



Addressing the Teacher Shortage with American Rescue Plan Funds

One of the many challenges facing schools today is the hiring and retaining of qualified, experienced, effective, and diverse educators. Due in part to the unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, some sources suggest that teachers are considering leaving the profession at a higher rate than usual. Many teachers have already left the workforce due to health concerns, stress, and fewer opportunities for support and development during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pre-existing teacher shortages have been exacerbated by the pandemic and historically, these teacher shortages have had a disproportionate effect on students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Even before the pandemic, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds were more likely to experience inequities in access to qualified and experienced teachers. For example, schools with higher enrollments of students of color were [four times as likely](#) to employ uncertified teachers and more likely to have inexperienced teachers.

In addition to the ongoing overall shortage, efforts to diversify the educator workforce can be a challenge. The rates of [Black teachers](#) who plan to leave the teaching field are even higher than teachers overall. Teachers of color were already underrepresented in the field, even though research shows that a diverse educator workforce benefits all students and can [improve outcomes for students of color](#), including higher levels of student achievement, enrollment in more rigorous courses, referrals to gifted and talented programs, and reductions in exclusionary discipline.

With funding from the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER), which provided more than \$122 billion to state educational agencies and local educational agencies to meet the urgent needs of schools and students arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, states, districts, and schools can increase efforts to attract, prepare, support, and retain a diverse, well-qualified, experienced, and effective pool of educators. To this end, schools can work to [improve every step](#) of the educator pipeline: preparation, recruitment, hiring, and retention. States and districts can:

1. Increase Teacher Effectiveness and Retention through Comprehensive Preparation Programs

High-quality teacher preparation increases teacher effectiveness and makes it more likely that teachers will remain in the profession. However, more comprehensive approaches to preparation are often more expensive and can be out of reach for teacher candidates from low-income backgrounds. Schools that are under-resourced, serve more underserved students, or those that experience high educator turnover may have trouble recruiting, hiring, supporting, and compensating more experienced teachers. States, districts, and schools may use ARP ESSER funds to increase the number of well-prepared educators by:

- * Developing and implementing **high-quality comprehensive teacher residency programs** that provide extensive clinical experience, such as teaching residencies and “Grow Your Own” programs (see below).
- * Creating or scaling up **partnerships between educator preparation programs (EPPs) and districts and schools.**
- * Providing **stipends, scholarships, and other financial aid** to educators-in-training, including in exchange for committing to teach in a high-need area, to help lessen the cost of comprehensive, high-quality preparation.
- * **Covering the cost of additional courses or paying test fees** for educators to earn first or additional teaching licenses or certification, such as in a shortage area or National Board Certification.

2. Invest in “Grow Your Own” Programs, including Teacher Apprenticeships

“Grow Your Own” programs can take many forms from providing pathways to current school staff such as paraprofessionals and substitute teachers, to those that engage students early or recruit from the community. These programs provide opportunities to learn and grow into the profession and may be particularly effective in recruiting educators who reflect the diversity and understand the specific needs of underserved students. For example, programs for high school students can introduce students to the teaching profession and help them earn a paraprofessional certificate in high school. This certificate could allow students to work as paraprofessionals in their former high school as they work toward earning their bachelor’s degree and becoming certified to teach. States and districts may leverage ARP funds to support “Grow Your Own” programs that:

- * **Recruit diverse educators who understand the specific needs** of their community.
- * Support paraeducators, high-quality substitute teachers, and others in the community who are interested in expanding their roles as educators by **supporting their training and path to certification.**
- * Create **teacher apprenticeships** that allow teacher apprentices to earn a good wage while learning the skills on-the-job and through higher education partners and integrated coursework. Registered Apprenticeships work to establish career pathways in various industries by providing structured, paid on-the-job learning experiences combined with job-related technical instruction with a mentor that leads to a nationally recognized credential. To learn more about Registered Apprenticeships and U.S. Department of Labor’s recently approved standards that create an easy pathway for states to establish and use apprenticeship funding to support these efforts, visit www.apprenticeship.gov.

3. Prioritize and Improve Recruitment and Hiring Strategies

Hiring practices and school-based supports can also influence teachers' decisions to enter or remain in the profession. For example, late hiring makes it difficult for schools to recruit in-demand teachers, and teachers who start late have less time to plan and prepare in advance of the school year. Potential teachers may also make employment decisions based on school-based supports available to new teachers. Recruitment strategies should include efforts to support new teachers and set them up for success, including mentorship programs and efforts to create positive school cultures and environments that are supportive and collaborative. Specifically, states and districts may use ARP funds to:

- * **Increase educator and staff compensation** to recruit educators with the livable and competitive wage they deserve and that can keep them in the profession.
- * Create **strong partnerships between schools, districts, and institutions of higher education**, including **Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, other Minority Serving Institutions, and community colleges**, in order to expand the diversity of the teacher workforce and reinforce the pipeline.
- * Reach out to **recently retired educators** to offer [opportunities](#) to return to the classroom.

4. Improve Retention Strategies

A high-quality and diverse teacher workforce is critical for students, especially as schools are working to recover from the impacts of lost instructional time resulting from the pandemic. Research shows that filling open positions with inexperienced or underqualified educators has profound negative effects on student learning. For example, high turnover makes it more difficult to create stability and offer seamless instruction, and constantly hiring and training new teachers can tax school resources. This is especially true in schools educating underserved students. To retain high-quality educators who reflect the diversity of the nation, schools and districts can use ARP funds to:

- * Develop and implement **professional development programs and mentoring models**, particularly for newer teachers, that emphasize building effective instructional strategies and provide time for ongoing collaboration, such as through professional learning communities.
- * Build and **maintain a cadre of high-quality substitute teachers**. For example, districts can assign substitute teachers to a single school for the entire year to create stability and offer support when educators need to take time off.
- * **Increase the availability of qualified adults and personnel** to support educators, students, and staff through partnerships and community engagement. Districts can partner with institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, nonprofits, and businesses to provide additional supports to educators and students using teaching candidates and well-trained volunteers.
- * Build and implement **flexible scheduling to support students and educators**, for example by:
 - ◆ Offering courses in addition to core curriculum (e.g., music, art, physical education) on the same day so grade-level teams can plan together.

