

Initial Recommendations from Members of the Task Force on Public School Staff Shortages in New Jersey

February 2023

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This report reflects a compilation of the independent comments and views of members appointed to the Task Force on Public School Staff Shortages in New Jersey, which did not reach consensus on all points. The information and recommendations set forth herein, including any extrinsic articles referred to and data submitted by members, have not necessarily been verified or endorsed by the Murphy Administration or the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development.

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Technical assistance was provided to the Task Force by researchers at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

Executive Summary

The Task Force on Public School Staff Shortages in New Jersey (Task Force) was established pursuant to Governor Murphy’s Executive Order #309 to “develop recommendations to address teacher and ESP [education support professional] shortages in school districts across the State.” Comprised of 25 members, the Task Force was organized in November 2022 with the specific direction to provide the Governor with initial recommendations to address these public school staff shortages by January 31, 2023. The Task Force was tasked with the following six objectives:

1. To develop short-term and long-term recommendations to increase the quantity of teacher applicants in New Jersey.
2. To develop short-term and long-term recommendations to increase the quantity of education support professionals (ESP) applicants in New Jersey.
3. To explore innovative ways the state can recruit and retain the educators and school staff our students need.
4. To identify best practices and resources to increase the pipeline of teacher candidates.
5. To identify best practices and resources to increase the pipeline of ESP candidates.
6. To identify best practices and resources to ensure retention of school staff members.

Beginning in December 2022, the Task Force met five times to address the objectives for which they were tasked. Each meeting was structured around a general theme to enable a focused discussion and to identify possible recommendations relating to key objectives. The Task Force meetings were scheduled as follows:

- a. Thursday, December 8, 2022 (Educator Retention)
- b. Thursday, December 15, 2022 (Educator Recruitment)
- c. Thursday, January 12, 2023 (Educator Support Professionals Recruitment and Retention)
- d. Friday, January 20, 2023 (Discussion of Recommendations)
- e. Tuesday, January 31, 2023 (Discussion of Recommendations)

Chaired by the Governor’s Chief Policy Advisor, each meeting allowed members to provide background on the severity of these issues and lengthy discourse on recommended solutions.

As a result of these meetings, the Task Force established the following list of recommendations that fall into three categories, 1) supporting educators to improve retention, 2) improving recruitment and training, and 3) state funded programs to address educator shortages. It is important to note that the recommendations are not numbered according to priority, importance, or impact. Further, any potential implementation of these recommendations will vary, ranging from local school-level policy changes to those that may require state or federal legislative amendments.

The Task Force’s recommendations are grouped together by a general theme or overarching topic area, and where applicable, specific recommendations offered by Task Force members are further detailed.

Supporting Educators to Improve Retention

The Task Force identified several recommendation areas to support and reduce the stress of educators; improve retention of current staff; and increase interest in the field:

1. Expand mentorship and professional development for early career educators.
2. Find ways to support policies that promote work/life balance for educators.

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3. Support implementation of policies and practices that focus on safety, physical, and mental health in New Jersey schools to produce a healthy learning and working environment.
4. Support schools in implementing policies and practices that create a work environment that is free of bias, including microaggressions.
5. Reduce administrative paperwork and other tasks that pull teachers away from classroom instruction.
6. Expand mentorship and co-teaching models across the state.
7. Create a public relations campaign that advocates for individuals to become educators and to address the negative public discourse surrounding teachers and other educators, with additional focus on diversity for recruitment efforts.
8. Increase educator pay.
9. Explore reducing the time it takes to be granted tenure.
10. Create written “Core Beliefs” that will provide guiding principles for effective home and family partnerships with educators and school communities.

Improving Recruitment and Training

The Task Force identified the barriers to recruitment and training of new educators, particularly for diverse candidates to reflect the demographics of student enrollment in New Jersey, as a focus area for addressing staffing shortages. By focusing in on the most prominent barriers individuals face throughout this process or those that may discourage an individual to pursue this path, the Task Force identified the following recommendations:

11. Establish a New Jersey teacher apprenticeship program.
12. Develop a streamlined path to teacher certification for education support professionals (ESPs).
13. Grow and streamline the alternate route pathway to certification.
14. Review teacher preparation requirements and consider revisions that will reduce the burdens faced by teacher candidates.
15. Evaluate assessments teacher candidates are currently required to pass.
16. Expand certification reciprocity agreements with neighboring states and abroad.
17. Reevaluate student teaching requirements.
18. Create pipeline programs for students in middle and high school to pursue a teaching career.
19. Eliminate the New Jersey residency requirement to increase the educator candidate pool.
20. Implement a statewide data collection to understand why individuals choose not to complete educator preparation programs, why some educators leave the profession early, and other key data points to better understand this issue.
21. Prioritize recruitment and training for substitute teachers.

State Funded Programs to Address Educator Shortages

In anticipation of the upcoming Fiscal Year 2024 budget process, the Task Force considered possible programs that could be implemented through state appropriations and identified the following recommendations that include a fiscal component:

22. Implement an educator licensing fee holiday.
23. Provide stipends or other pay to candidates while they are completing student teaching requirements.

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24. Establish financial incentives for individuals that enroll in, or that have completed, an educator preparation program through tuition reimbursement, stipends, or tuition forgiveness.
25. Develop a state funded program that provides bonuses or scholarships for hard to fill vacancies.
26. Establish new state-funded programs to provide additional resources to educators (see specific recommendations on Page 25 of this report).
27. Explore supplemental funding to defray costs for school districts that implement an ESP tenure program or incentives to hire full-time ESPs.
28. Reduce assessment costs to educator candidates through a reimbursement or cost sharing model.
29. Revisit changes to pension plans and health care coverage for educators and allow retirees to return to the classroom without impacting retirement earnings.
30. Evaluate increasing the 2% local levy cap for local board of education taxing authority.
31. Create and fund a teacher residency program.

Introduction

The Task Force on Public School Staff Shortages in New Jersey (Task Force) was established pursuant to Governor Murphy’s Executive Order #309¹ to “develop recommendations to address teacher and ESP [education support professional] shortages in school districts across the State.” Noting key reasons for the assembly of this Task Force, the Governor indicated the following observations as backdrop to the charge before the Task Force:

- Across the country, states and school districts have reported staff shortages and continue to face challenges related to vacancies of teachers and educational support professionals (ESP).
- Data suggest the pandemic has exacerbated shortages in specific teaching areas, including, but not limited to, special education, science and math, and English as a second language or bilingual education.
- New Jersey public schools rank among the best in the nation and our teachers are one of the primary reasons why New Jersey’s school system is consistently ranked so high.
- Students need diverse, effective teachers and ESPs more than ever to help them accelerate back to grade level after the disruption of the past two years.
- Collaboration is critical for understanding the challenges our schools are facing and to allow policymakers to provide assistance to help our students and educators where it is needed.

Comprised of 25 members², the Task Force was organized in November 2022 with the specific direction to provide the Governor with initial recommendations to address these staff shortages by January 31, 2023. The Task Force was tasked with the following six objectives:

1. To develop short-term and long-term recommendations to increase the quantity of teacher applicants in New Jersey.
2. To develop short-term and long-term recommendations to increase the quantity of ESP applicants in New Jersey.
3. To explore innovative ways the state can recruit and retain the educators and school staff our students need.
4. To identify best practices and resources to increase the pipeline of teacher candidates.
5. To identify best practices and resources to increase the pipeline of ESP candidates.
6. To identify best practices and resources to ensure retention of school staff members.

