



# Strengthening the Educator Pipeline Through Service Scholarships

California's Golden State Teacher Grant Program

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# Executive Summary

California, like many states, has struggled to attract and retain teachers, especially in high-need schools and areas such as special education, math, science, and bilingual education. One important source of this shortage is an inadequate number of teacher candidates enrolling in and completing preservice teacher preparation, resulting in a growing reliance on substandard credentials over the past decade. Teachers with substandard credentials are less likely to stay in the profession and tend to be less effective than fully prepared new teachers.

An important barrier to expanding the teacher workforce is the cost of preparation. Given large increases in graduate education costs over time and California's already high cost of living, many teacher candidates struggle to afford the costs of attendance, which include all tuition and fees, books and materials, and living expenses. Statewide data from this study suggest that the cost of attendance for average teacher candidates ranges from approximately \$32,000 in the California State University system to \$54,000 in the University of California system. Private and independent institutions of higher education—enrolling almost half of all teacher candidates in the state—have widely varying costs, ranging from \$14,000 to \$86,000.

To help address California's educator shortages and offset preparation costs, state policymakers established the Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) Program, providing over \$570 million to fund the program since 2020–21. Administered by the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), the GSTG Program provides teacher candidates and Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) candidates (i.e., those training to be school counselors, social workers, and psychologists) with an upfront grant as part of their overall student aid package to offset a substantial portion of their costs for pursuing a professional education program. In exchange, candidates commit to teach in a California priority school or California State Preschool Program for 2 years. A school is designated as a priority school if at least 55% of enrolled students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, are English learners, or are living in foster care. Recipients who do not complete their service requirement must repay the grant funds they received.

The parameters of the GSTG Program have changed over time: The maximum grant amount per candidate started at \$20,000 in 2020 but was reduced to \$10,000 in July 2024 as funding for the grant ran short, and the service commitment was reduced from 4 years to 2 years. The program also began prioritizing applicants with greater financial need when available grant funds became insufficient to support all eligible applicants.

This study tracks and analyzes statewide participation in the GSTG Program over the program's first 5 years and examines grant recipients' perceptions of program impacts. We use administrative data from CSAC that capture information on all GSTG recipients and data from a survey that CSAC administered in April 2025. This study also includes findings from interviews with six educator preparation programs (EPPs) with high GSTG uptake rates to identify effective strategies and challenges in implementing the grant.