



**Testimony of the  
Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)**

**Public Hearing Regarding  
The Educator Shortage**

**Presented to the  
House Education Committee  
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**By  
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Good afternoon, Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Topper, and members of the House Education Committee. I am Rich Askey, President of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA). I want to begin by first expressing our gratitude for your inviting PSEA to share our perspective on the educator shortage, but more importantly, for hosting this vital conversation. I hear from PSEA members every week about the challenges they face in their schools and how staffing challenges impact the day-to-day operations of schools, the delivery of instruction, and the overall quality of teaching and learning environments.

The educator shortage is a crisis - not an ideological wedge issue. All parents want their children to learn from effective and properly trained educators and to have access to the support of staff like school nurses or counselors when they need it. Taking steps to implement a cohesive and bipartisan strategy to address the educator shortage now, and in years to come, is something we can all agree is a priority.

### **BACKGROUND DATA**

I have been an educator for more than 30 years-long enough to remember when Pennsylvania was considered an exporter of teachers, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s. That is not the case today. Based on the most recently available data from the Department of Education (PDE), Pennsylvania has experienced a 64 percent decline in the number of Instructional I certificates issued to in-state graduates between 2010 and 2021. PSEA has been sounding the alarm on this drastic decline in our pipeline, but let's consider two other important factors that shed light on the severity and nature of this educator shortage. First, during that same eleven-year period, there has been a 200 percent increase in the number of emergency permits issued.

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>In-State Certificates Issued</u></b>	<b><u>Out-of-State Certificates Issued</u></b>	<b><u>Emergency Permits (Types 1 and 4)</u></b>
2010-2011	15,031	2,080	1,845
2011-2012	13,503	1,396	896
2012-2013	16,614	2,343	1,214
2013-2014	9,893	1,290	1,165
2014-2015	8,751	1,329	1,377
2015-2016	8,271	1,402	1,971
2016-2017	4,412	992	2,972

2017-2018	5,842	1,076	3,783
2018-2019	5,505	1,125	4,330
2019-2020	5,128	878	4,665
2020-2021	5,440	1,101	5,958

Source: PDE – Act 82 Report. <https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Pages/Act82.aspx>.

Second, a deeper dive into the data demonstrates that “teacher attrition does not appear to be the primary driver of the shortage of teachers in Pennsylvania.”<sup>1</sup> An analysis of the data indicates that annual teacher attrition from 2014-15 to 2021-22 ranges from 7.5 to 6.0. In fact, Pennsylvania is below the national average for teacher attrition.<sup>2</sup> Attrition is greatest at the beginning of an educator’s career and as they approach retirement age based on years of service. In addition, the difference in the attrition rates in school districts vs. charter schools is stark, with the rate of charter school teachers leaving the profession being “at least double the rates of teachers in school districts.”<sup>3</sup>

### **This situation is simply not sustainable.**

All of this data tells us a few things:

1. Pennsylvania has a supply problem. The commonwealth is not producing enough teachers to meet demand.
2. If teachers are going to exit the profession, they will most likely do it within the first three years of their career.
3. Charter schools have a more substantial issue with attrition than school districts.

Why don’t young people want to become educators? How do we recruit the next generation of educators? How do we better support our early career educators? We need to ask these questions loudly and swiftly to devise solutions.

### **REBUILDING THE EDUCATOR PIPELINE**

#### ***Substitute Teachers***

In the short term, the lack of substitutes represents one of the most pressing of pipeline needs. Here are some examples of what is happening in schools:

<sup>1</sup> Fuller, Ph.D., Ed. Pennsylvania Teacher Staffing Challenges Fall 2022. The Pennsylvania State University Department of Education Policy Studies. Page 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Fuller, Ph.D., Ed. Pennsylvania Teacher Staffing Challenges Fall 2022. The Pennsylvania State University Department of Education Policy Studies. Page 11.

