

Connecticut Education Association **NEWS RELEASE**



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Landmark Legislation Could End State Teacher Shortage, Draw New Talent to Connecticut's Schools

Educators share stories, urge legislators to pass HB 6884 and HB 6881

Growing demands, diminishing supports, pay that hasn't kept pace with other professions, and a lack of respect are among a host of issues driving educators into other careers, pushing some into early retirement, and discouraging many people from entering the profession at all.

The Connecticut legislature has the opportunity to reverse the current teacher shortage and decades of policies that have driven educators away from the profession by passing HB 6884 An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention, and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession and HB 6881 An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators. These bills would increase educator salaries and address critical problems hindering teacher and educator recruitment and retention.

At a news conference held at the Legislative Office Building this morning, prior to the public hearing of the Legislature's Education Committee, CEA President Kate Dias stressed the importance of passing these bills, released a new CEA policy brief, and outlined recommendations to address teacher shortages, increase respect for the teaching profession, and improve education for students.

"HB 6884 and HB 6881 go a long way toward addressing Connecticut's teacher shortage," said Dias. "This landmark legislation would reverse teacher attrition and the shrinking teacher pipeline, break down barriers that discourage ethnic and racial diversity in the profession, and address poor working conditions and low pay that has not kept pace with other professions."

CEA's policy recommendations include the following: (see attachment 1 for more details)

- Provide teacher preparation incentives, including financial aid, to increase enrollment in four-year teacher preparation programs.
- Enhance the teacher pipeline and preparation programs to ensure the supply of new teachers matches the demand for subject shortage areas.
- Promote successful school communities by making classrooms more conducive to learning.
- Improve retention by treating teachers as professionals.

Escalating duties and responsibilities

Since the pandemic, additional work-related issues for teachers have exploded, including increased responsibilities due to staffing shortages, increased exposure to dysregulated, disruptive, and violent behaviors, and increased harassment for teaching American history that includes the Civil War, slavery, racism, and bias. An October 2022 CEA survey of teachers put the crisis into perspective, finding

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

"It is long past time for Connecticut to take care of its educators," said 2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year Sheena Graham, who retired early due to the burnout caused by the pandemic. "These bills are a step in the right direction. It's because of teachers that every profession is possible, and teachers have a positive impact on their students, today's leaders and the future leaders of Connecticut."

HB 6884 and HB 6881 include, among other provisions

- Statewide minimum teacher salary and funding for salary increases
- COVID pension benefit enhancement
- Teacher tax credits
- Ending edTPA, the ineffective assessment of teaching performance required of student teachers
- Raising the kindergarten start age
- Preserving play-based learning in the early grades
- Uninterrupted duty-free prep time
- Educator Bill of Rights

Financial implications

In 2021, the earnings gap between teachers and non-teacher college graduates grew to 33% with teachers earning \$1,348 weekly compared to \$2,009 weekly for non-teacher college graduates. In Connecticut in 2021, teachers earned 17.1% less than non-teacher college graduates.

Torrington educator Michael McCotter has a master's degree and nine years in the classroom but still struggles financially and earns only slightly more than the proposed minimum salary.

"My student loan payments account for 20% of my take-home pay. My brother, who works in finance, has a yearly bonus greater than my salary. Despite working additional jobs, I still spend hundreds a year on my students, supplementing supplies and materials to enrich my students' learning experience."

"It's getting more difficult for districts to attract teachers and for educators to stay in teaching when salaries are more competitive elsewhere," said Dias. "Teachers are taking their experience and leaving for jobs in finance, business, sales, and other professions that offer less stress, more autonomy and respect, and more pay."

"While I entered the profession prepared to make financial sacrifices, many entering college and choosing a profession are deterred from teaching by the low salary," added McCotter. "The first five years I was teaching, I lived with my parents so that I could save money for graduate school, as

master's degrees are required of teachers. In order to recruit new teachers, we need to have a starting salary that demonstrates teaching is a respected profession and supports the expected financial impact of additional schooling."

Many educators' starting salaries are so low that they qualify for certain federal and state benefits and programs, including the State of Connecticut Husky B public health plan. For a family of two to qualify, they must make under \$64,090, or 3.25 times the federal poverty level. (See Attachments 2 and 3.)

Olivia DeLoach, an aspiring educator at Mitchell College, is fueled by her passion to teach, and like others interested in the teaching profession, she can't ignore earning potential when selecting a career. "With starting salaries being inadequate, it brings up the hard question, 'How am I going to afford the things I need?'"

Adrianna Accioly, an aspiring educator at Central Connecticut State University and a student teacher at Plainville Middle School, said she is "constantly worried and second guessing being a teacher. I am worried about my financial situation. I have to work at least 15 hours a week to get by. Student teaching and work alone are above 55 hours, more than a typical full-time job. I cry often, and my only motivation for completing my teaching degree is seeing the students succeed. I am extremely burnt out from 80+ hours of student teaching, homework, edTPA, and work."

Accioly is not alone. Her plight is similar to that of many aspiring educators, including DeLoach.

"While currently student teaching, I have had to quit my on-campus job due to my full 7- to 8-hour day in the school, five days a week. During this time, I have had to continuously stress about paying for my day-to-day expenses and certification costs prior to graduation, which are added on top of the already hefty weight of college tuition. In the midst of stressing about my current situation, I have found myself already thinking about after graduation and if I will even be able to support myself financially. This, I believe, can be said for many future educators who are soon to enter the profession."

