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Pennsylvania is experiencing a dire and worsening teacher shortage, whose roots go back long before the pandemic. The supply of teachers has plummeted by two-thirds over the past decade, and a wide range of data points indicate that educator shortages and vacancies are at record-high levels, with low-income, urban, and rural schools impacted the most, and particularly acute shortages in certain subject areas and among teachers of color. According to the College Board, the percentage of seniors interested in majoring in education has decreased more than any other profession. To understand the reasons for these declines, we have to understand the reality Pennsylvania teachers face today. Consider the experiences of Brielle - a composite of many real Pennsylvania teachers whose experience, data and research tell us, is typical.

Brielle decides to become a teacher in college. She comes from a long line of teachers in her family, enjoyed school herself, and benefited from having many teachers who shared her experience. Many of her peers questioned why she would enter teaching, telling her, “You could make so much more money as a nurse or accountant,” but she goes forward with her plan.

Brielle has to take out over \$50,000 in student loans to attend a PASSHE school, where she majors in elementary education. Her mother, who was also a teacher and attended a PASSHE school 30 years earlier, describes how she’d been able to work her way through college with part-time jobs and graduate with no debt. But for Brielle, that path is no longer an option, given how steeply college costs have risen in recent years.

In Brielle’s teacher preparation program, she has the opportunity to student teach and meets all the requirements to become certified. However, she notices that the courses she takes seem piecemeal and disjointed, not like they are building toward something purposeful. She struggled in math as a student herself, and by graduation, she still doesn’t feel prepared to teach it to others.

Brielle’s student teaching experience is challenging. Even though she is placed in an affluent school near her college campus, she has to quit a part-time job she really needed in order to make the schedule work, making it harder to pay for tuition and rent. Many of her college classmates have paid internships, but Brielle has to pay tuition and give up her other job to student teach, which doesn’t seem fair. The twelve weeks fly by: Brielle’s student teaching starts in late September, over a month after the K-12 school year started, and she feels like she’s missed key parts of the year. At the end of the twelve weeks, she still isn’t confident in her classroom management or her ability to lead a class independently. Her mentor teacher isn’t very engaged and isn’t one of the stronger teachers in the grade; Brielle wishes she’d been placed with the stronger teacher in the classroom next door.

After graduation, Brielle easily finds a job teaching fourth grade in an under resourced rural district near where she grew up. It’s only when she compares notes with classmates who went through her education program with her that she realizes that her starting salary is significantly lower than what many of her peers are making in wealthier districts, while her class sizes are larger, her school building older, and her instructional resources fewer.

During her first year of teaching fourth grade, Brielle realizes just how unprepared she is to lead her own classroom. She struggles to teach grade-level content to mastery, especially math; the curriculum is different from where she student taught, and there are certain standards and topics she never covered in her program. She notices that her students are falling further behind and becoming more and more disengaged, which is making it challenging to manage student behavior. Brielle assumed she'd have time every day to collaborate with her colleagues and get their advice on how to best teach the curriculum and help students who are struggling. But she is lucky if she gets the allotted 45 minutes per week of common planning time; many of her daily prep periods are spent covering classes as a result of the increasing number of vacancies at her school. Her assigned mentor teacher doesn't check in on her regularly, and her principal is unsupportive and disengaged, making decisions without teacher input and frequently failing to consider the consequences of those decisions for students and teachers. Brielle's college classmates who went into computer science, sales, and engineering are quickly rising in the ranks at their jobs and getting promotions for their performance, but in her district, her only path to more pay is building up seniority or paying for more graduate credits. She sees some of the most effective young teachers in her building leaving, frustrated about the lack of opportunities to step into teacher leader roles that are reserved for the veteran teachers.

Meanwhile, every time Brielle's student loan bill comes in the mail, she is overcome by anxiety; the monthly payment consumes a big chunk of her paycheck, and after paying rent and other basic costs, she's not able to save up for a house or plan for a family like she'd like to. She turns on the news and sees politicians accusing her and her colleagues of indoctrinating and grooming students, and she looks on TikTok and sees memes about how terrible teaching is. When her students ask her why she became a teacher, she tells them she doesn't know and tells them not to make the same mistake. She isn't sure she'll make it to the end of this school year, much less stay in teaching for the rest of her career.

