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Staffing Challenges

EDITOR'S NOTE

School districts across the country are having staffing challenges. This spotlight will help you understand policymaker involvement; review the facts on school support staff's low wages; explore the impact of understaffed after school programs; examine why there aren't more women superintendents; identify changes to make to recruit teachers of color; observe how one principal dodged the staffing shortage; and consider ways to build a healthier school culture.

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'How Bad Could It Get?' State and District Leaders Work to Combat Teacher Shortages

By Madeline Will

The Hallsville, Mo., school district has been trying to hire a speech language pathologist and a specialist to teach English-language learners for months now, but administrators haven't received a single qualified application.

It's part of a troubling trend for a school district that's just 10 miles away from the state's flagship university: Hallsville can't seem to hire enough teachers. Even open positions for elementary teachers in the district are receiving fewer applications these days, despite the fact that elementary education is typically the most popular major for aspiring teachers.

"We have a strong reputation as a district as a great place for teachers to work and students to learn, and yet we've still seen an increased challenge in filling the vacancies," said Superintendent John Downs. "It's concerning to see the number of applications declining. ... How bad could it get down the road?"

Teacher shortages—particularly in certain subject areas, like special education or high school math—have been a challenge for years. But school district leaders say the pandemic has exacerbated the problem, and many districts started the school year with a higher-than-normal number of teacher vacancies. A national EdWeek Research Center survey, conducted in the fall, found that **nearly half of district leaders and principals said they had struggled to hire a sufficient number of full-time teachers this school year.**

At the same time, teachers already in the classroom are saying in survey after survey **that they want to quit**, although it remains to be seen whether most actually will. Even so, experts say that district leaders should be conscious of the **rising levels of teacher burnout.**

Also, **enrollment in teacher-preparation programs has been declining steadily over the past decade**, raising some concern about the strength of the pipeline into the profession. While a recent survey by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education found that most teacher-preparation programs said the pandemic has had either no or minimal impact on enrollment, a fifth of institutions did see a decline in new undergraduate enrollment of 11 percent or more.



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"If we aren't seeing the big, huge shortage increase right now, I think we will definitely be seeing it over the next couple years—if there [are] not the right interventions," said Megan Boren, a program manager at the Southern Regional Education Board who leads the organization's work on educator human capital strategies.

Increasing teacher compensation is one such intervention, she said, and some state legislatures are working to pass teacher pay raises. (For example, the Mississippi legislature is **negotiating two different plans that would provide teachers at least a \$4,000 annual raise.**) But pay can't be the only consideration for district leaders and policymakers, Boren said. **Supportive working conditions** are critical, too.

The Hallsville district, for instance, will pivot to a four-day school week in the fall, a decision that was primarily made with the goal of recruiting and retaining more teachers. Downs

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MEGAN BOREN

Program manager, Southern Regional Education Board

said teachers can use the noninstructional day to meet with their professional learning community, plan, collaborate, and take care of their own needs: “We’re looking to maximize the flexibility of those days,” he said.

The rural, 1,400-student district has to find creative ways to hire and keep its teachers because it’s a challenge to compete with more-affluent neighboring districts on salaries and benefits, Downs said. **The district has also received grant funds to support tuition reimbursement for teachers and pay them stipends for taking on extra duties. And administrators are coordinating with local colleges and universities and neighboring districts to provide a pathway toward certification for paraprofessionals.**

“At the end of the day, we’re talking about trying to provide a benefit for students,” Downs said. “The research is very clear: Quality teachers are the No. 1 [in-school] indicator of student success.”

States are using federal relief money to build pipelines

Armed with an influx of federal COVID-19 relief money, state policymakers are working to address the school staffing crisis by **strengthening the teacher pipelines and removing barriers to entry.**

The Oklahoma State Department of Education, for instance, has designated \$12.7 million of its federal money to **pay a stipend to 1,300 student-teachers each year for the next three years. Student-teachers will receive \$3,250, half of which will be paid up front and the remainder after they complete student teaching and sign a contract to teach in an Oklahoma public school.**

State officials say that many prospective teachers do not complete their teacher-preparation programs because of the time commitment of student teaching—time that could have been spent working another paid job.

New Mexico’s education department earmarked \$37 million of its federal relief money to hire 500 educational assistants and support them as they study to become a teacher, counselor, or school nurse. Interested school districts will receive grants that cover an educational assistant’s full salary plus benefits, a \$4,000 stipend to support each fellow’s postsecondary education, and money to cover all licensure fees.

And Tennessee recently became the first state to be approved by the U.S. Department of Labor to establish a permanent “grow your own” model that **will allow people to become a teacher for free.** The first registered apprenticeship program is a partnership between

the Clarksville-Montgomery County school system and Austin Peay State University that allows school employees to get on-the-job experience—and a paycheck—while training to become a teacher. Tuition, fees, books, and required exams are all covered.

Tennessee officials say the approach will help address shortages while also investing in high-quality candidates who may have otherwise faced barriers into the profession.

“This isn’t just, ‘Anybody should become a teacher just to get more bodies in classrooms,’” said Penny Schwinn, Tennessee’s education commissioner. “If we can get great people in the classroom, we can get them in debt-free, [and] we can make sure that a first-year teacher has three years of experience, ... we’re thrilled about what this means.”

Tennessee is using \$20 million of its federal relief funding to support 65 “grow your own” programs across the state, including the one in Clarksville-Montgomery. Now, the state plans to register the 64 other programs with the U.S. Department of Labor, as long as they meet the minimum requirements, so they have a permanent source of funding.

