



Faculty Work Comprehensive List

9-6-2022

Growing Our Own: Addressing the Teacher Shortage

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Keywords

teachers, supply and demand, Christian education, career development

Disciplines

Christianity | Education

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Re-posted from The Center for Advancement of Christian Education (CACE) blog.

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Growing Our Own: Addressing the Teacher Shortage

September 6, 2022

On August 25, 2022, *Education Week* published a piece titled “Most Parents Don’t Want Their Kids to Become Teachers, Poll Finds.” The 2022 PDK International poll found that when parents were asked if they would want their child to become a teacher, 62 percent of parents surveyed responded “no.” The reasons varied, from poor compensation to difficulty of the job to lack of respect.

These three reasons certainly ring true for those in the classroom every day. Teachers are not paid well. According to Business.org researcher Nicolle Okoren, salaries for American K-12 teachers dipped about 3% from 2010 to 2021. Whereas teaching has never been an easy job, the increasing levels of disruptive behavior, threats of school shootings, and constant advances in technology have significantly amplified the complexity of the teaching vocation (not to mention a pandemic that caused a steep learning curve in online teaching).

Also disheartening is a lack of respect for the profession. While trust is at a ten-year high (54 percent of respondents giving their schools an “A” or “B” grade and 63 percent saying they have a “great deal or a good amount” of overall trust and confidence in their community’s teachers), only 23 percent of this group gave that same “A” or “B” grade to America’s K-12 school system. There appears to be respect for local teachers but not for the system at large. On the August 21 episode of CBS News *Face the Nation*, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona stated, “Let’s face it, this teacher shortage is a symptom of something that’s been going on for longer than the pandemic and that’s a teacher respect issue.”

The status of teachers

There was a time when education was considered one of the noblest professions. Along with medicine and church ministry, teaching was a highly respected and coveted position. For a community to grow and thrive, it needed to have medical professionals to keep people healthy and free from disease, religious leaders to strengthen faith and enrich spirits, and well-trained and enthusiastic teachers to inspire and equip the children.

Each profession is still needed for a flourishing community; these three are not exclusive, but the calling to teach has dropped in the “noble job” rankings. The reasons noted above (teacher compensation and complexity of the vocation) certainly contribute to this drop, but there are other factors as well. Whereas unions have their rightful place in our nation’s history, there is a natural consequence when teachers are perceived as labor instead of professionals. The school calendar does not help our cause—have you heard the “I guess you are getting ready to go back to work?” comment lately? The frequency of parents (and even fellow educators) taking to

social media to blast a teacher or a school has taken its toll. To add fuel to the fire, when states (whose hands are forced due to the teacher shortage) pass laws that no longer require a bachelor's degree for teaching, the profession is naturally degraded.

As I reread the first part of this post, it was hard not to get a little depressed! As one of many who have given years to this vocational calling, it is disheartening to see statistics denoting teachers leaving the profession and reading their stories explaining why. How do we elevate teaching? We must. Education is the backbone of our democracy. Schools are where we have the greatest opportunity to foster creativity and curiosity, strengthen our understanding of how our country was built and how other countries were built, and challenge students to new levels of performance and achievement. A great teacher in every classroom is one of the most valuable resources we can ever provide for families in our communities. How can we meet such a lofty goal in the current context?

Looking for solutions

We seem to find ourselves in step three of an action research study. We have already 1) identified the problem and 2) reviewed the literature. It is now time to develop and implement a plan. We will need a number of experimental studies to address this challenge, as a single solution is not likely. A survey conducted earlier this year by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 44% of public schools report having full-time or part-time teacher vacancies. In other words, 44% of schools do not have a great teacher in every classroom.

There are several action research plans being piloted, some simply to address the immediate shortage. A district in Iowa is offering a \$50,000 retirement incentive for teachers 60 years or older to stay through June 30, 2023. Some districts are switching to four-day weeks. Signing bonuses are also becoming more common. Hartford (CT) Public Schools is offering a \$5,000 signing incentive for educators in high-demand subjects like math, science, and bilingual education. Taos (NM) Municipal Schools promises a \$50,000 starting salary for any new teacher hire, plus a \$10,000 bonus. Stanly County (NC) Schools also announced a \$10,000 signing incentive.

One promising practice I see is a movement to **grow our own**. While succession planning has been a popular conversation in the school boardroom for administrative positions, I believe it is time for a similar initiative as we think of how to meet the goal of a great teacher in every classroom.

This movement is already underway in places like Colorado and Iowa. Colorado's **Pathways2Teaching** is a concurrent enrollment program for high school juniors and seniors. Students can earn 3-9 credits that can transfer to teacher education programs. They can earn a paraprofessional certificate as well. Iowa launched a program to provide opportunities for current high school students to earn a paraeducator certificate and associate degree. Inservice paraeducators can earn their bachelor's degree all while learning and working

in the classroom. These grant opportunities allow students to get into the profession without being saddled with massive college debt. These programs are identifying and knocking down barriers to the profession.

Growing our own means that we need to look at local candidates and recruit members of our own communities. Our staff picture directory needs to better mirror the communities where we live. There are forward-thinking schools in the CACE network that will hire a candidate of color even if they do not have an opening!

Some of a school's best candidates will be the people we interact with daily—church members, parents, and local business leaders: research and anecdotal evidence show that teachers hired within the community tend to teach long-term. Hiring locally grown teachers often leads to longer stays, countering the cost to short-term teachers. High teacher turnover undermines student achievement and consumes valuable staff time and resources. **The Learning Policy Institute** estimates that urban districts can spend, on average, more than \$20,000 on each new hire, a significant investment with little return if teachers leave within 1-2 years.

Do you have programs in place to grow your own? Are there other ways your school elevates teaching as a profession? If you do, please share those with the CACE network of schools in the comment section below or send me an email at tim.vansoelen@cace.org. The wisdom of our community is needed! Together, we can find a way to again elevate the teacher profession.