



# ***Pennsylvania Educator Workforce Strategy***

## **Feedback from the Field**

July 2022

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of Education  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333  
[www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov)



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Pennsylvania Educator Workforce Strategy Feedback from the Field

July 2022

## CONTENTS

---

**Overview** 4

Acknowledgment 4

**Focus Area 1: Meet the educator staffing needs of rural, suburban, and urban areas** 5

ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

Educator Preparation Program Recruitment Efforts 5

School and District Recruitment Efforts 5

Specialized Preparation Programs at Intermediate Units 5

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Negative Perception of Education as a Career 5

Educator Preparation Program Recruitment Efforts 6

Policy Deterrents to Educator Preparation Programs 6

Financial Deterrents to Educator Preparation Programs 7

Educator Preparation Program Enrollment Practices 8

School and District Recruitment Efforts 8

Residency programs and Grow Your Own Programs 8

Principal Residency Programs 9

Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Education 9

Additional Notes and Observations 10

**Focus Area 2: Build a diverse workforce representative of the students we serve** 11

ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

Recognition of the Importance of Workforce Diversity 11

Professional Development Related to Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education 11

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Perceived Lack of Interest of Candidates of Color to Pursue Education as a Career, Especially in Rural Areas 11

Lack of Effective Recruitment Systems to Attract Educators of Color 12

Policy Deterrents to Educator Preparation Programs 13

Educator Preparation Program Recruitment 13

Data and Metrics 14

Additional Notes and Observations 14

**Focus Area 3: Operate a rigorous, streamlined, and customer-service oriented certification process 15**

ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

Certification Processes 15

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Emergency Certification 15

Certification Administrative Processes 15

Certification Reciprocity 16

Certification Requirements 16

Emergency Certifications 16

Additional Notes and Observations 16

**Focus Area 4: Ensure high quality preparation experiences for aspiring educators 17**

ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

Key Programmatic Elements 17

Desire for Collaboration 17

Metrics and Data Collection 17

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

A Need for Stronger Partnerships Between Districts, Schools and Educator Preparation Programs 17

State Policy Updates 18

Accountability, the Accreditation Process, and the Drivers (and Barriers) to Change and Innovation 18

Early Literacy 19

Metrics and Data Collection 20

Additional Notes and Observations 20

**Focus Area 5: Ensure educator access to high-quality and relevant professional growth and leadership development opportunities 21**

ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

Professional Development in Schools and Districts 21

Educator Retention 21

Metrics and Data Collection 21

PDE Communications and Relationships with Educators 21

Educator Mentorship and Induction Programs 21

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Educator Well-Being and the Effects of the Pandemic 22

Educator Compensation 22

Professional Development Systems in Schools and Districts 22

Educator Collaboration and Social Networks 23

Retention Efforts in Schools and Districts 23

New Educator Onboarding Systems in Schools and Districts 23

PDE Communications and Relationships with Educators 24

Educator Career Ladders and Leadership Pathways 24

Lack of Treatment as a Valued Professional 24

Educator Mentorship and Induction Programs 24

Metrics and Data Collection 24

Additional Notes and Observations 25

# Overview

The prosperous future of Pennsylvania—from healthy young children and families to a thriving economy to vibrant and civically engaged neighborhoods and communities—depends on a healthy and robust educator workforce. Educators encompass a wide range of professions, such as early childhood professionals, teachers, school and district leaders, and other school support staff professionals (e.g., school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, mental health professionals, speech pathologists, health professionals, school librarians, and others).

Our educator workforce not only represents a critical sector of the commonwealth's economy, but educators also play a doubly important role in preparing young learners to participate in and lead our communities, our governments, our businesses, and our families in the future.

## **Despite this, Pennsylvania faces an educator workforce crisis.**

As a result, PDE is reimagining its educator workforce strategy to ensure that Pennsylvania builds and maintains the robust and thriving educator ecosystem that our students need and deserve. PDE is focusing on five key workforce areas to drive this strategy:

1. Meet the educator staffing needs of rural, suburban, and urban areas
2. Build a diverse workforce representative of the students we serve
3. Operate a rigorous, streamlined and customer-service oriented certification process
4. Ensure high-quality preparation experiences for aspiring educators
5. Ensure educator access to high-quality and relevant professional growth and leadership development opportunities

To inform PDE's efforts in each of these focus areas, the department conducted interviews in late 2021 and early 2022 with more than 40 individuals with expertise and interest in the educator workforce. Participants included teachers, school and district administrators, educator preparation program leaders, intermediate unit administrators, local government officials, education nonprofit leaders, educator union leaders, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, and representatives from other organizations. The feedback received from these individuals informed the pages that follow.

## **Acknowledgment**

The Pennsylvania Department of Education would like to acknowledge and thank all of the individuals who gave generously of their time and wisdom to provide the rich feedback outlined in this document. Participants interviewed included teachers, school and district administrators, educator preparation program leaders, intermediate unit administrators, local and state government officials, education nonprofit leaders, educator union leaders, and representatives from other organizations. Out of respect for each individual's privacy and to allow for the free and uninhibited sharing of feedback, the names and organizations of individuals interviewed shall remain confidential.

## FOCUS AREA 1:

# Meet the educator staffing needs of rural, suburban, and urban areas

Pennsylvania must urgently attract more educators into the profession and retain a higher percentage of existing excellent educators to meet the staffing needs of early childhood centers, schools, and libraries in our rural, suburban, and urban settings.

## ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

### ***Educator Preparation Program Recruitment Efforts***

In support of PDE's goal to increase the number of candidates enrolled in educator preparation programs, leaders of these programs reported that nearly all of their institutions currently engage in some combination of the following recruitment practices:

- Social media promotion
- On-campus visits and open houses for potential students
- Participation in college or university-wide recruiting events
- Coordinated recruitment events with their local school districts

A few of the participating institutions described using more in-depth on-campus experiences for local high school students—including mini-conferences, retreats, or extended summer bridge programs—as key recruitment tools. A few of the institutions also cited partnerships with local education or youth development programs as an important recruitment tool, particularly to attract potential students of color. These partnerships were particularly important in rural areas with a small proportion of residents of color.

### ***School and District Recruitment Efforts***

In support of PDE's goal to reduce vacancies at schools, LEA leaders reported utilizing a variety of tools to recruit new educators. Efforts included:

- Selecting teachers into teacher residencies residency programs where they could earn a salary while teaching and studying under a mentor teacher
- Hiring student teachers who have worked in the school or district
- Hosting and attending job fairs
- Advertising in local and national jobs boards
- Social media promotion

On rare occasions, LEA leaders mentioned using geofencing—the use of GPS to send targeted recruiting messaging to potential candidates when they enter an established geographical zone—to identify and contact potential candidates. A few LEAs highlighted their region's leading pay scale as their most effective recruitment tool.

### ***Specialized Preparation Programs at Intermediate Units***

Some intermediate units with specialized preparation programs in endorsement areas such as English as a Second Language, autism, and gifted education noted that their programs are often oversubscribed. They also noted that their programs are delivered at very low cost points, making them readily accessible by educators or their employers.

## CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Significant barriers to meeting PDE's staffing goals at both the preparation program level and the school and district levels emerged from the interviews.

### ***Negative Perception of Education as a Career***

Across the board, interviewees noted that one of the biggest hurdles to bringing new educators into the field is a widespread negative perception of education as a career. This perception has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Participants cited the observation that many educators are actively discouraging high school students and potential career switchers from entering the field. Low pay, poor working conditions, and a lack of respect for the profession were among the most commonly cited elements of this negative narrative.

Among the teachers interviewed, some posited that high school students who have experienced a lack of relevant and inspiring instruction in their lives as K-12 students are loath to pursue a career that they don't believe is an effective or engaging environment for learning. These teachers urged the department

---

to convene focus groups of high school students to hear directly from them on why they're not interested in education as a career and what it would take to change that.