¹ Governor Murphy’s Executive Order #309 is available [here](#).

² Full membership of the Task Force is included in the Task Force Members section of this report.

Task Force Actions

Beginning in December 2022, the Task Force met five times to address the objectives for which they were tasked. Each meeting was structured around a general theme to enable a focused discussion and to identify possible recommendations relating to key objectives. The Task Force meetings were scheduled as follows:

- a. Thursday, December 8, 2022 (Educator Retention)
- b. Thursday, December 15, 2022 (Educator Recruitment)
- c. Thursday, January 12, 2023 (Educator Support Professionals Recruitment and Retention)
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- e. Tuesday, January 31, 2023 (Discussion of Recommendations)

Chaired by the Governor's Chief Policy Advisor, each of the first three meetings featured substantive discussions among Task Force members using a framework that 1) defined the breadth and scope of the staffing shortages and the barriers to addressing these issues, 2) identification of possible policy solutions to those areas and potential policy proposals from other states or other publications for further study, and 3) small group focused recommendations stemming from the large group discussion.

In addition to the membership discussions, data and detailed process information was presented to members. The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University presented Longitudinal data that provided observations of certificated school staff since 2012 and a comparison of teacher exits with certified teacher graduates, among other relevant data points. The New Jersey Department of Education presented on the pathways for certification, focusing on opportunities for ESPs and details on the alternate route to certification process.

Throughout these meetings, members offered frank dialogue about the severity of these issues and lengthy discourse on possible solutions, all of which was summarized to assist members with the six objectives outlines in the executive order establishing the Task Force.

Background and Scope of Staff Shortages

Staffing challenges are not new to New Jersey school districts. Pandemic related effects on educators have exacerbated difficulty filling key positions in education that have persisted for a decade or more. The pandemic has impacted the field in many ways, including teachers signaling “that they’re more inclined to quit their jobs, citing high stress, low pay, and a lack of respect.”³ Retention has become a focal point as current educators seek other career opportunities that do not face these same daily pressures. These staffing challenges may be felt across school communities, by educators’ fellow colleagues and school and district administrators. Addressing this is important to prevent any potential negative impact on students, and ensure students do not encounter instability in educational environments due to shifting personnel needs.

Many Task Force members noted that educators themselves have been the best recruiters for new individuals to enter the field. Recently, however, data suggests that fewer current educators are making this recommendation to those close to them. In a October 2022 survey of its members conducted by NJEA, only 21% encouraged a friend or family member to become an educator (see Figure 1 below).

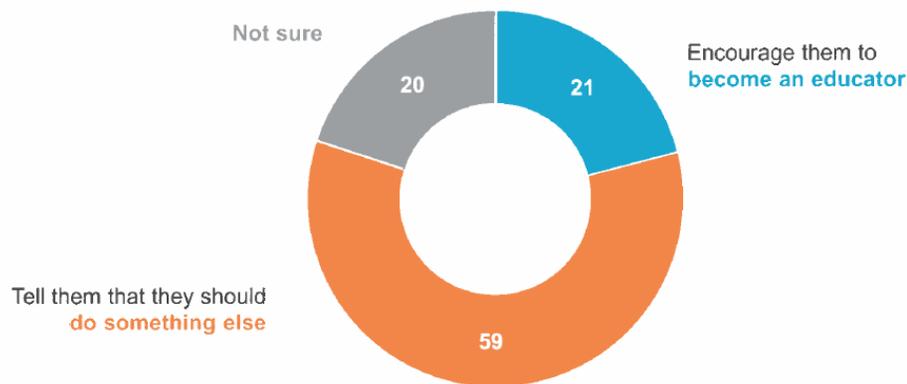
Figure 1: NJEA Survey of its Members on Encouraging Entry into the Profession

Source: NJEA Survey of Its Members – Conducted by GBAO in October 2022

Majority Of Members Likely To Tell Others They Should Not Go Into Education

Encourage Profession

If a friend or family member was considering becoming an educator, would you encourage them to become an educator, or tell them that they should do something else?



Many noted vacancies may not be directly tied to a significant change in retirements, but rather the decline in new teacher candidates. Educator preparation programs have seen declining enrollment impacting the number of new teachers, and threatening offerings⁴ for low-demand specializations. Meanwhile, overall national enrollment in educator preparation programs declined by more than a third from 2008 to 2019.⁵

³ [Education Week article](#) from September 6, 2022, “How Bad Is the Teacher Shortage? What Two New Studies Say.”

⁴ The College of New Jersey [closed the Health & Physical Education track](#) in the spring of 2020.

⁵ [Inside Higher Ed article](#) from August 20, 2022, “Teacher Education Programs Desperately Seek Students.”

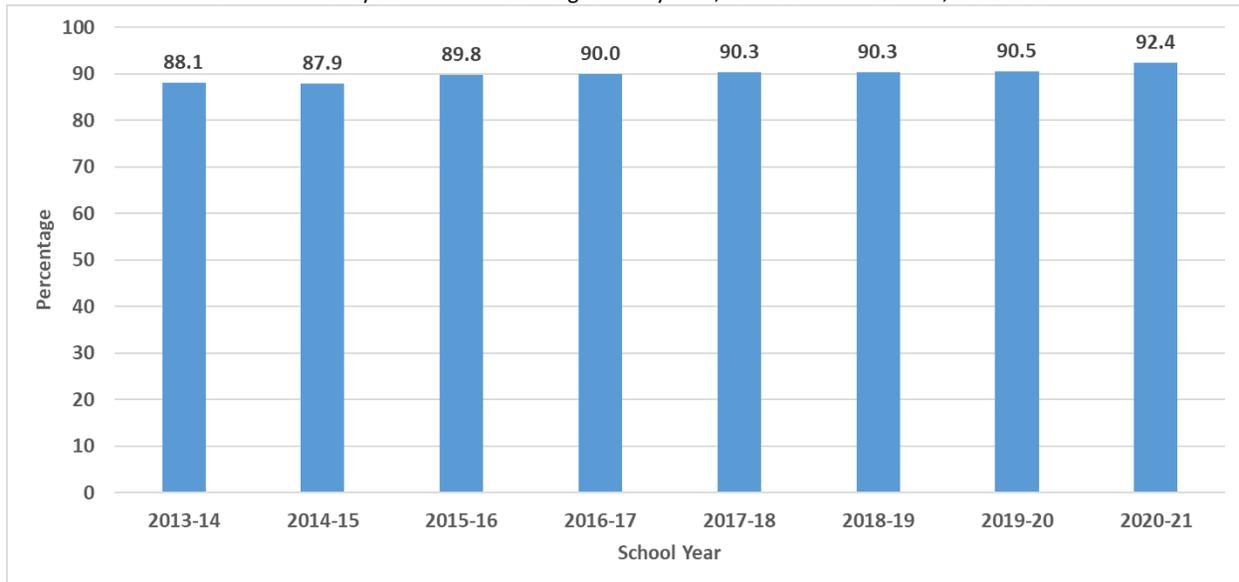
Retention

Educator retention has impacts in a localized way or a broader impact statewide, depending on whether an individual remains in the profession, or leaves the field entirely. As each school district plans for an upcoming school year, staff retention could mean competing with neighboring school districts, or with other job opportunities generally. If an educator leaves the field, this reduces the number of options for school districts statewide to fill vacancies. Compounding the issue is when individuals choose to move to an opportunity at a neighboring school district but continue to be an educator. In either case, even if the individual simply moves school districts, a vacancy is created that must be filled.

