Thousands of California teachers missing needed credentials

By Joanna Lin, California Watch

The last time Charlie Parker took a social studies class, he was a teenager with an Afro and Jimmy Carter was president of the United States. Yet here he was, standing at the front of a classroom, trying to teach dozens of high schoolers subjects that never appealed to him when he learned them more than 30 years ago.



On his first day teaching U.S. history, world history and economics at McAlister High School in Los Angeles nearly four years ago, Parker struggled to keep his course materials straight and handed a student the wrong textbook. Some days, his students' questions went unanswered or were directed to the Internet. Later, Parker said, when his students took state tests, their scores were low.

After school, Parker said, "I was doing homework, just like the kids."

These were not the troubles of a rookie teacher. In fact, Parker had taught for more than 20 years, including 11 at McAlister.

The problem for Parker, who taught social studies at McAlister for two years and now teaches at another Los Angeles high school, was that he should not have taught history to begin with.

Every year in California, public school administrators assign thousands of teachers to classes for which they lack the credentials or legal authorization to teach. Untrained teachers have been assigned to a variety of difficult classes, including those filled with English-language learners and others with special intellectual and physical needs. Or, in Parker's case, to teach social studies when they're credentialed for biology.

Nearly 1 in 10 teachers or certificated personnel – more than 32,000 school employees – did not have the credentials or authorization for their positions from 2007 through 2011, according to data compiled by the state Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

The problem is greater at low-performing schools, where students are overwhelmingly low-income and Latino. The average rate of improperly assigned teachers at these schools was 16 percent over the same period.

"That isn't something that should be acceptable to anybody," said Brooks Allen, director of education advocacy at the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California.

In the 2010-11 school year, more than 12,000 teachers and certificated personnel at more than 1,000 low-performing schools served in positions they should not have held. On average at these schools, 82 percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, and more than three-quarters were Latino, a California Watch analysis found.

Research and interviews with state and local education officials suggest that staffing turnover and shortages, insufficient resources, poor planning and mismanagement contribute to assigning teachers to classes for which they lack specialized training.

This problem of "misassignments," as they're known, has improved dramatically since the 2005-06 school year, when the

state began giving greater attention to teacher assignments at low-performing schools. At the time, 29 percent of teachers at these schools lacked licenses for their positions.

Teachers gaining authorization to instruct English-language learners have driven much of that progress. The extra scrutiny – a product of Williams v. California, a landmark class-action lawsuit that in 2004 charged the state with ensuring all students had qualified, credentialed teachers – also has helped.

Still, the rate of improperly assigned teachers at low-performing schools has hovered above a persistent 12 percent. (It's unclear how California ranks nationally; states have different standards and policies for employing teachers, making comparisons difficult.)

"The persistence of misassignments, year over year, even with annual monitoring, certainly suggests that it's something that needs to be looked at," said Allen, the attorney assigned to implement the Williams settlement.

Public Advocates, which represented students in the Williams lawsuit, has called for the Legislature to hold a hearing on the problem and for the credentialing commission to push the issue.

Alamo Democrat Joan Buchanan, chairwoman of the Assembly Education Committee, said that while she is open to holding a hearing, she is "not sure passing a law is going to be like waving a magic wand and solve the problem there." She said she hoped the State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson would also look into the issue.

Ensuring teachers are appropriately licensed "is very important back-office work that nobody ever sees and can pay huge dividends and, in some instances, be very harmful to kids," said Michael Hanson, superintendent of the Fresno

Unified School District.

In one case, at the public Berkeley Technology Academy, a student failed the California High School Proficiency Examination after enrolling in a class intended to prepare her and other credit-deficient students for the test. The student later told her mother that the class included nothing she encountered on the exam, which allows students to receive the equivalent of a high school diploma.

“I paid good money for my daughter to participate (in) this CHSPE experiment only to find out that the teacher may have been unqualified to teach it, and that she did not adequately prepare the students to take the final exam,” the student’s mother wrote in a June 2011 complaint.

The Berkeley Unified School District acknowledged in a letter to the mother that a noncredentialed staff member had taught the course. It offered her daughter 20 hours of private instruction and the option to enroll at the high school for a fifth year.

While credentials and legal authorization do not guarantee effective teachers, they represent the baseline qualifications that educators must have. If a teacher has been assigned to the wrong class, his or her performance evaluation is nullified under state law, making it more difficult to identify bad – and good – teachers.

