

Limited certificated teachers in Washington: Barriers to becoming fully certificated and needed supports

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Many states, including Washington, are attempting to reduce teacher shortages by encouraging limited certificated teachers to become fully certificated. Before investing in further support for these teachers to seek full certification, Washington policymakers want to understand the interest of limited certificated teachers in becoming fully certificated, the barriers they face to doing so, and the supports they report needing in order to pursue full certification. This study presents the results of a statewide survey of limited certificated teachers on those topics. More than two-thirds of respondents expressed interest in becoming fully certificated—many in a subject area in which there is a staffing shortage. Respondents who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated identified substantial barriers to doing so, including time and financial concerns. This was true particularly for limited certificated teachers of color, who identified a broader range of supports needed to pursue full certification than White teachers did. The findings have important implications for the state's efforts to reduce teacher shortages and to increase the diversity of its teacher workforce and for designing state policies and programs to help limited certificated teachers become fully certificated.

Why this study?

Teacher supply poses challenges in many areas of the United States (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Washington state faces a growing teacher shortage, especially in bilingual education, math, science, English language development, and special education (Cross, 2017). About 97 percent of school district human resource directors in the state reported struggling to fill positions or facing a teacher shortage crisis during the 2016/17 school year (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2016). Moreover, the number of people who received an initial teaching certificate, meaning they completed a teacher preparation program and earned a teaching credential in the state, dropped by 40 percent, from 4,370 to 2,591, between 2008/09 and 2014/15 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). During the same period the number of students in the state increased by 3 percent, or approximately 30,000 (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2017a).

In addition, Washington's teacher workforce is much less diverse than its student population. In 2015/16 only 10 percent of fully certificated teachers were people of color, while 44 percent of students were people of color (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2016).

Encouraging limited certificated teachers to become fully certificated is one strategy for reducing teacher shortages and increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce (see box 1 for definitions of key terms used in the report). Schools across the nation employ teachers with limited or temporary teacher certifications for short periods when fully certificated teachers are not available. Washington had 1,834

For additional information, including technical methods, the Limited Certificated Teacher Survey, and supporting analyses, access the report appendices at <https://go.usa.gov/xpXZD>.

limited certificated teachers in 2017, including teachers with conditional teacher certificates, emergency teacher certificates, and emergency substitute teacher certificates. If some of them became fully certificated, that could enlarge the permanent teacher workforce (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2017b).

Helping limited certificated teachers become fully certificated may also increase the number of teachers of color and the number of bilingual teachers. Limited certificated teachers are more likely than fully certificated teachers to be people of color or bilingual (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; Clotfelter, Hemelt, & Ladd, 2016; Flores, Keehn, & Pérez, 2002; Goe, 2014).

Box 1. Key terms

Limited certificated teacher. A teacher who is not fully certificated but is allowed to teach for a limited amount of time in Washington when a fully certificated teacher is not available to fill an open teaching or substitute position. Limited certificates are valid for one school year and can be renewed up to two times, for a maximum of three years of teaching as a limited certificated teacher. Limited certificates include conditional teacher certificates (for educators who have met most, but not all, of the requirements to teach in an education area; these teachers are often certificated in a state other than Washington), emergency teacher certificates (for educators who have completed at least a bachelor's degree but do not yet qualify for a full teaching certificate), and emergency substitute teacher certificates (for educators who are available for substitute teaching on an emergency basis but do not qualify for a substitute teaching certificate or a full teaching certificate).

Fully certificated teacher. A teacher who has met all the requirements for teaching in Washington. The requirements vary by subject area and grade level, but all include holding a bachelor's degree, completing course work in education, passing the required teacher assessments, and having classroom experience.

Subject area with a staffing shortage. The U.S. Department of Education designates subject areas with a staffing shortage. Washington had 18 teacher such subject areas in 2017/18: bilingual education, biology, chemistry, early childhood special education, earth and space science, elementary education, English language learner, math, middle level education math, middle level education science, occupational therapist, physical therapist, physics, school nurse, school psychologist, science, special Education, and speech language pathologist.

Teacher of color. Any teacher who identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or as two or more races/ethnicities.

