



Teacher Recruitment & Retention

FEBRUARY 20-21, 2025
ISSUE BRIEF

OVERVIEW

[Research](#) indicates that teachers are the most important school-based factor for student growth and achievement. Students taught by highly effective, excellent educators are [more likely](#) to graduate from high school, attend college, be employed, and earn higher wages.

Extensive research has [also found](#) that a diverse educator workforce is beneficial to all students, but especially students of color. When students are taught by an educator who reflects their racial identity, [their test scores](#) improve in both math and reading in early grades, and they are less likely to face exclusionary discipline practices and more likely to attain a postsecondary credential or degree.

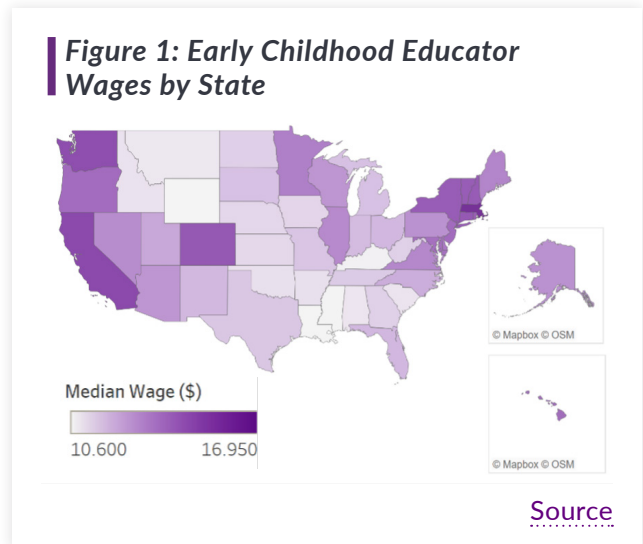
Thus, as access to excellent and diverse teachers is crucial for the academic achievement and success of all students, it is essential for policymakers to ensure that teacher preparation, compensation, and evaluation policies and practices support the recruitment and retention of an educator workforce that is both excellent and diverse.

Strengthen the Teacher Workforce | Early Learning

Science consistently shows the earliest years of life lay the foundation for children's future learning, behavior, and health outcomes. With decades of research informing our understanding of [brain development](#) and the long-term impacts of targeted investment, one condition is increasingly clear: the early years matter.

Despite the role early learning plays in a child's future success, the professionals that make up the nation's early childhood workforce are struggling. As of 2024, there were approximately 2.2 million early childhood educators in the workforce caring for and teaching over 9.7 million children. Many in the early childhood workforce do not receive compensation in line with their state's [living wage](#).

In fact, the early workforce experiences a poverty rate [7.7 times](#) higher than teachers in the K-8 system. The graphic below highlights the wide range of wages for early childhood educators in each state.



Even within the early childhood workforce, educator compensation can vary across settings. [Pay parity](#) is the practice of paying workers comparable amounts for similar skills, competencies, and qualifications. To achieve pay parity, wages for early educators must be comparable across child age, race of educator, education setting, skill, competencies, and qualifications. The composition of the early childhood profession is [majority women](#), and of those women, a large percentage are women of color. Women of color in the childhood profession are compensated at lower wages than their white peers. Additionally, the workforce also lacks access to critical benefits such as paid sick leave and health insurance. The lack of compensation and benefits causes many child care providers to report difficulty with food security, housing, or paying for utilities, causing many to seek and maintain an additional job to meet their basic needs.

State Examples

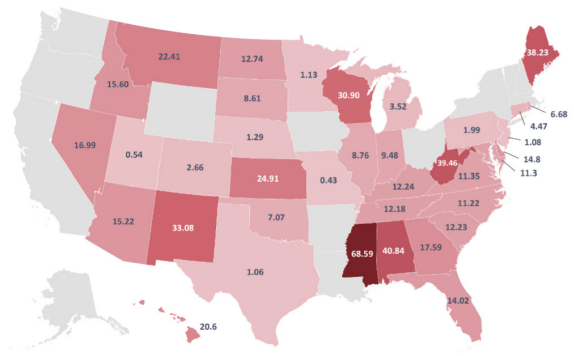
The following offers examples of initiatives aimed at achieving pay parity for early childhood educators. These and other examples of workforce

initiatives can be found at this [listing](#) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration of Children and Families.