The Commission on Teacher Credentialing typically needs to work with only a handful of school districts that struggle to resolve improper assignments on their own, said Roxann Purdue, a consultant in the agency’s professional services division.

Yet the lengthy, laborious and often paper-heavy process of monitoring assignments means that teachers and other staff can remain in the wrong positions for months.

County offices of education typically begin compiling

paperwork from school districts in late fall or winter. Once they identify teachers who lack necessary credentials or authorization and notify the district, the district has 30 days to address the problems. By the time it's all resolved – teachers must be reassigned, get the appropriate credentials, receive emergency or short-term permits or local authorizations, obtain waivers or resign – the school year could be nearly over.

In the 2011-12 school year, for example, Alameda County notified the Oakland Unified School District on May 15 to correct any remaining teacher assignment problems by June 30 – 15 days after the school year ended, records show. A letter listed 50 teachers whose qualifications were unclear or who held inappropriate assignments.

"If we had a whole bunch of people working on it, we could identify the misassignment sooner. You're talking about one manager, one analyst – that's all we are," said Stephanie Tomasi, Alameda's credentials manager.

County officials said there's little they can do to expedite the monitoring process. School schedules and staffing tend to shift during the first month or two of school, so counties don't begin monitoring until classes are settled. Schools, too, need time to gather their records.

"It seems like we want to catch it (improperly assigned teachers) really early in the school year so you don't have a student going all year without services or whatever they need," said Teresa Ussery, a credential analyst for Stanislaus County, which requests district documents in October and reports assignment problems in March and April. "But just because of timelines and processes, it's very hard to do that – especially if it's a large district."

Still, Ussery said, problems identified late in one school year pay off the following school year. Schools learn to not

repeat the same mistakes, she said.

In the Berkeley case, for example, the district said that the class led by an uncredentialed staff member would no longer be offered and that credentialed teachers would teach all courses at the school.

Improper assignments often are the result of school administrators who do not know that even elective or short-term courses require appropriate certification, said Purdue of the credentialing commission.

Middle and high schools in particular, she said, are offering more experimental courses that are less straightforward to staff than, say, a physics class.

Still, nearly 2,400 teachers in low-performing schools were assigned to teach core academic subjects – English, math, science and social science – without the appropriate credentials or authorization during the 2010-11 school year.

By comparison, teachers lacking authorization to teach English-language learners – which numbered more than 22,200 in the 2005-06 school year – plummeted to 1,575.

“That is a success story,” said Allen of the ACLU. “So the question is, what is it that needs to be done to have that similar trend across the board?”

California teachers of all subjects must have authorization to teach English learners, even if they have just one student in their class who is learning the language. But Purdue said what worked to increase authorizations for teaching English-language learners does not apply to other subjects.

“It’s an isolated problem with a permanent solution, whereas the other subjects areas, it’s a new opportunity to misassign them every semester and every year,” she said.

The commission tackled the problem with English-learner

authorization by first offering training opportunities to existing credentialed teachers. It then phased in English-learner training at educator preparation programs so that all new teachers would automatically have the authorization.

“You’d keep closing the circle until it becomes smaller and smaller,” Purdue said. “But you can’t do that for math, because if someone’s misassigned in math, we have to have all teachers authorized in every subject to close every loophole.”

Hanson, of Fresno Unified, said assigning teachers outside of what their credentials allow is sometimes the best solution to a Rubik’s cube of teachers, students, courses and schedules.

In the last school year, for example, scheduling conflicts led to a high school algebra teacher instructing one period of geometry, a course the teacher’s credential did not permit. “I’m not going to find a geometry teacher who can work one period during the day,” Hanson said. “Here’s the only way I can get it done.”

In certain locations and subjects, such as math, science and special education, incorrect assignments could reflect teacher shortages. These shortages are most critical in schools concentrated with low-income and minority students and in districts with fewer resources, a state task force reported in September.

“You can’t leave it up to local principals to find good teachers and well-prepared teachers if they don’t exist,” said Linda Darling-Hammond, chairwoman of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, who also co-led the task force. “Ultimately, you have to invest in getting enough teachers in shortage fields and invest in getting enough teachers who will teach in shortage locations.”

Teacher layoffs – California schools cut about 32,000 teachers between 2007-08 and 2010-11 – ought to have produced a larger supply of qualified teachers, said John Affeldt, who served as

lead counsel on the Williams lawsuit and is a managing attorney at Public Advocates.

