



**House Education Committee
Informational Meeting- Education Workforce
May 5, 2026, at 9:30 am, 140MC**

9:30am Call to Order

Committee Member Introductions
Opening Remarks- Chairman Schweyer

9:40am **Panel 1- Educator Perspective**

Mr. Aaron Chapin, President
Pennsylvania State Education Association

Ms. Jill Weller-Reilly, Teach Plus PA Senior Policy Fellow
Central Bucks SD

Dr. Ciminy St. Clair, Teach Plus PA Senior Policy Fellow
Norwin Area SD

10:10am **Panel 2- Administrator Perspective**

Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director
Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

Mr. Brian Pawling, President, PASBO
Director of Business Administration – Radnor Township School District

10:40am Closing Remarks/Adjournment

Written Testimony:

Dr. Eric C. Eshbach, Ed.D., Executive Director
Pennsylvania Principals Association

All times are approximate and include time for questions.

Live streamed at www.pahouse.com/live



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

**Informational Meeting Regarding
Issues Related to the Education Workforce**

**Presented to the
House Education Committee
May 5, 2026**

**By
Aaron Chapin
PSEA President**



Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Aaron Chapin, speaking on behalf of PSEA's 177,000 members, about a growing issue in our schools: injuries due to student behavior that are forcing educators and support professionals out of the profession. Retention is often framed as a pipeline issue, but one of the more immediate challenges is keeping the skilled educators we already have. Too many are being asked to meet rising student needs, and to face classroom conditions that at times can be unsafe, in increasingly complex environments without the protections inherent in the profession necessary to sustain a long-term career.

Over the past year, I conducted roundtables with special educators in each of PSEA's 11 regions across Pennsylvania and invited legislators to attend. Many of you, or your colleagues, joined those conversations. These were grounded in the daily realities educators are navigating right now. Special education teachers, paraprofessionals, personal care aides, and non-teaching professionals spoke candidly about increasing demands, growing caseloads, and the intensity of student needs. One theme came through consistently in every region: injuries that our educators face are not isolated concerns. They are daily realities that are putting educators at risk.

Those conversations made clear that educator safety is the result of a system under sustained strain. Across the state, educators described increasingly intense student behaviors, including hitting, biting, throwing objects, and frequent classroom evacuations, resulting in serious injuries such as concussions, emergency room visits, and extended medical leave. These incidents are not rare. At the same time, educators reported that there are often limited supports or consequences in place to address severe behavior, creating environments that not only are unsafe for staff, but also disrupt the learning of every student in the classroom.

These challenges are compounded by significant staffing shortages. Schools are facing ongoing gaps in properly certified teachers, paraprofessionals, personal care aides, and specialized staff, driven in part by low pay, limited benefits, and high turnover. Existing staff are frequently pulled from their assigned roles to fill immediate needs, leaving critical gaps elsewhere. As a result, many schools are struggling to meet IEP requirements, maintain appropriate supervision, or provide consistent support to students with complex needs.

Caseloads and class sizes have also exceeded manageable levels across multiple roles, including teachers, speech-language pathologists, and school psychologists. Educators are expected to provide instruction, manage cases, and meet compliance requirements simultaneously, often in overcrowded classrooms that exceed recommended or legal limits, making individualized instruction and fidelity to IEPs increasingly difficult.

These challenges are compounded by a significant rise in student behavioral and mental health needs. Educators are seeing more trauma, dysregulation, and emotional complexity, while access to counselors, psychologists, behavior analysts, and outside services remains limited. Delays in

evaluations, services, and placements are common, and students often return from crisis settings without the supports necessary for a successful transition.

Further complicating this picture, placement and inclusion decisions are frequently constrained by available resources rather than student need. Classrooms can become imbalanced, with high concentrations of students requiring intensive support, without the staffing necessary to meet those needs safely and effectively.

Taken together, these conditions are not just increasing demands on educators. They are increasing risk. Behavioral incidents are becoming more frequent, more intense, and more difficult to manage safely, making injuries more likely.

In this environment, injuries due to student behavior are not isolated incidents. They are an increasingly predictable outcome.

These incidents occur in a range of settings. Many take place in classrooms serving students with significant needs, including students with disabilities, where educators and support staff are working intensively to provide appropriate services, often without sufficient staffing or resources. But they are not limited to those environments. Educators in regular education settings are also experiencing serious incidents, and in more limited but still important cases, injuries are caused by parents or guardians.

The common thread is not who is involved, but that the system lacks consistent protections for the adults responsible for maintaining safe and effective learning environments.

Educators were clear that while long-term solutions must address staffing and student supports, there is also an immediate need to ensure that when an injury due to student behavior occurs, the response is consistent, is fair, and does not place the burden solely on the employee. House Bill 1919 reflects that feedback. It addresses a critical gap identified by educators themselves: the absence of a reliable, statewide standard that supports and protects school employees when they are injured and unable to perform their job duties.

When an educator or school employee sustains an injury due to student behavior that prevents them from performing their job duties, the consequences extend far beyond the incident itself. In most cases, they are routed into the workers' compensation system, which was not designed for the ongoing and unpredictable nature of student-related injuries in school settings. Many educators report delays in accessing benefits, the need to exhaust personal leave before qualifying, and the reality that workers' compensation replaces only a portion of their salary or wages, often making extended recovery financially unsustainable. The process can be slow and, at times, adversarial, with pressure to return to work before they are medically able to resume their duties.

Time out of work can also mean disruption in health insurance coverage and loss of credited service toward retirement in the Pennsylvania Public School Employees' Retirement System.

That loss directly impacts long-term financial security. For many educators and support professionals, particularly in high-need roles where both the intensity of student needs and the risk of injury are greatest, this experience becomes a breaking point. It is not the profession they are leaving, but the conditions.

House Bill 1919 offers a direct and practical response. The legislation would ensure that school employees who sustain an injury as a result of student behavior, or in less frequent cases behavior of parents or guardians, that prevents them from performing their job duties, can take the time they need to recover without losing pay or benefits, including the ability to continue accruing service credit. It replaces uncertainty with stability and reflects what educators themselves have said they need to remain in the profession. School employees should not have to bargain for these basic protections at the local level. They should be able to rely on a consistent standard that reflects the realities of their work.

This approach is not unprecedented. Under the Heart and Lung Act, the Commonwealth has long recognized that certain public servants face inherent risks in their work and should not be forced to bear the financial burden of injuries sustained in the line of duty. When a role carries inherent danger, the responsibility for that risk is assumed by the employer, not the individual worker. As conditions in schools continue to evolve, educators and support professionals are increasingly being asked to operate in environments where the risk of injury is real and growing. House Bill 1919 reflects that same principle, and PSEA applauds Representatives Mehaffie and Friel for jointly championing injury leave protections for school employees.

House Bill 1919 will not solve every challenge facing our schools. But it addresses one that is immediate and fixable and forces us to answer a simple question: when an educator is injured due to student behavior and cannot perform their job duties, who bears that cost? No school employee should be forced to absorb the financial consequences of being injured while doing their job. Right now, too many are, and increasingly, they are choosing to leave. And when they leave, the impact is felt by the entire school community, students and staff alike. That is not sustainable for our workforce or for our students. If we want stability in our schools, we must provide stability for the people in them.

Thank you for your time and consideration. PSEA urges the Committee to advance House Bill 1919.



**Written testimony of Teach Plus PA before the House Education Committee
Tuesday, May 5, 2026
Harrisburg, PA**

Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and Esteemed Education Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of Teach Plus Pennsylvania for today's informational hearing on the educator workforce.

We are grateful for your leadership in addressing one of the most urgent challenges facing our commonwealth: ensuring that every student in Pennsylvania has access to a well-prepared, well-supported, and effective teacher. Pennsylvania's educator workforce is at a critical inflection point. While the teacher shortage is often framed as a pipeline issue, the reality is more complex. It is a systems issue rooted in how we structure the teaching profession itself. If we want different outcomes, we must design a different system.

The Need for Reimagining

Across Pennsylvania, educators are navigating a system that has not kept pace with the evolving needs of teachers or students, making the teaching role increasingly difficult to sustain. The system fails educators at both ends of the profession; new teachers need consistent, high-quality preparation and job-embedded support, while experienced educators need opportunities to advance without leaving the classroom. Teachers at every stage of their career are currently expected to work in isolation rather than as a part of collaborative teams. At the same time, compensation structures and working conditions frequently lag behind those of other professions requiring similar levels of education.

These challenges are not isolated; they are interconnected. And they are contributing to both recruitment challenges and high attrition rates, particularly in historically underserved communities. The result is a system where educators are stretched thin and students experience too much inconsistency in instruction. Addressing this requires more than filling vacancies: it requires rethinking how the profession itself is designed. If we want more people to enter into and stay in education, we must reimagine the teacher role to be more differentiated, attractive, collaborative, and rewarding.

Reimagining the teacher role involves moving beyond a one-teacher, one-classroom model to more flexible, team-based structures that differentiate roles, distribute expertise, and create sustainable career pathways. With strong collaboration structures and expert teacher leadership, these models not only support teacher satisfaction, but also better equip teachers to deliver rigorous instruction that will improve student outcomes.

This vision is reflected in [PA Needs Teachers'](#) recently published report, [Reimagining Teaching: How Strategic Staffing Can Empower Teachers and Accelerate Learning in PA](#). Authored by Teach Plus PA Policy Fellows, the report examines the potential of one specific strategy for reimagining teaching, known as strategic staffing. Schools implementing strategic staffing models meet five key criteria:

- Team-based staffing
- Differentiated roles and compensation for educators

- Time for collaboration and support within the school day
- Flexibility in scheduling and staffing
- Integrated preparation pathways

This is not theoretical. These structures exist in high-performing systems around the world and in school systems in the United States. The question is not whether this vision is possible; it is whether we are willing to take the steps necessary to realize it in Pennsylvania.

Criteria of Strategic Staffing

What has endured for generations—one teacher, one classroom, and minimal collaboration—is increasingly unsustainable in a world that demands teamwork, flexibility, and continuous learning. Teachers across Pennsylvania are expressing clear needs for strong support, more time to work together, and meaningful career advancement opportunities. At the 2025 PA Needs Teachers Summit, educators, non profit leaders, district leaders, and researchers highlighted both their experience and growing evidence that rethinking traditional roles can improve both teacher retention and student outcomes.

International research from the National Center for Education and the Economy shows that high-performing systems organize teaching as a collaborative profession, where educators share responsibility for student success, spend more time dedicated to planning, are treated with agency, and have career pathways that allow them to lead without leaving the classroom. Teachers in these high-performing systems also receive professional preparation and mentoring that reflects the real demands of the job and are equipped with high-quality instructional materials.

