

GENERATING SOLUTIONS TO COVID-SPECIFIC EDUCATOR SHORTAGES: A SYNTHESIS OF INSIGHTS FROM A CROSS-STATE COLLABORATIVE

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Cross-State Collaborative on Generating Solutions to COVID-Specific Educator Shortages

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic led districts and schools to experiment with new staffing and support structures to meet students' academic, emotional, and physical safety needs. Shortages of teachers and substitute teachers, challenging conditions for student teaching, and early retirements all became pressing issues during this time. Region 1, Region 9, and the Center on Great Teachers & Leaders (GTL Center) partnered with colleagues at state education agencies (SEAs); Region 12; and key stakeholders in Colorado, Illinois, and Vermont to pause, take stock of the rapid changes, and discuss challenges and solutions. The result was a Cross-State Collaborative on Generating Solutions to COVID-Specific Educator Shortages, which included five sessions in early 2021, with the goal of discussing strategies to address educator shortages related to the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitate cross-state problem solving. Topics for each session were identified by consulting with experts in the field and talking with state and district leaders regarding their priorities and states' unique context. Topics included the following:

- Leveraging Educator Preparation Programs and Engaging Teacher Candidates to Fill Learning Gaps
- Understanding How Addressing Substitute Teacher Shortages May Exacerbate Equitable Access to Quality Teaching
- Innovative Teacher Staffing Models
- Preventing Teacher Attrition and Early Retirement
- Investing in Teachers First: A Discussion of New Federal Opportunities

Key Takeaways From All Sessions: At a Glance

The sessions led to productive and engaging discussions that resulted in the following key takeaways:

- **Engage and utilize teacher candidates from educator preparation programs.** Consider new collaborations with educator preparation programs (EPPs) that engage teacher candidates to help fill learning gaps and provide additional assistance to students. For example, candidates can create video content for lessons, locate and curate online content, create extension activities, and monitor small groups of students for teachers.
- **Be aware that some short-term efforts addressing shortages may hinder long-term strategies.** For example, relaxing rules for when and for how long substitutes can teach in place of full-time teacher can counteract or hinder long-term efforts to build the quality and prestige of the profession.

- **Continue the innovations and new flexibilities that were designed to address challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.** New staffing models have the potential of leveraging teachers' expertise and knowledge to give them reach beyond a typical classroom and providing new pathways for teacher growth and recognition.
- **Consider new incentives to encourage veteran teachers to remain in the profession.** Retaining veteran teachers is especially important, as their expertise will be needed in the schools that have been most impacted by the pandemic and have been traditionally difficult to staff.

Along with these key takeaways, each session generated additional insights into each topic. The remainder of this document consists of a synthesis of the session summaries. Each summary provides the following:

- Session Takeaways
- News Highlights and Articles: Resources that provide context on the challenges related to educator shortages and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educator workforce
- Resources: Curated resources that address the varied challenges

