CSU Northridge

Eduardo R. Muñoz-Muñoz, Assistant Professor, San José State University

Janice Myck-Wayne, Professor, CSU Fullerton

Richard Navarro, Professor, Cal Poly Pomona

Thomas Nelson, Professor Emeritus, University of the Pacific

Julie Nicholson, Professor of Practice, Mills College

Lisa Norton, Dean, Touro University California

Julia Nyberg, Professor, Purdue University Global

Valerie Ooka Pang, Professor, San Diego State University

Robert Oprandy, Professor Emeritus, University of the Pacific

Maria Oropeza Fujimoto, Assistant Professor, CSU Los Angeles

Jeff Passe, Dean, Cal Poly Pomona

Jann Pataray-Ching, Professor, Cal Poly Pomona

Ruth Piker, Professor, CSU Long Beach

Marcos Pizarro, Associate Dean, San José State University

Farima Pour-Khorshid, Assistant Professor, University of San Francisco

Martha Quadros, Program Manager, San Juan Unified School District

Mary Candace Raygoza, Assistant Professor, Saint Mary's College of CA

Christina Restrepo Nazar, Assistant Professor, CSU Los Angeles

G. T. Reyes, Assistant Professor, CSU East Bay

Marisol A. Ruiz, Associate Professor, Humboldt State University

Christina Rusk, Coordinator, University of the Pacific

Sheeva Sabati, Lecturer UC Santa Cruz

Louise Santiago, Assistant Dean and Director, Touro University California

Al Schademan, Professor, CSU Chico

Ann Schulte, Professor and Coordinator, CSU Chico

Sumer Seiki, Assistant Professor, University of San Francisco

Paula M. Selvester, Coordinator, CSU Chico

Fay Shin, Professor and Chair, CSU Long Beach

Leslie Simon, Instructor, City College of San Francisco

Christine Sleeter, Professor Emerita, CSU Monterey Bay

Patricia Stall, Director, CSU San Marcos

Charlane Starks, Assistant Professor, University of the Pacific

Heidi Stevenson, Associate Professor, University of the Pacific

Gregory K. Tanaka, Visiting Distinguished Fellow, Institutions McLaren de Pedagogia Critica y Education Popular

Carlos Tejeda, Professor, CSU Los Angeles

Jacquelyn M. Urbani, Associate Professor, Mills College

Susan Verducci, Professor and Coordinator, San José State University

Maika Watanabe, Professor and Chair, San Francisco State University

Kimberly White-Smith, Dean, University of La Verne

Erin Whitney, Assistant Professor, CSU Chico

Dee Williams, Associate Chair, CSU Los Angeles

Kimi Wilson, Assistant Professor, CSU Los Angeles

Joanna Wong, Assistant Professor, CSU Monterey Bay

Shelley Xu, Professor, CSU Long Beach

Cathery Yeh, Assistant Professor, Chapman University

Christine Yeh, Professor, University of San Francisco

Darryl Yong, Professor, Harvey Mudd College

Miguel Zavala, Professor and Director, CSU Los Angeles