Many of the state’s programs are either targeted toward school employees like paraprofessionals or creating a pathway for high school students who are interested in teaching. So far, Schwinn said, the programs are preparing 650 future educators—enough to fill about two-thirds of the state’s unfilled classroom vacancies.

Districts work to retain teachers

Meanwhile, district leaders are taking steps to keep the teachers they already have.

A national EdWeek Research Center, conducted in late January and early February, found that 43 percent of district leaders say they’ve given teachers a one-time pay bonus since the start of the pandemic. District leaders have told Education Week that the bonuses, which can fall between \$1,000 and \$5,000, are meant to show gratitude for hard work during a challenging school year and to help entice teachers to stick around.

Many districts are also putting more of an emphasis on **employee wellness,** especially at a time when so many teachers say they’re burned out and experience a great deal of job-related stress.

“We don’t just want to get staff through the semester, we want to make sure we’re taking the opportunity to really listen and hear,” said Alex Moseman, the director of talent acquisition for the Indianapolis school district.

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At the end of the day, we’re talking about trying to provide a benefit for students. The research is very clear: Quality teachers are the No. 1 [in-school] indicator of student success.”

JOHN DOWNS

Superintendent, Hallsville, Mo.

“What are the challenges? What are additional supports [teachers need from school leaders]? What are the ways we can rethink the way the teaching role looks that makes the job more sustainable?”

Fostering a supportive work environment that celebrates success is an important component of retaining teachers, Moseman said. He’s also focused on recruiting teachers for the next school year—a competitive process, especially given declining enrollment trends in the state’s teacher-preparation programs.

“COVID is a new variable in the equation, but the problem we’re trying to solve for is not new,” he said.

Among other initiatives, the Indianapolis district has partnered with a local charter network to launch a free, one-year apprenticeship program for current district support staff, recent college graduates who didn’t earn an education degree, and career-changers. Aspiring teachers receive a salary and are partnered with a mentor teacher as they work in classrooms and prepare for the state licensing exam.

Moseman said the district’s approach to talent recruitment is all about removing barriers and making it as easy as possible to bring high-quality people into classrooms. “It’s an incredibly competitive landscape, and we want to make sure we’re not missing out on folks,” he said. ■

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School Support Staffers Don't Make a Living Wage. Here's a Comparison by State

By Madeline Will

There's no state in the country where an education support professional—such as a paraprofessional or a school cafeteria worker—earns enough, on average, to support themselves and one child while living in the state's most affordable metropolitan area, a new analysis finds.

In addition to this year's teacher salary rankings, the National Education Association released data for how much school support staff make in each state. The nation's largest teachers' union, which represents about a half-million education support professionals, analyzed federal data to provide a picture of all support staff working in public schools. There are nearly 2.2 million education support professionals working in K-12 public schools, compared to about 3.2 million classroom teachers.

Education support professionals are known as the backbone of schools for their work supporting classroom learning and maintaining the functionality of school operations. Many of them work directly with students, particularly those who have disabilities. Yet many of these workers are not making a living wage, this analysis found.

According to the NEA's data, the largest share of K-12 education support professionals—39 percent—are paraprofessionals, followed by clerical workers (16 percent), custodial workers (almost 16 percent), food and service staff (11.5 percent), and transportation workers (9 percent). Technical staff (such as computer operators or public relations specialists), skilled trade workers (such as electricians or HVAC specialists), health and student services workers, and school security make up smaller shares of the workforce.

Almost 80 percent of K-12 education support professionals work full time, defined by the NEA as 30 or more hours per week. (About half of those employees work 40 or more hours.)

The average full-time K-12 support professional earned \$32,837 in the 2020-21 school year. Delaware had the highest salary for full-time K-12 support staff (\$44,738), while Idaho had the lowest (\$25,830).



Wilfredo Lee/AP

Food service assistant Brenda Bartee, rear, gives students breakfast last August at Washington Elementary School in Riviera Beach, Fla.

More than two-thirds of K-12 support staff don't have any higher education degree, and about 12 percent have an associate degree. These school-based workers—who are, on average, more racially diverse than the teacher workforce—are increasingly being viewed as a potential pool of future teachers. Many states and districts have started pipeline programs for paraprofessionals and other staffers to earn a college degree and become a classroom teacher while still working in schools.

Yet the NEA warned that like teacher salaries, the salaries of education support professionals have not kept up with inflation—and these “persistent pay gaps” will make it difficult for schools to attract and retain these workers.

The NEA used the Economic Policy Institute's family budget calculator to determine whether support staff make a living wage and found that on average, these employees would not be able to live in a metropolitan area and support themselves and one child without government assistance or another adult's income.

In at least four states—Vermont, Hawaii, New Hampshire, and Oregon—and the District of Columbia, the gap between the average salary and this measure of a living wage is more than \$25,000. ■

Additional Resource

To view K-12 support staff salaries by state, click [here](#).



—Dusan Stankovic/E+

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After-School Programs Are Low On Staff, Leaving Students Unsupervised and Underserved

By Mark Lieberman

Unprecedented staffing shortages have plagued schools nationwide all year—and these issues haven't spared after-school programs.

Roughly three-quarters of after-school program providers who answered a recent survey from Edge Research for the Afterschool Alliance said they're struggling to hire or retain staff. Suburban program providers were more likely to report staff shortage troubles than urban and rural providers.

Reduced staffing for after-school programs means some services had to shut down entirely, or reduce the number of students who can attend. That means fewer students are getting crucial opportunities for social-emotional support and homework help, and more kids may be ending up without proper supervision after school with family members still at work.

