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Policy Analysis: BTSA

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In reflecting upon California's educational major public policy initiatives over the last ten years, many important policies come to mind. Charter schools continue to be hotly debated as parents fight for vouchers. Class size reduction threatens elimination every time a budget crisis comes along. API scores are scrutinized as schools try to bring up their scores and low performing schools are taken over by the state. Although these issues are important, they all relate to one basic issue: teacher quality. A major public policy focus in California over the past ten years is teacher preparation. The policy change component I will focus on is BTSA, (pronounced "bit-suh") an acronym for Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Unfortunately, the problem of teacher quality begins with teacher preparation programs. Fullen (2001) believes that most do not generate the suggested key attributes, such as: clear conceptions of teaching and schooling, student cohort groups, articulation between campuses and field bases, and adequate curriculum materials. He also reports disturbing problems in education, such as: low expectations for students, poor teacher recruitment, and lack of professional development and rewards.

An even more pressing problem that brought about policy change was teacher retention. Nationally, "A third of beginning teachers quit within their first three years on the job" (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002). Thirty percent of new teachers leave within five years of entry. "The rate is considerably higher for teachers in disadvantaged districts. The rate is also higher where there are no supports—orientation or induction programs—in place for beginning teachers" (Fullen, 2001, p. 249).

Since the early 1990s, the annual number of exits from teaching has surpassed the number of entrants by an increasing amount putting pressure on the nation's hiring systems" (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Additionally, R.M. Ingersoll found that "the movement of

teachers from school to school and district to district, a phenomenon that he calls migration, accounts for half of the turnover that schools and districts experience” (Johnson and Birkeland, 2003).

*The California Educator* (2002) reports statistics for California. 17% of teachers leave teaching after one year; 30% percent of teachers leave after two years; 40% leave after three years; and nearly half leave after five years; up to 80% leave after ten years.

Teacher attrition has enormous financial impact as demonstrated by a study in Texas. It was estimated that the state had an annual “. . .turnover rate of 15 percent which includes a 40 percent turnover rate for public school teachers in the first three years, costs the state a ‘conservative’ \$329 million a year, or at least \$8,000.00 per recruit who leaves in the first few years of teaching” (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Multiply that amount times 50 states and there is a huge amount of money that could be spent better on students.

“Further complicating the picture is the profession’s ongoing ‘brain drain,’ the steady loss of teachers who, after a relatively short time in the classroom, give up on the profession, opting instead for jobs that offer more financial rewards or may simply appear less stressful” (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002). “This revolving door creates a permanent core of inexperienced teachers who are learning their craft by, essentially practicing on the students before them. At the school wide level, high teacher turnover drains energy and resources, as well, requiring that administrators and teaching colleagues constantly focus on bringing newcomers up to speed” (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002).

Keeping good teachers is an important concern for school leaders. Research has been done to determine what factors influence teacher attrition. “Four major factors strongly influence whether and when teachers leave specific schools or the education profession

entirely: salaries, working conditions, preparation, and mentoring support in the early years” (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Although everyone is talking about improving public education, from No Child Left Behind, to policy changes at the state and local levels, many agree that improved schools will come about only in tandem with improved teacher quality (Olebe, Jackson, & Danielson, 1999). “A growing body of evidence indicates that teachers who lack adequate initial preparation are more likely to leave the profession” (Darling-Hammond, 2003). “In a state that will hire 265,000 new teachers in the next five years, crafting policies for sustaining teaching quality requires accounting for the complexities of educating 5.8 million children in 1,000 school districts –and accounting for the different needs of teachers as learners” (Olebe et al., 1999).

Additionally, there is a correlation between teacher qualifications and student learning. “Teacher expertise –what teachers know and can do—affects all the core tasks of teaching” (Fullen, 2001, p. 244). Teacher expertise accounted for over 40% in student achievement. Studies also found that teacher education and ability, along with small schools, and low teacher-student ratios attributed to the scores (Fullen, 2001).

#### POLICY IMPLEMENTAION

Solutions for addressing teacher quality have been at the forefront of reforms and policies the last 15 years; therefore, several policies led to the implementation of BTSA. Research shows that a key element in improving the retention rate is to recruit and target good teachers; then use a process of support and assessment to work with beginning teachers for the first two years of their careers. Beginning teacher support programs, more commonly called teacher induction programs, help schools and districts improve teacher retention rates by enhancing new teacher satisfaction. “A well-designed and implemented effort can

improve practice, helping new educators apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in their teacher preparation program to the complexities of real-life teaching” (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002).