- Alabama | Funding from the American Rescue Plan Act funds was used towards quarterly [bonus payments](#) of up to \$1,500 for eligible child care staff.
- District of Columbia | The District's Early Childhood Educator Equitable Compensation Task Force provided recommendations that established the [Early Educator Pay Equity Fund](#). These funds provided supplemental payments in fiscal years of 2022 and 2023 of up to \$14,000 and will increase early childhood educator pay in alignment with minimum wages.
- Illinois | The state is developing a [statewide early childhood education \(ECE\) pay scale](#) that accounts for years of experience with the goal being to achieve parity with K-12 educator pay. The state also allocated funds towards financial support and scholarships to encourage educators to pursue advanced credentials.
- Virginia | The Virginia General Assembly provided funding to create [RecognizeB5](#), a financial incentive for ECEs working in publicly-funded childcare centers and family day homes that are participating in VQB5.



Figure 2: Teacher Shortages by State



Source

Strengthen the Teacher Workforce | K-12

While teacher shortages have been a concern across the country, the nature and severity of shortages varies across school locations and types, subject areas, and teacher demographics. However, a common thread throughout the landscape of shortages is the disproportionate impact on low-income students and students of color. Figure 2 below provides an overview of teacher shortages by state.

Certain communities face additional unique challenges when it comes to teacher recruitment and retention. For instance, rural communities often experience [difficulties](#) recruiting and retaining teachers. [Research](#) shows that low-income rural public schools lose almost 28 percent of their teachers each year, a higher rate of turnover than low-income schools in urban districts. One challenge is teacher salaries; while some might note that cost-of-living is [lower](#) in rural communities, compensation for teachers in rural areas remain lower than in other geographic areas even after adjusting for cost-of-living differences. [Other factors](#), such as high transportation costs and limited housing, can create additional barriers.

Of schools reporting at least one teacher vacancy for the 2021–22 school year, [43 percent](#) of these schools reported a vacancy in special education, making this the area of highest need. This need is only expected to grow as the number of special education students continues to [increase](#) each year. Filling vacant special education teaching positions also includes unique regulatory challenges, as the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act [prohibits](#) states from waiving certification or license requirements for special education teachers and related services personnel on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis.

Additionally, there were roughly [100,000 unfilled job openings](#) for STEM educators in high schools across the country as of 2018. In middle schools, the number of unfilled openings increases to 150,000. Historically, leaders have cited barriers like location, respect for the teaching profession, lucrative alternatives STEM careers, and fewer students pursuing teaching careers as barriers to hiring STEM teachers. These shortages disproportionately impact low-income schools, students of color, and students in urban and/or rural schools. In fact, [more than half](#) of public school districts, and more than 90 percent of districts serving large populations of Black and Hispanic students reported difficulties recruiting and retaining STEM teachers.

State Examples

The following offers examples of initiatives working to recruit and retain teachers to alleviate shortages:

- [Arkansas](#) | The state passed the LEARNS Act in 2023, which includes incentives like waiving initial licensing fees for first-year teachers and increasing both starting salaries of existing teachers.
- [Kentucky](#) | Teach Kentucky is an initiative that aims to recruit teachers by providing students that commit to serving as full-time teachers in subjects with teacher shortages or low-income communities with grants.
- [Texas](#) | In San Antonio, the City Council is considering a measure to retain educators by payment assistance or a forgivable loan to first-time homebuying teachers in exchange for a commitment to work in a public school district.

Strengthening Educator Preparation Programs

As states across the country [struggle to retain teachers](#), they are also navigating the reality that fewer teachers are entering the teacher workforce pipeline. Between 2009 and 2019, enrollment in teacher preparation programs dropped by more than one-third. This trend has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has raised [additional barriers](#) for those interested in becoming educators. Additionally, ACT [research highlighted](#) that from 2007 to 2017, the percentage of students intending to major in education declined significantly to just five percent in 2017.

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) are required by states for prospective teachers to pursue pathways to licensure or certification. [Nationally](#), Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) are split into three categories:

- Traditional Educator Preparation Programs: Traditional EPPs are offered through institutions of higher (IHEs) and provide undergraduate programs, attracting college students and their aspiration of becoming a teacher.
 - Traditional EPPs make up [67 percent](#) of teacher preparation providers.
 - National enrollment in traditional EPPs is [declining](#).
 - Only [32 percent](#) of pre-service teachers in traditional EPPs identify as people of color.
- Alternative Educator Preparation Program, with IHE affiliation: Alternative EPPs support candidates who hold bachelor's degrees and may already be teachers of record. These candidates are often changing careers. Requirements for alternative pathways vary by state.