Some interviewees called on PDE to use its bullhorn to amplify educator voices and create a campaign to counter these negative perceptions of the profession. They urged PDE to develop and disseminate consistent messaging and public relations materials about how amazing educators are and how they are the lifeblood of communities.

### ***Educator Preparation Program Recruitment Efforts***

While educator preparation programs are generally engaged in the recruitment activities mentioned previously, these efforts have not resulted in the matriculation of the number of aspiring educators that programs desire or that the state needs. Pennsylvania generally has seen steep declines in preparation program enrollment over the last 15-20 years. A significant number of programs noted that their recruitment efforts were limited to the recruitment initiatives conducted by the college or university as a whole and that they did not have a distinct recruitment effort focused on future educators. Many also noted that word of mouth and the school's historical reputation were the program's most important recruitment tools. Most programs noted that they had limited resources and staffing dedicated specifically to recruiting aspiring educators into their preparation programs.

In rare cases, leaders cited the traditional nature and mindset of the institution and its leaders—characterized as a “We’ve always done it this way and we always will do it this way” mentality—as a barrier to recruitment.

### ***Policy Deterrents to Educator Preparation Programs***

There was widespread agreement among interviewees that GPA requirements and the basic skills assessment serve as barriers to entry into preparation programs that disproportionately impact students of color and students from rural backgrounds. Neither preparation program leaders nor school or district leaders felt that the basic skills test is an accurate or necessary barometer of who has the potential to be a good educator. Some leaders suggested that PDE replace the basic skills test with a performance task modeled off a modified Danielson performance assessment currently in use in some institutions.

A few educator preparation program leaders cited the state's requirements for the number of competencies to be mastered—and thus the number of courses needing to be completed by aspiring educators—as a barrier to entry for potential students. These leaders observed that students that did not commit early to education often did not have enough time to fulfill the program requirements, and thus would not choose to enter the program later. They also noted that there was little flexibility for education students to take electives, which turned many students off from participating in the program.

One K-12 teacher described the experience of a colleague who began their college journey pursuing a career as an actuary but later decided they wanted to pursue education. This aspiring educator wound up having to pay for an extra year of coursework to complete the program and to delay entering the workforce—neither of which they could readily afford.

An education preparation program adjunct professor described extreme burnout from some of their preparation program students. In one instance, an aspiring educator was simultaneously completing coursework, field placement, and holding down two jobs, resulting in an unsustainable 80-90 hours per week between work and school.

Some teachers that were interviewed suggested that the course sequences at many educator preparation programs are traditional and overly regimented. They further suggested that this approach does not promote the development of one's philosophy of education or promote critical cross-disciplinary thinking or holistic approaches to education. Some teachers made reference to a teacher-developed rubric for educator preparation that takes a more holistic approach to teacher preparation and urged the department to review the rubric.

Some nonprofit leaders who were interviewed described successful efforts to partner with educator preparation programs to rethink coursework (with a cap of 30 credits) with a focus on teachers getting the theory and practice experience they need to sustain themselves and be effective in classrooms serving predominantly students from low-income backgrounds. These nonprofit leaders also noted the need to extend new teacher induction and mentorship up to three years—a commitment which has been a struggle to accomplish given that, in their view, IHEs and school districts are not used to or resourced for doing that level of new teacher support and induction. They cited a lack of incentives for

faculty to be out in the field and a lack of incentives for preparation programs to change curriculum as barriers to making this shift in approach. Some of these nonprofit leaders pointed to IHE-based incentive models at Mercer University and Piedmont University in Georgia as examples for how universities have better incentivized and resourced faculty field experience and extended new teacher mentorship.

While most preparation leaders described their field experience as going above and beyond minimum requirements, some teachers who were interviewed expressed concern over the length of field placements. One supervising teacher who was interviewed said that they would only have their student teacher with them for seven weeks, and that this was not enough experience to properly prepare the student teacher.

In a few instances, preparation program leaders described a struggle to remain financially viable given competition with online programs and with schools that educate much larger cohorts of new educators. Some described a need to scale back certain programs, particularly in areas such as principal and superintendent certification, due to an outflow of students to online or large program competition.

Several intermediate unit leaders expressed an interest in becoming providers of alternative educator certification programs.

### **Financial Deterrents to Educator Preparation Programs**

Many preparation programs cited the cost of education as a barrier to student recruitment, but some noted that this typically was not an issue for their students. Interviewees estimated that the cost of their preparation programs range from approximately \$71,000 annually at some small private schools to about \$12,000 annually at some public institutions. Most interviewees stated annual costs in the \$18,000 - \$20,000 range. Most program leaders also shared that the majority of their students receive some sort of financial aid, though it was not readily clear in most cases what the average out-of-pocket costs were for students.

One teacher who was interviewed reflected on their educator preparation experience in which the teacher reported having entered the profession on an emergency credential, and after having performed the job successfully for several years was forced to go back to school and pay \$60,000 to complete the required coursework. The teacher described the

preparation coursework as being ineffective and that it did not make them better as a teacher. A deeper quantitative study on this issue is needed to provide more objective clarity on the extent to which the finances of educator preparation are indeed a barrier to entry for aspiring educators.

It was noted that more services are needed to support postsecondary students in filling out the forms and completing the processes for financial aid, and to ensure that aspiring educators aren't scared off by the initial sticker shock of tuition costs before they understand the resources available in that area. Participants suggested that the state initiate a student loan debt forgiveness program (especially for special education educators), that the state implement programs to pay for the tuition and fees of aspiring educators in exchange for a service commitment (potential model: [New Mexico](#)). Participants representing the nonprofit sector suggested that PDE build off the Wilson College model to provide scholarships to career switchers who want to return to college to become educators.

Some IHEs noted problems with the federal loan forgiveness programs which have made them reluctant to advertise these programs to their students. A few program leaders expressed that upwards of 80-90% of their students who appeared to initially have qualified for the program wound up finding out later that they did not qualify. In those instances, students were unexpectedly left with significant debt that they had to repay.

### **Educator Preparation Program Enrollment Practices**

In most cases, especially among public universities, educator preparation programs would enroll as many qualified applicants as they received. In rarer but not uncommon circumstances, especially among private IHEs, educator preparation programs would enroll only up to a certain number of aspiring educators, often based on the capacity of existing teacher education faculty. Few educator preparation programs had enrollment goals tied to local or state workforce needs.

There seemed to exist little financial incentive for educator preparation programs to increase enrollment. Most preparation program leaders stated that they did not believe that a significant increase in preparation program enrollees would result in a proportional increase in the funding and staffing available to their program, at least in the short term. As a result, more students would likely translate into the need to



---

stretch existing resources and staff capacity further. Conversely, it also did not appear that significant declines in enrollment had led to significant declines in the number of faculty. However, more quantitative research would need to be done on this point to verify its accuracy and the extent to which this trend was pervasive.

In a few of the instances in which schools placed limitations on the number of enrollees, educator preparation program leaders cited a desire not to disrupt the balance between full-time and part-time faculty or between research and clinical faculty. Some education preparation program leaders cited a lack of incentives—and in some cases clear disincentives—to shift faculty from academic- and research-focused work to field work. These disincentives for increasing field-based staffing serve to limit the number and depth of field experiences that IHE-based preparation programs can offer. Some participants suggested that monetary or non-monetary incentives for student teacher supervision (such as Act 48 credits or formal certificates of recognition) could be effective incentives to attract more potential supervising teachers to support student teachers.

Some programs stated that they are likely producing too many elementary education majors<sup>1</sup> and too few in secondary education and special education.

