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Teacher Shortages

EDITOR'S NOTE

Teacher shortages lead to stretched resources and diminished individualized attention for students. This Spotlight will help you uncover what principals look for when hiring teachers; learn how establishing a supportive culture can help retain teachers; dissect the key reasons why teachers say they left the profession; examine how some states are making it easier to become a substitute teacher; and more.

Do Online Job Boards Help Districts Find More Teachers? **2**

What Principals Look for When Hiring Teachers..... **4**

Why Teachers Are Turning Down Lucrative Offers to Stay at This Texas School..... **6**

Behind the Stats: 3 Former Teachers Talk About Why They Left..... **8**

Could Retired Teachers Be the Answer to Shortages? It's Complicated **10**

States Are Making It Easier to Become Substitute Teachers **12**

OPINION

It Will Take More Than \$60K Salaries To Solve the Teacher Shortage **14**

A Better Plan for Addressing Teacher Shortages..... **16**

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Do Online Job Boards Help Districts Find More Teachers?

By Elizabeth Heubeck

Each recruitment season brings with it a set of strategies that school district job recruiters hope will lure qualified teacher candidates and other certified workers to open positions. Since the pandemic, one such tactic has surged in popularity: the use of private job boards.

The uptick in private job boards by K-12 recruiters is one of the takeaways from an EdWeek Research Center survey of 400-plus K-12 human resources professionals conducted last fall. The job boards' growth in popularity results in part from an initiative of the Biden-Harris Administration announced last August. It promised commitments from leading job platforms—including Handshake, Zip Recruiter, and Indeed—to support schools in their efforts to address teacher shortages. While it's too soon to draw conclusions about the initiative's effectiveness, early feedback from recruiters gives the strategy mixed reviews.

Big effort, little reward

David Robertson, the director of human resources/labor relations in the Twin Rivers Unified School District in McClellan, Calif., said that he has between 180 and 200 job vacancies for certified positions to fill for the upcoming school year. To attract candidates, the district's HR team decided to take advantage of Indeed's offer this spring to school districts to highlight job postings free of charge on its site during the month of March as "sponsored," meaning these postings get higher visibility than others.

The offer was part of a broad Indeed initiative aimed at supporting school districts nationwide in filling critical vacancies, according to Maggie Hulce, executive vice president for Job Seeker at Indeed. "We want to be able to use our products and services such as Indeed Hiring Platform, Sponsored Jobs, and Resume, and to make it easier to fill these gaps and get quality, dedicated teachers into these open roles," Hulce wrote in an email.

As part of the initiative, Indeed committed \$10 million to public school districts across the United States to help them fill open positions through free job advertising and a series of virtual hiring events. Indeed report-



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“What we need is not the ability to advertise more, but a systematic plan to rebuild our teaching workforce.”

DAVID ROBERTSON
Director of Human Resources,
McClellan, CA

ed that, subsequently, job postings for education roles on their site increased 87 percent compared to 2020. Over 300 school districts used the free services, and a total of 34,000 sponsored jobs were posted on the site.

But for the special offer that Robertson used, Indeed did not pull job listings from Edjoin.org—the online job site that most California public school districts, including Twin Rivers, use to post jobs online, he said. In

order for the district's job ads to be listed on Indeed as "sponsored posts" the Twin Rivers' HR staff had to submit each posting individually, a task Robertson said was time-consuming and ultimately unrewarding. The district received very few responses from its Indeed-sponsored postings and just one from a qualified candidate, an out-of-state math teacher, Robertson said.

For one district, a job board experiment didn't feel 'sustainable'

Justin Wing, the assistant superintendent of human resources at Mesa Public Schools, Arizona's largest school district, reported stronger results when his district took advantage of an education-related promotion from a different private online employment service. But he doubts his district will continue using it.

Looking to fill over 400 vacancies for certified positions, Wing turned to a free, short-term service this spring offered by LinkedIn to advertise and recruit talent across the country, a program he said was promoted by LinkedIn as an offshoot of Biden's initiative to address the educator shortage. The offer involved six months of free advertising services and allowed the district to post up to 120 classroom-only positions.

Despite receiving robust support from LinkedIn to set up the account, Wing said

that managing the LinkedIn application process required about 30 hours per week of administrative support from the district's staff.

"With limited funds in public education, we cannot sustain about one person [employee] handling just LinkedIn for most of his/her time each week," Wing said.

He also noted that the service is only free for a short period. "If it were affordable, school districts across the nation would have been using all of these services, so this free, short-term opportunity would not have been necessary," Wing said.

In just a few months of using the service, Mesa Public Schools received 287 applications from applicants who learned about the vacancies via LinkedIn, a 249 percent increase over applications received via LinkedIn during the entire 2021-2022 school year, said Wing. But advertising on the Arizona Department of Education website yielded 494 applicants, almost twice as many.

Wing suggested that's because job applicants—especially newly minted graduates looking for their first teaching positions—are accustomed to using district websites as their primary source of job postings. But Wing theorizes that job changers combing private job websites like LinkedIn may be more likely than traditional educator applicants to click on job postings advertised by his district—especially those highlighting the district's own teacher certification program, which allows individuals who meet certain criteria to get paid to teach while they complete their coursework requirements toward certification.


"We touted that program [on LinkedIn], and it helped us build reach for that," Wing said.

A rebuild, not more advertising, is what's needed, some say

Robertson takes his lukewarm assessment of the advertising landscape a step further than Wing.

"What we need is not the ability to advertise more, but a systematic plan to rebuild our teaching workforce," he said. Robertson points to several factors keeping people away from the profession of education altogether, including the highly charged politicized environments in which educators find themselves caught in the middle and the lengthy education process to become a certified teacher, which typically takes five years in California.

"We need to streamline the processes for people to become teachers," said Robertson, "including a fully paid internship during their student teaching." ■

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Published May 3, 2023

What Principals Look for When Hiring Teachers

By Denisa R. Superville

What do principals look for when hiring teachers?

The top three qualifications, according to a new survey of school leaders: how well a teacher's mindset aligns with the school's vision, whether their professional certification meets the school's needs, and their experience managing student behavior.

Notably, teacher diversity did not make the top of the list despite increased attention to the high mismatch between the demographics of school-aged population and the teaching force.

Skill working with students and overall job experience round out the top five qualifications, according to the findings released May 3 by RAND.

Even while principals were having trouble finding substitutes to staff classrooms, the majority of them said fit remained extremely important to them—though elementary and middle school principals placed more premium on it.

Certification carried less weight for elementary principals than for those leading middle and high schools.

Among all grade levels, the percentage of principals who ranked job experience among their top three qualifications was surprisingly low: Less than a quarter overall, with 26 percent of elementary school leaders saying experience was a top-three qualification, compared to 18 percent of those in middle and high schools.