Slightly more than half of the 1,049 after-school providers who answered the survey, conducted in November and December, said they were "extremely concerned" last fall about staff shortages. Eighty-seven percent said they were at least "somewhat concerned."

For after-school programs, having an insufficient number of people to lead programs adds another headache to what is already a stressful and draining job.

"If I had a quarter for every time I looked at a child and said you need to mask up over your mouth, I could retire," said Angela Todriff, a senior child-care director for the YMCA of Pierce and Kitsap Counties in Washington state.

Todriff runs before- and after-school programs for three school districts. At its peak, her team can run 30-student programs at 14 different school sites. Each one needs two workers to meet the state-mandated ratio of one adult for every 15 children.

Since December, though, the team has only had enough staff to maintain six 30-student programs.

The YMCA typically finds luck employing college students, who are comfortable with the unconventional business hours, and para-professionals, who are already in the building during the school day.

But the districts, like so many others this year, are running short on qualified paraprofessionals, which means the after-school programs feel the spillover effects. College students, too, haven't been turning out when new

positions open up.

These positions pay between \$15 and \$18 an hour for 30 to 40 hours of work per week. Todriff is looking for ways to make the job more appealing, including offering a higher salary.

"We're just literally not getting applications," she said.

Increasing salaries is the most common approach after-school providers are taking to stem the tide of staffing shortages, with more than half trying it out, according to the survey. Roughly a third said they're expanding professional development opportunities; 18 percent said they're offering free childcare for staff; and 15 percent said they're adding sign-on bonuses to entice new workers.

Some programs are also raising prices for students to pay for increased wages for staff. Others are supplementing their budgets with federal pandemic relief aid. After-school programs that received federal relief funds were more likely to take steps to attract staff, according to the survey results. The majority of survey respondents, though, didn't receive those dollars.

In Contra Costa, Calif., after-school program providers started getting interest last fall from potential employees, but when they scheduled interviews, the candidates sometimes wouldn't show up. Some candidates even got through the process to the point of sharing proof that they passed a required state exam only to disappear.

"Most of our workforce works less than 20 hours a week with only a handful of staff making over \$20 an hour—which is horrible when you think of everything we have been asking staff to do," said Kasey Blackburn-Jiron, an expanded-learning coordinator for the West Contra Costa district.

Among those asks, she said: "Be amazing youth development practitioners. Teach our children new skills. Support social and emotional development, all while we are struggling through a pandemic that has ravaged our communities."

Blackburn-Jiron's team contracts with nonprofit organizations that hire employees to craft after-school programs. The vast majority of those providers are struggling to fill positions, she said. Love.Learn.Success, one of the only providers in the district to get federal relief aid, has been the most successful recruiter among programs that serve the district, Blackburn-Jiron said. The organization used its \$800,000 in federal relief funds to maintain health insurance benefits and raise wages for staff, and to hire enrichment specialists who lead dance workshops and nature walks, said

Ann Ngo, CEO of Love.Learn.Success.

The state recently bumped up the district's after-school program funding allocation, but Blackburn-Jiron won't be able to distribute the money until the school year's almost over.

She worries about finding enough people to run summer programming and about the working families who depend on after-school programs to help make ends meet. "It's heart-breaking to admit that we have kids on waitlists," she said.

Fifty-four percent of survey respondents also said they have waitlists for student attendance.

Even programs that haven't experienced painful staff shortages have seen the pandemic affect their operations. The after-school program known as Catamount Community Hours, or "CatCH," at the public St. Johnsbury School in Vermont managed to overstaff its programs before the school year started, anticipating that some people might have to be out due to COVID-19 exposure.

Christine Owens, who directs the CatCH middle school program, has filled in for program staff on several occasions, cutting into her regular administrative duties, including interacting with parents.

"That does add a layer of stress to everything," Owens said. "Overall, we've been very lucky that we haven't had to close our program."

The pandemic has crashed against the after-school programming in other ways, too. Many Kitsap County school buildings now use the rooms that previously housed after-school programs as overflow space for social distancing purposes, forcing Todriff's programs to relocate.

Some students who previously could have taken the bus from one school building to another for an after-school program have now lost that option because districts consolidated routes.

Todriff worries about the students who are missing out on crucial emotional support because their typical after-school program isn't running. Children who might not have family members at home right after school no longer have the lifeline in the school building that they once had.

Still, she's among the 74 percent of survey respondents who are optimistic about the future of their after-school program. Hiring has started to pick up a bit as mask mandates wind down and COVID-19 cases fall. The pandemic has also forced her team to rethink some of its curriculum, putting a stronger emphasis on social-emotional support.

"When we can't run a program it's not because we don't want to," Todriff said. "Right now we don't have the means to do it. We want to get back to that." ■

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Why Aren't There More Women Superintendents?

By Stephen Sawchuk

Women—the backbone and brain trust of America's public schools—are vastly underrepresented in the superintendent's chair. And as turnover in that crucial role seems to be worsening, especially in large school districts, the churn could be weakening women's already tenuous hold on the top job.

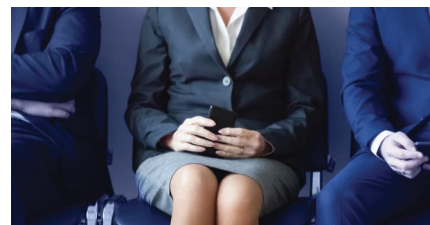
In a review of the 500 largest school districts, 186 have completed a leadership transition since March of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic exploded in the United States—and those districts overwhelmingly hired men, finds an analysis by the ILO Group, a women-founded education policy and leadership group.

