



# News Release

For Immediate Release  
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## **New Survey Shows Unpaid Student Teaching Leading to Declines in Teacher Prep Enrollment, Educator Diversity**

*"I lived in my car the entire time and nobody knew. I needed to graduate with this degree to be safe and have a shot at a better future."*

That's how one educator describes the hardship posed by unpaid student teaching—the subject of [a new survey](#) and [policy brief](#) released by the CEA Aspiring Educator Program.

The survey finds 90% of Connecticut's student teachers are deeply concerned about affording groceries, and more than 80% say unpaid student teaching makes them feel exploited.

In addition to being a major stressor and financial hardship, unpaid student teaching is a significant deterrent for students considering careers in education and a barrier to diversifying the teaching profession; data shows it's a key factor in the disproportionate dropout rate of nonwhite students from teacher prep programs.

### **Other key findings:**

- Personal finances are a concern for more than 96% of current student teachers, with the vast majority reporting being considerably or extremely concerned.
- More than three-quarters of active and aspiring educators (78%) feel undervalued compared to peers entering non-education careers.
- Student teachers—who are required to work full-time without pay and are largely prohibited or discouraged from working second jobs—report concerns about their ability to afford groceries (90%), personal transportation (83%), professional clothing (73%), rent (68%), tuition (63%), and other necessary expenses.
- States that provide financial compensation during student teaching report stronger enrollment in educator preparation programs and more diverse applicant pools.

The CEA survey and policy brief were released at a news conference [livestreamed](#) at the State Legislative Office Building this afternoon. CEA leaders, aspiring educators, and legislators discussed survey results and proposed legislation to compensate student

teachers, as several other states do, and address shrinking enrollment and diversity in Connecticut's educator preparation programs.

"We would never tell aspiring architects or engineers that they have to do unpaid work," said CEA President Kate Dias. "Paid internships are the norm in every other field, and this is particularly and historically true of male-dominated fields. Refusing to pay student teachers is a holdover from a time when educating children was considered women's work, and women's work was undervalued and underpaid—or completely unpaid."

She added, "Paying our student teachers is a critical step toward showing we value their work and their chosen profession, and we have already seen paid residencies in other states demonstrate positive growth in teacher recruitment. Connecticut needs diverse teachers. We need special education teachers. We have a persistent educator shortage, and paying student teachers would be an important step toward addressing it."

"Going unpaid for months of mandatory full-time work in addition to paying full tuition costs is an extreme financial hardship for college students," said CEA Aspiring Educator Program Chair Hannah Spinner, a graduate student at UConn. "I've hardly known a student teacher who isn't weighed down by the stress of trying to balance this mandatory graduation requirement and support themselves at the same time. Those whose families lack the financial resources to help them pay tuition and living expenses for an entire semester of unpaid work often have to opt out of educator preparation programs, denying them a chance to pursue their professional goals. Several states have put a stop to this exploitive practice, and it's time for Connecticut to do the same."

Representative Jennifer Leeper, House chair of the legislature's Education Committee, and the committee's vice chair, Rep. Kevin Brown, agreed.

"Student teaching is an invaluable experience for our aspiring educators, one that helps to hone their skills and prepare them for a successful career in the classroom," said Rep. Leeper. "Unfortunately, rising higher education costs and the rapidly increasing cost of living are making it difficult for some of our brightest young people to make that commitment. Aspiring educators shouldn't be locked out of the profession because they can't financially bridge the gap of unpaid student teaching. A statewide paid student teaching program will help us support our aspiring educators as they develop these essential classroom skills. This program also sends the message that Connecticut values our educators and wants to attract the most talented and dedicated young people into the profession, which our students urgently need."

"Paying student teachers is a key step toward addressing teacher shortages, and when future educators are expected to work full time without pay, many are pushed out before they ever enter the profession," said Rep. Brown. "When we remove barriers, we will have a more robust teacher workforce that reflects the students in their classrooms."

“We’re extremely grateful for the support of our Education Committee on a paid student teaching bill,” said Spinner. “In states that have adopted this practice, it has improved student teachers’ well-being, the educator pipeline, and educator diversity. Connecticut would benefit strongly in all these areas.”

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

The CEA Aspiring Educator Program offers unique opportunities in professional development, community outreach, leadership, and networking for future teachers enrolled in educator preparation programs in Connecticut.

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