In any given school year, around 90% of teachers are retained in jobs within their school district from year-to-year.⁶ As shown in Table 1, the retention rates ranged from 88% in 2012-13 to 92% in 2020-21. The cumulative effects of this retention rate accumulate over time. The cumulative statewide retention rate within the same district is 56% between 2012 and 2021. This means that 56% of teachers who worked during the 2012-13 school year were working within their same district in the 2020-21 school year. New Jersey’s statewide cumulative school district retention rate for these years is shown in more detail on Table 2 below.

Table 1: Statewide district teacher retention rate: 2012-13 to 2020-21

Source: New Jersey Education to Earnings Data System, NJSMART Staff Extract, 2012-2020⁷



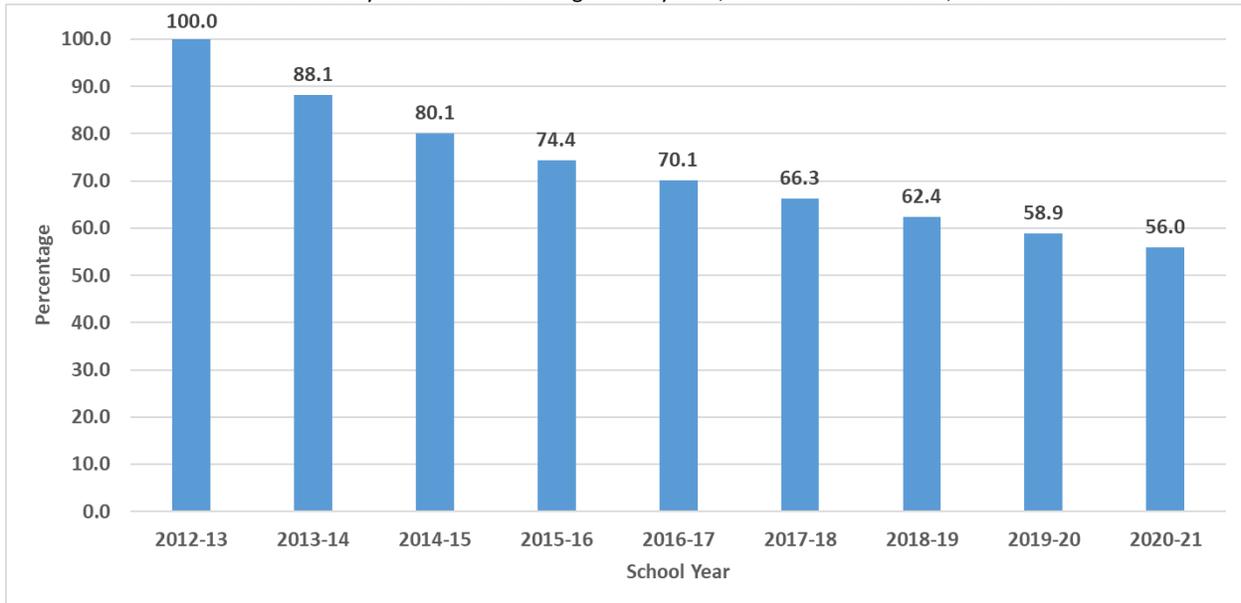
⁶ Analysis by researchers from 2012-2021 staff data from the [New Jersey Education to Earning Data System](#) (NJEDS), which includes data submissions from multiple state agencies for research and evaluation purposes. The New Jersey Department of Education’s staff data extract within the [Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching system](#) (NJSMART) is the primary statewide database of school district data and is included in NJEDS.

⁷ The [New Jersey Education to Earning Data System](#) (NJEDS) includes data submissions from multiple state agencies for research and evaluation purposes. The New Jersey Department of Education’s staff data extract within the [Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching system](#) (NJSMART) is the primary statewide database of school district data and is included in NJEDS.

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Table 2: Cumulative statewide district teacher retention rate: 2012-13 to 2020-21

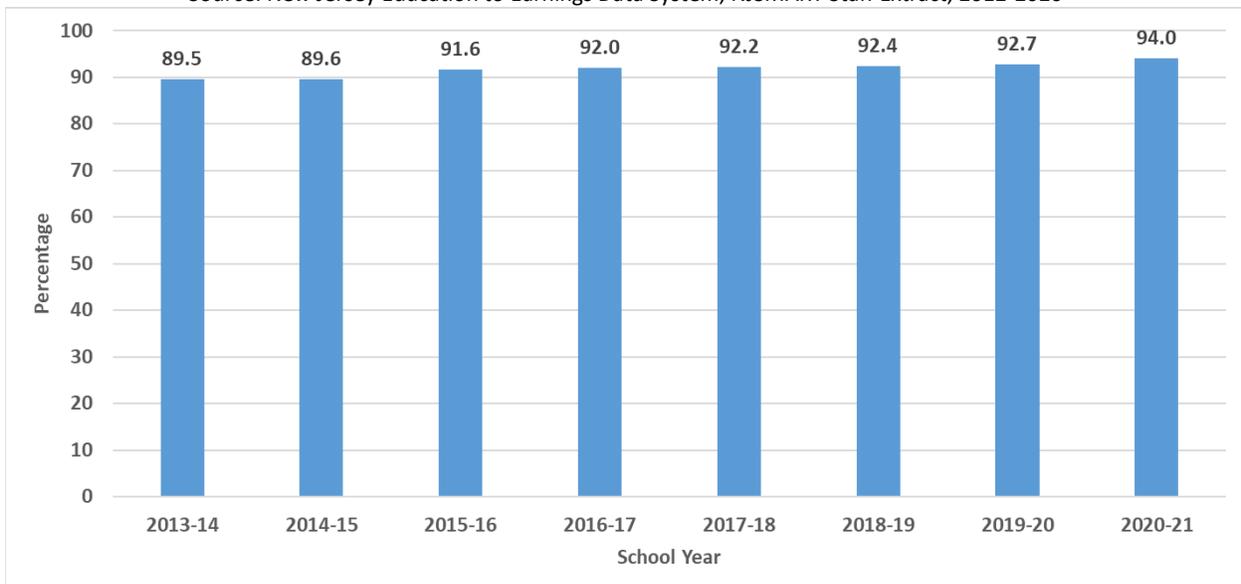
Source: New Jersey Education to Earnings Data System, NJSMART Staff Extract, 2012-2020



While teachers may leave their school districts, some continue to remain in the profession and in the state, but not many of them do so. As shown in Table 3, the statewide retention rate is about 1-2% above the district retention rates meaning that most of the teachers who leave their jobs are not returning to a public school position within the state. Even with an in-state retention rate ranging from 90% in 2013-14 to 94% in 2020-21, it shows teachers are leaving the profession and are leaving positions to be filled by new teaching candidates.