- ◆ Developing school schedules that integrate other staff to support tutoring, interventions, and advisory groups to accelerate learning and build strong relationships.
- ◆ Developing staffing and course models, informed by educator and student surveys, that support the social, emotional, and academic well-being of staff and students. These models may include flexible small group time, enrichment and well-being programs that build on student and educator interests, and relationship-building opportunities with adults and students.
- * Use **incentives to encourage educators** to work in schools and subject areas with the most need, such as special education; bilingual education; science, technology, engineering, and math; career and technical education; and early childhood education by increasing compensation for all teachers and reducing any within state gaps in teacher pay that might exist between districts. Research shows that offering more [competitive compensation](#) can be effective in retaining current teachers and hiring new ones. Retention bonuses can be used as an immediate strategy to encourage retention while districts are working to improve compensation overall.
- * **Create or expand loan forgiveness, grants, or service scholarship programs** that support educators navigating the cost of postsecondary education, in exchange for a commitment to teach in a high-need area or school for a minimum number of years.

5. Support Educator and Staff Well-being

Educator well-being is closely tied to educator retention and effectiveness. To effectively meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students, the adults in school buildings also need to prioritize their own mental, emotional, and physical health needs. For example, educators who are experiencing stress or burnout may be more likely to leave the profession and could benefit from additional supports. To build systems that support educator and staff well-being, district and school leaders may use ARP funds to:

- * **Increase communication** by dedicating time to debrief, especially after hard or stressful days.
- * Survey educators to **gather information** (e.g., through climate surveys) on wellness, staff perception of workload, and morale, or use existing data (e.g., attendance, exit interviews) to uncover trends in experiences. This information can be used to identify and address areas for improvement.
- * **Prioritize educator mentoring** programs to build support systems and prevent burnout and give educators who serve as mentors recognition and time to become effective mentors.
- * **Schedule staff planning time** into work hours and a monthly planning day when possible.
- * **Increase awareness and accessibility** of school and district human resources support.

EXAMPLES FROM STATES AND DISTRICTS USING ARP FUNDS TO INVEST IN EDUCATORS

The Arizona Department of Education has partnered with the state’s three universities and created a dedicated Educator Recruitment and Retention team to support schools with recruitment, retention, and professional development strategies in partnership with local communities. This team has also developed and implemented Principal and Supervisor of Principal professional learning academies to build leadership capacity in school districts and charter schools to provide support for students and educators.

The Tennessee Department of Education has created a “Grow Your Own” grant with federal funding, including ARP, that is designed to foster partnerships between EPPs and districts to provide promising and innovative, no-cost pathways to the teaching profession by increasing EPP enrollment and growing the supply of qualified teachers. The program is currently comprised of 65 partnerships between 14 EPPs and 63 districts across the state—enabling more than 650 future educators to become a Tennessee teacher for free. \$6.5 million has been allocated to this program thus far. Tennessee also pioneered a pathway with the U.S. Department of Labor by establishing the nation’s first registered apprenticeship program for teachers, which will help sustain the state’s “Grow Your Own” programs and partnerships leveraging federal apprenticeship funding.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will offer both teacher recruitment retention grants to all local educational agencies. ARP funds will be used to support research-based strategies, including, but not limited to, strengthening the mentor program for early career teachers, utilizing culture and climate surveys to determine and address working condition issues, and providing services that address the social emotional needs of teachers.

The Puerto Rico Department of Education plans to use ARP funds to further compensate staff as a retention strategy. These strategies include, but are not limited to, improving school environments; providing needed academic resources, materials, and equipment; paying stipends; recruiting necessary school and Regional Education Office staff to support teachers; arranging internships, professional development with credit hours, and specialized professional development; and targeting support related to accelerated learning.

The South Carolina Department of Education collaborated with institutions of higher education, including the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and the SC Technical College System, to grow and expand career and technical education programs, adult education programs, and provide scholarships to high demand technical college programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency’s partnership with The Riley Institute at Furman University to create a leadership development program seeks to prepare and grow leaders who are working to address the academic impact of COVID-19 through summer and afterschool learning programs. SCDE will also collaborate with higher education partners to develop and attract a pipeline of new talent to the classroom with an emphasis on educators of color as well as launch a communication platform to promote the pathways.

Asheville City Schools in North Carolina is using a portion of their ARP ESSER allocation to provide bonuses to all full-time employees, with up to \$3,000 for certified staff.

Gaston County Schools in North Carolina provided additional teachers to classrooms to reduce class size and the student-teacher ratio. To support schools when employees have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional temporary employee is assigned to each school (54 locations) to provide classroom coverage as needed.

Providence Public School District in Rhode Island is using ARP funds to launch new incentives to recruit and retain highly qualified educators, including early signing bonuses for newly hired educators and support staff in hard-to-fill positions, increased support for teachers pursuing their ESL certification, and continuing a loan forgiveness incentive for educators of color.

The Pachogue-Medford school district in New York will be hiring additional permanent substitute teachers to help facilitate classroom instruction when teachers are absent and to offer teachers time for collaboration during the school day and professional development.

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