



August 31, 2022

Dear Colleague:

As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, a robust and sustainable teacher workforce is essential to educating and supporting our children and youth. Yet many states and school districts face significant challenges in attracting and retaining the teachers and school staff who are integral to helping students as they recover academically from the pandemic. Demand for teachers in critical areas such as special education; bilingual education; science, technology, engineering, and math; career and technical education; and early childhood education existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The past two years have exacerbated these shortages.

Two of the most important actions states and districts can take to address these challenges are to provide affordable high-quality pathways into the profession and to ensure that the teaching profession offers a livable and competitive wage. As the Secretaries of the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Education, we are calling on states to take significant action and use federal, state, and local resources available to ensure that prospective teachers will not face economic challenges as they pursue and enter the teaching profession, so all students have access to a high-quality education and the educator workforce they need to succeed.

Specifically, we encourage you, as part of your state's broader efforts to address teacher shortages, to (1) establish high quality paid Registered Apprenticeship programs for teaching; (2) increase collaboration across workforce and education systems, including strengthening career pathway partnerships, to bring more people into the education profession through high-quality pathways, such as providing opportunities for school-based staff to become teachers; and (3) ensure teachers are paid a livable and competitive wage. All of these efforts will help address labor shortage challenges made worse by the pandemic and benefit students and communities across the country.

1. Establish a Registered Apprenticeship Program for Teaching

There is growing evidence that teacher preparation programs that incorporate significant “on the job training” through clinical experiences that are tightly integrated with rigorous and relevant coursework are key elements of effective programs. Registered Apprenticeship programs can be used to establish, scale, and build on these existing high-quality pathways into teaching that emphasize classroom-based experience, such as Grow Your Own¹ and teaching residency programs.

Registered Apprenticeship is an effective, high-quality “earn and learn” model that provides structured, paid on-the-job learning experiences combined with job-related technical instruction with a mentor that leads to a nationally recognized credential. Registered Apprenticeships serve

¹ Garcia, Amaya, “A 50-State Scan of Grow Your Own Teacher Policies and Programs.”
New America, May 3, 2021, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/grow-your-own-teachers/>.

as an avenue for skills-based hiring by removing potential barriers to early-level careers for qualified workers. [Case studies](#) across multiple sectors have highlighted key benefits of establishing a Registered Apprenticeship program (RAP), including developing a more skilled and diverse workforce, retaining workers through reduced turnover, and improving productivity. As with other RAPs, teacher candidates serving as apprentices through a RAP are paid by their employer while they participate in a RAP, helping to make their pathway into the profession more affordable.

The U.S. Department of Labor has recently approved the first nationally registered K-12 Teacher Occupation Apprenticeship in Tennessee. This led to the establishment of Tennessee's RAP and will make it easier for other states to adopt this model. Tennessee's RAP is a Grow Your Own teacher residency program that enables apprentices to earn a BA and obtain their teaching license in three years, as opposed to a typical four-year program. The state is using this model to eliminate shortages by preparing teacher's aides as teachers, and getting students on the pathway to becoming a teacher when they are a high school senior, expanding, diversifying, and strengthening the pipeline into teaching.

To operationalize and establish a RAP for teaching, Governors, chief state school officers, state legislatures, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) can take the following steps:

- Convene state education leaders, labor representatives, apprenticeship leaders, and workforce partners to explore the [process of starting an apprenticeship program](#).
- Identify an organization to sponsor the program. Although either a state educational agency or school district can serve as sponsor, state departments of education are better positioned to serve as sponsor because they oversee teaching licensing requirements and can accelerate the process of scaling statewide.
- [Contact](#) and consult your state apprenticeship agency or the federal Office of Apprenticeship (OA) at the U.S. Department of Labor. Some states have DOL-recognized state apprenticeship agencies that can help facilitate the process of developing a Registered Apprenticeship Program, and other states have a federal representative that can guide them through the process. Stakeholders who need information on their state's appropriate contact can visit this [webpage](#). OA is available to answer questions from interested parties at any point in this process and has a variety of resources available at www.apprenticeship.gov. OA also has intermediaries who can work with partners to develop programs.

Once established, RAPs can leverage financial resources from the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor to support this career pathway. We encourage the use of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I funding for this purpose.² Direction for the use of these funds is set by state and local workforce development boards. Some WIOA Title I programs that can potentially be used to support placing eligible participants into RAPs include:

² Neither the National Apprenticeship Act nor the apprenticeship regulations of 29 CFR Part 29 and 30 restrict apprenticeship opportunities to only U.S. citizens. Employers must ensure that their workers meet and continue to meet work eligibility requirements.