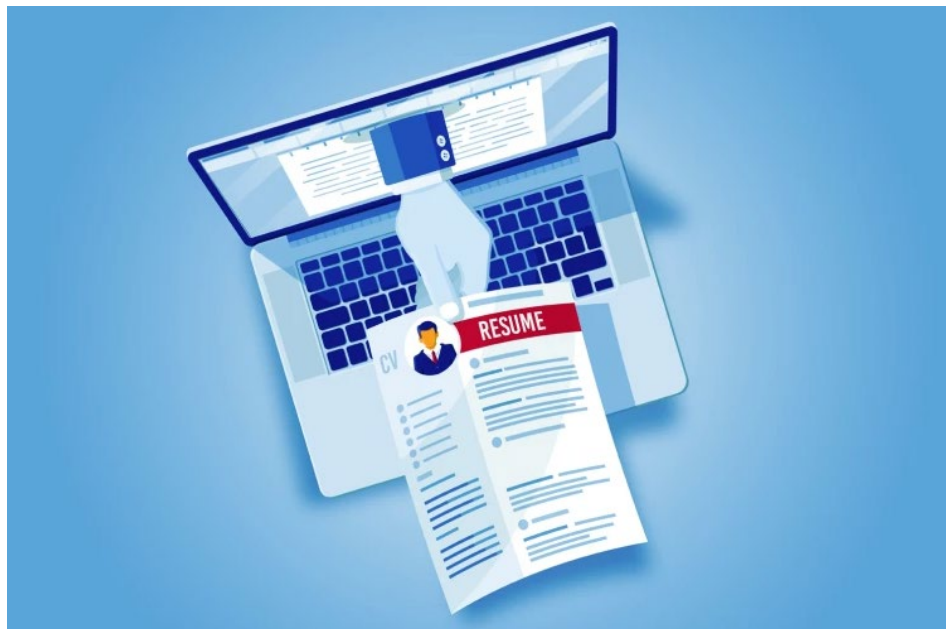
Educator diversity also ranked low among all grade levels—and across all school types: urban, suburban, rural, and schools with majority white and majority nonwhite populations.

Overall, 20 percent of principals put educator diversity among their top-three qualifications. Twenty-eight percent of principals in urban schools said it was among their top three considerations, compared with 27 percent of school leaders in suburban schools and 10 percent in rural settings.

Twenty-six percent of leaders in schools serving a majority of students of color said diversity was among a top-three consideration, compared to 15 percent of leaders in majority-white schools.

Principals in low-income schools did not seem to prioritize diversity in teacher hiring.

George Zuo, an associate economist at



—iStock/Getty

high school principals seemed to place more value on those who worked well with students.

“Principals see a lack of substitute teachers as a key driver of their staffing struggles.”

GEORGE ZUO

Associate Economist,
RAND

RAND and the lead author on the brief, cautioned that the survey asked leaders to list their top three qualifications. It's possible that while diversity may be important to leaders, it just didn't top their list. (RAND gave principals a list of 13 different qualifications from which to choose.)

While elementary principals were looking for teachers who worked well with their peers,

Vacancies an ongoing concern

The context of the survey results matter. The survey was conducted in spring 2022 when schools were facing shortages of staff amid a new wave in the pandemic.

Eighty-seven percent of principals said they had at least one vacancy on campus at the time, and that missing person was most likely a substitute teacher. Seventy-six percent of principals said that they had a substitute teacher vacancy, followed by paraprofessionals (56 percent), and then classroom teachers (55 percent).

About 44 percent were missing custodians and 12 percent were missing assistant principals.

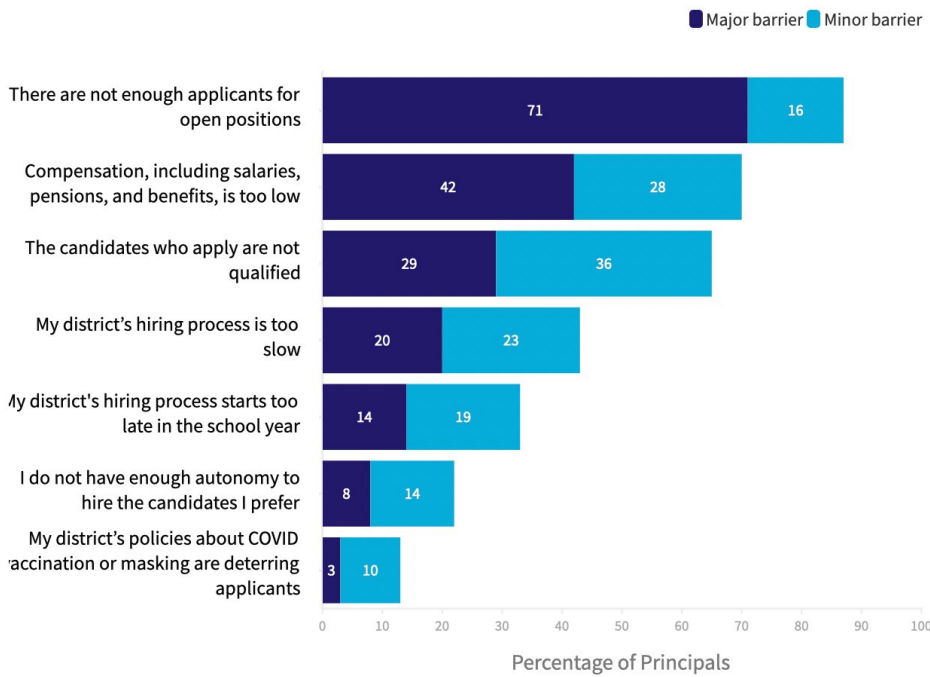
Tellingly, about 43 percent of principals chose “other,” a category that could have included anything from a family engagement coordinator to clerical staff member, RAND said.

The substitute and regular teacher shortage appeared to be more acute in rural schools compared to schools in urban areas. Middle and high schools were harder hit than elementary schools, according to the brief.

Why were principals having trouble filling positions? Mainly because they had trouble finding applicants, principals said.

Principals said teacher vacancies had be-

What Prevented Principals from Filling Vacant Teaching Positions?



SOURCE: Principal Perspectives on School Staffing Struggles: Findings from the 2022 Learn Together Survey, RAND Corporation, 2023 

come harder to fill in 2021-22 than the previous year, in particular because fewer people were applying (72 percent) and they were seeing more resignations (42 percent). Another 33 percent said that fewer prospective employees were accepting offers.

While the staffing picture has changed as the pandemic has waned, Zuo said the data collected at that moment in time could still be instructive for the field.

Working conditions changed during the pandemic, and more recent surveys of district leaders indicated that principal and teacher departures were on the rise. National data trickling in from individual states also show that both teacher and principal vacancies are increasing.

“I would say that it’s still very useful to have that data, just to know where we were because I think it’s hard to predict what the trend is going to be,” he said.

Policymakers and media should pay attention to how they talk about vacancies and shortages—they are not the same thing and even in the same districts they’re experienced differently. They also differ by regions, the brief notes.

Districts can do a better job of managing their substitute teacher pool, in part by focusing on ways to boost the supply of those teachers and how to retain them.

