

State Policies to Support K-12 Staffing

“The truth is we call it a teacher shortage, but in reality, we have a shortage of respect for teachers and all school staff.”

—Randi Weingarten
AFT President
“Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?”

Background

In July 2022, the AFT Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force released the report “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?” which breaks down the causes of the high attrition rates and steadily decreasing recruitment rates of K-12 teachers and staff. The report is a result of the work of the task force, which was convened to study the retention and recruitment shortfalls and recommend constructive approaches to ensure our schools are staffed to serve the needs of students.

It’s hardly a new crisis. In 2018, the AFT and other advocates were sounding the alarm that there were 110,000 fewer teachers than were needed to staff our K-12 schools. And there has been renewed attention to school staffing levels as the COVID-19 pandemic has worn on and vacancies have increased.¹ Another cause for concern: Enrollment in teacher preparation programs is plummeting. We are losing the teacher diversity battle as well. An analysis by the Brookings Institution found America’s teaching workforce, which is disproportionately white, is growing less reflective of those they teach, who are now for the most part students of color.

As AFT President Randi Weingarten points out in the report’s introduction, the situation has been mischaracterized as a shortage in the number of qualified educators in the United States. In truth, the conditions found within public schools have driven qualified workers away from the teaching field. These conditions range from increased class size, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, and poor compensation; but the situation also stems from an erosion of respect for teaching as a profession.

“Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?” puts forth a vision for a “new era of schools” that challenges the rigid test score-obsessed system that is in place today along with an implementation strategy for unions, school districts, and federal and state lawmakers. Delegates to the AFT’s biennial convention in July unanimously adopted the report’s findings and recommendations, integrating them into the work of the union going forward. The following policy guidance summarizes recommendations for state lawmakers and provides concrete examples that state

¹ Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss. *U.S. Schools Struggle to Hire and Retain Teachers*. (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 2019), <https://www.epi.org/publication/u-s-schools-struggle-to-hire-and-retain-teachers-the-second-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series>.

lawmakers can act on to help K-12 schools attract and retain the educators and school staff our students need.

Revitalize the Educator and School Staff Pipeline

Create and Fund Recruitment Programs. Grow Your Own Illinois is a teacher training program that assists community members in becoming certified teachers in their neighborhood schools. It has created a pipeline of highly qualified teachers of color, with 123 teachers in 88 schools across Illinois.² In New York City, the Success Via Apprenticeship Program prepares career and technical education high school graduates to become CTE teachers and boasts one of the highest training and retention rates for teacher preparation.³ New Mexico earmarked \$2.5 million in 2019 to fund a program that provides paraprofessionals with scholarships to become teachers.⁴

Enact Initiatives to Diversify the Educator Workforce. Connecticut lawmakers enacted legislation in 2016 creating a Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force whose work culminated in a set of recommendations to increase diversity among its educator workforce. Those recommendations called for the establishment of a Minority Teacher Recruitment Policy Oversight Committee within the state Department of Education; an annual survey of students on the effectiveness of minority educator recruitment programs in the state; and an annual report on the effectiveness of minority educator recruitment programs in the state using results-based accountability methods.⁵ In Minnesota, the Increase Teachers of Color Act provided support to community groups engaged in recruiting and supporting educators of color as well as investing additional funds in the state's existing career ladder/grow-your-own programs.⁶ More recently, Minnesota lawmakers proposed legislation to require reporting progress on making the educator workforce more diverse and providing for a Tier 3 teacher license for any candidate who has completed a teacher preparation program from a culturally specific minority-serving institution, including a Hispanic-serving Institution, and is eligible for a teacher license in another state.⁷

Work to Identify and Remove Career Barriers. Louisiana lawmakers enacted legislation in 2021 creating a Teacher Recruitment, Recovery and Retention Task Force to study declining

² "What We Do," Grow Your Own Teachers, 2021, <https://growyourownteachers.org/what-we-do>.

³ "Program History," Success Via Apprenticeship, 2022. <https://www.svaprogram.org/history>.

⁴ Grow Your Own Teachers Act, H.B. 20, New Mexico Legislature (2020), <https://www.nmlegis.gov/Legislation/Legislation?chamber=H&legType=B&legNo=20&year=19>.

