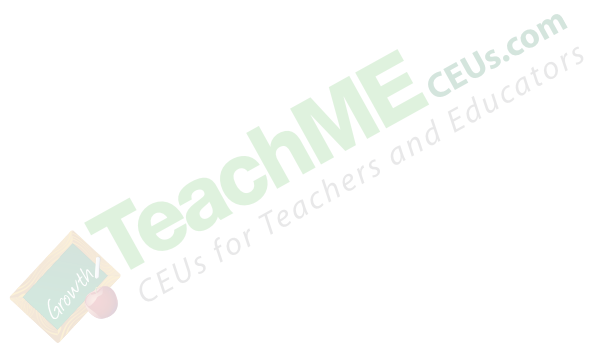


Building and Sustaining Teacher Retention



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Introduction

The teacher shortage in the United States has reached crisis levels, affecting schools in every region and disproportionately impacting high-need communities. For more than a decade, schools have faced rising teacher attrition rates while struggling to attract and retain qualified educators. This issue has been further exacerbated by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased workload demands, stagnant wages, and a lack of professional support. As a result, districts have been forced to implement stopgap measures—such as increasing class sizes, assigning additional responsibilities to existing teachers, and hiring under-qualified individuals—all of which compromise student learning and educational equity. Addressing this crisis requires a deep understanding of the factors driving teacher attrition and the systemic barriers preventing long-term retention. In this course, we will explore the root causes of the teacher shortage, examining why educators leave the profession and what strategies can be implemented to encourage them to stay. We will consider both policy-level solutions and school-based strategies, analyzing initiatives that have been successful in supporting teachers and improving retention rates.

Section 1: Understanding Teacher Retention and Attrition will examine the key factors influencing teacher turnover, including burnout, compensation, workplace conditions, and systemic challenges within the education system. We will analyze the consequences of teacher attrition and discuss its disproportionate impact on under-resourced schools. *Section 2: Strategies to Retain Teachers – Government and Policy* will explore the role of federal and state policies in improving teacher retention. Topics include government-funded initiatives, legislative efforts, and structural reforms aimed at strengthening the teaching profession. *Section 3: Strategies to Retain Teachers – District and School-Level Strategies* will focus on school- and district-level interventions, such as improving school climate, fostering administrative support, and implementing mentorship programs that enhance

teacher well-being and professional development. By the end of this course, educators, administrators, and policymakers will gain a comprehensive understanding of the teacher shortage crisis and the actionable solutions that can be implemented at multiple levels. Through research-based insights and real-world strategies, this course will provide the tools necessary to support and sustain a strong, effective teaching workforce.

Professional teaching conditions in the United States are widely recognized as inferior compared to those in high-achieving countries, where teachers receive better preparation, higher salaries, and ongoing career support. These countries experience far lower teacher attrition rates, as educators are more likely to remain in the profession for their entire careers. In contrast, U.S. teachers frequently leave the profession due to dissatisfaction with their working conditions, salaries, and limited input in decision-making. This high rate of attrition drives the majority of teacher shortages, with roughly 90% of new hires each year replacing teachers who left for reasons other than retirement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023).

Section 1: Understanding Teacher Retention and Attrition

The educator shortage in the United States has reached critical levels, exacerbated by long-standing issues and worsened by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. For more than a decade, data has shown a steady increase in job openings within the public education sector, coupled with stagnating hiring rates. This widening gap between demand and supply, along with troubling trends in teacher turnover, has led to a crisis in the profession. Research from the National Education Association (NEA) and other sources reveals that the number of teachers leaving the profession each year continues to rise, with a disproportionate impact on high-poverty and rural schools. Additionally, the

number of students enrolling in teacher preparation programs has dramatically declined, leaving fewer qualified candidates to fill teaching roles.

Teacher turnover and attrition are not only costly in terms of recruitment and training but also pose significant challenges to the stability and quality of education, particularly in under-resourced schools. The attrition rates are especially concerning among teachers of color and those in hard-to-staff subjects like mathematics, science, and special education. Furthermore, teachers' decisions to leave are often driven by a combination of factors including burnout, insufficient compensation, workplace stress, and safety concerns. The emotional and psychological toll of these challenges is compounded by systemic issues within the education system, such as understaffing and a lack of mental health resources. In this section, we will explore the root causes of teacher attrition, its impact on the education system, and the factors that contribute to teachers' decisions to leave the profession, as well as to stay. By understanding these dynamics, we can begin to identify strategies to address the growing crisis and support teachers in their vital roles.

1.1 Trends in Today's Teaching Workforce

The teaching workforce has seen significant changes in recent decades, reflecting a mix of growth and challenges. The number of teachers in public, private, and charter schools grew at more than three times the rate of student enrollment between 1987-1988 and 2015-2016, yet this increase has not alleviated widespread challenges (Hanover Research, 2021). Alarming, 44% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years, and turnover disproportionately impacts high-poverty, high-minority, urban, and rural schools, which account for half of all teacher turnover. The workforce is also becoming younger and less experienced; in 2015-2016, teachers most commonly had only 1

to 3 years of experience, a sharp decline from the 15 years of experience typical in 1987-1988. Fewer men are entering the profession, with women comprising 76% of public school teachers, and minority teachers remain underrepresented, accounting for only 20% of the workforce compared to 51% of students. Compounding these issues, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated teacher shortages, with one-third of teachers indicating they were somewhat or very likely to leave the profession by late 2020, citing increased workloads and lower job satisfaction (Hanover Research). These trends underscore the pressing need for strategies to address retention, workload, and diversity within the teaching profession.

1.2 The State of Teacher Retention

The educator shortage in the United States has been a growing concern for over a decade, a situation significantly worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the National Education Association (NEA, 2022), multiple indicators have pointed toward an educator shortage crisis brewing since the end of the Great Recession in 2009. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) reveal that job openings in the public education sector have been on the rise, while hiring rates have not kept pace, indicating a widening gap between the demand for and supply of educators. Further, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reveals a troubling trend, reporting that over 270,000 teachers have left the profession each year since 2016—a pattern projected to continue through 2026 (Hailey; American University, 2021).

The teacher shortage is further compounded by a significant decline in teacher preparation program enrollment. From 2010 to 2018, total enrollment in these programs fell from 940,520 to 604,264 students, a decrease of over 35%; the number of students completing teacher preparation programs also dropped by

28% during this period (Hanover Research, 2021). This shrinking pool of traditionally qualified candidates presents a challenge for districts, which must recruit new teachers from an increasingly limited talent pool. Additionally, a 2018 survey of superintendents revealed that teacher pipeline issues are more pronounced in rural areas, cities, and towns than in suburban settings. The teacher shortage disproportionately impacts students of color and those in high-poverty schools, as teachers of color are among the most likely to leave the profession, further exacerbating educational inequities in these communities (Hanover Research).

This shortage spans various categories of school staff, including teachers, counselors, and support personnel. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues, leading to increased stress, burnout, and a higher rate of attrition among educators. The NEA emphasizes that solving educator shortages requires evidence-based, long-term strategies that address both recruitment and retention, with specific attention to recruiting and retaining educators of color who face unique barriers to pursuing education careers. Failing to address these shortages has led to negative effects on students, schools, districts, and communities, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive solutions to this ongoing crisis.

Increases in Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition occurs when teachers leave the profession or move to a different school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years, 84.1% of public school teachers stayed at their current schools, while 7.9% left the profession altogether, and 7.9% moved to different schools (Merod, 2023). These numbers are consistent with historical trends; for instance, in the 1988-89 school year, 86.5% of teachers stayed at their schools, while 5.6% left the profession. However, over the past three decades,

teacher retention has declined slightly by 2.4 percentage points, while attrition increased by 2.3 percentage points. Despite this, teacher attrition rates remained relatively steady for over a decade leading into the pandemic. However, the data for the 2022-23 school year, highlighted by ERS (2024), paints a more concerning picture. During this period, teacher turnover rates increased significantly, with 23% of teachers leaving their schools. This figure reflects not only those exiting the profession or leaving their districts but also teachers transferring within districts. This type of internal turnover often exacerbates inequities, as teachers tend to transfer from schools serving high-poverty communities to those with fewer students in poverty.

Impacts: Why Turnover and Attrition are Problematic

Teacher attrition is a significant factor contributing to the ongoing teacher shortage in the United States. Research by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) shows that teacher attrition accounts for nearly 90% of the annual demand for teachers nationwide. Remarkably, less than one-third of this attrition is due to retirements; the majority stems from early- and mid-career teachers leaving the profession. This creates a persistent cycle of schools hiring tens of thousands of replacements each year. Even small increases in teacher attrition have a substantial impact on the labor market. For instance, U.S. attrition rates have fluctuated from 5.1% in 1992 to 8.4% in 2008. While these percentages may seem small, in a workforce of 3.8 million teachers, they translate to an additional 125,000 teachers needed annually. By comparison, high-achieving nations like Finland and Singapore maintain attrition rates of just 3% to 4%. If the U.S. could lower its attrition rate to these levels, the national teacher shortage could be nearly eliminated, except for specific needs in certain subjects or regions.

The Effect of Turnover on Quality Education

Attrition includes teachers transferring between schools. This movement disproportionately affects schools serving students from low-income families or communities of color, where teachers are more likely to leave or transfer (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2019). Such instability hinders long-term school improvement efforts as leaders struggle to attract and retain qualified staff year after year. The consequences of high turnover are widespread. Schools facing frequent staff changes often resort to hiring inexperienced or unqualified teachers, increasing class sizes, or cutting classes. These adjustments negatively affect the quality of education, particularly for students in schools with high turnover rates. Research indicates that teacher inexperience and high turnover both negatively impact student learning (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond). Furthermore, the presence of constant turnover affects the academic progress of all students in a school, not just those directly taught by newer or less experienced educators.