“Substitute teachers are not a postscript in current discussions of teacher shortages,” according to the researchers. “Principals see a lack of substitute teachers as a key driver of their staffing struggles.”

Given the finding that principals do not appear to place a premium on staff diversity, districts should also contemplate ways to boost and retain staff of color, the brief says.

And states should take a look at teacher qualifications, the brief concludes. While some states lowered requirements to get into the profession during the pandemic, many principals cited lack of qualified applicants as a reason for the vacancies. Ensuring that principals are included in those discussions could help bridge the gap. ■

Additional Resource

To view the charts that accompany this article, click [here](#).

Published April 20, 2023

Why Teachers Are Turning Down Lucrative Offers to Stay at This Texas School

By Denisa R. Superville

Stephanie McAvoy drives about an hour each way to her job at Colleyville Middle School in Colleyville, Texas, where she's taught English for the last three years.

Her daily commute takes her past several schools, including one within walking distance from home, and others where she turned down several job offers over the years.

The reason: McAvoy really wants to continue teaching at the 650-student Colleyville Middle School, which was named a Texas School to Watch, a special designation given to high-performing middle schools by the state's secondary school principals' association. It's a school where staff members say the environment is one that supports professional growth, values staff input, and celebrates their successes.

McAvoy is not the only staff member to balk at entreaties to jump ship—some of which would have resulted in big pay increases. The school's principal, David Arencibia, has also been approached by other districts to come on board as a school leader or in a central office role. Education-focused organizations have also come calling for him.

Aaron Arroyo, who is in his second year as a theater teacher, also turned down an offer from a private school that would have bumped his salary by \$15,000 a year.

"What makes Colleyville unique—and Grapevine-Colleyville ISD as a whole—is that they are involved, which doesn't happen in a lot of districts," Arroyo said. "They are invested in not just the students, but the faculty. They are invested in what they can do to make the program build. It's very a family atmosphere."

The district has not been without controversy, however. It made national headlines in 2021 after it chose not to renew the contract for Colleyville Heritage High School Principal James Whitfield amid accusations that Whitfield was promoting "critical race theory." Whitfield, who is Black and did not teach, had written a letter to the school community about racism and the need for "conciliation," following the 2020 killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. He later resigned in an agreement with the district, and has since sued the district and a school board member.



Principal David Arencibia, left, talks with Brooke Schuster, a learning liaison, at Colleyville Middle School in Colleyville, Texas, on Tuesday, April 18, 2023.

That's not to say that people don't leave Colleyville Middle School or that some level of turnover isn't healthy, said Arencibia, who is now in his 7th year as the school's principal. It took years to create the working and learning environment that teachers and other staff don't want to leave, he said.

Arencibia cites four specific efforts that draw and keep employees at his school.

Hire with clear expectations and support teachers' growth

The school's staff know what they're getting into when they are hired, Arencibia said.

The school is expected to compete with top ones in the state. Teachers are expected to plan lessons every day—no winging it—regardless of the number of years they've been in the classroom. And they're expected to teach from "bell to bell," meaning that instruction and engagement with students should cover every minute in a 45-minute period, he said.

Questions during the job interviews let teachers know what's expected of them, he said. Among them: What would you do in this situation? How would you approach this issue?

"We hear when someone is a good fit," Arencibia said.

But the school is equally supportive of helping teachers get professional development and training to meet its ideals, he said.

Professional development sessions have included discussions on the importance of maximizing every minute in each period and how losing just a few minutes of instruction each period adds up over an academic year. Those expectations are also delivered in staff updates and newsletters.

"We communicate, communicate, and communicate those expectations," Arencibia said.

But there's also a level of trust and professional freedom, where teacher creativity is encouraged. That doesn't mean they have free reign, he said.

"They stay within the guidelines that we use," Arencibia said, referring to state and district requirements. "But beyond that, we really allow them to be the professionals that they are and be as creative as possible."

"There are a lot of places that are structured and rote," he continued. "We don't do that here. We pull those constraints off of them to allow them that creative teaching flexibility. That's a very specific reason that teachers enjoy time on campus."

McAvoy said she knew she was a good fit for the school during the interviewing process

when she was asked about her skills, strengths, and values. She was interviewed and hired on the same day.

“I was like, ‘This doesn’t happen for anyone;’ so, obviously this is where I am supposed to be,” she said.

She’d worked in places where it seems like teachers were given extra duties instead of opportunities to grow if they were good at their jobs. But, her takeaway from the Colleyville interview was: “You’re a professional; now go do your job,” she said.

She’d never felt that way before.

“I think that’s why people do excel at CMS,” she said. “Because you are allowed to be the professional that you are and [practice] the craft that you know. You’re just trusted in that way.”

Create a positive culture and school environment

A positive school culture is essential to keeping staff, Arencibia said.

Colleyville Middle School’s administration carves out time for culture-building exercises during staff meetings, with time for staff members to get to know each other, as well as to learn about their strengths and weaknesses.

Understanding co-workers helps to build empathy, said Arencibia, who cited a Gallup survey that shows that employee engagement increases when they’re connected to someone at work or have a friend at work.

In a state where fine and performing arts may not always get the same level of visibility as sports programs, Arroyo, the theater teacher, said both the school and district administrations have enthusiastically backed the program as he breathes new life into it.

Just weeks after arriving, Arencibia asked Arroyo what he needed for the theater program. The list included new lighting, sound, and a new stage. Within weeks, those items were on the district’s bond program.

The school also paid for Arroyo to immerse himself in a full-day of professional development at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, the largest performing arts high school in the Dallas area, to deepen his teaching expertise.

“It’s investment,” Arroyo said. “They are willing to go above and beyond—just like fellow staff members—not just for the fine arts. It’s literally for ELA, for the CTE programs, for athletics.”

That helps solidify the positive school culture, he said.

“It’s also reinforcing that you are going to

be supported because you matter, because we care,” Arroyo said.

Celebrate staff

Staff members are routinely recognized by peers and students, for everything from a victory in the classroom to a child’s birthday, McAvoy said.

One way students show appreciation is through a monthly program that allows them to nominate a teacher who’s gone out of their way to help them. Those nominations are given to teachers so they learn firsthand how they’re impacting students, Arencibia said. Some students submit video nominations, which pack an emotional punch.

“Those are bucket-fillers,” he said. “Our staff and students love that. We would do that in staff meetings as well. We lift them up, and say, ‘This is what students are saying about you.’ ... We’ll have teachers crying because we are hearing straight from our kids.”

The Parent Teacher Association also plays a big role in honoring teachers and staff and ensuring they know that their efforts are appreciated.

Colleyville Middle School has the distinction of having more PTA members than it does parents of currently enrolled students—meaning that lots of PTA members don’t have children in the school.

Parents show their gratitude in a number of ways, including by volunteering for projects, making treats for staff, doing regular food runs to surprise teachers with lunch and other meals, and collaborating with teachers on classroom activities.

Teachers take note, he said.