Table 3: Year-to-year statewide teacher retention rate: 2012-13 to 2020-21

Source: New Jersey Education to Earnings Data System, NJSMART Staff Extract, 2012-2020



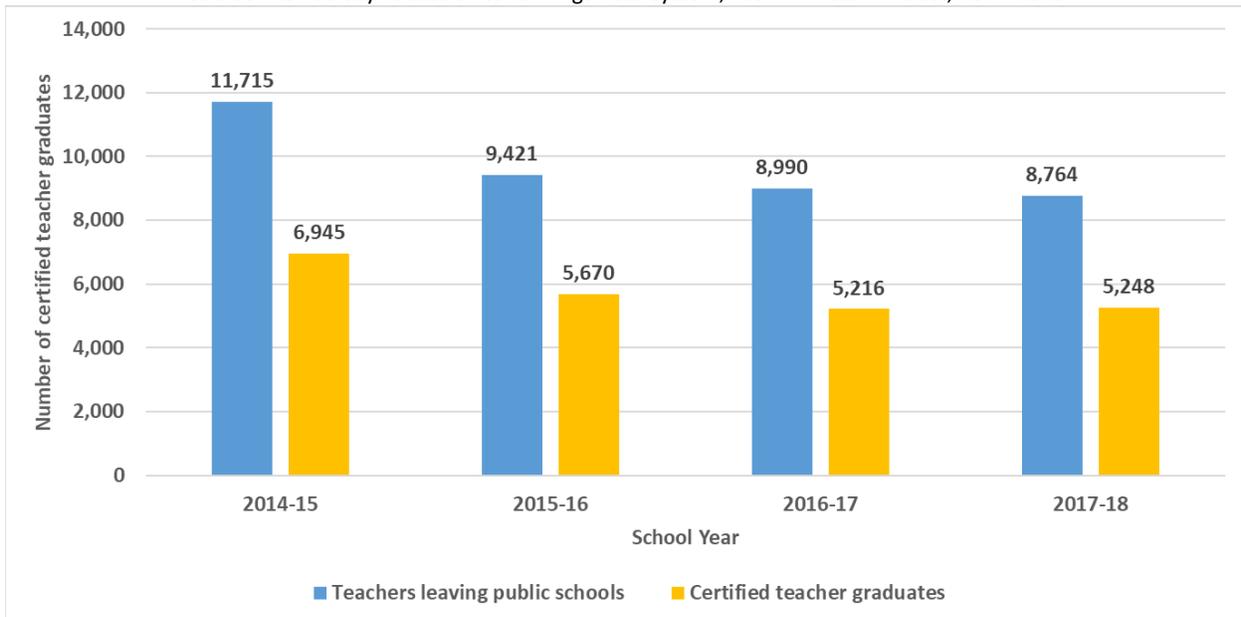
Teacher Pipeline (New Educators)

Although teacher retention has been largely stable in recent years, the new teacher pipeline may not necessarily be keeping up with the vacancies created across the state. Using the most recent data available, from 2014-15 school year to the 2017-18 school year, the number of teachers leaving New Jersey schools far exceeds the number of new certified teacher graduates. Table 4 shows the breakdown for each of these school years and highlights the persistent gap in the number of teachers exiting the field and the number of new teachers entering the profession. As has been reported nationally and within New Jersey, these data show the lagging enrollment in educator preparation programs and highlight that this is a perennial concern.

An examination of new teacher certifications shows that the supply of new teachers does not replace those who are leaving, especially when examining new teacher retention rates. New Jersey collects data on teachers that remain in the profession after their first and second year on the job. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future found that nearly 50% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years.⁸ Although New Jersey’s data currently only tracks for the first two years, a similar trend can be seen. Table 5 shows the cohort of newly certified teachers in each year and then the remaining number of those employed in a New Jersey school district both one year and two years out from the time of certification. In approximate numbers, fewer than half of those certified remain employed two years post completion across the four most recent years for which data is available. This data exacerbates the gap shown in Table 4 where the number of certified graduate teachers is outpaced by the number of teachers leaving. Taken together, each year, the teacher shortage in New Jersey continues to expand.

Table 4: Number of teachers leaving public schools and the number of certified teacher graduates: 2014-15 to 2017-18

Source: New Jersey Education to Earnings Data System, NJSMART Staff Extract, 2012-2020

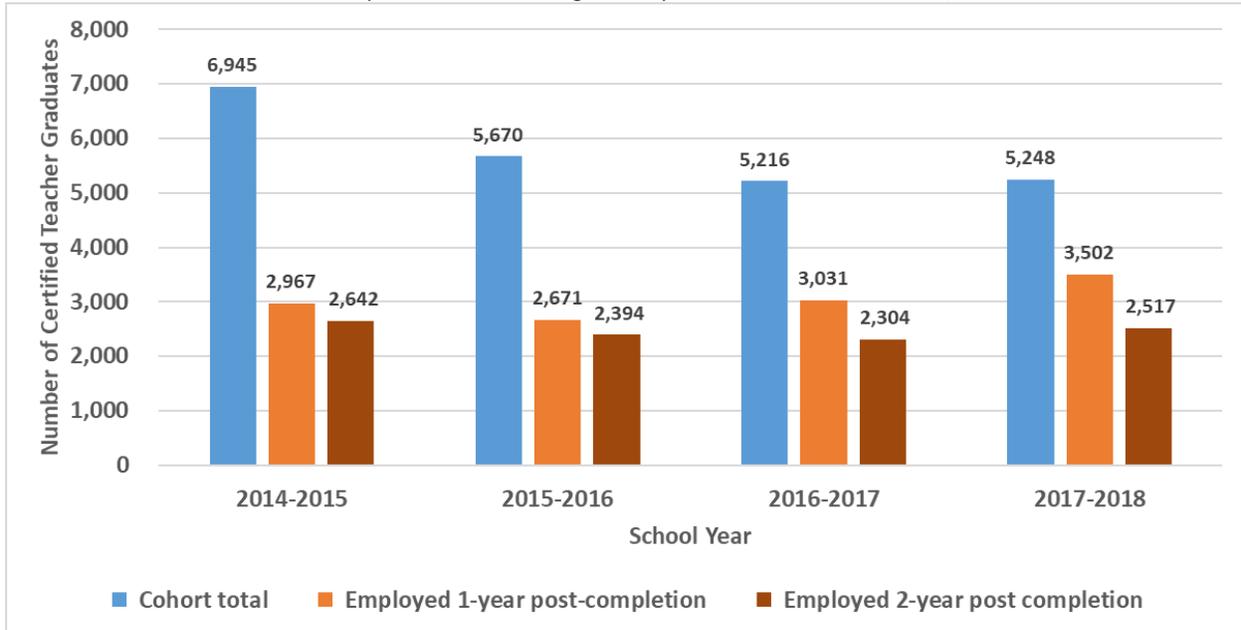


⁸ See [Facts about the Teaching Profession for A National Conversation about Teaching](#) from the U.S. Department of Education.