### **School and District Recruitment Efforts**

Both district leaders and education preparation program leaders cited the late recruitment cycle utilized by many Pennsylvania school districts as a major barrier to effective recruitment, often putting Pennsylvania school districts at a disadvantage relative to neighboring states and to in-state and out-of-state charter schools that begin recruitment and make offers much earlier. While some districts had clear dates by which they hoped to have all or nearly all vacancies filled, other districts did not have clear targets established. In some cases, districts noted that offer letters may not go out until August, often months after many educators have accepted roles elsewhere.

Some leaders of medium- and large-sized districts noted that their recruitment efforts are often more generic and less customized than those of smaller districts or charter schools. Their increased size and complexity made it more difficult to orient candidates to the openings for which they would be the best match, to streamline the communication between school principals and candidates, to shepherd individual candidates through the process, and to offer concierge recruitment services such as supporting candidates to find housing. They noted that smaller districts and charter schools in their areas could often out-recruit them by offering more customized and supportive recruitment tools.

Some district HR leaders also noted that many principals have not internalized their role as hiring leaders for their building. Instead, these principals remained reliant on central office HR teams to lead recruitment efforts for their buildings.

Some LEAs expressed interest in the state helping districts to establish a local “grow your own” program.

Conversations with district leaders suggested that there is significant variation with regard to how and if data on educator vacancies is tracked, and that gathering this data would likely require a concerted data strategy for collection and reporting.

### **Residency Programs and Grow Your Own Programs**

Some individuals who were interviewed expressed concern about the state’s current implementation of residency programs and GYO programs. One area of concern was the lack of clarity about what constitutes a residency program. A [recent study](#)<sup>2</sup> of the early implementation of four new teacher residency programs in the state revealed that three of these four programs established a residency program by essentially extending the undergraduate unpaid student teaching experience from one semester to two while changing little else. This stood in opposition to the fourth program which launched a graduate program that placed residents in classrooms full time for a full year supported by a full salary and benefits. The study’s findings in this area suggest that the state should consider developing a clear-

---

1 Elementary education is an identified teacher shortage area in Pennsylvania.

2 Terziev, J., & Forde, J. (2021). Exploring early implementation of Pennsylvania’s Innovative Teacher and Principal Residency grants (REL 2022-130). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.



---

er definition of the key components of a residency program based on a theory of change about how these programs should be structured to drive the change being sought.

This study further found that the graduate teacher residency maintained close partnerships with their partner districts, whereas three of the four teacher residencies did not. Two of the undergraduate teacher residencies did not explicitly track where residents got job placements following completion of the program and were thus unable to produce job placement data for their graduates. Interviewees urged the state to implement uniform data collection expectations and protocols for residency programs.

Further concern was raised about the diversity of teacher residency programs. The evaluation study referenced above found that the undergraduate teacher residencies in the study enrolled only 9% people of color, compared to 38% at the graduate program. Interviewees posited that this stark difference may be due to the difference in location and recruiting methods by the sponsoring universities, with the undergraduate programs tending to be more rural and with less diverse student bodies and located in less diverse communities. The study found that these programs tended to recruit residency participants from their undergraduate student bodies which lack diversity. It would come as no surprise then that the residency programs similarly lacked diversity.

Other suggestions for improving residency programs that were offered by interviewees included forming communities of practice for residency program staff to learn from one another and share best practices and balancing the demands of coursework and in-classroom time for participating residents.

On the positive side, the evaluation study did find that participants in all the residency programs studied generally rated their experience highly and credited their residency with high-quality preparation for the profession.

### **Principal Residency Programs**

A concern regarding principal residencies centered around the logistical difficulty in releasing aspiring principals (who were primarily teachers with full rosters and assignments) from their assigned duties to serve in a full-time principal resident capacity. Often, these aspiring principals could not begin their assignment until a replacement teacher could

be found for them, which took a long time in many instances given the general teacher shortage.

This problem was exacerbated by a delayed funding cycle in which LEAs or IHEs were not notified of their award to participate in the program until very close to the start of the semester. This delayed award cycle complicated recruiting efforts. Interviewees urged the state to better align the funding cycle to match up with programmatic and recruitment timelines.

Like the teacher residencies, the evaluation study of principal residency programs did find that residents generally rated their experience highly and credited their principal residency with high-quality preparation for the profession.

### **Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Education**

Some state and local government officials who were interviewed suggested that the state is missing an opportunity to leverage the registered apprenticeship program to increase the effectiveness of and resources available to teacher residency programs. These officials noted that the structure of teacher residencies meets the primary criteria for qualification as a registered apprenticeship, and some suggested that IUs would be ideally situated to serve as sponsors for these programs, with interested LEAs partnering with IUs and IHEs on implementing the program. These officials also urged PDE to coordinate more with local workforce boards to get these registered apprenticeship programs developed and approved, and to ensure that education is on each local region's list of high priority occupations.

There was widespread interest among various groups interviewed in establishing GYO programs focused on paraprofessionals. Some interviewees suggested that the registered apprenticeship model would be a perfect fit for such a program, and that a framework to get a program up and running exists but needs a committed entity such as an IU to drive this forward. Some educator preparation program leaders noted that they have been actively pursuing a paraprofessionals-to-teachers program, but ran into a number of hurdles including difficulty transferring credits, difficulty establishing candidate eligibility based on prior coursework taken, program cost, and arranging program logistics to enable participants to be able to continue working while pursuing their degree—including attracting sufficient enrollment to be able to offer courses during evening and weekend hours. Some participants urged LEAs and PDE to use federal COVID relief dollars to support

---

GYO programs through financial support to paraeducators to get their certification. Some participants expressed interest in learning from the [model emerging from Tennessee](#) to develop an extensive GYO program supported within the registered apprenticeship framework.

***Additional Notes and Observations***

There was wide variation in the percentage of the teacher workforce that school districts anticipate

needing to replace on an annual basis going forward. Projections ranged from as high as 10% annually, to as low as 0.4% annually. Districts stated that their biggest needs for new educators are in the areas of special education and secondary math and science. While districts noted the critical nature of teacher shortages, they have an even bigger challenge in the current moment of finding sufficient support staff and perhaps the greatest challenge in finding substitute teachers.

## FOCUS AREA 2:

# Build a diverse workforce representative of the students we serve

PDE must make concerted efforts to ensure that students have access to an educator workforce that represents the incredible diversity and rich histories, traditions, and life experiences across the commonwealth. PDE must also take steps to ensure that early childhood centers, schools, and libraries are equipped to create the working conditions necessary to retain great educators of color. This focus area addresses the needs related to the following educator workforce lifecycle stages: identification, recruitment, preparation, and retention.

## ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

### **Recognition of the Importance of Workforce Diversity**

In support of PDE's goal to build a diverse workforce, there was widespread agreement among all interviewees that workforce diversity is a critically important goal for the state. They expressed belief in the importance of students seeing their backgrounds and cultures represented in the educator workforce and referenced research on students of color benefiting from having teachers of color. Educator preparation program leaders who participated in the interviews stated that their programs address culturally responsive and sustaining education competencies in their curriculum. Most stated that these competencies are integrated in all courses, while a few stated that they have specific courses designed

to specifically address these competencies. A few preparation program leaders described school-wide processes by which all faculty reviewed curriculum from a culturally responsive lens and made changes to better address those competencies explicitly in each course.

### **Professional Development Related To Culturally Relevant And Sustaining Education**

The majority of LEA leaders also spoke to efforts their district was making to provide more frequent and higher quality professional development related to culturally responsive and sustaining education and anti-bias training.

## CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Significant barriers to meeting PDE's workforce diversity goals at both the preparation program level and the school and district levels emerged from the interviews.