“It’s a good feeling when you’re recognized by the individuals around you,” Arencibia said. “People are willing to invest more of their time and energy into those things” for which they’re being lauded.

Listen to your staff

Like many schools, administrators at Colleyville Middle ask teachers every year for a wish list. It can include everything from classroom supplies to things that would improve teachers’ professional and personal lives.

One teacher, for example, had seasonal affective disorder and asked for her classroom to be moved to one that had more natural light.

“Let me tell you, she was like a different person that following school year,” Arencibia said. “It truly impacted her—from a physical, mental, and wellness standpoint.”

Another teacher had to drop off her daughter at a neighboring school in the morning, which made it difficult for her to do lesson-planning early in the day. The school moved her morning duties to the afternoon. That accommodation was a “game changer,” he said, giving the teacher “a lot more flexibility and freedom.”

Teachers said that when they go to the administration with an initiative or a request, administrators don’t reflexively say no. They work to figure out how to fulfill the request if it’s a good thing for students.

That’s one of the reasons why Lauren Jones, the school’s head band director, is still at Colleyville Middle School, where she started 11 years ago.

“The answer is hardly ever no when we are trying to do something that’s in the best interest of our students and the community,” she said. “It’s always, ‘Let’s brainstorm and figure out a way to make it happen. Just think big picture.’ There’s never a roadblock, and if there is, it’s like a team effort to talk about it and find solutions and do what’s right for our kids on a daily basis.”

Arencibia said it takes time to build the kind of environment he has at Colleyville Middle School, where he currently has only two teaching vacancies.

That was not the case when he arrived.

“There were some staff members that we had to help move along,” he said. “I had to help them find what their next true passion was—whatever that was—because it wasn’t teaching kids at the time.”

There’s natural turnover, and people leave because of spousal relocations and promotions, for example, he said. He’s hired about three-quarters of the current staff and loses about 10 staff members a year, with custodians and secretaries included in that number in addition to teachers, Arencibia said.

McAvoy, the teacher who drives nearly an hour each way to work, appreciates the quality time she spends with her daughter, whose school is just down the hill from her mother’s, on the commute. They have heart-to-heart mother-daughter conversations. She listens to the radio. She decompresses.

This works for her, she said.

“The main thing with teaching, I believe, is that you find your fit, you find your family, and it doesn’t matter if you take a slight pay cut or you have to drive a little bit farther,” McAvoy said. “Quality of life is worth more. Your life is worth more. You being a really good parent is worth more, and that’s what I have found over the three years, and that’s why I continue to do this.” ■



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Published April 18, 2023

Behind the Stats: 3 Former Teachers Talk About Why They Left

By Elizabeth Heubeck

Teacher dissatisfaction is real. After the 2021-22 school year, teachers in eight states left the profession at their highest rate in at least five years. Many more considered quitting. According to the Merrimack College Teacher Survey, a nationally representative poll of more than 1,300 teachers conducted by the EdWeek Research Center in January and February of 2022, 20 percent of respondents said they were “very likely” to leave the teaching profession within the next two years, and 24 percent reported being “fairly likely” to do so.

Not all recent news about the teaching profession is negative, though. Researchers meeting at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting earlier this month reported that 53 percent of the undergraduate education majors they followed in surveys and focus groups in 2021 said they received encouraging messages about the teaching profession from people they respect, like family members, friends, or former teachers.

What neither set of statistics offer is detailed information on why teachers depart, what they miss about teaching, and what, if anything, could have made them stay.

Those details can only come from the teachers themselves who chose to leave.

Three former educators with more than 40 years of combined teaching experience gave the lowdown on why they left the profession and where they are now. While their experiences are more anecdotal, here’s some of what they had to say.

Why they leave: a growing list of frustrations

Former Florida elementary teacher Zachary Long didn’t simply leave the teaching profession after seven years on the job. He now helps others do the same. Long and his wife Brittany in 2019 co-founded Life After Teaching, an online community of over 80,000 teachers considering leaving the classroom for other careers. What started as a passion project evolved into an income-generating initiative that offers paid products. It got a big boost in the summer of 2022 when it was chosen by Meta to participate in the Facebook Community Accelerator Program, which helps online community leaders grow their impact and sustainability through training, coaching, and financial support. Long routinely communicates with teachers and former teachers who share anecdotes about why they leave the classroom. He,

in turn, revealed some of the most common complaints teachers tell him are pushing them out of classrooms.

Multiple reasons rise to the top of the list. Student behavior is a leading complaint Long hears from teachers who contemplate or leave teaching, and one he believes is among the hardest to address. “I don’t think anyone has the answer,” said Long, referring to accounts of extreme student behavior targeting teachers that has resulted in physical or emotional harm that he’s heard.

Out-of-touch administration also ranks among the top reasons teachers tell Long they quit, or plan to. “There’s some amazing stories about administrators not being qualified or not knowing how to work with teachers in a way that’s beneficial. Stories upon stories about that,” said Long, who taught most recently in Lake Weirsdale, Fla.

Pay, which some might expect to top teachers’ reasons for wanting to quit, is also cited often, according to Long. And it seems to be the tipping point—not the primary complaint.

Such was the case for Beau Thompson, a 63-year-old educator-turned-professional actor, writer, and aspiring film director whose salary topped out at \$58,000 in his 30th year as an educator in Texas, most recently in Waxahachie, Texas, where his various titles included the following, often simultaneously: athletic director, head football coach, Advanced Placement social studies teacher, and department head.

Thompson listed several gripes about Texas’s educational system and its leaders. He referred to the educational system as out of date, noting its development during the Industrial Revolution. He said he feels that his state’s educational leaders are more concerned with obtaining a 100 percent graduation rate than whether students are actually learning.

He also pointed to a lack of autonomy for teachers, mentioning that administrators interfered with how he taught history, even before Texas enacted HB 3979 in 2021, which limited discussions of race and history from classrooms. “They didn’t want me to spend a lot of time on Martin Luther King [Jr.] or the Civil War,” said Thompson.

The ‘last straw’

While former teachers expressed varied stressors and frustrations about their jobs, not being able to effectively balance work and family life often served as the proverbial “last straw” a lot of the time.

Long describes his own reckoning with these circumstances: “For me, it came down to this: My wife had a health crisis. At the time, I was working 60-plus hours a week. During summer, I worked

“

I could not be the mom my daughter needed me to be if I stayed in teaching. The hours were going to be too long.”

VICKY WEBER

Former Elementary School Teacher,

a part-time job. I realized that I had to make a choice: Do I want to spend more time with my family, or all my time teaching and working?”

Vicky Weber taught elementary music and STEAM in Lake Bluff, Ill. for six years before becoming a best-selling children’s author. It wasn’t until she became pregnant and went on maternity leave from her teaching job in April 2021 that she decided to leave the profession.

“I realized I could not be the mom my daughter needed me to be if I stayed in teaching. The hours were going to be too long,” she said. “I asked myself: How would I have the patience? How would I have the energy?”