⁵ Aysha Mahmood. Diversity Among Teachers Bill (Hartford, Conn. Connecticut House Democrats, 2016), <https://housedems.ct.gov/sites/default/files/Diversity%20Among%20Teachers%20Bill.pdf>.

⁶ Rachel Kats, Increase Teachers of Color Act of 2021 clears education committee on party-line vote (St. Paul: Minnesota House of Representatives, 2021), <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/SessionDaily/Story/15517>.

⁷ Increase Teachers of Color Act, S.F. 446, Minnesota Legislature (2021), <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/bill.php?b=senate&f=SF0446&ssn=0&y=2021>.

enrollment in educator preparation programs and offer recommendations to increase rates of employment and retention of teachers. In a report summarizing its findings and recommendations, the task force acknowledged that Louisiana's teacher workforce does not reflect the diversity of students and identified the Praxis Core as a key barrier to entry into the teaching profession. Evidence suggests that cultural biases are driving racial and ethnic disparities in Praxis Core test passage rates, which results in teachers of color disproportionately being denied entry into the teaching profession.⁸ The task force recommended that Louisiana lawmakers remove the Praxis Core from Teacher Preparation Provider enrollment and certification requirements.⁹ After convening its Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force in 2016, Connecticut eliminated a satisfactory score on the Praxis exam as a licensure requirement for its educators.¹⁰

Provide Supports for Students to Succeed in College. States can take action to support students from underrepresented communities seeking degrees in education. Legislators in Washington, for example, passed a comprehensive bill in 2022 requiring colleges to create pathways for students from underrepresented communities to form student-based organizations and work with community-based organizations that mentor students; establish a culturally appropriate outreach program to assist potential students in understanding the opportunities available in the community college system; create clear educational pathways for students that include dedicated advising and counseling that is culturally competent; build a data component to help identify opportunities for early interventions to help keep students on track; and create a mental health counselor pilot program to give students additional support.¹¹

Invest in Robust Mentoring and Induction of New Educators and Staff. States can help support and retain new educators and staff by providing funding and resources for new educator induction and mentoring. Mentor teachers and education support staff should be provided with training and compensation as well as time during the school day to teach, support and evaluate beginning educators and staff. In Washington, the Legislature funds competitive grants for school districts participating in the Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) mentoring program. Districts that are fully engaged in the BEST mentoring program retain new educators

⁸ "Diversify the Education Workforce: Change Teacher Certification," July 10, 2019, <https://www.aft.org/news/diversify-education-workforce-change-teacher-certification>.

⁹ Em Cooper, "Louisiana launches statewide educator recruitment and retention recommendations," Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, March 23, 2022, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/blogs/relsw-la-recruitment-retention.aspx>.

¹⁰ Aysha Mahmood, *Diversity Among Teachers*.

¹¹ Senate Bill 5194, Washington Senate (2021), <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bills/SessionLaws/Senate/5194-S2.SL.pdf?q=20220318130210>.

at a 4-percentage point higher rate than school districts.¹² California has taken action to remove barriers to participation in educator induction programs with legislation to prohibit districts from charging new educators a fee to participate in the state’s beginning educator induction program.¹³

Support Educator Residencies. Educator residency programs are an alternative to traditional educator certification that borrows from the concept of medical residencies, grounding educator training in clinical practice. A resident works in a classroom under the supervision of expert educators while they are taking their academic coursework to earn a master’s degree. These programs have been shown to expand the diversity of educator recruitment pools, improve educator retention, and there is some evidence of improved student results as well. The New Mexico Legislature created an educator residency program with the goals of filling high-needs positions and providing high-quality educator preparation in a clinical setting while diversifying the teaching force.^{14, 15} A few years later, New Mexico lawmakers enacted legislation to ensure that educators in their final year of residency had the support needed to avoid having to take second and third jobs.¹⁶ The Colorado Legislature advanced legislation to provide stipends to candidates in educator residencies. California earmarked \$75 million to create and expand educator residency programs.¹⁷

Create Positive Working and Learning Conditions for All

Invest in Community Schools. Schools must be places where kids are welcomed, wanted and safe. But too many schools must deal with the damaging effects of poverty—including hunger, toxic stress and untreated medical conditions that undermine children’s well-being and their ability to learn. Community schools represent a strategy for coordinating support and services to address students’ academic, emotional, social and health needs. By providing this support to children and their families, community schools can be places where educators can teach, staff can support, and students can learn. States should invest in the planning and implementation

¹² The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, “Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) Program Reports Success,” Medium, May 15, 2017, <https://medium.com/waospi/beginning-educator-support-team-best-program-reports-success-6520e95c9f76>.

