

# Back to Basics: Public School Teacher Recruitment & Retention

## Executive Summary

The current teacher shortage is a reckoning of decades of anti-teacher public policies and neglect of teachers' voices by school administrators and policymakers. Even before the pandemic, teacher retention was a problem in urban, rural, and high-poverty schools as well as in the subject areas of math, science, and special education.<sup>1</sup> For decades, low pay, few opportunities for career growth, and an impossible job description have pushed an increasing number of college-bound students away from teaching.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that *"Negative perception of the teaching profession and perceived lack of support for current teachers are among key recruitment and retention challenges."*<sup>3</sup>

The consequences are a shrinking of the teacher pipeline and not enough teachers to fill all classrooms. In Connecticut, from the fall semester of 2015 to June 2021 the total number of graduates who completed teacher preparation programs declined from 2,132 to 1,788. That is a drop of 344 completions, or 16 percent, over five years. The issue of teacher recruitment and retention has responded to real-world problems that have been at play in the classroom for years—and routinely ignored.

### ***Low pay and grueling working conditions hinder recruitment and retention of educators.***

Simply put, teachers' working conditions are more demanding than those of most professionals,<sup>4</sup> but their salaries are significantly lower. Teachers earned less than \$4 for every \$5 a non-teacher college graduate earned (i.e., 23 percent less), an imbalance often referred to as the *teacher wage penalty*.<sup>5</sup> In 2021, the earnings gap between teachers and non-teacher college graduates grew to 33 percent, with teachers earning \$1,348 weekly compared to \$2,009 weekly for non-teacher college graduates. In Connecticut in 2021, teachers earned 17.1 percent less than non-teacher college graduates. It is getting more difficult for districts to attract teachers and for educators to stay in teaching when salaries are more competitive elsewhere.

**"Educators are not the problem. They are, in fact, the duct tape that holds the whole janky thing together. Duct tape is probably the best analogy ever for a teacher: durable, endlessly versatile, and unbelievably cheap in proportion to its utility."**

[After Teaching For 11 Years, I Quit My Job. Here's Why Your Child's Teacher Might Be Next.](#) HuffPost September 4, 2022

Since the pandemic, teachers are confronting additional work-related issues, including more responsibilities due to staffing shortages, increased exposure to dysregulated, disruptive, and violent behaviors, or harassment for teaching about race, racism, and bias.<sup>6</sup> An October 2022 survey of Connecticut teachers by the Connecticut Education Association presented troubling news for the future of staffing K-12 education in the state:<sup>7</sup>

- Nearly 3 in 4 teachers are dissatisfied with the many difficult daily conditions they must face,
- Nearly all teachers said stress and burnout were a serious concern,
- About 3 in 4 said they are more likely to leave teaching earlier than previously planned.

The evidence suggests that the quality of the climate and culture of our schools is diminishing. More than half of teachers experience *moral injury*, which is trauma from situations that violate an individual's conscience or threaten their core beliefs.<sup>8</sup> Teachers feel like they are failing their students and it is out of their control. A crisis in school climate and culture adds an additional obstacle to the goal of diversifying school faculties.

### ***Becoming a teacher is expensive.***

The cost of becoming a teacher is also a factor in the declining number of graduates of 4-year traditional teacher preparation programs. The cost of tuition at Central Connecticut State University for the 2023–2024 year is \$12,380 per year for

an undergraduate state resident, not including meals, housing, and other fees.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, not only are student teachers unpaid for their time as classroom interns, their programs make it extremely difficult for them to also have a paying job during their semester-long internship. For many students, if not most, getting a teaching degree requires borrowing, leading to significant debt when they graduate. This is a heavier financial burden for new teachers, whose salaries are lower than those of other college-educated professionals.

***The teacher certification pipeline is shrinking.***

In 1969, 3 of 4 parents (75 percent) approved of their children becoming public-school teachers.<sup>10</sup> The most recent poll from 2022 shows that number is down to barely more than 1 in 3 parents. Put another way, nearly 2 out of every 3 parents do *not* want their children to be public school teachers—hardly a surprising trend given teachers’ working conditions and salaries compared with those of other professionals.



***Too many teachers are leaving the profession.***

Education is the 5th most regretted college major after journalism, sociology, liberal arts/general studies, and communications. A startling statistic is that 6 of 10 educational degree holders (61 percent) regret completing an education degree. Connecticut’s teacher preparation programs (i.e., traditional four-year and Alternate Route to Certification) declined by 41 percent from 2010 to 2018.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, not just in schools considered low-income based on the federal designation as Title I, teachers are leaving the profession at the highest rates ever recorded.<sup>12</sup> A study by the Learning Policy Institute tells us why: Teachers’ workplaces—their schools—are

the problem.<sup>13</sup> Schools place too much emphasis on student testing; misguided and ill-conceived accountability measures create undue stress for teachers; administrators do not consistently support teachers; classrooms need repairs; and there are insufficient resources for teaching.<sup>14</sup> Teachers leave the profession at nearly double the rate of other professional occupations, with 30 percent of teachers leaving within five years, compared to 16 percent of engineers and 19 percent of nurses and lawyers.<sup>15</sup>

***Barriers are discouraging ethnic and racial diversity.***

Challenges to diversifying the educator workforce are driven by low numbers of diverse candidates in the educator pipeline and high attrition rates among teachers of color.

In 2021, nearly 2 in 3 individuals in Connecticut identified as white.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, statewide in 2021–2022, more than 5 in 10 students were children of color, while only 1 in 10 teachers were nonwhite.<sup>17</sup> The state would have to hire 22,000 teachers of color to mirror the student population. Teachers in Connecticut’s public schools do not reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of students, and implementing policy solutions to remedy the situation is critical, but will take time.

While whites are more likely to become teachers through a traditional four-year teacher preparation program, ethnically and racially diverse teacher candidates are more likely to become certified teachers through an alternative certification program.<sup>18</sup> Graduates of alternative certification programs are 25 percent more likely to leave the profession, resulting in a higher attrition rate for teachers of color. Furthermore, teachers disproportionately come from families of teachers, and in Connecticut only 1 in 10 teachers (10.7 percent) are from an ethnically diverse background.<sup>19,20</sup> This is a small pool of teacher families whose children could add to the number of ethnically diverse teachers in the state.

Additionally, teachers of color disproportionately work in low-income schools, such as Title I schools.<sup>21,22</sup> Teacher turnover in these schools is 50 percent higher than in non-Title I schools. Ethnically diverse and white teachers leave Title I schools at about the same rate and for the same reasons.<sup>23</sup> However, overall, nonwhite teachers leave the profession at a higher rate than white teachers (i.e., 18.9 percent for ethnically diverse vs. 15.1 percent white), because most nonwhite teachers are in Title I schools with high attrition rates.

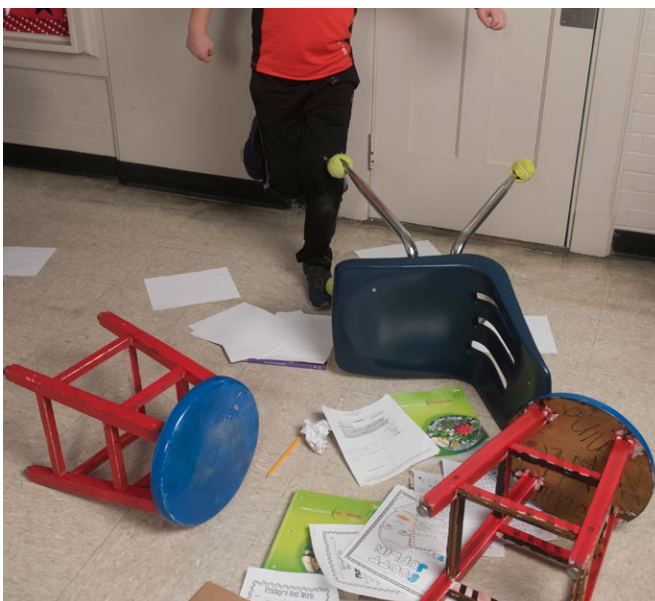
The lack of diversity among staff adds additional work-related pressure. The typical teacher of

color works in a more stressful environment than the typical white teacher and is subject to a level of discrimination not experienced by white teachers. In a recent Rand study, only 1 in 10 white teachers reported being the target of racial discrimination, compared to 1 in 3 teachers who are not white.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, about half of teachers reported being held to different standards or expectations or being singled out to perform additional tasks by other staff.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Insufficient support for student needs***

