

# ADDRESSING TEACHER SHORTAGES IN THE SHORT AND LONG TERM

## WHAT STATES AND DISTRICTS CAN DO

**By Eric Duncan**, P-12 Data and Policy Senior Analyst – Educator Diversity

The pandemic has wreaked havoc on American lives and our nation's schools, causing disruptions that have compromised their ability to provide a high-quality education to all students, particularly students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. As districts and states work to shape programming and invest in resources to solve [students' unfinished learning](#), nearly [half of U.S. schools](#) are facing COVID-related staff shortages that threaten these efforts and have caused school leaders to take drastic measures to provide day-to-day instruction. These shortages, which are due to factors like early retirement, burnout, and teachers exiting the profession in response to attacks on honest teaching of history, are so severe in some districts that district leaders have been forced to [send staff from their central offices](#) and even [their superintendents](#) to fill in as substitute teachers, while other states are calling on members of their [business community](#) to teach certain subjects or, [sending the National Guard](#) to fill vacancies.

These COVID-related teacher shortages are exacerbating several longstanding problems. For many years, there have been [chronic teacher shortages](#) in certain [subject areas](#) (e.g., STEM, special ed, and EL teachers) and in [certain locations](#) (e.g., rural and low-income schools). Students of color often attend schools with high teacher turnover and [more novice and uncertified teachers](#). Teachers of color, meanwhile, are more likely to experience burnout and [leave the profession](#) at higher rates than their White peers.

Staff shortages mean that the kinds of academic, social, and emotional supports that students need are not available. Without enough teachers and support staff, students won't receive rigorous instruction, won't have access to [targeted intensive tutoring](#) to address their unfinished learning, and won't receive mental health supports and experience the positive school environments they need to thrive. High turnover also creates instability that disrupts relationships between adults and students and makes it difficult for schools to create coherent instruction and implement new initiatives.

Below are some short- and long-term actions that state and district leaders can take to address these shortages and support the most underserved students and teachers to prevent deeper, persistent inequities.

## SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

- Provide targeted incentives for new and current teachers:** States and districts should provide targeted incentives to retain teachers and bring new teachers into the profession to build staff capacity and provide consistent, high-quality in-person instruction. State and district leaders should direct funding and resources toward incentives for teaching in schools that have had longstanding challenges with resource inequities — particularly schools that serve higher percentages of students who have been most affected by the pandemic, including students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. For example, Texas incentivizes teachers to work in high-needs schools through their [Texas Teacher Incentive Allotment](#), while Jefferson County (KY) used their federal dollars to offer teachers [\\$5,000 retention bonuses](#).
- Consider temporary changes to licensure policies:** States and districts should consider temporary changes to licensure policies to support teachers in obtaining initial certification, while supporting their efforts to navigate the licensure process to become full-time teachers. For example, [in Nashville](#), the district is using ESSER funds to pay for English learner licenses for new teachers to fill subject need during the pandemic.
- Build a long-term substitute pool and tap into retired teachers:** State and district leaders should be creative and strategic when building the pool of substitute teachers available to schools to ensure that students have access to high-quality instruction and that full-time teachers can take breaks and utilize their planning periods throughout the day. Some districts — like [Houston](#) — are partnering with community-based organizations to identify and train community members to become long-term substitutes; while [Oklahoma](#) is bringing recently retired teachers back into schools to provide short-term support.
- Build staff capacity to provide targeted supports and high-quality instruction:** State and district leaders should continue to build staff capacity to provide tutors and support staff to serve all students' needs, particularly in schools that have the most vacancies, which are often schools that have a high concentration of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. For example, the Texas Education Association created a [Vetted Texas Tutor Corps](#) to help districts find high-quality tutors, while [Houston](#) hired alumni from the district as tutors to build staff capacity.



## IMPACT OF OTHER STAFF SHORTAGES ON SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

While teacher shortages have a huge impact on student learning and achievement, school support staff shortages also affect how schools serve students. According to many [reports](#), some districts have been forced to return to remote learning because they do not have the staff necessary to transport students to and from school or prepare and serve food to students who need it the most. Schools are also grappling with supply chain disruptions where food is either in short supply or delivery is delayed, forcing schools to find, on an almost weekly basis, creative ways to feed children. As a result, students are often not getting the food they originally ordered, are receiving food that is perhaps not as nutritious as it should be, or are missing meals all together.