¹³ Assembly Bill No. 2852, California Legislature (2018), https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB2852&search_keywords.

¹⁴ Teacher Residency Act, 22-10B-2 (2020), <https://nmonesource.com/nmos/nmsa/en/item/4368/index.do#!b/22-10B-9>.

¹⁵ Teacher Residency Act, 22-10B-2.

¹⁶ House Bill 22-1220, Colorado Legislature (2022), https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2022A/bills/2022a_1220_01.pdf.

¹⁷ “California Budget Provides \$75 Million for Teacher Residency Programs,” Commission on Teacher Credentialing, Aug. 10, 2018, <https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/grants/residency-advisory.pdf>.

of the community schools' strategy, and they should provide districts with financial support for school site-level coordination of wraparound services.¹⁸

Foster Parental Involvement. AFT affiliates have *always* worked with parents and parent organizations on behalf of our students, our schools, school budgets and public education. But extremist politicians have been attempting to drive a wedge between parents and teachers with an agenda that seeks to undermine teacher authority and autonomy, banning books and politicizing curriculum. Lawmakers should push back against these attacks on public education, and instead focus on the kinds of supports that will allow parents to be the most effective advocates for their children. In addition to supporting investment in community schools, lawmakers should follow the lead of Massachusetts¹⁹ and Washington, D.C.,²⁰ and enact laws requiring employers to provide parents with 24 hours of annual leave to participate in children's school activities.

Strengthen School-Based Medicaid Programs. Children's medical conditions can create barriers to learning. A federal policy change enacted in 2014 created a new opportunity for schools to access resources that can fund vital nursing and healthcare services, but state legal and administrative barriers prevent full implementation. Leveraging this new opportunity, Colorado amended its state Medicaid policy in 2020 to expand reimbursement to cover all Medicaid-enrolled students and added licensed applied behavior analysts and speech-language pathologist assistants as Medicaid-eligible providers,²¹ and this is expected to bring in \$8 million in additional federal Medicaid funds per year.²² Similarly, Louisiana made policy changes to allow billing for school nursing services, and this increased Medicaid revenue by 35 percent.

Provide Proper Social, Emotional and Health Supports. Connecticut lawmakers considered a bill in 2022 that would have required districts to implement mental health screenings, including a post-COVID-19 trauma assessment; to maintain a minimum of one school counselor, one social worker, and one family therapist for every 250 students; maintain one school psychologist for every 500 students and a paraprofessional-to-student ratio as recommended by a nationally recognized paraprofessional effectiveness organization. It would also have

¹⁸ "Community Schools," AFT, <https://www.aft.org/position/community-schools>.

¹⁹ "Break and Time Off," <https://www.mass.gov/guides/breaks-and-time-off>.

²⁰ Paternal Leave Act (Washington, D.C., Office of Human Rights, 2015), https://ohr.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ohr/publication/attachments/ParentalLeave_Poster_2015_1.pdf.

²¹ Medicaid and CHIP Operations Group, Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Approval Letter, State Plan Amendment (SPA) #: 19-0021 for Colorado, 2020, <https://www.medicaid.gov/sites/default/files/State-resource-center/Medicaid-State-Plan-Amendments/Downloads/CO/CO-19-0021.pdf>

²² Understanding the Financial Impact of Expanding Medicaid Funded School Health Services in Colorado (Healthy Students, Promising Futures Learning Collaborative, 2020), <https://healthystudentspromisingfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CO-RMTS-Case-Study-HSPF.pdf>.

required integration of social emotional learning into professional development.²³ This year, the Utah Legislature passed a bill to increase the number of school nurses from one nurse for every 5,000 students to one nurse for every 2,000.²⁴

This year, the New York Legislature considered a bill to provide a school psychologist in every school.²⁵ The bill requires that schools provide mental health evaluations, screenings and assessments; that they address identified mental health needs of children who are identified in those assessments; and that they provide support for interventions, techniques and behavioral approaches to respond to the mental health needs of children. Similarly, legislation in Rhode Island from 2021, had it passed, would have provided grant funding to districts that employed one social worker per 250 students, or one psychologist per 700 students or one counselor per 250 students.²⁶

Provide Resources and Support for School Staff Working with Special Needs Students.