Even in those cases where replacements haven't been settled, the crop of departing leaders include some of the country's highest profile, longest-tenured, and well-respected women leaders: Barbara Jenkins in Orange County, Fla.; Brenda Cassellius in Boston; Susan Enfield in Washington state's Highline district; Sharon Contreras in Guilford County, N.C.; and Janice Jackson in Chicago. Many of these leaders are also women of color, who are especially rare in the upper echelons of K-12 leadership.

For Julia Rafal-Baer, a co-founder of the ILO Group, the findings are a clarion call for the K-12 field get a handle on the entire pipeline for sourcing promising women leaders, coaching them, and ensuring they get a fair crack at hiring.

Right now, she said, these patterns send an implicit signal to women educators that there's no place to rise—even as the teacher pipeline gets thinner, with fewer enrollments in the college programs that prepare the bulk of teachers. They also reinforce the decades-old message that it's not possible for women to square family responsibilities with those of an executive.

"There's a lot of work that needs to get done so that we minimize biases, that we recognize the impact that a job description can have, and make more public and trans-



—fizkes/Getty

“

I didn't hear communities say to male superintendents: 'You hate children,' the way they would to women.”

SHARON CONTRERAS

Guilford County, N.C. superintendent

parent contracts that make room for men or women who have to take on larger shares of family and elder-care responsibilities,” Rafal-Baer said.

The pandemic seems to have exacerbated the problem

Just what is driving the pattern remains unclear, but researchers suggest that, as in almost every other sector, the demands of child care, parenting, and elder care during the pandemic have fallen much more heavily on women than on men.

On top of that, the new pressures of the job—ever-shifting COVID protocols, protests over masks, rage over how race is taught or perceived to be taught—have exposed superintendents to a lot of vitriol. And women superintendents say that the criticism they endured was not merely abusive—it was also gendered.

“I didn't hear communities say to male superintendents: 'You hate children,' the way they would to women. Or, 'You're trying to hurt children,'” said Sharon Contreras, the superintendent in Guilford County, N.C.,

who will be departing that district at the end of the school year. “That is particularly difficult for women, as we are mothers. We bear children, so that is particularly stinging to us.”

Even those women who remain committed to staying in their districts acknowledge the tenor of criticism has changed.

“What I noticed particularly as we headed into the challenges of online learning and managing COVID was that I’d hear specifically from male parents who made pointed comments about how if I weren’t female, I would make a better decision,” said Sue Reike-Smith, the superintendent of the Tigard Tualatin district near Portland, Ore. “That was a frame that was consistent in those emails.”

In some cases, the discourse has become distinctly threatening. In Washington state, someone defaced property in Enfield’s district, spray-painting “racist superintendent” on an administration building last year, apparently in response to her position on returning to in-person schooling. (Susan Enfield is vice chair of the board of trustees for Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit publisher of Education Week.)

In Guilford County, Contreras last year had to get police protection after a right-wing disinformation site disseminated a misleading video about her on YouTube, resulting in a flood of racist, expletive-laden emails and phone calls.

On their own, those signs would be concerning enough. But as school boards have sought talent during the pandemic to fill slots vacated by women, they have tended to hire male candidates. The ILO Group found that, of the 51 women in the sample of districts that had made new hires, three quarters of their replacements have been men.

It’s a pattern that shows up regionally as well as nationally. A 2021 report conducted by the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators and several other Oregon agencies found that more than half of that state’s 17 women superintendents left that year, and only 12 women were hired. (The state has about 200 districts, plus 19 education service districts.)

Supply and demand a tough nut to crack

As many education scholars have noted over the years, there is perhaps no other field in the United States in which women make up the bulk of the workforce while the top job is so disproportionately held by men—and white men at that.

It’s a problem that has festered even as researchers say it’s challenging to untangle exactly why it remains so stubbornly lopsided.

“I don’t think there’s anyone out there that knows exactly why there are fewer women. It’s not one thing, it’s 17 things,” said Rachel White, an assistant professor of K-12 education leadership at Old Dominion University in Virginia. She’s among the researchers who are working to better illuminate what those factors are and how they work.

Using first names as a proxy for gender, she found that in the 2019-20 school year, just 26 percent of superintendents were women. What was more surprising, though, was how those patterns broke out by state and region.

Some states, like California, Arizona, and Virginia, were much closer to achieving gender parity in the superintendency than others—like Utah or Iowa, where there were more than 7 men on the job for every 1 woman superintendent. Such findings raise questions about whether requirements like credentialing criteria, the structure of boards, or the size of districts could be a factor in who gets selected. (Women were more likely to work in urban and suburban districts than in towns or rural areas.)

And White found some preliminary evidence that women are more likely to lead districts with a higher concentration of students in poverty. A vicious cycle may be at work: Women are leading districts that tend to be under-resourced and have higher staff turnover.

White is currently working to extend the project and create a dataset of every district and its leadership over the past three years, similar to the ILO’s Group’s project but on a larger scale. She’ll analyze it for more insights about what patterns show up over time. So far, she said, the evidence suggests superintendent turnover was slightly higher among women than men in 2019-20 but the inverse in 2020-21. And strikingly, a fifth of districts that had a woman leader in 2019 kept one, while hiring a leader of the opposite sex was comparatively rarer.

Part of the challenge, she said, is that researchers keep stumbling into an interpretive problem: Is the core problem one of supply—that well-qualified women aren’t applying for the open spots? Or is it selection, that they’re applying and not getting chosen?

And because many searches are run by private firms, there are barriers to getting a full picture about how boards go about sourcing candidates or what other dynamics might be in play.

Plenty of talent, but an absence of hiring

What is clear is that there’s no lack of talent.

