

# **POLICY ISSUE BRIEF:**

# PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER SHORTAGE

## **Issue at a Glance**

Research shows that about one in five principals leave their school each year, and one out of every two principals will leave by their third year of leading a school. A national survey on America's school leaders conducted by NASSP in 2022 also found that nearly 40% of principals were at least considering leaving the profession, citing an overwhelming workload, burnout, and unrealistic job expectations as primary causes. School leaders who are retiring, transferring schools, or pursuing new opportunities within the education sector are not being replaced by enough qualified candidates. As a result, many school districts across the country report overwhelming principal vacancies and a severe lack of qualified applicants to replace them.

Nationwide shortages in the teaching profession have also continued to grow in recent years, with 2025 research from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) finding that about one in every eight teaching positions across the country are currently vacant. LPI's research found that less than one fifth of teachers leaving the profession are retiring. Others cite reasons like pursuing other careers, needing a higher salary, and dissatisfaction with teaching or their specific position. School leaders are struggling to find qualified candidates for all the teaching positions in their schools.

According to the Education Commission of the States, urban, rural, high-poverty, high-minority, and low-achieving schools face the most persistent staffing challenges. Middle and high schools, in particular, face challenges in filling positions in special education, math, science, foreign language, applied technology, and ESL. School leaders also report finding teachers of color, male teachers, and bilingual teachers, most representative of the communities they serve, to be extremely difficult.

While the shortages in the education profession grow, the demand for more qualified educators is only increasing. Our nation's schools are facing a teacher and principal shortage crisis that requires immediate attention and careful long-term planning.

## NASSP Position

- While there can be successful teachers in failing schools, there are no effective schools without effective school leaders. As a result, school leadership is the key to closing achievement gaps and increasing student performance in all subjects across all grade levels.
- NASSP's policy issue brief on [Leadership Development](#) provides research and background on principal influence on lower teacher turnover and higher teacher satisfaction.
- School leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to individual student achievement.
- High-quality, sustained professional development for principals focused on instructional leadership, organizational management, schoolwide reform, innovation, and other 21st-century practices are lacking. On average, states spend less than 4% of federal Title II dollars on principal professional development activities with several states opting to make no investments at all.
- Increased responsibilities and accountability without incentives—not the least of which is commensurate pay—have sorely hampered school districts' abilities to attract and retain quality candidates. Superintendents cite the most frequent barrier discouraging potential candidates is that compensation not sufficient to encourage applications.
- Postsecondary education and training programs have not been audited to determine the effectiveness of these institutions in preparing principals for the new challenges and requirements of the position.
- Few school districts have structured recruitment programs that systemically seek out the best principal candidates or implement training programs to “grow” future principals.
- State and federal policymakers must take action to create new pipeline leadership programs and allocate new funding that will incentivize more candidates to enter and remain in the teaching and school leadership professions.

## Recommendations for Federal and State Policymakers

- Adopt the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and align principal evaluation and support systems to the standards.
- Increase funding for school leader professional development, training and mentoring and for reforming school leader certification and tenure systems.
- Fully fund and advocate for Title II, Part A, of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which districts and schools rely on to invest in principal residencies, job-embedded and cohort-based professional learning, and mentorship opportunities for aspiring principals.
- Restore funding and advocate for the School Leadership Recruitment and Support Program Title II, Part B, of ESSA, to no less than \$30 million per year for the recruitment, training, and development of effective principals.

- Remove higher education financial barriers by increasing federal financial aid through Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Opportunity Grants; advocate for the passage of The Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act, bipartisan legislation which would expand qualified expenses under 529 savings plans to include postsecondary training and credentialing.
- Pass legislation that would provide loan forgiveness, grant, and/or tax credits to school leaders and teachers who commit to working in high-need schools.
- Conduct a systemic study of effective principals, particularly those who serve in our most challenging settings.
- Take action to elevate public perception of the profession by emphasizing the principalship as a call to service that is central to the well-being of communities, the economic success of individual states, and the strengthening of our nation's democracy.
- Develop a federal campaign to promote the education profession and encourage more individuals to become teachers and principals.
- Encourage the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to collect data on teacher recruitment and retention that would allow for a comparative analysis of the teacher shortage in states and districts by school level (elementary, middle, high); subject area; geographic region (rural, suburban, urban); gender; and race.
- Reauthorize the Higher Education Act and ensure that teacher preparation programs include a strong residency program and ongoing mentoring and support for new educators.
- Authorize matching grants for states and districts that implement high-quality teacher preparation programs.
- Offer incentives for states to design reciprocity agreements and portability options that would allow teachers to easily transfer their license and certification from state to state.
- Revise teacher certification and licensure requirements so that teacher preparation programs only accept and graduate individuals who demonstrate the capacity to be high-caliber teachers.
- Align state licensing and certification levels with school grade configurations (e.g. K-6, 5-9, 7-12) to increase the quantity and quality of potential applicant pools.
- Ensure that teacher preparation programs focus their recruitment and training efforts in grades and subject areas that will meet local workforce needs.
- Require new teachers to be "profession-ready" when they become the teacher of record in a school. At a minimum, they should:
  - Hold a bachelor's degree and demonstrate in-depth content knowledge in their area of licensure;
  - Fulfill the requirements of a state-approved preparation program that includes clinical experiences using models of accomplished practice by instructors with K-12 experience, as well as promotes cultural responsiveness and the ability of teachers to address the individual learning needs and backgrounds of all students;
  - Complete a comprehensive residency program in which a teacher preparation program and a local school district partner to engage teacher residents in a series of school-based experiences and teaching enrichment opportunities under the guidance of accomplished educators; and
  - Demonstrate proficiency through a valid and reliable classroom-based performance assessment.

- In collaboration with all education stakeholders, develop a teacher evaluation and support system that includes the following components:
  - Feedback and reflective practice;
  - Multiple measures of classroom practice, student learning, and other evidence related to the teacher's contribution to schoolwide improvement; and
  - High-quality training, credentialing, and ongoing professional development for principals to coach and mentor teachers to improve their practice.

## Recommendations for District Leaders

- Improve teacher and school leader recruitment efforts through increased collaboration between school districts and postsecondary institutions.
- Establish centralized data systems that modernize recruiting practices and analytics for matching principals to schools, with a focus on retaining and diversifying the workforce. The data should then be used for future hiring and placement decisions and should also be sent to the program where each school leader was trained.
- Ensure the principal's salary is commensurate with the job responsibilities. Raising salaries for school administrators is a must if schools are to make the principalship more attractive to a new generation of school leaders.
- Provide significant and meaningful ongoing coaching and professional development to support the practicing principal's continuing education in instructional leadership practices that will improve schoolwide instructional practice and student achievement.
- Decrease the gap between principal training and practice. Many of today's preparation programs are irrelevant to and inadequate in developing the skills and competencies required for the principalship. Preparation programs must include a clinical component comparable to other professional preparation programs and be oriented toward competencies judged critical to principal effectiveness in improving instruction, teacher quality, and student achievement.

## Recommendations for School Leaders

- Increase advocacy efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure funding and policy decisions meet the needs of their community, school, and professional growth as a leader.
- Encourage others to aspire to the principalship and provide assistant principals and other emerging leaders with increased responsibilities and professional development that will adequately prepare them to lead schools.
- Participate in evidence-based mentoring and residency programs.
- Complete federal, state, and district staffing surveys to provide policymakers with a better understanding of current job demands and opportunities for improvement.