Teaching assistants, bus drivers and other paraprofessionals are important members of the education team for students with disabilities. These students are best served when all staff members are able to appropriately participate in team meetings regarding individualized education programs (IEPs). Parents and guardians should have the right to have paraprofessionals present at IEP team meetings where their child's educational program is being developed, reviewed or revised. The AFT also supports measures which ensure that paraprofessionals won't be pulled away from instructional time in the classroom to perform work outside their assigned area.

Make Schools Safe. Our schools must be safe and healthy places for students and staff to learn and work. In 2021, there were 35 school shootings that claimed 15 lives and wounded 55 others.²⁷ Lawmakers should act to keep guns out of our schools. That includes measures to allow schools to initiate extreme risk protection order processes when they believe a student with access to firearms is a danger to themselves or others. States should take other actions, including, at the least, to ensure the background check process is properly implemented.²⁸

Moreover, only 26 states have extended Occupational Safety and Health Administration safety and health standards to staff in public schools. In addition, states should require written safety plans for every school building and for specific educational activities. These should be

²³ Raised Bill No. 6557, Connecticut General Assembly (2021), <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/TOB/H/PDF/2021HB-06557-R00-HB.PDF>.

²⁴ School Nursing Services Amendments, H.B. 114, Utah State Legislature (2022), <https://le.utah.gov/~2022/bills/static/HB0114.html>.

²⁵ Senate Bill S.1969, New York State Senate (2021), <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/S1969>.

²⁶ RI S0757, Rhode Island Senate (2021), <https://legiscan.com/RI/bill/S0757/2021>.

²⁷ "School Shootings in 2021: How Many and Where," *Education Week*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-this-year-how-many-and-where/2021/03>.

²⁸ "Gun Safety Policies Save Lives," Everytown Research & Policy, 2022, shorturl.at/alox0.

developed with input from educators and school support staff. Long-term and sustainable school safety also requires a commitment to preventive measures, including efforts to stop bullying. States should require and support training for all staff on student discipline and managing student behavior that incorporates restorative justice practices and is culturally inclusive. Finally, states should require schools to establish joint labor-management safety committees that ensure representation of teachers and school support staff.

Invest in School Construction, Repair and Maintenance. The U.S. Green Building Council’s Center for Green Schools reported in 2016 that the U.S. is spending \$46 billion less each year on school construction and maintenance than is necessary to ensure safe and healthy facilities.²⁹ The impact of this disinvestment can be seen everywhere. Teachers, school support staff and students in Pennsylvania are exposed to lead and asbestos in their schools; at least one teacher has been diagnosed with mesothelioma. Schools in Baltimore lack heat in the winter and air conditioning during the summer. Detroit schools are plagued by rodents, roaches and mold. States need to invest to bring all school facilities up to a standard that is safe, healthy and educationally appropriate.

Provide Workers with Trust, Time, Tools and Training to Do Their Jobs

Provide Optimal Class Sizes to Meet Student Needs. Class sizes should be optimal for educators, staff and students to form real relationships, so educators can differentiate instruction, provide more project-based learning, and see that students are actively engaged in their learning. As Bruce Baker writes in “Does Money Matter in Education?”:

Ample research indicates that children in smaller classes achieve better outcomes, both academic and otherwise, and that class size reduction can be an effective strategy for closing racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps.³⁰

Lawmakers should prioritize state investment in class size reduction as it yields cost-effective benefits for students.

Reduce Administrative Burdens that Take Time Away from Serving Students. New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed an executive order in May 2022 directing the Public Education Department to reduce the administrative burden on educators and staff.³¹ Texas enacted legislation in 2021 intended to limit the time school counselors spend on inappropriate duties. The law requires that school districts adopt policies ensuring that at least 80 percent of

²⁹ “Center for Green Schools,” <https://centerforgreenschools.org/state-our-schools>.