- Students have been reassigned to large study halls in cafeterias and auditoriums at the secondary level for asynchronous instruction on an iPad or laptop, whereas elementary classes are being split and assigned to other classrooms for the day.
- Teachers are losing lunch and prep periods to cover other classrooms. Not only are they losing valuable time to plan instruction, but they are also losing equally precious time to have a mental break. Their days are truly non-stop.
- Sometimes, when a teacher is absent, multiple teachers cover a single class at various points throughout the day because a single substitute is not available.
- Administrators are providing coverage as a desperate last effort to have an adult in the room.

Fortunately, the General Assembly responded with Act 91 of 2021, which provided some much-needed relief. PSEA was proud to draft HB 412 and the Senate amendment, which became Act 91, widening the pool of potential substitutes, streamlining the process for retired educators to return to the classroom, and allowing for the designation of classroom monitors. This was a necessary band-aid to help alleviate the current crisis and will hopefully provide teachers and administrators with some relief. Some of the law's provisions were purposefully temporary. We are looking forward to the report from PDE that is supposed to be released by this Saturday. The report will provide information on how schools used the classroom monitor permit to provide classroom coverage, but also if they responded to demand by increasing substitute teacher pay and making it worthwhile for people to take on those roles.

### ***Scholarships/Loan Forgiveness***

Fixing the longer-term educator pipeline is going to take a sustained, multi-year commitment. It should be informed by data and feedback from current and aspiring educators, as well as high school students considering the profession.

One such group that PSEA is listening to is our aspiring educators. PSEA enjoys the honor of representing 7,000 future educators who are actively enrolled in teacher preparation programs. They would be the first to tell you that the excessive cost of attaining a bachelor's degree has been one of the greatest barriers for individuals seeking to enter and remain in the teaching profession. Forty-five percent of today's educators took out student loans to finance their education with a total average loan amount of \$55,580.<sup>4</sup> Sixteen percent of Black educators who used student loans borrowed \$105,000 or more compared to 11 percent of White educators.<sup>5</sup> Long-term income projections and the ability to afford student loan payments, housing, transportation, and other necessities and accomplish personal life goals are things everyone considers when they plan their future. The near constant attacks on educators by groups in their

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<sup>4</sup> "Student Loan Debt Among Educators: A National Crisis." July 2021. National Education Association and the Center for Enterprise Strategy. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/Student%20Loan%20Debt%20among%20Educators.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

communities, the changes to the retirement system, and the failure of school districts to keep up with the private sector in terms of starting salaries for similarly-educated professionals have not encouraged the next generation to commit their talents to public schools.

The federal Teacher Loan Forgiveness is just beginning to take the edge off the impact of student loans for teachers. For individuals who teach full time for five complete and consecutive academic years in a low-income school, and meet other qualifications, they could be eligible for forgiveness of up to \$17,500 on Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans and Subsidized and Unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loans. This program provides much needed relief, but significant student debt still remains.

### ***Student Teacher Stipends***

Our future teachers would also tell you that the traditional student-teaching model is an emerging barrier. Pennsylvania requires a 12-week student teacher experience. There are three concerns with these programs. First, for both traditional and non-traditional students, a lack of income for a semester is often not feasible, especially for those living independently and/or lacking family support. In fact, some higher education institutions require students to sign contracts stating they will not engage in full-time or part-time work during their student teacher experience. The traditional student-teaching model does not contemplate the current economic conditions of our society.

Second, student-teaching placements are not guaranteed to be local for the student teacher. In fact, depending on availability candidates can be forced to travel over an hour each way to their placement. This might seem insignificant to you and me but put yourself in the shoes of a 21-year-old who is trying to pay for housing, keep up with transportation costs, and get back to their campus for other course responsibilities following their student teaching day.