High rates of teacher turnover can also significantly disrupt efforts to improve curriculum and instruction, particularly in urban schools. Kamrath and Bradford (2020) note that schools experiencing constant staff turnover often struggle to maintain long-term instructional improvement initiatives. When teachers leave frequently, professional development efforts become inconsistent, collaboration among educators is disrupted, and curriculum development efforts fail to gain momentum. Sustained improvement in teaching practices relies on the ability of educators to engage in ongoing training, share best practices, and refine instructional strategies over time. However, when a school is in a continual state of flux, with new teachers cycling in and out, these efforts are jeopardized (Kamrath and Bradford). New teachers often require extensive support, which can shift the focus away from long-term instructional planning and toward short-term

survival. This instability makes it difficult to build a cohesive and effective learning environment, ultimately impacting student achievement.

The Monetary Cost of Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover is not just a challenge in terms of staffing and student outcomes—it also carries a significant financial burden for schools and districts. Kamrath and Bradford (2020) highlight that recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers requires substantial investment, diverting resources away from instructional improvement and student support. The National Center for Teaching and America's Future estimated that the national cost of teacher turnover exceeds seven billion dollars annually (Kamrath and Bradford). At the district level, these costs accumulate through expenses such as advertising job openings, reviewing applications, conducting background checks, and funding teacher induction programs. A Texas study from 2000 found that each new teacher hire cost schools over \$8,000, which, when adjusted for inflation, reached approximately \$12,000 in 2019. However, more recent estimates from the Learning Policy Institute suggest that the cost per teacher replacement can be as high as \$20,000 (Kamrath and Bradford). This financial strain is exacerbated when new hires leave within their first few years, forcing schools to continuously reinvest in recruitment and training rather than directing funds toward sustainable improvements in education.

Addressing teacher turnover is critical to improving the overall stability and effectiveness of schools, particularly those serving marginalized communities. Reducing turnover not only alleviates teacher shortages but also enhances the quality of education and fosters more equitable learning environments for all students.

Data on Turnover and Attrition

Teachers of mathematics, science, special education, and foreign languages are more likely to leave their positions or the profession than those teaching other subjects (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2019). These fields consistently face shortages nationwide, as educators leave at disproportionately high rates. Schools with a majority of low-income students and students of color are especially impacted, with turnover rates in these schools often double those of schools serving predominantly White and higher-income students. This disparity is tied to a combination of factors: lower salaries, poorer working conditions, and fewer resources. These conditions perpetuate cycles of instability, leaving schools with less experienced teachers who often receive inadequate preparation to meet the demands of their roles.

Alternative certification pathways also contribute to attrition challenges. Teachers entering the profession through these expedited programs, which constituted 25% of new teachers in 2012, are far more likely to leave, especially in schools with high proportions of low-income students and students of color (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2019). These programs often provide less coursework and student teaching experience, resulting in higher turnover rates, even when accounting for factors like school working conditions. Ironically, many teachers in fields with critical shortages—such as mathematics, science, and teachers of color—enter through alternative pathways, inadvertently worsening the cycle of turnover in these areas.

Teachers of color face additional challenges. While they are essential for fostering culturally responsive learning environments, they are more likely to teach in under-resourced schools with poor working conditions, factors strongly linked to turnover. Moreover, they are often overrepresented in alternative certification programs, which correlates with higher attrition rates.

1.3 Why Teachers Leave: Root Causes of Attrition

Workplace Stress and Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout is a growing concern that significantly impacts the education system, and it is defined by the National Education Association (NEA) as “a condition in which an educator has exhausted the personal and professional resources necessary to do the job” (as cited in Peck, 2024). This overwhelming fatigue culminates from years of navigating heavy workloads, understaffing, and emotionally taxing challenges such as managing student behaviors, helping students dealing with trauma, and meeting the diverse needs of students. Teachers frequently find themselves leaving the profession, not due to a lack of passion for their work, but because the mounting pressures make it feel unsustainable. Teacher burnout is a widespread and pressing issue in the United States, with 90% of teachers recognizing it as a "serious" problem, and 67% viewing it as "very serious" (Hailey, 2024). Annual teacher turnover rates are at 8%, and younger educators are particularly affected by burnout.

The modern education environment is particularly susceptible to fostering burnout. Teachers are exposed to constant criticism from various sources, including parents and the broader public. The current landscape of education includes high levels of understaffing, which means schools are unable to provide the necessary resources to support teachers. As a result, teachers are often left to manage larger classes with fewer colleagues and support staff, making it increasingly difficult to meet both academic and behavioral needs (Peck, 2024). Research reveals that 90% of public schools in the United States are grappling with the issue of understaffing. Teachers are forced to manage larger class sizes, cover multiple subjects or grade levels, and take on additional administrative tasks such as grading assignments and coordinating parent-teacher conferences. Moreover, many educators must adapt lesson plans to provide individualized support for

students with learning difficulties. This increased workload takes a toll on teachers, who are expected to balance these responsibilities while maintaining the quality of their instruction. In schools with chronic understaffing, the lack of adequate support leads to a diminished ability to provide students with the one-on-one attention they need. As a result, student performance often declines, which can further exacerbate teachers' feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

In sum, teacher burnout is a complex and multi-faceted issue that is worsening due to increased workloads, understaffing, and emotional stressors. As educators continue to face these challenges, it is essential to find ways to support them, improve school resources, and create a sustainable work environment that allows teachers to continue their vital work without sacrificing their health or well-being. Addressing teacher burnout is not only crucial for the educators themselves but also for the success of their students and the broader education system. Below we will discuss some of the most commonly cited causes of teacher burnout.

Work-Life Balance

A lack of work-life balance is a significant factor contributing to teacher burnout. Many teachers work long hours both inside and outside the classroom, often dedicating additional time to lesson planning, grading, attending meetings, and providing extra support to students. This excessive workload creates physical and mental fatigue, leaving educators feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained (Hailey, 2024). About 75% of educators who cite workload concerns as a primary reason for leaving indicate they are overburdened by daily responsibilities, exacerbated by staffing shortages (Bryant et al., 2023). Those citing well-being concerns express frustration over the expectation to sacrifice personal time and energy for their jobs, leaving little room for meaningful activities outside of work. These challenges are often more severe in rural or under-resourced districts,

where existing staff are required to take on additional responsibilities due to hiring gaps.

High Emotional Demands

Teaching is inherently emotionally demanding, requiring educators to juggle not only academic responsibilities but also the emotional needs of their students. Teachers often feel a profound sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of their pupils. In work environments that lack sufficient support, this burden can feel overwhelming (American University, 2021). Moreover, teachers frequently support students who have experienced trauma, such as neglect or abuse. As mandated reporters, teachers are legally required to report suspected cases of abuse, which places them in a difficult position. Being among the first to recognize signs of trauma can be emotionally taxing, especially when teachers feel powerless to change a student's circumstances. This exposure to students' hardships, coupled with the emotional weight of their struggles, can result in secondary trauma for teachers. Witnessing the impact of challenging home environments or tragic events on their students takes a toll over time. Without adequate mental health resources and organizational support, this emotional labor becomes harrowing, leading many teachers to feel emotionally depleted (American University).

Safety Concerns

Safety concerns are a significant factor contributing to teacher burnout and the increasing rate of teacher attrition. The safety of both educators and students has become a critical issue in the school environment, and many teachers are citing concerns over inadequate safety measures as a key reason for leaving the profession. Over recent years, school shootings have surged, setting alarming records. In 2024, there were at least 83 incidents of gun violence on school grounds, and 2022 marked one of the deadliest years, with 47 fatalities, including

the devastating Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas. Tragically, 19 students and two educators lost their lives in this single incident, highlighting the profound vulnerabilities in school safety. Matthews et al. (2025) note that this upward trend in gun violence follows the reopening of schools post-pandemic, reversing the temporary decline seen when schools were closed in 2020.

This lack of safety not only threatens the well-being of students and staff but also erodes the overall sense of security that is essential for an effective learning environment. The absence of sufficient security measures in schools is one of the primary reasons teachers feel compelled to leave their roles (Peck, 2024).

Teachers often report that they do not feel adequately protected, and many express concerns about the lack of mental health support and resources available to help them navigate these stressful situations. A survey revealed that 70% of teachers believe that reducing class sizes would help improve safety, yet they receive less than half of the mental health support they feel is necessary to cope with the emotional toll of working in such a high-risk environment (Peck). Without adequate support systems in place, the emotional and psychological strain can become overwhelming, prompting many teachers to seek other career paths. The impact of safety concerns extends beyond physical threats, affecting the broader school culture and classroom dynamics. According to research from the EdWeek Research Center, behavioral issues in schools have risen consistently over the past four years. Teachers find it increasingly difficult to address these behavioral problems when there is an overarching atmosphere of fear and insecurity within the school. The lack of discipline and the inability to create a safe and orderly learning environment only exacerbate the challenges teachers face (Peck, 2024).

Compensation Concerns

According to research by McKinsey & Company, compensation is the leading factor driving educators to consider leaving their positions, across all school types

(Bryant et al., 2023). The survey, conducted between February and May 2022, included responses from more than 1,800 educators, including teachers, mental health service providers, and school leaders. Respondents came from elementary, middle, and high schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas and served public, charter, and private (both religious and nonreligious) schools. Around 75% of educators in this category feel they contribute more to their work than they receive in return, and 69% believe their total compensation—salary and bonuses—does not reflect their qualifications or efforts.

Additionally, 65% report that they cannot live comfortably on their teaching earnings and that they have had to take on a second job to cover living expenses (Educators for Excellence, 2020). It's important to highlight that in most public schools, teachers are required to hold at least a Bachelor's degree and are encouraged to pursue a Master's degree. Given this level of education, not earning a livable wage is a significant concern. When asked what would encourage them to remain in the profession long-term, the majority of teachers point to higher salaries as their top motivator. Further, compensation issues are compounded by feelings of being overworked and undervalued.

While teacher tenure and “steps and lanes” pay structures have long been integral to teacher contracts, many teachers are open to alternative pay and benefit systems, especially those that offer the potential for higher compensation. About two-thirds of teachers express a willingness to trade tenure for better pay or benefits (Educators for Excellence, 2020). Similarly, a comparable number are open to replacing the guaranteed small raises typical of “steps and lanes” models with the possibility of larger performance-based salary increases. This sentiment is particularly strong among early-career teachers and teachers of color, with around 80% expressing interest in these trade-offs.

