



Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

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Educator Workforce Challenges

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Good afternoon Chairman Argall, Chairwoman Williams, and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. Thank you for hosting this hearing and inviting PASA to speak on behalf of more than 950 PASA members including 456 who are sitting school superintendents and executive directors. We are at a critical level in our ability to meet the staffing needs in our schools, and I anticipate that unless we find creative ways to address these shortages, both in the short-term and the long-term, the situation will become even more desperate. I provide this testimony to not only emphasize the current workforce shortage crisis but to bring potential strategies to assist our schools to overcome these shortages.

The workforce shortage is affecting all our schools- rural, urban, and suburban. Both in retention as well as recruitment. It is affecting many certification areas, leaving many open positions in our schools filled with emergency-certified teachers. And with all things in education, it is affecting some of our schools more than others; typically, those with less financial stability and community resources to provide reasonable starting salaries and better working conditions, such as class sizes, student support services, etc.

Finding solutions to our current education workforce crisis is multifaceted -from recruitment and “Grow your Own” teacher efforts, through the higher education preparation programs and certification complexities, to the existing school environment conditions and retention efforts for the existing educator workforce. The action I was asked to speak about today focuses on resolving an issue for our future teachers as they migrate through their college requirements for certification and engage in their student teaching experiences. Students who are attending our colleges and universities to get their teacher certifications often have to maintain part-time or full-time work to support themselves and their families. Keeping these jobs during their student teaching experience

is many times impossible. The student teaching experience is a critical step in the preparation of our educators as it is when all the lessons learned in the coursework are put into action in the classroom with a room full of students. Student teaching is an all-consuming experience -one that takes one's full attention and efforts. It's a time when individuals have to quit their part-time or full-time jobs to be able to complete their student teaching obligations. This becomes a barrier for some as it is just not feasible for them to give up their paycheck to complete their student teaching obligations.

That's why looking for a way to provide stipends to our student teachers is a critical step to fixing our current impaired educator workforce pipeline. Valuing and treating our student teachers as we do in other professions as a paid intern or apprenticeship will solve this problem for our future teachers. When I participated in a recent Educator Workforce Shortage panel hosted by Penn State University, I was intrigued to hear the responses from the future and current teachers on the panel when asked what they thought was a priority to improve conditions in the teacher pipeline -every one of the teacher panelists indicated that a paid apprenticeship while student teaching was a priority.

Recently posted Senate Bill 300 provides for an Educator Pipeline Support Grant Program to address the concern of unpaid student teacher experiences for future educators. Student teachers would receive an opportunity to receive a \$10,000 stipend grant during their student teaching experience. This stipend could increase by an additional \$5,000 if the student teaching experience is in an area of the Commonwealth that attracts few student teachers, such as our more remote rural communities, or where there is a high rate of open teaching positions. As a condition of receiving this grant, the individual must agree to work as a teacher in a school entity in the Commonwealth for no less than three years. An added bonus to the process established in this proposed bill is it follows the same process as the PA Helps (PA Mental Health Education Learning Program in Schools) grant program which provides for paid internships for nurses, psychologists, social workers, and counselors in our schools. Embedding the same process for both grant programs makes it more efficiently implemented in practice for our schools.

As we look to long-term solutions to ensure qualified, correctly certified teachers for our students, we must put increased efforts and support into the recruitment and preparation of future educators. Paid internships that provide needed financial support for our student teachers removes another barrier for many who desire to become Pennsylvania's future educators.

We appreciate the Senate Education Committee providing PASA the opportunity to provide these educator workforce recovery thoughts. We welcome further collaboration to engage in other creative thinking and discussion to strengthen our educator workforce across the Commonwealth.