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Table 5: Number of certified teacher graduates, by number employed after one and two years: 2014-15 to 2017-18

Source: New Jersey Education to Earnings Data System, NJSMART Staff Extract, 2012-2020



The data outlined here is based on what the Heldrich Center has available and their assessment of what could be clearly presented. It demonstrates a snapshot of the educator shortage landscape while additional research is needed to better understand variations across subgroups and where higher quality data collections are necessary. Some Task Force members had questions about the methodology. Additional research, beyond what is prepared for this report, will be necessary to summarize educator pipeline and shortage data within and across subgroups such as demographic, racial, or by certification. State data collected on ESPs is unreliable and less robust than that collected for certificated staff, so it is omitted here. Future data collections that provide more detailed and complete data on ESPs would allow for a comprehensive analysis for school staff that do not require a state certificate, which is included in the recommendations below. Finally, as presented, these data represent the most recent available while a new report is anticipated from NJDOE in the spring of 2023 that will provide more recent figures.

Initial Recommendations: Supporting Educators to Improve Retention

The Task Force identified several areas to support the day-to-day activities of educators and reduce the stress educators face to improve the retention of current staff and increase interest in the field. Several Task Force members specifically noted that “retention is the best form of recruitment” since it is common for current educators to recruit others into the field. Pandemic impacted instruction has taken a toll on classroom educators to the point that many Task Force members identified this as a driver of educators changing careers. Similarly, the demands educators feel in their daily instructional life has increased stress levels and made the career less compelling for those considering entering the teaching profession. For these reasons, the Task Force members identified several recommendations to target these issues.

These recommendations are grouped together by a general theme or overarching topic area, and where applicable, specific recommendations offered by Task Force members are further detailed.

Each recommendation laid out in this report would require different actions at different levels of Government. Recommendations may require statutory, regulatory, or administrative action at the federal, state, or local level. It is important to note that the recommendations are not numbered according to priority, importance, or impact. Further, implementation of these recommendations varies, ranging from local school-level policy changes to those that may require state or federal legislative amendments.

1. Expand mentorship and professional development for early career educators.

- 1.1. Fund and support more early career mentoring and support.**
- 1.2. Create leader-to-educator and peer-to-peer support systems.**
- 1.3. Pay for mentoring fees for novice teachers.**
- 1.4. Retain new educators through robust professional development, mentoring, and training.**
- 1.5. Encourage union membership and other ways to maximize educator voice.**

Educators that are new to the field often face an adjustment period transitioning from student teaching to being the leader of a classroom. To avoid early burnout and career exits during these crucial early years in the field, the expansion of mentorship programs, teacher leader pathways, and targeted professional development opportunities. Programs such as the Men of Color Hope Achievers (MOCHA)⁹ and the Minority Teacher Development Program¹⁰ can serve as models for expanded efforts to increase diversity and provide supplemental supports to educators during their preparatory years and into early career.

2. Find ways to support polices that promote work/life balance for educators.

Many educators face long hours outside of the classroom to complete grading and other after-hours tasks. Other career paths have emphasized a work/life balance that is typically not available to classroom instructors. Through collective bargaining, seek increased flexibility

⁹ The MOCHA program is a partnership between the New Jersey Department of Education and Rowan University. More details can be found [here](#).

¹⁰ The [Minority Teacher Development Grant](#) is offered by the New Jersey Department of Education to identify effective programs and strategies to recruit, train, and place new teachers, with an emphasis on the training and retention of minority teacher candidates.

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with personal days, sick days, and limiting required participation in activities that take place outside of school hours are key areas of focus.

3. Support implementation of policies and practices that focus on safety, physical, and mental health in our schools to produce a healthy learning and working environment.

3.1. Provide mental health supports for staff and students.

3.2. Support implementation of policies and practices that improve morale through regular appreciation days, staff surveys, innovation hours, etc.

3.3. Improve safety and climate of building for all in the education community. Invest in facilities improvements to improve general working conditions (HVAC, availability of drinking water, quality of classroom facilities, mold and allergen remediation, removing toxic materials, etc.).

3.4. Improve working conditions by supporting educator well-being and mental health, inclusive of educator input and rewarding effective school district practices through culture and climate innovation grants.

Educators face growing strain on their own mental health while also being tasked with playing a key role in helping students through their own mental health struggles. Providing in-school support groups, time specifically for mental health, and other direct services to educators should be expanded to deal with this growing crisis. Physical health and safety, such as recent firearm restrictions¹¹ and funding to support improvements in school air quality¹² have provided good first steps. Expanding successful programs and policies like these will reinforce schools as safe and healthy place to work and learn.

4. Support schools in implementing policies and practices that create an environment that is free of bias, including microaggressions.

4.1. Explore the potential of Board of Education civility policies to improve the climate of Board meetings and interactions.

4.2. Invest in a diverse educator pipeline.

Place a greater emphasis on programs to improve culture competency training to reduce bias and microaggressions in schools for all staff. The New Jersey School Climate Improvement Survey¹³ was designed to help schools identify school climate strengths and needs and make use of data to create strategic plans to improve conditions for teaching and learning. This survey, along with antibias training¹⁴, the work of the New Jersey Interagency Task Force to Combat Youth Bias¹⁵, and Trauma-Informed & Healing-Centered Practices¹⁶ are all good starting point to expand these efforts.

¹¹ See [P.L. 2022, Chapter 131](#).

¹² Programs such as the [School and Small Business Energy Efficiency Stimulus Program](#) offered by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities has provided additional funding to upgrade heating, ventilation, and cooling (HVAC) systems in schools.

¹³ More information on the New Jersey School Climate Improvement Survey can be found [here](#).

¹⁴ [P.L. 2020, Chapter 68](#) requires implicit bias training as part of the cultural diversity training curriculum for law enforcement officers.

¹⁵ See [An Anti-Bias Vision for the Next Generation](#) from October 2020 from the New Jersey Interagency Task Force to Combat Youth Bias.

¹⁶ The New Jersey Department of Education has a resource page for [Trauma-Informed & Healing-Centered Practices](#).

5. Reduce administrative paperwork and other tasks that pull teachers away from classroom instruction.

- 5.1. Reassess student growth objectives (SGOs) and median student growth percentiles (mSGP).**
- 5.2. Meaningfully reduce burden of paperwork for educators.**
- 5.3. Provide more autonomy around lesson planning and curriculum: for example, eliminate tedious lesson planning templates and requirements for daily plan submission as well as lockstep adherence to pacing guides.**
- 5.4. Revise Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) to make it less paperwork intensive.**
- 5.5. Increase prep time (non-teaching time) during the regular school day; explore opportunities for innovative scheduling practices such as 4-day teaching week.**
- 5.6. Provide additional support staff and planning time and properly communicate the resources available to teachers.**
- 5.7. Explore the impact of standardized testing on educator recruitment and retention.**

Adding to educator stress levels is the amount of administrative paperwork and other reporting required by state agencies and by the local district administration. Finding ways to measurably reduce these reporting requirements for classroom teachers will reduce the daily stress of educators and allow them to focus on the needs of their students. A thorough review of state regulations and the amount of reporting requirements that are driven by local district requirements could find ways that these can be minimized. Some testing is needed to meet federal requirements.

6. Expand mentorship and co-teaching models across the state.

- 6.1. Increase collaboration opportunities for staff during the regular school day, including authentic professional learning communities (PLCs) requiring no follow-up paperwork; utilize collaboration to foster leadership and collective teacher efficacy as well as solution-creating and distributed leadership.**
- 6.2. Elevate the Teacher Leadership Endorsement program with tangible benefits.**
- 6.3. Fund avenues for career advancement – for example, provide meaningful benefits to the Teacher Leader credential.**

Consider developing a statewide mentorship program for new teachers that may include successful components such as afterschool mentorship and a co-teaching model. This program could build off the current Teacher Leadership Endorsement¹⁷ offered by the New Jersey Department of Education. Some Task Force members noted that this program is not well known and should be expanded and more widely advertised.