Brielle's experience illustrates many of the systemic and interconnected root causes of teacher shortages, which are discussed in detail in the recent report from Teach Plus and NCEE, [*#PANeedsTeachers: Addressing Pennsylvania's Teacher Shortage Crisis Through Systemic Solutions*](#).

First, the financial value proposition for becoming a teacher in Pennsylvania continues to worsen as the cost of college and other expenses to enter the profession rise and teacher compensation remains low. Over the past 30 years, the cost of public in-state college has more than tripled from \$8,000 per year to over \$26,000. Meanwhile, inflation-adjusted average weekly wages of teachers have been relatively flat since 1996, while weekly wages of other college graduates rose 28% over the same period, leading to a wage penalty of 15.2% for Pennsylvania teachers. The cost-benefit equation doesn't make sense for many prospective teachers, particularly those from low-income backgrounds or those considering working in underfunded schools, where salaries are lower.

Second, interest in teaching and the status of the profession continue to decline, particularly among younger generations, making recruitment into the profession more and more difficult. National surveys have shown all-time lows for interest in teaching among high school seniors in recent years, and only 37% of parents want their children to become a teacher, down from 65%. Surveys of members of the Gen X, Millennial, and Gen Z generations suggest that those who make up the bulk of potential teachers in the workforce are looking for working conditions that the current teaching profession doesn't typically provide, including opportunities for advancement based on competence, a team environment with shared responsibility for success, and work-life balance. Even teachers themselves are discouraging students from entering the profession, with over half saying they wouldn't advise their younger self to become a teacher.

Third, in Pennsylvania, preparation and induction experiences can be of varying quality and consistency, sometimes lacking in exposure to rigorous subject area content, sufficient pre-service clinical experience, effective support from highly skilled and experienced mentor teachers, and alignment between educator preparation programs and districts. As a result of the inconsistencies in the teacher preparation experience across coursework and clinical experience, many rookie

teachers in Pennsylvania, even those who have completed a traditional certification program, report feeling unprepared for the challenges of leading their own classroom. Half of new teachers in Pennsylvania leave their first school placement within five years.

Finally, many Pennsylvania teachers experience stressful and isolating workplace conditions, without opportunities for career progression or input into school-wide decision-making. Pennsylvania teachers have far less time built into the school day for planning and collaboration than their peers in higher-performing countries, and opportunities for advancement are based on seniority and credit accumulation rather than on demonstrated competence and the ability to build the capacity of others. Teachers often have little to no say in school decision-making, and many teachers leave due to lack of administrative support. Teachers of color also face additional challenges that contribute to their higher attrition rates.

As long as these root causes remain unaddressed, we will continue to see declining numbers of highly qualified and diverse teachers entering the profession, with catastrophic consequences for our future students, workforce, and economy. But it doesn't have to be this way. NCEE's international research on the highest-performing educational jurisdictions in the world, along with our understanding of the research on factors that improve teacher recruitment and retention of teachers, help us imagine a different reality that could become possible in Pennsylvania, which we'll illustrate through the experience of a future teacher named Jamal.

Jamal decides to become a teacher in third grade when his favorite teacher, Mr. Hamilton, tells him that he has a lot of leadership potential and would make a great educator someday. Jamal makes good grades throughout high school and through high school's participation in the career and technical education program of study for teaching, he is able to both earn college credits toward becoming a teacher and get hands-on experience working with younger students in his district before he even graduates from high school.

Due to Pennsylvania's commitment to recruiting and retaining the next generation of outstanding teachers, Jamal is able to attend a PASSHE school for free in exchange for a commitment to teach in a high-need school or subject for four years after graduation. During his time in college, Jamal progresses through a systematic and interconnected pathway of courses that intentionally build his content knowledge and pedagogy; because of his school's partnership with the local intermediate unit, he knows that the content he's being trained on is aligned with the content he'll later teach his students.

When it's time to student teach, Jamal is placed in the district he plans to teach in after graduation, which has a partnership with his college. His residency is paid and runs concurrently with the K-12 academic year, so he experiences the full year with his students and mentor teacher. His mentor teacher, who is relatively young but one of the strongest teachers in the school, receives special training and compensation to mentor rookie teachers as part of the district's career ladder program, and she is invaluable in teaching him the ropes and building his confidence.