Third, current educators are not jumping at the opportunity to be a mentor teacher in a student teacher program. High-quality mentors are essential to prepare our aspiring educators. And before you say anything, I know PSEA has a responsibility to encourage quality mentors for our student teachers. We will work on that. But I also would argue that school entities and higher education institutions have the same responsibility to incentivize our best and brightest to take on that additional work. When you consider the potential implications for a teacher's evaluation, the additional workload, and the logistics of coordinating with student teachers and their preparation programs, people are just not jumping at the opportunity.

States are responding to the concerns of aspiring educators by creating PAID student-teaching experiences. Oklahoma committed \$12.75 million in federal relief funds to pay eligible Oklahoma college students for their work as student teachers. Michigan's state budget now includes \$50 million for stipends for student teachers, providing up to \$9,600 per semester to help with tuition, living expenses, childcare, and other costs associated with student teaching. In Colorado, teacher candidates placed in a semester-long academic residency may receive a

stipend of up to \$11,000. Alabama is jumping on this issue too by experimenting with a couple different ways of paying teacher interns.

In addition, we should note that aspiring educators do not solely pay tuition to earn their teacher certification. There are fees associated with assessments to achieve certification, certification fees to PDE, costs for the 24 post-baccalaureate credits required to get an Instructional II certificate, and finally the ongoing costs associated with professional development for the rest of an educator's career. Two years ago, one of our student members tallied his costs to get his certification after college. He spent \$1,128 to become certified in Pennsylvania with four state certificates – including his Instructional I – all before he started earning a paycheck.

### ***Starting Salaries***

Finally, we would be naïve to believe that compensation does not play a role in a young person's career planning, particularly when we consider the significant costs associated with becoming a teacher. Compensation is a critical factor in one's decision whether to enter or remain in the education profession. Educator compensation must reflect the value that these professionals provide to their students, their communities, and society as a whole. Educator and support staff contract negotiations cannot be approached as an opportunity to pinch pennies, but instead must be a means of establishing appropriate levels of salary and benefits that will keep educators in the classroom.

Salaries have simply not kept up with inflation. Perhaps even more concerning is the fact that many states, including Florida, New Mexico, Arkansas, Delaware, Connecticut, Texas and Maryland, have proposed or passed significant increases in their starting teacher salaries, while Pennsylvania's statutory minimum salary remains at \$18,500. Currently, the average starting salary for teachers in Pennsylvania is \$42,000, and in some areas of the state, starting salaries are still in the \$20,000s. Unsurprisingly, education support staff (ESP) salaries are well below what teachers earn, and the average ESP salary in PA is at least \$10k below the basic living wage for a family of one adult and one child. The data is clear; education careers lack adequate compensation, leading many educators to work more than one job to achieve an adequate standard of living. The recruitment and retention crisis can be, in part, blamed on the fact that many educators can make more money in less-stressful jobs outside of education. That is why educator compensation must reflect the value these professionals provide to their students, their communities, and society.

PSEA is partnering with Representative Patty Kim, who will soon introduce legislation that would, over a 5-year period, bring Pennsylvania's minimum teacher salary up to \$60,000, and establish a minimum salary of \$20/hour for support staff. We estimate there are 25,962 certified professionals working in 580 school districts, career and technical centers, and intermediate units who would see their earnings lifted to \$60,000 if our proposal becomes law. For support staff, we estimate 34,167 (64.5% of all ESPs statewide) would be affected by the \$20 ESP minimum

salary requirement. School entities would be reimbursed by the state each year for the amounts required to lift school staff salaries to the proposed minimums, and thereafter those funds would be built into schools' base funding allocations.

We know this strategy works, because research consistently shows that increasing pay attracts more and higher-quality teaching candidates.<sup>6</sup> In addition, districts that offer higher pay have had lower levels of teacher attrition, both in terms of moving to another district as well as leaving the profession altogether. Most important, states and districts with higher educator wages have had higher levels of student achievement and smaller achievement gaps among black and Hispanic students.