### **Perceived Lack of Interest of Candidates of Color to Pursue Education as a Career, Especially in Rural Areas**

Educator preparation program leaders at most IHEs described a high degree of difficulty in fielding diverse classes of students. This was most pronounced in rural areas in which the local population also lacks racial diversity. Some preparation program leaders attributed the lack of interest in their programs by students of color to a preference by aspiring educators of color to learn and work in more diverse environments. Others cited the history and reputation

of their college or university as being a "very white" school as a barrier to attracting students of color.

The lack of diversity in educator preparation programs is mirrored in schools and districts in the state. LEA leaders cited similar challenges in building a strong pipeline of diverse candidates. School and district administrators in rural areas also echoed the sentiment expressed by preparation program leaders that some candidates of color expressed interest in living and working in areas of the state with more local diversity than is currently present in many rural areas in Pennsylvania. District leaders acknowledged a need to work collaboratively with local parent and community groups to address this issue.<sup>3</sup>

Some leaders requested that the state convene focus groups or a similar research effort to better un-

3 From 2000 to 2018, rural Pennsylvania's population became more racially diverse. In 2000, there were about 168,114 residents, or 5 percent of the total population, who were non-white and/or Hispanic. In 2018, 311,606 rural residents, or 9 percent of the total population, were non-white and/or Hispanic. (U.S. Census Bureau). <https://www.rural.pa.gov/data/rural-quick-facts>

---

derstand why young people of color are not attracted to education.

### **Lack of Effective Recruitment Systems to Attract Educators of Color**

Several individuals interviewed described what they see as a lack of effective recruitment systems—at the state, LEA, and IHE levels—to attract educators of color. A key component of an effective system, some interviewees suggested, is the need to start the recruitment process and exposure to field experiences in educational settings very early, ideally in middle school and high school. To paraphrase one interviewee, “Districts are waiting to go to an education career fair and hope a candidate of color comes by so they can say ‘come to my district’, but they’re ignoring the talented high school students of color who have been sitting in their classrooms for multiple years...We need a farm system for teachers, and there isn’t one right now.” Another interviewee declared, “It has to be more than just opening the doors and saying, ‘please come teach here.’ People aren’t going to just come.”

Another interviewee noted that nearly all the Black male educators that they knew were never actively encouraged to become educators until after graduation from college, whereas most White female educators they knew had first been encouraged to become an educator in elementary or middle school.

To support this early start recruitment, participants suggested that the state, LEAs, and IHEs need to make education an option for an official career and technical education pathway, and as a dual credit option. Any dual credit option would need to be supported by a review of the articulation agreements between IHEs, which in many instances currently do not allow for the streamlined transfer of dual enrollment credits from one IHE to another. It was not clear from interviewee and PDE staff feedback that the current structure for articulation agreements that exists primarily among a set of about 30 public IHEs and only a few private IHEs is sufficient to address the core issues regarding credit transfers.

Another key component to an effective recruitment system outlined by participants is the need to charge an individual in the organization (LEA, library, early childhood center, IHE, PDE) with the professional responsibility to recruit a diverse student body or diverse workforce. It needs to be a clear and significant part of the job description. Currently, participants felt, there are very few instances in which someone’s job is tied to recruiting a representative

workforce or student body, and thus no one takes responsibility for it. Therefore, few organizations actually set goals around workforce diversity or pay specific attention to the retention of educators of color. These participants suggested that the responsibility for recruiting a diverse workforce needs to be shared by all parties in the IHE, library, early childhood center, and school system, and they placed specific emphasis on the school or organizational leadership team’s role in the recruitment process (as opposed to the principal, director, or district-level staffer working alone).

Interviewees also pointed to needs for support and diversification among two critical roles in the recruitment process: high school counselors and recruitment directors/HR managers. On the counselor side, interviewees noted that many of the counselors in their experience either don’t or don’t know how to advise students of color to enter the education profession. On the recruitment director/HR manager side, interviewees expressed concern that the people in these roles tend to be overwhelmingly White, and that this lack of representation leads to widespread lack of understanding about the experiences of educators of color and what it takes to effectively recruit them, along with a lack of focused attention on recruiting a diverse workforce.

Some nonprofit leaders interviewed had either expressed interest in or had actively started working on developing an education-focused CTE and dual enrollment pathway with local high schools and IHEs. They noted that these nascent efforts were being undertaken without any formal commitment on the part of local school districts or early childhood centers and without systemic funding, technical support, or human resources to support the efforts.

Some interviewees decried the lack of a coordinated, statewide campaign for educator diversity as a deterrent to recruiting a more robust educator workforce. One interviewee stated “There’s not a campaign to say that this is a priority for the city, for the region, or for the state. We need a moonshot declaration to galvanize people. We need PSAs and champions for this.” Some participants described the fact that there is not a state website for aspiring educators to go and find out what the clear path is to become an educator.

Some interviewees urged the state to adopt a program analogous to the [“Pittsburgh Promise”](#) to spur educator workforce diversity. Such a program could take the form of a state commitment to fully fund a candidate’s college experience if they obtained a

certain GPA and committed to work in education for a specified number of years. They suggested combining this program with other incentives, such as tax abatements and housing vouchers, to create a strong financial incentive for diverse young people to pursue education careers.

Some interviewees also suggested that educational entities should place new educators of color in cohorts in schools or sites, as opposed to spreading them out over multiple schools or sites. This would allow for the building of supportive networks and greater collaboration on common experiences and challenges.

Some interviewees referenced a recent [Research for Action](#) report on Pennsylvania’s educator workforce diversity challenges, and urged the state to review and implement its findings.

In summary, participants listed the items below as effective strategies to recruit a more diverse workforce:

1. Begin the recruitment process early with opportunities for clinical experience in high school
2. Create an official educator preparation career and technical education (CTE) and dual enrollment pathway in high school
3. Set clear goals and establish organizational responsibility for recruiting a diverse student body or workforce, supported with a transparent approach to data and technical supports for LEAs, libraries, early childhood centers, and IHEs
4. Place candidates of color in cohorts—as opposed to spreading them out across sites—where they can have peers going through the same experience to work with and learn from
5. Launch a coordinated campaign at the state and local levels to establish the importance of a diverse educator workforce and to attract diverse candidates into the profession
6. Provide financial support to the candidate both during college (grants, scholarships, loan repayment assistance, etc.) and through retention bonuses early in the candidates’ career
7. Establish partnerships with organizations that

are currently doing effective work to recruit, train, or support educators of color

### **Policy Deterrents to Educator Preparation Programs**

There was widespread agreement among interviewees that GPA requirements and the basic skills assessment serve as barriers to entry into preparation programs that disproportionately impact students of color and students from rural backgrounds. Neither preparation program leaders nor school or district leaders felt that GPAs or the basic skills assessment are accurate or necessary barometers of an individual’s potential to be a good educator. Some leaders suggested that PDE replace the basic skills assessment with a performance task modeled off a modified Danielson performance assessment currently in use in some IHEs. Many preparation program leaders expressed appreciation for the ability to offer some flexibility regarding the GPA requirement, but the vast majority requested that requirement be eliminated.

Some nonprofit leaders who were interviewed suggest that legislation is needed<sup>4</sup> to create a grant program for IHEs to develop workforce diversity programs, to make permanent a waiver of the basic skills assessment, to establish a chief DEI officer at PDE,<sup>5</sup> and to promote data transparency policies.

### **Educator Preparation Program Recruitment**

While a few educator preparation programs have established formal definitions of diversity, most programs have not done so. Nearly all program leaders spoke to a general desire to increase the diversity of their incoming classes, but few had identified concrete plans for doing so or identified human or financial resources that would be specifically targeted to increasing the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and language diversity of entering classes. Where formal goals for increasing diversity did exist, they tended to take the form of an institution wanting to increase diversity by a certain amount of percentage points annually over an established baseline.