³⁰ “Does Money Matter in Education?” (Washington, D.C, Albert Shanker Institute, 2019), <https://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/does-money-matter-second-edition>.

³¹ Michelle Grisham, Reducing Administrative Burdens in the New Mexico Public Education Department (Santa Fe: Office of the Governor, 2022), <https://www.governor.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Executive-Order-2022-058.pdf>.

a counselor's total work time is spent on duties that are components of the statutorily mandated counseling program.³²

Delink Student Assessments and Teacher Pay, and Build Capacity So Educators Can Use Student Assessments to Inform Teaching Practice. Poorly designed high-stakes standardized tests that are used to evaluate students and determine teacher pay create costs in time, money and learning. The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development says that state lawmakers should instead devote resources to help build the capacity of educators to access, use and share data to monitor the impact of teaching on student outcomes.³³ State departments of education should also ensure that data is disaggregated by subgroups so it can be used to “identify gaps in access and areas for improvement.”³⁴ The Washington Teachers’ Union is charting a path to reforming the district’s evaluation system. Research has shown that the current system of evaluation, IMPACT, gives undue weight to test scores as the main measurement of success and does not effectively measure progress being made with students from diverse backgrounds. WTU is working with the Council of the District of Columbia toward a system that, instead of penalizing teachers, would help them work with their administration to identify the training and resources they need to help students succeed.³⁵

Allow Teachers the Freedom to Create Authentic Assessments of Student Learning. The AFT fought hard in the reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to get beyond high-stakes, low-quality tests that were limiting student learning across the K-12 spectrum. New Hampshire’s Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE) was the first Innovative assessment pilot implemented under that law. PACE consists of assessments that are created locally by teachers and ask students to solve problems instead of regurgitate information. In New York, the Performance Standards Consortium allows consortium schools to develop their own performance assessments, which grow directly from the curriculum and serve as an extension of the learning process. These assessments ask students to think deeply and show evidence. This focus on student performance measures allows consortium teachers to emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving, writing and discussion, open-ended questioning and student input.

Provide Time and Support for Collaboration and Professional Development. State lawmakers can support professional development by providing funding to allow release time, no-cost access to university courses, reimbursements for conferences or workshop fees, and reduced

³² S.B. 179, Texas Legislature (2022), <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=SB179>.

³³ *Building an Equitable School System for All Students and Educators* (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2021), https://educationminnesota.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/EPIC_v5n1_EquitableSchools_Book.pdf.

³⁴ *Building an Equitable School System for All Students and Educators*.

³⁵ "The Impact Committee," Washington Teachers’ Union, https://www.wtulocal6.net/the_impact_committee.

teaching schedules for novice and mentor teachers to focus on teaching practice.³⁶ Rhode Island advanced legislation in 2022 that, had it passed, would have allocated \$200 per student to professional development and have that professional development be administered via a committee with a majority of educators appointed by their union.³⁷ Legislators may need to remove statutory barriers to educators taking the lead in designing and implementing their own professional development opportunities. In Connecticut, for example, lawmakers enacted a law that provides districts with more flexibility to design professional development activities that are aligned to district goals after the Educator Professional Development Requirements Task Force urged the state to cut back on the “unwieldy list of mandated trainings.”³⁸

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development suggests that states provide funding so districts can hire more teachers and add meeting days to the school year, pointing to UCLA's University Elementary School as exemplary, where 20 pupil-free teacher workdays are being built into the annual calendar to allow teachers to meet and collaborate, and six teachers are assigned to four classes to free teachers to meet on a rotating basis.³⁹

Provide Teachers and Paraprofessionals with Meaningful Career Advancement Pathways.

Educators need satisfying career paths that allow them to take on different roles and responsibilities as they develop their teaching practice.⁴⁰ State lawmakers can support career advancement for teachers by providing funding for training and compensation of education leaders. In New Mexico, legislators recently created a level four license. These new license tiers recognize master teachers who are responsible for supporting classroom teachers and educational assistants through professional development activities.⁴¹

Connecticut's School Paraprofessional Advisory Council was created by state law in 2013.⁴² It is a unique institution and AFT Connecticut was integral to its founding. It operates at the state and local levels to amplify the voices, professionalization, and the safety of paraprofessionals. This council consists of one paraprofessional representative from each statewide bargaining

³⁶ Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss, "Teachers Need Better Professional Development Opportunities, More Support," Economic Policy Institute, July 26, 2019, <https://www.epi.org/blog/teachers-need-better-professional-development-opportunities-more-support-from-the-system>.

