



Addressing the Teacher Shortage: What States Can Do

Overview

Providing all students with excellent educators is one of the most important drivers of a well-functioning education system—a system that must prepare diverse students to participate in today’s knowledge-driven economy. However, many states are facing a teacher shortage that threatens their ability to deliver a quality education to all children. Shortages are most severe in certain fields (special education, math, science, and bilingual education) and in high-poverty districts and schools, where students most need highly skilled teachers.

A recent surge in the demand for teachers, alongside a diminishing supply and ongoing high attrition rates, has left schools scrambling to staff classrooms.¹ These schools face a small number of undesirable options: increase class sizes, cancel classes, or hire underprepared teachers. All of these stopgap solutions undermine the quality of education.

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While it can be tempting for states to turn to short-term solutions to a teacher shortage, often by lowering the standards to become a teacher, such solutions can exacerbate the problem over the long haul. For example, if teachers are hired without having been fully prepared, the much higher turnover rates that result (from two to three times as high as for fully prepared teachers²) are costly in terms of both dollars spent on the replacement process

and decreases in student achievement. High turnover is costly to both students and districts, reducing student achievement and increasing district costs for replacement, which can run as much as \$20,000 per teacher.³

What States Can Do

The Learning Policy Institute’s report titled *Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators*, provides a comprehensive review of the research on teacher recruitment and retention policies. Based on this review, the authors identified sustainable state policies that can ease shortages while also prioritizing student learning and a strong teacher workforce.

To build a sustainable and high-quality teacher workforce, states can:

Improve teacher preparation and reduce costs to enter the profession

1. Provide **service scholarships and loan forgiveness** programs to attract prospective teachers to the fields and locations where they are needed most.
2. Develop **teacher residencies**, which have been successful in recruiting talented candidates into high-need fields to work as paid apprentices to skilled expert teachers.
3. Create **local pipelines into the profession**, such as **high school career pathways** and **“Grow Your Own” models**, that recruit talented individuals from the community and support them in training to become teachers.

Strengthen hiring practices and personnel management

1. **Set timelines and provide incentives for earlier budget decisions** so that hiring processes can begin as early as possible. States can implement incentives to encourage state legislatures to pass budgets on time and teachers to declare their intent to resign or retire earlier in the school year.
2. Develop systems to **monitor teacher supply, demand, and turnover** so that incentives can be put in place to recruit and prepare teachers for the fields and locations where needed, and so that high attrition rates can be examined and addressed.
3. **Reduce unnecessary barriers to entry for veteran teachers moving from other states** by creating mechanisms such as cross-state pensions and portable benefit plans; developing reciprocity agreements with other states to attract mobile, out-of-state teachers; and investing in the design and implementation of online hiring platforms where teachers can easily identify the steps necessary to be hired in the state.

Provide quality mentoring and induction for beginning teachers

1. **Invest in high-quality induction and mentoring programs** that reduce beginning teacher attrition and increase their competence and effectiveness, leveraging ESSA Title II dollars.

Improve teachers' working conditions

1. **Invest in the development of high-quality principals** who learn to create productive, collaborative work settings important to retaining teachers by establishing strong preparation standards and investing in principal preparation programs that meet these high standards. Resources include ESSA's School Leader Recruitment and Support Program, which authorizes competitive grants to recruit and train principals for high-need schools, and ESSA's Title II optional 3% set aside to support principal and school leader training.
2. **Survey teachers** to assess the quality of the teaching and learning environment and to guide improvements.
3. Incentivize professional development strategies and the redesign of schools to **foster greater collaboration**.

Increase teacher compensation

1. **Increase teacher salaries** in schools and communities where salaries are not able to support a middle-class lifestyle and create salary incentives for accomplishments such as National Board Certification or taking on additional responsibilities.
2. **Use federal levers in ESSA** to provide low-income schools and districts with additional resources to attract and retain high-quality teachers.
3. Increase teachers' overall compensation by offering **housing incentives**, such as money for rent, relocation, and down-payment assistance as well as discounted homes and subsidized teacher housing. States also can fund research on how these types of creative compensation structures impact teacher recruitment and retention.

The full report can be found at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/solving-teacher-shortage>.

Endnotes

1. Sutchter, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
2. Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2014). *What are the effects of teacher education and preparation on beginning teacher attrition?* Philadelphia, PA: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania, CPRE Report (#RR-82).
3. Carroll, T. G. (2007). *The High Cost of Teacher Turnover.* Washington, DC: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.