- **Individual Training Accounts:** A WIOA-eligible apprentice in a RAP can use an individual training account (ITA) to support the educational portion of the RAP. ITAs can also finance pre-apprenticeship training in preparation for formal RAPs if the provider of the pre-apprenticeship training is on the state eligible training provider (ETP) list.
- **On-the-Job Training:** WIOA funding can be used to defray the costs of on-the-job training (OJT), where an employer trains WIOA-eligible participants on the job for the skills and requirements of an occupation. This is an effective tool to support WIOA participant placement into RAPs, which feature both OJT and related instruction. OJT employers, in this case schools or school systems, may receive up to 50 percent reimbursement of the wage rate (or more in certain circumstances) of trainees to help defray personnel training costs. State and local workforce development boards can set up arrangements with RAPs where participants may engage in OJT for multiple employers who are signatories to the RAP, consistent with state and local policies. Unlike the related instruction component, the OJT component is supported by a contract, not an ITA.
- **Contracted Classes for Training Cohorts for Related Instruction:** In certain circumstances, a local workforce development board may opt to contract with an ETP to train a cohort of potential apprentices in in-demand industry sectors or occupations instead of utilizing individual ITAs. This approach provides an efficient process for certain cohorts of RAP training, such as teacher training.
- **Customized Training:** State and local boards can support participant placements in RAPs through customized training agreements under WIOA with employers. Customized training provides states and local areas with the flexibility to ensure that training, such as training for teachers, meets the unique needs of the job seekers and employers or groups of employers.
- **Incumbent Worker Training:** Local boards may use up to 20 percent of their WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker funds to pay the federal share of the cost of incumbent worker training, such as enhancing the skills of a paraprofessional to become a licensed teacher, through a RAP or other program.
- **Supportive Services:** WIOA funds can support a variety of supportive services for WIOA participants who are apprentices, including books, supplies, child care assistance, transportation, tools, and uniforms. WIOA funding can also be used to provide support for individuals with disabilities pursuing a career in teaching.

The U.S. Department of Education provides funding to individuals and IHEs that can also be used to support affordable pipelines into the profession. For instance, Pell Grants can help students and employers cover the technical instruction portion of a RAP. Information on the full range of these resources can be found in this U.S. Department of Education [Fact Sheet](#). In the near-term, federal COVID-19 relief funds can also be used to bolster these efforts. These funds include:

- IHEs can use Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) grant funds under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 to provide stipends, scholarships, and other financial aid to educators-in-training to help underwrite the cost of teacher preparation.
- Governors can use funds under the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) to provide additional financial support to teacher candidates through an institution of higher education or the school district.
- Chief state school officers can use funds under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund under the Coronavirus Aid, Recovery, and Economic Security Act (ESSER I), the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations

Act (ESSER II) and ARP ESSER, as well as Supplemental Support Under ARP (SSARP)³ to provide additional financial support to teacher candidates.

Additional information on steps that states, districts, and institutions of higher education can take to address labor shortages impacting schools and how federal relief funds can support these efforts, can also be found in the previously referenced [Fact Sheet](#). Information on how these efforts can be sustained in the long-term with other federal resources can be found in this U.S. Department of Education [Fact Sheet](#).

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor are committed to continuing our joint efforts to support states, districts, and institutions of higher education in addressing teacher shortages through high-quality pathways into the teaching profession, including providing technical assistance to stakeholders and potential sponsors as needed. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Labor is committed to including education as a priority sector in future funding opportunities.

To build on this federal effort, today the Council of Chief State School Officers, National Governors Association, National Education Association, and American Federation of Teachers are announcing that they will work together with other partners in the field to identify best practices and support their members in pursuing registered apprenticeships or other key strategies that ensure teacher quality while offering increased pathways for entrance and growth in the profession.

2. Increase Collaboration across Workforce and Education Systems

Greater collaboration between workforce and education systems provides an opportunity for states and school districts to leverage resources and partnerships, particularly with the publicly funded workforce system, to support pathways into education professions. For example, states and school districts can collaborate with state and local workforce systems by connecting directly with state and local workforce development board leaders to explore and facilitate opportunities to strengthen the pipeline for school staff. These boards are responsible for carrying out the workforce development strategy in their states and local communities and consist of public and private sector industry leaders committed to improving their communities. Workforce and education partners can work more closely in developing their respective statewide strategies, including how they can create pathways for individuals from underrepresented populations to become educators. School systems employ various professionals in addition to teachers, including bus drivers, accountants, and human resource professionals. Workforce systems can ensure they are directing eligible applicants to the range of opportunities in education.