Similar trends are also found in American schools implementing innovative staffing and scheduling models, commonly known as strategic staffing. Strategic staffing leverages proven, research-aligned strategies designed to improve teacher retention, advance equity, and support stronger outcomes for students. Although there is no single definition of strategic staffing, our research is guided by the following criteria:

1. **Team-based staffing:** Teams of educators—including teachers, support staff such as paraprofessionals, and (in some instances) other individuals such as tutors, student teachers, teacher apprentices or residents—are collectively responsible for supporting groups of students. Teams share responsibility for planning and instruction and are collectively responsible for the outcomes of their students.
2. **Differentiated roles and compensation, including team leader positions for teachers:** Highly effective teachers have formalized opportunities to earn additional compensation for extending their reach to more students, via leading teams of teachers, coaching, and/or taking on more students. Roles (and class sizes, teaching loads, etc.) are also differentiated to allow rookie and aspiring educators additional support and time for development (sometimes known as “shelter-and-develop”).
 - Roles such as lead teacher or Multi-Classroom Leader[®] allow accomplished teachers to extend their impact without leaving the classroom, improving their satisfaction and retention while giving more students access to excellent instruction and all teachers on their teams more support. Shelter-and-develop structures help early-career educators become more effective, supported, and likely to persist in the profession. Such role differentiation supports career progression and retention across the workforce, making teaching a profession with multiple pathways for growth
3. **Structure and time for educator collaboration and support:** There is space during the contractual school day or week for teams to meet for professional learning and instructional

- planning, and for team leaders to coach, mentor, and support other team members. Professional learning is growth-oriented, job-embedded, and curriculum-aligned.
4. **Flexibility in school staffing and scheduling, with teacher voice in design:** In order to allow for team-based staffing, differentiated roles, and space for collaboration and support, schools are empowered to think outside the box about educator roles, school schedules, student grouping, and class sizes. Teachers and other key stakeholders such as paraprofessionals, school partners, and students, and community members are part of the design process to determine the staffing and schedule changes needed for each school's unique context.
 5. **Integrated preparation pathways:** Multiple pathways into the teaching profession (e.g. traditional certification and student teaching, youth- and para-to-teacher pathways, teacher apprenticeships, and teacher residencies) are designed in collaboration with educator preparation programs to align with school needs. Aspiring educators are integrated into teams and receive robust, evidence-based, on-the-job training and support that is intentional and cohesive, not disconnected.

Models for Reimagining the Teacher Role

Although strategic staffing is a relatively new concept in Pennsylvania, schools across the country are already implementing a variety of models that are showing strong results. Our research highlights two of these innovative models that strongly reflect the strategic staffing criteria identified and share characteristics with the world's highest-performing education systems: Public Impact's Opportunity Culture model and Arizona State University's Next Education workforce model.

Opportunity Culture: Expanding the Reach of Great Teachers

The Opportunity Culture strategic staffing model, developed by Public Impact, creates new, differentiated roles and school-based flexibility to extend the reach of excellent teachers. Since its launch in 2013, it has expanded to over one thousand schools in 18 states, with over 90 percent of participating schools eligible for Title I funding.

This strategic staffing model reimagines how schools organize their staff by using teacher-led design teams to align instructional schedules and structures with student needs. Each team is led by a Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL), an effective teacher who remains in the classroom while also coaching and supporting a small group of colleagues. These teacher leaders earn additional compensation, typically about 20 percent more, and are provided dedicated time to lead instruction, coach peers, and analyze student data. Schools fund these roles by reallocating existing resources, allowing the model to operate within district budgets after the design process is complete.

In the Opportunity Culture Model:

- Excellent teachers have access to career pathways tied to impact without having to leave the classroom.
- Students have greater access to excellent instruction and more small-group teaching and tutoring for stronger learning results.
- Teachers on teams have access to embedded coaching, shared responsibilities, additional support, collaboration, and advancement opportunities.
- Principals share responsibility with teacher leaders to improve instruction and student outcomes.
- Compensation is aligned with expanded responsibilities.

Across multiple evaluations, the Opportunity Culture model has been shown to produce a range of positive results, including up to an extra half-year of learning for students on MCL teams each year and

over 90 percent satisfaction with the model among educators in MCL roles and teachers in Opportunity Culture schools, according to survey results.

Next Education Workforce: Teams Sharing Instructional Responsibility

The Next Education Workforce (NEW) model, designed by Arizona State University, shifts the unit of instruction from a single teacher to teams of educators collaboratively responsible for a shared roster of students. This model has spread to over 150 schools across Arizona, Michigan, and California.

This strategic staffing model organizes educators into teams of 4-6 who share responsibility for a common group of about 100 students. These teams may include lead teachers, residents, tutors, coaches, and community educators who collaboratively plan, teach, and support students. The collective responsibility for students allows for differentiated instruction and stronger student-adult relationships.

The NEW model has eight key elements:

1. Teachers share a roster of students.
2. Teachers share multiple learning spaces and move across these spaces throughout the day.
3. Teachers have and use team planning time.
4. Team members have different roles and responsibilities.
5. Teachers adjust their schedule according to the needs of both teachers and students.
6. Teachers group and regroup their students based on students' needs and interests.
7. Teachers use data to tailor learning to each student.
8. Teachers provide each student with rigorous learning opportunities.

Dr. Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania recently evaluated the NEW model in Mesa Unified school district finding that teachers in NEW teams reported greater professional influence and flexibility than their peers. NEW educators were 50 percent less likely to leave the classroom than similar non-NEW teachers, suggesting the model can significantly reduce turnover while strengthening teacher leadership. Additional research also links the NEW model to high job satisfaction and improved student outcomes.

Opportunity to Incentivize Strategic Staffing Statewide

Pennsylvania is already seeing growing interest in these models, and Philadelphia is likely to launch multiple philanthropically-funded pilots next school year. At the state level, Pennsylvania should consider establishing a grant program to support strategic staffing models across the commonwealth. This program would fund districts to design and implement innovative staffing models, including support for planning, professional development, and technical assistance. School districts should work in collaboration with their union leadership to design and implement these models. The state could further fund independent evaluations to assess impacts on teacher retention and student outcomes. North Carolina's Advanced Teaching Roles initiative offers a strong model for this approach.

North Carolina's Advanced Teaching Roles Program

Facing a worsening teacher shortage, an underprepared educator workforce, and high teacher turnover, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted the Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) program as a small pilot in 2016. Due to strong demand, the pilot was expanded and made permanent in 2020. It is available to any district in the state that applies and meets eligibility requirements within available funding.

Under the Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) program, districts apply for grants by submitting locally designed plans that expand teacher leadership across schools. Grant funds are limited to design and

transition costs, ensuring models are created to be sustainable over time. To qualify, districts must create advanced roles that extend the reach of highly effective teachers, include salary supplements for teachers in those roles, and design compensation structures tied to professional growth and improved student outcomes. In North Carolina, the ATR initiative has grown to 508 schools and are in about one-third of all districts statewide.

State-funded evaluations of the ATR model have found that the state's investment in innovation is yielding significant results for both students and teachers. Specifically, research has demonstrated that ATR models:

- Improved student performance and achievement,
- Led to greater satisfaction among both ATR teachers and other educators working with ATR teachers, and
- Improved beginning teacher retention and overall teacher effectiveness.

Pennsylvania can look to North Carolina's Advanced Teaching Roles initiative as a model for supporting and scaling strategic staffing approaches. The Commonwealth is well positioned to incentivize these models by aligning local innovation with targeted state-level investment. With relatively few state-level policy barriers, districts have a clear path to pilot team-based staffing structures. This opportunity is reinforced by growing momentum following the November summit on Reimagining Teaching, signaling increasing statewide interest in thoughtful policy action and sustained investment. We are currently working with Representative Curry on legislation that will be soon introduced on this topic.

Conclusion

Pennsylvania's teaching profession is at a pivotal moment. Statewide attrition data, national research, Pennsylvania educator voices, and examples from high-performing systems all point to the same conclusion: the current structure of teaching in Pennsylvania is misaligned with the needs of both educators and students. Reimagining the teacher role offers a path forward and is aligned with what our research showed us to be true: when the structure of teaching aligns with student and professional need, outcomes improve for both students and educators.

Teach Plus Pennsylvania stands ready to partner with this Committee, the Department of Education, and local school district leaders to bring strategic staffing to educators and students in Pennsylvania

Thank you for your time and commitment to Pennsylvania's students and educators.

REIMAGINING TEACHING:



How Strategic Staffing Can Empower Teachers & Accelerate Learning in PA



**TEACH
+PLUS** 

PA NEEDS TEACHERS
End the teacher shortage crisis.

 **NCEE**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written by Teach Plus Pennsylvania Policy Fellows in the 2025-26 Reimagining the Teacher Role working group. The Fellowship is a highly selective leadership opportunity for outstanding Pennsylvania teachers and early childhood educators to deepen their knowledge of education policy and gain a voice in decisions that affect their students and the teaching profession.



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This report is dedicated to our students: thank you for challenging us to think bigger and do better every day. We commit to reimagining the teaching role so it better supports educators and strengthens learning for every student.

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

In order to permanently address teacher shortages in Pennsylvania and ensure an education system in which all students thrive, the job of the teacher must fundamentally change.

Pennsylvania faces an ongoing teacher shortage crisis, driven by a range of root causes and impacting every corner of the commonwealth. While progress has been made in recent years in reducing financial barriers to enter the profession and beginning to grow the pipeline of future teachers, teacher turnover remains near record highs, and teachers cite dissatisfaction with working conditions and the teaching role itself as reasons they are leaving the profession.

Although society as a whole and the needs of students have changed dramatically in recent decades, in most schools, teaching remains the same isolating, one-size-fits-all, unsustainable job it has been for more than a century. If Pennsylvania hopes to rebuild its educator workforce and ensure a thriving education system and economy, recruitment efforts alone are not enough. If we want more people to enter the profession—and, most crucially, to stay—we must fundamentally reimagine the teacher role to be more differentiated, attractive, collaborative, and rewarding.

Reimagining the teacher role involves moving beyond a one-teacher, one-classroom model to more flexible, team-based structures that differentiate roles, distribute expertise, and create sustainable career pathways. With strong collaboration structures and expert teacher leadership, these models not only support teacher satisfaction, but also better equip teachers to deliver rigorous instruction that will improve student outcomes.

This report examines the potential of one specific strategy for reimagining teaching, known as strategic staffing. Schools implementing strategic staffing models meet five key criteria:

- Team-based staffing
- Differentiated roles and compensation for educators
- Time for collaboration and support within the school day
- Flexibility in scheduling and staffing
- Integrated preparation pathways

Several strategic staffing models across the country are demonstrating promise in improving teacher retention and satisfaction while simultaneously accelerating student learning. And Pennsylvania is well-positioned to seed and scale strategic staffing models through local pilots and statewide policy incentives.