Hundreds of teachers from across the state submitted testimony on HB 6884 and HB 6881. Here are some of their comments.

"Teachers are a vital part of students' lives. During the pandemic we were charged not only with the task of educating children but with providing structure during what was by far the most chaotic time in modern history."

"This legislation will protect me and assist me in giving my students a truthful account of American history."

"If we want to keep the best and brightest in our state, we need the best schools. If we want to attract talent, we need the best schools. Buildings are built from a strong foundation up, and schools are the foundation, the bedrock of our society. A better long-term investment does not exist. Please support our schools. Everyone is for better education except when it comes to paying for it. Let's put our money where our mouths are."

"'You can't retain what you don't maintain' seems easy to understand when we're talking about a lawn or equipment. It's true for educators also. Uninterrupted duty-free prep time along with the Educator Bill of Rights are two integral steps towards meeting teachers' needs."

"I have witnessed positions going unfilled, and teachers are stressed to the max. I have never seen so many teachers leave their jobs midyear. New teachers are not making it past four years before leaving the profession."

"Teaching has gone from a rewarding passion to a soul-crushing daily struggle with grossly inadequate financial compensation."

"The COVID credit is imperative to retain our most experienced teachers. The burnout is real, and personally speaking, the COVID credit would entice me to stay in the classroom."

"We need to ensure that teachers in Connecticut are free from threats, are able to teach pedagogically sound books, and can display symbols and flags that are valuable to student well-being."

"In an age where the pressure of standardized testing drives many educational decisions, students from a young age are stripped of their time to fall in love with learning. Taking away playtime in the early grades has not led to long-term academic gains. Instead, my colleagues and I have witnessed increased mental health and serious behavioral issues in our students. Play-based learning (PBL) allows students to see the joy in learning while still addressing priority standards. PBL also allows students to practice important critical thinking and social skills."

"As a teacher with eight years of experience, three of those being throughout the pandemic, I still don't make the same amount of money as my brother, who doesn't even have a master's, like I was required to get by the state. My brother has been an engineer for six years, but I have more education and experience yet get paid almost half of what he does. I have to work a second job, and we deserve a livable wage without needing a second job."

"I'm tired of watching teachers leave because they can get paid more somewhere else while being treated better and not having as much stress placed on them. We've lost so many teachers recently, and there seems to be no end in sight. Please help save our profession. We need teachers for the future. We need to make the job better for all teachers, present and future."

"We are paid less than professionals with equal schooling, and we work beyond the hours we are paid—evenings and weekends. If Connecticut wants to attract and keep teachers, then treat them as professionals. Guaranteeing duty-free prep time is one way to do this. Establishing minimum teacher salaries is another. Please listen to our voices, support what we do, and treat us as the professionals we are."

"I see teachers in tears daily because they are being pulled in so many directions that they cannot give their students their best. It is unsustainable. Please pass this legislation."

"I hope you pass this bill to show educators that they are valued and motivate us to move forward and stay in teaching. We need to continue to educate Connecticut students with the passion they deserve. The burnout is real. I fear for our schools and our students if we don't take real steps to recognize this. I hope you will pass this bill to reward, support, and recognize teachers like me, who've been through so much and are feeling like more keeps piling on."

"If someone asked me today if they should become a teacher, I'm sad to say no. The pay is incredibly poor, the stress too high, and 'doing it for the kids' just isn't a way to make a living."

"As a veteran teacher, I can't urge you enough to support our schools and teachers. Children deserve more than what they're getting now; teachers that are burnt out and leaving the profession in record numbers, lack of funding for basic school supplies, deteriorating buildings that use up local money and resources to keep running, as well as a lack of resources to address mental health issues."

“We must bring back joy in learning and return to teaching young children in developmentally appropriate ways through play.”

“Within the state of Connecticut, the certification requirements can be a hefty financial burden while you are studying, due to the costs of certification tests such as the Praxis exams and Foundations of Reading exam. Then, adding to these financial burdens while in school, aspiring educators are forced to look to the future to plan for things such as affording rent, starting to pay back loans, having funds for furthering education, obtaining professional dress and reliable transportation, and all of the other basic necessities to live.”

“Legislators have the opportunity to pass historic legislation that will vastly improve the teaching profession,” said CEA Vice President Joslyn DeLancey. “We hope they will listen to the pleas of educators and those looking to enter the profession and take the steps necessary to protect Connecticut’s future as a leader in public education. We must ensure a future that respects teachers, encourages and supports them, and acknowledges the importance of the profession.”

Dias added, “It is time for our education systems to openly, clearly, and decisively stand behind those individuals who care for and teach our children. We can stop bleeding educators from our schools with bold and decisive actions that are supported by the vast majority of voters, 90% of whom say that teacher compensation should be comparable to or higher than professionals with similar education and training. It is time for us to make some history. We are in a time when needs and resources are aligned, when our desires for support and acknowledgment align with those of voters. The support is there; we just need this legislation to make it happen.”

[CEA Policy Brief - Back to Basics: Public School Teacher Recruitment & Retention](#)

[Attachment 1 – CEA Policy Brief Summary Recommendations](#)

[Attachment 2 – Starting Teacher Salaries with a Bachelor’s Degree](#)

[Attachment 3 – Starting Teacher Salaries with a Master’s Degree](#)

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The Connecticut Education Association is Connecticut’s largest teachers’ union, representing active, retired, and aspiring educators across the state.

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