Federal data show that women earn around two-thirds of all leadership degrees in educa-

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I thought, ‘Wow, have we ever referred to a man as a ‘mean girl?’ I’ve never heard a man called mean, ever,. Not in business, not in the private sector, not in the public sector.’”

SHARON CONTRERAS

Guilford County,
N.C. superintendent

tion, usually the foundational credential needed to advance to the principalship. There seem to be plenty of qualified, talented, and even credentialed women leaders, but relatively few of them ever advance to the superintendency.

Other research points to some of the cultural and sociological obstacles that get in the way. Women face both explicit and implicit bias in hiring; they are often asked in coded (and not-so-coded) ways about “family commitments”; they often have less access to mentors than their male peers or to the networks that open doors to new positions, concluded the Oregon report, which relied on focused interviews with women superintendents.

One woman leader who requested anonymity described what happened when she was a finalist for a city school district search in 2020. After several rounds of strong interviews, board members’ attitudes changed almost immediately after the candidate mentioned that she would be driving home on weekends to visit her daughter, who was completing high school in another district about 200 miles away.

Though such an arrangement is commonplace for men, board members in a public hearing explicitly mused whether that meant that the candidate wouldn’t be completely committed to the district. It was a horrifying spectacle for the leader—and a devastating one for the candidate’s daughter, who watched the whole thing play out on TV.

“The fact that my child was brought into the conversation about whether or not I was a good candidate is just completely foul,” she said. “I’ve never seen them discuss that about a man.”

And the double standard is not always limited to hiring. Contreras said she's noticed women's personality traits are frequently discussed, rather than their knowledge, skills, and performance. What really hit that lesson home for her was the time one of her board members commented that they'd heard that Contreras was a "mean girl."

"I thought, 'Wow, have we ever referred to a man as a 'mean girl'? I've never heard a man called mean, ever," she said. "Not in business, not in the private sector, not in the public sector."

What are some of the solutions?

The solutions to undoing those patterns are going to be complex. They demand more transparency in the hiring process, for search firms to hold themselves accountable to goals for increasing the number of women candidates they field, for pay equity—women leaders tend to be paid less than men—and for better networking and support systems for women leaders, said Rafal-Baer. Even job descriptions, she said, can be written in ways that seem to prioritize skills traditionally viewed as masculine.

Other long-standing traditions that disfavor women should be reconsidered, added Contreras. In her view, the process of parading superintendent finalists in front of the

board in successive public meetings amounts to a big popularity contest that doesn't actually do much to illuminate the specific skills and strengths candidates bring to the job.

And she believes all contracts should explicitly set norms for board-superintendent relations, detailing that bullying and shouting are not appropriate ways to communicate.

The woman leader who lost out on the big-city job added that districts can also more explicitly signal a healthy balance between work and life in contract language.

"I think at some point, there needs to come a time where there's a level-setting on what's a realistic expectation for that role. Right now you have to be a medical expert, a statistician, a diplomat, a [certified public accountant]. You have to understand the law. It's just so unrealistic," she said. "I think they can make the job just a little bit more attractive to someone who has a family. Women want to have a life; they want to have work-life balance."

There are some hopeful signs on that front. Newer contracts in places like Oakland, Calif., and Atlanta are evidence that some boards are reconsidering whether it's healthy for the job to be so all-encompassing. Kyla Johnson-Trammell's most recent contract in Oakland gives her a sabbatical option, while in Atlanta, Superintendent Lisa Herring's most

recent contract extension grants her 10 well-ness days to use as she sees fit.

Rafal-Baer believes other districts that want to signal they're serious about attracting women leaders will have to follow suit—by setting clear boundaries about availability on nights and weekends, for instance.

"These jobs are 24/7, they are highly political, and they are highly impactful and have an ability to be transformative," she said. "To get to a place where they are sustainable and reflect the reality of what pandemic recovery is going to require, this combination of focusing on health and wellness—as much as overall compensation—is going to continue to be a trend." ■

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4 Changes Schools Can Make to Recruit Teachers Of Color and Keep Them Around

By Eesha Pendharkar

America's K-12 teaching force today remains predominantly white in stark contrast to its rapidly diversifying student body.

Almost 80 percent of public school teachers are white, according to a 2017-18 National Center for Education Statistics survey. That's despite the fact that students of color today make up the majority of America's student body.

Research shows that having more teachers of color in a district boosts the performance of all students, no matter their race, and makes students of color feel a sense of belonging.

But districts—even when they're aware of the shortfall—have struggled to recruit and re-

tain teachers of color for a variety of reasons, including flawed hiring practices, racially biased workplace environments, and lack of sustained diversity efforts, according to experts.

1. Establish teacher residency programs

Aspiring teachers of color are more likely than white teachers to carry with them mounds of student loan debt, according to a recent study from the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers' union. That debt can stop them from pursuing a teaching job which may not pay as much as other professions, said Travis Bristol, an assistant professor at the University of California, Berkeley's Graduate School of Education.

"One barrier for teachers of color to enter the teaching profession is actually the cost of certification," he said.

Bristol suggests that districts consider starting their own teacher residency programs, or partnerships with local universities that allow teaching candidates to work in a school as they complete their teaching certification.

Some residency programs cover the full costs of becoming a teacher and allow candidates to work in schools as they complete their certification requirements, Bristol said.

These programs help teachers get hands-on experience and often cover a part or all of their tuition for the certification program they are enrolled in.

California recently allocated \$350 million in teacher residency program grants.

A lack of diversity in the teaching profession is a problem with academic ramifications for all students.