This report, authored by Teach Plus Pennsylvania Policy Fellows, synthesizes findings, themes, and participant input from the fourth-annual PA Needs Teachers summit, held in Harrisburg in November 2025. This summit, Reimagining Teaching, focused on innovative approaches to redesigning teacher roles in ways that improve outcomes for both students and educators. Summit participants included classroom teachers, administrators, higher education faculty and staff, non-profit leaders, representatives from teachers' unions and statewide associations, and policymakers and staffers.

Teach Plus PA's Reimagining the Teacher Role working group is made up of experienced classroom teachers from a wide variety of backgrounds and locations across Pennsylvania, and we believe strongly in the innovative ideas described in this report. But reimagining teaching isn't just an issue for educators: it offers the potential to strengthen our educational system, our future workforce, and our commonwealth's economy.



Participants at the summit consistently expressed interest in and excitement about strategic staffing models, describing them as energizing, sustainable, and better aligned with how complex student learning actually happens. In alignment with the research literature, summit participants affirmed that teaching is more effective and sustainable when educators share responsibility for students rather than working in isolation. Innovative staffing models involving the elevation of teacher leaders to drive school-wide change offer the prospect of strengthening instruction, improving retention, creating stronger pathways into the profession, and fostering more supportive learning environments for both students and educators.

By reimagining teacher roles, we can not only better retain both rookie and veteran teachers in the classroom, but also improve instructional quality and outcomes for students. For the sake of Pennsylvania's future, it's time to bring the teaching role into the 21st century and create the conditions under which both teachers and students can thrive.

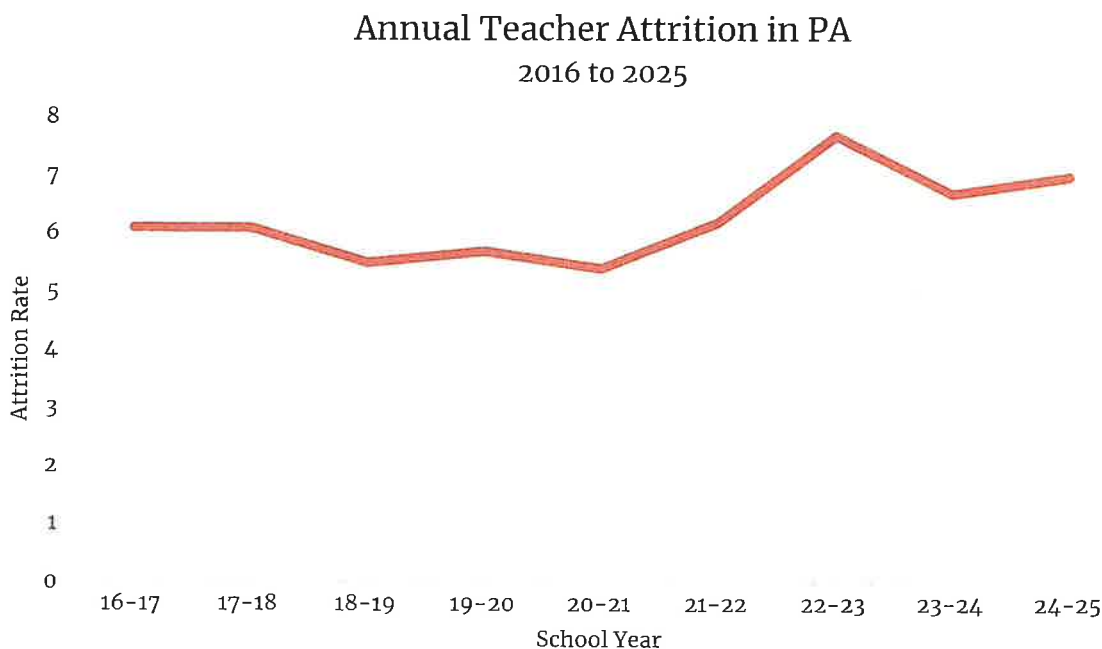
SECTION II: WHY THE TEACHING PROFESSION MUST CHANGE

Teaching in Pennsylvania is at a breaking point. Rising attrition, deep inequities in teacher retention, and inconsistent preparation practices are collectively undermining student learning and educator sustainability. National and Pennsylvania-specific research, along with insights from Pennsylvania teachers and education leaders, reveal both the scope of Pennsylvania’s teacher attrition crisis as well as the root causes driving teachers out of classrooms.

The Scope and Consequences of Pennsylvania’s Teacher Turnover Crisis

Research consistently demonstrates that a well-prepared, stable, and diverse educator workforce is associated with improved student outcomes—not only improved academic results, but higher lifetime earnings, better postsecondary outcomes, and other life-long benefits.¹ Additionally, higher rates of teacher retention are associated with better-performing schools, whereas schools and districts with high teacher turnover have poorer student outcomes, overrely on less effective emergency-permitted teachers, and spend great sums of money on filling vacancies year after year.²

Unfortunately, teacher attrition in Pennsylvania has reached highs of over 7% statewide in recent years.³ This rate of turnover is triple the rate of top-performing international systems, which average only 2–3% turnover.⁴



Pennsylvania Department of Education data compiled and analyzed by Dr. Ed. Fuller, Penn State University⁵

While all schools have experienced heightened levels of teacher turnover recently, teacher attrition is not uniform across the state. Turnover tends to be higher in low-wealth districts, in underfunded districts, and in charter schools. Philadelphia County, which employs less than 20% of the state's teachers, accounts for 30% of statewide attrition. More broadly, urban and rural districts tend to have higher rates of attrition, as do schools serving higher proportions of students of color and students experiencing poverty. These patterns have a range of causes, including inequities in school funding, more challenging working conditions, and the impacts of poverty and student demographics.⁶

Teacher turnover also does not affect all demographic groups equally: both nationally and in Pennsylvania, teachers of color are leaving at disproportionately higher rates.⁷ This loss not only shrinks the educator workforce but also threatens student achievement, because teachers of color have measurable positive effects on student engagement and outcomes for all students, particularly students of color.⁸ As one teacher at the summit put it:

“Teacher retention is not just a staffing issue, it is an equity issue.”⁹

Teacher turnover is highest—both in Pennsylvania and nationally—among early-career teachers. Nearly half of new teachers leave their first school placement within five years,¹⁰ creating a revolving door that disrupts instructional continuity and weakens school culture.



With teacher supply decreasing and turnover up, public school districts and charter schools increasingly rely on teachers on emergency permits; in recent years, the number of Pennsylvania teachers teaching on emergency permits has outstripped the number of new fully certified teachers. Emergency-permitted teachers—who research indicates are, on average, less prepared and less effective than certified teachers—tend to be retained at lower rates, creating a vicious cycle of teacher turnover and further shortage.¹¹

At the summit, Dr. Ed Fuller of Pennsylvania State University, the leading researcher on Pennsylvania's educator workforce, emphasized the scale of Pennsylvania's teacher turnover crisis: over 280 public schools in Pennsylvania lose more than 20% of their teachers year after year. This level of teacher turnover, he said, makes student success impossible:

“You cannot have a high-functioning school with high turnover.”¹²

Beyond the numbers, summit participants described how teacher attrition reshapes the daily realities of schools. Staffing instability translates into larger class sizes, administrators and central office staff covering classrooms, lost preparation time, and increased risk of compliance failures for students with disabilities. These conditions create a cycle in which educators are asked to do more with fewer supports, accelerating burnout and weakening instructional continuity.

Root Causes of the Teacher Turnover Crisis

Pennsylvania's teaching profession is at a tipping point. Without change, schools will continue to lose teachers at unsustainable rates, students will face instructional instability, and equity gaps will widen. But in order to address Pennsylvania's teacher turnover crisis, we must first understand: why are teachers leaving the classroom at such high rates? National research and polling data, along with the perspectives of educators at the summit, point to several root causes related to the design of the teacher role itself.

While the world has changed dramatically in recent decades with the rise of globalization, the internet, social media, smartphones, and artificial intelligence, the fundamentals of the American teaching role haven't changed significantly in that time. Student needs have evolved and intensified, but in most schools, teachers remain trapped in an "egg-crate model," siloed in their classrooms and working in isolation.¹³ In many elementary schools, students spend over 80% of their time with a single teacher. Individual teachers spend most of their time behind their classroom door teaching, individually responsible for lesson planning and delivery, grading and paperwork, parent communication, and building relationships with students. The average teacher gets less than one hour per week to collaborate with colleagues.¹⁴

Dissatisfaction with working conditions is the most commonly cited reason for teacher turnover, along with salary concerns. According to Dr. Richard Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania, a leading national researcher on teacher retention:

"It's not the students that drive teachers out—it's the environment in which they are asked to teach."¹⁵



Dr. Ingersoll's research has found that "lack of influence and autonomy" is the top source of dissatisfaction among teachers leaving the profession.¹⁶ Teachers often feel detached from school-wide decision-making and feel a lack of agency in decisions affecting them and their students. At the summit, teachers described how limited influence over school decisions, lack of recognition for their expertise, and exclusion from leadership pathways contribute to conditions that push teachers—and especially teachers of color—out of the profession. One key to improving retention is improving professional belonging, agency, and voice. One summit participant said:

*"Teachers don't just want a seat at the table. We want to set the table."*¹⁷

This call for agency and professional respect surfaced repeatedly as participants reflected on what it would take to retain a more sustainable and diverse educator workforce.

Another challenge in the current design of the teaching role is the lack of time for planning and collaboration, which leads teachers to feel both isolated and overwhelmed. In top-performing education systems internationally, teachers average 19 hours of direct instruction per week, compared to 27 hours in the United States, allowing international peers significantly more time for collaboration, planning, and professional learning.¹⁸ Pennsylvania educators consistently report that the absence of protected collaboration time and differentiated roles leaves them isolated and overextended—conditions that accelerate attrition even among experienced teachers. Summit participants reinforced the urgency of redesigning the profession around time and connection:

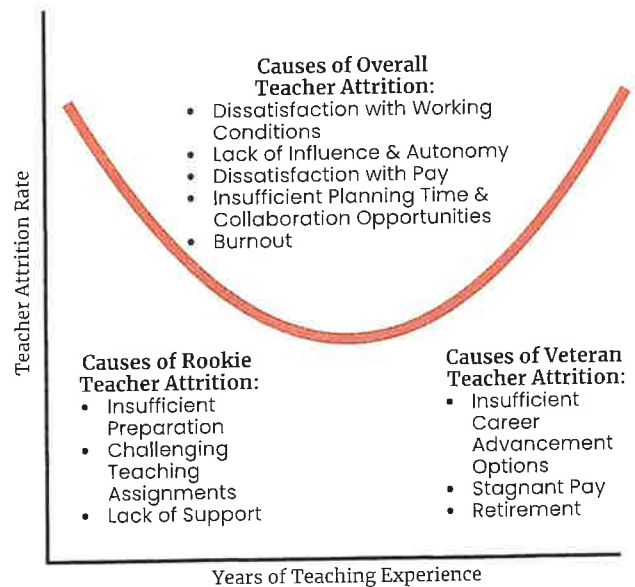
"Teaching has become isolating and lonely... teachers eat alone and work alone."