The pandemic didn’t help, either. Weber made clear that she worked at a supportive, well-funded district.

“But even with all those factors, with remote learning I was essentially doing three full-time jobs,” she said. Weber was, in her words, “shoved into a 4th grade co-teaching position” while teaching music remotely and serving as on-call tech support for the whole school—with no extra pay.

Next steps

While there’s no data that tracks the career trajectory of teachers once they leave the profession, some of the industries Long has seen teachers pivot toward most frequently include instructional design, corporate training, communications, and educational technology. But teachers’ expansive skill set could lead them in many directions, Long observed.

“Teachers create content constantly,” Long said. “Not only that, they create content that not only is attractive, but can effectively get across the message they need to ... As a business owner in the online space, this was the strong foundation for many of the skills I use now on a daily basis.”

Long added that teachers are expert communicators, planners, problem solvers, and collaborators.

“You can go on and on down the list,” he said, referring to the transferable skills teachers possess. As Weber’s and Thompson’s career shifts demonstrate, a teacher’s skill set also can transfer to less-common careers.

Weber, who had been writing children’s books on the side while she taught, published her first one in January 2020, *Lazlo Learns Recorder*. What became, as she put it, “a little bit of a side income,” eventually became much more.

“Things took off during the pandemic,” Weber said. “I became a best-selling author, and had Disney reach out to me.” Subsequently, Weber penned a book version of the Disney movie, “Encanto.” To date, Weber said she’s had 19 children’s books published, all of which have been big sellers.

Thompson, the teacher turned full-time actor, explained some of the ways he draws on his former profession in his current one. Perhaps the most obvious way is knowing how to entertain an audience, something that Thompson said he did routinely as a teacher attempting to make history interesting to students.

He also leans on his former experiences to get into character. “All the different kids I’ve gotten to know and parents; as an actor, that’s your library resource,” he said. “If you have to play a certain role, you can find that reference.”

Thompson also brings to his new career what he referred to as the teacher and coach work ethic. “I’m used to getting up, having a checklist. People are shocked by how much I’m doing,” said Thompson, who rattles off a number of upcoming acting and script-writing projects he’s working on. “I work every single day.”

What they miss

The other common factor that the former educators say stays with them since leaving the profession: the students.

“I still miss working with the kids,” Long said. “I don’t help kids now, but I help a much bigger audience.”

Thompson echoes that sentiment. Asked what he missed about teaching, he responded: “The kids, absolutely without a doubt. They’re what kept me in it.”

“But,” he added, “I wouldn’t go back for any amount of money.”

Using an acting metaphor, Thompson reflected on the state of the teaching profession as he sees it. “We [teachers] are put in a villain role,” he said. “But teachers need support. There’s a lot of bitter teachers out there.” ■

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Could Retired Teachers Be the Answer To Shortages? It's Complicated

By Madeline Will

To fill teacher vacancies, states are luring retired educators back into the classroom with financial incentives—including letting them “double dip” by earning a paycheck on top of their pension.

At least a half-dozen states have passed or are considering legislation this year to entice teachers out of retirement, an EdWeek analysis has found. Typically, states have policies that limit the amount retired educators can work or earn while collecting retirement benefits, but many of these new laws are lifting those restrictions in the face of shortages.

This recruitment strategy is often considered in times of high teacher vacancies, but experts note that it seems to be an increasingly popular option for state policymakers this year as a patch to the embattled teacher pipeline. The approach can be expensive for districts, but advocates say that it's putting experienced teachers in front of students who need them.

“Generally, bringing back retired teachers is probably a better approach than simply lowering the bar for new teachers,” said Heather Peske, the president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, which advocates for more-rigorous teacher preparation. (This year, some states have eased certification requirements and, in a couple cases, even gotten rid of bachelor's degree requirement to bring new teachers into classrooms.)

Peske noted that retired teachers have years of classroom experience and have demonstrated their content knowledge on licensing tests in the past. “Both of those attributes are connected to research that shows an impact on student learning,” she said.

Teachers tend to retire younger than other working professionals because their pension wealth spikes once they reach a certain age or length of service, said Chad Aldeman, the policy director of the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University who studies teacher pensions.

That means that teachers often retire in their 50s or 60s, after 25 or 30 years of experience. In many cases, those teachers want to continue working, Aldeman said, but they have no incentive to do so without reducing their pension wealth in the long term. Although veteran teachers are at the high end of the pay scale, there are



—Collage by Gina Tomiko/Education Week and Getty

“Generally, bringing back retired teachers is probably a better approach than simply lowering the bar for new teachers.”

HEATHER PESKE

President,
National Council on Teacher Quality

diminishing returns to their retirement benefits after a certain point in their career, and it's not in their best financial interest to keep working past that point, Aldeman said.

Retired teachers who want to still work in some capacity often turn to substituting, but finding another full-time job has typically been out of reach without jeopardizing their pension.

Yet many school districts are still searching for qualified teachers to staff their classrooms. In a nationally representative survey conducted by the EdWeek Research Center in September, just 21 percent of district leaders said they had no unfilled teaching positions.

New state laws let retired teachers 'double dip'

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, signed a law in January that allowed

teachers who have been retired for at least six months to come back to work in a position of “critical need,” as determined by the state commissioner of education. The retired teacher can continue drawing their retirement benefits on top of a salary, although the state doesn't have to contribute additional money to the pension while they're working.

Returnees are limited to a one-year contract, which can be renewed only twice—unless the state approves a further renewal as “being in the best interests of the school district.”

The Newark, N.J., school district has hired about 36 retired teachers, NJ.com has reported—and is paying them all \$92,000 this school year. (The 40,000-student district employs about 2,800 teachers.)

“Teachers are in a very good place right now to negotiate salaries,” Yolanda Méndez, the assistant superintendent for the district, told NJ.com. “We wanted to make it very attractive.”

In New York, retired teachers typically lose their pension payments if they return to work and receive a salary of more than \$35,000, but the state suspended the income cap this year. At least one school district in the state, Syracuse City, is rehiring retired teachers at their prior salary. So far, the 20,000-student district has rehired 19 retired teachers, a district spokesperson said.

In Tennessee, meanwhile, Republican Gov. Bill Lee signed a measure this summer that temporarily—until July 1, 2025—allows retired educators to return to work as K-12 teachers for a full school year without the loss or suspension of their retirement benefits. During their re-employment, their retirement benefits are reduced to 70 percent of what they would have received if they hadn't returned to work.

In New Mexico, the governor signed a law in June to allow retired teachers to go back to the classroom for an additional three years, without salary or work hour limits. They previously would have been forced to suspend their retirement if they returned to the classroom and could only earn up to \$15,000.

“This is a win-win for New Mexico teachers and New Mexico students,” Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said in a statement.

Similar legislation was considered in Louisiana but did not pass this year. New Hampshire lawmakers are also considering enacting such a policy this fall, according to news station WMUR 9.