Lack of Training and Professional Development

New teachers who enter the classroom with minimal or no preparation are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession within their first year compared to those who have received thorough training (Walker, 2022). Unfortunately, teacher preparation programs often fail to provide educators with the essential training required for success in the classroom. According to research by Educators for Excellence (2020), only about 10% of teachers feel that their preparation programs adequately trained them for the real-world challenges of the classroom. Many teachers report not receiving training in areas they consider critical to their work, such as classroom management, student engagement, and meeting diverse student needs. Of the teachers who did receive training in these areas, only about half rated it as very effective. This means that a small percentage of teachers feel they were well-prepared to tackle the demands of their role in key areas. Further, many schools do not offer any type of mentoring program for new teachers. New teachers who lack mentoring and other forms of support are more than twice as likely to leave the profession compared to those who receive such assistance (Walker).

Problems with Administration

A key factor in teacher turnover is the relationship between teachers and school administrators. Many teachers express frustration with the lack of understanding or support from their administrators, which can contribute significantly to their decision to leave the profession. Research shows that school leaders' management styles have a measurable impact on teacher well-being, and when these leadership styles fail to align with teachers' needs, the effects can be detrimental to teacher retention (K-12 Elevate, 2024). One of the frequently cited complaints from teachers is the frequent "carousel of initiatives" that occurs when a new administrator, such as a principal or superintendent, takes charge, and they

feel compelled to introduce new programs or policies (Stoya, 2019).

Unfortunately, these changes may not always consider the efforts or resources already invested in existing programs. As Stoya suggests, administrators should engage teachers in discussions about proposed changes, consider their input, and ensure that necessary resources and professional development are provided to make new initiatives successful.

Another significant issue arises from the lack of responsiveness and follow-through from administrators. Teachers frequently report feeling that their concerns go unheard or unresolved (Stoya, 2019). When administrators fail to address issues in a timely manner, whether due to disorganization or avoidance of conflict, teachers can begin to feel that their voices do not matter. This sense of neglect can erode trust and morale, leading to frustration and, ultimately, attrition. Finally, the failure of administrators to “water the plants,” or nurture their relationships with teachers, can also contribute to teacher dissatisfaction (Stoya). When administrators focus solely on tasks and neglect to build personal connections with staff, teachers can feel isolated and unappreciated. Small gestures, such as attending school events or offering praise, can make a significant difference in improving teacher morale. By taking the time to recognize teachers' efforts and showing genuine care, administrators can build stronger relationships with their staff, which can improve retention rates.

Hearing Straight from Teachers: Why They Are Leaving

In recent years, teachers have taken to social media to share their experiences, frustrations, and reasons for leaving the profession. Online communities like the Reddit group *Teachers in Transition*, which has over 37,000 members, provide a space for educators to discuss their struggles and career changes. Similarly, the popular Instagram account *@TeacherMisery* has amassed over 540,000 followers—more than twelve times the combined follower count of both current and

former U.S. Secretaries of Education (Agnello, 2024). These platforms serve as powerful testimonials, shedding light on systemic issues within education that contribute to high turnover rates. By listening to teachers' voices, schools and districts can gain valuable insights into the challenges educators face and develop strategies to improve teacher retention. Below are real quotes from teachers explaining why they left the profession. Notice how many of their reasons align with the challenges discussed in this section (Agnello):

- *"I left because of the constant chaos in my classroom with no real support. I was left to handle everything on my own. I was dealing with frequent physical fights between students, and the most they got was a 10 to 5 minute time-out. I was left to handle everything on my own—there were no consequences. The stress made me physically ill, and my anxiety became unbearable."*
- *"I'd add the fentanyl epidemic and the expectation that we literally save these kids' lives to the list. As soon as we were asked to keep Narcan handy, I was out."*
- "Energy was a big one. It's so hard to perform to students every day. You have to be mentally on every second. Then after a long day of teaching, you need to go to a meeting, write reports or plan lessons."
- "I had no more to give. Couldn't find any balance between home and work - health and fitness not good. Unsustainable."
- "Constantly changing arbitrary initiatives which led to bad teaching practices...I felt like I had to sneak in my actual teaching that led to results, especially for my students who were reading far below grade level. Lack of respect as a professional & infantilization in the culture and from admin."

1.4 Why Teachers Stay: Factors That Encourage Retention

Meaningful Work

Teachers often stay in the profession because of the profound sense of meaning that they find in their work. Teachers are nearly 20% more likely than their private-sector counterparts to cite meaningful work as a primary reason for staying in their current roles (Bryant et al., 2023). This deep sense of purpose is a driving force for educators, with 93% of teachers who feel their work is meaningful believing that it directly helps others, and 89% stating that their organization's mission aligns with their personal values. This sense of purpose is especially prominent in schools serving high numbers of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. Teachers in these districts report a particularly strong connection to the meaningfulness of their work, with 76% citing it as a major reason for their commitment to their positions (Bryant et al.). In communities facing higher levels of poverty, educators often see firsthand the profound impact that quality education can have on the lives of students and their families. This direct, tangible effect of their work in improving students' futures reinforces their dedication to the profession.

However, Bryant et al. (2023) also acknowledge that working in high-poverty districts presents unique challenges. Despite the meaningfulness of their work, teachers in these areas often face significant resource constraints. Many report feeling overwhelmed by the unsustainable demands of the job, with 33% citing work-related stress and 30% pointing to concerns about their well-being as major reasons they are considering leaving. The emotional and professional rewards of teaching in these districts are paired with the high costs of addressing the diverse needs of students who face economic hardship, creating a complex, dual-edged reality for educators.

Students

One of the most powerful and consistent reasons teachers remain in the profession is their deep love for their students. According to Loewus (2021), when teachers are asked why they stay in the field, the most common response is their "love for students." More than 40% of teachers cited this as a top factor in their decision to stay, underscoring the profound impact that their relationships with students have on their commitment to teaching. This love for students is a core motivator for many teachers, who are drawn to the profession by their passion for nurturing and guiding young people. For teachers, the act of teaching is often about much more than the subject matter—it is about making a positive difference in the lives of their students. The emotional and intellectual connections that teachers form with students are what make the challenges of the profession worthwhile.

As one Indiana middle school teacher noted in a survey, while the daily demands of teaching—including endless meetings, emails, and administrative duties—can be exhausting, the joy of teaching students makes it all worthwhile (Loewus, 2021). In the face of overwhelming paperwork and the weight of non-teaching responsibilities, it is the direct interaction with students that renews teachers' passion for the job. The other aspects of teaching—such as meetings and administrative tasks—can wear teachers down, but the opportunity to shape young minds and make a difference in their lives remains a key source of motivation. Loewus highlights that while factors like retirement benefits and the love of the subjects taught are also important to teachers, it is their love for students that stands out as the most influential reason for staying in the profession. Teachers continue to teach not for the material rewards, but for the joy of seeing their students grow, learn, and succeed.

Convenient Schedules

For some educators, the convenience of school schedules is a significant factor in their decision to remain in the profession, particularly for those who are also parents. The alignment between the school calendar and family schedules provides a unique benefit that is often not available in other professions. Teachers with children in school appreciate the fact that their work schedule mirrors the academic year of their children. This means that teachers are generally able to spend their vacation breaks, including summer vacation, winter holidays, and spring break, at the same time as their kids. This alignment makes family planning easier, as teachers can coordinate vacations, time off, and other family events without the stress of conflicting schedules.

Additionally, the typical school day hours (often from about 8 a.m. to 3 or 4 p.m.) allow teachers to have time at home when their children are not in school, which is especially valuable for parents of younger children who may need supervision and care after school. The relatively consistent hours also provide a sense of predictability and stability, allowing teachers to plan personal activities and appointments without worrying about disrupting their professional commitments. For parents, these benefits are often key in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Juggling professional responsibilities with the demands of raising children can be challenging, and the convenience of a school schedule helps ease some of that burden. Teachers can attend parent-teacher conferences, school performances, and other important events in their own children's education, without needing to arrange time off from work. The ability to participate in their children's school life in this way is a unique advantage that many teachers value and cite as a reason for staying in the profession.

However, it is important to acknowledge that, while the schedule can be convenient, teachers who are also parents face additional challenges. The

workload that extends beyond school hours, including grading, lesson planning, and administrative tasks, may sometimes infringe on personal time and family activities. Still, for many educators, the ability to be home during school holidays and the structured nature of the school day make the teaching profession particularly appealing, providing them with more opportunities for family involvement.

Hearing Straight from Teachers: Why They Stay

Many educators remain in the profession not because the job is easy, but because they feel valued, supported, and fulfilled. When school leaders foster a culture of trust and collaboration, they create an environment where teachers can thrive despite challenges. In response to a Reddit thread asking, “What’s keeping you from quitting?” 150 educators shared their thoughts. Many highlighted the pivotal role of supportive administration in their decision to stay (Agnello, 2024):

- *“I have an absolutely incredible admin team, and I love my kids. When it’s hard, I know I feel way more fulfilled doing this than anything else.”*
- *“There’s something I look forward to almost everyday. Either a certain class which is just a ton of fun, a fun lesson that I know hits well every year, or just interesting problems and watching kids work through and succeed.”*
- *“One of the reasons I’ve stuck with my current school for five years is that I teach my 8th graders three full novels, a Shakespeare play, and John Hersey’s Hiroshima, cover to cover, a year. They’re novels written for adults. We read them anyways. We have great discussions. I’ve put up with a LOT because I know my principal will never make me teach chopped up books... which I’ve been made to do in the past.”*
- *“I make decent money, have good health benefits, and my admin team and colleagues are awesome. I plan to stay for the long haul.”*

1.5 The Bigger Picture: The Impact of Teacher Attrition and Retention

The relationship between teacher excellence and retention is a critical one, as each influences the other in a symbiotic cycle. Excellence in teaching creates an environment where students thrive, and strong, stable retention helps ensure that this high-quality education is sustained over time (NEA, 2022). On the other hand, high turnover rates disrupt this cycle, making it difficult for schools to maintain a high standard of teaching and learning. When teachers remain in a position for an extended period, they are able to build expertise in their subject areas, develop strong relationships with students, and hone their classroom management strategies. This accumulated experience leads to a level of teaching excellence that benefits students and the school community as a whole. Furthermore, experienced teachers act as mentors to newer educators, fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment. This mentorship is essential in creating a culture of continuous improvement, where teachers share best practices and learn from one another.