"Teachers need TIME TIME TIME."¹⁹

Research has found that schools with more supportive working conditions—collaboration time, mentoring, and shared leadership—tend to have higher teacher satisfaction and retention.²⁰ Conversely, when teachers spend excessive time in whole-class instruction with little planning or professional collaboration, burnout and turnover rise.²¹

Dr. Ingersoll describes a U-shaped pattern of teacher attrition, where beginning and veteran teachers are most likely to leave.²² While challenging working conditions affect teachers of all experience levels, they can be particularly overwhelming for early-career teachers. Some rookie teachers—many of whom are also emergency-certified—lack adequate preparation in areas that correlate with classroom success, such as classroom management, differentiation, and working in high-need schools.²³

The U-Shaped Teacher Attrition Curve



When teachers enter the profession without this foundation, especially if they do not have strong mentoring and induction supports in place in their schools, they are more likely to leave, particularly in demanding contexts. Furthermore, in most schools, rookie teachers' class sizes, teaching loads, and teaching assignments are similar to or even more challenging than those of more veteran teachers, with limited opportunities for support. Leon Smith, a Teach Plus PA Policy Fellowship Alumnus and Pennsylvania's 2025 Teacher of the Year, spoke to these challenges at the summit:

"Novice teachers face the hardest schedules and highest attrition."²⁴

While veteran teachers also struggle with burnout, many also leave the classroom due to stagnant salaries and lack of advancement opportunities. For many teachers, the only pathway to significantly increase their compensation and expand their impact is to shift into school administration or to leave education entirely. Few schools offer formalized teacher leadership pathways that allow excellent teachers to continue to teach while also taking on additional responsibilities such as coaching and leading teams of teachers.

In a way, the one-size-fits-all nature of the current teaching role is failing both rookie teachers, who would benefit from additional support, and veteran teachers, who would benefit from opportunities to grow as leaders and build the capacity of their colleagues. According to Leon Smith, differentiating teaching roles within buildings offers solutions for both groups:

"Pairing [novice teachers] with experienced educators in structured roles builds confidence, capacity, and keeps both groups in the profession."²⁵



SECTION III: MODELS FOR REIMAGINING THE TEACHER ROLE

What has endured for generations—one teacher, one classroom, and minimal collaboration—is increasingly unsustainable in a world that demands teamwork, flexibility, and continuous learning. Teachers are unsatisfied with their current working conditions, and are asking for more support, more time for collaboration, and opportunities to progress in their careers. In order to better retain teachers in Pennsylvania and ensure an education system in which all students thrive, we have to change what it actually means to be a teacher.

In Pennsylvania, the call for a more modern profession with better working conditions is being led by the educators who see the promise of reimagining the teaching role. There is a growing body of evidence, presented at the 2025 PA Needs Teachers summit, about the positive impact of innovative models for reimagining roles to better serve both students and educators. By looking at what is working in other contexts, we can see a vision of what a modern teaching profession could look like in Pennsylvania—one that optimizes educator impact and student success.

Research presented at the summit by the National Center on Education & the Economy (NCEE) reveals that a collaborative, expert profession is possible, as seen in the highest performing school systems internationally, where:

- Teachers work collaboratively and share responsibility for student success.
- Teachers spend about 50% of their contracted time teaching (as opposed to 75% in the United States), with the remaining time dedicated to planning, collaboration, or mentoring.
- Teachers are treated as professionals with agency.

- Teachers have career pathways that allow them to lead without leaving the classroom.
- Teachers receive professional preparation and mentoring that reflects the real demands of the job, and continuous learning and peer support are built into their roles.
- High-quality instructional materials, shared curriculum planning, and frequent professional dialogue are expected and supported, not treated as optional add-ons.²⁶

Similar conditions are also found in American schools implementing innovative staffing and scheduling models, commonly known as **“strategic staffing.”** Strategic staffing leverages proven, research-supported strategies for improving teacher retention, equity, and student outcomes. While there is no single agreed-upon definition of strategic staffing, for the purposes of this report, we define strategic staffing as a strategy to reimagine the teaching role to ensure teacher and student success, meeting the following criteria:





1. Team-based staffing: Teams of educators—including teachers, support staff such as paraprofessionals, and (in some instances) other individuals such as tutors, student teachers, teacher apprentices or residents—are collectively responsible for supporting groups of students. Teams share responsibility for planning and instruction and are collectively responsible for the outcomes of their students.

- Why: The United States’ traditional one-teacher classroom model places heavy burdens on individual teachers. With team structures, each teacher doesn’t have to be a superhero operating in isolation, but can work with colleagues, play to their strengths, and distribute work in a profession where individuals are often spread impossibly thin. At the PA Needs Teachers summit, educators expressed that teaching is more effective and sustainable when educators share responsibility for students rather than working in isolation.

“Teams of teachers – what a great way to collaborate and share in the teaching of students.” – Summit participant²⁷

2. Differentiated roles and compensation, including team leader positions for teachers: Highly effective teachers have formalized opportunities to earn additional compensation for extending their reach to more students, via leading teams of teachers, coaching, and/or taking on more students. Roles (and class sizes, teaching loads, etc.) are also differentiated to allow rookie and aspiring educators additional support and time for development (sometimes known as “shelter-and-develop”).

- Why: Roles such as lead teacher or Multi-Classroom Leader® allow accomplished teachers to extend their impact without leaving the classroom, improving their satisfaction and retention while giving more students access to excellent instruction and all teachers on their teams more support. Shelter-and-develop structures help early-career educators become more effective, supported, and likely to persist in the profession. Such role differentiation supports career progression and retention across the workforce, making teaching a profession with multiple pathways for growth.²⁸

“When we redesign roles to fit teacher strengths and student needs, everyone benefits.” – Jill Weller-Reilly²⁹

3. Structure and time for educator collaboration and support: There is space during the contractual school day or week for teams to meet for professional learning and instructional planning, and for team leaders to coach, mentor, and support other team members. Professional learning is growth-oriented, job-embedded, and curriculum-aligned.

- Why: Teachers develop faster and are more effective when they have time to collaborate, and job-embedded, ongoing professional learning is more likely to change teacher practice than stand-alone workshops. Intentionally building within-school structures for teacher-led professional learning reduces burnout, decreases isolation, increases buy-in and satisfaction, and drives improved student achievement.

“Supporting teachers is not optional—it is essential.” — Laura Boyce³⁰



4. Flexibility in school staffing and scheduling, with teacher voice in design:

In order to allow for team-based staffing, differentiated roles, and space for collaboration and support, schools are empowered to think outside the box about educator roles, school schedules, student grouping, and class sizes. Teachers and other key stakeholders such as paraprofessionals, school partners, and students, and community members are part of the design process to determine the staffing and schedule changes needed for each school's unique context.

- Why: Rigid class sizes, schedules, teaching assignments, and compensation structures can constrain resources and limit innovation when seeking to strategically deploy staff most effectively. Breaking out of the box in terms of scheduling and staffing is necessary to make strategic staffing models work. Furthermore, research has found that strategic staffing redesigns are most effective at improving teacher retention and student outcomes when teachers have a seat at the table to co-create new school designs.³¹

“Just as the Ford Model T doesn't serve today's transportation needs, the traditional classroom model isn't working well for too many teachers and students.” – National Council on Teacher Quality³²



5. Integrated preparation pathways: Multiple pathways into the teaching profession (e.g. traditional certification and student teaching, youth- and para-to-teacher pathways, teacher apprenticeships, and teacher residencies) are designed in collaboration with educator preparation programs to align with school needs. Aspiring educators are integrated into teams and receive robust, evidence-based, on-the-job training and support that is intentional and cohesive, not disconnected.

- Why: Preparation programs and in-school supports should be seamlessly connected so that new teachers transition into supportive professional environments. When preparation is paired with structured mentoring and collaborative teams, novice teachers are far more likely to stay and grow in the profession.³³ Additionally, aspiring educators can add capacity to educator teams, allowing more flexibility to teams so that teacher leaders have time to coach, mentor, and lead.

“If we expect day-one excellence, we must fund year-one experience. That means paid residencies, skilled mentors, and multi-year induction tied to real classroom needs.”
– Leon Smith³⁴

Collectively, these innovations are intended to improve teacher retention and student outcomes by providing more individualized instruction, equitable access to expert teachers, and stronger support structures within schools.

While the concept of strategic staffing is relatively new in Pennsylvania, there are multiple models being implemented in different parts of the United States with exciting results. At the summit, participants focused on two promising initiatives that exemplify the strategic staffing criteria and share many of the characteristics of the highest-functioning international systems: Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture model and Arizona State University’s Next Education Workforce model.



Opportunity Culture[®]: Expanding the Reach of Great Teachers

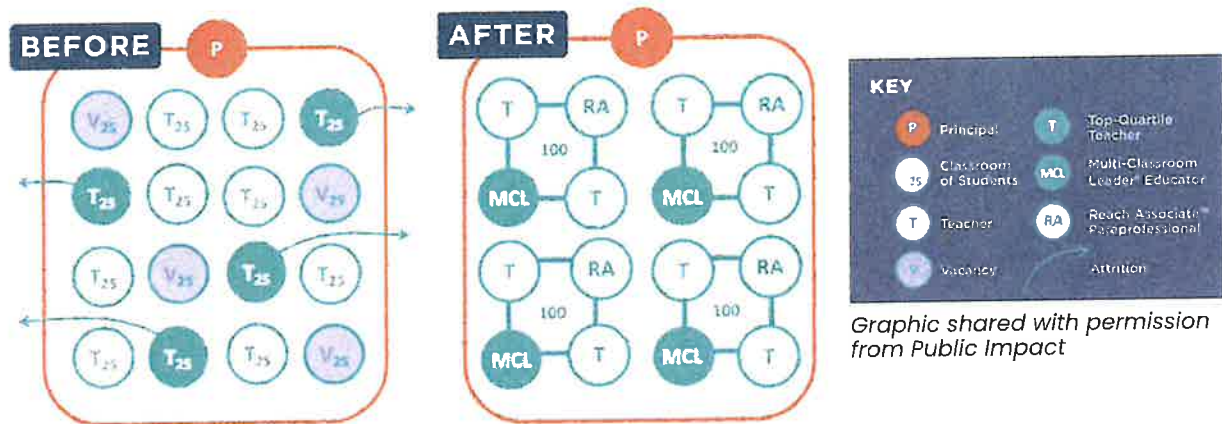
The Opportunity Culture[®] strategic staffing model, developed by Public Impact, creates new, differentiated roles and school-based flexibility to extend the reach of excellent teachers. Since its launch in 2013, it has expanded to over 1,000 schools in 18 states, with over 90% of participating schools eligible for Title I funding.³⁵

In the Opportunity Culture[®] model, a design team composed mostly of teachers determines each school’s team structure and schedule to meet its unique needs, all while adhering to a set of proven core design principles. Each teaching team is led by a Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL[™]) — a teacher who continues to teach while also leading and coaching a small team of teacher colleagues. These team leaders, who are identified based on demonstrated classroom effectiveness, earn on average 20% more per year along with release time to lead, coach, co-teach, analyze student data to adjust instruction, and plan with their team teachers. Other teachers and paraprofessionals on the team may also take on advanced roles and earn more as well.