Some of the [potential reasons](#) for the prolonged staff shortages in support jobs is that these workers tend to be closer to retirement, are [severely underpaid](#), and work reduced hours. In response to this challenge, the White House has recently [recommended](#) that cafeteria workers be full time. Fortunately, many of the federal resources included in this brief to address teacher shortages can also be purposed toward addressing support staff shortages. For example, North Carolina used [\\$10 million of their ESSER dollars](#) to help schools recruit and retain food service workers.



## LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

- **Collect and publish information on teacher vacancies and turnover**
  - Strong data collection and transparency are fundamental to addressing the specific shortage areas in a strategic and actionable way. States should develop strong data systems to collect and publicly report on vacancies at the district level to help state and district leaders identify immediate needs and address chronic shortages. For example, [Illinois](#) uses a comprehensive dashboard to track shortages in real time at the district level and helps districts target resources to address specific needs.
  - This data should include school characteristics and teacher characteristics by school, such as percentage of teachers not fully credentialed, teacher demographics, and teacher experience. For example, [Arkansas](#) includes more detailed information about teacher characteristics to help districts and schools identify inequities and address them in a targeted way.
- **Ensure safe, responsive working conditions for teachers and staff**
  - Teacher burnout and high rates of turnover are issues for many districts across the country that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. Improving working conditions to ensure that teachers, particularly [teachers of color](#), feel safe and supported will help mitigate some of the long-term shortages that districts have been grappling with for years. State and district leaders should engage teachers, particularly [teachers of color](#), in the process of developing and implementing any new policies in response to COVID-19 to ensure their needs are met.
  - Additionally, states and districts should continuously monitor and improve working conditions for teachers, particularly teachers who work in high-needs schools and teachers of color who experience harsh working conditions and partner with the community to support teachers' increased social, emotional, and mental health needs. For example, [The Hamilton County Schools \(TN\) Reopening Taskforce](#) surveyed teachers on their preferences for safely reopening schools for the 2020-21 school year.
- **Provide connected professional learning**
  - States and districts should work to provide better opportunities for teachers to engage in high-quality professional learning to build their capacity to effectively address all students' needs, including addressing students' [unfinished learning](#). Teachers, especially new teachers, need sufficient planning time, time for formal and informal collaboration, and coaching.
  - States and districts should ensure that additional supports go to schools and classrooms where they're needed most and should develop cohesive plans to address the most critical needs. For example, [Tulsa Public Schools](#) transformed school staffing and scheduling to increase professional learning and support for teachers.

- **Increase compensation**

- Create loan forgiveness or service scholarship programs:
  - To attract more teachers to the profession and discourage high turnover, states can create loan forgiveness and service scholarship programming that provides teachers with the opportunity to accumulate wealth and eliminate [crippling debt that disproportionately affects students of color](#). Some states, including [Florida](#), prioritize teachers of color with this programming.
  - Connecticut goes further by providing [mortgage assistance for teachers](#), including additional support for teachers of color who enter the profession.

As state and district leaders work to recruit new and retain current teachers, it's crucial that they invest in strategies to diversify the teacher workforce. For more information about how your state is prioritizing teacher diversity, see our [50-state web tool](#).

- **Increase teacher pay**

- To make the teaching profession more attractive and sustainable, states must continue efforts to increase teacher pay. Many state budgets have included proposals to increase pay across the board, but states should look at ways to provide bonuses and raises for [teachers serving high-needs schools](#).
- States can also provide incentives for teacher candidates to ensure they are well-prepared and stay in the profession. For example, [Texas](#) invested \$91 million in a strategic staffing model that provides sustainable resident stipends as part of student teachers' yearlong student teaching experience.

## FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE STAFFING MODELS

States and districts should support school leaders, particularly in schools with high needs and greater vacancies, by providing sample schedules and staffing models for organizing staff in ways that extend the reach of strong teachers and accelerate student learning. With this support, schools can develop differentiated instructional roles based on needs and adapt to emergency situations like the pandemic and minimize the disruption of student learning. State and district leaders should review and revise policies that may be limiting staffing model options, such as overly restrictive job descriptions, staff ratio minimums, and stipend requirements.