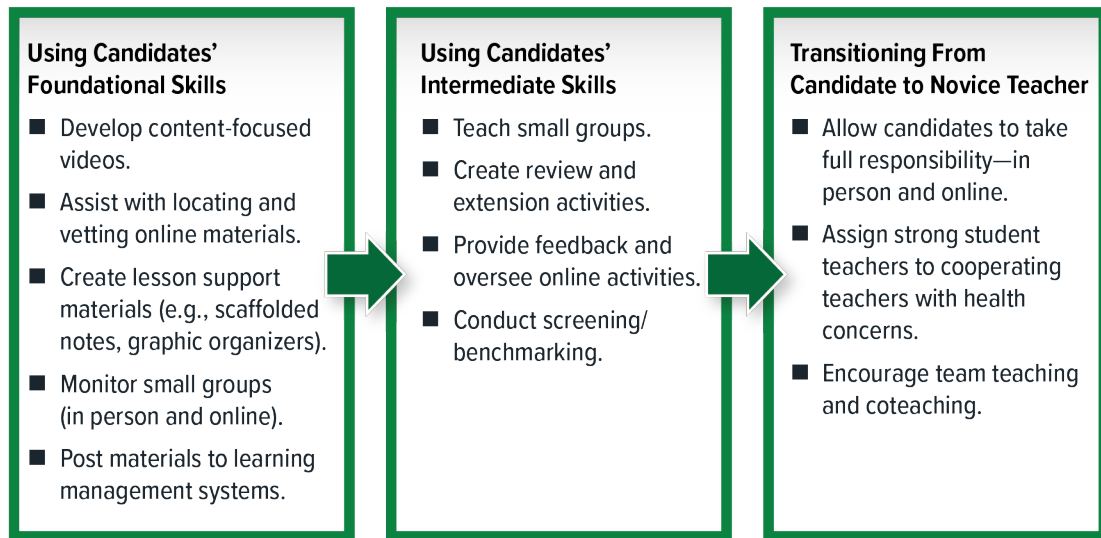


Leveraging Educator Preparation Programs and Engaging Teacher Candidates to Fill Learning Gaps

Session Takeaways

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic require innovative ways to staff schools and address educator shortages related to illness or challenges with shifting to remote learning. One strategy explored is the collaboration with EPPs that engage teacher candidates to help fill learning gaps and provide additional assistance to students (see Figure 1). Employing this strategy has the potential to (a) address staffing issues with both in-person and virtual learning options and (b) provide critical opportunities for teacher candidates to develop instructional skills and experience supporting students—opportunities that in some cases have been curtailed by the pandemic.

Figure 1. Numerous Opportunities Exist for Teacher Candidates to Provide Support in Schools



News Highlights and Articles

[College of Education Teacher Candidates Adapt to Changes in Schooling Amid COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (*University of South Florida*)

[Student-Teacher Experience Also Bends to Pandemic's Will](#) (*The Daily Gazette*)

Resources

[Addressing Shortages of Educators in an Uncertain COVID-19 Landscape: Viewing Teacher Candidates as Assets](#) (*CEEDAR Center*). Districts trying to address budget and service delivery uncertainties posed by the COVID-19 crisis may minimize collaborations with EPPs. This paper highlights how teacher candidates could be an asset in school buildings and may help alleviate potential and ongoing teacher shortages.

[Educator Preparation and New Teacher Licensures During COVID-19](#) (*The Hunt Institute*).

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many states may struggle to prepare and certify new teachers because of the in-person requirements, such as teaching experience and licensure examinations. This article highlights examples of steps taken by states on entrance examinations, clinical experiences, performance assessments, and licensure examinations.

[Teaching in the Time of COVID-19: State Recommendations for Educator Preparation Programs and New Teachers](#) (*American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education*). This paper summarizes what states are doing to help prepare teachers for the classroom during the coronavirus crisis; summarizes trends in state guidance on licensure and certification, clinical and field experiences, and new teacher induction; and identifies recommendations for state leaders to enhance the support of new teachers impacted by program and policy disturbances stemming from the crisis.

Shifting the Clinical Experience Using Virtual Formats (*US PREP*). This resource includes guidance, resources, and tools to shift clinical experience to online mediums. It includes guidance on observing in virtual schools, virtual teaching, co-teaching in remote learning, and leveraging videos to further teacher learning.



Understanding How Addressing Substitute Teacher Shortages May Exacerbate Equitable Access to Quality Teaching

Session Takeaways

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation had experienced shortages in substitute teachers. With the pandemic's restrictions and a growing number of full-time teachers in high-risk groups who were unable to deliver in-person instruction, the need, and shortage, of substitutes was further exacerbated with challenging conditions. The group discussed the related issue of short- versus long-term solutions and how local data can be used to assess need.

Short- and Long-Term Solutions. The issue of substitute shortages raises questions about whether actions or strategies taken to solve short-term shortage problems contribute to sustained, long-term shortages that are difficult to overcome.

Strategies to address short-term shortages, such as the use of substitute teachers, are often necessary to ensure that students and classrooms have a teacher. However, these short-term strategies (e.g., relaxing rules for when and for how long substitutes can teach in place of full-time teachers; prerecorded lessons on absence days – See Figure 2) can counteract or hinder long-term evidence-based strategies, such as building the prestige of the profession, resulting in increased attrition and greater shortages. Thus, although districts are implementing these needed short-term solutions to address shortages, states and the federal government should lead the development of a long-term comprehensive strategy to develop, strengthen, and retain an effective educator workforce (GTL Center, 2021).