### ***Educator Diversity***

Within the overall educator shortage, there is an even uglier problem. Pennsylvania lacks teachers of color. A [report](#) issued by Research for Action in December 2020 on educator diversity in Pennsylvania found that:

- Students of color make up 36 percent of Pennsylvania's public school student population, yet teachers of color comprise only six percent of the educator workforce.
- 138 school districts and 1,078 public schools had zero educators of color during any of the prior seven school years. In these schools, an average of 15 percent of students were students of color.

Further, a [report](#) issued by the Learning Policy Institute in April 2018 revealed that when taught by teachers of color, students of color have better academic performance and improved graduation rates and are more likely to attend college. As we aim to resolve the overall shortage, Pennsylvania must concurrently focus on educator diversity.

### ***Grow Your Own Programs***

One final solution that will ensure long-term success in rebuilding the educator pipeline would be for policymakers to establish and invest in a statewide Grow-Your-Own program. Grow-Your-Own programs are partnerships between school entities, community organizations, and institutions of higher education that are designed to recruit AND retain individuals from within the local school community to meet local education workforce needs on an ongoing basis. Grow Your-Own models are particularly effective at diversifying the field because recruiting from local communities means that school staff are more likely to reflect student demographics.

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<sup>6</sup> "Elevating the Education Professions." NEA. October 2022 <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/solving-educator-shortage-report-final-9-30-22.pdf>

PSEA is excited to be working with Rep Schlossberg to establish a statewide GYO program here in Pennsylvania. Under his soon-to-be-introduced proposal, the department of education would provide technical and financial assistance to partnerships that develop and implement education career pathways designed to fill gaps in the local education workforce. GYO programs can focus on nontraditional candidates, career-changers, high school students, education support professionals, or any other adults in the local community who may be interested in becoming an educator. The grants awarded under Rep Schlossberg’s proposal could be used to cover the costs of tuition, wage-earning internships, and mentoring. We’ve seen great success with GYO models all over the country, and even right here in Pennsylvania.

The good news is that we already have a foundation upon which we can build and strengthen our efforts to support a robust and diverse pipeline of aspiring educators. For example, Act 55 of last year created a program of study specifically designed to provide high school students with early exposure to K-12 education career pathways, and when schools begin offering the program of study this fall, it will allow aspiring educators to begin earning post-secondary credits while still in high school. We are very excited that many local school entities have shown interest or taken steps to implement one or more GYO pathways, so it is important that policymakers establish a high-quality statewide framework to support and incentivize these education career pathways. Here again, state investments in GYO programs are scalable and can be targeted depending upon the size of the state’s investment.

The most important thing policymakers should remember as you consider ways to address the educator workforce crisis is that increasing compensation, easing the student debt burden, paid internships, and GYO programs are proven solutions. If we want to see progress in reversing the shortage, we need to work together to implement these solutions now, and we must commit to meaningful investments now and in the future to support them.

### ***Prioritizing Health and Mental Health Professionals***

Even before the COVID crisis, our educators were pushed to maximum limits. Working in schools today is completely different from those times when Pennsylvania had an oversupply of educators. Technology (cell phones, computers, etc.), social media, toxic standardized testing, a diminished retirement system, mass school shootings, facilities in dire need of repairs and improvements, and the long-term consequences of the pandemic are the reality of current and future educators. On top of these complex demands, educators must support students through ever-more prevalent mental health needs, without an adequate support structure of in-school or community mental health resources. These challenges not only impact the students facing crisis, but also cause disruption and uncertainty in the broader classroom environment, impacting all students.

Often overlooked in the rhetoric around the “educator shortage” is the fact that this term includes not only teachers, but pupil services employees like school nurses, psychologists, counselors, and



social workers. Teachers serve many roles for their students, helping them learn, grow, and explore their interests. But for children and youth to really thrive, they need access to pupil service employees. Many of our students are struggling with mental health issues, anxiety, depression, bullying, and self-harm, as evidenced by the 83,000+ reports received via the Safe 2 Say Something system. This crisis is not unique to Pennsylvania. We've known for a long time that our districts do not employ the recommended numbers of mental and physical health staff, including school nurses, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and dental hygienists, and the need for the services these professionals provide has grown exponentially since March of 2020.

