

TO: House Committee on Education
FROM: Colin Robinson, Political Director, Vermont-NEA
DATE: January 23, 2025
SUBJECT: Educator Workforce

Context:

- Pre-dates the pandemic: The teacher workforce shortage, both in Vermont and nationwide, existed prior to the pandemic but has been significantly exacerbated by the pandemic. This is more acute in specific areas of instruction, like special education, and again this pre-dated the pandemic.
- Fewer people pursuing a career in education: Nationwide, the percentage of first year college students pursuing education has dropped by approximately 50% over the past 15 years.
- Difficult to retain teachers prior to the pandemic: We know that 50% of new teachers leave the profession after 5 years.
- High number of provisional and emergency licenses: Currently 800 teachers are working under emergency and provisional licenses.
- School support staff vacancies are very high: School support staff – paraeducators, bus drivers, food service workers, behavioral interventions, custodians – are critical to meeting the needs of students, but are very difficult to attract and retain.
- Lack of substitute teachers: There are very few available substitute teachers, if any, in some areas. This results in teachers, support staff and administrators doing their best of fill in gaps with an increased workload. With a difficult flu season and COVID still very present staff absences can be even more difficult to cover.
- Student and staff mental health: The pandemic had significant impacts on the mental health of our students, families and school staff. Our systems of mental health for students in the community is broken and while schools do their best, there are acute needs that impact students’ ability to learn. It also has a direct impact on the health of educators and their ability to teach kids, resulting in burnout.
- Compensation and working conditions: There is a long-documented teacher pay gap in the nation and in Vermont. Pay for school support staff continues to be low, as compared to other jobs that may be available. We also know that persistent challenging working conditions due to understaffing and the challenges to meet the complex needs of all students are impactful on recruitment and retention of educators.

Programmatic Updates:

- **GrowVT-ED (Grow Your Own Program):** In August 2022 Vermont-NEA launched a “grow your own” teacher training program called GrowVT-ED which was built at the request of with seven Northeast Kingdom school districts but was made available to educators across the state. This program provides training and supports to educators working on a provisional license to in one year complete the Agency of Education Peer Review process and to attain their teaching license. The target participants for this program are workers who may already be working in a school like para-educators but lack a full teaching license to build a teaching career and

find permanent work. This includes individuals who may currently be on emergency or provisional licenses. The program to date has supported nearly 200 teachers. The program is run by Vermont-NEA Director of Professional Program Dr. Juliette Longchamp. See the full January 2025 GrowVT-ED update from Dr. Julie Longchamp on the Committee website and learn more at www.growvted.org

- **Student Loan Forgiveness/Grant Pipeline Program** – As you hear from VSAC this program has been extremely well received, and we were glad to work with the Education Committees and VSAC on the development of this program. We support additional appropriation of funding to support this.
- **NEK Teacher Apprenticeship Program** – We have been happy to support and partner in this work with VREC, AOE, and VTDOL. We see the expansion of this program to the rest of the state as an exciting opportunity to support the growth of new teachers.