In 1988, California’s policymakers became interested in supporting teachers in their first and second years of teaching. This interest was fostered by concerns about the retention of new teachers in urban and rural environments and a large increase in the size and diversity of the student population. California developed a plan and initiated a comprehensive evaluation of alternative methods of new teacher support and assessment (Olebe, 2001).

These efforts led to what became known as the California New Teacher Project (CNTP). CNTP funded local programs to provide support and training for first-year and second-year teachers, and to pilot innovative assessments. “A central finding of this research identified the need to provide beginning teachers with focused induction support. To be useful, this support must be provided at a sufficient level of intensity to make a difference in the performance, retention, and satisfaction of beginning teachers” (Olebe, 2001).

CNTP served 37 local pilot programs with more than 3,000 new teachers and over 1,500 experienced teachers from 1988 through 1992. The CNTP was basically a research and development program. Local programs were challenged to try a variety of implementation designs (Olebe, 2001).

One such program began in 1988. The Santa Cruz New Teacher Program discovered that their model improved the quality and retention of new teachers. “We have found that mentoring offers veteran teachers professional replenishment, contributes to the retention of the region’s best teachers, and produces teacher leaders with the skills and passion to make lifelong teacher development central to school culture” (Moir & Bloom, 2003).

SB 1422 enacted the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program as an initiative to provide performance assessment and individual support based on assessment information for beginning teachers. BTSA encourages collaboration by the local school district, county office of education, colleges and university in the organization and delivery of new teacher induction (BTSA). This act examined alternative models for assigning and supporting teachers in the first two years of teaching while assessing their performance and competence in the classroom (Olebe, 2001).

The legislation required the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the requirements for earning and renewing teaching credentials. The legislation also stated that full funding would be a priority for the BTSA program prior to its taking effect. The BTSA program would be jointly administered by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) and the California Department of Education (CDE). Although there are millions of stakeholders, including teachers, students, and administrators, BTSA has been administered since the beginning by a six to eight member task force of professional staff from both agencies (Olebe, 2001).

From 1992 – 1997, the BTSA program grew, but participation was voluntary for both teachers and sponsoring organizations. Funds were awarded to local programs through grants. The statewide budget grew from \$4.9 million to \$7.5 million. During that time period, the number of participants grew from 1700 to 2480 serving 333 local programs. The SB 1422 funding called for a 3:2 ratio of state dollars to locally provided matching funds. Until 2000, the state funded Mentor Teacher Program was funded by matching local education agencies. (Education Code Sections 44490-44497). “Now the Mentor Teacher Program has sunset, and its successor, the Peer Assistance and Review Program (PAR), (Education Codes Sections 44500-44508), may be used for the same purpose” (Olebe, 2001).

In addition to creating the BTSA program, SB 1422 required the Commission to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the requirements for the earning and renewing of credentials. From 1995 to 1997 an advisory panel conducted this review. They published a document in 1997, called *California's Future: Highly Qualified Teachers for All Students*. The panel recommended a new format for awarding teaching credentialing, including multiple routes to the preliminary credential and the completion of two years of an induction program as a requirement for earning a Professional Clear Credential.

The framework was refined and revised based on the experience of local educators who had designed, operated and evaluated beginning teacher support programs. That framework evolved into the current BTSA program that was established by the 1997 Mazzoni legislation, AB 1266.

During this same time frame (1997-98), there was a growing concern regarding schools and accountability. California implemented class size reduction in grades 1-3. *What Matters Most: Teaching for American's Future* was published by the National Commission on Teacher Credentialing. California published *California's Future: Highly Qualified Teachers for All Students* (Olebe, 2001).

In 1998-99, California allocated \$67.2 million to the BTSA program. In 1999-2000, an additional \$75 million dollars were allocated (Olebe, 2001). "By July 1, 1999, each first- and second-year credentialed teacher in California will be able to participate in this massive state-supported program, although the credentialing requirement will not yet be implemented" (Olebe, 2001). For the fiscal year 2001, BTSA is funded at \$104.6 million and is providing 29,000 beginning teachers with assessments and professional development that promotes their effectiveness with students, retention in the teaching field, and job satisfaction (BTSA).

“By focusing on beginning teachers, California’s policymakers hope to set new standards of teaching and to assist new teachers in examining their teaching in relation to newly adopted standards for student achievement” (Olebe, 2001).