³⁷ S. 2035, Rhode Island Legislation (2022), <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText22/SenateText22/S2035.pdf>.

³⁸ Teacher Development and Advancement (Education Commission of the States, 2018), https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Teacher_Development_and_Advancement.pdf.

³⁹ Mary Anne Raywid, "Finding Time For Collaboration," Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1993, <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/finding-time-for-collaboration>.

⁴⁰ Department of Education, "Elevating Teaching," <https://www.ed.gov/teaching/national-conversation/vision/section-vi-career-pathways-and-professional-advancement27>.

⁴¹ Teacher Development and Advancement.

⁴² Paraprofessional Advisory Council, Sec. 10-155k, Connecticut (2013), https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_166.htm#sec_10-155k.

organization that represents school instructional-based paraprofessionals. At least quarterly, this council advises the Legislature on the conditions of the profession within the state, and on the standardization and effectiveness of current training for paraprofessionals.

Support National Board Certification. The certification process of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is one of the most rigorous professional development processes that teachers can undertake. Independent research indicates that teachers who complete the board process gain skills and are more effective in raising student achievement. National Board Certified teachers are also more likely to remain in the profession than other teachers. Board certification is a pathway to teacher leadership. States can provide support for teachers pursuing certification—including help with fees. States can also supply incentives in the form of stipends or additional professional roles such as mentoring for those who complete board certification. Such efforts should be undertaken with an eye toward equity, prioritizing recruitment of teachers of color and future National Board Certified Teachers who will work in under-resourced schools.

Provide Sustainable and Commensurate Compensation and Benefits

Pay Teachers a Wage Commensurate with Other Professionals. In 28 states, teachers are paid less than 80 cents for every dollar earned by similar college-educated workers in those states.⁴³ The Economic Policy Institute calls this wage gap the “teacher wage and compensation penalty” and recently showed how this ranges from 3.4 percent in Rhode Island to 35.9 percent in Colorado. Austerity and disinvestment in K-12 education have kept teacher pay down and are driving current and aspiring teachers away from the profession. Every state needs to commit significant new investment in our schools to address low wages for teachers to ensure they are paid a wage commensurate with that of other professionals.

Improve Compensation for School Support Staff. In 2020, the median rate of pay was \$13 an hour for food service workers, \$16.36 an hour for bus drivers, \$15.34 an hour for building and cleaning workers, and \$19.50 an hour for school administrative and support workers. On top of low wages, many school support staff workers are intentionally not hired to work enough hours each week to receive any health or retirement benefits.⁴⁴ To address this, the Maryland Legislature advanced a bill last year to determine what percent of school support workers do not earn a living wage and provided state support to help them achieve one.⁴⁵ A bill introduced in Florida required districts to identify staff shortage areas and fund incentives to help fill those

⁴³ Sylvia Allegretto, "The Teacher Pay Penalty Has Hit a New High," Economic Policy Institute, Aug. 16, 2022, <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-penalty-2022>.

⁴⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, “May 2021 National Industry-Specific Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, NAICS 611100 - Elementary and Secondary Schools, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4_611100.htm.

⁴⁵ S.B. 831, Maryland Legislature (2022), <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/bills/sb/sb0831F.pdf>.

positions.⁴⁶ In Minnesota, legislation would have provided a \$20 an hour minimum wage for school support staff.⁴⁷

Reduce the Burden of Student Debt. Too many educators struggle with student debt, and college costs are a barrier for some would-be educators, nurses, counselors, social workers and psychologists who do not pursue certification programs. State legislatures have advanced two kinds of bills that can help. The first set of bills covers Public Service Loan Forgiveness. Washington lawmakers enacted legislation to require employers to provide employment certification forms to employees at least annually, and to create a permissive structure to allow bulk certification should the U.S. Department of Education be ready to roll out that kind of program.⁴⁸ This follows legislation enacted in Utah in 2019 that creates awareness of the PSLF program through notifications to school district employees by their employers.⁴⁹ The other set of bills pertains to the state directly forgiving loans. For example, this year Michigan legislators have proposed a state loan forgiveness program to attract educators to work in high-need areas.⁵⁰

Support Educators and School Staff with Parental Leave and Flexible Working Schedules.