A national epidemic of school shootings continues unabated. Starting with the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, there have been 370 shootings (i.e., including accidental) at schools nationwide, resulting in 192 deaths, including teachers, students, and police officers — another 413 were injured.<sup>26</sup> Teachers now have more dangerous working conditions than police officers. This does not include the false threats that cause schools to lock down needlessly and add yet more stress to students, teachers, parents, and staff.<sup>27</sup>

And while the threat of school shootings is a horrific reminder of such high-profile violent events, there is also a rising epidemic of disruptive, dysregulated, and at times violent behavior at the classroom level driven by the unmet needs of children experiencing trauma, adverse experiences, and mental health challenges. In the 2021–2022 school year, nearly 6 out of every 10 school leaders said a major concern was an increase in student disciplinary issues.<sup>28</sup> Among all teachers, more than 1 in 4 say that managing student behavior is their top source of job-related stress.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, in a field where educators are disproportionately female, female teachers are more likely than their male colleagues to be physically attacked.



As noted in *CEA Policy Brief Playful Learning: Enhancing Education in the Early Grades*, an underlying crisis of mental health among children was exacerbated by the pandemic.<sup>30</sup> In 2022, the Connecticut legislature passed sweeping legislation ([PA 22-80](#), [PA 22-81](#), and [PA 22-47](#)) with the goal of addressing this intensifying crisis in children’s mental health. Included in the major provisions were resources for additional certified support staff, such as school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists, as well other behavioral health specialists. As of December 2022, districts had not yet begun to implement the additional support provided by the state, the benefits of which will take some time to affect the quality of school environments for teaching and learning.

Until additional resources and professional staff are in place, manifestations of insufficient mental health support for students, such as dysregulation, violence, or disruptive behaviors, are likely to persist. If insufficiently addressed, the children’s mental health crisis will continue to present challenges to classrooms, and school communities as a whole, making the teaching profession even less attractive for existing and prospective educators.

### ***The joy of teaching is dwindling.***

Entry into the field of education has long been driven by the prospect of “intrinsic” rewards—the joy of making a difference in the life of a student.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the intrinsic rewards help outweigh the relatively lower salaries of teachers compared to comparable professions. Academic research suggests that teaching is an “evolutionary trait” among individuals who have an “...innate drive to teach, relate, and connect to students...”<sup>32</sup> Teachers want to bond with their students and feel rewarded when their students succeed.

Unfortunately, the intrinsic rewards of teaching are diminishing as students exhibit deepening disengagement. One significant driver of this is standardized testing. Classroom instruction is increasingly standardized through federally required testing; it is becoming distanced and detached through remote instruction. Additionally, educator autonomy in the classroom—e.g., the ability to use discretion in meeting students’ interests and needs or implementing innovative strategies—has been diminishing, leaving an aura of disrespect toward teachers, their training, and their skills.

Taken together, teachers are not leaving just because of low salaries; much of what they seek does not need more funding. In the words of teacher Ashley Stockton, who works in New Haven Public Schools, “It’s working conditions,

treatment, disrespect, it's management. There's a lot that could have been corrected without a dime."<sup>33</sup> School administrators can keep teachers from leaving when they help teachers manage student behavior, reduce pressure on testing, and create positive relationships with teachers.<sup>34</sup> It's not surprising that teachers often leave in part because they blame administration for burnout and feel they have been "devalued and disregarded."

### ***To Teach, or Not to Teach? Other Decision Drivers***

This brief reviews many factors that diminish job satisfaction, cause attrition, and work against recruitment. It also looks at the factors that influence decisions to stay in teaching. Issues that stand out as helping keep teachers from leaving their job include supportive school climates with positive adult relationships, including administrators, and having a say in school/district decision-making.<sup>35</sup> Among teachers intending to leave their jobs, they would reconsider if they got a higher salary (63 percent), spent more time teaching and less time on nonteaching duties (36 percent), or had smaller class sizes (33 percent).<sup>36</sup>

Addressing educator recruitment and retention challenges in Connecticut will require addressing numerous policy areas. Policy and administrative focus should first **promote successful school communities** to ensure that school environments are conducive to learning and can **improve retention** by treating teachers as professionals. This is critical to stopping the loss of teachers already in the classroom and will in turn improve working conditions, leading to more people wanting to become teachers. Additionally, policies should be creative and work to **enhance the pipeline** of new teachers, the supply of which should match demand for shortage areas, including shortages by race and ethnicity. To help accomplish this, the state should **provide teacher preparation incentives** to increase enrollment in four-year teacher preparation programs.

This policy brief provides more than 30 policy recommendations, which are summarized in the 15 points below.



## Summary of Policy Recommendations

### ***Promote Successful School Communities: Make classrooms more conducive to learning.***

1. Improve class size, school support staffing ratios, and access to wraparound services for students and their families.
2. Enhance classroom management and child psychology requirements in education preparation programs and professional development.
3. Diminish reliance on statewide standardized testing.

### ***Improve Retention: Treat teachers as professionals.***

4. Increase teacher salaries to match those of other college-educated professionals and provide pension credit incentives.
5. Give teachers a tangible say in school/district decision-making that affects them, including the promotion of teacher-led schools.
6. Provide pay incentives (e.g., state personal income tax credit or deduction) to work in Title I schools or in subject areas where there are ongoing shortages, such as math, science, bilingual education, special education, and others.
7. Improve administrator preparation, diversity, quality, and support in order to
  - enhance school climate and culture (especially in Title 1 schools)
  - remedy existing institutional biases against the hiring of ethnically diverse teachers
  - reduce teachers' exposure to politicized attacks on them and the school.

### ***Enhance Teacher Pipeline and Preparation: The supply of new teachers should match the demand for subject shortage areas.***

8. Align education preparation program enrollments to shortage areas, including incentives for racial/ethnic diversity,<sup>37</sup> and promote teaching to students of color in non-education majors.
9. Recruit ethnically diverse teachers using teacher residency and "grow your own" programs,<sup>38</sup> targeted pay incentives, and ECE (Early College Experience) opportunities focusing on Title I schools.
10. Recruit working teachers from other states and provide housing support to teach in Connecticut's urban districts.

11. Provide mid-career alternate route teachers (i.e., with significant investment in Social Security) an alternate pension option to avoid the federal Windfall Elimination Provision.
12. Considering making teaching an apprenticeable profession under the federal Department of Labor's definition.<sup>39</sup>
13. Require alternative route to certification programs to have an extensive clinical experience component.

***Provide Teacher Preparation Incentives: Provide financial aid to increase enrollment in four-year teacher preparation programs.***

14. Substantial 4-year scholarships for students in teacher preparation programs in shortage areas, including compensation for student teaching.
15. Create paid internship programs in the state's Title I schools for students in Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

## Introduction

Confronting public school teacher recruitment and retention requires a comprehensive approach that considers the issue in its totality—specifically, the costs associated with becoming a teacher, the shrinking teacher certification pipeline, the high rates at which current teachers leave the profession, barriers that discourage ethnic and racial diversity, difficult working conditions, and pay that has not kept pace with other professions requiring graduate degrees. Recent legislative efforts have primarily focused on only part of the multifaceted problem.

Addressing barriers that discourage ethnic and racial diversity has been the focal point of many recent legislative changes. An Office of Legislative Research (OLR) report entitled “Minority Teacher Recruitment Legislation” summarizes a number of those changes.<sup>40</sup> While the focus has been on minority teacher recruitment, many of the legislative changes also positively impact teacher recruitment and retention more broadly, including the re-employment of retired teachers, certification for out-of-state teachers, extended duration of non-renewable certification, flexibility regarding reading and history requirements for teacher certification, interstate reciprocity, and funding for alternative routes to certification, to list a few. While these legislative changes took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, it is worth noting the shifting focus of the legislature as COVID-19 highlighted the inequities of the statewide teacher shortage.