Because schools are supported to think creatively about school schedules and staffing allocations, this model is designed to be budget-neutral and sustainable after schools have gone through the design process. Specifically, MCL salary supplements are typically funded by reallocating existing school resources, which may include collapsing vacant positions, strategically leveraging paraprofessionals and other support staff, or adjusting student groupings.

In the Opportunity Culture® model:

- Excellent teachers have access to career pathways tied to impact without having to leave the classroom.
- Students have greater access to excellent instruction and more small-group teaching and tutoring for stronger learning results.
- Teachers on teams have access to embedded coaching, shared responsibilities, additional support, collaboration, and advancement opportunities.
- Principals share responsibility with teacher leaders to improve instruction and student outcomes.
- Compensation is aligned with expanded responsibilities.



Across multiple evaluations, the Opportunity Culture® model has been shown to produce a range of positive results, including:

- Up to three times the rate of schoolwide high learning growth, according to a comparison of North Carolina Opportunity-Culture®-certified schools with those not using the model.
- Up to an extra half-year of learning for students on MCL teams each year, according to two third-party studies, with even larger student gains in some districts and for subgroups such as English language learners.
- Over 90% satisfaction with the model among educators in MCL roles and teachers in Opportunity Culture® schools, according to anonymous survey results.³⁶
- Improved teacher retention rates and dramatic reductions in teacher vacancies, according to evaluations in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County (N.C.) and Ector County (TX) schools.³⁷

Next Education Workforce: Teams Sharing Instructional Responsibility

The Next Education Workforce (NEW) model shifts the unit of instruction from a single teacher to teams of educators collaboratively responsible for a shared roster of students. This model, designed by Arizona State University, has spread to over 150 schools across Arizona, Michigan, and California.

In this model, teams of 4-6 educators—which may include a lead teacher along with other teachers, paid teacher residents, student success coaches, tutors, and community educators—collaborate and distribute responsibilities to ensure student success and teacher satisfaction. Teams are collectively responsible for about 100 students, allowing for differentiated instruction and stronger student-adult relationships.³⁸



Graphic shared with permission from Arizona State University Workforce Initiative

The NEW model has eight key elements:

1. Teachers share a roster of students.
2. Teachers share multiple learning spaces and move across these spaces throughout the day.
3. Teachers have and use team planning time.
4. Team members have different roles and responsibilities.
5. Teachers adjust their schedule according to the needs of both teachers and students.
6. Teachers group and regroup their students based on students' needs and interests.
7. Teachers use data to tailor learning to each student.
8. Teachers provide each student with rigorous learning opportunities.³⁹

A recent evaluation of the NEW model in Mesa Unified School District, led by Dr. Richard Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania, found that teachers implementing the NEW model reported higher levels of professional influence and flexibility than other teachers. After controlling for teacher and school characteristics, researchers found that **NEW team members were 50% less likely to leave the classroom than similar non-NEW teachers.**⁴⁰ In other words, this research suggests that the NEW strategic staffing model has the potential to dramatically reduce teacher turnover in schools while elevating teacher voice and leadership.

Other studies of the impact of the NEW model have found that it leads to:

- Greater job satisfaction among educators
- 1.4 more months of 3rd grade reading growth for students in NEW schools
- Higher Algebra I pass rates for students in NEW schools.⁴¹



Teachers' Views of Strategic Staffing

While not all educators are familiar with strategic staffing, new national survey data from Teach Plus suggests that teachers would be eager to embrace these new models. With an advisory group of Teach Plus Fellows and [Coalition to Reimagine the Teaching Role](#) members, and in partnership with the bipartisan team of Echelon Insights and GMMB, Teach Plus conducted original market research with teachers across the country. In a survey of U.S. teachers (n=1,001) in October 2025, respondents received an introduction to strategic staffing:⁴²

“Here is a description of a type of approach some schools have taken to reimagine teaching: A collaborative teaching structure is an intentional approach where teachers share responsibility for a larger group of students — instead of mostly working alone. Each team is given dedicated time in their weekly schedule to collaborate on figuring out how to use and adapt high-quality instructional materials and methods to reflect the needs of their students. Teachers take on different roles within their team based on their strengths, experience, and interests. Teachers have the opportunity to take on teacher leadership roles without leaving the classroom, where they are paid more to spend some of their time providing expertise and support to the other teachers on their team.”

After hearing this description, respondents were then asked, “Would you want your school to adopt this type of approach?” Among all teachers, 70% of teachers said they “definitely” or “probably” would. Among teachers with 4-9 years of experience, 81% responded that they definitely or probably would.

Would you want your school to adopt this type of approach?	Yes, definitely would	Yes, probably would	Yes, definitely or probably	Maybe, I'm unsure	No, probably not	No, definitely not
All teachers	23%	47%	70%	10%	7%	2%
Teachers with 4-9 years of experience	45%	36%	81%	14%	5%	0%

When asked to rank the importance of various possible benefits of this approach, teachers were most excited about “improving student outcomes,” “reducing teacher burnout,” “being adaptable to fit the needs of different schools and students,” “allowing teachers to focus on doing what they love and are best at,” and “making the teaching experience more collaborative.”

Q. Here are some different possible benefits of this type of approach. Please read them all, then select the two that resonate with you the most as reasons to adopt this type of approach. (Select two.)



This new survey data shows that strategic staffing is highly attractive to teachers, which is reinforced by highly positive survey data from teachers in Opportunity Culture and Next Education Workforce schools. These findings also align with national research indicating that:

- 63% of teachers want more time to collaborate
- Over 80% are open to co-teaching or team-teaching arrangements
- Only about 26% think the profession currently offers meaningful flexibility or growth opportunities.⁴³

Teachers want change — not because they are dissatisfied with students or the profession, but because the current system does not support the work they are being asked to do.



Educators and administrators at the PA Needs Teachers summit expressed similar hunger for change. One summit participant reflected that this is “actually the most exciting time to become a teacher,” if the profession evolves to value collaboration, expertise, and growth. In real-time survey responses, participants said they were energized by the prospect of opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, share expertise, feel trusted as professionals, and work in systems that recognize teaching as complex, team-based work rather than an isolated endeavor. Others drew parallels to medicine and business, where team-based models and differentiated roles are the norm rather than the exception. At the same time, participants were clear: reimagining the teacher role cannot simply layer new responsibilities onto an already overloaded workload. New models must come with protected time, clear role definitions, and structural support.

Reimagining the teaching job is not about abandoning tradition. It’s about transforming the systems in which teachers work to align with what we know works — for students, for educators, and for the future of public education. International and national research confirms that collaborative, supported teaching is not only possible but effective.




SECTION IV: OPPORTUNITIES TO SEED AND SCALE STRATEGIC STAFFING

New strategic staffing models—which redesign roles, redistribute expertise, and align supports with student and educator needs—show promise for reducing turnover, improving instructional quality, and expanding professional growth opportunities. But these models are dramatically different from the status quo in many Pennsylvania schools. What can Pennsylvania leaders—policymakers, philanthropists, teacher educators, and K-12 educators—do to help new models take root in the commonwealth, and ultimately to scale them to the system level?

Opportunity #1: Identify & Address Policy Barriers

In many states, policy barriers in state law and regulation—such as class size requirements, restrictions on teacher time, and teacher evaluation policies designed for the one-teacher, one-classroom model—make implementation of strategic staffing models difficult. Fortunately, an analysis of Pennsylvania state law found that Pennsylvania has few state-level barriers to implementation of innovative staffing models:

- There are no state-level limits on class size at the K-12 level, and the state does not mandate a specific student-to-teacher ratio.
- Pennsylvania’s accountability model also does not restrict districts from attributing student outcomes to a team of teachers, rather than an individual teacher, and the state student information system allows for flexible rosters; these flexibilities allow teachers to share responsibility and accountability for student outcomes.

- As a local control state, Pennsylvania school districts have relatively high autonomy in terms of budgeting, teacher time, and compensation.
- Pennsylvania's student-teacher stipend program and registered apprenticeship in teaching program provide multiple paid pathways into teaching that can be incorporated into strategic staffing models.⁴⁴

While state-level barriers are minimal, Pennsylvania is a local control state with strong teachers' unions, meaning that *local* collective bargaining agreements (CBA) may contain real, though not insurmountable, barriers to implementing new models. Success hinges on treating unions as partners rather than adversaries from the very beginning and finding thoughtful, jointly developed solutions. Specific areas for local negotiation include:

- Examining limits on class size or student-to-teacher ratios that might prevent flexible grouping
- Developing new teacher-leader roles such as team leader
- Moving away from purely seniority-based selection for leadership roles to ensure teacher leaders are selected based on demonstrated effectiveness

Union partnerships allow for a more cohesive and collaborative implementation of staffing models designed to meet the particular needs of each school. Many districts across the country that have implemented strategic staffing models have worked closely with teachers and their unions to amend collective bargaining agreements or use waivers in order to introduce strategic staffing.⁴⁵

Opportunity #2: Stand Up Strategic Staffing Pilots

One of the best ways for funders, policymakers, and other leaders to kickstart strategic staffing in Pennsylvania is by helping to seed local pilots, often starting with one to five schools within a single district, then quickly scaling up. When preparing to launch pilots, leaders should consider the following necessary elements:

- **Start-Up Costs:** While most strategic staffing models are intended to be budget-neutral after schools have gone through the design process, there are often significant up-front costs. Because strategic staffing is still unfamiliar in Pennsylvania, many





schools will require technical assistance from experts in strategic staffing to redesign schedules, roles, and compensation structures. Additional start-up costs may include professional development for administrators and teacher leaders, as well as stipends to compensate educators for engaging in redesign processes and training. These should be viewed as one-time transition costs, not permanent operating expenses. These up-front investments must be weighed against the current cost of failure: the great sums of money Pennsylvania districts lose annually in a perpetual cycle of recruiting and training replacements for teachers who leave.⁴⁶ But without dedicated funding to cover these shifts, small or under-resourced districts—the very ones most impacted by turnover—will struggle to access these models. To address this, philanthropists and/or policymakers should consider funding the up-front costs of shifting to new models. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education recently released guidance emphasizing that schools can use federal Title II dollars to support the transition to strategic staffing models,⁴⁷ and has indicated that strategic staffing may be a priority in future federal discretionary grants.⁴⁸

- **Research & Evaluation:** While pilots demonstrate the potential of strategic staffing, a rigorous evaluation plan is essential to quantify results. Funders should support both the initial transition costs and the subsequent analysis required to validate these models for responsible scaling.
- **Equitable Selection:** Too often, innovation is only available to schools with more resources, while higher-need schools miss out. Strategic staffing should be approached with an equity lens, with efforts to ensure access for historically underserved schools and districts. Within strategic staffing initiatives, system leaders should design incentives to attract effective, experienced teacher leaders to high-need schools that historically struggle with retention. It is also important to ensure that teachers of color have access to leadership opportunities and equitable support.