## THE RESULTS

California has spent millions of dollars on BTSA with the goal of improving the quality of education for students, improving teacher quality, and raising the retention rate of teachers. Has it worked? Until 1997-98, BTSA faced almost no resistance typically associated with reform. “This is attributable to the fact that no one intently opposes assisting novices, the pace of adoption of innovations was slow, and the scope was limited to volunteers” (Olebe, 2001).

As the BTSA program increased, so did the need for accountability. Policy makers wanted to demonstrate the program’s impact on teacher quality and retention. The stakes changed when the simultaneous implementation of SB 2042, that required completion of a two year induction program in order to obtain a professional clear credential and the funding that make induction available to all first and second year teachers (Olebe, 2001).

Although only six to eight people established the initial policies, BTSA now wanted documentation from key stakeholders. For individual teachers, the California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers (CFASST) is used to assist teachers in professional development. This assessment system is structured while flexible and consists of events that help teachers focus through a “plan, teach, reflect, apply” process while uniquely blending teaching knowledge with performance (BTSA). Local programs participate in a Formal Program Review which is an accountability system based on the programs standards being phased in over four years through 2003 (Olebe, 2001).

Local program evaluations were required as well as peer program evaluations. Anecdotal reports were completed regarding the value to both BTSA beginning teachers and their support providers beginning in the mid-nineties. Analysis of data collected over three years has given new understanding about the importance of the local program environments for facilitating a culture for new teacher success. Preliminary responses are positive. Local data suggests an overall retention rate of 92% statewide through the third year of teaching (Olebe, 2001).

I spoke with several stakeholders regarding BTSA, including professionals at both the site and district levels. Chris Flesuras, Director of Personnel for Modesto City Schools invited me to interview him. Until two years ago, he was a high school site principal at several different high schools. My first question was, “You were a principal before BTSA began and when BTSA was implemented. What do you see as the difference?”

He quickly answered, “The survival rate is better. More teachers stay.” This response is supported by research. As to helping site administration, “Principals used to have to do all that ourselves. We met quarterly with each new teacher. The principal was responsible for supervision of instruction, but it created a conflict of interest. We were responsible for training them while also being their evaluators” (Personal interview, December 3, 2003).

In a district that hires approximately 125 teachers annually, about 85 of those teachers are new to the profession. As Director of Personnel, Mr. Flesuras recruits new teachers at university jobs fairs from six western states. “Telling potential applicants that the district offers the BTSA program is a plus, especially since it covers many of the district’s requirements, such as Outlook training and district policies on sexual harassment and discrimination.” Classes are scheduled four times a year so teachers can choose which dates to attend. New teachers view this as a great service. They are also allowed four release days

for training and the district pays for their substitutes, although most of the requirements are completed during after school hours.

With the recent change that teachers will not receive a clear credential until after they've been hired, the BTSA coordinator and the personnel department have streamlined induction and BTSA. During the interview, Mr. Flesuras pulled out his 3" BTSA binder and gave me some of the forms and calendars the district uses. The district offers the BTSA health and computer classes which are both required for a clear credential. Additionally, the third year meets the requirements for induction. "BTSA is more important now because it becomes part of the clear credential. We have agreements with the state colleges so new teachers can earn 12 units of credit to use towards a master's degree while advancing on the salary schedule."

When I inquired about the cost of teacher attrition, he said that he didn't have specific numbers. "About 15 people are involved in the teacher orientations and training. When you add up all their hours and salaries, it is a lot of money."

Highly qualified teachers are part of the No Child Left Behind legislation. Support providers earn additional credit for being mentors. "The support providers really watch out for the new teachers. As a principal, they would come in and tell me, 'You can't give her more than two preps' or 'He shouldn't have to change classrooms.' They're like little mother hens!"

Most recently he instructed all principals to present the standards for the teaching profession at a faculty meeting. Since the standards have only been out since 1999, he believes many veteran teachers are unfamiliar with them. He's hoping that the standards will help serve as a reminder of the level of professionalism teachers should aspire towards.

Another key stakeholder is a school district's BTSA coordinator. Modesto City School's BTSA Coordinator, Heather Sherburn, answered my questions through a phone interview. She said that the state of California was spending \$98 million statewide to raise student achievement. She believes strongly in the value of BTSA for new teachers. "They wouldn't have made it if they didn't have their support provider. The positive impact is that BTSA especially focuses on new teachers using curriculum standards, integrated assessment, and raises student achievement. They also have someone to talk to" (H. Sherburn, personal communication, May 6, 2003).