7. Create a public relations campaign that advocates for individuals to become educators and to address the negative public discourse surrounding teachers and other educators, with additional focus on diversity for recruitment efforts.

- 7.1. Launch public recruitment campaign.**

¹⁷ Established by [P.L. 2015, Chapter 111](#), the New Jersey Department of Education established the [Teacher Leader Endorsement](#) provided to eligible candidates that complete an approved program of study.

- 7.2. Build a robust marketing and recruitment effort that advocates for individuals to become educators.**
- 7.3. Recognize that the negative public discourse and political demonization surrounding public education and public educators has contributed to a reduction in the number of education candidates.**

Develop an advertising campaign to help drive interest in pursuing an education career path. There has been a recent uptick in negativity directed towards educators at local school board meetings and online. These events create and diminish the hard work of these professionals and make it more difficult to recruit into the field. The state should develop a comprehensive public relations campaign to directly address these misperceptions to help rebuild the positive image of public school educators.

8. Increase educator pay.

Increasing pay for all educators was a recommendation by several Task Force members to improve retention. Doing so makes the field more appealing and could entice more educators to stay in the field.

9. Explore reducing the time it takes to be granted tenure.

Focusing on the retention of new educators, some Task Force members recommended that the amount of time be reduced for teachers to be granted tenure.

10. Create written “Core Beliefs” that will provide guiding principles for effective home and family partnerships with educators and school communities.

A written document outlining “Core Beliefs” for educators, and all members of the education community, enumerates the specific ways to recognize the professionalism and esteem of the professional educators who are integral to the operation of schools.

Initial Recommendations: Improving Recruitment and Training

The Task Force identified the barriers to recruitment and training of new educators, particularly for diverse candidates to reflect the demographics of student enrollment in New Jersey, as a focus area to addressing staffing shortages. As fewer individuals choose to pursue a career as an educator, the enrollment at the state’s educator preparation programs at institutions of higher education has generally declined in recent years. By focusing in on the most prominent barriers individuals face throughout this process or those that may discourage an individual to pursue this path, the Task Force identified the following recommendations.

These recommendations are grouped together by a general theme or overarching topic area, and where applicable, specific recommendations offered by Task Force members are further detailed.

Each recommendation laid out in this report would require different actions at different levels of Government. Recommendations may require statutory, regulatory, or administrative action at the federal, state, or local level. It is important to note that the recommendations are not numbered according to priority, importance, or impact. Further, implementation of these recommendations varies, ranging from local school-level policy changes to those that may require state or federal legislative amendments.

11. Establish a New Jersey teacher apprenticeship program.

11.1. Strengthen University partnerships, including grow-your own programs, to promote careers in education and encourage prospective college students to attend New Jersey’s institutions of higher education.

11.2. Build Grow Your Own Models.

Other states¹⁸ have developed model teacher apprenticeship programs that provide a new pathway for educators to learn the trade while receiving mentorship from experienced teachers. This model is designed with other trade apprenticeships in mind, with an emphasis on the skills necessary for classroom educators. One common approach to apprenticeship programs is through Grow Your Own¹⁹ programs that seek to train teachers locally to reflect the community’s diversity in the classroom. Although there are Grow Your Own initiatives in New Jersey, there is not a statewide policy²⁰ or any funding appropriated for these programs.

12. Develop a streamlined path to teacher certification for education support professionals (ESPs).

12.1. Support education support professionals’ pipeline with time in classroom counting toward certification requirements.

12.2. Establish tenure for ESPs.

12.3. Develop a federal Department of Labor approved apprenticeship program in New Jersey that would provide funding to support ESPs working towards certification.

¹⁸ Michigan recently established a [pilot apprenticeship program](#) in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor.

¹⁹ A [New America study](#) found that Wyoming was the only state that did not have a Grow Your Own Program.

²⁰ A recent [national study](#) summarized the Grow Your Own policies across all 50 states.

12.4. Provide coursework or pathways for existing teachers to earn and qualify for additional certifications (e.g. expanding add-on endorsements and/or broadening certification categories)

12.5. Develop a program enabling instructional assistants/paraprofessionals to become certified.

Although education support professionals have significant in-class experience, there is not a current recognition of this instructional experience if pursuing a teaching certificate. New Jersey should establish a clear path for ESPs that choose to pursue certification that eliminates redundant measures for already experienced educators. A recent partnership²¹ between Ramapo College of New Jersey and the Morris-Union Jointure Commission provides a framework for an expedited process for ESPs that already hold a bachelor's degree to receive full teacher credentials.

13. Grow and streamline the alternate route pathway to certification.

13.1. Explore an accelerated alternate route program pathway that would reduce time necessary from two-years down to one-year.

13.2. Increase investment in alternative route programs.

13.3. Reduce the number of hours required for the alternate route certification.

13.4. Allow school districts to be approved as providers of job-embedded educator preparation that aligns with the national standards and defined competencies for new career and technical education teachers.

13.5. Allow competency-based approach to pedagogical training for the alternate route program rather than defining the program by the number of "seat time" hours required.

13.6. Expand pathways into the education profession.

Expanding the alternate route pathway²² can help expand the educator workforce for those that have other work experience but did not complete a traditional educator preparation program through an institution of higher education. Many Task Force members find the current requirements for this program to be too onerous and generate barriers for individuals that would otherwise be interested in becoming an educator. Specifically, the number of hours required, including "seat time" requirements should be reduced. Similarly, allowing for a one-year accelerated program would expedite this pathway for highly qualified individuals. These members recommend that the state should complete a comprehensive review of the program, including exploration of options to provide state funding to further reduce fiscal barriers for potential teachers.

14. Review teacher preparation requirements and consider revisions that will reduce the burdens faced by teacher candidates.

14.1. Accept more transfer credits for those entering educator preparation programs.

14.2. Expand Community College Educator Training programs beyond current limitation of elementary education.

14.3. Reassess grade point average requirements.

14.4. Simplify, better support, and expedite certification process, including multi-lingual support.

²¹ Additional information on the Accelerated Post-Bac/MASE Dual Certification Program can be found [here](#).

²² Additional details about the [alternate route pathway](#) are available on the New Jersey Department of Education website.

- 14.5. Recommend that every district have a human resources expert on education certifications that can streamline the process by dealing closely with the county office and to provide for confirmation of certification requirements within each district.**
- 14.6. Coordinate with educator preparation programs to identify coursework requirements that are barriers for students.**
- 14.7. Expand partnerships with community colleges and repeal the current credit cap that prohibits transfers from pursuing an education degree.**

A comprehensive review of the regulatory requirements in N.J.A.C. 6A:9, et. al for teacher preparation is necessary, which was last completed in 2015²³. This process is currently underway with the State Board of Education. Several members of the Task Force submitted formal comments during the current regulatory amendment process and have shared those comments with the other members. Reconsideration of grade point average standards and coursework requirements, as two examples, would expand eligibility to otherwise qualified candidates. Working with educator preparation programs to determine areas that serve as roadblocks, such as specific courses or basic skills requirements, is necessary to ensure that these requirements are not overly burdensome to candidates.

