

Oklahoma's Teacher Supply: Shortage or Surplus? – Summary*

By Baylee Butler and Byron Schlomach

An alleged teacher shortage has become a big issue in Oklahoma, but at best the evidence for such a claim is sketchy and anecdotal.

The evidence regarding whether or not there is a teacher shortage can be categorized as largely anecdotal, or circumstantial based on the existence of a state emergency teacher certification process. There is only one professional-quality study using hard data.

Anecdotes about teachers moving to Texas fail to prove a trend. There are also anecdotes of fully certified teachers having difficulty finding a teaching position in Oklahoma, which indicates a surplus of teachers.

Emergency certification requires administrators to identify an individual as potentially qualified, a district superintendent to write a letter in support, and the potential candidate either have passed, or be signed up to take, a nationally-recognized subject knowledge exam.

It is not uncommon for an emergency certified teacher to be fully certified, either in another subject in Oklahoma, or in the same subject in another state.

Through an exhaustive investigation of almost 2,200 emergency certifications granted from January 2015 through September 2016, it was found that:

- In 2016, only 2.1 percent of all Oklahoma teachers were emergency certified.
- The bulk of emergency certified candidates had college degrees appropriate to the subject matter they were to teach.
- Many emergency certified had master's degrees. Several had PhDs. Two had MDs.
- Only three school districts – Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Putnam City – represented 36 percent of the state's emergency certification requests, but had only 19 percent of the state's students.
- Forty-one (41) percent of emergency certifications were for elementary education and early childhood.

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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at www.1889institute.org/k-12-public-education.html.

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*This is a summary of: Baylee Butler and Byron Schlomach, *Oklahoma's Teacher Supply: Shortage or Surplus?* (Oklahoma City, OK: 1889 Institute, October 2016), available at www.1889institute.org.

- Only 9.4 percent of emergency certifications were in Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, and Science, combined.
- There were no emergency certifications for Special Education.
- In Advanced Math, Biology, Chemistry, Early Childhood, English, and Science, 60 to 70 percent of emergency certification candidates had strongly subject-related college degrees.

A study chiefly commissioned by the Oklahoma State Regents of Higher Education and conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) shows a future statewide teacher shortage amounting to a functionally trivial 0.62 percent.

- This level of shortage can be eliminated by raising the state's student/teacher ratio from the current 16.3 to 16.4.
- Oklahoma's student/teacher ratio in 1975 was 19.8.
- According to The Brookings Institution, low student/teacher ratios are expensive but do not benefit students.
- Were Oklahoma to move to Indiana's current student/teacher ratio of 17.5, \$127 million would be freed to redistribute within public education.

An AIR researcher has pointed out the difficulty of identifying the actual potential teacher supply in any state, as well as the reasons, such as issues with classroom discipline, that certified teachers choose not to participate in the teacher market.

The national unemployment rate for all classes of educators is currently 2.9 percent, larger than the 2007 rate of 2.4 percent, indicating a national surplus.

Given the state of objective information available, Oklahoma has, at worst, a teacher shortage trivial in size. It may actually have a surplus.