Conversely, when turnover is high, schools are frequently forced to hire new teachers, who often lack the experience and institutional knowledge to maintain the same level of instructional quality (NEA, 2022). The constant cycle of recruitment, training, and adjustment that new teachers face can lead to inconsistencies in teaching methods and a lack of continuity in students' education. This, in turn, has a direct negative impact on student performance and achievement. Additionally, when teachers leave, schools lose not only their instructional skills but also their understanding of the community and the students they serve. This loss is especially detrimental in districts where turnover rates are already high, as it can create a culture of instability, making it more challenging to attract and retain new talent.

Moreover, high turnover can exacerbate existing challenges in schools, including strained resources and the emotional toll on staff members. Teachers who stay are often overburdened with the additional responsibilities of supporting new colleagues and managing inconsistent teaching practices. Over time, this leads to burnout and further attrition, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break. In essence, teacher excellence and retention are closely linked: the stability of experienced educators supports the cultivation of a high standard of teaching, while a focus on retention enhances the overall educational experience for students. Conversely, high turnover undermines teaching excellence, leading to negative outcomes for both educators and students. Therefore, efforts to improve teacher retention must be a priority, as they directly contribute to the overall effectiveness and success of educational institutions.

Section 1 Conclusion

The educator shortage and high turnover rates represent an urgent crisis that undermines the stability and quality of education, particularly in under-resourced schools. The factors driving teacher attrition—ranging from burnout and insufficient compensation to workplace stress and safety concerns—require immediate attention. As we explore the complexities of these challenges, it becomes clear that both systemic and individual factors contribute to teachers' decisions to leave or stay in the profession. However, by understanding the root causes of attrition and retention, we can begin to develop and implement strategies that support teachers' well-being, improve working conditions, and create a sustainable workforce that can meet the demands of a rapidly evolving education system. Addressing these issues is not just a matter of retaining educators, but also ensuring that all students, regardless of background or location, have access to the high-quality education they deserve. The next section

will focus on practical strategies at the government, district, and school levels to increase teacher retention and tackle these critical challenges head-on.

Section 1 Key Terms

Alternative Certification - A non-traditional pathway to teacher licensure that allows individuals to enter the profession with less coursework and student teaching experience than traditional programs.

Attrition - The process of teachers leaving the profession, moving to different schools, or transitioning to other careers, often contributing to educator shortages.

Burnout - A condition characterized by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion due to prolonged workplace stress, often leading to job dissatisfaction and high turnover rates among teachers.

Educational Inequities - Disparities in educational resources, teacher quality, and student outcomes, often affecting students of color and those in high-poverty schools.

Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) - A report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that tracks job openings, hiring, and employment trends in various sectors, including education.

Mandated Reporter - An individual, such as a teacher, who is legally required to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.

National Education Association (NEA) - The largest professional organization representing educators in the United States, advocating for public education and educators' rights.

Pipeline Issues - Challenges related to recruiting and retaining educators, often linked to declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs and high attrition rates.

Teacher Preparation Programs - University or alternative programs designed to provide aspiring educators with the necessary coursework and student teaching experiences for certification.

Teacher Retention - The ability of schools and districts to keep educators in their roles over time, often measured by the percentage of teachers who remain in the profession or at the same school.

Teacher Shortage - A condition in which the demand for educators exceeds the supply, often leading to unfilled positions and increased workload for existing teachers.

Teacher Turnover - The rate at which educators leave their schools or the profession, including both voluntary departures and transfers within school districts.

Understaffing - A shortage of teachers and support staff within a school, leading to increased workloads and larger class sizes.

Work-Life Balance - The ability to manage professional responsibilities while maintaining personal well-being and time for non-work-related activities.

Section 1 Reflection Questions

1. Consider the teacher pipeline in your district. What challenges do new teachers face when entering the profession? How could your school or district better support them?

2. Teacher retention is often linked to school culture and leadership. How does your school's leadership impact teacher retention and job satisfaction? What improvements would you suggest?
3. The National Education Association (NEA) advocates for teachers' rights and public education policies. How familiar are you with your local or national teachers' union, and what role do you think advocacy organizations should play in shaping the profession?
4. Reflect on a time when you considered leaving the teaching profession (if applicable). What factors influenced your thinking, and what ultimately made you stay or leave?
5. If you could redesign the teacher preparation process, what changes would you make to better prepare educators for the realities of the profession?
6. How does teacher turnover impact students, particularly in schools with high attrition rates? Have you seen any direct effects of turnover in your school?
7. Imagine you are designing a mentorship program for new teachers. What elements would be essential to ensuring they feel supported and are more likely to stay in the profession?
8. How do broader societal perceptions of teaching influence teacher recruitment and retention? What can be done to improve the public's view of the profession?
9. If you were advising someone considering a career in teaching, what honest insights would you share? How would you help them prepare for both the rewards and challenges of the profession?

10. What policies or strategies could be implemented at the state or district level to address teacher shortages? Are there any existing initiatives that you believe have been effective?

Section 1 Activities

1. **Teacher Pipeline Research:** Investigate the teacher pipeline in your state or district. Identify challenges related to teacher recruitment and retention, and summarize your findings in a one-page reflection.
2. **School Hiring Practices Audit:** Review your school's hiring and onboarding process. Identify strengths and weaknesses, then propose two to three improvements that could better support new teachers.
3. **Personal Burnout Reflection:** Assess your own experiences with stress and burnout. Identify specific triggers and create a personal action plan with strategies for maintaining work-life balance.
4. **New Teacher Interview:** Conduct an informal interview with a new teacher at your school about their onboarding experience, challenges, and support systems. Summarize key takeaways and suggest improvements.
5. **School Turnover Analysis:** Review data (if available) on teacher turnover in your district or school. Identify trends and reflect on possible causes and solutions.
6. **Professional Development Review:** Evaluate the professional development opportunities at your school. Identify what works well and what could be improved to better support teacher retention.

7. **School Culture Assessment:** Reflect on your school's culture and how it impacts teacher retention. Identify one way you could contribute to a more positive and supportive work environment.
8. **Exit Interview Exploration:** If possible, review or request access to exit interview data from teachers who have left your school. Identify common themes and suggest changes to address key concerns.
9. **Social Media & Teacher Perception Study:** Analyze how teaching is portrayed on social media (e.g., TikTok, Twitter, or Facebook groups). Identify common themes and discuss how these perceptions might influence recruitment and retention.
10. **Create a Teacher Retention Survey:** Design a short survey to gather input from your colleagues on what factors contribute to job satisfaction and retention at your school.

Section 2: Strategies to Retain Teachers - Government and Policy

Teacher shortages in the United States have reached critical levels, forcing schools to take measures that undermine students' learning and educational outcomes. Schools have resorted to increasing class sizes, canceling course offerings, adding additional responsibilities to existing teachers, and hiring underqualified individuals to fill vacancies. These stopgap solutions have compromised the quality of education at a time when learning recovery is a national priority for students affected by the pandemic (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). Addressing these shortages is not merely a matter of filling vacancies—it is a critical issue of educational equity and quality that demands immediate, systemic action.

The current teaching conditions in the United States are deeply rooted in outdated, factory-model school structures that emphasize heavy workloads, rigid schedules, standardized curricula, and extensive testing. These systems provide little time for teachers to build relationships with students and families or to collaborate with colleagues. Moreover, the reliance on hiring undertrained teachers has exacerbated staff instability, contributing to lower student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). The pandemic has magnified these long-standing issues, highlighting the urgent need to improve professional conditions for teachers while simultaneously addressing the changing learning needs of students. This pivotal moment offers an opportunity to reimagine and rebuild the teaching profession. In this section, we will explore strategies for retaining teachers, focusing on initiatives at the government level.

2.1 The Government's Role

Darling-Hammond et al. (2023) argue that the nation needs a comprehensive "Marshall Plan for teaching," a federal initiative modeled on the post-World War II recovery plan for Europe. Such a plan would marshal federal resources to focus on key areas, supporting the recruitment, preparation, support, and retention of teachers. By implementing these strategies, the United States can address the root causes of teacher shortages and build a stronger, more sustainable education profession that benefits both educators and students. Darling-Hammond et al. propose the following government and policy-level strategies to address the state of education, thus improving teacher retention.

Increase Net Compensation through Credits, Subsidies, and Incentives

To address the teacher shortage, it is essential to improve educators' overall compensation through strategies such as tax credits, housing subsidies, and salary incentives (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). Research consistently shows that

teacher wages significantly influence who chooses to enter the profession and how long they remain in it. While decisions about teacher salaries are typically made at the state or local level, the federal government can still play a vital role by implementing measures that directly enhance educators' financial well-being. Potential federal actions include incentivizing states and districts to increase and equalize teacher salaries, providing refundable tax credits or housing subsidies for early childhood and K-12 educators, and offering financial support to help eliminate education-related debt (Darling-Hammond et al.).

Offer Debt-Free, High-Quality, Preparation Programs

Improving teacher recruitment efforts requires eliminating the financial burden of teacher preparation. Student debt significantly impacts both the decision to enter the teaching profession and the retention of teachers, particularly among diverse candidates (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). A comprehensive approach, akin to a "Marshall Plan for teaching," would include fully covering the costs of undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation through expanded service scholarships and enhanced loan forgiveness programs. Research indicates that fully prepared teachers—those who have completed student teaching and other essential training—are much more likely to remain in the profession, thereby reducing turnover and the shortages it creates (Darling-Hammond et al.).

