

THE GOVERNOR'S EDUCATOR RETENTION TASK FORCE

Recommendations

THE GOVERNOR'S EDUCATOR RETENTION TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Governor champions education as a profession and seeks opportunities to champion educator voice and agency in conversations about education. Consequently, the **Governor's Educator Retention Task Force** (the Task Force) was convened by [Executive Order](#) to address educator retention challenges in the state of Arizona. Comprised of 19 diverse education leaders and stakeholders, the Task Force includes a cross section of educators, administrators, support professionals, school board members, and nonprofit leaders. The members of the Task Force can be found in [Appendix A](#).

To develop the recommendation included in this report, members of the Task Force convened in four working groups focused on Pay and Compensation, Working Conditions, Retention Innovations, and Teacher Preparation and Certification to examine the current landscape in Arizona and evidence-based practices to retain educators. In addition to meeting within their working groups, the Task Force met at large to discuss the qualitative and quantitative findings of the 2023 Educator Working Conditions Study and use the full spectrum of information gathered across their meetings to produce the following recommendations to support educator retention across Arizona.

Amplifying Educator Voice

1. The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor's Office create an educator advisory group to provide regular feedback and insights to the Governor.

As frontline workers, educators have unique insight into the current challenges of the field and provide expertise on working conditions related to educator retention. States with teacher advisory committees are better able to respond to their needs in more timely ways. In North Carolina, for example, the state seeks teacher input through both a teacher advisor to the Governor and the [Governor's Teacher Advisory Committee](#) that currently comprises 25 teachers and instructional support personnel from across the state appointed to amplify teacher voice in decision-making, share opportunities to support the educator community, and improve communication between the Governor's Office and local stakeholders.

Increasing Salary and Benefits

2. The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor's Office prioritize raising and maintaining average salaries for Arizona classroom teachers and certified staff (such as school counselors, psychologists, and social workers) to align with national averages and ensure that salaries for classified staff (such as paraeducators, food service, and transportation employees) are similarly adjusted.

As of the 2021-2022 school year, the average salary for teachers in Arizona public elementary and secondary schools is [\\$56,775](#), compared to a national average of \$66,745. While the state ranks 32nd nationally for average teacher salary, public school teachers in Arizona, on average, make only \$4,247 more than the living minimum wage for the state ([pre-tax](#)). Compensation was consistently rated amongst current and former educators in the 2023 Educator Working Conditions Study as the most important issue to remaining in the profession and improving salary was frequently cited as a solution for bringing qualified educators back to classrooms.

Additionally, other certified and classified staff within school buildings provide crucial resources and support to both students and educators. Ensuring that these salaries also support the recruitment and retention of high-quality professionals is inherently linked to retaining educators. The 2023 Arizona Educator Working Conditions Study found that 96 percent of current educators see increasing salary as a top solution for educator retention. As low pay has been an [ongoing concern](#) for classified staff, shortages in these positions have increased in recent years; while the median U.S. worker earned \$790 per week in 2020, the [median weekly wage](#) was \$331 for food service workers in K-12 schools, \$493 for school bus drivers, and \$507 for teaching assistants.

The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force also emphasized the importance of prioritizing retention in plans to increase the average salary for Arizona while also addressing compression issues and considering strategies to target high-priority positions that often see higher rates of turnover (including both shortage-area subjects and high-needs schools).

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3. The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor's Office work with the appropriate state agencies to pursue a reduction in the cost to educators and school personnel for health insurance plans that include dependent coverage to align with the proportion of total plan cost paid by educators with individual coverage.

Contributions to healthcare plans can range widely across the state and depend on the health plan that each school district or charter school chooses. Family and dependent coverage can be up to five times the contribution required for individual employees and was cited frequently by educators as a concern. Of those who responded to the 2023 Arizona Educator Working Conditions Study, 83 percent of current educators and 76 percent of former educators identified reducing healthcare premium costs as a top solution for educator retention. Therefore, partnering with state agencies to reduce costs for health insurance will assist with creating clarity and affordability for educators with dependents and families across the state.

4. The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor's Office support policies to provide educators and school personnel with twelve weeks of paid parental leave for childbirth, adoption, or fostering.

Paid leave is necessary to support the growth of families in Arizona and particularly support employees with children, as it enables families to navigate the initial hurdles related to child rearing while offering them financial support and job protection. Additionally, 76 percent of the educators in Arizona are [female](#), further emphasizing the importance of protecting parental jobs while they adjust to supporting children at home, and the 2023 Arizona Educator Working Conditions Study found that educators who are parents enjoy the ability to align their work schedule with their children's school. In January 2023, the State of Arizona began piloting a new [Paid Parental Leave \(PPL\) program](#) for state employees which offers up to 12 weeks of paid leave for the birth of a child or placement of a child in the home in the case of adoption or foster care, a policy that the Governor's Educator Retention Task Force believes should be extended to educators across the state.

5. The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor's Office work with key education partners to ensure educators and school personnel are aware of and able to access options for student loan forgiveness.