“In August 2022, the State Department of Education (SDE) conducted a staffing survey of all school

**“Teachers quitting, too many meetings, too many times having to cover other classes, disruptive students, [being] cussed out by parents and students, violence, weapons brought to school, huge classes, and a new principal.”**

Why teachers are leaving and what we can do about it, September 2022

districts in the state and found 1,221 teaching vacancies....<sup>41</sup> The SDE survey also highlights the impact on underserved minority communities. “71% of teaching vacancies and 64% of special service vacancies are in [the] 36 [Alliance] districts.”<sup>42</sup> (Alliance districts include the towns of Bridgeport, East Hartford, Hartford, Manchester, New Britain, and New Haven, among others.) The disproportionate impact of the current teacher shortage on communities of color cannot be overemphasized.

The frame in which the legislature will consider further changes in the law to promote teacher recruitment and retention is symbolic of a recent bipartisan effort to change the name of a prominent legislative task force. In the 2022 legislative session, the Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention Task Force was renamed the Task Force to Diversify the Educator Workforce. This name change is undoubtedly a step forward in accepting a broader lens to view all issues impacting teacher recruitment and retention.

## Low Pay, Heavy Workload

High teacher attrition has been an ongoing problem for quite some time. Before the pandemic, a majority of new teachers left the profession within three to five years after being hired.<sup>43</sup> The causes for the current shortage are persistent.

Teaching is among the most stressful professions, and work-related burnout is prevalent.<sup>44</sup> In fact, work-related burnout is reported by nearly 6 in 10 teachers (59 percent), compared to 4 in 10 working adults who are not teachers (44 percent).<sup>45</sup> Primary among sources of teacher stress are taking on extra work because of staff shortages (cited by 25 percent of teachers), and low salary (23 percent).<sup>46</sup>

**“Our pay does not reflect the amount of work that we pour into this job...”<sup>47</sup>**

When adjusted for inflation to 2021 dollars, nationwide in 1979 the typical teacher earned \$1,052 weekly compared to \$1,364 for non-teacher college graduates—a.k.a. the *teacher wage penalty*.<sup>48</sup> Teachers earned less than \$4 for every \$5 a non-

teacher college graduate earned (i.e., 23 percent less). In 2021, the earnings gap between teachers and non-teacher college graduates grew to 33 percent, with teachers earning \$1,348 weekly compared to \$2,009 weekly for non-teacher college graduates; Teachers earned \$2 for every \$3 a non-teacher college graduate earned. In Connecticut in 2021, teachers earned 17.1 percent less than non-teacher college graduates.

Another perspective on teacher pay is to look at the total amount teachers earn over their careers.<sup>49</sup> Figure 1 compares teachers with a bachelor’s degree to occupations with a bachelor’s degree having the five highest lifetime earnings. A software engineer will earn roughly \$3.6 million during their career, which is double teacher earnings of \$1.8 million.

Figure 1: Five Highest Paid Occupations with Bachelor’s Degree

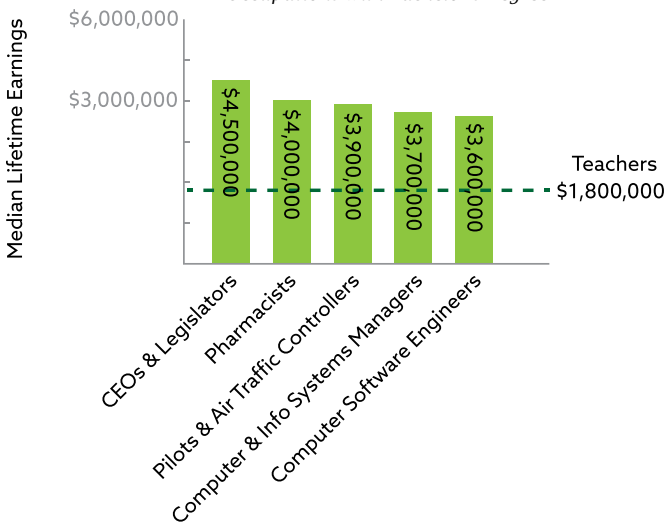
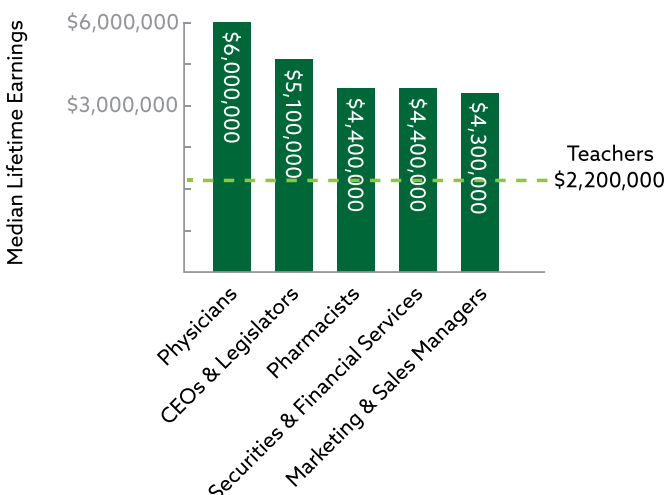


Figure 2 compares occupations with a master’s degree. A pharmacist will earn roughly \$4.4 million over their career, which is double the \$2.2 million earnings of a teacher.

Figure 2: Five Highest Paid Occupations with Master’s Degree



## Becoming a Teacher Is Expensive

Becoming a teacher via a traditional four-year teacher preparation program is expensive—especially for candidates of color.<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that graduates of traditional programs remain in teaching longer than individuals certified via alternative certification programs.<sup>51</sup> Policymakers should carefully reconsider “quick fix” alternative credentialing programs as a viable solution to teacher shortages, because individuals who enter teaching via this route have high attrition, making it a questionable long-term solution and investment of taxpayer dollars.

(The cost of tuition at Central Connecticut State University, for the 2023–2024 year, is \$12,380 per year not including meals, room, and other fees.<sup>52</sup> Central Connecticut State University has the largest 4-year traditional teacher preparation program among public universities in the state.<sup>53</sup>)



Nearly 6 in 10 teachers of color (58 percent) believe that increasing salary and offering loan forgiveness are the best ways to introduce more diversity into teaching; paying candidates for student teaching is also highly favored.<sup>54</sup> Over one-third (35 percent) suggest increasing teacher preparation programs at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) will help to put more teachers of color in the classroom. However, data shows that teachers of color at MSIs who take teacher licensure tests have much lower pass rates than those from non-MSIs.<sup>55</sup> (Connecticut’s teachers of color do not want to reduce professional certification standards, nor do they want to reduce program admission standards for teacher preparation programs.<sup>56</sup>)

Connecticut established the CHESLA Alliance District Teacher Loan Subsidy Program to incentivize teacher recruitment and retention in the state’s lowest-income districts.<sup>57</sup> The program provides a 3 percent interest rate subsidy for refinanced student loans. However, because it helps offset the

cost of education only after college completion, this program may not be as effective as necessary. For potential teacher candidates, the problem is not having funds to begin college or not wanting to take on a large student loan burden.

There are only two state-funded awards for full-time study in a 4-year college program, and they are open to all college majors—not just teacher preparation. These are the *Roberta B. Willis Need-Merit Scholarship*, paying up to \$5,250 a year for full-time study, and the *Roberta B. Willis Need-Based Scholarship*, paying up to \$4,500 for full-time study.<sup>58</sup>

In FY 2022, the *need-merit* scholarship had an average annual award of \$4,642, which was lower than in FY 2018.<sup>59</sup> From FY 2018 through FY 2022, the number of recipients decreased by 8 percent. While this is a 4-year scholarship, no first-year students have received an award from FY 2018 through FY 2022, because of insufficient funding. In FY 2022, the *need-based* scholarship had an average annual award of \$2,800, which was higher than in FY 2018. From FY 2018 through FY 2022, the number of recipients decreased by 7 percent.

