



Systematic Solutions to the Educator Staffing Crisis

During the 135th General Assembly, education stakeholders and a bi-partisan set of legislators secured several of the policy proposals from the 2022 EVA on Teacher Recruitment & Retention. The state biennial budget for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025 (HB 33 – 135th GA) contained several major priority recommendations from the EVA, these included: 1) Increasing the teacher minimum salary from \$30,000 to \$35,000; 2) establishing a “Grow Your Own Teacher” program, which provides low-income high school seniors and certain school employees scholarships to complete teacher preparation programs; and 3) eliminated the prohibition against school districts compensating student teachers.

Despite the forward progress in HB 33, according to an Ohio Department of Education and Workforce report,¹⁵ educator staffing shortages persist across the state, and shortages are more severe in specific regions of Ohio, subjects, and grade bands. According to the report, the geographies of most concern are Southeast, Southwest, and Western Ohio, particularly when looking at data related to student-to-teacher ratios. Additionally, the report indicated licensure and attrition trends amongst teaching staff have also contributed to local educator shortages. Notably, the number of courses taught by teachers whose licenses do not match the courses they are teaching has increased statewide. Additionally, the teacher attrition rate (those not returning as a teacher) was elevated over the 2021-2022 school year compared to the previous six years. Over this same period, the number of newly credentialed teachers steadily declined (from 7,706 in 2014 to only 5,000 in 2022), and there are more than 43,000 individuals with active teaching licenses who were NOT employed in a public school. Finally, the staffing crisis is not exclusive only to teachers, many districts have also experienced issues in recruiting and retaining educational support professionals, who are critical to providing a high-quality education for students in Ohio.

These educators include paraprofessionals, educational and classroom aides, secretaries, food service staff, custodial and janitorial staff, and bus drivers. Often these individuals are the first and last people the student sees during their school day. They ensure that students have access to the services they need, are educated in safe, clean and healthy environments, and can get to and from school in a timely and safe manner. However, many of these staff are the lowest paid in a district and often they are tasked with handling critical tasks throughout the school day.

¹⁵ Ohio's Teacher Workforce, <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Research-Evaluation-and-Advanced-Analytics/Data-Insights/Ohio-s-Teacher-Workforce>

Policy

Addressing the educator staffing crisis has taken time and continues to require a systematic effort by policy makers at all levels – federal, state, and local – in collaboration with stakeholders in the public education community. It is imperative that educators be included in the process that develops solutions to the staffing crisis. While not all policy recommendations proposed to address this issue impact the state’s next biennium budget, state policy must continue to: 1) ensure all educators are compensated at a level that reflects their value; 2) create supportive educator working conditions necessary for conducive conditions for student learning; 3) develop quality job-embedded support systems; and finally, 4) reflect a fundamental respect for educators and their professional autonomy. Furthermore, the State must adopt policies that are built upon what was secured in HB 33-135th General Assembly, by creating a system of financial support for pre-service educators, developing an annual survey of school districts to identify how many staff positions are left unfilled at the district level, and addressing educational support professionals’ recruitment and retention challenges.

Challenge

There are several distinct challenges that impact educator staffing that persist from the previous drafting of this brief connected to educator compensation, barriers to pre-service entry of qualified applicants, and working conditions. Additionally, there are distinct policy challenges impacting this issue. While some improvements were made in the last General Assembly, the passage of legislation like House Bill 8 (the so-called Parent’s Bill of Rights) and Senate Bill 104 (which contained the trans-bathroom ban) have continued to inject culture war fights into public schools and exacerbate problems with the cultural climate in classrooms that have and will continue to drive educators out of the profession.

Additionally, the ability to secure increased and sustainable public-school funding is in direct competition with the threat of further expansion of private school vouchers. Certain political leaders in the Ohio General Assembly have already declared that public school funding is unsustainable and that the final phase in of the Fair School Funding Plan is a “fantasy.” The lack of sustained and adequate funding for public schools will only serve to stymie the progress made and blunt the ability for school districts to hire and retain the educators needed to provide students with a high-quality education. Furthermore, the lack of political will to implement the Fair School Funding Plan with the three categorical cost studies on how much it takes to educate students with special needs, English learners, and that are economically disadvantaged will hinder the recruitment and retention of educators that specialize in educating students from these categories and/or geographies.

Lastly, policies to de-professionalize education and peel back collective bargaining rights were prevented in the 135th General Assembly. It is entirely possible that new leadership in the legislature will continue a push to de-professionalize public education by lowering pre-service requirements, educator prep-programs, professional learning, and licensure standards. It is also entirely possible that the legislature takes up policies that strip away collective bargaining rights of educators, already proposals have been

introduced to strip away collective bargaining rights for higher education faculty (Senate Bill 1) and to restrict activities for union leaders to advocate for their profession and public education (Senate Bill 8).

Opportunity

Despite recent attempts by members of the General Assembly to insert culture war policies into the classrooms and propose short-term, band-aid solutions to the educator staffing crisis, there are real opportunities to address the educator recruitment and retention problem in Ohio.

It is widely accepted by policymakers, education leaders (at both the local and state levels), and education stakeholders that Ohio must find a systemic and comprehensive set of policy solutions to address this issue.

Finally, policy recommendations must be developed to focus on the recruitment and retention of educational support professionals. Acute shortages of bus drivers, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, school secretaries, and other essential workers have significantly disrupted student learning, strained working conditions, and highlighted the need to invest in our ESPs.

Support Child Well Being: Budget Recommendations

Ohio must continue to build upon gains made in the 135th General Assembly so that all students have access to high-quality, dedicated educators by creating a comprehensive set of solutions to the educator staffing crisis that includes the following:

- Increase Ohio's state minimum teacher's salary from \$35,000 to at least \$50,000.
- Fully update and fund the final phase in of the Fair School Funding Plan and ensure that the formula is updated into the future.
- Extend Public Service Loan Forgiveness programs and expand student loan forgiveness, grants, and scholarships to provide meaningful financial relief for those who commit to service students in our public schools.
- Strengthen educators' retirement security by supporting a fully funded State Teachers and School Employees Retirement Systems (STRS and SERS, respectively).
- Pass policy that permits direct financial support for pre-service educators similar to those in House Bill 563 from the previous General Assembly.
- Require the state to complete a comprehensive assessment of the alignment of Ohio's teacher preparation programs with the realities of PK-12 schools.
- Seek feedback from educators on their working conditions and create a system for school leaders to act on that feedback to make necessary changes to policies, practices, and culture in schools.
- Create and maintain an accessible statewide database of education job openings to facilitate the matching of educators seeking employment with available positions and to provide a reliable source of information for the public to monitor trends in education employment in Ohio.
- Continue the expansion of "grow your own" educator recruitment programs and the development of Educator Registered Apprenticeship Programs.
- Develop policies to address the recruitment and retention needs of Ohio's educational support professionals.

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