Figure 2. Short-Term Approaches to Address Shortages May Be at Odds With Long-Term Strategies



The collaborative conversation also focused on the need to consider local data to best understand the shortage of teachers (see Figure 3 as an example). Educator shortages are typically a school-level problem that may contribute to state shortages when hard-to-staff schools

struggle to find certified candidates (Dee & Goldhaber, 2017)—and even more commonly, lose beginning teachers after their first or second year of teaching (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). These schools will be the ones with the greatest need for long-term substitutes and are more likely to enroll greater numbers of students from low-income families and students of color.

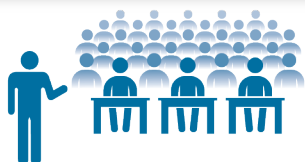
Figure 3. Shortage Is a School- and Subject-Level Problem, Not a State One

Broad analysis:



State X has 1 chemistry teacher for every 400 students

More accurate analysis:



1 qualified chemistry teacher for every 2,000 students in high-need schools



1 chemistry teacher for every 100 students in affluent schools

News Highlights and Articles

[Low Pay and High Risk: Being a Substitute Teacher During COVID-19](#) (*Education Week*)

[Substitute Teachers During the Pandemic: Requirements, Benefits, and Pay](#) (*National Council on Teacher Quality*)

Resources

[Sharpening the Divide: How California's Teacher Shortages Expand Inequality](#) (*Learning Policy Institute*). This report provides an overview of California's teacher shortages, including causes and an understanding of *where* shortages exist and who is primarily impacted, and outlines considerations for policy that may address teacher shortages. It notes that substitute teachers are often used as a short-term solution to address the problem of teacher shortages.

[Inequitable Opportunity to Learn: Student Access to Certified and Experienced Teachers](#) (*Learning Policy Institute*). This report analyzes data from the U.S. Department of Education's biannual Civil Rights Data Collection from 2014 and 2016 to understand students' access to qualified teachers. It finds that students in schools with high proportions of students of color have less access to certified teachers than schools with a low proportion of students of color, and that students in schools with high student of color enrollment have less access to experienced teachers.

[Redesigning the Substitute Teaching Experience](#) (*Substantial Classrooms*). This book focuses on how substitute teaching is undergoing change and innovation. The book emphasizes that substitutes are a vital resource that can diversify classroom experiences and details six key opportunities for innovation in substitute teaching while diversifying classroom experiences for students.



Innovative Teacher Staffing Models

Session Takeaways

Schools across the United States experimented with new staffing structures to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic while meeting students' academic, emotional, and physical safety needs. New staffing models can leverage teachers' expertise, knowledge, and skills in new specified roles, giving them reach beyond a typical classroom and providing new pathways for teacher growth and recognition. The innovations and flexibilities provided an opportunity for districts and schools to consider innovative staffing models to address long-term educator shortages while ensuring that all students have access to great teachers. Examples that were discussed include rotating content leads, redeploying staff to new roles, blending remote and in-person duties, creating cross-grade support structures, and adding in social-emotional support roles. States can play a significant role in incentivizing the use of innovative staffing models.

News Highlights and Articles

[New Roles for Educators](#) (*EducationWeek*)

[The Problem Isn't a Teacher Shortage: It's a Lack of Innovation in How Teachers May Work](#) (*Forbes*)

Resources

[Teaching Innovation: New School Staffing Strategies Inspired by the Pandemic](#) (*FutureED and Education Counsel*). This paper describes new school staffing strategies, such as extending the reach of highly effective teachers through multi-classroom leaders, using new coteaching or team teaching models, abandoning uniform class sizes or time blocks, employing new instructional cycles that emphasize more student-direct learning in 7-week cycles, and shifting teachers into specialized roles. It also describes some of the potential challenges with innovative staffing arrangements going forward, such as labor contracts, state and district rules and regulations regarding mandatory class size, teacher licensing, bell schedules, required instructional minutes, the length of the school day and year, seat-time requirements, and funding.

Opportunity Culture: Lessons Learned (*Public Impact and Region 6 Comprehensive Center*).