2. Advocate for states to rethink the use of teacher certification exams or establish alternative certification requirements

An NEA report from 2019 estimated that each year, the Praxis exams that many aspiring educators must take to become teachers screen out almost half of people of color, which is 27.5 percent higher than the exclusion rate for white teachers.

That might be, critics theorize, because the Praxis—which is used in more than 40 states—is culturally biased. Some questions exclude people who have not been exposed to a majority-white experience, according to a study by the American Federation for Teachers. For example, a question referencing “sand traps” requires working knowledge of golf courses, which are not universally familiar, especially outside white communities.

However, teacher certification exams aim to measure an aspiring teacher’s knowledge and skills and are typically used by most districts across the country to make sure teachers are qualified to be placed in front of students.

Many candidates of color are more likely than their peers to have received poor test preparation in their K-12 schooling and are aware of the stereotype that African-Americans don’t do well on standardized tests, which creates test anxiety. That can lead to poor performance on the Praxis, according to Emery Petchauer, an associate professor of English and teacher education at Michigan State University.

In May 2020, California Gov. Gavin Newsom suspended two standardized tests for teacher candidates due to the pandemic. The state’s public university system, which trains the largest number of teachers of color in the state, saw more Black and brown teachers entering the profession because of the temporary suspension of the certification exam, Bristol said.

“It’s a standardized exam in which Black or Latinx teachers just do less well than their white or Asian colleagues,” he said. “So certification exams have historically been a barrier.”

3. Establish ‘grow your own’ programs

In Minnesota, districts have been working with the legislature to build “grow your own”



— Brooke Saia

programs, which recruit people from their own school communities to become teachers. Candidates might be non-licensed staff members like paraprofessionals or teacher’s assistants, education technicians, or simply community members affiliated with the district.

Laura Mogelson, director of the Multiple Pathways to Teaching program at the University of Minnesota, runs one such program that specifically seeks bilingual elementary school teachers from diverse backgrounds and pays for their licensure and training fees. Since 2018, the program has prepared more than 73 teachers of color, and the cohorts are made up on average of over 70 percent teachers of color. About 90 percent of all program participants have stayed in the profession.

Minnesota’s legislature passed a bill earlier this year aiming to allocate \$17 million for the grow-your-own pathways, with the goal of increasing the percentage of teachers of color each year by 2 percent.

4. Provide targeted specific training and support for teachers of color

Black teachers often face questions about their teaching style, are undermined or ignored when they have suggestions on how to improve the school, and are overlooked for formal leadership positions, according to Rita Kohli, an associate professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Riverside. Kohli has studied the struggles, assets, and possibilities of teachers of color.

Teachers of color also face criticism for their efforts to include race and ethnicity discussions in the curriculum or are tasked

“

A real issue that our new teachers often face if they’re a teacher of color is being racially isolated in a school.”

LAURA MOGELSON

Director of the Multiple Pathways to Teaching program, University of Minnesota

with extra responsibilities of acting as disciplinarians for students of color, according to a study by EdTrust, a civil rights group that advocates for more accountability of low-performing school districts.

In recent years, many districts have established affinity groups for teachers of color, and started focusing on their well-being, Bristol said. Affinity groups allow employees a safe space to share their experiences, typically without supervision.

“A real issue that our new teachers often face if they’re a teacher of color is being racially isolated in a school,” Mogelson said.

It’s important to not only offer support to teachers of color in navigating workplace issues related to race and ethnicity, but also training for principals to recognize and address these issues, Bristol said. ■

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Teacher shortages are impacting districts of every size. Recent research from the EdWeek Research Center reported that half of the principals surveyed closed schools during the last major COVID-19 wave because of staffing shortages. Education job openings grew by nearly 75 percent in the fall of 2021. Enrollments in teacher education programs are dropping. It's all taking place as public scrutiny and performance expectations for schools increase.



Tutoring Solutions Extend Instructional Capacity

With tutoring programs integrated as part of regular instruction, districts have the flexibility to address short- and long-term staffing needs. In 1-on-1 and small group instruction, qualified tutors using technology-enabled delivery platforms can augment and extend teacher capacity. For short, on-demand tutoring and for longer-term intervention, tutors can work with students while teachers maintain instructional oversight. Detailed progress reporting from tutoring sessions in turn can help teachers adapt and target instructional pathways.

Designing for Flexibility and Quality Outcomes

Tutoring programs at scale can make full-time staffing shortages more manageable. The criteria? The right tutoring solution must have access to qualified educators and subject-area specialists, coupled with superior assessment, reporting, and scheduling technology. And yes, that "right" tutoring partner must bring district-level experience, a collaborative approach, and accountability to the relationship.

Let's start the conversation about how tutoring will help your district address staffing needs.

44%

VACANCY

Nearly 44% of US public schools currently report full- or part-time teaching vacancies*

*https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/3_3_2022.asp

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- — Anthony Salcito, Chief Institution Business Officer, Varsity Tutors



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Published May 13, 2022

How One Principal Has Dodged The Staffing Shortage

By Denisa R. Superville

Cynthia Rios remembers how much she relied on the secretaries and guidance counselors when she was a student at Haines City Senior High School in Florida's Polk County district.

Now, nearly three years after graduating, Rios sits next to some of the same secretaries as their colleague, ensuring that incoming freshmen have the supportive environment she enjoyed as a student.

That's also the case for Johnny Disla and his sister, Jocelyn, both of whom are alumni and work at the school as substitute teachers.

The three are among the 54 graduates employed at Haines City Senior High School, serving as assistant principals, teachers, substitutes, and support staff. About two dozen of them, Rios and the Dislas included, graduated since the current principal, Adam Lane, arrived in 2015.

