



Vermont
Superintendents
Association



Concepts for Strengthening and Supporting the Educator Workforce in Vermont 03/03/22

Introduction

Educator shortages existed long before the pandemic, are likely to grow as a result of the pandemic, and will persist for years to come. However, the nation and Vermont have a unique opportunity to invest in strategies to alleviate educator workforce shortages using funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II & ESSER III)¹.

The Vermont [Workforce Investment Board](#) has identified the significant workforce needs across all sectors in Vermont. While the education sector is not unique in need, it is unique as a foundational block for all other industry workforces. Concentrated attention and effort to the educator workforce crisis is sequentially strategic in attending to the issue as a whole by ensuring fully staffed and effective public schools and also as a recruitment tool for other industries to bring new workers to Vermont.

This brief synthesizes recommendations from Vermont education leaders and shares promising strategies from other states to be considered by state lawmakers, state and local education agencies, and higher education leaders.

1. Retain the current educator workforce in Vermont:

POLICY

Allow time for education systems to implement existing education policy with fidelity. As seen throughout the pandemic, local education agencies are responsible for far more than education, displaying Herculean efforts to support the wellbeing of students and their families every day. Each year new legislation adds to the tremendous responsibilities of education leaders, teachers, and support staff. At a time when open positions remain unfilled, school systems should not be asked to take on more. Assigning new duties and tasks to personnel without removing existing responsibilities only risks more burnout and high-quality educators leaving the profession.

¹ [Resource: [An Opportunity to Invest in the Educator Workforce](#); [Tools for Solving the Teacher Shortage](#)]

PENSIONS

Stabilize the pension fund. Pension obligations need to be honored to both prevent early retirement of educators and attract qualified educators from neighboring states.

GOVERNANCE STANDARDS

Develop school district governance standards. Some school districts around the state are contending with challenging governance dynamics. Divisive issues and contentious debate that have little to do with sound education governance create a negative climate within communities and affect people going into teaching, administration, and school board leadership. The state legislature and board of education should require clear governance standards².

RETIREES

Enact the retiree bill ([H.572](#)). Retired educators willing to support school systems during times of need are hamstrung by the minimal amount of income they can earn. The bill would allow retired educators to come out of retirement for a limited time period to fill a hard-to-staff position and still receive their full pension. During their time of employment, they would pay into the retirement system. This is a win/win proposition.

TEACHER TO ADMINISTRATOR PIPELINE

Create teacher to administrator mentoring and compensation programs. Creating more robust pathways to administrative roles could both improve critical shortages in leadership positions and promote a greater sense of purpose and autonomy for existing teacher leaders, particularly if programs are coupled with additional pay for taking on leadership tasks. For example, the [Iowa Teacher Leadership and Compensation System](#) empowers the strongest teachers as instructional leaders, offers additional professional training and compensation, and enhances top teachers' career potential and longevity in the profession.

LOAN FORGIVENESS

Fund loan forgiveness programs. The legislature could allocate federal funds to create a loan forgiveness program that encourages longevity and incentivizes working in rural and economically disadvantaged communities. Loan forgiveness should go above and beyond federal programs.

NEW EDUCATOR SUPPORT

Promote and fund mentoring and induction programs for early career educators. Effective training and support for new teachers increases retention and improves student learning (e.g. [Atteberry, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013](#)). For example, the [Oklahoma State Department of Education's Teacher Induction Program](#) supports first-year teachers through professional learning workshops, instructional coaching, and mentoring support from trained veteran educators. Programs could supplement district-wide professional development opportunities.

² [Resource: [Board of Education Governance Standards from Michigan State Board of Education](#)]

[Teacher residencies](#) allow teacher candidates and early career teachers to work alongside an expert educator for pay in exchange for a commitment to work in that district after their residency. Residencies are shown by research to both accelerate students' learning and keep teachers in the profession. [Believe and Prepare](#) from the Louisiana Department of Education expanded teacher preparation programs to include a yearlong residency program and financially incentivized programs that focused on rural partnerships.

2. Recruit new and out-of-state educators to work in Vermont:

INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Create out-of-state incentive programs. The Governor instituted the [Vermont Remote Worker Grant Program](#) to attract out-of-state workers to the state. A similar relocation program could grant money for educators, social services professionals, and related service providers to move to the state and work for a minimum number of years.

DIVERSIFYING EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

Use existing resources. Utilize the results of the [Diversifying Educator Workforce](#) report to enact the suggestions outlined for recruitment and retention efforts.

COMPETITIVE SALARIES & BENEFITS

Meet or exceed the benefits of neighboring states. The benefits and salaries of all Vermont school districts have to be competitive within the region. The [S.211](#) Study Committee should compare salaries and benefits with neighboring states and create recommendations for how Vermont can be more competitive statewide. Additionally, we need to strengthen our pension system so that it is competitive in the region. Right now, Vermont's pension system is a disincentive compared to our regional neighbors.