Certainly, strategies like those suggested above for teachers and paraprofessionals also must be considered to attract and retain health and mental health professionals in a school setting. In addition, we must continue to invest in targeted programs to remove barriers to entry for practitioners to work in schools. Schools are very different practice environments than clinical settings, therefore internship or practicum experiences provide invaluable insight and preparation prior to employment. However, these internships are often unpaid and do not provide health benefits, creating a financial disincentive for those interested in pursuing work in schools. This financial burden also contributes to a "brain drain" of professionals who may choose to study and subsequently seek employment in other states that provide incentives.

The General Assembly wisely appropriated funding in Act 55 to provide stipends to help sustain school-based mental health professionals during their internship experience. Future professionals are applying now to participate in the program. In addition, Gov. Shapiro proposed an additional \$10 million for the intern stipend program. We thank you and Gov. Shapiro for your foresight and urge legislators to continue this investment in future years to address the massive gaps between existing and optimal staffing levels. Given that there is high demand for health care and mental health professionals in all practice settings, we must also be aware of the highly competitive nature of this labor market. Practitioners are being lured away from work in school settings with the promise of higher pay and more flexible work environments in private or clinical practice.

In the absence of qualified health professionals to whom students can be referred, teachers and paraprofessionals bear the brunt of their students' distress. Often the challenges impacting student performance originate from factors completely outside an educator's control, such as unresolved issues at home, including food or housing insecurity or lack of reliable transportation or support in the home. Educators care deeply about their students, but they are not trained counselors or social workers. Watching a student struggle and being unable to help weighs heavily on the hearts of our school staff. Districts must view adding these positions as a means to improve well-being for both students AND educators.

### *Protecting Quality*

While we have raised significant issues and the many challenges associated with addressing the educator shortage, we must state for the record that the very worst possible solution would be to lower standards for our school employees. Our students deserve better. Pennsylvania’s educator certification requirements are some of the most rigorous and comprehensive in the nation. These high-quality standards must be lauded and protected. During times of crisis, it may seem tempting to loosen standards and fast-track preparation; however, we know that this just leads to much higher rates of turnover. For example, many people point to Teach for America (TFA) and lowering certification requirements as a solution. But those people ignore the studies that have demonstrated that retention rates among TFA are lower than overall retention rates. After four years, only 14.8 percent of TFA graduates are in the same placement and only 27.8 percent are still teaching.<sup>7</sup> Compare that retention rate to an estimated 50 percent for all new teachers across all types of schools and I think we can agree that we must address the underlying issues of why teachers leave – not create new, failing programs.<sup>8</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

Pennsylvania’s educators and support staff have risen to meet every challenge and every hurdle placed in their path – all with the singular focus to do what they love – care for and teach students. Policymakers can demonstrate their respect for and the value they place on the work our educators have done and continue to do by tackling the educator shortage in a way that doesn’t blame them for the problem or diminish their calling. Rather, I humbly ask policymakers to approach the educator shortage in a way that recognizes my friends’ and colleagues’ value to children, communities, and society. PSEA stands ready to work with all policymakers to respond to the teacher shortage in a holistic way that puts solutions in place, so we’re not dealing with this same issue in another twenty years.

Thank you, again, for the invitation to participate today and for your consideration of PSEA’s comments. I will be happy to answer any of your questions.

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<sup>7</sup> Morgaen L. Donaldson and Susan Moore Johnson. 2011. “[Teach For America Teachers: How Long Do They Teach? Why Do They leave?](#)” Phi Delta Kappan, 93, 2, Pp. 47-51.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, T. & Ingersoll R.M. (2003, May). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. Educational Leadership, 60 (8), 30-33.