Opportunity #3: Design for Maximum Impact

As strategic staffing models have proliferated across the United States, Pennsylvania can learn from other pilots and intentionally design local models to maximize effectiveness:

- **Integrate High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM):** While team-based staffing models are inherently attractive to teachers, it is possible that they can be implemented in ways that have no effect on teaching and learning. Teach Plus' [Center for Innovative Teaching and Exceptional Learning](#) is supporting and learning from pilots across the country that are bringing together strategic staffing and use of evidence-based curricula to accelerate teacher practice change. In these pilots, teacher leaders in new staffing models are supported and leveraged to focus teacher learning on curriculum implementation, minimize the variability of rigor across classrooms, and reduce the burden on teachers to create lesson plans from scratch. As Pennsylvania schools implement strategic staffing, they should consider pairing it with the roll-out of HQIMs, ensuring that school and team leaders are supported in using new staffing structures and collaborative planning spaces to focus on instructional coherence.
- **Incorporate Innovative Preparation Pathways:** The most effective strategic staffing models integrate pre-service and aspiring educators, including teacher residents and paraprofessionals, into educator teams. As schools design for strategic staffing, they should engage teacher preparation partners in the design process, identifying opportunities to create new pathways into the profession, ensure alignment across preparation and placement, and integrate university and school-based supports.





- **Address Implementation Complexity:** The shift from a “one-teacher, one-classroom” model is a very complex process with potential ripple effects across a variety of district functions, including finance, operations, academics, and human resources. To manage this complexity, districts should consider starting with a proven model and adapting it to fit their needs. It is also helpful to adopt a phased approach, starting with a small number of schools before scaling to the system level within three to five years. This allows districts to learn, make adjustments, communicate clearly and widely, and build internal capacity as they go, while simultaneously building buy-in and proof of concept across the system.
- **Shift Mindsets and Culture:** Even strong models can fail if key actors opt out of the initiative. Fear of change among educators, leaders, school boards, and communities was identified as one of the most significant barriers in summit table discussions and survey responses. Teachers are not immune to initiative fatigue, and some may be suspicious of new models or resistant to changing their current practice. Innovative teaching models require the support and influence of all stakeholders, so leaders must consider how to engage and invest these stakeholders, including teachers, in the model so they can understand its benefits to them. Participants noted that mindset shifts, trust-building, and shared understanding are as critical to this initiative as policy change, emphasizing the need for:
 - Transparent communication with school boards and communities
 - A clear public narrative about why reimagining the teacher role benefits students
 - Opportunities for trial, error, and learning without punitive consequences

Teach Plus' Center for Inspired Teaching and Exceptional Learning (CITEL)

The Center for Inspired Teaching and Exceptional Learning (CITEL), an initiative of Teach Plus, envisions an educational system in which “every student experiences rigorous, grade-level and affirming learning every day - surrounded by effective, thriving educators.” The CITEL hypothesis is that this vision will be possible when the following components are in place:



8 States

Arizona, California, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas

CITEL is currently supporting six pilots across eight states that are testing different structures for bringing together high-quality instructional materials and aligned professional learning with team-based strategic staffing models to raise the floor of instruction and create the conditions where teachers thrive – moving beyond fragmented reforms to systemic solutions that benefit students and educators alike.



Opportunity #4: Incentivize Strategic Staffing Statewide

At the state level, **Pennsylvania policymakers should consider codifying into law a state grant program to fund strategic staffing pilots across the commonwealth.**

Through such a program, the state would provide grants to districts and charter schools that apply for funding to support the design and implementation of innovative staffing models. Grant funds could be used to support up-front costs of transitioning to strategic staffing, including technical assistance, professional development, and costs associated with the design process. If needed, participating districts could receive waivers from any state policies that prevented implementation of new staffing models. The state could also pay for evaluation of these pilots to assess their impact on teacher retention and student outcomes. In designing such a program, lawmakers can look to North Carolina's Advanced Teaching Roles initiative as a model.



Case Study: North Carolina's Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) Program

Facing a worsening teacher shortage, an underprepared educator workforce, and high teacher turnover, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted the Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) program as a small pilot in 2016. Due to strong demand, the pilot was expanded and made permanent in 2020. It is available to any district in the state that applies and meets eligibility requirements within available funding.

Districts can apply to the State Board of Education by submitting locally designed plans that include advanced roles for teachers in some or all of their schools. ATR grant funds can only be used for transition costs, not for ongoing operating costs such as teacher compensation, to ensure that the models are sustainable.

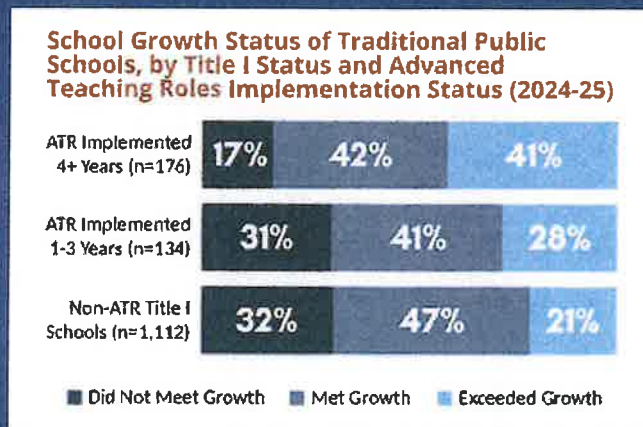
In order to qualify for funding, ATR district models must:

- Allow highly effective classroom teachers to reach a greater number of students by assuming accountability for additional students, either by becoming a lead classroom teacher accountable for the student performance of all the students taught by teachers on that teacher's team or by leading a larger effort in the school to implement new instructional models to improve schoolwide performance.
- Provide salary supplements to classroom teachers in advanced teaching roles.
- Create innovative compensation models that focus on classroom teacher professional growth that lead to measurable improvements in student outcomes.⁴⁹

After steady growth, the ATR model is now being implemented across 508 schools in 37 school districts—32% of all districts statewide. The General Assembly has approved an annual recurring appropriation of \$5.5 million to support ATR grants.⁵⁰

State-funded evaluations of the ATR model have found that the state's investment in innovation is yielding significant results for both students and teachers. Specifically, research has demonstrated that ATR models:

- Improved student performance and achievement, including an additional 1.7 months of learning in math
- Led to greater satisfaction among both ATR teachers and other educators working with ATR teachers
- Improved beginning teacher retention and overall teacher effectiveness.⁵¹



Graphic used with permission from BEST NC

Fertile Ground in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania is well-positioned to redefine the teaching profession by leveraging local experimentation and state-level incentives. Because the commonwealth faces few state-level policy hurdles, districts have a clear path to pilot innovative, team-based staffing structures. This grassroots potential is bolstered by growing enthusiasm and momentum for strategic staffing pilots after the November summit on Reimagining Teaching, signaling strong statewide appetite for policy shifts and targeted investment. By using North Carolina's Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) initiative as a blueprint, Pennsylvania can design its own framework to incentivize sustainable, collaborative roles. Collectively, these factors create a unique window of opportunity to scale efforts that reimagine the educator's experience. Strategic backing from policymakers and philanthropic partners will be essential to mitigate risk, establish a proof of concept, and ultimately transform teacher working conditions alongside student achievement.



SECTION V: CONCLUSION

Pennsylvania’s teaching profession is at a pivotal moment. Statewide attrition data, national research, Pennsylvania educator voices, and examples from high-performing systems all point to the same conclusion: the current structure of teaching in Pennsylvania is misaligned with the needs of both educators and students.

Reimagining the teacher role through strategic staffing offers a credible, research-supported pathway forward. Strategic staffing models such as Opportunity Culture, Next Education Workforce, and Teacher-Powered Schools demonstrate that when teaching is organized around teams, differentiated roles, and shared responsibility, schools can expand the reach of excellent educators, strengthen instruction, and reduce the isolation that drives burnout. Importantly, these models do not ask teachers to do more with less; they redesign time, talent, and support so educators can focus on what matters most—student learning—while progressing in their careers.

However, the promise of these models depends not on design alone, but on the conditions that allow them to take root. Summit participants consistently emphasized that success hinges on aligned policy, flexible start-up funding, and trust in educators as professionals. Without protected collaboration time, sustainable compensation for expanded roles, union partnership, and clear policy pathways for innovation, even the strongest models risk becoming short-lived pilots rather than scalable solutions.

Pennsylvania is not starting from zero: there are already strong strategic staffing models—such as Opportunity Culture and Next Education Workforce—and strong policy models—such as North Carolina’s Advanced Teaching Roles program—to learn from and adapt. What is required now of Pennsylvania is intentional coordination and investment to move from possibility to practice.

The question facing us in Pennsylvania is not whether change is necessary. The question is whether state and local leaders, alongside educators, have the courage to challenge the status quo and imagine a different future for teachers and students. By investing in strategic staffing pilots, centering teacher voice in design and implementation, and committing to learning through evaluation, Pennsylvania can reimagine teaching as the collaborative, expert profession that students deserve and educators are demanding.

“Our limit is our imagination. What COULD schools look like to ensure teachers and students thrive?”⁵²







APPENDIX A: ENDNOTES

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WILLARY FOUNDATION



PA NEEDS TEACHERS

End the teacher shortage crisis.