Some IHE representatives interviewed noted that their institutions—even though well-intentioned in their diversity recruitment and student support efforts—are having difficulty retaining students of color. These individuals cited a lack of culturally

4 Senate Bill 99 of 2021-22 includes several such suggestions, <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billinfo/billinfo.cfm?year=2021&kind=O&body=S&type=B&bn=0099>.

5 PDE currently has a Chief DEI position, but this position is not established in statute.

---

responsive curricula and pedagogy, a lack of diversity among faculty, a sense of isolation among students of color in some programs, the financial cost of student preparation, the basic skills assessment, and a lack of earning potential for educators (especially those needing to support their families or pay down debt) as primary reasons why students of color either leave or never enter educator preparation programs.

### **Data and Metrics**

Some interviewees noted that PDE does not publicly report on workforce diversity data and urged the state to collect and report on this data regularly.

### **Additional Notes and Observations**

Some school districts mentioned the fact that the state's current certification requirements related to certification reciprocity hampered local efforts to recruit from out-of-state Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). As a result, a potentially rich pool of Black educators could not be effectively tapped into by Pennsylvania school districts and charter schools.



## FOCUS AREA 3:

# Operate a rigorous, streamlined, and customer-service oriented certification process

PDE must systematically identify and remove barriers in the certification process that are not clearly correlated with educators' future success. PDE must also review internal processes and systems to ensure an efficient and customer-service oriented experience for certification applicants, as well as to ensure that the system is delivering on the workforce needs of LEAs, early childhood centers, and libraries. This focus area will most directly address needs related to the following educator workforce lifecycle stage: certification and retention.

## ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

### **Certification Processes**

Some interviewees expressed satisfaction with the online portal that powers the certification system and with the responsiveness of PDE certification

staff to helping resolve issues as they arise. Participants noted that the process to move from a Level I Certification to a Level II Certification is fairly straightforward and easy to navigate.

## CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

### **Emergency Certification**

Some LEAs cited a difficulty finding emergency certification programs that are financially reasonable. Many candidates are turned off by having to make the financial commitment to the certification coursework when taking on an emergency role. Interviewees also sought flexibility in the coursework requirements for mid-year hires. Given that mid-year hires may begin an assignment in an off-cycle time period relative to the academic calendars of IHEs and given that mid-year hires are often needed to fill an immediate and critical vacancy, the participants that flagged this issue were interested in obtaining expedited flexibilities for mid-year hires to take on their roles more quickly and to delay having to commit to some coursework requirements until a later date.

### **Certification Administrative Processes**

Participants expressed divergent views of existing certification systems and responsiveness. As mentioned above, some interviewees expressed satisfaction with the online portal that powers the certification system and with the responsiveness of PDE certification staff to helping resolve issues as they arise. Other participants expressed strong dissatisfaction with the system and recounted their inability to get PDE staff to respond to their certification needs in a timely manner.

A few participants suggested that the current website for certification, the Teacher Information Management System (TIMS), is not intuitive and hard to navigate.<sup>6</sup> Some complaints were shared regarding the difficulty in remembering the login to the site. A few district leaders declared that "things get stuck in TIMS all the time," particularly the processing of transcripts.

One suggested improvement made by interviewees was to enable participants to change their responses to the Good Moral Character (GMC) questions if they make a simple data entry error. Currently, participants say that the system flags individuals for an audit if they answer a GMC question a certain way, and this audit significantly lengthens the certification process. While participants seemed to agree that a longer process is likely warranted for those with serious red flags about their GMC, they noted that far too often, an individual accidentally clicked the wrong button but has no way to fix their answer later. In those cases, interviewees noted that the state should allow for an individual to make corrections during the process so as not to bottleneck their application.

In rare instances, participants cited frustration with the flow of payments for long-term certifications. According to the interviewees, the payments for long-term certifications must first go through the district account before going to the state. This

<sup>6</sup> As noted in [Pennsylvania's ARP ESSER State Plan](#), PDE made plans to and is in the process of identifying upgrades for both the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) and the Teacher Information Management System (TIMS) to better anticipate educator staffing needs at LEAs across Pennsylvania.

---

payment flow adds what is in their view an unhelpful and illogical extra step to the process, potentially contributing to even longer wait times for educators to be able to assume their assigned duties.

### **Certification Reciprocity**

There was widespread agreement among interviewees that more needs to be done to encourage certification reciprocity with other states. Participants generally noted the difficulty in getting out-of-state certified educators certified in Pennsylvania as a recurring and unhelpful barrier to recruitment.

Additionally, some participants specifically noted that music and social studies were the most difficult subjects with respect to educator reciprocity.

### **Certification Requirements**

Some participants expressed that the state lacks a process to efficiently facilitate the certification and placement of career-switchers. From their perspective, career-switchers must complete all of the same student teaching and education coursework requirements as individuals coming straight from preparation programs, often requiring the career-switching aspiring educator to take an extended time without pay. Such an extended time without pay represents a huge barrier to entry for people at that stage of their career and life. It was suggested that PDE create and/or advocate for the policy changes necessary to create a pathway for career-switchers to get into classrooms as the teacher of record without requiring the extended time off without pay and the same burden of coursework. It was not immediately clear from the feedback the reasoning or the extent to which these educators felt that the existing alternative pathways, such as the intern certificate, could not meet the needs of these individuals.

As noted in the previous section, the requirement that aspiring educators pass the basic skills assessment and maintain a 3.0 GPA to formally enter an educator preparation program was cited by almost all participants as presenting unnecessary and unhelpful barriers to entry into the profession.

Also as noted in the previous section, the volume of education coursework requirements presents a deterrent for some candidates to enter into a formal preparation program. Individuals that do not commit to education early in their postsecondary journey may struggle to complete all the required courses before their scheduled graduation dates.

In rare instances, educator preparation program leaders alluded to unwritten policies that prevent candidates from spending more than half of their student teaching time outside of Pennsylvania. In the view of these participants, such restrictions are antiquated, and teachers should have the ability to complete their student teaching in another state or another country if desired.

### **Emergency Permits**

Some district leaders found that emergency permits for substitutes are very difficult to obtain. These leaders noted that a significant number of applicants for emergency permits had committed what were in their opinions inconsequential violations of the department's standards for GMC. As a result, when these individuals applied for a certification, they often had to wait for weeks or months for their background check to be processed.

### **Additional Notes and Observations**

A few participants noted that an alert system for educators regarding their certification status and upcoming deadlines would be helpful. Some other participants did not feel that this would be helpful because educators were not focused on their certification status at the current point in time.

A few participants also noted that educators are having difficulty completing their Act 48 requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that educators were granted an additional year to complete these requirements due to the pandemic.

## FOCUS AREA 4:

# Ensure high quality preparation experiences for aspiring educators

PDE must work in partnership with educator preparation programs, early childhood providers, LEAs, intermediate units, and libraries to ensure that educator candidates experience an effective preparation program that provides substantial in-classroom training, that is aligned to the needs of early childhood providers, libraries, and schools in the communities served by the preparation programs, and that prepares educators to successfully work with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This focus area will most directly address needs related to the following educator workforce lifecycle stage: preparation.

## ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

### **Key Programmatic Elements**

Many educator preparation program leaders interviewed cited the strength of their field experience for student candidates as a key programmatic component of their program. These leaders often noted going well above and beyond minimum state requirements for student teaching when designing their field experiences. Other key programmatic elements cited by leaders as being hallmarks of their preparation programs included a mission-driven nature of their institution, an intimate, family-like atmosphere replete with student supports, and specialized programs focused on particular academic disciplines such as arts education.