For more information about how district and school leaders can ensure all students have access to strong and diverse teachers, see the Alliance for Resource Equity's [guidebook](#).

## PROMISING PRACTICE – TENNESSEE’S APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

The Tennessee Department of Education is pioneering a new way to develop teacher pipelines through an apprenticeship program with the U.S. Department of Labor to establish a permanent Grow Your Own program. The state is the first in the nation to sponsor Teacher Occupation Apprenticeship programs between school districts and Educator Preparation Programs. Apprenticeship programs are high-quality, industry-driven, work-based learning pathways that provide individuals with hands-on work experience while earning a wage that increases during the progression of the program. The Teacher Occupation Apprenticeship will provide a national model and permanent Grow Your Own pathway for [Tennesseans to become teachers](#) for free and obtain high-quality jobs in their own communities.

### FEDERAL RESOURCES

The federal government has invested billions of dollars in state and local efforts to provide high-quality instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of this money can — and should — be utilized to fund the short- and long-term solutions provided in this brief to address teacher and support staff shortages. The U.S. Department of Education, in alignment with the call to action from Sec. Miguel Cardona to address teacher shortages, recently issued a [fact sheet](#) to provide concrete examples of how states and districts have addressed shortages. Below are a few additional examples of funding available to states and districts and its allowable uses:

- **Federal COVID-19 relief funding provides a total of \$190 billion to support the needs of K-12 students, with \$125 billion of those funds coming from the [American Rescue Plan \(ARP\)](#)**
  - Many districts across the country have used ARP and federal relief funds to address specific shortages. For example, [Iowa City School District](#) used ARP funds to develop a Grow Your Own program and hired equity fellows and restorative justice mentors to support schools, building on district leaders’ existing plans to diversify the educator workforce. They also used federal relief funds to recruit substitute teachers, offering \$550/day stipends to those who teach in multiple locations; to make targeted hires in English and math classes in high-needs schools to reduce class sizes, to expand the school calendar with additional days off for staff and students, and to assign “building subs” to alleviate concerns about teachers covering for others when there were last-minute absences.
- **Increased funding for existing federal educator training programs**
  - Congress has committed more funding to federal educator training programs that state leaders can utilize to increase the number of teachers entering the pipeline. These programs include the [Teacher Quality Partnerships \(TQP\)](#) that fund pipeline programs like Grow Your Own models and Hawkins Centers of Excellence that focus on investments in minority-serving institutions to increase the number of teachers of color in the profession.

## GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs are investments in identifying, supporting, and preparing local teacher candidates to become full-time teachers in the communities in which they live. These programs can encourage middle and high school students to pursue education majors and identify adults with ties to schools (e.g., paraeducators) to help them obtain their teaching certification. GYO programs are racially neutral methods to diversify the educator workforce and to address specific shortages in hard-to-staff geographic areas while increasing the likelihood of retention. Most programs also involve partnerships between districts, and institutions of higher education, including community colleges. Some programs are run by states or districts while others are run by universities or community-based organizations. For more information about GYO, see [New America's 50-state scan](#).

- [State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Program](#). The Department of Treasury invested \$350 billion in state, local, and tribal governments to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Some ways that states and districts can use these funds to address teacher and other staffing shortages include:
  - Rehiring public sector workers – including teachers and other school staff who lost their jobs or retired – and restoring number of staff to pre-pandemic levels.
  - Providing support to disproportionately impacted schools through early learning services; assistance to high-poverty school districts to advance equitable funding; and evidenced-based educational services and practices to address students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs
  - Awarding premium pay to school employees who perform work in person, including teachers and staff who keep school buildings running
  - Providing states and districts government services, including educational services and/or public safety services

*We gratefully acknowledge Blair Wriston, Ed Trust's senior government affairs associate for sharing his expertise on federal policy and addressing school support staff shortages. We are also grateful to our colleagues at Education Resource Strategies for their ongoing partnership.*