Experts warn it's not a long-term solution

Teachers' retirement benefits are usually determined by a formula: the teacher's final average salary times the number of years of

service times a multiplier. For example, under a system with a 2 percent multiplier, a teacher retiring with a final average salary of \$70,000 and 25 years of service would collect an annual pension of \$35,000. (About 40 percent of public school teachers are not covered by Social Security.)

Aldeman said allowing retired teachers to collect a regular salary on top of their pension has led to some questions of fairness and whether it's the best use of districts' limited money. In many cases—like in Newark and Syracuse—previously retired teachers are earning a generous salary, far more than a regular first-year teacher would make.

State policymakers, however, say the approach is necessary to meet the staffing needs of school districts. In Virginia, Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, issued an executive order last month aimed at removing obstacles to getting qualified teachers in the classroom.

“Our children are still recovering from devastating learning loss and other effects of school shutdowns,” Youngkin wrote. “We must pursue a comprehensive approach to supporting teacher recruitment and retention efforts.”

Part of that approach, he said in the order, is making sure retired teachers can easily renew their licenses and get a new teaching job. Since 2001, teachers in the state who come out of retirement to teach in an area of critical shortage can both receive a new salary and continue collecting their pension.

The top critical shortage areas in Virginia this year are elementary education, special education, middle school education, career and technical education, and middle and high school math.

It's not the first time Virginia has made that pitch. In 2016, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, a Democrat, sent a letter to more than 500 retired teachers asking them to consider going back to work in a specific school district outside of Richmond that was plagued with a high number of vacancies.

Still, NCTQ's Peske said the approach is a “Band-Aid solution” to persistent teacher shortages.

“Rehiring retired teachers does little to ameliorate the underlying reason why there are shortages in some schools and in some subjects and why those shortages persist,” she said. “It needs to be a short-term solution.”

After all, Peske noted, research has shown that constant churn in schools is not good for student learning or employee morale: “And these teachers probably want to go back into retirement soon.” ■



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States Are Making It Easier to Become Substitute Teachers

By Elizabeth Heubeck

“I was freaked out.”

That’s how 23-year-old college senior Grace Christiansen described her first week as a long-term substitute teacher at Canyon Springs STEM Academy in Anthem, Ariz.

Christiansen is among a growing number of college students serving in this capacity across the country as shortages of teachers and substitutes show no sign of easing. She has worked as a long-term substitute eight hours a day, five days a week, since the school year began. At the end of some school days, she rushes to class at Arizona State University, where she’s a senior on pace to graduate this May with a dual major in English and secondary education.

Prior to her current job, the closest Christiansen had come to teaching was a college course for her education major in which she observed a class taught by a veteran teacher. But when a long-term substitute teaching position, referred to as “guest instructor” by the Deer Valley Unified School District, sat vacant, a district employee and friend of Christiansen encouraged her to apply.

A state law enacted in July 2022 made it possible. The bill, SB 1159, which made changes to various aspects of teacher certification, “adds a substitute teaching certificate to the certificates for which a person is not required to have a baccalaureate degree.”

Christiansen applied and was hired a week before the school year started.

How states are loosening standards for substitute teachers

Nationwide, there’s no single set of requirements to become a substitute teacher—criteria range from a GED and minimum age of 18 to a bachelor’s degree—but recent months have seen a flurry of states loosen their requirements to attract more candidates to these hard-to-fill jobs. The Arizona State Board of Education in January 2022 made changes to substitute and emergency substitute certificates, including removing the 120-day limit on the substitute certificate, thereby enabling substitute teachers to stay in their positions until a full-time teacher is hired. Emergency substitute certificates, formerly issued only for one year, are now good for two years. In July 2022, Arizona again loosened criteria with the enactment of SB 1159. One

month earlier, Missouri reduced the number of college credits required for substitute teachers, from 60 to 36. And a Wisconsin bill, signed into law last April, dropped substitute teacher training as a prerequisite to receiving a permit for that job. These legislative changes reflect the ongoing challenge districts face in finding substitute teachers.

Yet, while there’s broad acknowledgement that it’s tough to find substitute teachers—92 percent of 400-plus K-12 recruiters said so in a fall 2022 EdWeek Research Center survey—not everyone agrees that making it easier to become one is a good way to resolve the problem.

Low-income students of color are disproportionately taught by inexperienced teachers

Recent data show that low-income students and students of color are already more likely than their white peers to have teachers who are new and/or uncertified, according to the Education Trust. Some experts say this can have negative ramifications for the learning of affected students. They worry lowering the bar for substitute teachers could worsen those disparities.

“States must be very careful not to reproduce existing inequities that threaten students’ academic achievement and attainment,” Leslie Fenwick, dean in residence at the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, wrote in an email. “Disproportionately staffing schools that serve students of color and those from families experiencing poverty with uncredentialed teachers and teachers in training is discriminatory and does harm.”

Fenwick suggests that districts look at other, untapped potential sources of substitute teachers, such as graduates from schools of education who haven’t yet passed licensure exams. “They’re not talked about,” Fenwick said. “They would be a good source of talent to address the teacher shortage.”

A superintendent sees benefits in greater flexibility

But some see the practice of hiring teachers-in-training to be substitute teachers as beneficial. Nathan Quesnel, the superintendent of East Hartford Public Schools in Connecticut, said his district contracts with the staffing company Kelly Services to hire substitute teachers. And during their breaks from college, some students who have served in the district as student-teachers have been

hired as subs. “We know them, we’ve vetted them [as student teachers-in-training],” Quesnel said.

In addition, he said, existing teachers benefit because they take on the role of teacher-leaders, mentoring the teachers-in-training in their role as substitute teachers. “It helps them [teachers] grow their own game,” said Quesnel.

He also believes that having the college students working in the district makes it easy to vet talent for potential future job openings. “When you’ve had someone working in your school,” Quesnel said, “the principal can say: ‘This person is good, let’s get them in.’”

‘I don’t think there’s going to be another school year that’s going to top this’

Christiansen said she feels much more self-assured than when she took the reins of her 7th grade class in the beginning of the school year. She said four other 7th grade teachers have provided a lot of guidance, as well as a mentor teacher assigned to her.

“She has her own classroom, and I have mine,” she said. Christiansen is responsible for 88 students, who she said can be argumentative at times. “On the first day, I told them that respect is not given, it’s earned, but that I am ultimately giving you my respect,” she said.

As a substitute teacher, Christiansen earns \$175 a day. Arizona State University’s Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College considers her substitute teaching experience a replacement for student teaching, which she otherwise would have completed this semester.

The experience has not been without its challenges, Christiansen admitted. “I thought that I was going to be super-organized, able to manage everything,” she said. “As the year went along, some things got away from me.”

But she said she’s become more organized, reserving time on Sundays for grading students’ papers.

“I think it’s a great way to have people thinking about going into teaching test it out and see if that’s actually what they want to do,” she said, referring to her dual role of substitute teacher and college student. Christiansen has told her classmates about the opportunity, and she said many are looking into it.