Lane has cultivated a deep talent pipeline over the years, starting with explicitly telling seniors that there was always a place for them at the school after they'd graduated, attended college, gone off to the military, or tried out their first—or even second—jobs.

That's allowed him to build up a pool of substitutes who are ready to step in when a full-time staffer can't—and also alumni armed with credentials looking for full-time roles. It's also allowed him to overcome some of the staffing pressures that have bedeviled schools and districts throughout the country, he said.

Develop relationships and partnerships

But Lane has been equally intentional about welding together other pieces in the pipeline, such as working with five local colleges and universities to recruit student-teachers to intern at the school—he's hired about three or four interns annually, he said—and building support structures for teachers so that once they arrive, they'll find it hard to leave.

Staffers have also taken active roles in recruiting colleagues, family members, and friends, Lane said. As a result, the school has brothers and sisters working alongside husbands and wives and relatives.

That deep bench meant that Haines City Senior High School largely avoided the short-



Zack Wittman for Education Week

age of both full-time and substitute workers that afflicted schools and districts across the country this winter when coronavirus infections spiked with the omicron wave.

"We have not had a problem because we've really built a culture that students and staff are attracted to," Lane said of the nearly 3,000-student school, located about 50 miles south of Orlando. "I feel that it's my job to create unforgettable moments that keep them wanting to come back."

Building an alumni pipeline

Lane didn't exactly start out to engineer that system when he got to Polk County.

While many schools have established shadowing programs to give their current students a glimpse into

the teaching profession, Lane's approach has been less formal. He makes sure he tells seniors at each of the four senior meetings that there's always an option to work with him in some role in the school.

"The goal in the beginning was to build a place where students want to return to school and a place where staff want to return to work," he said.

Haines City Senior High School Principal Adam Lane greets seniors walking across campus at the school in Haines City, Fla.

"But then, as we're seeing the vacancies that were starting to come up, the goal ended up not only having a place where they want to return as a student or a staff member, but you know what, why don't you make a career here?"

Other components require more focus, he said.

One of the first things Lane highlights is the importance of creating strong relationships between students and staff and among employees. Haines City Senior High also focuses on empowering staff and teachers in decisionmaking. Students, staff, and parents, for example, participate in forums on major school issues and vote on things like dress codes and school schedules, which Lane then formally enacts.

These steps make people feel like they're valued and are having an impact, Lane said.

"My number one recruiting is the returning alumni, because they know what it was like to be a student here: they felt really good, they felt taken care of, they felt inspired, empowered.

Their teachers gave them a great relationship,” Lane said.

“Those relationships are what make the students want to come back and be a teacher across the hall from [their] favorite teacher and work with them.”

Johnny Disla, a provisional teacher and a long-term substitute for digital technology, graduated in 2016, Lane’s first graduating class.

Becoming a teacher was the furthest thing from his mind while he was a student, but he remembers how the school changed when Lane arrived.

One of the reasons he returned to teach at Haines City Senior High School, he said, was because of the positive influence the teachers and staff had on him.

“No matter what was going on—it could have been a storm, a fire drill—they always had a positive attitude,” Johnny Disla said. “They helped my way of critical thinking and how I’ve developed my personal judgement.”

“You could say that it’s my dream to be here,” he said.

But it’s not just getting new employees in the door, it’s also keeping them.

Lane has set up a new-to-campus group, with teacher ambassadors who help newcomers get acclimated. The group meets twice a week over the year to review everything from the school’s mission and vision and attendance issues to how to enter grades into the system. They also get together for coffee and lunch.

“They just really talk and support each other as new individuals on campus—again, to build those relationships, because when you have the relationships and support the odds of you staying are dramatically increased,” Lane said.

Another key prong is ensuring that there’s accountability and support for staffers, he said.

Each of the school’s assistant principals oversees about 40 staff members and is responsible for ensuring that those staff members have everything they need to do their jobs.

Having a designated go-to person for assistance can temper the frustration of staff members serving in a large school, where it’s easy to get lost, he said.

“You know one assistant principal is responsible and gets paid to take care of you, and you go to that person,” Lane said.

In turn, Lane does the same for the six assistant principals, so that they can help their staff with their needs.

‘Felt like coming home’

Jocelyn Disla, a substitute with a bachelor’s degree in psychology who teaches a dra-

ma class, began working as a substitute to get more hands-on teaching experience.

Leadership engagement with students is one of the things that stands out about Haines City Senior High School, said Jocelyn Disla, who graduated in 2018.

“Sometimes, the principals [in other schools] are not as engaging with their students,” she said. At Haines, by contrast, “you can really feel that—and you can notice the change in behavior in students. It’s really made me want to come back to my high school.”

Teachers have also jumped at the opportunity to help their former students learn the ropes.

“The teachers around us were our teachers,” Johnny Disla said. “The ones next to our doors would give us tips and advice on what materials to give the students and advice on classroom management.”

It “really just felt like coming home” said Rios, who was recently hired as a full-time front-office secretary.

Rios is majoring in finance at college and isn’t quite sure she’ll stay in education. But, she says, if she does choose an education career, Haines City Senior High School will be her choice.

“This is the only school that has [had] a great impact on my life,” she said. “I have thought of eventually coming back as a teacher, but who knows.”

For Camil Fowler, a 2018 graduate who teaches intensive 9th grade reading, working at her alma mater made a lot of sense.

For one, the school is only about 10 minutes from her home. And when she worked as a substitute at other schools, she didn’t feel that her requests for assistance were supported by administrators.

