

# Solving the Teacher Shortage How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators

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## Abstract

A highly competent teacher workforce is a necessary foundation for improving children's educational outcomes, especially for those who rely most on schools for their success. Yet in the United States, shortages in the teaching force have been growing across the country, reaching crisis proportions in some teaching fields—such as mathematics, science, and special education—and in locations where wages and working conditions are least attractive.(01)

This brief reports on a research review that finds that the most effective policies for attracting and retaining strong educators include increasing their compensation and improving their preparation, professional support, and working conditions, as well as improving district and school management practices that otherwise create obstacles to recruitment and retention. We describe research-based strategies at the district, state, and federal levels that can be used to enable schools to strengthen teacher quality.

## Introduction

Attracting and retaining excellent educators is one of the most important drivers of a well-functioning education system—a system that must prepare diverse students with complex needs to participate in today's knowledge-driven economy. However, a recent surge in the demand for teachers, alongside a diminishing supply and a steady rate of teachers leaving the profession, threatens students' academic and economic welfare.(03) Teachers who leave the profession prematurely hurt student learning(04) and cost taxpayers. For example, one study found that replacing teachers who leave—which can cost in today's dollars as much as \$20,000 per teacher in a large urban district—produces a national price tag of \$8.5 billion a year.(05)

Recruiting and retaining excellent educators is especially urgent in schools serving concentrations of low-income students and students of color, because teacher attrition disproportionately impacts their schools.(06) In 2012–13, almost one in 10 teachers in high-poverty public schools left the profession. In contrast, fewer than one in 15 teachers in low-poverty schools did so.(07) The persistently higher rates of turnover in high-poverty, high-minority schools contribute to a concentration of inexperienced and underprepared teachers in these schools.(08)

The federal government, states, and districts must invest in comprehensive human capital systems to prepare and retain competent and committed teachers for long-term careers in the classroom. The policies pursued will influence the quality of the nation's more than 3.1 million

public school teachers(09) and have long-term impacts on student learning, especially for students in the most underserved communities.

Based on a review of an extensive body of research on teacher recruitment and retention, we identify five major factors, and related policies, that influence teachers' decisions to enter, stay in, or leave the teaching profession. Those factors are:

1. Salaries and other compensation.
2. Preparation and costs to entry.
3. Hiring and personnel management.
4. Induction and support for new teachers.
5. Working conditions, including school leadership, professional collaboration and shared decision-making, accountability systems, and resources for teaching and learning.

## Preparation and Costs to Entry

Having strong preparation for teaching enhances teachers' sense of efficacy and their effectiveness, improving student outcomes.(17) Strong preparation also increases the likelihood that teachers will remain in the profession.(18) A comprehensive preparation typically includes observing others teaching, student teaching at least a full semester, receiving feedback, taking courses in teaching methods, learning theory, and selecting instructional materials. Teachers who enter the profession without these elements of preparation have been found to be two to three times more likely to leave the profession than those who are comprehensively prepared.(19)

In spite of the benefits of comprehensive preparation for teachers and their students, a growing share of teachers are entering the profession before having completed, or sometimes even begun, their training.(20) These teachers are disproportionately concentrated in low-performing schools serving large proportions of low-income and minority students.(21) Given the rising costs of higher education, including teacher training, and the lack of access to financial aid, many prospective teachers may rationally choose pathways in which they can earn a salary while undergoing training, rather than taking on debt they must repay while earning a low salary. Evidence shows that willingness to enter a lower-paying field is tied to the level of debt candidates must carry.(22) Accordingly, the cost of comprehensive preparation coupled with an often low salary contributes to many teachers entering the classroom unprepared, negatively influencing student outcomes, and culminating in teachers leaving the profession.

# Induction and Support for New Teachers

After districts hire talented teachers, strong induction and support for novice teachers can increase their retention, accelerate their professional growth, and improve student learning.(31) The most effective induction programs include mentoring, coaching, and feedback from experienced teachers in the same subject area or grade level as the novice teacher; the opportunity for novice teachers to observe expert teachers; orientation sessions, retreats, and seminars for novice teachers; and reduced workloads and extra classroom assistance for novice teachers.(32) Teachers who receive this set of supports have been found to stay in teaching at rates more than twice those of teachers who lack these supports.(33) However, only a small proportion of teachers receive this comprehensive system of support.(34)

Although mentoring and induction programs have become more widely available in the United States over the past two decades, there is great variability in the quality of these programs. High-poverty schools tend to have weaker programs, which is where early career teachers generally face more complex and diverse student needs and challenges.(35)

To improve the recruitment and retention of excellent teachers:

**States and districts** can invest in high-quality induction programs. States and districts can develop induction and mentoring programs using ESSA Title II funds and competitive grant funds, such as the Supporting Effective Educator Development program.