Separately, Connecticut funds the *Minority Teacher Incentive Grant Program*, which provides funding up to \$5,000 per year for two years only—junior and senior years.<sup>60</sup> The purpose is to incentivize college students who have completed their sophomore year to enter a teacher preparation program. From FY 2018 through FY 2022, the number of annual recipients nearly doubled, from 47 to 91, while the average annual award declined by nearly five percent.

## The Teacher Certification Pipeline Is Shrinking

Among teachers, the 2019 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools found that 55 percent would not recommend the teaching profession to their own children. Consequently, it should not be surprising that enrollment in Connecticut's teacher preparation programs (i.e., traditional four-year and Alternate Route to Certification) declined by 41 percent from 2010 to 2018.<sup>61</sup>

As of August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, there were known openings for 1,002 classroom teachers in grades 1–12.<sup>62</sup> (This is not a comprehensive list of openings throughout Connecticut.) The top five areas were special education (277), elementary (240), science (164), math (117), and world languages (94). Except for elementary, these areas are all certified shortage areas for the 2022–2023 school year.<sup>63</sup>

Figure 3: Completions of K–12 Teacher Preparation Programs Fall 2015 through June 2021

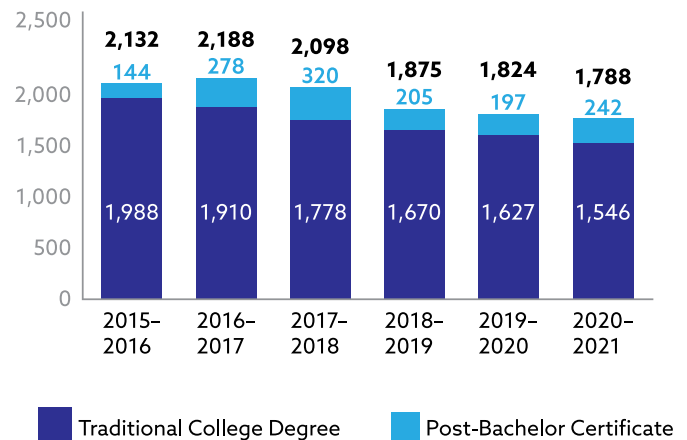


Figure 3 shows from fall 2015 to June 2021, the total number of annual completions of K–12 teacher preparation programs in Connecticut declined from 2,132 to 1,788. That is a drop of 344 completions, or 16 percent, over five years. Completions of traditional bachelor's and master's degrees dropped steadily each year, while post-bachelor certificates peaked in 2017–2018, at 320, and then declined to a low of 197 in 2019–2020. In 2020–2021, post-bachelor certificates increased from the prior year to 242.<sup>64</sup>

**In Connecticut, as nationwide, there is a "...chronic and perpetual misalignment of teacher supply and demand."**

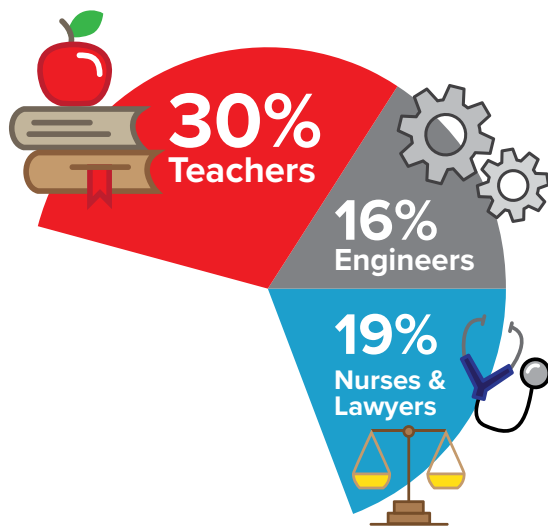
***Nuance in the Noise: The Complex Reality of Teacher Shortages*, McVey & Trinidad, Education Partners, 2019**

The Connecticut Department of Labor estimates annual openings at about 1,180 for elementary school teachers, 618 for middle school teachers, and 1,116 for secondary school teachers.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, areas where there has not been high demand are now showing a significant number of openings: language arts (77), music (60), social studies (53), art (48), and physical education (43). (These are job openings that do not consider the number of available applicants.)



## Teachers Leaving the Profession

Overall—not just in Title I schools—teachers are leaving the profession at the highest rates ever recorded.<sup>66</sup> A study by the Learning Policy Institute tells us why and further shows that white teachers and teachers of color leave for the same reasons.<sup>67</sup> Teachers' workplaces—their schools—are the problem. Teachers leave the profession at nearly double the rate of other professional occupations, with 30 percent of teachers leaving within five years compared to 16 percent of engineers and 19 percent of nurses and lawyers.<sup>68</sup> This is not only in the United States. In England teachers are leaving the profession because of a "...toxic mix of pupil behaviour, mounting workload and low pay."<sup>69</sup>



An academic review of teacher resignation letters illuminates a common set of personal and professional struggles teachers across the U.S. are facing in their classrooms. Furthermore, teachers are often not consulted on decision-making and policies that affect them.<sup>70</sup> This would be considered disrespectful treatment by any worker. A former teacher in Oklahoma said, "I had to quit for my sanity."<sup>71</sup> More than half of those who have left teaching say that working conditions are better in their new occupations.<sup>72</sup>

**"I began to feel I was part of a broken system that was causing damage to those very children I was there to serve."**

Excerpt from teacher resignation letter at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/03/23/kindergarten-teacher-my-job-is-now-about-tests-and-data-not-children-i-quit/> written by veteran teacher Susan Sluyter.

Another reason teachers are leaving the profession is due to a lack of academic freedom in the classroom, tied specifically to burdensome standardized testing requirements. School districts place too much emphasis on student testing; misguided and ill-conceived accountability measures create undue stress for teachers; administrators often do not support teachers; classrooms need repairs; and there are insufficient resources for teaching.<sup>73</sup>

It is prudent to consider that a high turnover of classroom teachers increases K-12 education costs, since districts have to pay ongoing costs for recruiting/hiring of replacement teachers. Estimates are that it costs \$21,000 to replace just one teacher in an urban school district.<sup>74</sup> In Bridgeport, 112 teachers left (i.e., non-retirees, both voluntary and non-voluntary separations) after the 2018-2019 school year, with a potential cost to the school district of \$2.4 million.<sup>75</sup> Statewide from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019, 368 teachers of color left public schools, and districts spent millions of dollars in recruiting/hiring costs because of teacher turnover.<sup>76</sup> Most of the cost would have been in Title I schools, where ethnically diverse teacher turnover is the highest.

## Barriers Discouraging Ethnic and Racial Diversity

### Low Diversity in Pipeline

In Connecticut, one fundamental reason for the shortage of ethnically diverse teachers is that candidates of color have a lower high-school graduation rate than white students. Consequently, the pipeline of ethnically diverse teachers into higher education is smaller than it could be.<sup>77</sup>

**"I don't feel at all confident that public education is going to attract and retain teachers of color unless schools where they want to teach become better places for them to work."**

Where Are All the Teachers of Color?, Prof. Susan Moore Johnson in Harvard Ed. Magazine, Summer 2016

Furthermore, teachers disproportionately come from families of teachers.<sup>78</sup> Compared to similar professions, children of teachers are more likely to become teachers themselves (except for Black sons). In 2021-2022, only 10.7 percent of teachers in Connecticut were from an ethnically diverse background, which is a small pool of teacher families whose children could add to the number of ethnically diverse teachers in the state.<sup>79</sup>



In 2017–2018, there were a total of roughly 3,545,000 public school teachers nationwide. Of these, roughly 2,811,000 (79.3 percent) were white, 331,000 (9.3 percent) Hispanic, and 239,000 (6.7 percent) Black.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the pipeline of new teachers from traditional four-year teacher preparation programs is mostly white.<sup>81</sup> Nationwide in 2015, whites were most likely to get a teaching degree, followed by Hispanics, then Blacks.<sup>82</sup>



Teachers of color are more likely to become certified through an alternative certification program instead of a traditional four-year teacher preparation program.<sup>83</sup> Graduates of alternative certification programs are 25 percent more likely to leave the profession and are more likely to teach in Title I schools.<sup>84,85</sup> Teachers certified through a traditional four-year program remain in Title I schools for about nine years; in contrast, teachers who entered the profession via an alternative route tend to stay in Title I schools only six years.<sup>86</sup>

Separately, there is some positive news regarding teacher programs that encourage high school students to become teachers.<sup>87,88</sup> While it is too early to assess the outcomes of “grow-your-own” teacher programs, there is some evidence that they might be a good source of ethnically diverse teachers who will stay in teaching longer than what is currently typical.<sup>89</sup> However, it is unlikely such programs alone can significantly reduce the state’s ethnically diverse teacher shortage.