### **Desire for Collaboration Between Districts and Educator Preparation Programs**

School and district administrators expressed a strong desire to form collaborative two-way partnerships with the educator preparation programs in their area. These administrators stated that they very much desired a tight alignment between the needs of their schools and districts and the subject matter taught at the preparation program.

Similarly, most educator preparation programs were able to describe collaborative programs that they currently have in place to work with local school districts and charter schools. The vast majority of preparation programs stated that they get regular feedback from their district and charter partners. The nature of the feedback varied, with the majority of IHEs describing a somewhat informal, ongoing dialogue with their local districts, and a minority of IHEs describing more formal systems for feedback, such as biannual surveys of supervising teachers and school administrators. In rare cases, participating IHEs had formed a formal advisory board consisting of local school and district administrators to provide feedback on their programming.

### **Metrics and Data Collection**

Most educator preparation program leaders mentioned that they currently track some combination of the following data points to assess the effectiveness of their program: pass rates on certification exams, feedback from supervising teachers, feedback from school and district administrators, feedback from students, graduation rates, percentage of students who persist in the program, on-time completion rates, job placement rates, and rates of success in obtaining a certification.

## CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Significant challenges to PDE's goals in this focus area emerged throughout the interviews.

### **A Need for Stronger Partnerships Between Districts, Schools and Educator Preparation Programs**

There remains a significant disconnect between what school and district administrators see as their needs regarding educator preparation and the practices and outcomes at educator preparation programs. School and district administrators estimated

that only between 10-40% of new teachers coming from preparation programs are prepared to succeed even at a novice level upon entering the classroom. Some school and district administrators noted that they have to conduct extensive training or retraining of their recently graduated teachers in order to prepare them to be successful in their schools. Notable areas of training or retraining included early literacy instruction, social and emotional learning, classroom management, and culturally responsive instruction,

and pedagogy. Some district and school leaders alluded to what they perceive as an unwillingness on the part of IHE preparation leaders to adapt their programs and approaches to meet the realities and needs of their schools and students. Some medium- and larger-sized districts expressed a desire to have more student teachers placed in the district's more challenging schools to better prepare student teachers to teach and succeed in more challenging environments.

Conversely, some educator preparation program leaders stated disagreement with the notion that the struggles of a new teacher are appropriately attributed to the shortcomings of a teacher's preparation program. These participants identified a number of factors beyond the control of the preparation program—including school and district leadership challenges, suboptimal working conditions, a lack of resources, and a lack of an effective induction program—as reasons that even the most well-prepared new teacher may struggle as they enter the profession.

While the vast majority of educator preparation programs noted that there are channels for feedback from local schools and districts, many of the feedback channels described were informal and based on relationships between individuals, as opposed to being systematic. Most district leaders that were interviewed suggested that they do not have a formal forum to discuss the needs of the district and the connections or disconnections between educator preparation programs and local needs. Some school and district administrators expressed interest in a set of incubation hubs across the state for IHEs to work with LEAs to implement aligned best practices.

### **State Policy Updates**

Educator preparation program leaders expressed varying levels of awareness of the impending opening up of Chapter 354 for updates. Most program leaders had heard in passing that this was going to happen but didn't have much more information than that. Several program leaders suggested that it would be helpful for PDE to implement new communications protocols regarding both enacted and impending policy changes. Suggestions included a regular update on regulatory changes, a webinar or professional development course to review chang-

es, and a guidebook and checklist of action items that preparation programs would need to take as a result of any updates to state education policies (or federal policies).

Specific suggestions from interview participants regarding changes to chapter 354 included:

- Replacing the basic skills assessment with a competency-based assessment. Some program leaders nominated a PAC-TE developed modified Danielson performance framework that is currently in use by some IHEs as a preferred replacement of the basic skills assessment.
- Providing flexibility on the 48 credits needed for candidates to receive advanced professional standing for official entry into a teacher education pathway.
- Formal adoption of updated Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CR-SE) competencies.<sup>7</sup>

Educator preparation program leaders expressed varying levels of awareness about the recent updates to Chapter 49 regulations on educator certification and implications to their programs. Some were very aware of the changes and were actively considering and/or beginning to implement the necessary changes. Others were vaguely aware but hadn't yet given much thought to the implications for their programs. Many of the leaders who described a vague awareness suggested that until they directly received a communication from PDE about the chapter 49 updates and any necessary changes that were required along with any clarity needed on those changes, they would continue operating as normal.

### **Accountability, the Accreditation Process, and the Drivers (and Barriers) to Change and Innovation**

When asked about the nature of state-level accountability for educator preparation programs and about the primary drivers of program change, the majority of education preparation program leaders cited the state's major review process as the central factor, along with feedback from school and district partners. On rare occasions, student performance assessments and Praxis data were mentioned as drivers of program change and improvement.

---

<sup>7</sup> Finalization of these and other competencies are required under the **Chapter 49: Certification of Professional Personnel** regulations that became effective on April 23, 2022.

---

In a few instances, educator preparation program leaders described what they felt were recent improvements to the major review process. These leaders noted that the process had previously been an exercise in number counting, but was now more outcomes oriented, with deeper inspection of how well recent graduates are performing in their placements and closer observation of IHE faculty and programs.

However, most educator preparation program leaders disagreed with this impression. The majority of preparation program leaders described the major review as a burdensome and superficial exercise that lacks substantive meaning and that contains no feedback from PDE. Programs lacked clarity on what this information is being used for, stating that they never know if they're doing something wrong. Program leaders further described the major review as being easy for institutions to say they are meeting various competencies when in fact they are not, with no follow up. They described the process as pro-forma—if you get something wrong, just go back and fix it until you pass. The majority of preparation program leaders felt that the major review process is not a driver of improvement in any meaningful way, but that it does occupy an inordinate number of hours for faculty and administrators to complete.

Many urged the state to rethink this process in a way that would make the review more meaningful and to give the state a more accurate window into what is and is not actually occurring relative to what programs have put on paper. Some suggested that the lack of site visits (which used to be a part of the process) has diminished the quality of the review. Some urged that the PDE take a more qualitative approach to major review, suggesting the department interview students, interview teacher supervisors, interview faculty, observe classes, observe student teachers and newly certified teachers in the field. Some suggested that the field experience needs to be a higher priority of the review.

Some noted frustration with the fact that the state asks programs for data that the state already has.<sup>8</sup> Some suggested additional data elements that the state needs to track, including student race and ethnicity, the schools and districts at which aspiring educators are doing their student teaching and under whose supervision). Some preparation

program leaders suggested that more substantive interim check-ins between the major reviews would be appropriate. As noted above, a few preparation program leaders disagreed with the notion of more interim check-ins and felt that the major review process has in fact improved, that it helps programs know what data to collect and organize around, and that it is more outcomes-focused than in the past.

Many preparation program leaders referenced a long timeline for any substantive programmatic adjustment to be implemented. For example, several preparation program leaders listed a 16-24 month lag time between the approval of a major curriculum change and the implementation of that change with students. They urged PDE to shape policy updates and deadlines with this important timeline consideration in mind.

In rare cases, education preparation program leaders described barriers to innovation and program change resulting from university system policies. One example was provided by an IHE that wished to launch a master's in teaching program but was denied permission to launch the program based on the university's desire to consolidate programs and offer joint programs as opposed to starting a new program. The preparation program leader described the inability to launch the master's program as a barrier to attracting more aspiring educators into a preparation program.