As for her own experience, Christiansen has zero regrets. “I look back at this year,” she said, “and I don’t think there’s going to be another school year that’s going to top this.” ■

A novel approach to school staffing: adding tutors and paraeducators to support student welfare and achievement

Dr. Kathleen Adolt-Silva and Dr. Stephanie Wall



As schools face a variety of challenges, both new and old, district leaders must consider innovative approaches to how they handle their most critical resources: their employees. To that end, it is crucial for districts to carefully consider their staffing needs and to prioritize the necessary resources for tiered instructional support and interventions. This often involves hiring additional tutors or paraeducators who can address the unique academic and social-emotional needs of students, ensuring that no one falls behind in their educational journey.

Student success is a district's mission, but it's at risk.

Districts experience a delicate balancing act as they strive to achieve academic recovery while addressing other pressing issues—including staff recruitment and retention, student and staff wellbeing, declining enrollment, infrastructure, and specialized programming for students with unique needs (such as English language learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and those in foster care). When weighing this consideration, school leaders are tasked with reducing administrative costs and consolidating services—without compromising the

quality of education or the integrity of the learning environment.

The challenge is even greater when addressing the needs of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are always in a state of "catch-up," and their progress during the pandemic was, as a whole, even lower than their non-disabled peers. In their study, "[Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Instructional Experiences of Students With Intellectual and Developmental Disability](#)," researchers found that many students with disabilities experienced significant losses in academic instruction time, as well as therapy services such as speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and applied behavior analysis therapy.

Because it's nearly impossible to develop a one-size-fits-all approach to academic recovery, this is where staffing tutors and paraeducators can help.

Tutors are more than an academic learning recovery tool.

Tutors are a part of the new educational ecosystem. They are critical to meeting the needs of all learners when and how they need it. While it is important to preserve core teaching time so students can

experience carefully sequenced lessons, [research](#) shows that tutoring embedded into the school day provides equitable access and consistency to supplemental learning interventions. It also helps districts/schools plan and coordinate efforts while encouraging student participation and attendance. Quality tutors should be part of the academic team supporting students' learning to make the most of this high-impact, individualized support.

Tutors also provide a range of benefits beyond academic support, including social and emotional support and mentorship. Moreover, tutors are a means to drive equity in schools when used in research-based ways. When tutors are integrated into the school day, all learners have access—and learning gains are distributed more equitably. Tutors help bridge the achievement gap and promote equity by offering a safe and supportive learning environment. This is especially valuable for students who may struggle in a traditional classroom setting, ultimately helping them to achieve their full potential.

Paraeducators play a vital role in creating a more inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued.



Working alongside certified teachers to provide instructional and behavioral support to students, paraeducators can help to identify students' strengths and challenges and collect data that informs the IEP Team in the development of tailored strategies to support their progress. The ongoing educator shortage makes paraeducators ideal candidates for alternative teacher certification; however, it is important that districts prioritize this role as a specialty function and include maintaining a healthy paraeducator talent pipeline in their plans.

While paraeducators can certainly play a critical role in academic recovery, their invaluable contribution lies in ensuring compliance with IEPs and implementing the principles of the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the classroom. This includes providing necessary support for students to be included in general education classrooms to the fullest extent possible, in accordance with Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirements. Achieving compliance and inclusion requires a significant influx of support staff, including paraeducators, who provide essential assistance to students with disabilities in the classroom.

School staffing partners connect districts with trained individuals who are ready to work on day one.

As the education industry faces increasing educator attrition rates, staffing vendors like Kelly Education are poised to provide much-needed assistance by taking on administrative and program implementation duties. These partners can leverage their expansive network of resources to address staffing needs efficiently and quickly. District decision-makers benefit from staffing partners who connect them with individuals who are well-trained and classroom-ready on day one. However, in today's tight labor market, it's essential to select a staffing partner with the capacity to recruit educators using an expansive range of strategies and recruitment tools.

To recruit and hire qualified educators who represent the

diverse populations of a district's student body, staffing partners must be committed to sourcing candidates who are both culturally competent and highly skilled. Partners must thoroughly vet these educators and offer ongoing support and accountability. By selecting the right staffing partner, districts can ensure that their staffing needs are met with qualified educators who are well-prepared to serve their student populations.

With the right staffing resources in place, districts can provide the tiered instructional support and interventions necessary to meet the unique academic and social-emotional needs of their students. With these needs being met, students are more empowered to reach their full potential. Engaging staffing partners who can help overcome workforce obstacles is key to creating a learning environment that fosters growth, achievement, and success for all.

Learn more about
Tutoring and
Managed
Paraeducator
programs at
kellyeducation.com

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OPINION

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It Will Take More Than \$60K Salaries To Solve the Teacher Shortage

The American Teacher Act is a good place to start, but it's only a start

By Katherine Norris & Kathryn Wiley

When U.S. Reps. Frederica Wilson of Florida and Jamaal Bowman of New York, both Democrats, reintroduced a bill in February that would set a minimum national teacher salary of \$60,000, we have to admit that it wasn't on our radar. We had been so busy focused on book bans, the great resignation, and legislation to end African American and Black history programs that we had missed the news of the American Teacher Act when they first introduced an earlier version of the bill in December. And, now that Sen. Bernie Sanders is putting his support behind the legislation on the Senate side, Congress should take action on this issue.

While over the last few years this teacher shortage has caught the eyes of the public, those of us in teacher education have been ringing the alarm bell for more than a decade. Like many in the teaching profession,

we are excited to see this crisis addressed at the national level. This attention to the profession is long overdue, and we feel this is a great first step. However, while we recognize that politics sometimes forces legislators to hold back from pushing too far for fear of incurring backlash, we would like to see this legislation go further to address the challenges within the profession.

As the department chair of a teacher education program and an education leadership professor, respectively, we often hear from district leaders requesting that we share job announcements for teaching positions they wish to be filled by Howard University graduates.

We hear of the struggles that superintendents and principals are facing filling teaching positions, especially those who are seeking to increase the number of teachers of color in their districts.

At our national job fair every spring, we see the demand from districts looking to hire our students outpace our number of graduating seniors.

With potential education majors seeing more opportunities and higher wages in other career paths, stricter teacher education requirements, and a generally bad word-of-mouth public campaign for the profession, it's no wonder they are choosing not to enter teacher education programs.

Throughout both our careers, we have also heard from educators across the country that the challenges make staying in the profession difficult for them. While working in the District of Columbia, Colorado, and North Carolina, we have heard from teachers who see their students hurt by homelessness, food insecurity, and disparities in health-care access every day. New teachers see an uphill battle ahead. For example, just last month a recent high school graduate told us of they were interested in going into teaching but foresaw having to get a second job and generally "struggling for the first five to 10 years."

We have heard from teachers who see and feel the impacts of decades of underinvestment in communities and from those who have watched state legislatures fail to fulfill constitutional funding obligations over generations.

The root causes of these large-scale inequities are not necessarily ones that schools alone can remedy. Instead, they require broader policy reforms to close the outside-of-school factors that create inside-of-school opportunity gaps. And, now, teachers face censorship in multiple states for teaching about race, gender, and sexual diversity.