Founded in 2022, PA Needs Teachers is a coalition of over 50 organizations -- including school districts, universities, non-profits, statewide associations, and business organizations -- working to address Pennsylvania's teacher shortage crisis by addressing root causes and implementing policy strategies to inspire systems-level change.



The mission of Teach Plus Pennsylvania is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. Teach Plus PA co-leads the PA Needs Teachers coalition and leads the Pennsylvania Policy Fellowship for teachers, as well as other policy and practice programs across the commonwealth.



Since 1988, the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) has been researching the world's best-performing education systems to give states and districts the tools they need to become world-class. NCEE co-leads the PA Needs Teachers coalition and facilitates the Pennsylvania Commission on Education and Economic Competitiveness.



Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

Written Testimony to the House Education Committee

Tuesday, May 5, 2026

Educator Workforce

Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director, PASA

Good afternoon Chair Schweyer, Chair Cutler, and members of the House Education Committee. I am Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. Thank you for hosting this informational hearing and inviting PASA to speak on behalf of nearly 1,200 PASA members including more than 600 sitting school superintendents, assistant superintendents and executive directors.

We appreciate your continued efforts to address the critical challenges associated with recruiting and retaining certified educators and qualified staff in our schools. Without sustained and creative action - both short-term and long-term - these workforce challenges will persist.

Pennsylvania's education workforce extends well beyond teachers to include school and district leaders, paraprofessionals, counselors, and essential support staff. Shortages are impacting all regions—rural, urban, and suburban—and are affecting both recruitment and retention.

Vacancies span multiple certification areas, often requiring schools to rely on emergency-certified staff. These challenges disproportionately affect districts with fewer financial resources to offer competitive salaries and strong working conditions.

A stable and high-quality education workforce is essential not only to student success, but also to community well-being and the Commonwealth's economic future.

While much attention has rightly been paid to teacher shortages, it is equally important to recognize the growing challenges facing **school leadership**, which is foundational to the stability and effectiveness of our education system.

Key Workforce Challenges:

Staffing Shortages and Pipeline Decline

Schools across the Commonwealth continue to report persistent vacancies, particularly in high-need areas such as special education, STEM fields, specialty certificates. Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has increased over the past few years; however, not to a level that addresses all certification areas and school needs. For example, in 2023-2024 7,677 total Instructional 1 Certificates were issued, however more Emergency Certifications were issued in this year with over 8,000 Type 1 and 4 Permits.

Retention and Burnout Concerns Continue

Educators are continuing to leave the profession at concerning rates. Contributing factors include workload, compensation concerns, political pressures, and increasing student needs.

The Penn State Center for Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis reported that in 2023, 7.7% of PA's experienced teachers left the profession. In 2024, teacher attrition decreased one percentage point to 6.7%, with another 8,326 teachers leaving their profession. This stat still exceeds the 7,677 total Instructional 1 Certificates issued in the 2023-24 year.

Compensation and Career Sustainability

Compensation often does not reflect the education, certification, and responsibilities required. Support staff—critical to school operations—are frequently underpaid, contributing to high turnover.

Working Conditions

Educators need safe, well-resourced environments with manageable class sizes, adequate planning time, and access to materials. Increasingly, they are also expected to address students' social, emotional, and mental health needs without sufficient support.

Impact on Students

Workforce challenges directly affect students. Staffing shortages can lead to larger class sizes, reduced course offerings, and inconsistent instruction. High turnover disrupts continuity and undermines relationships that are critical to student success. If left unaddressed, these issues risk widening existing inequities across districts and student populations.

Recommendations

To strengthen Pennsylvania's education workforce, PASA recommends:

1. Invest in Educator Recruitment Pipelines

- Expand “grow-your-own” programs that support high school students and paraprofessionals in becoming certified educators
- Provide scholarships, loan forgiveness, and stipends for teacher candidates, particularly in high-need fields
- Strengthen partnerships between school districts and educator preparation programs

2. Improve Retention through Support and Compensation

- Ensure competitive and sustainable compensation for teachers and support staff
- Increase access to mentorship and induction programs for early-career educators
- Provide funding for mental health and wellness supports for school staff

3. Strengthen Working Conditions

- Support reasonable class sizes and caseloads
- Increase funding for instructional materials, technology, and support personnel
- Expand access to school counselors, social workers, and behavioral specialists

4. Elevate and Support the Full Education Workforce

- Recognize the critical role of paraprofessionals, bus drivers, custodial staff, and other support personnel
- Create pathways for career advancement within the education system
- Ensure equitable pay and benefits across roles

5. Use Data to Drive Policy

- Continue to collect and analyze workforce data, including vacancies, certification trends, and retention rates
- Use this data to target investments where they are most needed

Escalating Health Insurance Costs: A Growing Workforce and Fiscal Challenge

In addition to staffing and leadership challenges, PASA is deeply concerned about the **rapid escalation of health insurance costs**, which is placing increasing strain on both school employees and district budgets.

Across Pennsylvania, school districts are experiencing **significant year-over-year increases in health insurance premiums**, often outpacing revenue growth and state funding increases. These rising costs present a dual challenge:

1. Impact on Employees and Workforce Stability

- Higher premium contributions and out-of-pocket costs are affecting educators’ financial well-being

- Health care affordability is becoming a factor in recruitment and retention decisions, particularly for early-career educators and support staff
- Increasing costs can erode the competitiveness of compensation packages, especially in comparison to other sectors

2. Impact on District Budgets and Resource Allocation

- Health care costs represent one of the fastest-growing expenditures for school districts
- Districts are forced to make difficult trade-offs, often diverting resources away from instructional programs, staffing, or student supports to cover benefit costs
- Financial pressure is particularly acute in districts with limited local tax capacity

PASA encourages the General Assembly to:

- Explore consortium-based or pooled insurance models
- Consider state-level support to offset extreme cost increases

Addressing these costs is essential to maintaining workforce stability.

Continued Work on Certifications

PASA appreciates the work that the House Education Committee has put toward addressing Educator Certifications over the past two years. The return of grade spans back to elementary and secondary certifications provides the needed flexibility schools were seeking. However, additional changes are needed.

We live in a time where greater flexibility and common-sense policies and preparation must prevail. With too many vacancies in core roles, we must continue to find creative solutions.

Areas of concern include:

- Secondary math and science requirements
- Speech and language certification models - why not have certified technicians work under a certified Speech and Language Pathologist?
- Nursing certification flexibility - If concerns that lack some of the training, allow for a completion of a program in first year of service?
- Social work certification barriers (the newest certification change has hurt getting needed social workers into our schools)

We encourage consideration of:

1. In Higher Education, many courses are taught by Adjunct Professors; professionals who have areas of expertise that teach part-time to college students. As we move to focus high school programs on increased career preparedness and earlier opportunities, adopt the

concept of Adjunct Teachers, and open the doors for community and business partners to teach a course for our students.

2. Charter Schools have a 75% rule for certified teachers. Can local public schools have the same flexibility? Again, opening the door in certain classrooms to professionals in our
3. Expansion of two-year preparation programs for other four-year degree professionals.
4. Recruit our past teacher applicants who completed their four-year preservice program and who did not originally find teaching positions, therefore went into other professions. Offer them a one-year refresher preparation program and get them back into their chosen profession.

Paid Student Teacher Apprenticeships and Preparation Programs

We appreciate the past legislative support for:

- Student teacher stipends
- Elimination of the Basic Skills Assessment

Further improvements should include:

- Reevaluating Praxis requirements
- Streamlining early coursework in teacher preparation programs
- Offering alternative demonstrations of competency

Emerging Crisis: Turnover of School Leaders

PASA is increasingly concerned about elevated turnover among superintendents and school leaders, a trend that has accelerated in recent years and shows no signs of returning to pre-pandemic levels. National data shows that nearly one in four large school districts (23%) experienced a superintendent change in the past year, significantly higher than historical norms of roughly 14–16%. (K-12 Dive)

Recent Pennsylvania specific data:

- 91 (18%) Superintendent positions changed in 82 districts during the 2024-25 calendar year
- 17 Superintendent positions were held by Acting or Interim Superintendents
- 182 (36%) Superintendent positions changed over the past two years
- Average stay in one district for a Superintendent is 5.4 years over the past 10 years
- Average number of Superintendents per district in the past 10 years = 2.5
- 22 Districts have had five or more changes in the Superintendent in the past 10 years!

This instability matters. Research consistently shows that frequent leadership turnover undermines long-term planning, disrupts reform efforts, and negatively affects staff morale and student outcomes.

Likewise, the number of administrative certificates (principals, central office) issued, is also at-risk. Although 2023-24 data showed the first increase in number of administrative certificates issued in the past five years, the 642 total pales in comparison to the 1032 issued in 2012-13.

Superintendents and school leaders across Pennsylvania report a convergence of pressures that are making the role increasingly difficult to sustain:

- **Expanded Job Demands**

School leaders are now expected to manage not only instructional leadership, but also student mental health, staffing shortages, safety concerns, and complex operational challenges.

- **Political and Community Pressures**

Since the pandemic, the role has become significantly more politicized, with increased scrutiny and tension related to curriculum, public health decisions, and governance.

- **Board Relations and Governance Challenges**

Strained or unclear roles between boards and superintendents contribute to instability and, in some cases, premature departures.

- **Burnout and Workload**

The intensity and visibility of the role have led to increased burnout, with many leaders choosing early retirement or career changes.

- **Shortened Tenure**

The average tenure of superintendents has declined nationally.

Leadership turnover has a cascading effect across the entire education system:

- Disrupts strategic planning and long-term improvement efforts
- Weakens staff retention, including teachers and principals
- Reduces community trust and continuity
- Creates instability during a time when schools need steady leadership most

For districts already facing staffing shortages and funding challenges, leadership instability compounds these issues and disproportionately impacts students in high-need communities.

PASA urges the General Assembly to recognize school leadership as a critical component of the education workforce and to take the following actions:

1. Invest in Leadership Development and Pipelines

- Expand state support for superintendent and principal preparation programs
- Strengthen “grow-your-own” leadership pathways within districts

- Support mentoring and induction programs for new superintendents

2. Improve Retention Through Support and Stability

- Provide resources for leadership coaching and professional learning
- Encourage governance training for school boards to support effective superintendent-board relationships
- Reduce administrative burden where possible to allow leaders to focus on instruction and student outcomes
- Recognize the increased scope of the role and ensure compensation and benefits reflect these demands

Without intentional action to address the growing instability in school leadership, the Commonwealth risks undermining the very foundation of its education system. Stabilizing and strengthening the education workforce must include a focused commitment to **recruiting, supporting, and retaining high-quality school leaders**.