### ***High Attrition Among Diverse Teachers – Why Do Teachers of Color Leave the Profession?***

In short, the typical teacher of color works in a more stressful environment than the typical white teacher and is subject to more discrimination.

Only 1 in 10 white teachers report being the targets of racial discrimination compared to 1 in 3 teachers (33 percent) who are not white.<sup>90</sup> Surprisingly, half of the teachers report other staff members

holding them to different standards/expectations (52 percent) or being singled out to perform additional tasks (49 percent) by other staff.<sup>91</sup>

***“Other teachers of color reported hearing their school leaders make offensive remarks about students or teachers of color, feeling tokenized, or being held responsible for teaching about race.”<sup>92</sup>***

Most students of color in Connecticut live in the state’s urban areas, which is where Title I schools are typically located. For both ethnically diverse and white teachers, the highest teacher turnover rates are in Title I schools.

Teachers of color disproportionately work in low-income schools, such as Title I schools.<sup>93,94</sup> Teacher turnover in these schools is 50 percent higher than in non-Title I schools (i.e., 16 percent for Title I vs. 11 percent for non-Title I). A study by the Rockefeller Institute of Government found that charter schools in high-poverty areas have an even higher teacher turnover rate, about 25 percent per year.<sup>95</sup> Teacher attrition in high-poverty “revolving door” districts is the opposite of affluent districts, where teacher turnover is low and the demand for new teachers is also low. Other influences outside the classroom also negatively impact attrition rates among ethnically diverse teachers.

***“... teachers who leave high-poverty schools are not fleeing their students. Rather, they are fleeing the poor working conditions that make it difficult for them to teach and for their students to learn.”***

Nicole Simon & Susan Moore Johnson, *Teacher Turnover in High-Poverty Schools: What We Know and Can Do*, Teachers College Record, 2015

Children bring to school the positive and negative social-emotional consequences of what their parents encounter at work, in personal relationships, with extended family responsibilities, etc., which makes schools a complex social workplace for teachers. A child who lives in a higher-income, two-parent home with a stay-at-home parent and an employed parent and no additional responsibilities to extended family is likely to be in a better mental and physical state than a child with parents/guardians who are struggling. Teachers in low-income districts have more students from struggling families than teachers in middle- and high-income districts.

***“More than half of the nation’s schoolchildren—about 25 million—live in low-income households. Increasingly, they live in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage and racial isolation, where they face society’s neglect of their most basic needs. Many suffer adverse experiences and persistent hardship: food insecurity, homelessness, inadequate healthcare.”***<sup>96</sup>

High-poverty districts have higher teacher turnover rates.<sup>97</sup> Between 2011–2012 and 2012–2013, only 6 percent of teachers left a low-poverty school compared to double that rate of 12 percent leaving high-poverty schools.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, teachers in districts with a higher percentage of Black and Brown students face some of the worst working conditions.<sup>99</sup> And teachers of color are disproportionately in these types of districts.



White teachers and teachers of color leave Title I schools at about the same rate and for the same reasons.<sup>100</sup> However, overall, teachers of color leave the profession at a higher rate than their white colleagues (i.e., 18.9 percent for ethnically diverse vs. 15.1 percent white), because most teachers of color are in Title I schools with high attrition rates. (In Connecticut from 2010–2011 to 2018–2019, teachers of color left at an average annual rate of nine percent, compared to seven percent for white teachers.<sup>101,102</sup>)

White teachers and teachers of color have the same reasons for leaving the profession: too much emphasis on student testing, stress related to accountability, lack of support from principals, and poor working conditions, among others.<sup>103,104</sup> In particular, there can be a large disconnect between how teachers view their working conditions compared to how principals see working conditions. For example, a survey by the Education Week Research Center found that

while roughly two out of three principals (69%) believed teachers felt they could bring problems to them, only one in four teachers (25%) said they could take problems to their principal.<sup>105</sup>

In schools where there are few teachers of color, Professor Susan Moore Johnson says, *“individual teachers are being asked to speak for an entire race.”*<sup>106</sup> According to some researchers, ethnically diverse teachers are subject to an “invisible tax” that slowly wears down their drive to help ethnically diverse students and leads to early burnout.<sup>107,108</sup> This is a “physiological” tax levied when school staff view a teacher of color primarily as the go-to disciplinarian for students of color, not as a valued classroom teacher. Staff may also treat ethnically diverse teachers as experts on racism and champions for racial diversity, which adds to the already high stress and ever-expanding responsibilities of a typical classroom teacher.

Such unintended biases reduce opportunities for teachers of color to teach higher-level classes or take on academic leadership roles in grades K–12.<sup>109</sup> Teachers of color are pigeonholed as the go-to person for anything having to do with racial or ethnically diverse issues. The invisible tax is a major cause for Black males leaving the teaching profession. Furthermore, Black males tend to be hired by high-poverty, high-turnover, “revolving door” districts, which further exacerbates Black-male teacher attrition.<sup>110,111</sup>



Teachers of color in schools with a racially/ethnically diverse teaching staff feel more comfortable discussing race-related issues.<sup>112</sup> Similar to white teachers, teachers of color want more autonomy and better handling of student behavior issues.<sup>113</sup> In addition, racially and ethnically diverse teachers believe allowing them to implement culturally responsive instruction—such as the new African American, Black, Puerto Rican and Latino studies curriculum, which has been well received by teachers and students—will help to keep them from leaving the profession.<sup>114,115</sup>



Teacher burnout has various consequences for schools, including higher rates of both retirement and turnover, and it harms student achievement.<sup>116</sup> High teacher turnover is more likely to occur where principals fail to encourage and acknowledge staff, where there is not a clear vision for the school, and where mismanagement of a school's day-to-day operation is commonplace.<sup>117</sup> It should not be a surprise that effective principals can increase teacher satisfaction and thereby lower teacher turnover—especially in Title I schools.<sup>118</sup> In the 2021–2022 school year, nearly 9 in 10 school leaders (87 percent) said the mental health of their teachers was a major concern.<sup>119</sup>

For the most part, the top sources of job-related stress are similar among teachers, regardless of race/ethnicity.<sup>120</sup> However, teachers of color are more likely to work in schools/districts where these stressors are more prevalent:<sup>121,122,123</sup>

- low salary
- uncompensated work
- high workload
- ongoing unresolved organizational challenges
- lack of support from administrators
- being excluded from school/district decision-making

Since the pandemic, teachers are now considering additional work-related issues for leaving their job: having more responsibilities due to staffing shortages, exposure to violence, or being harassed about teaching about race, racism, and bias.<sup>124</sup> An October 2022 survey of Connecticut teachers by the Connecticut Education Association has some troubling news for the future of K–12 education in the state<sup>125</sup>:

- Nearly 3 in 4 (72 percent) teachers are dissatisfied with the many difficult daily conditions they have to face.

- Nearly all teachers (98 percent) said stress and burnout were a serious concern.
- Nearly 3 in 4 (74 percent) said they are more likely to leave teaching earlier than previously planned.

While the situation involving teacher pay and working conditions is quite concerning, districts are beginning to respond. For example, In Connecticut, Darien Public Schools lost 70 certified teachers in a single year—only five were retirees.<sup>126</sup> In response, the board of education gave teachers the biggest increase in salary they had seen in more than a decade. Additionally, New Haven recently approved a teacher contract that will eventually increase starting pay to over \$51,421. These measures are expected to go a long way toward addressing a major concern of educators.