15. Evaluate assessments teacher candidates are currently required to pass.

- 15.1. Study the impact of eliminating the mandatory Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators exam as a New Jersey requirement to be considered an education student or adding alternative passing options.**
- 15.2. Reduce the number of days that candidates need to wait until being able to re-take a required assessment.**
- 15.3. Create assessment alternatives for candidates who fail required assessments multiple times.**

In December 2022, Governor Murphy signed legislation²⁴ that eliminated the requirement for the completion of the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) as a requirement for teacher certification. This was a significant step in allowing educator preparation programs to implement performance-based assessments. Further review is necessary for the requirements of the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators exams. Specifically, alternative pathways should be explored to allow for individuals that are otherwise qualified for certification but are struggling to pass the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators exam to move forward with certification.

16. Expand certification reciprocity agreements with neighboring states and abroad.

- 16.1. Provide reciprocity for those entering New Jersey with a teacher certification from outside of the state.**
- 16.2. Develop reciprocity agreements and partnerships for international candidates.**

The current rules²⁵ for out-of-state certificated educators (“reciprocity”) are thought to be burdensome to those that may choose to move to New Jersey – these barriers limit the number of individuals from other states that seek to teach in New Jersey school districts. By

²³ Summary of requirements for a certificate of eligibility with advanced standing (CEAS) is found [here](#).

²⁴ P.L. 2022, Chapter 129 was [signed by Governor Murphy](#) on December 16, 2022.

²⁵ Requirements for out-of-state educators seeking reciprocity can be found [here](#).

revisiting these requirements and expanding this to include streamlined processes for candidates coming from abroad, New Jersey can significantly increase the teacher candidate pool.

17. Reevaluate student teaching requirements.

17.1. Streamline student teaching requirements to provides teacher candidates more flexibility in meeting this requirement.

The requirements for student teaching should be reevaluated to address difficulty for some students to complete these requirements. By requiring unpaid student teaching, it is financially burdensome to candidates for this experience who may also be facing student debt. Some Task Force members believe that this clinical experience can be completed within a single semester for successful teacher candidates.

18. Create pipeline programs for students in middle and high school to pursue a teaching career.

18.1. Invest in middle school and high school pipeline programs in collaboration with institutions of higher education through grants, scholarships, and loan forgiveness.

Interest in careers begins at an early age and students in middle and high school can learn about the education profession close-up during their school years. This presents an opportunity to generate interest in the profession during formative years and when teachers and other educators have close relationships with students. Coordinated efforts to create clubs or other future educator programming can pay long term dividends. The Center for Future Educators²⁶ at The College of New Jersey is just one example of a model that could be expanded further statewide.

19. Eliminate the New Jersey residency requirement to increase the educator candidate pool.

19.1. Eliminate New Jersey First, the state residency requirement for educators and other public employees.

Since the passage of the New Jersey First Act²⁷ in 2011, non-exempted public employees are required to reside in New Jersey. Especially for school districts that border other states, the residency requirement significantly restricts the recruiting pool for educators. In addition, this change would reduce the administrative burden and expense currently tied to the residency waiver process.

20. Implement a statewide data collection to understand why individuals choose not to complete educator preparation programs, why some educators leave the profession early, and other key data points to better understand this issue.

20.1. Implement a more comprehensive statewide educator data collection.

20.2. Develop a statewide exit survey to understand why individuals choose not to complete educator preparation programs.

²⁶ Additional information about the [Center for Future Educators](#) can be found on The College of New Jersey's website.

²⁷ See [P.L. 2011, Chapter 70](#).

Currently, there is limited information available regarding those individuals that begin enrollment in an educator preparation program but do not ultimately complete the program. By creating a statewide exit survey, it would provide valuable information about those students that changed to a different program as well as those that did not complete college at all. Similarly, the State does not collect comprehensive data on ESPs and other non-certificated staff that are essential to school activities. Going forward this information would provide a roadmap for key areas of focus in student retention and completion of educator preparation coursework.

21. Prioritize recruitment and training for substitute teachers.

21.1. Recruit and train substitute teachers.

21.2. Build and maintain a cadre of high-quality substitute teachers by increasing daily pay, establish a resident substitute program so the same substitute teachers serve the same schools, and remove barriers for retired teachers to substitute.

21.3. Explore expansion of the time that substitute teacher can serve in an instructional role in some instances.

Putting an emphasis on increasing the number of highly trained substitute teachers helps to fill current needs and develops a new pipeline of individuals that are likely to be interested in becoming a full-time teacher or educator. Some members identified that in certain instances it may be administratively necessary to utilize a substitute to serve in an instructional role longer than is currently allowed. This possibility would require more study to determine the specific parameters under which these circumstances would be met. Several Task Force members underscored the importance of having qualified individuals ready to substitute to address the current shortage.

Initial Recommendations: State Funded Programs to Address Educator Shortages

In anticipation of the upcoming Fiscal Year 2024 budget process, the Task Force considered possible programs that could be implemented through state appropriations. Many of these recommendations provide a fiscal response to those barriers and issues identified elsewhere in this report. In many cases, the State could provide supplemental funding that would reduce student debt, reduce financial hardship during the educator preparation process, and assist school districts that face fiscal constraints. Some of these proposals would require separate legislation.

These recommendations are grouped together by a general theme or overarching topic area, and where applicable, specific recommendations offered by Task Force members are further detailed.

Each recommendation laid out in this report would require different actions at different levels of Government. Recommendations may require statutory, regulatory, or administrative action at the federal, state, or local level. It is important to note that the recommendations are not numbered according to priority, importance, or impact. Further, implementation of these recommendations varies, ranging from local school-level policy changes to those that may require state or federal legislative amendments.

22. Implement an educator licensing fee holiday.

22.1. Eliminate fees for certification and licensure.

When seeking certification, educator candidates pay fees²⁸ ranging from \$20 to \$200 for the issuance of certificates, evaluation of credentials, renewals, assessment service fees, and more. These are direct costs to the candidates above and beyond the cost of an educator preparation program and can pose a financial barrier to those just entering the field more making a career change. Most Task Force members recommend a “holiday” on these fees to make these services a state funded service that is not directly charged to candidates.

23. Provide stipends or other pay to candidates while they are completing student teaching requirements.

23.1. Pay students for student teaching.

Unlike other professional and technical fields where full-time internships/apprenticeships are a requirement for certification or licensure, candidates that are completing their student teaching requirements are currently unpaid for this experience. As this can pose a financial hardship and an additional barrier for individuals to pursue the education field, most Task Force members recommend a stipend or pay considerations for candidates completing this work. Oklahoma, for example, has established a paid student teaching program²⁹ that utilizes federal pandemic stimulus funds.

²⁸ The full New Jersey certification fee schedule is available [here](#).

²⁹ The [paid student teaching program](#) provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Education is in partnership with the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education.

24. Establish financial incentives for individuals that enroll in, or that have completed, an educator preparation program through tuition reimbursement, stipends, or tuition forgiveness.