But most districts have policies that allow them to hold on to teachers in high-need areas, even when layoffs are required, said Sharon Robison, the Association of California School Administrators' liaison to the credentialing commission. Teachers who are laid off are not always qualified in the subjects or available in the locations that schools need, she said.

It took Oakland Unified five months to find a permanent teacher for a class of 12 severely disabled children at Fred T. Korematsu Discovery Academy. Seven substitutes led the class before a teacher from Washington state could take over Nov. 1, more than two months after the start of the school year.

Of the 30 to 40 applications Principal Charles Wilson saw prior to the teacher's hiring, seven applicants had appropriate credentials and three were interviewed. None was a good fit for the position, he said.

Low-performing schools like his are sometimes accused of "intentionally trying to hire young, kind of throwaway teachers because they're cheap," Wilson said. "But the reality of it is those kinds of (qualified, experienced) teachers don't apply to these kinds of schools. They don't take an interview."

Even though his elementary school has a positive reputation as being supportive of teachers, Wilson said, "people are scared. … It's too much of a stress they don't want to take on."

Education officials and critics agree that much progress has been made in reducing the number of incorrect assignments. Among nearly 300 low-performing schools that had improper assignments for six consecutive years, 79 percent had fewer instances of the problem in 2010-11 than they did in 2005-06.

Seven years ago, Huntington Park Senior High School, south of downtown Los Angeles, had more improper assignments than any other school in the state. In fact, it had more misassignments than it had teachers – 477 in all, indicating that staff members lacked more than one necessary credential or authorization for their positions.

After years of poor student performance, Huntington Park underwent a dramatic district-ordered transformation in 2011 that switched it from a year-round calendar to traditional school year and required teachers to reinterview for their jobs. The school replaced about 70 percent of its staff in less than two months.

School administrators, themselves newcomers, saw the process as an opportunity to ensure all teachers had the credentials for a predictable stable of classes that mirror those required for admittance to California universities, said Freddy Lara, the school's assistant principal. Lara said the Los Angeles Unified School District referred the school only qualified, credentialed candidates for each position.

Today, the school's principal, Lupe Hernandez, reports that the campus has no incorrect assignments. But Huntington Park may be an outlier. Most schools cannot require all their teachers to reapply for jobs, and doing so would not necessarily prevent future assignment problems.

"This is really about the tension between what students need every year and the adults that we've already hired in the system and probably have permanent (tenured) status," said Hanson of Fresno Unified.

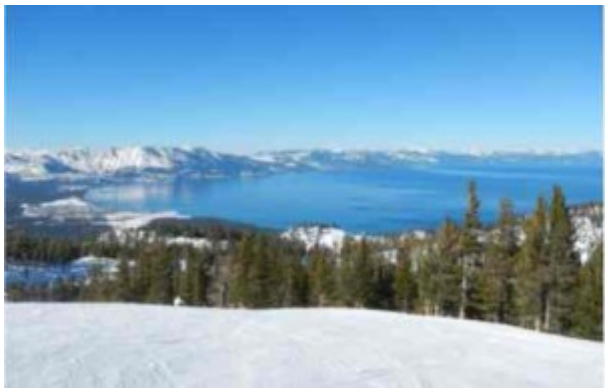
Schools should always strive to have no improperly assigned teachers, Hanson and other education officials said. But they doubted that was a realistic possibility.

"I don't think it's a menacing problem that people haven't really tried to work on," said Robison of the Association of

California School Administrators. “It’s just that you have over 1,000 school districts, hundreds of thousands of students, and on any given day, you’re going to have a vacancy you need to fill because you have students who are there and ready to learn – and expecting to learn – and you have to teach them.”

Heavenly combining big air, poker in competition

Heavenly Mountain Resort is partnering with Snow Park Technologies and two-time Olympic gold medalist Shaun White to host High Roller Hold ’Em big air competition.



There is $50,000 at stake in this casino-inspired event that combines high-flying big air competition with Texas hold’em poker.

High Roller Hold ’Em will take place on the World Cup run at Heavenly on April 6 with a monster big-air jump created by SPT. In this unique poker-style format, each rider will be dealt two cards (three in the super final) with each card featuring a different trick. Each rider will then bet on the trick of their choice and must execute the trick during that jump to win that round. The rider that lands the trick with the highest level of difficulty will win that round and

qualify for the big cash in the super final.