## Insufficient Support for Children's Mental Health

As noted in CEA Policy Brief [Playful Learning: Enhancing Education in the Early Grades](#), an underlying crisis of mental health among children was exacerbated by the pandemic. In 2022, the Connecticut legislature passed sweeping legislation ([PA 22-80](#), [PA 22-81](#), and [PA 22-47](#)) with the goal of addressing this intensifying crisis in children's mental health. Included in the major provisions were resources for additional certified support staff, such as school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists, as well other behavioral health specialists. As of December 2022, districts had not yet begun to implement additional supports, the benefits of which will take some time to affect the quality of school environments for teaching and learning.

Until additional resources and professional staff are in place, manifestations of insufficient mental health supports for students, such as dysregulated, violent, or disruptive behaviors, are likely to persist. If insufficiently addressed, the children's mental health crisis will continue to present challenges to classrooms, and school communities as a whole, making the teaching profession less attractive for existing and prospective educators.

## Violence at School

In Connecticut, on December 14, 2012, a school shooting in Newtown resulted in the deaths of 20 children as well as six school staff.<sup>127</sup>

Starting with Columbine High School in 1999, there have been 370 shootings (including accidental shootings) at schools nationwide, resulting in 192

deaths, including teachers, students, and police officers—and another 413 people injured.<sup>128</sup> For all of 2022, there were shootings at 46 schools, resulting in 34 deaths and a separate 58 injuries.<sup>129</sup> From January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, through May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022, more children died in school shootings nationwide than on-duty police officers killed by gunfire.<sup>130</sup>

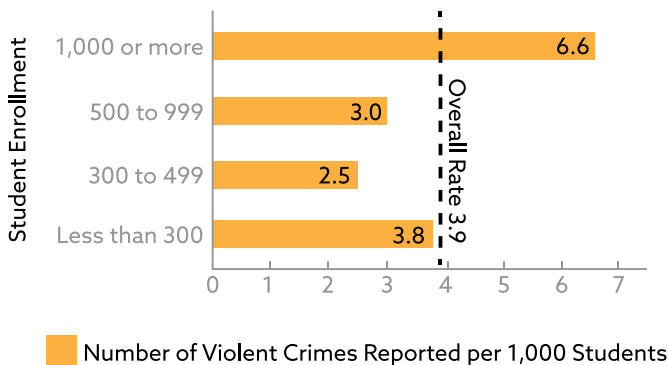
**“The measure of a good day is no longer about learning. The measure of a good day now is that no one was injured, assaulted or suspended.”**

Jennifer Reynolds, 4th grade teacher, Danbury, CT; testimony CT General Assembly, February 22nd, 2019

In some cases, teachers are specifically targeted. On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, two students from Fairfield High School in Iowa killed their Spanish teacher.<sup>131</sup> She was murdered outside of school at a local park where she was known to go for walks. One of the students did not like the low grade he was getting in Spanish class.

One statistic on school crime that stands out is the relationship between the size of a school’s population and the incidence of violent crime. Figure 4 shows that schools with enrollments of 1,000 students or more reported 6.6 violent crimes per 1,000 students, substantially higher than the overall rate of 3.9 incidents per 1,000 students.<sup>132</sup>

Figure 4: Student Enrollment and the Rate of Violent Crimes in Schools



**Disruptive and Threatening Student Behavior**

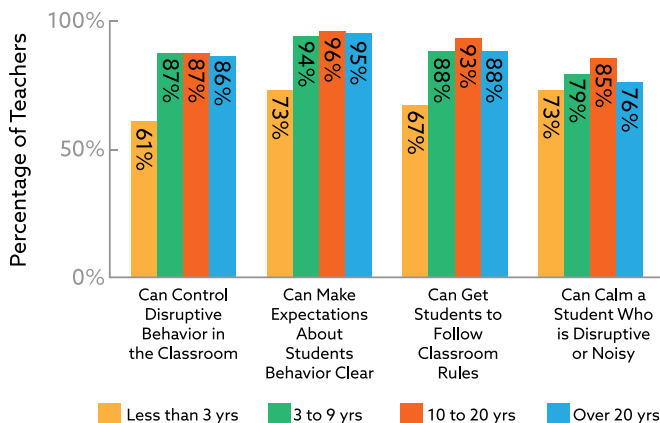
In the 2021–2022 school year, nearly 6 in 10 school leaders (59 percent) said a major concern was an increase in student disciplinary issues.<sup>133</sup> Among all teachers, more than 1 in 4 (29 percent) say that managing student behavior is their top source of job-related stress.<sup>134</sup> Separately, Black teachers are more likely than white or Hispanic teachers to be threatened by a student.<sup>135</sup>

As noted earlier, at the national level, elementary school teachers are more likely to be physically attacked than high school teachers.<sup>136</sup> Additionally, it is more likely that male teachers are only threatened, as opposed to female teachers, who are more likely to be physically attacked.

In 2017 in Connecticut, one out of every 14 students (7.1 percent) in grades 9–12 reported being either threatened or injured *at school* at least once in the previous 12 months.<sup>137</sup> This is higher than the national rate of 6 percent. (Connecticut had the 12<sup>th</sup> highest percentage among the 50 states and D.C.)

Additionally, as Figure 5 shows, teachers with less than 3 years of teaching experience say they are less able to manage student behavior in the classroom.<sup>138</sup>

Figure 5: Inexperienced Teachers Struggle with Classroom Management



Only 61 percent of teachers with less than 3 years of experience say they can control disruptive behavior, compared to over 85 percent of teachers with more experience.<sup>139</sup> Teachers who find themselves unable to improve student behavior may decide it’s a lost cause and stop trying.<sup>140</sup> In fact, teachers reporting high stress also report experiencing more disruptive student behavior.<sup>141</sup> Such circumstances suggest a spiraling relationship between stress and disruptive student behavior among early career educators that could be addressed with support, mentoring, and targeted professional learning.

**Dwindling Joy in Teaching and Other Drivers of Teacher Attrition**

Entry into the field of education has long been driven by the prospect of “intrinsic” rewards—the joy of making a difference in the life of a student.<sup>142</sup> Academic research suggests that teaching is an “evolutionary trait” among individuals who have an “...innate drive to teach, relate, and connect to students...”<sup>143</sup> Unfortunately,

various factors are contributing to student disengagement, which not only diminish the joy in teaching but also the joy in learning.

Traditionally, teachers have spent time adapting their teaching to the unique needs and interests of each student. As noted in CEA Policy Brief on [Standardized Assessment](#), two decades of deepening reliance on standardized assessment have resulted in a disconnect between students and the fundamental role of teachers and schools in preparing graduates for life beyond high school.

Standardized tests, which focus on only three core subjects—math, English language arts, and to some degree science—are inherently “standard” and therefore narrowly targeted at the expense of broader student skills, interests, and knowledge. Consequently, such tests fail to inspire students from wide-ranging backgrounds and quite often challenging lives outside the school day. They do not allow for the variety of learning styles nor the necessary time for students to pursue their true interests. As a result, the time and resources necessary to help students grow are unavailable to educators. They witness students becoming disengaged, resulting in their own frustration and diminishing joy.



Teachers who form supportive relationships with their students are less likely to experience burnout.<sup>144</sup> A small learning community (SLC) embedded in a large urban high school in Massachusetts provides an illustrative example of this effect.<sup>145</sup> Teachers in this school noted that the SLC, with its small class sizes, allowed for greater personalization with students, increased student-teacher interaction, and more mutual trust. Teachers had time to personalize teaching to close gaps in students’ knowledge or focus on topics with which students had trouble. However, this positive effect was reversed with the school’s decision to focus on a

standardized curriculum with the aim of passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Systems (MCAS) test. The progress these teachers had made connecting with students and helping them with their individual knowledge gaps came to an end.

Additionally, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the switch from in-person teaching to remote instruction broke the physical connection teachers had—and needed—with their students.<sup>146</sup> Teachers were not able to support the “whole child” without the ongoing in-person contact.<sup>147</sup> The pandemic has left teachers feeling disconnected from students, and teachers took it personally, feeling as though they were failing their students<sup>148</sup>—even though the real-world pandemic situation was out of their control.