Although the federal government currently offers some programs to offset education costs for teachers, these programs have diminished in value and fail to adequately address recruitment needs. To tackle rising higher education costs and mounting student loan debt, the federal government could take bold steps to ensure debt-free teacher preparation. This could include covering federal student loan payments for teachers while they are actively teaching and retiring their debt after fulfilling a service commitment in high-need fields or schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). Additional measures could involve increasing the TEACH

grant to align with the actual costs of teacher preparation, reforming punitive loan conversion penalties, and leveraging workforce development initiatives, such as registered apprenticeships and national service programs, to support educators in affording comprehensive preparation (Darling-Hammond et al.).

Expand High-Retention Pathways to Improve Teacher Preparation

The quality of teacher preparation has a significant impact on both a teacher's effectiveness and the likelihood of remaining in the profession. To address this, the federal government could adopt a strategy similar to its approach in medicine by supporting the development of high-retention pathways into teaching.

Programs such as teacher residencies, Grow Your Own initiatives, and teaching partnership schools—designed to function like teaching hospitals—are proven models for retaining teachers and enhancing their readiness for the classroom (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). A comprehensive federal effort could expand and strengthen these pathways to ensure teachers are well-prepared and more likely to stay in the profession.

To achieve this, Congress could substantially increase investments in initiatives like the Teacher Quality Partnership program, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act personnel preparation provisions, and the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence (Hawkins) Program. These programs, which help historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), and minority-serving institutions build capacity to prepare educators, received only \$240 million in federal funding in 2023—far less than some states allocate independently (Darling-Hammond et al.). Federal policymakers should prioritize larger and sustained funding increases for these initiatives while encouraging states to build infrastructure that supports high-quality, high-retention teacher preparation models.

Enhance Support for Novice Teachers Through High-Quality Mentoring

Effective mentoring and induction play a crucial role in retaining new teachers and fostering their professional growth. Research highlights that new teachers who lack adequate mentoring are twice as likely to leave the profession compared to those who are guided by expert veterans and provided with induction supports (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). Unfortunately, as of 2016, only 16 states have allocated funding for teacher induction programs. This issue is particularly pressing in under-resourced schools serving students from low-income families and students of color, where novice teachers are often concentrated, placing an additional burden on already strained schools. To address this challenge, the federal government could establish a program offering matching grants to states and districts implementing research-based mentoring and induction programs. This initiative would expand access to high-quality supports for beginning teachers, particularly in under-resourced schools, reducing attrition rates and improving outcomes for students and educators alike (Darling-Hammond et al.).

Invest in Opportunities for Educators to Expand and Share Expertise

Teachers thrive in environments that promote ongoing learning, collaboration, and opportunities to share their expertise. Research demonstrates that educators become more effective and are more likely to remain in the profession when professional development is content-rich, collaborative, job-embedded, and easily accessible (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). Expanding investments in educator expertise not only strengthens teacher effectiveness but also enhances retention, particularly in high-need schools. The federal government can support this by increasing funding for Title II-A and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which finance teacher training and professional development. Additionally, incentives could be provided to help states attract and retain experienced, highly qualified teachers—such as those certified by the National

Board for Professional Teaching Standards—who could mentor new teachers and share their expertise in high-need schools and subjects (Darling-Hammond et al.).

Encourage School Redesign to Enhance Teaching and Learning

Teachers are more likely to remain in schools where they feel equipped to support student success. This requires redesigning schools to foster strong relationships among students, educators, and families while personalizing education to meet students' unique needs. Federal support could incentivize schools to move away from outdated factory-model structures and adopt 21st-century strategies that enhance teaching and learning. Potential initiatives could include reinstating programs like the Smaller Learning Communities Program, which was previously authorized under the Improving America's Schools Act and the No Child Left Behind Act. Additionally, Congress could expand and modernize funding for the Full-Service Community Schools Program, enabling it to drive systemic change and deliver broader benefits for schools and communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023).

Reimagine School Accountability to Promote Equity and Improvement

Reforming school accountability systems is essential to fostering educational improvement and teacher retention, particularly in high-need schools. A reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently the Every Student Succeeds Act) could focus on authentic measures of school quality and equity that support continuous improvement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). This shift would move away from punitive metrics that discourage educators from working in the most challenging environments and instead provide tools and data to help schools grow and thrive. A more supportive accountability approach would align with broader efforts to improve recruitment and retention in schools serving the highest-need communities.

2.2 Real-World Government Programs Addressing Teacher Retention

Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program

The Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program, launched by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), is a targeted initiative designed to mitigate chronic teacher shortages by providing financial support to the most understaffed districts in the state; this grant empowers districts with flexibility to implement innovative, evidence-based retention strategies, such as signing bonuses, housing stipends, down-payment assistance, loan repayments, tuition support, and teacher apprenticeships or residencies (ISBE, 2024). Additionally, the program supports the sustainability of current educators by funding resources like classroom materials, coaching, and school culture initiatives.

Eligibility for the grant is based on Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) Tiers, with only districts in Tiers 1, 2, and 3 eligible for participation. Districts in Tier 4, as well as those that reported no unfilled teaching positions during the 2022-23 school year, are ineligible. A total of 170 districts have been identified to receive funding, with an equitable distribution model ensuring 60% of awards go to rural districts (102 awards) and 40% to urban districts (68 awards) (ISBE, 2024). The program's 60/40 allocation aligns with the overall composition of Tiers 1-3 statewide, and district classification follows National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) locale data to differentiate between rural and urban areas. By addressing financial and structural barriers to teacher retention, the Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program provides critical resources to help districts attract, hire, support, and retain qualified educators, ultimately strengthening the long-term stability and effectiveness of Illinois schools (ISBE).

The Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Program

The Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) program is a federally funded initiative designed to enhance high-quality teacher preparation and professional development. With approximately \$25 million in funding, the program supports undergraduate ("fifth-year") teacher preparation programs as well as teaching residency programs that recruit and train diverse candidates to serve high-need districts (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education [OESE], 2025). The TQP program consists of two primary models:

- The Pre-Baccalaureate Model, which requires partnerships to reform teacher preparation programs at higher education institutions, ensuring that new educators are well-equipped for modern classrooms.
- The Residency Model, which recruits individuals with strong academic and professional backgrounds, providing compensation in exchange for a three-year teaching commitment to promote retention in high-need districts.

Additionally, the program prioritizes school leadership development, preparing individuals for roles such as superintendents, principals, early childhood program directors, and rural school leaders who may take on multiple duties within their districts (OESE).

The TQP initiative also includes four competitive priorities aimed at: 1) Increasing Educator Diversity, 2) Supporting Professional Growth, 3) Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs, and 4) Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources (OESE, 2025). Two invitational priorities further encourage partnerships to develop Grow Your Own programs, registered apprenticeship programs for K-12 teachers, and specialized support for early elementary educators and school leaders. By fostering innovative approaches to teacher preparation and retention, the TQP program plays a crucial role in strengthening the educator pipeline, ensuring that schools—especially those in high-need areas

—have well-trained and diverse educators ready to support student success (OESE).

Section 2 Conclusion

Addressing the teacher shortage requires comprehensive, systemic action at the government and policy levels. Current conditions highlight the urgent need for strategies that go beyond temporary fixes, focusing on long-term solutions that improve teacher retention and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Government interventions, such as increasing teacher compensation, providing debt-free teacher preparation, and expanding high-retention pathways, are essential for tackling the root causes of teacher shortages. Additionally, enhancing support for novice teachers through effective mentoring programs and investing in ongoing professional development will help to retain experienced educators and improve overall teaching quality. By reimagining school accountability systems and supporting school redesign, the government can also create environments where teachers feel supported and equipped to succeed. These policy-driven strategies offer a pathway toward building a more sustainable, diverse, and effective teaching workforce, addressing both the immediate challenges of teacher shortages and the long-term health of the profession. In the next section, we will focus on strategies at the district and school level.

Section 2 Key Terms

Debt-Free Teacher Preparation - A strategy to eliminate the financial burden of teacher preparation by covering the costs of undergraduate and graduate programs, reducing the impact of student debt on recruitment and retention.

Evidence-Based Retention Strategies - New, research-supported approaches to keep teachers in the profession, such as signing bonuses, housing stipends, and loan repayments.

Federal Resources - Funding and support provided by the national government to help address educational challenges, such as teacher shortages and retention, often through grants, incentives, and program funding.

Grow Your Own Initiatives - Programs designed to recruit and train local candidates to become teachers, fostering homegrown educators who are likely to stay in the community.

High-Retention Pathways - Programs designed to support teacher preparation and retention, such as teacher residencies, which have proven to increase teacher effectiveness and reduce turnover.

Housing Subsidies - Financial assistance provided to teachers to help cover housing costs, aimed at making teaching positions more attractive and accessible.

Induction Programs - Support systems for new teachers, often involving mentoring, designed to help them integrate into the profession and reduce early-career attrition.

Mentoring Programs - Structured programs where experienced teachers guide and support novice teachers, which help improve teacher retention and effectiveness.

National Service Programs - Government-sponsored programs that provide opportunities for individuals to work in education or other sectors in exchange for benefits, such as loan forgiveness or stipends.

No Child Left Behind Act - A federal law aimed at improving educational outcomes by holding schools accountable for student performance, which previously funded programs like the Smaller Learning Communities Program.

School Redesign - The process of restructuring schools to foster better teaching and learning environments, often by moving away from outdated systems and implementing more personalized, student-centered models.

Tax Credits - Reductions in the amount of tax owed, used as a financial incentive for teachers, especially in high-need areas or for those who enter the profession.

Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Program - A federal initiative that funds teacher preparation programs, focusing on preparing educators for high-need districts and supporting ongoing professional development.

Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program - A state-funded initiative in Illinois designed to address teacher shortages by providing financial support to understaffed districts for retention efforts like signing bonuses and housing stipends.

Title II-A and Title III Funding - Federal funding programs that support teacher training, professional development, and retention efforts, as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Workforce Development Initiatives - Programs designed to help individuals, including teachers, gain the skills needed for the workforce, such as registered apprenticeships and national service programs.

Section 2 Reflection Questions

1. How does your current school or district support teachers financially?
Reflect on any challenges or benefits this might present in terms of teacher recruitment and retention.