This paper provides a high-level overview of Opportunity Culture and describes some lessons learned from implementing this model. The lessons include following the Opportunity Culture principles closely, such as extending the reach of excellent teachers; paying teachers more for additional leadership; protecting in-school time for planning, collaboration, and development; and setting the appropriate team size for multi-classroom leaders and providing them with support.

Opportunity Culture: Career Paths and Pay (*Public Impact*). This guide provides examples of career paths in the Opportunity Culture model and gives a variety of scenarios on how these paths can be realized within a school's budget.

Reaching Further and Learning More? Evaluating Public Impact's Opportunity Culture Initiative (*CALDER*). This study examined the impact of Public Impact's Opportunity Culture initiative on student achievement in reading and math in three partner districts that include 44 schools. The study found that students exposed to the Opportunity Culture models improved statistically significantly better in math and better in reading with most models.

Toward the Structural Transformation of Schools: Innovations in Staffing (*AIR*). This paper describes a neo-differentiated staffing structure that leverages teachers' talent, knowledge, and skills to provide effective instruction and increase professionalism. It describes implications that states should consider when implementing neo-differentiated staffing structures, such as adopting a common set of performance competencies and impacts to teacher preparation, licensure, and teacher selection.

Innovative Staffing to Personalized Learning (*Christensen Institute and Public Impact*). This paper examines eight schools and school networks that provided students with more personalized learning via blended learning while using new staffing models. It describes some innovative staffing approaches, including creating new roles such as teacher-leader, collaborating teachers, support staff, and teachers-in-training, and using small-group instruction and team teaching.



Preventing Teacher Attrition and Early Retirement

Session Takeaways

Since March 2020, there has been speculation that the COVID-19 pandemic would lead to increased rates of teacher attrition and early retirement. The percentage of teachers leaving the profession had been increasing even before the pandemic, with rates of public school teacher turnover (including educators who left to teach at another school) at roughly 16%. Many of those educators are retiring early as shown in studies of [California](#) and [Michigan](#).

Educators who left cited dissatisfaction with the work as the number one reason for their decision. Although data are still incoming on the impact of the pandemic on national and global attrition and retirement rates, related indicators—such as increases in teacher stress and decreases in job satisfaction—highlight areas in need of improved supports to prevent educators from leaving the profession. Retaining veteran teachers is especially important because their expertise will be fundamental to the recovery effort as schools return to in-person learning, address students’ social-emotional and mental health needs, and engage in learning recovery efforts. Preventing attrition and early retirement will also be key to supporting schools and districts that have been [most impacted](#) by the pandemic and are historically underserved—including schools that serve a disproportionate number of Black, Indigenous, and Latino students, as well as students from low-income households. States are actively engaged in addressing teacher attrition and early retirement through the following actions:

- Implement flexible and creative scheduling.
- Utilize targeted incentives.
- Offer relevant, flexible professional learning.
- Improve the quality of mentoring and induction programs.
- Reduce educator stress through additional social-emotional support for teachers.
- Prioritize retaining veteran teachers and teachers of color.

News Highlights and Articles

[More Teachers Plan to Quit as COVID Stress Overwhelms Educators](#) (CNBC)

[Eroding Opportunity: COVID-19’s Toll on Student Access to Well-Prepared and Diverse Teachers](#) (Learning Policy Institute)

Resources

[ED COVID-19 Handbook: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students’ Needs](#) (U.S. Department of Education). This roadmap released by the U.S. Department of Education highlights strategies for stabilizing a diverse and qualified educator workforce. Its proposed strategies for retaining educators (starting on page 38) include (a) extending the reach of effective teachers using teacher leaders; (b) increasing availability of qualified adults to support educators, students, and staff; (c) building and maintaining a cadre of high-quality substitute teachers; (d) implementing flexible and creative scheduling while providing planning and collaboration time; (e) using targeted incentives to encourage workers to work in high-need subject areas and schools; and (f) offering relevant, flexible professional learning.

Stress Topped the Reasons Why Public School Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19 (*RAND Corporation*). This report describes how stress impacts teacher attrition, both prior to and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Key findings indicate that nearly half of public school teachers who voluntarily stopped teaching after March 2020 but before their scheduled retirement left because of the pandemic and that pandemic-related stress exacerbated already high levels of stress among educators. In addition, it notes that stress is the most common reason for leaving public school teaching early, almost twice as common as insufficient pay. Some recommendations to address the issue include involving teachers in developing districts' strategies for reducing teacher stress and increasing the flexibility in teachers' schedules both during the pandemic and in the long term.