Furthermore, the various forms of remote instruction that have remained since the pandemic hinder tangible student-teacher bonding and create additional work that takes away from interactive classroom instruction.<sup>149</sup>

**“I feel like the responsibility to chase down non-participatory students and document the non-participation took away from time better spent making learning more accessible.”<sup>150</sup>**

Elementary teachers, in particular, believe they were less effective when teaching remotely.<sup>151</sup> Teachers who taught students in-person and remotely at the same time found it more overwhelming and difficult to meet the needs of students in-person and remote at the same.<sup>152</sup>

**“I’ve taught simultaneously since August (2020). At times, I have 25+ in the classroom with 10+ online. Classroom management is impossible.”<sup>153</sup>**

### **Disrespect Toward Teachers**

Teachers are not leaving just because of low salaries. In the words of teacher Ashley Stockton, who works in New Haven Public Schools, *“It’s working conditions, treatment, disrespect, it’s management. There’s a lot that could have been corrected without a dime.”<sup>154</sup>*

**“... educators have never been treated in a way that matched the importance of education. Underpaid, under-respected, often with challenging conditions.”**

[Here Today, Gone Tomorrow? Report from the AFT Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force, July 2022](#)

Administrators can keep teachers from leaving when they help manage student behavior, create positive relationships with teachers, and reduce pressure on testing.<sup>155</sup> Data collection and reporting can cut significantly into time spent teaching and result in burnout. Administrators' focus on data collection and reporting increases teacher workload and takes away from teaching.<sup>156</sup> It's not surprising that teachers often leave in part because they experience burnout and feel they have been "devalued and disregarded."

On the other hand, when teachers have more control over their instructional roles, there is less turnover, which benefits students and boards of education as well.<sup>157</sup>

Furthermore, as the primary contact for parents, teachers are often on the receiving end of anger or criticism regarding school/district policies in which teachers are typically not involved.<sup>158</sup> Administrators can also play a key role in supporting teachers who encounter disrespectful or confrontational parents. Frequently, however, administrators are viewed as unsupportive of teachers in such situations.<sup>159</sup>

**"Parents are super-critical, and kids are blatantly disrespectful. It feels like everything is getting worse."<sup>160</sup>**

**"... jackhammer parents take their intensive parenting to new heights. [...] They're not just interested in getting their way; they need anyone who gets in their way obliterated.' Sound familiar? Parental behavior is mirroring broader political attitudes. As such, it has become increasingly common for non-educators to demonize teachers and unions, 'diagnose' all the wrong problems, and oversimplify education to justify treating teachers like glorified babysitters."<sup>161</sup>**

It is now common practice for businesses and organizations to set ground rules for acceptable participant behavior at the beginning of meetings. Should the same be done at the start of teacher-parent meetings? Do we need a Teacher's Bill of Rights?

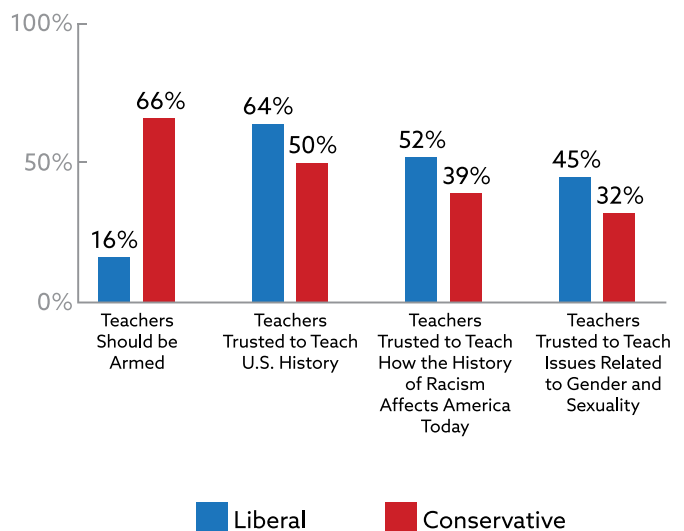
### ***Extremist Political Attacks on Public Schools***

Extremists' political attacks on schools, controversies over book banning, and the politicization of decisions affecting classrooms have also contributed to a diminishing level of joy and satisfaction in teaching. This wave of politicization has created teaching environments laden with additional angst. Whether answering questions from parents about district

policy set at the board level or facing social media attacks from extremists based on falsehoods, teachers are increasingly on the front lines of the politicization of issues and decisions best addressed at the board of education level. This contentious climate is pushing educators out and dissuading others from pursuing a career in teaching.

Figure 6 shows results from the 54<sup>th</sup> Annual PDK (June 2022) Poll indicating an ideological divergence on K-12 related issues.<sup>162</sup> Conservatives are 4 times more likely than liberals (66% vs. 16%) to support arming teachers.<sup>163</sup> In contrast, nearly 3 in 4 teachers are against carrying a gun in the classroom.<sup>164</sup>

Figure 6: The Nation is Ideologically Split on K-12 Issues



Attempts at banning books are also increasing, according to the American Library Association.<sup>165</sup> The effort is driven primarily by politicized groups, with the five most banned book titles dealing with subjects of race, racism, gender, and sexual identity. There are national groups across the political spectrum focused specifically on what should be taught or not taught in classrooms. Groups ranging from Moms for Liberty to the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, promote perspectives to influence what is taught in schools, making classroom instruction feel unnecessarily contentious for teachers.<sup>166,167,168</sup>

A separate 2022 American Federation of Teachers (AFT) poll found that 62 percent of respondents had a great deal, or fair amount, of confidence in public school teachers to have the right ideas for public schools.<sup>169</sup> In contrast, only 15 percent said the same of politicians.

Clearly, teaching in today's environment is politically fraught. The country's political polarization

started to interfere with schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic over vaccine mandates and mask wearing.<sup>170</sup> Some argue that the pandemic itself may have led parents to unleash their frustration with COVID by becoming more critical of public schools.<sup>171</sup> The result has been a place less hospitable to retaining teachers or attracting new teachers into the profession.

## To Teach, or Not to Teach? Other Decision Drivers

Among teachers intending to leave their jobs, 63 percent would reconsider if they received a higher salary, 36 percent would reconsider if they were able to spend more time teaching and less time on non-teaching duties, and 33 percent would reconsider if they had smaller class sizes.<sup>172</sup>

**“It [leaving] has nothing to do with the teaching. I love being in the classroom. I love being with my students, but it has been an exhausting experience.”**

*Restoring Teacher and Principal Well-Being Is an Essential Step for Rebuilding Schools, RAND, 2022*

Additionally, a supportive school climate with positive adult relationships—including administrators—and having a say in school/district decision-making are important to retaining teachers.<sup>173</sup> Often teachers have stayed—even when they wanted to leave—because they believed no jobs other than teaching were available to them, or they were concerned that their retirement would be harmed.<sup>174</sup> The current shortage of workers in Connecticut, however, gives teachers more employment alternatives in non-teaching professions.

**“... today there are three openings [in Connecticut] for every two jobless residents.”<sup>175</sup>**

## Conclusion

Priority must be given to remedying the numerous problems causing teachers to leave the classroom; otherwise, the attrition rate will remain high, and the teacher shortage will persist regardless of how many new educators come through the pipeline. Decision-makers should act to improve existing working conditions by addressing ongoing complaints of low pay, too much standardized testing, disruptive student behavior, violence in the classroom, and a lack of teachers’ input on what they teach and how they teach it.

**“While school leaders and policy makers might be tempted to solve shortages by focusing solely on teacher recruitment strategies, a better approach begins with understanding teacher attrition and turnover.”**

*Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It., Learning Policy Institute, August 2017*

Consideration should be given to providing bonuses or other incentives to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools or shortage subject areas.<sup>176</sup> Financial incentives such as loan forgiveness, housing assistance, and tuition reimbursement can help get more teachers in Title I schools, and they must be combined with improvements in working conditions.<sup>177</sup> The retention of ethnically diverse teachers increases when the principal is a person of color.<sup>178</sup>

**“... the quality of a school’s leadership is among the most important predictors of teacher turnover.”<sup>179</sup>**

Schools that give teachers more autonomy have lower rates of teacher attrition.<sup>180</sup> Teachers who have more autonomy have higher job satisfaction and are more likely to remain teachers.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, teachers are looking for ways to be leaders while staying in the classroom<sup>182</sup>, and teacher-led schools can provide that opportunity. Turning Title I schools into teacher-led schools with greater teacher autonomy and teacher leadership may make them more desirable places to teach, thereby boosting teacher retention.<sup>183,184,185,186</sup>



Policymakers must also consider the breadth of the challenges contributing to teacher recruitment and retention. Today, the majority of Connecticut's K-12 students are children of color, providing a more ethnically and racially diverse pool of students available to become teachers. However, they must have the desire and the financial resources to pursue teaching. Aspiring educators of color have fewer financial resources than the white students who preceded them. Consequently, more financial resources must be dedicated by the state to teacher preparation programs if a more diverse population of K-12 teachers is wanted.