### **Early Literacy**

Educator preparation program leaders described a range of approaches to early literacy instructional methods. In many cases, the interviewee was not the resident expert on early literacy and could not describe in detail the program's approach to teaching it. For those that were able to provide an overview of their approach, there was no clear consensus on the most effective approach. Some programs expressed a clear commitment to structured literacy and the science of reading. Some programs described a balanced literacy approach, drawing from a broad array of theoretical perspectives. Some program leaders acknowledged that there is ongoing controversy over early literacy instructional methods among the faculty, and that wading into this controversy and asking the department to

---

8 The final form amendments to the **Chapter 49: Certification of Professional Personnel** regulations enable PDE to annually collect data from educator preparation programs on students admitted, retained, and graduated from their programs, including numbers from historically underrepresented groups.



---

commit to an approach would create problems with existing faculty.

### **Metrics and Data Collection**

As noted above, most educator preparation programs currently collect some combination of the following metrics to gauge their program's success: pass rates on certification exams, feedback from supervising teachers, feedback from school and district administrators, feedback from students, graduation rates, percentage of students who persist in the program, on-time completion rates, job placement rates, and rates of success in obtaining a certification. In a few instances, educator preparation program leaders expressed skepticism in the value of this numeric data as barometers of the quality of their programs. These leaders suggested that more qualitative data that could be obtained through classroom observations, interviews of students, and interviews of supervising teachers and administrators as providing more fruitful information on which to judge the quality and success of preparation programs.

A minority of programs noted that they send out annual or bi-annual surveys to students, supervising teachers, and school administrators to gather feedback on the extent to which the preparation program effectively prepared the student to be an effective educator. In rare instances, metrics such as educator tenure rates, aspiring educator scores on performance assessments, the number of students admitted into a preparation program, and the number of program graduates retained by their chosen school or district over a given time were cited as tracked metrics of program success. A small number of IHEs with high out-of-state student populations suggested that they would like for PDE to track job placement for out-of-state candidates in a manner similar to job placement for in-state candidates. They said that the absence of this data distorts the programs' success in ensuring that their graduates are successful in obtaining employment.

A few prep program leaders cited a desire to get access to their recently graduated educators' student performance data through the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS).

Interviewees suggested that the specific data points collected by any given institution vary, and the methods by which the data are captured also vary from one institution to the next. For many of these data points, there does not appear to be a clear and accessible state system for capturing or reporting on this data across the state.

Additionally, PDE does not appear to have issued guidelines regarding what it considers to be important metrics of success for educator preparation programs, nor has the department made clear what data it considers or how it uses that data to inform policies for and oversight of educator preparation programs.

At the school and district level, most of the leaders interviewed stated that they had the ability to determine how many educators in their systems came from the various preparation programs, but they did not have systems for collecting information on or analyzing the extent to which the graduates of various preparation programs were systematically proving to be more or less effective in the classroom.

For recruitment purposes, some school and district leaders stated that they would like access to a portal that displayed the number of enrollees at the state's preparation programs at any given time. Some also suggested that a central location to post job openings directly to aspiring educators enrolled in PA preparation programs would aid their recruitment efforts.

### **Additional Notes and Observations**

Some preparation program leaders expressed concern over their perception that the state is moving toward a system that consolidates certain educator preparation program specialties into only one or two institutions in the state. These leaders cautioned that teacher education is primarily a local enterprise, and that the state would be well-served to offer the full breadth of programming in accessible localities across the state as opposed to trying to consolidate programs.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Consolidation of programs rests within an institution's authority, not PDE's.



## FOCUS AREA 5:

# Ensure educator access to high-quality and relevant professional growth and leadership development opportunities

PDE must work in partnership with educator preparation programs, early childhood providers, LEAs, intermediate units, and libraries to ensure that educator candidates experience an effective preparation program that provides substantial in-classroom training, that is aligned to the needs of early childhood providers, libraries, and schools in the communities served by the preparation programs, and that prepares educators to successfully work with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This focus area will most directly address needs related to the following educator workforce lifecycle stage: preparation.

## ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

### ***Professional Development in Schools and Districts***

Some LEAs, particularly in medium- to large- settings, reported that they have a very centralized PD structure that allows for a significant breadth of professional development offerings.

### ***Educator Retention***

Some LEAs described how they use student achievement data, student social-emotional learning data, and walkthrough data to identify their most effective teachers.

### ***Metrics and Data Collection***

Some leaders of IUs reported that they are well-equipped to help expand the educator workforce data collection system. They referenced the fact that they meet with HR directors around the state regularly and would be interested in collaboration with PDE on addressing data collection and reporting needs.

### ***PDE Communications and Relationships with Educators***

Some teachers interviewed expressed an appreciation of the fact that for the last six years, PDE has been good about trying to relieve PD mandates.

Some teachers complimented former Secretaries Pedro Rivera and Noe Ortega for their efforts to connect directly with educators around the state. These teachers cited Secretary Rivera's bus tours as building enormous amounts of goodwill toward PDE and helped satisfy teachers' ongoing need to be seen and heard by policymakers. Some also noted that Secretary Ortega's "warm and fuzzy demeanor" make him seem approachable and genuine.

### ***Educator Mentorship and Induction Programs***

Many school and district leaders were able to point to mentorship and induction efforts in their schools and systems that pair new educators with veteran mentors to support and guide them in their first year, and sometimes beyond the first year.

---

## CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Significant challenges to PDE's goal of ensuring educator access to high-quality and relevant professional growth and leadership development opportunities emerged throughout the interviews.

### ***Educator Well-Being and the Effects of the Pandemic***

Teachers interviewed expressed general agreement that teacher well-being is at the lowest point that teachers have witnessed in their careers. Exacerbated greatly by the pandemic, teachers noted that they are being expected to make sure that their students are well when they are not well themselves. Participating teachers stressed the importance of time to speak with each other, network, and support one another. While time has never been sufficient to fully allow for this, the pandemic-induced shortage of substitutes and support staff and the resulting increase in the number of times teachers are then assigned to cover other classrooms has rendered such time non-existent. Teachers stated that they simply don't have the bandwidth or energy to take on this collaboration outside of school hours.

Relatedly, teachers cited a perceived lack of consistency and transparency over COVID-19 policies, a constantly shifting set of operating circumstances, the decline of community civility, and the rise of politicization in education as forces rapidly driving educators out of the profession. The loss of educators may be made even more dire when combined with the fact that employers in other sectors have moved more nimbly to attract new workers through wage increase and other perks. According to some interviewees, they estimate that 30% of educators that they have spoken to or polled have indicated that they have considered leaving the profession this year—a figure far higher than similar responses from previous years. These respondents also suggested that focusing extra attention on early career teachers and those approaching retirement age—the two points in the pipeline where they see the biggest attrition—could yield immense dividends.

Some respondents cited a sharp increase in the mental health needs for educators currently. In one instance, an interviewee who had worked to connect educators with telehealth services noted that their organization had so many educators accessing the

telehealth benefit that the provider couldn't keep up with demand. These respondents urged PDE and LEAs to make available counseling services, telehealth services, and to create forums for people to get together and share their experiences.

Other factors cited by interviewees as having a detrimental impact on educator retention include class sizes, a decline in educator autonomy, standardized testing and its negative impact on student/teacher relationship building, and less support from administrators.

### ***Educator Compensation***

Some participants interviewed pointed to educator compensation packages as being a key barrier to retaining great educators. These participants noted that Pennsylvania funding for education generally is not where it needs to be in terms of adequacy or equity.<sup>10</sup>

Some interviewees suggested that compensation, along with working conditions, are the two primary levers that PDE and LEAs need to pull to have any hope of stemming the tide of educators leaving the profession. To paraphrase one respondent, "The market is dictating what is happening in schools. The challenges aren't going away anytime soon. So you either need to lessen the demands of the profession, increase compensation, or some combination. Otherwise, you won't solve the problem. Compensation plus working conditions are the only way to step off this treadmill."