Past studies of the demographics of limited certificated teachers and their interest in becoming fully certificated are limited to certain subject areas, such as science, technology, engineering, and math, or locales, such as rural or urban areas (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; Connally, Garcia, Cook & Williams, 2017; Williams, Garcia, Connally, Cook, & Dancy, 2016; Flores et al., 2002). These studies do not provide evidence on the supports that limited certificated teachers need in order to pursue full certification (Clewell & Villegas, 1998, 2001; Connally et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2016). But helping limited certificated teachers become fully certificated could be a promising strategy to increase the number of qualified teachers: at least one study shows that limited certificated teachers who became fully certificated after completing an alternative program were rated effective in teaching by their principals (Clewell & Villegas, 1999).

The current study, conducted in response to a request from the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board, provides new evidence on the potential of limited certificated teachers to fill teacher shortages and contribute to a permanent stable teacher workforce that more closely resembles the demographic characteristics of Washington students. It adds information on the barriers and supports relevant to becoming fully certificated and how they differ by teacher race/ethnicity, which can inform efforts to diversify the teacher workforce. The findings may also provide useful information to state and national education leaders as they design alternative pathways for limited certificated teachers to become fully certificated.

Research questions

The study examined four research questions:

1. What percentage of limited certificated teachers are interested in becoming fully certificated to teach in Washington?
2. What subject areas and grade levels do limited certificated teachers who express interest in becoming fully certificated want to teach?
3. What barriers to becoming fully certificated do limited certificated teachers who express interest in doing so perceive?
4. What supports do limited certificated teachers who express interest in becoming fully certificated report needing in order to pursue full certification?

All analyses explored differences based on whether the respondent was a teacher of color or a White teacher. Differences of at least 5 percentage points between groups were classified as meaningful. The data sources, sample, and methods used in the analysis are summarized in box 2 and detailed in appendix A.

Box 2. Data sources, sample, and methods

Data sources. The study findings are based on results of a statewide survey of limited certificated teachers in Washington administered in 2017 by the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board. The board and the study team adapted a previous survey of paraprofessionals that had been administered in 2016 in seven Seattle-area school districts (State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board, 2016) and that had explored barriers and supports relevant to becoming fully certificated teachers. To adapt that survey for limited certificated teachers, the board and the study team drew on information about teacher certification in Washington (Francovich, 2017) and on the professional expertise of board staff. The full survey is included in appendix B, and detailed findings are in appendix C. Because the survey of limited certificated teachers was adapted from an earlier Washington survey of paraprofessionals, it is possible that the resulting items do not address all the key barriers and supports relevant to becoming fully certificated for limited certificated teachers.

Sample. In May 2017 the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board emailed all 1,834 limited certificated teachers in Washington inviting them to take the survey online. In September 2017 the board followed up with districts in which no teachers had responded, asking them to invite teachers to take the survey. A total of 1,073 limited certificated teachers completed the survey, for a response rate of 59 percent. The results are not representative of all limited certificated teachers in Washington. Limited certificated teachers in urban and suburban schools are overrepresented among respondents, and limited certificated teachers in town and rural schools are underrepresented.

Methods. The study team analyzed survey responses using descriptive statistics, calculating the percentage of respondents who answered each item. Because of the small proportion of teachers in each race/ethnicity category other than White and associated concerns regarding data confidentiality, the study team combined the race/ethnicity categories other than White into a single category, teachers of color, who made up 23 percent of study respondents. Results were compared for teachers of color and White teachers, and differences of at least 5 percentage points between groups were classified as meaningful. The findings should not be interpreted as providing causal evidence about strategies for inducing or supporting limited certificated teachers in becoming fully certificated. There is no evidence that providing limited certificated teachers with the supports identified will help them complete the certification process.

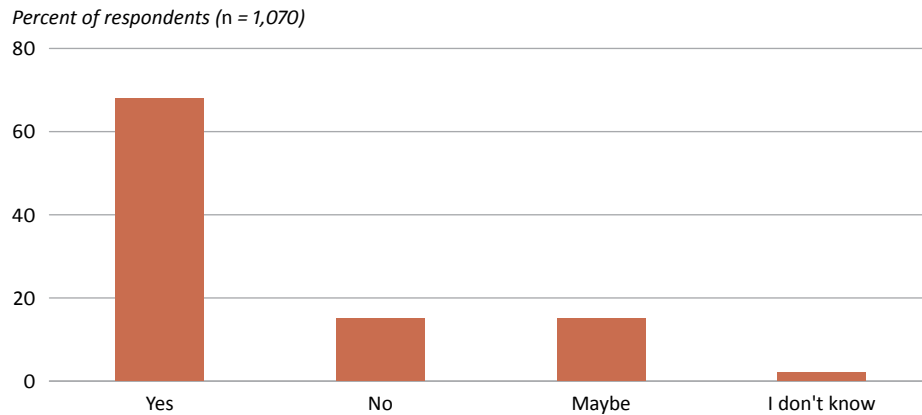
Findings

This section contains the findings related to each of the study research questions. Additional results are in appendix C.