The challenge is to prepare and employ more than 20,000 new teachers of color in Connecticut. To accomplish this, the state should reinvigorate traditional 4-year teacher preparation programs, which have the best track record for graduating lifelong career teachers. Additionally, grow-your-own (GYO) programs show promise but must do more to produce ethnically diverse teachers who stay in teaching longer, and these programs need specific types of nurturing to be successful.<sup>187</sup> While alternative routes to certification (ARC) programs, on their face, put more diverse teachers in the classroom, the attrition rate among those who complete ARC programs is also high and therefore does not result in a tangible, permanent increase in the number of long-term career teachers of color. Placements of teachers prepared through GYO and ARC programs are concentrated in low-income districts, which raises an additional concern—such districts already have high attrition rates. More needs to be done to support teachers from these programs in the first years to ensure successful experiences.

In addition, the need for special education services needs to be closely evaluated, as the percentage of English learners identified for special education

is well above the norm,<sup>188</sup> and the Connecticut State Department of Education has reported an overidentification (and potential misidentification) for special education services among other students as well.<sup>189</sup> At the current rate, by 2030, 1 in 5 preK-12 students (19.8 percent) might be identified as needing special education services.<sup>190</sup>

As a result, special education caseloads and intensities of services are placing more pressure on special education teachers. Overidentification of English learners and other students results in a mismatch of resources allocated to misidentified students' needs—or in some cases the absence of appropriate resources. Ultimately, such situations place undue challenges and stress on general education teachers, too.<sup>191</sup> Moreover, the recent implementation of a new statewide special education administrative system (CT-SEDS) has been "riddled with flaws." The time-consuming nature of the new system has resulted in scenarios such as this, described in *The Hartford Courant*: "...an IEP [an individualized student's special education plan] that used to take 1.5 hours to write now consumes upwards of three, with some clocking in at 10 hours, putting time-sensitive compliance guidelines for paperwork at risk."<sup>192</sup>

Many educators across the country are recognizing the need to engage communities to build allies for public schools and rebuild trust and respect for teachers.<sup>193</sup> This is especially true as political extremes drive K-12 public policy in many states, and Connecticut has seen similar efforts in some of its school districts. Some local teachers' union are considering paperwork/bureaucracy committees to catalog the amount of data and reports that the union's members are required to submit in order to address the amount of time teachers waste on non-teaching duties.<sup>194</sup> In a recent AFT report, a 2022 survey of teachers identified the top three actions to improve teacher recruitment and retention:<sup>195</sup>

- 95 percent said less paperwork and fewer non-teaching duties that take away from student needs,
- 93 percent said pay raises,
- 91 percent said more respect and support from administrators.

Whether an individual teacher stays or leaves the profession is a complex combination of factors that can be influenced by variety of policies.<sup>196</sup> For policymakers, the single best takeaway is to make teaching once again a profession that teachers—and parents—want their own children to pursue.



Below are specific policy recommendations for Connecticut.

## Policy Recommendations

### ***Promote Successful School Communities: Make classrooms more conducive to learning.***

1. Improve class size, school support staffing ratios, and access to wraparound services for students and their families.
2. Enhance classroom management and child psychology requirements in education preparation programs and professional development.
3. Diminish reliance on statewide standardized testing.
4. Increase the number of counselors or behavior interventionists focusing on individual students with behavior problems.
5. Require schools to have paperwork reduction committees composed of teachers and administrators.
6. Improve mentoring opportunities for new teachers and explore innovative support strategies like Duke TeachHouse<sup>197</sup> and teacher-centered housing communities<sup>198</sup>.

### ***Improve Retention: Treat teachers as professionals.***<sup>199</sup>

7. Increase teacher salaries to match those of other college-educated professionals and provide pension credit incentive.
8. Give teachers a tangible say in school/district decision-making that affects them, including the promotion of teacher-led schools.
9. Provide pay incentives (e.g., state personal income tax credit or deduction) to work in Title I schools or for subject areas where there are ongoing shortages, such as math, science, bilingual education, or special education, among others.
10. Improve administrator preparation, diversity, quality, and support in order to:
  - enhance school climate and culture (especially in Title 1 schools),
  - remedy existing institutional biases against the hiring of ethnically diverse teachers,
  - reduce teachers' exposure to politicized attacks on them and the school.
11. Address harassment, discrimination, or biased attitudes toward teachers.
12. Administrators must take an active role in building camaraderie among all staff.
13. Teachers should not have to speak to parents on hot-button political decisions made by administrators or elected members of a board of education. Those who make the decision should have to defend it and not unload their political accountability onto teachers, who often have no say in district or administrative decision-making.
14. Turn schools into hubs that serve the needs of the whole child and the whole family by providing wraparound services. This is of particular importance in low-income communities.
15. Require mandatory training for principals in Title I schools on how to create a positive workplace for all teachers and especially teachers of color.
16. Increase the number of ethnically diverse principals, superintendents, and high-level decision-makers to reflect the diversity of the student population.
17. Require college education programs for K-12 institutional leadership to include cultural bias training and preparation for supporting teachers of color. Similar training must be required for obtaining a state education administrator's license.
18. Adopt a statewide policy guiding parents' and guardians' treatment of their child's teachers and require that parents/guardians who do not adhere to these standards of respectful treatment be accompanied by an administrator and facilitator at parent-teacher meetings. This could be part of a broader "Teacher's Bill of Rights."

## Policy Recommendations Continued

***Enhance Teacher Pipeline and Preparation: The supply of new teachers should match the demand for subject shortage areas.***<sup>200</sup>

19. Align education preparation program enrollments to shortage areas, including incentives for racial/ethnic diversity<sup>201</sup> and promote teaching to students of color in non-education majors.
20. Recruit ethnically diverse teachers using teacher residency and “grow your own” programs,<sup>202</sup> targeted pay incentives, and Early College Experience (ECE) opportunities focusing on Title I schools.
21. Recruit teachers from other states and provide housing support to teach in Connecticut’s urban districts.
22. Provide mid-career alternate route teachers (i.e., with significant investment in Social Security) an alternate pension option to avoid the federal Windfall Elimination Provision.
23. Consider making teaching an apprenticeable profession under the federal Department of Labor’s definition.<sup>203</sup>
24. Require alternative route to certification programs to have an extensive clinical experience component.
25. Require that the CSDE inform individuals seeking teacher certification of both surplus and shortage subject areas.<sup>204</sup>
26. List racial/ethnic designations as shortage areas to access statutory incentives.
27. Limit alternative certification programs to subject shortage areas.
28. Subject shortage areas should specify districts with a shortage.
29. Implement grow-your-own programs in Title I schools with a focus on subject shortage areas.
30. Provide Early College Experience (ECE) certification to more teachers in Title I schools to support grow-your-own programs. High school students who participate in an ECE program are more likely to attend and graduate from college.<sup>205</sup>
31. Higher education should encourage collaboration between education departments and non-education majors to increase the pipeline of diverse candidates into four-year teacher preparation programs.

***Provide Teacher Preparation Incentives: Provide financial aid to increase enrollment in four-year teacher preparation programs.***

32. Create generous 4-year scholarships for students in teacher preparation programs in shortage areas, including compensation for student teaching.
33. Create paid internship programs in the state’s Title I schools for students in Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions.

## Endnotes

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- 201 This will reduce the number of new teachers in surplus areas and incentivize individuals currently certified in a surplus area to obtain cross-certification in a shortage area. It may also increase the number of ethnically diverse teachers by getting more candidates of color into shortage areas where there are job openings.
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