After graduation, Jamal returns to teach in the same school he did his residency in, and he feels prepared and supported from day one. His schedule and teaching assignments are intentionally designed so that he has a lighter load than his more experienced colleagues, and he not only collaborates in the planning of lessons but often receives support from his grade-level lead teacher in his classroom. His principal is supportive and solicits the input of teachers into major school decisions, and every day Jamal has protected time to work with his colleagues on planning, student work review, and improvement of their teaching. Since he has no college debt, Jamal is able to start saving for a home and family right away, and he also receives a salary supplement for teaching in a high-need school. After a few years on the job, Jamal's gifts as a teacher really start to shine, and his principal approaches him to encourage him to apply to become a mentor teacher himself. Now, Jamal is receiving extra compensation and support as he learns how to support the growth of rookie teachers and other colleagues, and there's no place he'd rather be.

Jamal's experience couldn't be more different from Brielle's, but it is entirely possible in Pennsylvania if we are willing to take bold action to reimagine the status quo. In the #PANeedsTeachers report, we outline six policy principles that any potential policy solutions should adhere to:

1. **In order to make teaching more attractive as a career, the job of the teacher must fundamentally change.** To make teaching more attractive, schools must be organized in a manner more consistent with the characteristics of professional work environments, such as law firms and hospitals, which foster high levels of collaboration, value professionals' expertise, provide competitive compensation, and offer opportunities for advancement based on competence.
2. **Teacher shortages cannot be solved in the long term by lowering the bar to become a teacher.** Although eliminating requirements to become a teacher may seem like an attractive and low-cost short-term solution to addressing shortages, in the long term this will make the profession less attractive to high-performing students and perpetuate the undesirable pay and working conditions that currently plague the profession. While *unnecessary* barriers to entry that are *not* predictive of teacher quality or success—particularly those that lead to racial disparities—should be eliminated, rigor and quality must remain goals for Pennsylvania's educator preparation programs and schools.
3. **Any policy solutions that involve investment of additional public funds should improve both the quality and quantity of the educator workforce.** Public funds should be used not only to subsidize the costs of recruiting and retaining more educators, but also to incentivize needed structural changes that will address systemic root causes to teacher shortages, resulting in more qualified, better prepared, and more diverse teachers entering and staying in the system.
4. **Policy solutions should function primarily as incentives rather than requirements in order to reduce compliance mentality.** Institutions such as educator preparation programs and local education agencies (LEAs) should be encouraged to make needed structural changes through the use of incentives, such as competitive grant funds, rather than forced to make changes through across-the-board mandates. This will reduce compliance mentality in favor of an opportunity mentality, encourage innovation among the willing, and allow for proof points that build buy-in across the system.
5. **Policy solutions should be systemic and address root causes.** Policy solutions should address root causes of teacher shortages rather than the symptoms. Ideally, policy solutions should be designed to simultaneously impact multiple root cause problems given the interconnectedness of our educational system. However, policy recommendations may be introduced separately, provided they contribute to and do not diminish a larger, long-term systemic solution.
6. **Policy solutions should drive both excellence and equity.** While all communities in Pennsylvania are impacted by teacher shortages, certain communities—particularly urban and rural communities, low-wealth and low-income communities, and communities of color—suffer disproportionately. Ideal policy solutions will not only increase the supply of high-quality and diverse teachers across the board but also identify ways to accelerate the supply of such teachers to high-need districts and schools.

The following strategies for state-level policy action, informed by existing research, national and international comparisons, and recommendations from participants in the summit, have been identified by NCEE and Teach Plus as priorities moving into 2023 and beyond:

1. **Incentivize high-quality teacher preparation, characterized by rigorous coursework and intentionally**

designed clinical experiences developed in partnership with local education agencies. Pennsylvania should invest funds to incentivize close collaboration between educator preparation programs and local education agencies to redesign pre-service teachers' preparation experiences in a way that ensures teachers are prepared to meet LEAs' staffing needs and succeed in the classroom from day one. Specifically, to qualify for funding, these partnerships must demonstrate intentional shifts that will ensure teacher candidates:

- Are diverse and reflective of the communities they serve;
- Are prepared to teach high-need subjects and/or in high-need schools;
- Are able to obtain their degrees free of cost in exchange for a commitment to teaching in the partner LEA for at least four years;
- Develop deep subject-area and pedagogical content knowledge through rigorous, cohesive coursework that aligns with the LEA's curricular approach;
- Participate in a year-long clinical residency under the mentorship of an effective, trained mentor teacher, with additional aligned mentoring during induction;

Preference could be given to high-need districts, educator preparation programs with a track record of success, partnerships with strong working agreements and plans for collaboration, and programs that commit to pursue registering their program as an apprenticeship to unlock other sustainable funding sources.