LOAN FORGIVENESS (see section 1)

HOUSING

Think about housing programs. Anecdotal accounts from school administrators have cited instances where they have successfully recruited out-of-state employees only to have them withdraw their commitment due to the inability to secure housing. Nationwide strategies include, teacher-focused affordable apartment complexes (e.g. [Teacher's Village in Newark](#)) and mortgage, down payment, and rent assistance programs (e.g. [Good Neighbor Next Door](#), [Teacher Next Door Program](#)). The affordable housing crisis in Vermont extends beyond the educator workforce, however, and should be treated as such.

3. Attract new talent to the workforce:

GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS

Fund statewide and local "Grow-Your-Own" and alternative routes to licensure programs. Grow-Your-Own (GYO) Programs partner state, district, and educator preparation programs to

attract local community members, paraprofessionals, and middle/high school students into the teaching profession. Missouri, for example, included grant funding for LEAs to develop and strengthen GYO programs in [their ESSER plan](#). Programs should support candidates financially in exchange for a commitment to work in Vermont communities for a minimum number of years and can be targeted to specific geographic areas and teaching specialties.

GYO local and state programs can support paraprofessionals on their path to licensure by reducing financial and time barriers (e.g. [NYC Department of Education Pathways for Paraprofessionals](#), [Tennessee's GYO](#)). In Vermont, local programs and the AOE can support paraeducators through the alternative licensure process through robust mentoring, paying or waiving fees, and creating a supportive cohort model to connect with peers going through the process. Adult education programs within our CTE's can be a vital part of this work.

Partnerships between higher education and LEAs should focus on supporting individuals interested in transitioning to the teaching profession by allowing them to still earn an income while pursuing licensure. [Delaware's Masters Plus Certification Program](#) allows individuals with Bachelor's degrees to earn teacher certification in Delaware while working as a paraprofessional full-time in year one and a teacher full-time in year two.

The Vermont legislature and Agency of Education can also prioritize federal funding to incentivize CTE programs to develop, strengthen, and promote Education and Human Services programs. These programs could leverage dual enrollment and internships with local schools.

Direct collaboration and support of Vermont CTEs that are actively engaged in developing educational programs and high school internships for the 2022-23 school year. This group would benefit from dedicated incentive funding for participating students and coordination support among the CTEs with related partners (dual enrollment partners, internship support at Department of Labor, licensure scaffolding).

Some evidence suggests that GYO programs might also help to support Teachers of Color to enter the workforce, when programs (1) "affirm their humanity and allow them to persist," (2) create meaningful collaborations with community partners to support retention, (3) have sustainable funding, (4) and empowers participants to actualize their potential to transform students' learning experiences ([Gist et al., 2019](#)).

LICENSURE

Support licensure access. The licensing process needs greater flexibility and accessibility to create more opportunities for more people to attain licensure and/or additional endorsements. Innovative solutions in this area could include, but are not limited to: leeway for career-changers and emergency use of educator license, reducing cost barriers, ease of access and usage, multilingual access, identified paraeducator standards, and increased reciprocity. Within this work, collaborate with the [Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators](#).

4. Consider key partners of PK-12 education systems:

POST-SECONDARY

Include representatives from VSAC and the Vermont College and University System in the study committee proposed in [S.211](#). As stated previously, it is critical that strong partnerships are formed between the PK-12 school system and higher education to create and promote innovative solutions to workforce shortages.

Provide additional state funding to colleges and universities committed to increasing the educator and human services workforce. The legislature could use funding from federal sources and/or the state General Fund to create a competitive grant program to incentivize higher education institutions to proactively contribute to innovative solutions to Vermont's educator workforce shortage. An example of the kind of program that may be possible is an [Earn and Learn](#) program for college educated professionals to more readily shift to the educational field while earning educator training and credentialing in focused and expedited pathways.

MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Prioritize the mental health system. Provide adequate funding outside of a reliance on the Education Fund to Mental Health Designated Agencies. The need for increases in intensive mental health services and DCF support for families has grown exponentially in the last three school years, while their respective staffing levels and available services have decreased. As an example of state level prioritization, Nevada is using federal funding for a [grant program](#) to increase mental health professionals in high-need schools through recruitment, retention, and respecialization strategies.

AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Invest in more robust support structures at the state level. Support an increase in funding and infrastructure for the Agency of Education to serve and support practitioners in the field.

STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP

Commit leadership to the issue. Given the importance and magnitude of the challenge, and the potential for achieving educational, societal, and economic benefits if the challenge is met, this effort deserves a coordinated and well-organized approach reflecting strong leadership.

This leadership should come from the Administration, General Assembly, and the Field.

Some of the concepts referenced above are actively being pursued. Coordination arranged by the state with legislative support would provide a basis for better utilization of resources, measuring effectiveness, and sustained focus on the issue.