- Alternative EPPs with IHE affiliation make up [23 percent](#) of teacher preparation providers.
 - Data shows that alternative entry educators are [more likely](#) to leave the profession than traditionally certified teachers. [Evidence](#) suggests increased organizational support for new educators may reduce this effect.
 - Alternative entry educators are [more likely](#) to teach in high need schools and are [more diverse](#) compared to their traditional entry counterparts.
- Alternative Educator Preparation Program, with no IHE affiliation: Alternative EPPs support candidates who hold bachelor's degrees and may already be teachers of record. Alternative, non-IHE-based providers offer pathways to the profession through state departments, nonprofits, for-profit organizations, districts, and other partnerships.
- Alternative, non-IHE EPPs make up [10 percent](#) of teacher preparation providers.
 - Student outcomes for educators prepared by these programs vary by program.

As enrollment in EPPs continues to decline, all types of EPPs are exploring innovative approaches to educator preparation to reduce common barriers to program completion and address national educator shortages. Alternative EPPs are [increasingly popular](#) as they offer opportunities for innovation outside higher education institutions and reduce [common barriers](#) to program completion in traditional programs such as unpaid student teaching requirements. Traditional EPPs are also exploring innovative solutions. For example, the [Next Education Workforce](#) at Arizona State University is exploring strategic staffing models to increase educator pathways through community, professional, and leadership pathways. In this model, schools form teams of educators with distributed expertise to replace conventional one-teacher, one-classroom staffing methods. This approach acknowledges quality educators can enter the profession through a variety of pathways when they are supported by a lead educator.



INNOVATIVE PATHWAYS

[Teacher apprenticeships](#) combine coursework and job experience to reduce the cost of earning a teaching degree while providing candidates with crucial time in the classroom during their preparation. Apprentices also earn a wage for their time in the classroom and ultimately end up with a degree and/or license in teaching. Apprenticeship programs are generally an expansion of the teacher residency concept, which provides teaching candidates with the opportunity to work alongside a mentor teacher for at least one year before becoming the teacher of record. Teacher residencies tend to attract people of color at [high rates](#) when compared to the national teacher population, and teachers prepared through residency programs tend to stay in the classroom [longer](#) than those who are not.

While a relatively new concept for teachers, evidence suggests that apprenticeships can support higher employment rates and higher wages — a [study](#) of North Carolina workers who lost their jobs during the Great Recession found that those who subsequently participated in an apprenticeship program experienced higher rates of employment and higher wage earnings in the years after than those who did not.

State Examples

The following offers examples of statewide campaigns aimed at addressing teacher workforce shortages

- Arkansas | In March 2022, the state [partnered](#) with non-profit organization Forward Arkansas to launch Teach Arkansas, a statewide initiative aimed at educating Arkansas about the various pathways to entering the teaching profession, as well as what financial highlights school-specific financial resources that are available to potential enrollees of teacher preparation programs.
- Connecticut | Connecticut's [Teacher Mortgage Assistance Program](#) aims to alleviate shortage areas to help educators purchase homes in the

communities in which they teach. The program, a joint effort between the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) and the Department of Education, offers below-market interest rates to teachers certified to teach in Connecticut.

- Tennessee | The state of Tennessee recently utilized \$2 million in ESSER funding to establish a [Grow Your Own \(GYO\)](#) competitive grant program. Selected participants train as [paid educational assistants](#), receive guidance from teacher mentors, and are provided the necessary resources (including tuition, textbooks, and fees) to complete a residency for bachelor's degree or one-year program. Grant funding has been used to establish GYO partnerships in 37 districts across the state.
- Kentucky | Kentucky invested American Rescue Plan funding into the [Kentucky Child Care Assistance Program](#) which provides subsidies to employees working in licensed childcare facilities. Childcare subsidies allow childcare professionals with more flexibility and additional compensation to support retention efforts.



IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATOR DIVERSITY

Despite [54 percent](#) of students in the United States identifying as people of color, nearly 80 percent of teachers and 78 percent of principals are white. Additionally, [40 percent](#) of public schools in the United States do not have a single teacher of color. As a growing body of research indicates, when education systems recruit and retain teachers and leaders of color, [all students](#), particularly students of color, benefit. [Students of color](#) who have teachers of the same race/ethnicity, identity, and lived experience are less likely to be suspended and more likely to graduate from high school. They are also [more likely](#) to enroll in postsecondary education and obtain a postsecondary degree and/or credential.

Rural Schools

It is important to recognize that educator diversity extends beyond race and ethnicity to include geographic diversity, such as rural representation. In 2021, 9.8 million students, or [20 percent](#) of all public school students, attended schools in rural areas.

Recruiting teachers in rural school districts presents [significant challenges](#) due to geographic isolation, [limited access](#) to teacher preparation programs, and lower salaries compared to urban counterparts. These factors contribute to higher staffing difficulties in rural areas. For instance, [59 percent](#) of rural secondary schools reported serious difficulty filling teacher vacancies, a higher percentage than both urban and suburban schools. Research [reveals](#) that new teachers hired in rural schools primarily replace those who leave their positions at the end of each school year. These departures are mostly due to pre-retirement turnover rather than retirements, making teacher attrition the [leading cause](#) of staffing challenges in rural schools. Additionally, rural districts [often](#) offer lower salaries, making them less attractive to qualified teachers.

College Access

Students of color experience [lower enrollment and graduation rates](#) from postsecondary institutions, making diverse educator recruitment difficult. The barriers faced by people of color begin long before colleges or other educator preparation programs. Growing up, students of color are [more likely](#) to attend schools where the majority of students are also low-income or of color. These schools tend to be underfunded, have fewer qualified educators, and sparser educational offerings — [reducing the likelihood](#) these students will matriculate to college. Low-income and students of color who attend college are [more likely](#) to be enrolled in remedial courses, delaying their graduation and thus increasing the cost of their education.

Educators of color, particularly Black students, are [more likely](#) to finance their college education through student loans, causing them to carry more debt. Therefore, students of color and low-income students, who often lack generational wealth or may be supporting additional family members, take on [additional risks](#) when attending college — likely leading them to pursue more financially stable careers.

Discrimination

Studies have shown that educators of color report [higher levels](#) of discrimination, microaggressions, and other forms of racism while on the job compared to their white coworkers. In one study, educators of color in predominantly white school settings were more likely to [receive lower](#) evaluation scores — which may lead educators of color to leave their schools for other opportunities.

Educators of color working in majority-white schools are also prone to heightened feelings of isolation. An assessment conducted by Minneapolis Public Schools in 2018 found that educators of color [reported feeling](#) vulnerable, excluded, and unwelcoming in their schools. The same assessment also highlighted that educators of color felt they



would be risking their jobs by expressing their frustrations or attempting to address inequities within their schools. Half of all U.S. states have taken steps to [limit](#) how educators can talk with their students about racism and sexism, potentially leading educators of color to feel unsupported by their schools.

The “Invisible” Tax

The [“Invisible”](#) tax is levied on educators of color when they are expected to take on additional duties due to the color of their skin. Often, educators of color are required to serve as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion experts within their schools. Teachers who speak more than one language may be required to translate documents or liaise with families that do not speak English, often for no additional compensation.

Black male educators, who are already [underrepresented](#) in the education profession, are asked to take on additional duties quite frequently. Black male teachers report spending more time [mentoring and counseling](#) students than teachers of any other demographic, and often have to serve as disciplinarians to students of color in their schools as well. These additional duties require educators to spend more time at work and expend more intellectual and emotional labor, potentially leading educators to leave the profession for less demanding opportunities.

Policy Considerations

- How can different educational systems work together to strengthen the teacher workforce?
- How can educator diversity be incorporated into policies to strengthen the teacher workforce?
- What policies are present in your state to recruit and retain educators across the education continuum?



Established in 2001, [The Hunt Institute](#) honors the legacy of James B. Hunt, Jr., the former governor of North Carolina who distinguished himself as an ardent champion of education.

The Hunt Institute brings together people and resources to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers about key issues in education, resulting in visionary leaders who are prepared to take strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success.

In 2016, The Hunt Institute became an independent, nonprofit entity and joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships, and events related to improving education policy.

Learn more at www.hunt-institute.org.



4000 Centregreen Way | Suite 301 |
Cary, NC 27513 | 984-377-5200