2. What are your thoughts on debt-free teacher preparation programs? How might they impact new teachers entering the profession, particularly in high-need areas?
3. Reflect on the role of housing subsidies in teacher recruitment. Have you seen any programs that offer similar support? How do you think housing assistance would impact teachers' job satisfaction and retention?
4. How do you perceive the importance of innovative, evidence-based retention strategies such as loan forgiveness or stipends? How might these strategies work at your school or district?
5. Do you have any experiences with mentoring programs? Reflect on how mentorship has impacted your professional growth, and how it could benefit teachers in the early stages of their careers.
6. What are the pros and cons of national service programs like AmeriCorps or Teach for America in relation to teacher retention and quality in schools?
7. Consider workforce development initiatives. How could programs like registered apprenticeships be beneficial to the teaching profession? What challenges might arise in implementing these types of programs for educators?

Section 2 Activities

1. **Develop a Resource Guide for Teacher Incentives:** Create a comprehensive guide of teacher incentive programs, both local and national, and how teachers can access these resources to support their professional growth and retention.

2. **Audit Current Mentorship Programs:** Review your school's current teacher mentorship program and identify areas for improvement based on the retention strategies discussed.
3. **Analyze Teacher Turnover Data:** Collect and analyze your school's teacher turnover data over the past few years. Reflect on patterns and propose strategies for improvement.
4. **Review Financial Incentive Programs:** Research local or national programs that offer financial incentives for teachers, such as loan forgiveness or housing subsidies, and assess if any could be applied at your school.
5. **Design an Induction Program:** Based on the best practices you've read about, create a detailed induction program for new teachers that focuses on mentorship, professional growth, and community integration.
6. **Analyze Teacher Job Satisfaction Surveys:** If your school conducts job satisfaction surveys, analyze the results to identify trends in teacher satisfaction and retention. Suggest actions based on your findings.

Section 3: Strategies to Retain Teachers - District and School-Level Strategies

The strategies implemented at the district and school level are crucial in addressing the teacher shortage crisis and improving teacher retention. While national and policy-level initiatives provide the broader framework for reform, the daily experiences of teachers are shaped by the conditions and support available to them within their schools and districts. To foster a sustainable, high-quality teaching workforce, schools must prioritize creating environments that value educators, provide the necessary resources, and support teachers both professionally and personally. This section explores key strategies at the district

and school levels aimed at improving teacher retention, focusing on creating positive school climates, building trust between teachers and administration, fostering inclusivity, and promoting teacher well-being. By taking a holistic approach to support educators, districts and schools can create environments that not only retain talented teachers but also enhance their effectiveness, ultimately leading to better outcomes for students.

3.1 Fostering a Positive School Climate

Creating a supportive school climate and fostering a positive working environment are critical strategies for retaining teachers, often yielding greater impact than financial incentives alone (Hanover Research, 2021). A positive school climate encompasses several interconnected aspects of teachers' working conditions that districts and schools can strategically improve. Physical features, such as well-maintained buildings, adequate equipment, and sufficient resources, provide the foundational infrastructure that enables teachers to perform their work effectively. Beyond the physical environment, cultural features, including shared values, traditions, and norms, influence teachers' sense of belonging and commitment to their roles. Instructional features play a significant role in teacher satisfaction by shaping what they can teach. Flexible and supportive curriculum and testing policies empower teachers to focus on meaningful instruction, rather than being constrained by rigid mandates. Similarly, psychological features—such as the meaningfulness of daily tasks, opportunities for growth, and personal fulfillment—help sustain teachers' motivation and well-being. The organizational structure of a school also has a profound effect on teacher retention. Clear lines of authority, manageable workloads, appropriate autonomy, and effective supervisory arrangements support teachers in navigating their responsibilities and relationships within the school community. Political features, such as giving teachers a voice in important decision-making processes, further enhance their

sense of agency and value. Finally, sociological features—including the roles teachers play, their status within the school, and their relationships with students and peers—shape how teachers experience their work. A school climate that fosters collaboration, respect, and shared purpose contributes to higher satisfaction and long-term retention.

Trust and Transparency Between Teachers and Administration

One of the most effective strategies for reducing teacher turnover is ensuring strong and supportive school leadership. Kamrath and Bradford (2020) highlight the importance of administrative support in making a teacher's job more feasible and improving instructional effectiveness. Research has consistently shown that when teachers feel supported by their administration, they are more likely to remain in their positions. Teachers rank effective administrative support as one of the most significant factors influencing their decision to stay at a school. This support includes clear communication, professional development opportunities, mentorship, and assistance with classroom management. Researchers found that teachers' perceptions of school leadership were even stronger predictors of retention than salary or student demographics (Kamrath and Bradford). When administrators foster a collaborative and supportive work environment, teachers feel valued and are more likely to invest in their school community long-term.

Building trust and fostering positive relationships between teachers and school leaders is also a cornerstone of creating a positive school climate, which plays a pivotal role in improving teacher retention (Cells et al., 2023). Shared and distributed leadership practices have emerged as effective approaches in cultivating such trust and relationships. When principals adopt a distributed leadership model, they intentionally share decision-making authority with teachers, promoting autonomy, collaboration, and a shared sense of responsibility. These practices not only empower teachers but also mitigate

feelings of isolation or being undervalued, which are significant factors contributing to teacher attrition (Cells et al.). Research indicates that schools implementing shared leadership practices see improvements in both teacher retention and student achievement. By involving teachers in decisions about school operations and improvement efforts, leaders foster a culture of mutual respect and collaboration, reinforcing teachers' sense of professional worth. This connection creates an environment where teachers feel valued and supported, increasing their job satisfaction and likelihood of staying in the profession (Cells et al.).

The influence of a principal's leadership style on teacher retention cannot be overstated. Principals who focus on an employee-centered approach—prioritizing teacher support, resources, and professional growth—see higher retention rates among their staff (Cells et al., 2023). Studies show that when teachers feel their leaders are supportive, collaborative, and transparent in their decision-making, they are more likely to remain in the field (Urlick, 2020). Furthermore, teachers who feel acknowledged and appreciated by their leaders report greater satisfaction and are more invested in their work. Effective school leaders balance instructional leadership with strong interpersonal relationships. They provide clear communication about school improvement initiatives, ensure teachers have access to necessary resources, and foster professional development opportunities to build teacher capacity. These actions establish trust and contribute to a positive school climate where teachers feel both supported and valued. In turn, this helps to retain talented educators who might otherwise leave the profession due to feelings of disengagement or lack of support (Cells et al.).

Creating an Inclusive School Environment

Research by Lachlan-Haché et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of cultivating culturally affirming and inclusive teaching environments where educators can

bring their authentic selves to their work. These environments promote a sense of belonging and professional satisfaction, both of which are key to retaining a diverse teacher workforce. For example, Park Spanish Immersion Elementary School in suburban Minneapolis partnered with the Supporting Inclusive and Diverse Educator Environments initiative to strengthen its school culture. This effort included leadership coaching on cultural proficiency, affinity groups to foster peer support among educators, and mentorship programs to prepare teachers for inclusive practices. These strategies allowed the school to explore its cultural competency and build a more racially and ethnically inclusive environment.

Innovative staffing models also play a role in creating inclusive and collaborative workspaces. Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, in partnership with Mesa Public Schools, implemented a new co-teaching model based on Public Impact's Opportunity Culture framework. This approach leverages diverse teams of educators, including education leaders, professional teachers, community educators, and paraeducators, to enhance collaboration and teacher-student interactions. Early results show increased teacher satisfaction and improved teamwork, laying a strong foundation for teacher retention and student success (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2023).

Promoting Teacher Well-Being

Teacher well-being is critical to maintaining a stable and effective workforce. According to Hanover Research (2021), a significant majority of teachers report feeling uncertain (81%), stressed (77%), anxious (75%), and overwhelmed (74%). These emotional and psychological challenges can contribute to teacher burnout, which is one of the leading causes of attrition in the profession. It is crucial for districts and school leaders to actively address teacher well-being to reduce the likelihood of burnout and support retention efforts. One of the most effective ways to support teacher wellness is by offering comprehensive wellness programs

and mental health resources. Districts can implement wellness policies school-wide and integrate mental health-focused professional development to equip teachers with strategies to cope with the pressures of the profession. Self-care strategies, such as mindfulness practices, exercise, and ensuring a healthy work-life balance, can help mitigate stress and improve teachers' emotional resilience. In addition, self-care should be encouraged as a daily practice, enabling teachers to recognize their needs and take action before stress becomes overwhelming.

A district that has effectively supported teacher well-being is the School District of Newberry County in South Carolina. They designated Wednesdays as virtual learning days for students, allowing teachers to leave school early for self-care and planning. This initiative has been praised by teachers, who have reported feeling rejuvenated and better able to manage their responsibilities. It also emphasizes the importance of honoring teachers' professionalism and well-being, with the district board's full support. In addition to such initiatives, districts should encourage teachers to stay connected with supportive networks and provide opportunities for peer support and mentorship. School leaders must also take proactive steps to destigmatize mental health issues and lead by example, showing that caring for one's mental health is essential for personal well-being and effective leadership. Ultimately, supporting teacher well-being is not only about reducing burnout but also fostering an environment where teachers feel valued, capable, and connected to their students and colleagues. A supportive culture that includes flexible policies, adequate benefits, and opportunities for professional growth can go a long way in improving teacher retention and, by extension, student outcomes.

3.2 Increasing Pay and Financial Incentives

Financial incentives are a powerful tool, particularly when used to recognize teachers who take on challenging roles or demonstrate excellence. A significant number of educators support the idea of providing financial rewards for teachers who work in hard-to-staff schools, specialize in difficult subjects, or assume leadership roles. According to research, early-career teachers and teachers of color are particularly supportive of financial incentives tied to demonstrating excellence (Educators for Excellence, 2020). These may include receiving outstanding evaluations, making significant gains in student test scores, obtaining certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), or specializing in hard-to-fill subjects. These rewards can help recognize and support educators who are going above and beyond in their roles, further motivating them to stay in the profession.