[Research](#) has shown that loan forgiveness programs can successfully recruit and retain high-quality teachers into classrooms and communities where they are most needed. Moreover, student loan forgiveness has been shown to [be particularly effective](#) for recruiting educators from diverse backgrounds, which is imperative given that Arizona's current teacher demographic is [73 percent](#) white compared to only [36 percent](#) of students.

Improving Working Conditions

6. The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor's Office support state-level policies and investments that make direct improvements to educator working conditions, including but not limited to: decreasing class sizes, decreasing workload, increasing staffing levels of support (e.g. counselors, coaches, aides, interventionists, and social workers), ensuring educators have adequate planning and preparation time, and addressing school safety concerns.

Recent [research](#) has found that individuals working in K-12 education report the highest rate of physical and mental stress among all U.S. professions. These high rates are caused by [many factors](#), including workload, student behavior, and lack of administrative support; additionally, educators of color report even [higher](#) rates of frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression than their white colleagues, caused by [discrimination and racism](#), the expectation that they will take on [additional duties](#) related to their racial or ethnic identities (for example, translating documents or facilitating communication for families who speak a language other than English), and a significant amount of time spent on [mentoring, counseling, and disciplining](#) students of color. Relatedly, educators of color are [more likely](#) to express an intention to leave the classroom.

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District superintendents [report](#) that they are struggling to support their educators due to a lack of capacity, creating a cycle of exhaustion – schools need funding and sufficient staffing to address these challenges, but these challenges are directly contributing to educators leaving the profession and exacerbating staffing shortages. These capacity issues also [include](#) non-instructional school staff, such as physical and mental health professionals, bus drivers, and food service staff, who provide crucial supports to students and teachers throughout the school day and year.

These trends are reflected in the 2023 Arizona Educator Working Conditions Study, where 80 percent of former educators cited “feeling burned out” and 73 percent cited “unable to have a healthy work-life balance” as the top factors contributing to their decision to leave the classroom. Current educators agreed with 78 percent citing “reduce workload,” 86 percent citing “decrease class sizes or student load,” and 91 percent citing “ensure that educators have adequate preparation time” as solutions to keep educators in schools.

7. **The Governor’s Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor’s Office convene partners to highlight best practices and expand the implementation of innovative models that recognize and support teachers as professionals and redesign the delivery of instruction to support the success of all students.**

Improving job satisfaction and responding to the educator study feedback around the challenges of educator working conditions requires innovative solutions that leverage educator expertise and create collaborative school environments. The Governor’s Office can play a leadership role in convening stakeholders to discuss innovative models that reimagine education delivery and have strong outcomes related to increased effectiveness and higher job satisfaction.

8. **The Governor’s Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor’s Office work with the relevant education organizations and stakeholders to support and develop strong school leadership in Arizona, inclusive of both school principals and leadership pathways for classroom educators.**

School administrators have a substantial impact on the success of students, educators, and the school community as they hold responsibility for setting their school’s vision and goals, creating a positive school culture, and managing resources effectively. The importance of school leadership is emphasized in the results of the 2023 Arizona Educator Working Conditions Study that showed that 80 percent of former educators identify strong school leadership and 77 percent identify the improvement of incentives to retain high-quality leadership as solutions for educator retention. Additionally, [research](#) indicates dissatisfaction with their administrators as one of the most cited reasons for why educators leave the profession.

[Research](#) also finds that educators who are incorporated into decisions related to school policies and who have greater agency in their jobs are more likely to stay in the classroom and feel a greater investment in their schools; this is specifically supported in Arizona by the 75 percent of former educators who expressed support for amplifying educator influence regarding school policy and practice decisions in the 2023 Arizona Educator Working Conditions Study. Providing educators with the opportunity to serve in formal instructional leadership roles also [benefits](#) the entire teaching staff by increasing capacity for more frequent observations and providing in-class coaching and support from expert educators around planning and instructional delivery.

Developing Strong Pathways into the Classroom

9. **The Task Force recommends that the Governor’s Office ask the Arizona State Board of Education to conduct a study analyzing the retention rates of the various pathways into the educator profession to help identify how recruitment and preparation may be impacting the length of time educators stay in the classroom, identify successful practices, and inform future policy decisions.**

During the past few years, pathways into the classroom have been greatly expanded, however, it is unclear how those pathways lead to retention. This study should focus on collecting and analyzing data that provides an understanding of the degree to which each of the various pathways into the classroom are supporting a high-quality and diverse profession and

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their retention rates. Results should ultimately be used to inform policy decisions to ensure that regardless of the path educators take to enter the classroom, they are prepared to be successful.

10. The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force recommends that the Governor's Office support the expansion and funding for statewide induction and mentoring programs using the Arizona Beginning Teacher Induction Program Standards, including teachers in alternative certification pathways.