More than two-thirds of limited certificated teachers expressed interest in becoming fully certificated

About 68 percent (729) of the limited certificated teachers who responded to the survey expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, 15 percent said they were not interested, 15 percent said maybe, and 2 percent said they did not know (figure 1).

Figure 1. More than two-thirds of limited certificated teachers surveyed in Washington in 2017 expressed interest in becoming fully certificated

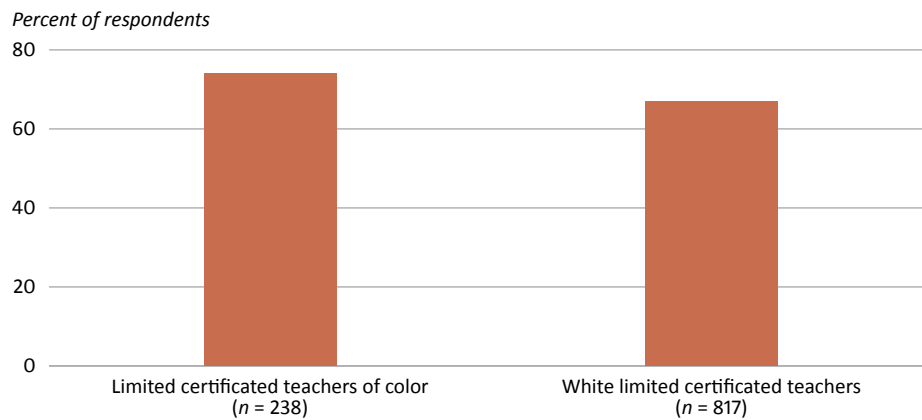


Note: Values are based on responses to the question “If you had all the support you needed to become a certificated teacher, would you be interested in pursuing full certification?”

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to item 24 in section IV of the Limited Certificated Teacher Survey administered in 2017 by the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board.

A higher percentage of respondents of color (74 percent) than of White respondents (67 percent) expressed interest in becoming fully certificated (figure 2).

Figure 2. Among limited certificated teachers surveyed in Washington in 2017, a higher percentage of teachers of color than of White teachers expressed interest in becoming fully certificated



Note: Values are based on responses to the question “If you had all the support you needed to become a certificated teacher, would you be interested in pursuing full certification?”

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to item 1 in section I and item 24 in section IV of the Limited Certificated Teacher Survey administered in 2017 by the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board.

A little over two-thirds of limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated wanted to teach a subject area in which there is a staffing shortage

Among respondents who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, 69 percent want to teach in one or more area with a staffing shortage, such as special education (25 percent), some field of science (20 percent), math (19 percent), English language development (15 percent), or bilingual education (10 percent; table 1). And 88 percent of respondents who wanted to teach some field of science and 82 percent of respondents who wanted to teach math were interested in doing so at the secondary school level.¹

Among limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, a higher percentage of teachers of color than of White teachers expressed interest in teaching bilingual education (29 percent of teachers of color and 4 percent of White teachers) or English language development (19 percent of teachers of color and 13 percent of White teachers; see table 1). In contrast, a higher percentage of White teachers than of teachers of color expressed interest in teaching special education, general science, biology, and earth and space science.

Table 1. Subject areas with a staffing shortage and grade levels in which limited certificated teachers surveyed in Washington in 2017 who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated want to teach

Subject area and grade level	Percentage of limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated			Difference between White limited certificated teachers and limited certificated teachers of color ^a (percentage points)
	All teachers (n = 729)	White teachers (n = 546)	Teachers of color (n = 177)	
Subject area				
Special education	25	26	20	6†
Reading	23	24	20	4
Some field of science ^b	20	21	17	4
Math	19	20	16	4
General science	17	18	13	5†
Career and technical education	16	17	15	2
English language development	15	13	19	-6†
Bilingual education	10	4	29	-25†
Biology	10	11	6	5†
Earth and space science	9	10	5	5†
Early childhood special education	9	9	10	-1
Chemistry	4	5	2	3
Physics	3	4	1	3
Grade level				
Prekindergarten	11	11	11	0
Elementary school (grades K-5)	56	55	57	-2
Middle school (grades 6-8)	46	47	41	6†
High school (grades 9-12)	55	57	50	7

† indicates that the difference between limited certificated teachers of color and White limited certificated teachers was at least 5 percentage points.