### ***Professional Development Systems in Schools and Districts***

Although many school and district leaders could point to a significant amount of professional development opportunities in their settings, most still agreed that there was not as much breadth or depth to their PD offerings as they would like. Some school and district leaders also suggested that local professional development offerings could be disconnected from individual school and educator needs. These LEAs saw the need to better position principals to lead effective professional development aligned to their school plan. Many districts stated that it is difficult to find time to provide profes-

---

<sup>10</sup> Teacher compensation is part of Governor Wolf's proposed budget for 2022-23. The proposal is to increase the minimum salary to \$45,000 per year to align with competitive salaries and attract highest quality talent to educate Pennsylvania's children.

---

sional development given the numerous competing demands for non-instructional time, including state-mandated trainings.

Most teachers interviewed largely agreed with the challenges noted by school and district leaders. Some described the PD they currently participate in as triage—a disjointed and reactionary series of events designed to respond to the crises of the moment but that do not help educators get better at or feel good about their jobs. The teachers also pointed to state-mandated trainings that they feel do little or nothing to make them better educators, including trainings on how to administer standardized tests and training on mandated reporting. The teachers acknowledged that both of these were important subjects, but that they could be covered through shorter and more effective methods, and that they were not of sufficient importance to take up 20-25% of available PD time as they currently do in some districts and schools.

### **Educator Collaboration and Social Networks**

Many teachers reported feeling more isolated in their jobs than ever before. These educators spoke to a strongly-felt need for time to work with their colleagues as a team to support the needs of the students they collectively serve. They cited a need to be intentional about building a supportive professional community for teachers and to intentionally bring new teachers into that professional community.

Some teachers expressed a need for schools, districts, and state policies to adjust the way in which schools operate to foster protected teacher collaboration time. One case study of the Sanger Unified School District near Fresno, CA was cited as a model for how a district created protected time for weekly teacher-led professional learning communities.<sup>11</sup>

### **Retention Efforts in Schools and Districts**

Most school and district leaders noted that they do not have systematic retention efforts in place apart from the ongoing work of trying to ensure competitive pay and to create good working conditions generally. Some school and district leaders did note that they have plans to train principals on effective retention strategies in the future. Some teachers

and nonprofit leaders interviewed suggested that PDE and LEAs need to ensure that each school has in place a fully effective and implemented teacher retention plan. For schools and LEAs losing educators of color at higher rates, these plans would need to be differentiated and should include training for supervisors and leadership teams on effective retention strategies for educators of color.

Most school and district leaders also stated that they did not have a systematic method for identifying their most effective teachers.

Some of the teachers interviewed described retention efforts less as a strategic effort by their employer to keep them, and more as a crossing of a threshold in which the individual has been in the school or district so long that they no longer worried about getting fired. To paraphrase one interviewee, they declared “I’ve been here long enough and have been visible enough in the community that I’m not worried that I’ll lose my job if I speak up. I’m not sure my younger colleagues have that same luxury.”

Teachers interviewed stressed the importance of schools, districts, and PDE taking the time to talk directly with the people who are leaving the profession after three years and understand why they are leaving and what supports would have kept them in the classroom. Some teachers suggested that PDE had done studies in this area in the past, but are not sure what, if anything, has been done with the results.<sup>12</sup>

### **New Educator Onboarding Systems in Schools and Districts**

Many of the school and district leaders interviewed noted that they have limited capacity and systems for onboarding new educators. In some of those cases, the leaders noted that their principals often don’t fully embrace or plan for the role of onboarding. They also noted that as a school system, the responsibility and accountability for onboarding have not been clearly defined, supported, and reinforced.

Some LEAs suggested that they must do a significant amount of retraining of their teachers—particularly on the science of reading, culturally responsive instructional practices, and positive behavior

---

11 Talbert, J. E., & David, J. L. (2019). Sanger Unified School District: Positive outliers case study. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/positive-outliers-case-studies>.

12 PDE has engaged partners regarding equitable access to educators but is not aware of an official PDE study of the reasons why educators are leaving the profession

---

supports—after they have completed their preparation programs.

Some of the teachers interviewed discussed the importance of being intentional when bringing new teachers into the community of professionals at their school, and noted that oftentimes neither the community of teachers nor their school or district provide sufficient onboarding support.

### ***PDE Communications and Relationships with Educators***

Some of the teachers interviewed described a disconnect between the work of PDE and frontline educators in the field, and that there seemed to be few if any direct lines of communication between PDE and frontline staff. One example given was a recent survey commissioned by a professional organization of teachers in which less than 5% of responding teachers said that they were aware that PDE had launched an equitable practices hub on the PDE website. While the organizations and nonprofits that represent various teacher groups are often invited to inform policy, participants felt that few if any forums exist for other educators to speak directly with the department.

Some participating teachers noted that superintendents and principals, in their view, serve as gatekeepers of information, and as a result, frontline educators may not get the information directly from the department. These teachers urged PDE to proactively hear from the workforce more often by reaching out to educators directly.

Some of the teachers also cited the need for more resources at PDE. Of particular interest were the curriculum departments, whom these teachers described as the PDE staff members with the closest relationship to educators in the field. They noted that PDE had fewer resources than Delaware's state education agency despite serving significantly more students across a larger geographic area.

Some teachers also described the demoralizing effect that shifts in policies from one administration to the next have on the teaching force.

### ***Educator Career Ladders and Leadership Pathways***

Some of the school and district leaders interviewed discussed the necessity of having clear growth pathways for educators as a tool to both attract and retain new entrants into the profession. Some

participants described the bench of future leaders as being dangerously thin, with many educators loath to step into leadership positions or pathways.

Interviewees generally acknowledged that the challenge of identifying, training, and hiring future leaders has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Principal internship programs that have a tight alignment between the school district and educator preparation program were cited by participants as a critically needed lever to develop a new cadre of school leaders.

### ***Lack of Treatment as a Valued Professional***

Some teachers who were interviewed expressed frustration with what they view as a lack of respect for teachers as professionals. These interviewees expressed frustration with what they experienced as a lack of belief from administrators in the ability or willingness of teachers to design and deliver high-quality instructional experiences. One example cited was what they described as a resurgent movement to force teachers into using scripted curricula.

A few of the teachers expressed distrust of the intentions of their schools' and districts' requirements to place all their lessons in the local learning management system, fearing that this requirement was made to facilitate the easy replacement of teachers with new teachers that would then have access to their predecessors' lesson plans and materials.

### ***Educator Mentorship and Induction Programs***

Although most school and district leaders interviewed stated that they did have a mentorship or induction program, many also expressed a need to expand and deepen these programs. Some called for PDE to implement a robust coaching model for all districts, as well as to provide additional resources to implement the model.

Some nonprofit leaders who were interviewed expressed agreement with the assessment that LEAs are not doing enough with mentorship efforts and urged the state to consider a comprehensive mentoring and induction support overhaul.

### ***Metrics and Data Collection***

The school system leaders described a variety of methods by which they define and track vacancies, with some noting that they do not have clearly established definitions or data systems to report on vacancies across different educator roles. They

---

noted that it will take significant effort on the part of PDE to establish data systems to track vacancies using a standard definition and methodology across the state.

Interviewees noted a similar lack of standardization and data collection systems when it comes to tracking educator professional development.

***Additional Notes and Observations***

A few interviewees spoke to the need of a focused legislative strategy to address glaring needs in educator workforce policies. They suggested that

PDE work collaboratively with major institutions, associations, and consortia to develop a unified set of messages.

Some school leaders discussed a focus on advocating for changes to Act 93 of 1984 (compensation plan for school administrators) due to feedback that they have received from educators who are reluctant to become principals. They described a prevailing sentiment among many teachers of “why become a principal when I would make less money,” which they attribute to provisions within Act 93.