Further, long-term collaboration and solutions can be explored in state plans such as those required under (1) the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended; (2) WIOA; (3) the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (which can be combined with WIOA state plans); (4) the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; and (5) the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Strategies delineated in these plans can

³ SSARP assists public and private nonprofit IHEs that have the greatest unmet need related to the coronavirus, as determined by the Secretary, after allocating available funds under HEERF III, including IHEs with large populations of graduate students who otherwise did not receive a HEERF allocation under ARP.

promote greater collaboration between school districts and workforce systems to ensure the K-12 education systems are aligned to family-supporting jobs in in-demand sectors. Some of these strategies include:

- *Providing supports to teachers in training:* Consider partnerships with state and local workforce development boards to link prospective apprentices or individuals going through teaching residencies or other programs to supportive services. For example, obtaining affordable child care can be a significant challenge for workers and individuals going through training programs. WIOA requires local boards to develop supportive services policies for use with WIOA participants. These supportive services may include child care assistance, dependent care, transportation, housing, testing and licensure fees, and work clothes and can make teacher preparation programs, including RAPs, more accessible and affordable to prospective teachers. Additionally, states may choose to analyze labor market information as part of economic, workforce, and education plans and outline strategies they are leveraging to advance opportunities for educators.
- *Braiding funding:* Workforce and education systems can explore strategies to braid funding across workforce and education institutions. States can convene and create an apprenticeship program that leverages state, federal, private, and philanthropic dollars to fund education, training, and supportive services.
- *Enhancing partnerships:* State and local workforce boards can have superintendents serve on their respective workforce boards, and otherwise identify ways to partner with school districts. These partnerships can facilitate workforce boards supporting district hiring efforts and provide school districts with critical insights into what sectors are in-demand and producing family-supporting jobs in the local and regional economies, so that schools can provide students with career-connected opportunities in these sectors before they graduate from high school.

3. *Pay Educators Competitively*

A tight labor market in many states and communities has also meant that teaching and non-teaching staff—such as paraprofessionals and teacher’s aides—can often earn more working in non-education sectors. In many states, teachers earn less than other professionals with similar qualifications and often do not earn a livable and competitive wage. This continues to be a significant contributor to a weak teacher pipeline and high turnover rates for those in the profession, and remains an impediment in accelerating academic recovery for students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, teachers make about 33 percent less than other college-educated workers. This is known as the teacher wage penalty, and in 28 states, the teacher wage penalty is larger than 20 percent. Adjusted for inflation, the average weekly wages of public school teachers has only increased \$29 between 1996 and 2021.⁴ And in 38 states, the average teacher salary is so low that mid-career teachers who are the head of household for a family of four qualify for two or more government benefits based on income.⁵

⁴ S. Allegretto (August 2022). The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high: Trends in teacher wages and compensation through 2021. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-penalty-2022/>.

⁵ Southern Regional Education Board analysis of starting teacher salaries based on data available at <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/2018-2019%20Teacher%20Salary%20Benchmark%20Report.pdf> and average teacher salaries data available at https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_211.60.asp?current=yes. See also Boser, U. & Straus, C.

States and school districts should use the \$122 billion in ARP ESSER funds to ensure children have the teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff they need to recover and thrive. This includes paying these critical staff competitively, so states and school districts can attract and retain the talent they need.⁶ Governors, county commissioners, and mayors can also help districts address this challenge by using the \$350 billion in State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to help schools hire staff, including by providing premium pay. Please see this [U.S. Department of Treasury FAQs](#), which address how SLFRF can be used for this purpose, and this [White House toolkit](#) highlighting how state and local leaders can use SLFRF funds to address students' academic and mental health needs, including by addressing staffing needs.

While ARP funding is available to address this challenge right now, it is critical that states and communities also make significant investments in elementary and secondary education to sustain the staffing levels necessary to support all students in pursuing their dreams.

Attracting and retaining teachers requires a comprehensive set of short- and long-term strategies. As part of these efforts, these are concrete steps that state and local leaders can take right now to provide our future teachers with high-quality and affordable pathways into the profession and ensure that college affordability and compensation no longer serve as barriers. As federal partners in this shared goal, we stand ready to support you in these efforts and are committed to working with you to ensure that every student has access to well-prepared, fully qualified, and talented teachers to support their success.

Sincerely,



Martin J. Walsh
U.S. Secretary of Labor



Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education

(2014). Mid- and Late-Career Teachers Struggle With Paltry Incomes. Center for American Progress.
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/mid-and-late-career-teachers-struggle-with-paltry-incomes/>.

⁶ See, for example, FAQ D-7 in these Department of Education's ARP FAQs:
https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/05/ESSER.GEER_FAQs_5.26.21_745AM_FINALb0cd6833f6f46e03ba2d97d30aff953260028045f9ef3b18ea602db4b32b1d99.pdf.