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 because respondents could select more than one response. The number of White teachers and the number of teachers of color do not sum to the total number of teachers interested in becoming certificated because of missing data on race/ethnicity. See box 1 for a complete list of subject areas with a staffing shortage.

a. A negative value indicates a higher percentage of teachers of color than of White teachers.

b. Includes general science, biology, earth and space science, chemistry, and physics.

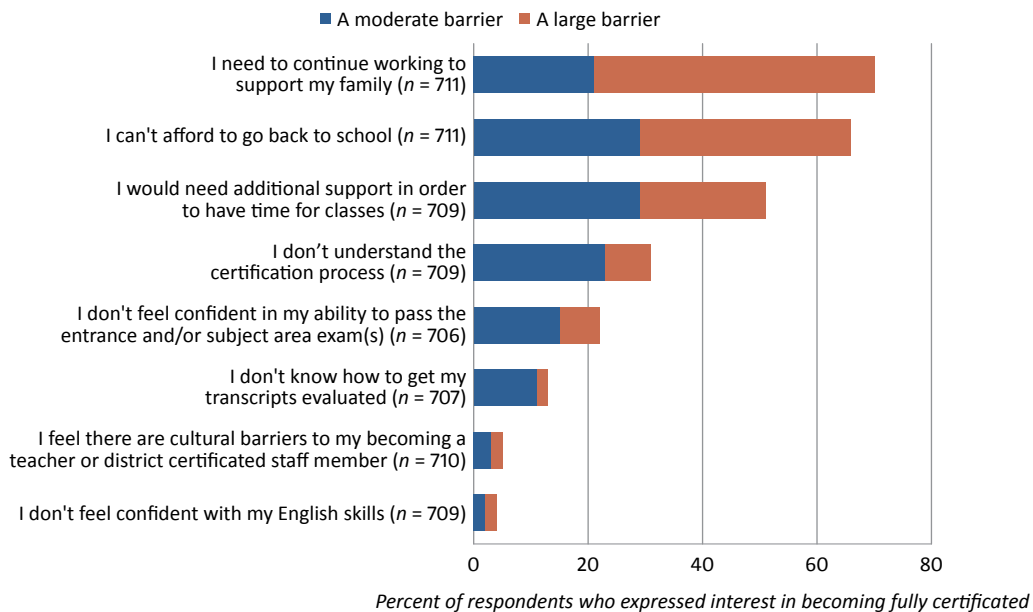
Source: Authors' analysis of responses to items 24, 27, and 28 in section IV of the Limited Certificated Teacher Survey administered in 2017 by the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board.

1. Refers to respondents who expressed interest in teaching science and in teaching only at the middle school or high school level and respondents who expressed interest in teaching math and in teaching only at the middle school or high school level.

Limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated identified substantial barriers to doing so, including time and financial concerns

About 70 percent of limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated indicated that the need to continue working to support their family was a moderate or large barrier, and 66 percent indicated that affordability was a moderate or large barrier (figure 3; see also table C2 in appendix C). Cultural issues and confidence in English skills were cited least often as moderate or large barriers.

Figure 3. The need to continue working was a moderate or large barrier for the largest percentage of limited certificated teachers surveyed in Washington in 2017 who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated

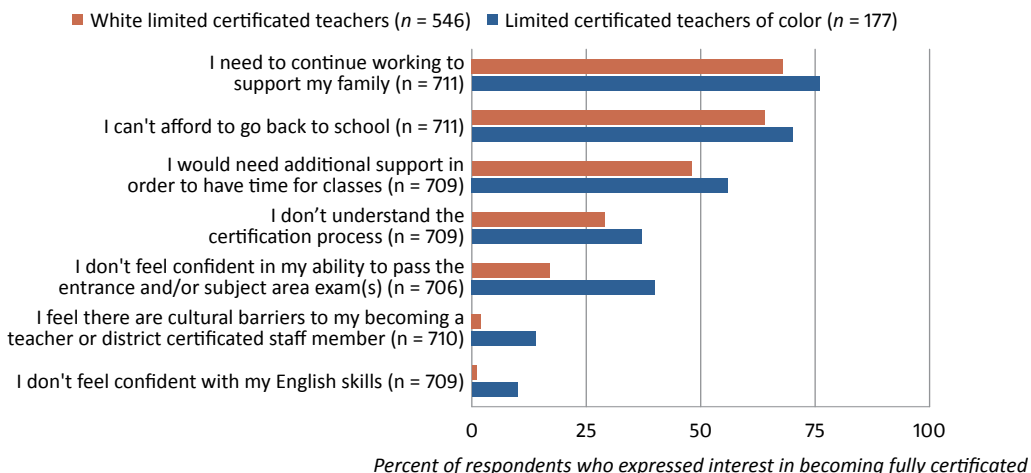


Note: Numbers in parentheses are the total number of respondents for each survey item about specific barriers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to item 24 in section IV and items 40-1 to 40-8 in section VII of the Limited Certificated Teacher Survey administered in 2017 by the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board.

Among limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, teachers of color and White teachers reported barriers at different rates (figure 4; see also table C3 in appendix C). A much higher percentage of teachers of color than of White teachers indicated that entrance and/or subject area exams were a moderate or large barrier to full certification.

Figure 4. Among limited certificated teachers surveyed in Washington in 2017 who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, teachers of color and White teachers identified each of the barriers at different rates



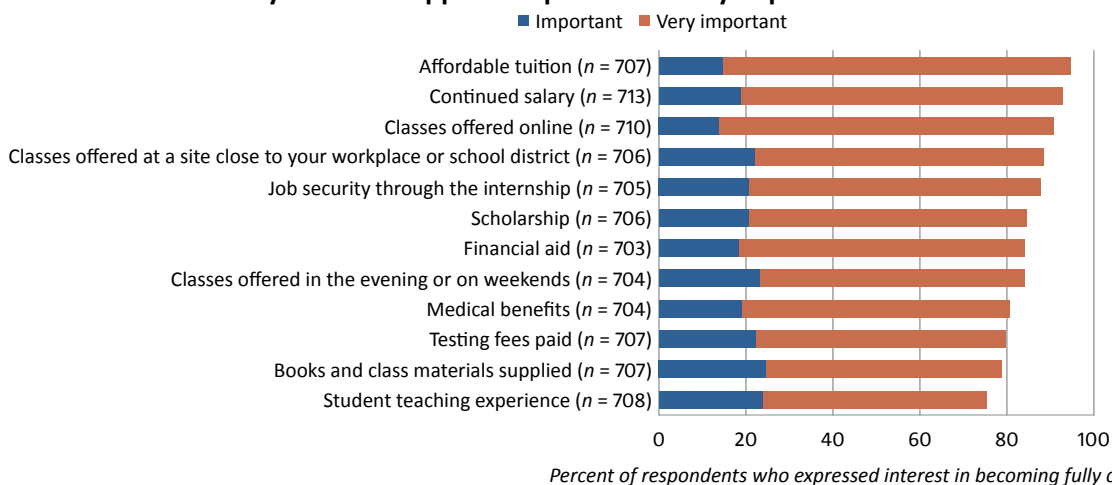
Note: Values refer to the percentage of limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated and who rated the issue a moderate or large barrier. The figure shows only barriers for which the difference between teachers of color and White teachers is at least 5 percentage points. See table C3 in appendix C for underlying values.

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to item 1 in section I and items 40-1, 40-2, 40-4, 40-5, 40-6, 40-7, and 40-8 in section VII of the Limited Certificated Teacher Survey administered in 2017 by the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board.

Among limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, teachers of color identified a broader range of supports needed to pursue full certification than White teachers did

Among limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, 95 percent indicated that affordable tuition was important or very important, and 93 percent indicated that continued salary was important or very important (figure 5; see also table C4 in appendix C). Large percentages also indicated that flexible classes, such as those offered online (91 percent) or close to their current workplace (89 percent), were important or very important.