Mike Coats, a second year principal at Johansen High School, agreed to let me interview him regarding BTSA. He was extremely positive about the benefits of BTSA to new teachers. "The teacher has someone to go to for help without feeling like they're inadequate to do the job. They are forced to talk to their support provider as part of the process. This helps take away any fears that they might have about feeling like a rookie and being afraid to ask questions" (M. Coats, personal communication, December 2, 2003).

As a principal, Mr. Coats finds the induction process helpful. He believes that the BTSA program makes his job as a principal easier. "The little questions can be answered by the new teacher's support provider." He is also impressed that new teachers are arriving with standards for the profession. He even plans to present the standards at a future faculty meeting because most veteran teachers are unfamiliar with them.

The BTSA program also provides resources and materials for administrators. During my interview, he pulled out an entire file folder of BTSA information. He shared with me a copy of the "New Teacher Site Orientation: A Model for Principals" that he found very helpful. "After you've been teaching a while, you forget what new employees need to know, like where is the bathroom and where do I get a grade book?" Another handout he shared

was, “The Support of New Teachers: An Administrators’ List of Ideas,” that served as good reminders of what new teachers need.

I found it interesting that each new teacher makes an appointment to interview the principal. The support provider also attends with the new teacher. The new teachers have a list of questions to ask the principal. The purpose is for the BTSA teacher to gain an understanding of the school’s culture. Even though he has three new teachers this year, each new teacher meets with him individually, not as a group.

An area he mentioned was the benefits to the support providers. Support providers have opportunities to share their teaching experiences. It causes them to reflect on their own teaching practices and discover areas perhaps that they can improve upon.

The benefit to the school at large is that the numbers of new teachers leaving the profession has been lowered through BTSA. Mr. Coats stated, “It helps with longevity of teachers. BTSA helps new teachers to become good teachers before they get too frustrated and quit.”

Mary Kappas, a veteran teacher at Johansen High School, is a BTSA Support Provider. Through email, I asked her, “What do you see as the impact of BTSA on new teachers?” She responded,

The goal of BTSA is that teachers will begin their teaching career with the understanding that they must become a reflective teacher. They are taught that they should teach in such a way that they plan, teach, reflect and apply. It is a process that teaches new teachers to constantly evaluate what they are teaching, and how they will teach. They are taught to monitor students closely to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to learn. I think that this has a tremendous impact on new teachers in that it sets the pattern for good teaching practice throughout their career. Perhaps new

teachers don't understand the ultimate goal and the big picture, but the program engrains this in new teachers. I believe ultimately the students are the ones who benefit the most (M. Kappas, personal communication, May 7, 2003).

Probably the most critical stakeholders are the new teachers themselves. I asked three new teachers at Johansen High School about BTSA. Ann Amador, a new teacher at Johansen High School said,

In BTSA we are required to observe other teachers. This is beneficial to new and veteran teachers to get new ideas from our peers. I also think BTSA is beneficial because it makes us really focus on different aspects of a lesson. Sometimes it seems time consuming, but in most events it has made me look at some aspect of my lesson (i.e. assessment, grouping, using a variety of instructional strategies, etc.) and I believe has made my lesson better. It also makes you focus on the different types/levels of students that are in your classes and plan to make sure all students are successful (A. Amador, personal communication, November 3, 2003).

Ann Whiteside, a second year teacher at Johansen High School, had some different ideas on the benefits of BTSA.

The main benefit of BTSA is that it provides a mentor to new teachers. My support provider has been a great source of school info and a good person to make sure I'm on the right track regarding teaching in general. He helps remind me of the details that can be a bit much for a beginning teacher. Although you didn't ask, for teachers with a clear credential, the rest of the BTSA program is a waste of time (A.

Whiteside, personal communication, October 27, 2003).

Clearly not everyone sees BTSA as THE answer to teacher quality, teacher retention, and increasing student performance.

Perhaps a second year Johansen High School teacher, David Muncrief summarizes best the outcomes of BTSA.

I don't think the BTSA program teaches anything that wasn't taught in the credential program, but what it does do is make the participant think about what they are doing in the classroom. It lays down guidelines and reinforces what should be happening in the classroom. It requires teachers to look at key issues from classroom management and support to how to design tests. These are the benefits of the program. As beginning teachers we are often swamped with a hundred different things to do at once. I think the BTSA programs makes the new teacher focus on how those things should be done. BTSA teachers often complain that the program takes too much time, but is also makes us take the time to focus on what needs to happen in the classroom (D. Muncrief, personal communication, October 27, 2003).

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