2. **Invest in teacher retention through well-defined career ladders.** Pennsylvania should incentivize LEAs to develop innovative staffing models that incorporate teacher leadership development, career ladders, and a more flexible approach to scheduling and staffing to allow for increased collaboration and professionalization. To qualify for additional funding, which could be used for teacher leader compensation and training as well as technical assistance and capacity building, LEAs would have to create teacher leadership roles such as lead teacher and mentor teacher, clearly defined within a career ladder or leadership capacity development system, that allow teacher leaders to take on progressively more responsibility for impacting student achievement and leading the learning of their colleagues based on demonstrated competence. These adjustments would likely involve changes to salary schedules, master schedules, staffing structures, collective bargaining agreements, and other district policies and practices. Priority would be given to high-poverty LEAs facing the greatest staffing challenges, and this strategy should be connected to the previously discussed strategy to target the same LEAs building new pipelines of highly qualified teachers.
3. **Expand pathways into teaching for youth and paraprofessionals.** Pennsylvania should continue to expand youth pathways into teaching—both through the new high school career-and-technical education (CTE) teaching pathway as well as through dual enrollment opportunities. In addition to providing funding to further expand these pathways, the state should provide support and incentives to LEAs and educator preparation programs to ensure program quality, public awareness of these pathways, clear articulation agreements to allow for transfer of credits, and expansion of these opportunities to students in every district in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania should also invest in the development, expansion, and funding of programs and apprenticeships that provide pathways for paraprofessionals into teaching.
4. **Improve the financial value proposition for becoming a teacher.** Pennsylvania should explore multiple avenues and funding sources, including the teacher apprenticeship model and service scholarship programs, to move toward the goal of making it free to become a teacher in Pennsylvania. Efforts should also be made to eliminate other financial barriers by encouraging or funding stipends for teacher candidates during clinical experiences, subsidizing the costs of certification exams, and investing in loan forgiveness for teachers, especially in high-need subjects and schools. Finally, teacher pay must become more competitive with other fields that require a bachelor's degree, both through increased and equitable state funding of education to support local pay increases as well as through targeted financial incentives for teachers in high-need subjects and schools.

5. **Improve data collection to allow for targeted investments in the teacher pipeline.** There are many gaps in Pennsylvania’s current data collection efforts that make it difficult to identify and anticipate teacher shortages, measure the effectiveness of different programs and initiatives, and understand root causes of teacher dissatisfaction. With improved data collection and visualization systems, we can better understand and address root causes of teacher shortages, identify and address pain points, identify and learn from bright spots, target resources where they’re most needed and to programs best equipped to prepare high-quality teachers, and incentivize behaviors that will support recruitment and retention. Specifically, Pennsylvania should begin collecting data on demand for teachers (as measured by vacancy numbers and rates), begin tracking teacher candidates longitudinally from their educator preparation programs into the workforce, establish a statewide teacher working conditions survey and teacher exit survey, and create publicly accessible dashboards for many other existing measures of teacher supply, demand, retention, and satisfaction, as well as educator preparation program success.

Addressing Pennsylvania’s teacher shortage crisis will not be easy. It will require broad public support, political will, investment of public resources, and a willingness to disrupt “the way things have always been done.” But the stakes couldn’t be higher: our children’s futures, our commonwealth’s economy, and our shared prosperity and security are on the line. With vision, leadership, and courage, Pennsylvania can not only respond proactively to this growing crisis but seize an opportunity to become an innovative leader by reimagining the teaching profession to recruit and retain the highest-performing teacher workforce in the world. NCEE and Teach Plus stand ready to partner with policymakers, K-12 leaders, educator preparation program leaders, statewide associations, and non-profit and advocacy organizations to advance this vision and take bold action. Our children can’t wait: together, we can address the root causes of teacher shortages in our commonwealth and build the excellent and diverse teacher workforce that every Pennsylvania student deserves.