Due to the limited flexibility in payment structures, some states and districts are exploring innovative compensation models, particularly in urban areas where workforce shortages are more pronounced (Bryant et al., 2023). Some districts have implemented pay raises to retain teachers. For example, Clark County, Nevada, offered its first teacher pay raise since 2015, while Nashville adjusted salaries in response to inflation. San Diego took another approach, introducing larger bonuses for educators. Beyond general raises, targeted programs like the Noble Network of Charter Schools' Distinguished Teacher Program in Chicago provide substantial salary increases—an additional \$10,000 annually—for teachers demonstrating excellence in areas such as student growth, classroom culture, instructional rigor, inclusion, and extended impact (Bryant et al.). Districts are also tailoring financial incentives to address specific retention challenges. Bonuses could be targeted to teachers working in high-poverty districts, younger grade levels, or high schools—segments often at higher risk for attrition. In addition, innovative staffing models, such as multiclassroom methods, are gaining

traction. These models leverage the expertise of senior teachers, allowing them to lead lessons across multiple classrooms. This strategy not only optimizes instructional quality but also provides an opportunity to increase teacher compensation by up to \$10,000 in certain cases, making it a cost-effective solution to retention issues (Bryant et al.).

Retirement Benefits

Less than half of teachers express interest in reducing their retirement benefits in exchange for higher pay or better immediate benefits, indicating that many educators prioritize the long-term security provided by a reliable retirement plan (Educators for Excellence, 2020). When asked about specific features of retirement plans, teachers express a clear preference for more control over their investments, a lower-risk approach, and features such as portability and immediate vesting. These preferences suggest that many teachers value flexibility and security in their retirement planning, particularly if they move between districts or change careers. Two of the most strongly favored features are the ability to maintain a retirement plan without penalties if teachers change districts or states and the accrual of benefits evenly throughout their careers, rather than heavily relying on decades of service. These factors are especially important given that around 16% of teachers either move schools or leave the profession each year (Educators for Excellence). If these preferences were implemented, they could improve teacher retention by providing greater financial flexibility and a more stable future for educators, ultimately contributing to a more satisfied and committed workforce.

3.3 Support Systems & Professional Development for Teacher Success

Mentoring programs are a powerful strategy for increasing teacher retention, especially when implemented as part of a comprehensive support system for educators. As cited by Cells et al. (2023), early career teachers are particularly vulnerable to attrition, with the highest rates of turnover occurring within the first five years, especially among teachers under 30 years. The first three to seven years of teaching are critical for educators to develop into effective practitioners, yet many leave the profession before reaching their full potential. Induction programs provided by districts during the first two to three years of a teacher's career lay the foundation for their professional growth. However, many new teachers require additional differentiated support tailored to their unique needs and experience level. Mentoring programs that pair early career teachers with veteran educators provide this critical support, offering guidance, collaboration, and a safe environment for professional learning. Research shows that these programs not only help teachers refine their instructional planning and practice but also contribute to their sense of belonging and job satisfaction, reducing burnout and increasing retention rates (Cells et al.).

Effective mentoring extends beyond early career support to address the needs of educators at all stages of their professional journey. Teaching experience can be divided into three stages: early career, mid-career, and late career. Each stage presents unique challenges and opportunities for growth. Mentoring programs that recognize and adapt to these differences ensure that teachers continue to develop their expertise throughout their careers. Veteran teachers, too, benefit from mentoring relationships, as they gain opportunities to reflect on their own practice, engage in meaningful collaboration, and take on leadership roles within the school community (Cells et al., 2023). Another critical benefit of mentoring programs is their ability to combat teacher burnout. Increased demands, time

constraints, and unrealistic expectations often lead to stress and emotional exhaustion, which are significant contributors to teacher attrition. By providing time and space for collaborative instructional planning and offering support through mentorship, schools create an environment that reduces burnout and fosters professional fulfillment. Teachers who are given opportunities to plan and collaborate with peers report higher satisfaction rates and are more likely to remain in the profession.

Apprenticeships for New Teachers

Effective teacher preparation is critical to long-term retention. Mehta highlights the importance of apprenticeships for new educators, likening them to medical residencies, similar to what Darling-Hammond et al. (2023) describe in discussing the role of the government in teacher retention (Christopher, 2022). Pairing first-year teachers with experienced mentors for a year of in-classroom support allows new teachers to gain confidence, refine their skills, and build a strong foundation for their careers. Unfortunately, only 20% of new teachers receive such opportunities before their first job (Christopher). Teachers who do receive such opportunities often enter the teaching profession through alternative licensing programs, which lack the preparation of a formal degree program. Expanding such apprenticeships and providing ongoing support for veteran teachers—such as classroom specialists who assist with diverse learning needs—would enhance teacher success and longevity.

Job-Embedded Professional Development

Another essential strategy for supporting teachers, particularly those entering the profession through alternative routes, is to provide job-embedded professional development tailored to their unique challenges. According to Cells et al. (2023), this support should focus on areas such as managing student behavior, effectively

teaching English language learners, and addressing the needs of students with disabilities. One key consideration is the structure and duration of existing mentoring programs. Expanding these programs to include sustained opportunities for learning through classroom observations and targeted professional development in instructional strategies and classroom management could greatly benefit second-career teachers.

While some districts, like those in Central Florida, already offer online learning modules to alternative route teachers, incorporating more practical, hands-on training could further enhance teacher efficacy and job satisfaction (Cells et al., 2023). Implementing a four-year induction program that provides consistent mentoring, professional development, and opportunities for applied learning has the potential to improve both instructional practices and teacher retention rates. By equipping teachers, particularly alternative route and second-career teachers, with the tools and resources they need to succeed, districts can create a more supportive environment that fosters long-term professional growth and satisfaction.

Multi-Classroom Models

Multi-classroom models offer a promising approach to addressing teacher workload and improving retention by creating a more collaborative and supportive teaching environment. This model helps distribute responsibilities more evenly across a team of educators, easing the strain on individual teachers and providing them with valuable professional development opportunities (Bryant et al., 2023). For example, at Ranson Middle School in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district, teachers and leaders work in teams, with leaders assigned to specific cohorts of classes, such as sixth grade language arts. These leaders divide their time between coaching teachers, co-delivering lessons, planning, and analyzing student data. This distribution of tasks ensures that teachers are not

overwhelmed with all aspects of their job, allowing them to focus on teaching and improving their instructional practices. It also helps lower-tenure teachers, who are at higher risk for attrition in their early years, by providing them with mentorship and leadership development opportunities. At Ranson Middle School, this approach has yielded impressive results, with the school ranking in the top 1 percent for overall student growth, despite its Title 1 status (Bryant et al.).

Re-Evaluate Current Succession Practices

Another recommendation for improving teacher support systems is to reevaluate current succession planning practices. Cells et al. (2023) note that some districts prioritize seniority rather than teacher evaluation or performance-based data when making decisions about job security, particularly during budget cuts. While this approach may have practical benefits, it fails to account for teacher expertise and can result in frequent reassignments, with educators being moved from one school to another year after year. This lack of stability may contribute to higher attrition rates, especially among teachers in their first three to five years of teaching. By adopting succession planning strategies that balance seniority with considerations of teacher performance and expertise, districts can promote a sense of stability and professional growth. This, in turn, could encourage teachers to remain in their positions and contribute to the long-term success of their schools.

Building Teachers' Social and Emotional Competencies

Teachers increasingly encounter problematic student behavior and mental health challenges, which can contribute to feelings of stress and burnout. To address these issues, districts should prioritize the development of teachers' social and emotional learning competencies (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2023). Schools like J. Sterling Morton High School District 201 in Cicero, Illinois, and Pasco County

Schools in Florida, are embedding SEL standards into their curricula and daily instruction. This approach integrates SEL into teacher practices, classroom culture, and overall school climate, helping educators manage challenges more effectively.

Instructional coaches in these districts play a pivotal role in supporting SEL by co-planning lessons, modeling effective strategies, and providing feedback to teachers on their SEL practices. Additionally, a self-assessment tool developed in partnership with National University helps educators reflect on their own social and emotional skills. Teachers can further enhance these competencies through asynchronous online modules offered by Inspire: Leading in Learning and the American Institutes for Research (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2023). These modules cover topics such as the neuroscience of emotions, teamwork, self-regulation, and problem-solving, equipping teachers with tools to better address classroom challenges.

Building Leadership Skills

School and district leaders also face significant challenges, including managing stress, addressing student learning loss, and advancing equity. Supporting leaders to develop their skills not only benefits the leaders themselves but also positively impacts teachers and students. Programs such as those offered by Loyola Marymount University's Institute of School Leadership & Administration integrate critical topics like equity, culturally responsive pedagogy, and SEL across their leadership preparation curriculum (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2023). This comprehensive approach ensures that principals and other administrators are better equipped to foster inclusive and supportive school environments that promote teacher retention. Collaborative efforts like the Educator Preparation Laboratory, led by the Learning Policy Institute and the Bank Street Graduate School of Education, bring together teacher and principal preparation programs to develop systemic, equity-focused models. These initiatives prepare educators to

apply responsive and inclusive practices, laying the foundation for supportive school climates and long-term retention.

3.4 Improving Working Conditions Beyond Pay, Culture and Climate

Improving teacher retention begins with creating supportive, sustainable working conditions that acknowledge and address the challenges educators face. The following strategies, based on insights from Christopher (2022), offer actionable solutions to enhance teachers' professional experiences and foster a more positive and productive environment.

Provide More Planning Time

Teachers in the United States spend an average of 1,100 hours per year in front of students—double the amount of classroom time compared to teachers in Japan. This leaves little opportunity for essential activities like planning, collaboration, and building relationships with students. Mehta argues that this imbalance reflects a broader societal undervaluing of time for reflection, creativity, and teamwork (Christopher, 2022). Expecting teachers to plan solely during their personal time is not sustainable and contributes to burnout. Allocating structured planning time during the school day would allow teachers to engage in thoughtful preparation and collaboration, leading to more effective teaching and greater job satisfaction.