While educators who experience a lack of support in their initial years of teaching are [more likely](#) to leave the profession within their first five years, [research](#) demonstrates that teachers who participate in mentoring or induction programs are more likely to stay in the classroom than those who do not and utilize stronger instructional practices. The [Arizona Beginning Teacher Induction Program Standards](#), which have been adopted by the State Board of Education, were released in 2020 to provide guidance to LEAs on building and sustaining highly effective induction programs that retain educators in classrooms. Providing support for the implementation of these standards from the state-level will ensure that all LEAs are able to provide their incoming teachers with the support they need to be successful.

Using Data to Inform Retention

11. The Governor's Educator Retention Task Force recommends asking the Arizona State Board of Education to determine the data needed to evaluate the state of the educator workforce and ensure the continuous collection and analysis of the determined data on an annual basis.

Arizona lacks data on educator retention and the gaps in the educator workforce. Other states are able to use data to show the number, type of educators, grade level, location and subject of educators needed. By creating systems to collect such data, Arizona could increase its capacity to enable systemic solutions and investments to support schools and educators. Further areas of data collection for consideration could [include](#):

- A breakdown of the educator workforce by subject area to improve targeted initiatives for hard to staff schools and subject areas to support decision-makers and Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in recruiting candidates for areas with the greatest shortages.
- An analysis of teaching positions examining how positions are created and filled to improve understanding of which positions are likely to be left vacant or filled by under qualified candidates.
- An analysis of educator turnover disaggregated by subject area, district, school geography, race and ethnicity, experience in the classroom, effectiveness, and program of preparation.

As an example, Illinois currently offers a publicly available, interactive [Supply and Demand dashboard](#) for stakeholders to examine teacher retention by district, experience level, race, and gender. This type of data allows EPPs to anticipate local needs for future teachers, increases district awareness of talent to support competitive hiring practices, and ensures state, local, and school administrators can create policies aimed at balancing supply and demand within the teacher market.

Areas for Future Work

In addition to the above recommendations to the Governor's Office, the Governor's Educator Retention Task Force also highlighted the below areas as important considerations for future work in Arizona:

- Expand and enhance the Arizona Teachers Academy to ensure high-quality educators are serving high-needs schools and communities
- Policies and systems to support educator mental health
- Child care for educators
- Payment for experience hours required for candidates to receive certification, including student teaching and counseling and psychology practicums
- Revision of policies related to retired teachers returning to the classroom to shorten the amount of time to be able to return (currently at one year)

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Conclusion

These recommendations are submitted with the support of the Governor's Educator Retention Task Force. Based on research, best practices, and feedback from educators across the state, the implementation of these strategies will provide a strong support for current educators and create schools and classrooms that are conducive to retaining high-quality educators for the students who need them most. The members of the Task Force are committed to supporting the Governor's Office in garnering support for these recommendations and to engaging with stakeholders from the public and private sectors to emphasize the importance of investing in educators to ensure the future success of all Arizona citizens.

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Appendix A

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNOR'S EDUCATOR RETENTION TASK FORCE

Compensation & Benefits Working Group

- **A parent of a child who currently attends a public school in Arizona:** Jeremiah Gallegos | Financial Literacy Instructor, Littleton School District
- **An educator from a rural school:** Luisa Arreola | Gifted Program Coordinator, San Luis Middle School
- **An educator from a Tribal community:** Lynette Stant | 3rd Grade Teacher, Salt River Indian Reservation, 2020 Arizona Teacher of the Year
- **A representative from a nonprofit organization focused on education policy:** Marisol Garcia | President, Arizona Education Association
- **A school administrator from a school district in a Tribal community:** Quincy Natay | Superintendent, Chinle Unified School District
- **A school board member:** Ruth Ellen Elinski | Cottonwood-Oak Creek School District Governing Board

Retention Innovations & Solutions Working Group

- **A human resource professional:** Justin Wing | Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, Mesa Public Schools
- **An expert with significant experience in educator retention:** Lloyd Hopkins | CEO/Founder, Million Dollar Teacher Project
- **A school administrator from a rural school district:** Melissa Sadorf | Superintendent, Stanfield Elementary School District
- **An educator from an urban school:** Violeta Ramos | Spanish Teacher and Governing Board Member, Osborn School District

Teacher Preparation & Certification Working Group

- **An education support professional:** Curt Bertelsen | Director of Professional Development, Pima Joint Technical Education District
- **A representative from a community college:** Dr. Jennifer Gresko | Faculty Chair of Educator Preparation Programs, Rio Salado College
- **Dean of a university college of education:** Ramona Mellot | Dean, College of Education at Northern Arizona University
- **An educator from a Title 1 school:** Zel (Zelatrice) Fowler | Gifted Education Teacher, Balsz School District
- **A school mental health professional:** Janine Menard | Tolleson Elementary School District

Working Conditions Working Group

- **An educator from a charter school:** Jennifer Hulbert | 2nd Grade Teacher, Champion Schools-South Mountain
- **A special education teacher or director:** Jesus "Anthony" Lovio | Special Education Teacher | Flowing Wells Unified School District
- **A school administrator from an urban school district:** Jonathan Parker | Principal, Sunnyslope High School
- **An educator who recently left the profession:** Sarah Tolar | City of Mesa's Education and Workforce Administrator, City of Mes