Figure 5. Limited certificated teachers surveyed in Washington in 2017 who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated rated many financial supports important or very important

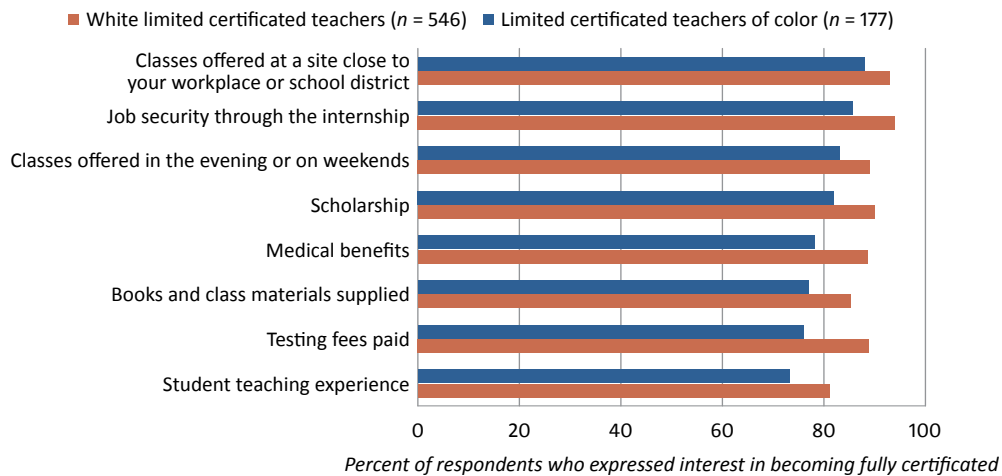


Note: Numbers in parentheses are the total number of respondents for each survey item about specific supports who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated.

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to item 24 in section IV and items 39-1 to 39-12 in section VII of the Limited Certificated Teacher Survey administered in 2017 by the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board.

Among limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, teachers of color and White teachers identified supports needed to pursue full certification at different rates (figure 6; see also table C5 in appendix C). A higher percentage of limited certificated teachers of color than of White limited certificated teachers rated having testing fees paid as important or very important to becoming fully certificated.

Figure 6. Among limited certificated teachers surveyed in Washington in 2017 who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated, teachers of color and White teachers identified supports needed to pursue full certification at different rates



Note: Values refer to the percentage of limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated and who rated the support important or very important to becoming certificated. The figure shows only supports for which the difference between teachers of color and White teachers is at least 5 percentage points. See table C5 in appendix C for underlying values.

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to item 1 in section I, item 24 in section IV, and items 39-2, 39-3, 39-4, 39-5, 39-8, 39-9, 39-10, and 39-12 in section VII of the Limited Certificated Teacher Survey administered in 2017 by the State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board.

Implications

The study findings have several implications for reducing teacher shortages and increasing the diversity of Washington’s teacher workforce and for designing state policies and programs to help limited certificated teachers become fully certificated.

Implications for Washington’s teacher workforce

Helping interested limited certificated teachers become fully certificated could substantially expand the teacher pool, especially important given the state’s recent enrollment growth. If some of the 729 limited certificated teachers surveyed who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated did so, the number of new teachers securing an initial credential in a given year in Washington could increase by up to 25 percent. About 87 percent of limited certificated teachers who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated have at least a four-year college degree, and 60 percent have three or more years of teaching experience (see table C1 in appendix C), which makes them strong candidates for full certification.

Providing support for limited certificated teachers to become fully certificated could also advance the state’s goal of having a more diverse teacher workforce that better represents student demographics by increasing the number of teachers of color. Seventy-four percent of teachers of color surveyed expressed interest in becoming fully certificated.

Encouraging limited certificated teachers to become fully certificated may also help reduce staffing shortages in particular subject areas, because 69 percent of respondents who expressed interest in becoming fully certificated want to teach a subject area in which there is a staffing shortage, such as special education and the sciences.

Implications for state policies and programs

Financial support may be a vital part of any strategy to support limited certificated teachers in Washington, 70 percent of whom make less than \$30,000 a year (see table C1 in appendix C), in becoming fully certificated. Given the large share of respondents who indicated that they face financial barriers to becoming fully certificated, the state could consider offering low-cost online courses that are required to obtain full certification, which would allow limited certificated teachers to work full time while taking the courses at a convenient time and pace. Such courses could address the biggest supports that limited certificated teachers need in order to pursue full certification: affordable tuition, continued salary, testing fee waivers, scholarships, and flexible classes.

Because limited certificated teachers of color were less confident in their ability to pass exams and in their English skills than White limited certificated teachers were, the state could consider offering free preparation courses at school or online to help limited certificated teachers pass certification exams.

Other supports that states could consider providing include student teaching experience, medical benefits, job security through an internship, classes offered in the evening or on weekends, classes offered at a site close to the workplace or school district, and books and class materials—all of which higher percentages of teachers of color than of White teachers reported needing.

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