

Testimony to the House Education Committee Hearing on the Educator Workforce Shortage
March 15, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Sonney, Chairman Longietti and distinguished members of the House Education Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today about Pennsylvania's shrinking educator workforce. My name is Dr. Tanya Garcia, and I am the Deputy Secretary and Commissioner of the Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education. With me today is Dr. Kerry Helm, our Acting Director of the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality and Chief of the Division of Certification Services.

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, librarians, and others). Our educator workforce not only represents a critical sector of the commonwealth's economy, it plays 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.

Pennsylvania has 119 providers that offer 3,272 educator preparation programs.¹ In the 2018-19 academic year, 17,942 students were enrolled in educator preparation programs.² The Pennsylvania certification requirements are recognized as among the most rigorous and comprehensive in the nation. Yet, over the past 10 years, Pennsylvania's educator workforce has been shrinking, especially in rural and urban districts and hard-to-fill areas like special education, English language instruction, and STEM.

Since 2010, the number of undergraduate education majors in Pennsylvania has declined by 66%.³ Newly issued in-state teaching certificates have dropped 66% between 2009 and 2020 (15,247 vs. 5,128).⁴ The number of out of state Instructional I certificates has decreased 58%.⁵ All while the rate of educators leaving the teaching profession accelerates. These factors, coupled with the physical and emotional toll of the pandemic, have stretched the educator pipeline to its breaking point, and as a result, schools are facing a harder time filling critical staff positions than ever before.

The demographics of our state and our public school population continue to change and become more diverse – racially, ethnically, linguistically, and in numerous other ways. By August 2025, Pennsylvania's K-12 population will have higher proportions of students of color,⁶ and these are precisely the student groups that our entire educational system – from early childhood to K-12 to postsecondary – has least been able to serve well. However, Pennsylvania's educator workforce

¹ PA Department of Education, Teacher Information Management System (TIMS) data

² U.S. Department of Education, Title 2 Public Report, [State User Home Page \(ed.gov\)](#)

³ U.S. Department of Education, Title 2 Public Report, [State User Home Page \(ed.gov\)](#)

⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Education. [Report of Education Preparation and Certification](#)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Knocking on the College Door: Projections of U.S. High School Graduates: Pennsylvania. 10th Edition. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. <https://knocking.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/12/Pennsylvania-Profile.pdf>

does not reflect the students they serve. As of 2018-19, only about 25% of students pursuing education degrees were from racial and ethnic minority groups. As of 2020-21, just over 6% of active classroom teachers are from racial and ethnic minority groups. Without a significant increase in the diversity of our educator workforce, large percentages of students will go through most or all of their educational careers without seeing teachers, principals, and other school leaders who look like them or who have first-hand knowledge of their cultural and linguistic traditions and assets.⁷ Research conclusively demonstrates that students perform better when they have access to teachers that share their race or language backgrounds.⁸ In addition, students of all backgrounds benefit when exposed to diverse students and staff. Students of all backgrounds who have the opportunity to learn in diverse settings display increased tolerance and are less likely to engage in stereotyping; are more likely to seek out and thrive in integrated settings later in life; exhibit increased intellectual self-confidence; and develop critical leadership skills.⁹ The lack of diversity in Pennsylvania's educator workforce hinders schools' ability to help students reach their full potential.

Alarming, far too many new educators enter the profession without the tools needed to create an effective and rigorous learning experience for students.¹⁰ Student achievement data, anecdotal reflections from new teachers, and new teacher attrition rates clearly illustrate an urgent need for improvement in teacher preparation. Nowhere does this lack of effective preparation hit harder than in our neediest rural and urban schools that serve the least advantaged student populations in the state. The turnover rate for teachers in high poverty schools is almost a third higher than the rate for all teachers in all schools.¹¹ While insufficient preparation is only one of many factors driving this turnover, better prepared teachers remain in the classroom longer and are more effective in driving student achievement.

A competitive wage is essential to attracting and retaining qualified education professionals. Yet, according to the National Education Association, Pennsylvania educators earn nearly 15% less than professions with similar educational requirements (\$.87 on the dollar).¹² Starting salaries for educators in surrounding states ranges from \$37,569 in Ohio to \$53,177 in New Jersey.¹³ Increasing the statutory minimum salary for Pennsylvania teachers and other education professionals, including counselors and school nurses, from \$18,500 per year to \$45,000 per year would align an educator's starting salary with the current cost of living and ensure that Pennsylvania schools are offering competitive base salaries so they can attract the most qualified and talented teachers to educate our children. Studies also find increased teacher pay is

⁷Diversity of Teacher and Student Populations in Pennsylvania School Districts. Research for Action. 2020.

⁸ Carver-Thomas. Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color. Learning Policy Institute. 2018.

⁹ "The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms." The Century Foundation.

¹⁰Lewis, et al. Teacher Quality: A Report on The Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers. National Center on Education Statistics. 1999.

¹¹ Simon and Johnson. No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. 2003..

¹² [Teacher Pay and Student Spending: How Does Your State Rank?, National Education Association Report, 2021](#)

¹³ [Teacher Pay and Student Spending: How Does Your State Rank?, National Education Association Report, 2021](#)

associated with improved teacher retention, gains in student performance, and an increased likelihood of hiring teachers who earned top scores in their educator certification programs.¹⁴

The process to become a certified educator – which was intended to ensure high standards for educators entering the profession – too often serves as a cumbersome and inefficient barrier to entry to the profession, while failing to serve its intended purpose. Bureaucratic hurdles and antiquated processes – often divorced from reliable measures of educator quality – often serve as unhelpful roadblocks that keep or drive good people out of the profession. The impact of these barriers is felt most acutely by applicants of color and applicants who speak a first language other than English, as anecdotal feedback received by the Department suggests that current certification processes and requirements may disproportionately impact educators from these groups.

Continuous improvement and professional growth and development are essential to improving educational outcomes for students and for retaining great educators. However, far too few educators receive high quality professional development opportunities that help them grow in their practice or to successfully teach students of different backgrounds.¹⁵

Legislative efforts such as Act 91 of 2021 and waivers provided under Acts 13 and 136 of 2020 eased the pressure for schools and educators by providing short-term solutions to substitute teacher shortages and providing additional time for educators to meet certain professional development requirements. Chapter 49 regulations relating to the certification of professional personnel that were adopted recently by the State Board of Education will provide additional support to new and incumbent teachers and better prepare them for today's classrooms. The Department also is upgrading the Pennsylvania Information Management System and Teacher Information Management System to help schools anticipate and plan staffing needs and to share data with educator preparation programs to align better with the needs of school entities. This spring the Department also will release its Educator Workforce Strategy with solutions to address school staffing needs, educator diversification, strengthening the certification process, entry into educator preparation programs, and continuing professional development.

The Department is committed to making meaningful progress on addressing these challenges at each of the educator workforce lifecycle stages – identification, recruitment, preparation, certification, induction, continuing professional development, and retention. We welcome the opportunity to work with the General Assembly and stakeholders throughout the commonwealth to address this growing crisis.

¹⁴ Denise-Marie Ordway. [Raising Public School Teacher Pay: What the Research Says](#). *The JR Guide to the 2020 Democratic Policy Proposals*

¹⁵ Schultz, et al. *Swimming Against the Tide: A Study of Prospective Teachers' Attitudes Regarding Cultural Diversity and Urban Teaching*. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*. 1996.