Some of the world's top professional snowboarders will compete in this high-production, nighttime event, which will also feature live DJ music, an exhibition with local athletes, and pyrotechnics.

The competition starts at 6pm, with fireworks and music about 8:45pm. There is no cost to watch.

Exchange student embraces life at STHS

By Rebekka Kuehnapfe

Before I came to America I thought: "Tahoe looks amazing" and now I can say: "It really does."

Tahoe is the perfect place to spend a year as an exchange student. I love to go skiing or watching the sunset at the beach. It almost gives me a feeling of being home. Especially my wonderful host family makes me feel even more welcome. We go out for dinner, on trips or watch movies together. So I can tell, honestly, I have found a second mum, dad and sister.



Rebekka Kuehnapfe is adapting to her home away from home. Photo/Provided

What I like the most about America are school sports. In Germany school and sports are two different things. To do a sport we have to join a club outside of school. So I was fascinated by the school spirit and now I am proud to be a Viking too!

I was on the tennis and the basketball teams. Next season I will do swimming. In basketball I had the most fun. I met a lot of nice people, who love to play sports as much as me. Right now I am thinking about continuing to play in Germany.

Also I have really enjoyed South Tahoe High School, taking fun electives and learning about U.S. history.

It seems like my reasons to come to America: speaking better English, seeing a different culture, making new friends or just growing up, are all becoming true. But it was not always easy. I changed host families after a few months and hope to continue making lasting friendships.

All these experiences are making me stronger. This is a year to look back on and be proud of.

Rebekka Kuehnapfel 15, is a sophomore exchange student at South Tahoe High School. She is from Germany.

—

Note:

International Student Exchange is looking for families to host students who will attend South Tahoe, Whittell, Douglas Carson and Dayton high schools. Local education coordinator is Deborah Malone, (775) 443.6874.

Kashima returns to competition

By USSA

INAWASHIRO, Japan -– Rookie of the Year Bradley Wilson (Butte, Mont.) earned his career first podium in single moguls with a second place finish on a slick course in Inawashiro.



Sho Kashima

Wilson was able to stay tight and in control on the fast course and finished only 0.10 points behind the winner. Sho Kashima (Stateline) finished a respectable sixth in his first competition back since a knee injury sidelined him last season.

Mikael Kingsbury and Audrey Robichaud both of Canada took the respective wins.

Eliza Outtrim (Hamden, Conn.) was the top U.S. woman landing in seventh.

Tight race in women's downhill

By USSA

MERIBEL, France – Less than a second separated the top 17 finishers in Saturday's Audi FIS Alpine World Cup women's downhill, with Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) leading the way for the U.S. Ski Team at 13th, 0.90 behind surprise winner Carolina Ruiz Castillo of Spain.



Julia Mancuso

It was a historic first World Cup downhill victory for Spain and the first podium of any kind since 2006. Alice McKennis (Glenwood Springs, Colo.) finished just behind Mancuso in a three-way tie for 14th.

Leanne Smith (N. Conway, N.H.) was 18th, Stacey Cook (Mammoth Mountain) 27th and Laurenne Ross (Bend, Ore.) 35th. Cook dropped one spot in the World Cup downhill standings to third behind sidelined Lindsey Vonn (Vail,) and Tina Maze of Slovenia.

McKennis is fifth, Smith ninth and Mancuso 14th in the standings as the U.S. Ski Team continues to lead the nation's standings for downhill.

Sullivan leads U.S. men in World Cup

By USSA



Marco Sullivan

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany – Veteran Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) was 19th to lead the U.S. Ski Team in a shortened Audi FIS Alpine World Cup downhill Saturday in Germany as Birds of Prey downhill champion Christof Innerhofer of Italy claimed his third win of the season.

The race course was shortened after heavy snow covered the Kandahar course over night, making track preparation of the upper section difficult. Action now shifts to giant slalom on Sunday with triple World Champion Ted Ligety (Park City) returning to the site of his 2011 GS gold to seek a record fifth World Cup victory this season in the discipline.

Early starters Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) and Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah) finished 33 and 42 respectively

Ski report: Snow possible

Chance of snow today.

Here is the Feb. 23 ski report.

– Curtis Fong

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Bicycle Advisory Committee of the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority will meet March 1 form 9–11am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

• Earthly Delights in the Northstar Village has launched a new website.