24.1. Increase scholarships and/or tuition free options.

24.2. Expand access and eligibility to student loan forgiveness.

24.3. For ESPs, increase scholarships or tuition free opportunities to pursue certification requirements.

24.4. Provide tuition reimbursement for the alternate route program.

24.5. Provide financial incentives for college students to enter and education program through tuition reimbursement, stipends, and tuition forgiveness programs.

To improve affordability of entering the educator profession, the many Task Force members recommend that the state establish a targeted program to reduce the cost of college for students that work towards and complete an educator preparation program. Included in this program can be a requirement that graduates agree to teach for a minimum number of years post completion. The Arizona Teachers Academy³⁰ helps pay for tuition and fees to candidates enrolled in a state university or community college educator preparation program with a required minimum of one year teaching to receive the scholarship. Establishing a similar program in New Jersey would address the barrier of college costs to those that may be deterred from pursuing a teaching career.

25. Develop a state funded program that provides bonuses or scholarships for hard to fill vacancies.

25.1. Invest in educator pipeline loan forgiveness and service scholarship programs to teach high-need areas and commit to serving a certain number of years.

25.2. Address certification shortages in the following areas: Special Education, Nurses, Science, LDTC, Mathematics, Media Specialists, Computer Science/Business, CTE, World Language, ELL/Bilingual/ESL.

25.3. Hire AmeriCorps members to serve as tutors.

25.4. Ensure adequate staffing, including substitutes, nurses, counselors, and support staff.

Some positions, such as special education teachers and high school math, have been persistently hard to fill positions across the state. Recently, other staff positions in schools such as those related to student transportation, nurses, and counselors have also been difficult to fill. Some Task Force members recommend that the state establish an incentive program to provide additional compensation to entice candidates to pursue these fields. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education has established a scholarship program³¹ that provides up to \$4,000 for candidates that will teach in a high need area upon graduation. In this program, high need positions are defined as special education, or science or math at the middle/high school level. Using this as a model, New Jersey should establish a scholarship or bonus program to help districts fill high need positions.

³⁰ The [Arizona Teachers Academy](#) provides supplemental funding to cover the tuition and fees after acceptance of all other forms of aid and scholarships.

³¹ Program requirements for the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's Student Teaching Scholarship for High-Need Fields can be found [here](#).

26. Establish new state-funded programs to provide additional resources to educators.

- 26.1. Provide reimbursements to educators for out-of-pocket expenses on classroom supplies or necessities.*
- 26.2. Provide adequate funding for school and classroom supplies so that educators and families do not have to spend their own money supplying classrooms.*
- 26.3. Enact tax credits for educators.*
- 26.4. Fund pilot programs to encourage innovation: empower educators to design and test creative approaches to education and school operations.*
- 26.5. Create other economic supports for educators – access to house buying programs, workforce housing, transportation, and parking costs, etc.*
- 26.6. Create programs to contract with community-based organizations, parent and advocacy organizations, and others to fulfill tasks that may be part of school staff job descriptions but do not necessarily need to be completed by certified teachers or other professionals.*
- 26.7. Provide direct state support to institutions of higher education to maintain certification programs that are under-enrolled and are at risk of closure or failing to meet the current demand from public school districts.*

As school districts have reduced spending on school supplies, educators have supplemented these needs by purchasing classroom supplies and materials using their own money. Several Task Force members recommend establishing a state funded program to reimburse teachers for these out-of-pocket expenses to remove a common financial impact educators face. Many Task Force members recommend that the state consider this and other innovative programs that use state funds to incentivize educators into the field and to make education more competitive in attracting top talent.

27. Explore supplemental funding to defray costs for school districts that implement an ESP tenure program or incentives to hire full-time ESPs.

To avoid the cost of benefits provided to full-time staff, some districts only offer part-time positions for critical need ESP roles within the district. Some Task Force members recommend that this issue be further studied to identify possible incentives for districts to hire ESPs as full-time employees of the district or to establish a tenure program to recognize the importance of their work.

28. Reduce assessment costs to educator candidates through a reimbursement or cost sharing model.

- 28.1. Eliminate or reduce fees for exams required for certification.*

Educator candidates, depending on the type of certification being sought, face a slate of required exams that add to the financial burden of becoming a certified teacher. The state should establish a reimbursement program to help candidates with these costs. Alternatively, the state could enter into agreements with the testing vendors to defray the costs of these assessments for New Jersey test takers.

29. Revisit changes to pension plans and health care coverage for educators and allow retirees to return to the classroom without impacting retirement earnings.

- 29.1. Revisit healthcare coverage: lower out-of-pocket costs of healthcare and benefits, including disability insurance.**
- 29.2. Revisit educator pension: eliminate Tier 5 and lower retirement age.**
- 29.3. Offer a pension incentive to attenuate Tier 1 numbers so that decisions and compensation moving forward can be addressed in a uniform fashion.**
- 29.4. Continue to permit retirees to return to the classroom without impacting their pension.**

The establishment of a tiered pension plan³² for educators, which provides less generous benefits to newer hires has made teacher positions less competitive with other positions that require similar levels of education. Recent changes through P.L. 2020 Chapter 44³³ established new health benefits programs specifically for educators that were anticipated to generate enrollee savings, but it has had mixed results.³⁴ Previously, it was an accepted trade-off that teachers would accept more modest salaries in lieu of generous health and pension benefits, but the recent changes to these programs have lessened or eliminated this value proposition. Many Task Force members recommend that the state reassess these changes to the pension and health benefits programs for educators.

30. Evaluate increasing the 2% local levy cap for local board of education taxing authority.

- 30.1. Expand the 2% tax authority for local school boards of education.**
- 30.2. Consider additional exemptions to the cap calculation.**

In 2010, a new law³⁵ established a 2% growth limit (with minor exceptions) to the annual increase in local school tax levy sought by the school board. For many years since that time inflation has been historically low, but we are now facing the highest inflation³⁶ seen in decades. This hard cap limits the additional revenue that a school district can collect to cover all educational costs for the year. With the recent changes to school funding³⁷ and the recent increases in inflation, most Task Force members recommend that the state relax this cap or provide additional cap exemptions to allow districts to raise additional revenue.

31. Create and fund a teacher residency program.

- 31.1. Establishing a high-quality teacher residency program to increase teacher retention and effectiveness.**
- 31.2. Fund residency programs for career changes.**
- 31.3. Create embedded and funded teacher residency programs.**

Some school districts and states across the country³⁸ have established a teacher residency program to provide an alternative pathway to teaching for prospective educators that already

³² New Jersey's Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF) has [five tiers of benefits](#) depending on an enrollee's date of hire.

³³ See [P.L. 2020, Chapter 44](#).

³⁴ [NorthJersey.com article](#) from May 19, 2022, "New state teachers' health plan didn't deliver promised savings, say school districts."

³⁵ See [P.L. 2010, Chapter 44](#).

³⁶ [PBS News Hour story](#) from July 13, 2022, "U.S. inflation at 9.1 percent, a record high."

³⁷ See [P.L. 2018, Chapter 67](#).

³⁸ Examples of teacher residency programs include [New York](#), [Boston](#), and [Chicago](#).

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have a bachelor's degree. These programs are designed for individuals that have a background in the field (such as math or science) and can learn through on-the-job training and under the guidance of an experienced teacher. Some Task Force members recommend that New Jersey establish a teacher residency program as a new pathway for educators to gain the experience and credentials necessary to join the field.