



## Systematic Solutions to the Educator Staffing Crisis

In 2022, the Ohio Education Association (OEA), which represents over 120,000 educators across the state, formed state Educator Voice Academy teams to address issues related to Teacher Recruitment & Retention and Social & Emotional Learning. From that process, OEA has laid out a comprehensive set of recommendations for addressing the growing educator shortage crisis. The following issue brief draws from these recommendations. To access the full report of the EVA, please visit the OEA website<sup>i</sup>.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were 21,000 fewer people employed in K-12 public schools in Ohio in September 2021 than in September 2019. This trend appears to be continuing into the 2022-2023 school year, with preliminary July 2022 BLS data showing a decrease of 17,000 employees versus July 2019 employment levels. While the data do not distinguish between teachers and others employed in the system, it is alarming that Ohio's public education workforce is 6% smaller now than three years ago. During the same period, public school enrollment in Ohio declined by 2%. Any impact of the COVID pandemic on enrollment and staffing appears to have disproportionately affected staffing levels.

A recent Economic Policy Institute (EPI) study, published on December 6, 2022, on teacher recruitment and retention issues confirmed the findings of the OEA Educator Voice Academy report. The EPI Study indicates that the "combination of substandard [educator] compensation and highly stressful working conditions...made [the education profession] a much less attractive profession than alternatives..."<sup>ii</sup> What is clear is that the shortage of qualified educational staff – both classroom teachers and education support professionals – have a direct and distinct impact on Ohio's public schools. The staffing crisis harms students' abilities to academically succeed and have their social and emotional needs met by caring qualified individuals. Finally, the educator shortage causes the quality and effectiveness of educators that remain in the profession by increasing the pressures of an already stressful workplace when they are forced to take on larger class sizes and caseloads and are expected to do more with less.

### Policy

Addressing the educator staffing shortage will take time and 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 may not impact the state's next biennium budget, state policy must: 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.

## Challenges

There are several distinct challenges that impact educator staffing. Both the OEA Educator Voice Academy Report and EPI study outlined recruitment and retention challenges connected to educator compensation, barriers to pre-service entry of qualified applicants, and working conditions. Additionally, there are distinct policy challenges impacting this issue. During the 134th General Assembly, legislators introduced legislation that would have censored what was taught in Ohio's classrooms and short-term fixes to this issue that would have only served to drive more individuals away from and out of the profession and erode professional standards of educators.

### Recruitment Challenges

The decline in the number of university students pursuing careers in education is alarming. A report from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education showed that traditional teacher-preparation programs experienced a decline of 35% in enrollment over the ten-year period from 2008-09 to 2018-19. And that does not include an expected drop due to the pandemic.<sup>iii</sup> An August WKYC report highlighted “a big drop off” in enrollment in teacher preparation programs at northeast Ohio universities<sup>iv</sup>. According to the National Council of Education Statistics, completion of education programs by Ohio's higher education graduates decreased 30% between 2003 and 2021. A federal Title II report reveals 16,982 students enrolled in teacher preparation programs at Ohio's 50 college and university providers in 2019-20. In 2011-12, there were 28,502 enrolled at 51 colleges and universities in the state, representing a 40% drop.

### Retention Challenges

Mounting pressures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, under-resourced schools, politicization of education, and lack of respect for educators and the education profession are leading to growing challenges with teacher retention.

During the 2021-2022 school year, the National Education Association (NEA) surveyed members across the country. A whopping 90% reported feeling burnt out, and 55% expressed an interest in retiring early or leaving the profession. The numbers are even worse among members of color. While a mass exodus of experienced educators from the teaching profession has not yet materialized, it is cause for significant concern when so many are expressing deep frustrations over what they believe is a lack of support and respect for the work they do with students. There has long been a struggle to retain educators in their first five years of teaching, but pressures of the past three years are taking their toll on those with more experience as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated problems that had been evident prior to 2020, including deep levels of inequity that place significant pressure on educators in high-poverty communities and communities impacted by systemic racism. Inequitable access to non-academic supports, including mental health services, as well as greater needs for nutrition, after-school care, access to technology, and physical health and safety create challenges particularly for educators in marginalized communities. Layered on top of that, especially during the early phases of the pandemic, were threats to educators' personal health and safety, concerns about their own vulnerable family members, and intense pressures related to the transition to remote learning. Perhaps not coincidentally, educators also reported having greater unmet mental health challenges than before the pandemic.

## Opportunity

Despite recent policy attempts by members of the General Assembly to censor honest education (HB 322, 327, and 616 – 134th GA) and propose short term, band-aid solutions to the educator staffing crisis (SB 361 – 134th GA), there are some real opportunities to addressing 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 addressing this issue. This was apparent at several Regional Roundtables convened by the Ohio Departments of Education and Higher Education at the end of October and beginning of November. At these regional convenings, state officials, local superintendents and PK-12 staff, higher education faculty, and other education stakeholders came together to discuss the educator staffing crisis and work collaboratively to identify components of a comprehensive solution. Already, stemming from these discussions, a bi-partisan group of policymakers and stakeholders are working to develop a set of systematic policy recommendations to address the educator staffing crisis in the new General Assembly.

Finally, while OEA's initial Educator Voice Academy focused on teacher recruitment and retention, it has established an Educator Voice Academy to address the education support professional (ESPs) recruitment and retention issue. 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. The OEA Educator Voice Academy cadre for Education Support Professionals will develop advocacy and organizing strategies to ensure every student in Ohio is served by caring, qualified support professionals who are respected, given the resources they need to be successful, and reflect the diversity of our population

## Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendation

Ohio must ensure that all students have access to high quality, dedicated educators by creating a comprehensive set of solutions to the educator staffing crisis, that include the following:

- Increase Ohio’s state minimum teacher’s salary from \$30,000 to \$50,000.
- Fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan and provide state support to local school districts with the resources to fund necessary salary increases.
- 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) and repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).
- Remove financial barriers for completion of pre-service requirements for teacher licensure, such as allowing student teachers to be compensated.
- 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.
- Explore and support the expansion of “grow your own” educator recruitment programs and the development of Educator Registered Apprenticeship Programs.

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<sup>i</sup> OEA Press Release on Educator Voice Academy Report on Teacher Recruitment and Retention, <https://ohea.org/press-releases/2022/ohea-members-offer-solution-to-states-growing-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-crisis/>

<sup>ii</sup> *The Pandemic has exacerbated a long-standing national shortage of teachers*, Report by John Schmidt and Katherine DeCourcy, December 6, 2022, the Economic Policy Institute, <https://www.epi.org/publication/shortage-of-teachers/>

<sup>iii</sup> AACTE’s National Portrait Sounds the Alarm on Declining Interest in Education Careers - American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE).

<sup>iv</sup> Northeast Ohio universities say fewer students are choosing education as a profession | wkyc.com.