• This story-video proves why one should not throw a snowball while on a chairlift.

• The Fields Advisory Committee of the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority will meet Feb. 25 from 4 – 6pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

• Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz shares the company’s success story in this video from Bloomberg:

Ritz-Carlton selling multimillion dollar homes in Truckee

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Clearly there is a demand for high-end properties in the greater Lake Tahoe area because within days of full ownership residences at the Ritz-Carlton at Northstar coming on the market some are already in escrow.

The public was able to stroll through the multimillion dollar penthouse floor parcels last weekend. Seventeen homes are available on the sixth floor and another six on the third floor.

For Nora Lacey of Newcastle it was the level of service, quality of food and the people at the Ritz that convinced her buying was the correct decision. She and her family will have a second home on the third floor.



Twenty-three full ownership residences at the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe were released this month. Photos/Kathryn Reed

“We had been considering a cabin on the lake,” Lacey said as she and her two adult daughters perused the sixth floor during the open house Feb. 17. “With a vacation home, you don’t want to worry about it.”

Frozen pipes, shoveling, driving – those are things they won’t have to worry about once they arrive. And for the family members who ski, a concierge will lay their skis in snow so they can schuss to various lifts at midmountain.

The Bay Area is the primary market for the residences, with those in their mid-30s and mid-40s making the most inquiries, according to Jenn Wade, who is handling publicity for the residences.

The two-, three- and four-bedroom penthouses range from 1,554- to 3,407-square-feet at a price between $1.25 million and $4.5 million.

Wade told *Lake Tahoe News* the change in ownership at the Ritz and the uptick in the housing market are why the residences finally went on sale – more than three years after the property opened midmountain at the Northstar ski resort.

Kennedy Wilson and its partners acquired the Ritz-Carlton,

Lake Tahoe and Ritz-Carlton Residences, Lake Tahoe in December 2012.

The $300 million hotel opened in December 2009 as the recession was taking hold. Developer East West Partners was not able to pay its debts, defaulting on a $165 million loan in 2011. Placer County records reveal the Kennedy Wilson group paid $73.6 million for the whole site.

Four models are open – two by San Francisco designer Jay Jeffers and two by Truckee's Debbie Costa. Jeffers will do a third that will be done in mid-March.

The designers started with almost a blank canvas. The wood floor and mostly Wolf appliances were already installed. Large windows throughout capture either views of the ski slopes or the Martis Valley.

Some places have a double-sided fireplace – the second side being on the balcony. All have high ceilings. Recessed lighting is throughout, but so is plenty of natural lighting. And unusual angles are throughout most of the rooms, which adds character and uniqueness to each home.

"Modern mountain" is how Jeffers described his approach.

"The wood beams and fireplaces and stone create a nice palette," Jeffers told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He used a cloud fixture above the dining room table in one residence "because we are in the clouds here. When you are under it, it is like a cumulus cloud."

Costa had two weeks and a tight budget to come up with her offerings. She tried to use as many local vendors as possible. While her décor is more understated than what Jeffers came up with, they seem more livable.

For those who choose to go with an approved Ritz-Carlton interior, they can put their residence in the hotel rental

pool. Otherwise, if renting is what they want to do with a non-approved design, they can do so on their own or through a separate firm.

For more info about the Ritz Residences, go online.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder Click on photos to enlarge.

Library looking for donations for book sale

The Friends of the Library is accepting donations of books and audio/visual materials (DVD and books on tape-CD only) for the upcoming book sale.



The materials should be in good condition and with a copyright date no earlier than 2000.

Especially needed are recent children’s books and children’s DVDs, as well as recent materials in Spanish.

All donations are tax deductible, with receipts available from the front desk. All proceeds from the book sale go to Friends of the Library, and help to support various library programs

and events for children and adults.

The Friends of the Library annual Spring Book Sale is March 16 from 10am to 3pm. This year the special offering is the 33-book set of the Complete Works of Charles Dickens, including his private letters. This Red Edition was published in 1895 and is in excellent condition. Similar sets are selling on eBay for in excess of $1,000, but it can be yours for $350.

In addition, the sale boasts a large selection of material to choose from. Hardcover and paperback, DVDs, VHS, audio books, and children’s books will also be available at bargain prices.

All members of Friends of the Library are invited to a preview of the book sale, from 9-10am. New members are welcome to sign up at the door.

For additional information, call (530) 573.3185.