The Educator Context and Stress Spectrum (*Center on Great Teachers and Leaders*). This tool can support educators in gaining a greater awareness of how their current personal and professional context affects their levels of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. This self-awareness tool can be used individually or by teacher teams to consider personal, community, and professional conditions that contribute to low, mid, and high levels of stress. A companion to *Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care: Self-Assessment and Planning Tool*, the spectrum leads educators to consider strategies for building resilience and well-being.

Teaching Innovation: New School Staffing Strategies Inspired by the Pandemic (*FutureEd*). This resource highlights strategies for staffing that have been effective during the pandemic and may hold promise for improving teaching conditions after in-person learning resumes across the country. It includes strategies for extending the reach of experienced and effective teachers, utilizing coteaching models, and developing instructional cycles (e.g., 7 weeks of schooling followed by 7 weeks of teacher planning and professional development). It also highlights several challenges to developing innovative staffing models and examples of schools and districts that have worked with local unions and other organizations to implement them.

The Future Depends on Teachers (*TEACH*). This 60-second public service announcement highlights the important role teachers play in supporting children and preparing them for the future.

Retaining Teachers Grant Program Report (*Colorado Department of Education*). This report detailed the 2-year outcomes of a cohort of teachers participating in the Retaining Teachers Grant Program, a grant designed to decrease teacher shortage in Colorado by utilizing and funding research-based retention strategies.

SESSION 5

Investing in Teachers First: A Discussion of New Federal Opportunities

Session Takeaways

The final session involved a rich discussion on how states are considering supporting schools and districts in their use of the recently released federal funds. SEAs engaged in the collaborative described plans to invest new federal funds in initiatives such as technology, broadband, summer programming, virtual tutoring, and teacher professional development for e-learning. A key discussion centered on the condition associated with the American Rescue Plan Act funding that 20% of district funds must address student learning loss. Bridging the learning gap is essential to prevent additional disengagement of students who are behind. Given that the shortage of effective teachers disproportionately impacts students who are at a disadvantage in both schools and society, states are in a critical position to use these funds to address equity and opportunity gaps. Investing in supporting and stabilizing the educator workforce in underserved schools is essential to avoid the risk of widening gaps.

During the discussion, participants acknowledge the important role of effective educators in every classroom; otherwise, states may not see gains in closing gaps. Furthermore, there is a risk of widening gaps between students. Research suggests that one of the most significant impacts of the pandemic is exacerbating existing inequality and widening achievement gaps. Staff from the GTL Center highlighted the [Call to Action](#) as a resource for states considering this issue. As a result of this conversation with states, the GTL Center also developed *Strengthen and Diversify the Educator Workforce: Address Shortages by Engaging Stakeholders in a Data-Driven, Equity-Focused Approach*, which offers the following recommendations:



Source: Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. (2021). *Strengthen and diversify the educator workforce: Address shortages by engaging stakeholders in a data-driven, equity-focused approach*. American Institutes for Research.

News Highlights and Articles

U.S. Department of Education Posts State Plans for Use of American Rescue Plan Funds to Support Students and the Safe and Sustained Reopening of Schools (*U.S. Department of Education*)

Invest in Teachers First: A Call to Action for Teacher-Focused Investments of Federal Relief Funds (*Center on Great Teachers and Leaders*)

Resources

American Rescue Plan State Applications and Plans (*U.S. Department of Education*).

Applications were due to the U.S. Department of Education on June 7, 2021. Section F of the State Plan Template required information on educator shortages.

Strengthen and Diversify the Educator Workforce: Address Shortages by Engaging Stakeholders in a Data-Driven, Equity-Focused Approach (*Center on Great Teachers and Leaders*). State and local education agencies can use this short brief to allocate funds from the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund to leverage existing efforts, reframe ongoing efforts, and/or start a new initiative to address educator shortages and lack of diversity in the profession. Please contact the GTL Center at gtlcenter@air.org for more information about this resource.

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