Trust Teachers' Professional Judgment

Teaching has become increasingly bureaucratic, leaving many educators feeling constrained by rigid guidelines and excessive assessments. Christopher (2022) emphasizes that teaching is not just about implementing instructional techniques;

it requires creativity and professional judgment. Allowing teachers greater flexibility and autonomy to adapt lessons to meet their students' needs fosters intrinsic rewards and professional growth. For instance, providing teachers the freedom to deviate from pacing guides or focus less on standardized testing can empower them to prioritize meaningful learning experiences. Bright, capable individuals are drawn to professions where they can grow and express themselves; teaching should be no exception.

Recognize Teachers' Workload

Acknowledging the growing demands placed on teachers is a vital step in supporting them. Christopher (2022) emphasizes the importance of providing practical support, such as using occasional staff meeting time for teachers to complete tasks like grading and finalizing progress reports. Simple gestures like these show that school leaders understand the pressures teachers face and are committed to easing their workload wherever possible.

- **Cross-Coverage Models:** To alleviate concerns about overwork, districts might explore implementing a cross-coverage model. For instance, at Treadwell Elementary in Memphis, school administrators and other staff members step in to cover classes, allowing teachers to avoid additional workload without sufficient breaks or planning time (Bryant et al., 2023). Combined with initiatives such as professional development and staff social events, this support system has helped the school maintain an impressive 90 percent teacher retention rate, even during the challenges of the pandemic.

Provide More Time for Collaboration

Research highlights that fostering an environment of collegiality and collaboration can have a significant positive impact on teacher retention. By continuing to

allocate funding and time to support these collaborative efforts, districts can create meaningful opportunities for teachers to think and plan together, enhancing the overall school experience (Cells et al., 2023). Addressing time as a persistent barrier in education is essential for supporting educators and improving outcomes for students on local, state, and national levels.

Section 3 Conclusion

Teacher shortages present a significant challenge at the district and school levels, directly affecting both educational quality and equity. Addressing these shortages requires more than just broad policy interventions; it requires intentional efforts to create supportive, positive environments within schools and districts. Key strategies include fostering strong relationships between teachers and administrators, promoting a culture of inclusivity, and prioritizing teacher well-being. Additionally, ensuring that teachers feel valued, supported, and equipped with the resources they need to succeed is essential for improving retention rates. By focusing on these internal strategies, districts and schools can build a more stable and supportive teaching workforce.

Section 3 Key Terms

Co-Teaching - A staffing model in which two or more educators share responsibility for teaching a group of students, fostering collaboration and enhancing instructional practices.

Culturally Affirming Environment - A teaching environment that values and reflects the cultural backgrounds and identities of both students and teachers.

District-Level Strategies - Approaches implemented at the district level to improve teacher retention, such as offering professional development, providing resources, and fostering supportive school climates.

Financial Incentives - Monetary rewards offered to teachers for demonstrating excellence, working in hard-to-staff schools, or assuming challenging roles.

Inclusive Teaching Environment - A classroom or school environment where diverse students feel valued and respected, and teachers can bring their authentic selves to their work.

Instructional Coaches - Educators who support teachers by providing feedback, modeling teaching strategies, and guiding them in instructional practices, including social and emotional learning.

Job-Embedded Professional Development - Professional development integrated into teachers' daily work, providing real-time learning opportunities through collaboration, observations, and mentoring.

Leadership Development - Programs designed to help teachers and school leaders build skills in areas such as equity, culturally responsive pedagogy, and social and emotional learning.

Mentoring Programs - Structured systems of support in which experienced educators help guide and support newer teachers, promoting professional growth and reducing burnout.

Multi-Classroom Models - Staffing structures that involve teams of educators working together to share teaching responsibilities, which reduces workload and fosters professional collaboration.

Professional Development - Ongoing training and learning opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills and instructional practices.

Retention - The ability of a school or district to keep its teachers in their positions over time, which is impacted by various factors like administrative support and working conditions.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) - Programs that focus on developing teachers' and students' social and emotional competencies, such as self-regulation, teamwork, and problem-solving.

Support Systems - Structures put in place to assist teachers in their professional development, well-being, and work-life balance, such as mentoring, coaching, and wellness programs.

Teacher Well-Being - The emotional, psychological, and physical health of teachers, which affects their ability to be effective educators and influences their decision to stay in the profession.

Section 3 Reflection Questions

1. Reflecting on the relationship between trust and transparency in schools, how do you think effective administrative support can impact teacher retention in your district or school?
2. How can you contribute to creating a more inclusive and culturally affirming environment in your school or district? What steps would you take to make sure teachers feel their authentic selves are valued in the school culture?
3. Consider how innovative staffing models (like co-teaching) can reduce teacher workload and improve collaboration. How might this model be adapted in your school to support teacher retention?

4. Reflect on your own experiences with teacher well-being. What wellness initiatives or support systems have you found effective in preventing burnout? How could these be enhanced in your school or district?
5. How can job-embedded professional development, particularly for teachers from alternative routes, be structured to support ongoing growth and retention?
6. How could succession planning in your district be adapted to prioritize teacher performance and expertise over seniority? What impact could this have on teacher stability and retention in your school?
7. Reflect on your own social and emotional skills. How could developing these competencies help you navigate challenges in your teaching role and improve your overall job satisfaction?
8. In what ways can leadership development programs in your district or school support principals and educators in fostering an inclusive, supportive environment? What leadership qualities do you think are most important for retaining teachers in your school?
9. How do you perceive the relationship between teacher workload and job satisfaction? What changes could be made in your school to improve working conditions and reduce burnout, especially regarding planning time and workload management?

Section 3 Activities

1. **Design a New Teacher Mentorship Plan:** Create a mentorship plan that you believe would help new teachers feel supported and prepared for their role. Outline key components such as meeting frequency, topics, and available resources.

2. **Develop a Teacher Support Network:** Start a teacher support group or online network at your school where teachers can share resources, advice, and provide emotional support to each other.
3. **Organize a Teacher Wellness Event:** Plan and facilitate a teacher wellness event or professional development day focusing on mental health, stress management, or self-care.
4. **Explore Financial Incentive Models:** Research the financial incentives used by other districts or schools and create a proposal for integrating these incentives into your district's policies.
5. **Collaborate on Multi-Classroom Model Implementation:** Work with other teachers or administrators to design a multi-classroom model that could reduce workload and increase collaboration.
6. **Observe an Inclusive Teaching Environment:** Visit a classroom known for its inclusive practices, observing how diversity is integrated into lessons and how teachers create a culturally affirming environment.
7. **Review Succession Planning Practices:** Analyze your school's current succession planning strategies and create recommendations for improvements that prioritize teacher performance and expertise.
8. **Research and Implement Social-Emotional Learning Practices:** Research SEL strategies and create a plan for integrating them into your teaching practice, with a focus on improving both your students' and your own emotional competencies.

Course Conclusion

The teacher shortage crisis is one of the most pressing challenges facing the U.S. education system, with far-reaching consequences for students, schools, and communities. Throughout this course, we have explored the complex factors driving teacher attrition, from systemic barriers to the daily realities of burnout, low compensation, and workplace stress. We have also examined a range of solutions, from broad policy reforms to school- and district-level initiatives designed to create more supportive environments for educators. Addressing this crisis requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes both immediate and long-term strategies. Government policies play a crucial role in shaping the teaching profession, providing necessary funding, and implementing reforms that improve working conditions. At the same time, districts and schools must foster environments where teachers feel valued, supported, and equipped to succeed. Strengthening administrative support, improving school climates, and investing in mentorship and professional development are key steps toward improving teacher retention.

Ultimately, retaining educators is not just about filling vacancies—it is about ensuring that students have access to high-quality, experienced teachers who can help them succeed. Schools thrive when teachers thrive. As education professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders, it is our collective responsibility to implement meaningful changes that make teaching a sustainable and fulfilling career. By applying the insights and strategies discussed in this course, we can work toward a more stable, effective, and resilient teaching workforce—one that benefits both educators and the students they serve.

Case Example

Mr. Finch, a dedicated middle school science teacher, has always been passionate about fostering curiosity and critical thinking in his students. Teaching in a high-need urban district, he is committed to making science engaging and accessible for all learners. However, due to the ongoing teacher shortage, Mr. Finch faces numerous challenges that threaten both his well-being and the quality of education he can provide.

Challenges

1. Increased Workload and Larger Class Sizes:

Due to unfilled vacancies at his school, Mr. Finch's class sizes have grown significantly. With nearly 35 students per class, he struggles to provide individualized support and effective hands-on learning experiences. The increased grading, lesson planning, and classroom management demands are overwhelming, leaving him with little time for professional development or collaboration with colleagues.

2. Lack of Administrative Support and Resources:

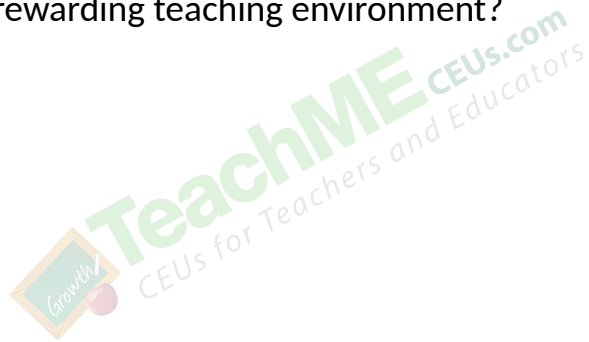
With limited funding and staffing shortages, Mr. Finch often lacks access to updated lab materials and technology. Additionally, he receives minimal support from administrators, who are equally strained by the district-wide staffing crisis. When he raises concerns about student behavior and engagement, he is encouraged to "make do with what he has," leaving him feeling undervalued and unheard.

3. Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion:

The growing pressures of his role—combined with a lack of work-life balance—have led Mr. Finch to experience burnout. He often stays late to

catch up on grading and lesson planning, yet still feels like he is not meeting the needs of his students. With little time for self-care or personal interests, he is beginning to question whether he can sustain a long-term career in education.

Consider how Mr. Finch's school could address these challenges. What strategies might help him manage his workload while maintaining high-quality instruction? How could his school and district implement policies that provide more support for educators facing burnout? What role could mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and administrative interventions play in improving teacher retention? Finally, how might systemic changes—such as increased funding, improved teacher salaries, and workload adjustments—help create a more sustainable and rewarding teaching environment?



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