“Just having the administration there every single day, supporting you, reminding you that if you need anything, we’re here, we’ve got you, that definitely helps out a bunch,” said Fowler, who recently started on staff full-time after subbing for more than a year during the pandemic.

“I think in other schools where it didn’t work out for me, where I only subbed there once, and I said, ‘You know what, never again,’ that was because the administration and the staff weren’t as welcoming or they weren’t as reminding of like ‘Hey, if you need anything we’ve got you.’”

Despite coming from a family of teachers—her mother and grandparents were teachers—Fowler only started seriously considering teaching while completing a degree in communications at the University of Central Florida.

“

Just having the administration there every single day, supporting you, reminding you that if you need anything, we’re here, we’ve got you, that definitely helps out a bunch.”

CAMIL FOWLER

2018 graduate who teaches intensive 9th grade reading

She started subbing after she finished her first year, just before the pandemic hit.

“It was a good experience, and it was almost like an internship—kind of a window to see if I wanted to teach.”

Now, she says, she thinks she’s in the profession for the long haul.

“This place is a community in and of itself,” she said. “I don’t see myself going anywhere for a while.” ■

OPINION

Published May 20, 2022

How to Build a Healthier School Culture

By Laurie J. Carr

I recently celebrated my birthday. In addition to the texts, calls, and Facebook messages from family and friends, I received 27 emails and texts that were less personal. They came from universities I've attended, stores I frequent, alumni organizations, my favorite perfumery, multiple restaurants, my car insurance company, and the airline I frequently fly. I received small gifts from them as well: vouchers for free ice cream cones, a dozen donuts, pizzas, sandwiches, dessert, discount offers, a piece of pie—all from organizations I interact with an average of once every few months.

These messages tell me my business matters to them. They value me. They want to stay connected with me. They see me and want to honor me as a client in some small way.

As I read through the messages at day's end, the organization with which I spend the most time and to which I devote repeated extra hours and energy was noticeably absent. I tried to recall the last time I received a card or email from my supervisor on my birthday, but I couldn't. It's never happened, and this void speaks volumes.

I have, however, received Mother's Day greetings, despite not being a mother. My Jewish and Muslim colleagues have received Christmas and Easter well-wishes while their own celebrations have gone unacknowledged. These generalized messages communicate something about the organizational culture and values of a district.

When I was a principal, I worked hard to create safe, nurturing, trusting climates within the school community. This was a focus with the region of schools I supervised as well.

Everyone I supervise receives birthday cards and special recognition during the workday from me; I try to do the same for colleagues. It's an easy, and important, place to start. It tells people that they matter enough for me to remember their special day. I ask about their children, I know their personal interests, and I check in when they are sick. As a result, they know I value and care about them.

District and school culture doesn't just happen. Culture forms out of intentional decisionmaking about who and what to recognize (or not recognize). How and when ad-



—Alisa Zahoruiko/iStock/Getty

SIMPLE STEPS TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Affinity groups

- Men of color breakfasts
- Native American luncheons
- Women in science dinners
- LGBTQ meet ups

Activity clubs

- Book clubs
- Walking clubs
- Museum club (with discount passes)

Support groups led by district counselors or community partners

- Divorce group
- Diabetes and cancer groups

Themed weeks or months

- District gratitude week
- Random acts of kindness month

Employee recognitions

- Donated book/gift cards for employee returns from maternity leave

Virtual classes taught by employee experts (synchronous or asynchronous)

- Fitness classes such as yoga, bootcamp, or hip-hop dance
- Hobbies such as cake decorating, gardening, car repair

Virtual talks by community partners (synchronous or asynchronous)

- Visit our parks
- Learn to paint
- Healthy eating
- Learning mindfulness

Free onsite health/wellness screenings

ministration communicates with employees matters and clearly demonstrates the values of the leaders of the organization.

I once worked in a school district in which the only birthday celebrated by the district was the superintendent's. Money was collected for gifts, a big to-do was made during the cabinet meeting, and a fancy bakery cake was served to her table at a district principals' meeting, while principals and others ate supermarket sheet cake. This, too, sent a message.

The past few years have emphasized the importance of social-emotional wellness for our students and staff. Even during the upheaval of the pandemic, there are many small, low-cost ways that school and district leaders can further this work.

For example, set up an automatic email for each employee's birthday when first hired. If funding or donations are permitted, a token of appreciation like a gift card for a cup of coffee

can be included. A supervisor's or superintendent's personal touch can also improve employee morale, so consider a hand-signed card.

Another meaningful gesture is assigning each new employee a buddy who can welcome and orient them to the district. Regular communication via check-in calls, texts, or meet ups will also help transition and aid in an employee's ability to feel a part of the larger organization.

A sense of belonging is a key factor in employee happiness. Everyone needs someone at work who checks on them, listens to them vent and helps them problem-solve, understands their challenges, and celebrates their achievements.

Be inclusive. Recognize all cultural-heritage months and holidays. Remember that recognizing only a dominant group has a greater detrimental exclusionary effect than many realize.

Affinity groups are a good way to begin cultivating a healthy community of support for individuals who are underrepresented

in a school or district. Technology can make scheduling simple through virtual meet ups. It's one thing to recruit a diverse workforce, but if you're not willing to examine your practices and create structures that support their retention, you've created a revolving door.

It's not too late to make a shift toward developing a healthier and happier educator workforce. School systems are filled with talented and caring people who look out for each other informally every day. Little additional effort is needed to formalize these efforts, though their potential impact on employees' individual and collective well-being is truly unlimited. ■

Laurie Carr is the senior director of principal leadership, development, and recruitment at Guilford County schools in North Carolina. She was previously a teacher, principal, leadership coach, and principal supervisor

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