With low teacher pay, challenging classroom and school conditions, and long-standing underinvestment in education, coupled with the new anti-critical-race-theory and anti-anything-equity movement, teachers are under greater strain. These factors have led to a crisis in our nation's classrooms unlike anything we have seen in our careers.

The American Teacher Act, which has the support of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, attempts to tackle the critical nationwide teacher shortage head-on by offering financial support to states to enable the increase of a teacher's minimum salary to \$60,000. The bill also offers funding for a public-awareness campaign supporting the teaching profession and prioritizes support for low- and moderate-income districts.

The American Teacher Act is a good start, but more will be needed to address the challenges to the teaching profession that we have seen firsthand. Because the bill structures funding for states and districts in the form of four-year grants, we worry that already overworked and stressed teachers and admin-

istrators will have to jump through bureaucratic hoops to apply on top of their regular daily demands—not to mention handle additional paperwork burdens on the back end of the grants. Such additional work assignments tend to have a harder impact on Black and brown communities and high-poverty schools, whose teachers and administrators are already overtaxed.

And the short proposed timeline of grants leads us to question how sustainable these changes will be over the long term. What education funding needs is sustainable long-term sources, not one-time grants.

Although the importance of increasing the number of Black and Latino teachers has gained national prominence (a conversation that often leaves out the historical post-desegregation pushout of Black educators that led to today's teacher demographics, as documented in Leslie T. Fenwick's *Jim Crow's Pink Slip*), addressing salary is just one, albeit important, component to increasing teacher diversity.

Will the federal legislation eliminate pay inequities between teachers of color and white teachers? Will it improve the workplace conditions for educators of color, who are often held responsible for a range of extra roles in schools and who must contend with racially hostile work environments? Increasing salaries alone may be only part of the solution. Recent studies have pointed to racial hostility and discrimination in the workplace as additional factors influencing thoughts of leaving the profession among Black and Latino educators. And, looking further upstream to factors that influence who enters the profession, it will also be important to close the K-12 opportunity gaps that impose unnecessary obstacles to Black and Latino students entering the teacher workforce.

Moving forward, we would like to see this legislation strengthened. We would like to see new legislation introduced to tackle rising state censorship issues that curtail teachers' ability to teach truth, diversity, and equity in all levels of schooling. This legislation is a start to a much-needed movement to support teachers across the country. But no single piece of legislation can address everything. It will take a concerted effort on the federal, state, and local levels to improve the status, compensation, school climates, and protections for teachers. ■

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OPINION

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A Better Plan for Addressing Teacher Shortages

Short-term staffing solutions shouldn't come at the expense of long-term equity

By Jonas Zuckerman

In the face of teacher shortages, some states are turning to unconventional strategies to fill vacancies, including relaxing certification requirements or recruiting from outside the education field or among retired educators. While the intent of these strategies is admirable, these approaches may be causing more problems than they solve. At best, most of these strategies are short-term stopgap measures that will exacerbate the disparities the current system produces.

Policymakers do not seem to understand that these teacher vacancies are neither randomly distributed nor do they impact all schools and districts equally. Multiple studies have found a disproportionate rate of teacher vacancies in districts and schools with higher percentages of students living in poverty and from historically underserved populations. These realities are not accounted for in the unconventional staffing strategies.

There are better approaches that center the needs of students by prioritizing placement of effective teachers in the classrooms where they are most needed. First, it is critical to accurately define the problem: Instead of narrowly framing teacher shortages as the need to hire teachers for every classroom, we should consider them an opportunity to do something different to address long-term systemic issues and meet the needs of those students who have been historically underserved.

The better way to address teacher shortages must begin with authentic, meaningful family and community engagement—an element missing from current stopgap strategies. In the schools that have the most difficulty filling vacancies, communities are not regularly engaged to help solve problems. This is a glaring omission: Those people who are most attuned to long-running staffing issues live and work in the community.

Some of the staffing strategies states are considering include plans to attract retired teachers, veterans, other professionals, and people who do not have bachelor's degrees. These might be effective components of a comprehensive, com-



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The better way to address teacher shortages must begin with authentic, meaningful family and community engagement.”

A BETTER PLAN FOR ADDRESSING TEACHER SHORTAGES

Jonas Zuckerman

munity-based strategy but only under certain conditions. For these plans to succeed, districts should add an additional requirement to address their cultural competency: that the people recruited for these alternative certifications are selected by the local community.

These community-led recruitment efforts

might, for example, only grant provisional licenses to retired teachers, veterans, or other nontraditional teaching candidates who have lived in the same neighborhood as the school for a certain number of years. Such candidates would both be more able to relate to the school's students and be more likely to remain teaching at the school.

Another component of a comprehensive plan would be to use these alternative certification routes creatively so that schools with the students most historically underserved are more likely to be staffed with fully certified, effective teachers. Research has shown how impactful an effective teacher can be, and if fully licensed teachers are selected by the community and demonstrate cultural competency, they would be much more likely to have a positive impact on students. Examples of community schools that actively and effectively engage the local community and could be used as models for this selection process.

Some states, therefore, might consider only allowing alternatively certified teachers to work in the most highly rated schools in the state. This would free up fully licensed, expe-

rienced teachers to teach in schools where they are most needed.

Maybe you just had a negative reaction to this suggestion. But consider that, under current strategies, the overwhelming majority of new, alternatively licensed teachers will be working in historically underserved schools and communities, which are most often the state's lowest-rated schools. If you are OK with current practice, ask yourself why you have a problem with only allowing these teachers in the highest-performing schools.

Any new strategy to filling teacher shortages should carefully balance the need for greater community input in recruiting effective teachers against the need to put the most experienced teachers in the schools that need them the most. A policy could, for instance, require that new, alternative routes to teacher certification may only be used to work in the highest-rated schools in the state. But the policy could also include exceptions when the local school community—meaning the families who send their children to a particular school—specifically requests an alternative route to certification for a teacher who meets the needs of a historically underserved population.

Creating a more equitable and community-led approach to filling teacher vacancies will require additional resources. In the near term, states and districts should seize on the limited time remaining to use federal COVID relief funds to support these strategies. In doing so, they could use this window of opportunity not only to fill urgent needs today, but also to build a base of experienced, effective teachers in historically underserved schools who could serve as mentors and coaches to new, alternatively certified teachers in the future. Research shows that mentors can be an essential part of school improvement efforts. Therefore, a strategy that increased the number of high-quality mentors would have a positive impact on students.

States should keep that long-term goal in mind. If all the new teachers recruited to fill emergency vacancies were selected in a process that included authentic community engagement, it would be a step on the path to disrupting the inequities and developing a truly equitable system for all. That is a better way to approach this moment. ■

Jonas Zuckerman has over 30 years of experience in education, working as a classroom teacher, on districtwide curriculum, and as a state director of Title I. He is now an education consultant with a focus on equity for students from historically underserved populations.

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