We appreciate the House Education Committee providing PASA the opportunity to provide these educator workforce recovery thoughts. We welcome further collaboration to engage in other creative thinking and discussion to strengthen our educator workforce across the Commonwealth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials

Testimony to the House Education Committee

May 5, 2026

Brian Pawling, PCSBA, SFO

Business Administrator, Radnor Township School District

Good morning. My name is Brian Pawling, and I am the business administrator for the Radnor Township School District. I also serve as the current president of the PA Association of School Business Officials, PASBO. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee this morning on the important issue of the education pipeline.

PASBO is a member association with more than 3,500 individuals serving in full-time school business finance and operations roles in Pennsylvania schools across the Commonwealth. Our members—school business officials—are responsible for leading and supporting school finance, accounting, payroll, benefits, human resources, technology, facilities, transportation, food service, safety, and procurement programs in all types of LEAs across Pennsylvania.

School business officials ensure that budgets are adhered to, employees are paid, facilities are cleaned and maintained, students are transported safely, nutritional food is served, internet is functioning, and buildings are safe each and every day. Without them, schools can't operate, and we are seeing increasing strain on the school business official pipeline.

There are increasing vacancies in school business roles across the Commonwealth, which is layering responsibilities on others—most of whom already have overflowing plates, causing increased turnover and more vacancies, and ultimately, causing delays or inefficiencies in school business operations.

The cause of these vacancies and the pipeline challenges is likely a combination of issues. Post-COVID, the politics in public education has increased, as has the rhetoric, adding layers of scrutiny, time, and resources to already complex positions. At the same time, layers and layers of mandates have been added, the benefits—namely the retirement benefits—are significantly less for school employees than they have been in the past, and

along with salaries that don't always match up to what prospective employees could get in the private sector.

Additionally, there is virtually no capacity for remote or hybrid work in the k-12 education space for school business officials, which creates additional limitations for schools when seeking to attract private sector candidates. In addition, many of the pipelines that once fed school business official positions—such as the pathway through accounting and auditing firms—are drying up as well.

Positions in school business are essential and critical roles for every school, so addressing the school business official pipeline has been, and continues to be, a priority for our association.

To support our members and schools across the Commonwealth, we have worked to grow and strengthen our interim program, providing support in the form of retired school business officials to fill positions temporarily as LEAs are working through the hiring process—which, can take longer than expected. Through this program, schools can continue their operations without a hiccup—Annual Financial Reports get filed, payroll is processed, facilities projects can be completed, budgets are developed, meals are served, and transportation is provided. However, the scope of the need is certainly outpacing our ability to provide this temporary support.

Recognizing the scope of the pipeline challenges that school business is facing, PASBO has prioritized efforts to increase the visibility of school business as a profession and to highlight the existence of school business operations positions with prospective job seekers. PASBO has developed an internship toolkit to help our members by simplifying the process of identifying potential candidates in institutions of higher education and in other post-secondary education and developing summer or school-year internships to give students the opportunity to try out jobs in school business. The toolkit contains templates for every step of the process and for every area of school business to ensure that schools can connect students with all school business official positions.

Starting even earlier, PASBO has developed a career pathways toolkit to elevate the roles of school business officials to students in high school so that students start to make the connection to the vast array of positions in school business operations that exist post-graduation.

We're finalizing resources for school business officials and others in school leadership to assist in the hiring process. PASBO's "How to Hire a School Business Official" guides will define the value of hiring full-time school business officials, reflect on the critical expertise needed for each position, and will provide templates to assist with the hiring process

specific to all areas of school business. They will also include information to help ensure that school business official positions are visible and understandable to the private sector—ensuring that titles make sense to a private sector audience, salaries are competitive, and supports are in place to ensure that new hires can thrive in the chaotic and complex world of school business.

We also recognize the importance of retaining individuals in school business positions once they're hired. We're updating and finalizing checklists and resources for school business officials in all areas of focus to help them ease into their complex and critical positions. Giving them resources to assist with reporting requirements, what to focus on your first 30, 60, 90 days on the job, what questions to ask, and what to prepare for will help ensure that new school business officials stay in their positions for the long term. We've also overhauled and expanded our mentorship program, pairing new school business officials and tenured school business officials to provide another layer of support and guidance.

While we still have a long way to go to address the pipeline challenges that we're seeing in school business alone, we appreciate the opportunity to be here today to tell the story of the education workforce development issues through our lens. We ask that as these important conversations continue, school business officials—and the important work they do every day to ensure that schools can operate—be included in the conversation.



PENNSYLVANIA PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION

122 Valley Road - Enola, PA 17025

Dr. Eric C. Eshbach
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Testimony of the Pennsylvania Principals Association Before the House Education Committee Concerning the Laws Governing Administrator Compensation and Benefits (Act 93)

Introduction

Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler and Honorable Members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the important topic relating to the compensation and rights of school administrators. While I would rather present this testimony in person today, I am out of state at a conference with other state association executives who represent school leaders. Unfortunately, I cannot excuse myself as I am helping to lead that event. I trust that my written testimony will suffice and provide the necessary background for this Committee as you gain an understanding of and vote on this topic.

Our testimony today focuses on the urgent need to modernize and strengthen the laws governing administrator compensation and benefits, specifically Section 1164 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949, or as we generally refer to it: Act 93. The Pennsylvania Principals Association represents over three thousand school leaders across the Commonwealth, including principals, assistant principals, and other administrators who serve as the instructional and operational leaders of Pennsylvania's public schools and who are members of Act 93 teams in their respective school districts.

The Importance of Effective School Leadership

School leadership matters. A robust and growing body of research clearly demonstrates that effective principals play a critical role in student achievement and overall school success. A 2021 meta-analysis by the Wallace Foundation, examining two decades of research involving more than 22,000 principals, concluded that replacing a below-average principal with an above-average one could result in nearly three additional months of student learning in both mathematics and reading each year. The research also found that the impact of an effective principal on student achievement rivals that of an effective classroom teacher.

These findings confirm what educators and families already know: strong school leadership is essential to student growth, teacher retention, school climate, and community trust. Yet, despite this critical role, the systems designed to support and compensate school leaders have failed to keep pace with the realities of the job.

The Changing Role of Principals and the Leadership Crisis

Over the past 15 years, the role of principal has changed dramatically. Today's school leaders are expected to serve simultaneously as instructional leaders, facility and safety managers, mental

health coordinators, human resource professionals, community relations officers, and crisis managers—often with limited authority, insufficient support, and inadequate compensation.

These compounded demands have produced a leadership crisis. Nationwide data illustrate alarming levels of stress, burnout, and turnover among principals and assistant principals. In recent studies, a majority of school leaders reported extreme stress, threats or verbal abuse, and serious concerns about their mental and emotional health. Many are actively considering leaving the profession.

Turnover data further highlights the problem. Principal turnover rates climbed to approximately 16 percent nationally entering the 2022–2023 school year, with even higher rates in high-poverty and rural districts. High turnover destabilizes schools, disrupts instructional continuity, and disproportionately harms students with the greatest needs.

Importantly, school leaders are not leaving because they lack commitment to education. They are leaving because working conditions, compensation structures, and professional protections no longer reflect the scope, responsibility, and accountability of the role.

Act 93: An Outdated and Ineffective Framework

Act 93 was intended to provide a framework for administrator compensation and benefits through a “meet and discuss” process with school boards. However, as currently structured, Act 93 has proven to be insufficient, outdated, and inequitable.

Feedback from Pennsylvania administrators underscores these deficiencies. In a recent survey of principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators across the Commonwealth:

- A majority reported that meaningful meet and discuss sessions either do not occur or take place only when an Act 93 agreement is up for renewal.
- More than half expressed dissatisfaction with the process, noting that final compensation decisions often ignore administrator input.
- Nearly two-thirds indicated that Act 93 agreements fail to account for the additional hours, days, and responsibilities required of administrators, resulting in salaries that are, in some cases, less favorable than those of teachers on a per diem basis.

Administrators reported situations in which accepting a promotion to school leadership resulted in a significant pay cut, undermining any incentive for talented educators to pursue administrative roles. Others described interactions with school boards that lacked good faith, transparency, or respect for the professional expertise of school leaders.

Structural Failures Within Act 93

The Pennsylvania Principals Association believes Act 93 is fundamentally flawed in several key ways:

- It is a one-sided, nonbinding model with no enforceable standards or remedies.

- It addresses compensation narrowly while ignoring other essential professional rights and working conditions.
- Participation is not mandatory, and outcomes are not negotiable.
- The law provides no guidance on administrator evaluation systems.
- There is no dispute resolution process when agreement cannot be reached.

As a result, Act 93 has, in practice, created a pathway for administrators to be treated as disposable rather than as essential educational leaders.

The Need for Legislative Action

The Pennsylvania Principals Association respectfully urges the House Education Committee and the General Assembly to pursue substantive reforms to Act 93. During the 2024 legislative session, Representative Takac took the bold move to introduce HB 2581. This bill took the first step in 40 years to introduce legislation that would address the rights and compensation of school administrators.

While HB 2581 adequately realized the need for fair treatment and compensation of school administrators, we heard concerns from legislators, as well as other education stakeholders who represent the leadership of public schools across the Commonwealth. Thus, we spent time listening to concerns, refining our requests to meet the realities school districts face today, and rewriting this legislation into the form in which it is presented to you today.

We believe the revised proposed legislation before you shows the importance of collaboration, cooperation, and negotiation. It also demonstrates that there is a significant interest in promoting and encouraging our best educators to pursue opportunities in school and district leadership.

This revised proposal seeks to provide incentive, protection, and compensation by doing the following:

- Require meaningful, good-faith engagement between school boards and administrators. This is accomplished through required and timebound discussions and agreements between the two entities.
- Ensure compensation structures reflect the true scope of administrative responsibilities, time commitments, and accountability. This is achieved through fair compensation for those administrators with supervisory or administrative certificates without causing undue burden on school districts.
- Address benefits, workload, evaluation processes, and professional protections—not compensation alone.

- Establish clear standards and procedures, including mechanisms for dispute resolution that are meant to be productive, yet non-binding. We believe the process for dispute resolution is as important as the resulting action.
- Strengthen administrator retention and support leadership pipelines across Pennsylvania. Without the protections and provisions outlined in this proposed legislation, the leadership of our schools and districts is jeopardized.

Conclusion

Pennsylvania's students, educators, and communities depend on strong and stable school leadership. Without meaningful reform to Act 93 and the laws governing administrator compensation and benefits, the Commonwealth risks further exacerbating the leadership shortage and undermining student success.

The Pennsylvania Principals Association stands ready to work collaboratively with legislators, policymakers, and stakeholders to modernize Act 93 and ensure that school leaders are supported, respected, and retained. We thank the Committee for its attention to this critical issue and for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,
Pennsylvania Principals Association
Eric C. Eshbach, Ed.D., Executive Director