Early-career educators and school staff who are likely to have little accumulated paid leave can find it difficult to balance parenthood and work. Almost one-fourth of educators who have left the profession cite personal life reasons, which include pregnancy and child care, as a reason for leaving.⁵¹ On average, educators receive only about 12 days of sick and personal leave every year. Lawmakers should follow the example of the District of Columbia, New Jersey and Washington and adopt parental leave laws that provide workers with paid leave.

Utilize Union Voice and Strength to Impact Change at All Levels

Support the Right of Teachers and Education Support Staff to Form and Join Unions. It is through their unions that teachers and education support staff come together to advocate for autonomy in the classroom and authority and voice in their profession. State lawmakers should enact legislation to give all school staff the right to organize a union to bargain collectively. Lawmakers can go a step further to balance the power between employers and school staff. For

⁴⁶ Educational Support Staff, S.B. 1576, Florida Senate (2022), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/1576>.

⁴⁷ H.F. 2133, Minnesota Legislature (2022), https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2133&version=0&session=ls92&session_year=2021&session_number=0

⁴⁸ S.B. 5847, Washington State Legislature (2022), <http://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5847&Year=2021>.

⁴⁹ H.B. 213, Utah State Legislature (2019), <https://le.utah.gov/~2019/bills/static/HB0213.html>.

⁵⁰ S.B. 673, Michigan State Legislature (2021), <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2021-SB-0673>

⁵¹ Madeline Will, "With No Paid Parental Leave, Many Teachers Return to Class Before They're Ready," *Education Week*, April 1, 2019, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/with-no-paid-parental-leave-many-teachers-return-to-class-before-theyre-ready/2019/04?r=217152598&mkey=FF1E0384-3628-4A73-985B-001F31679C8F>.

example, pro-union lawmakers in Virginia sponsored legislation in 2020, which ultimately did not advance, that would have allowed workers to have their union recognized by a showing of signed union membership cards; required school districts to notify union representatives when new staff are hired; provided education union representatives with time during new employee orientation to talk about the union; provided union representatives with access to school and administrative facilities; and allowed education staff and their union representatives to communicate over email.⁵² More recently, Connecticut enacted legislation to prevent management from compelling workers to attend meetings about decisions to join unions.⁵³

Foster Productive Labor-Management Collaboration, and Encourage School-Level Decision-Making. Union-management partnerships provide a way for educators, staff and administrators to work together to build great schools. While collective bargaining provides one path for educators and staff to work together with school administration, state lawmakers can also incentivize union-management partnerships by providing financial support for district and school-level partnerships. States can also enact legislation giving staff working in schools a say at the district and school levels in how state budget revenues are used. States can also turn over more decision-making to schools, allowing for school-level union-management collaboration on curriculum, textbooks and instruction practice, student assessments, teacher evaluation, professional development and peer review. States should also eliminate barriers that prevent teachers, school support staff and administrators from meeting during the school day to work on the issues outlined here.

Require Teacher Representation on State Boards of Education and Teacher Practice Committees. State Boards of Education set policy on high school graduation requirements, standards for teacher-preparation programs, teacher evaluation and curriculum. Whether board members are elected or appointed, state legislatures can enact laws to provide representation by classroom teachers. Arizona, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon, and Wyoming all require teacher representation on the state's Board of Education.⁵⁴ Arizona also requires teacher representation on the Board of Education's Professional Practices Advisory Committees.⁵⁵

⁵² H.B. 582, Virginia House of Representatives (2020), <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+ful+HB582H1+pdf>.

⁵³ S.B. 163, Connecticut General Assembly (2022), https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/CGABillStatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill_num=SB163.

⁵⁴ "What Is the Composition of the State Board of Education?," November 2020, <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/k-12-governance-state-board-of-education-02>.

⁵⁵ Title 7. Education, Chapter 2. State Board of Education, Arizona Administrative Code, https://apps.azsos.gov/public_services/Title_07/7-02.pdf