



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF LAURA BOYCE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TEACH PLUS PENNSYLVANIA
BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, March 15, 2022
Harrisburg, PA

Chair Sonney, Chair Longiotti, and Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for elevating the critical issue of teacher shortages in Pennsylvania and allowing Teach Plus to provide written testimony. Teach Plus is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. We work with nearly 400 PK-16 educators across Pennsylvania through our teaching policy fellowship, instructional leadership programs, and statewide teacher network.

Through our work with educators across Pennsylvania, we have become extremely concerned that staffing shortages are a ticking time bomb threatening our schools, which are already in a state of crisis in the wake of the pandemic. Schools across the Commonwealth are facing unprecedented numbers of vacancies, absences, and mid-year departures that are crippling their ability to meet the academic and mental health needs of students. With teachers and other staff absent, schools have had to close temporarily, combine classes, or ask teachers to cover classes during their prep and lunch periods. In addition to disrupting student learning, this also has devastating ripple effects on the morale, well-being, and retention of the remaining educators. In the past several months, we have witnessed a principal resign due to crippling stress-induced vertigo, a teacher hospitalized with a bladder infection after losing prep periods and not being able to use the restroom, and countless educators saying, "I don't know how much longer I can do this."

Our experience is supported by statewide and national data. A January [report](#) from The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO), and the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS) found that labor challenges are the top concern of Pennsylvania superintendents, school business officials, and operational specialists surveyed. In February, the School District of Philadelphia released [data](#) showing that mid-year teacher resignations are up 200%, with higher rates of absence and long-term leave as well. Nationally, a recent [National Education Association poll](#) found that 55% of teachers plan to leave teaching sooner than originally planned, 90% feel burnout is a serious problem, 86% have seen more educators leaving the profession since the start of the pandemic, and 80% have seen work obligations increase as a result of the departure of colleagues. These concerns are echoed in surveys conducted by [TNTP](#), [RAND](#), and others. And the general public is growing concerned as well: a new [survey](#) found that 83% of Americans are concerned about public school shortages and 81% are worried about educator burnout. Finally, [acute shortages](#) in the early childhood care and education sector have been [widely reported](#) and are having [ripple effects](#) on the larger workforce and economy.

While the pandemic has exacerbated educator shortages, this has been a looming problem for years. The supply of teachers in Pennsylvania has [declined precipitously](#) in the past decade, with the number of Instructional I teaching certificates issued in Pennsylvania declining by two-thirds, from 21,045 in 2011 to 6,937 in 2020. The [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#) has called these shortages "startling" and "urgent," noting that "the commonwealth's significant demand for educators largely outweighs its supply," with particularly dire shortages in special education, English Language instruction, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Additionally, Pennsylvania has a longstanding educator diversity problem. According to [Research for Action](#), teachers of color comprise 6% of Pennsylvania's workforce, while students of color comprise 36% of the student population. 50% of Pennsylvania's public schools and 37% of all school districts have no teachers of color at all. Since 2013-14, the teacher workforce has become only marginally more diverse, while the student body has diversified more quickly, leaving thousands of students of color with no access to teachers who look like them. Additionally, teachers of color [leave the classroom](#) at higher rates than their white counterparts, with this trend [accelerating](#) in the wake of the pandemic. Teach Plus has published two research reports, [If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover](#) and [To Be Who We Are: Black Teachers on Creating Affirming School Cultures](#), on conditions that affect retention of teachers of color; factors that lead teachers of color to leave include antagonistic workplace cultures, high financial and psychological costs, and unfavorable working conditions.

Research is clear that a highly-qualified, adequately staffed, and diverse teacher workforce is essential for schools to succeed. [Teacher quality](#) is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement, and having fully staffed schools is a critical prerequisite for the kind of high-quality teaching and learning that have transformative effects on student achievement, life outcomes, and Pennsylvania's future economy. [High-poverty schools](#) tend to suffer the most from teacher shortages, and teacher shortages and turnover [disproportionately impact students of color](#), leading to larger class sizes, long-term vacancies, and classes taught by uncertified teachers. Additionally, all students benefit from learning from diverse educators, and the [benefits for students of color](#) can be truly life-changing. Students of color have higher test scores, are more likely to graduate from high school, and perform better in college when they are taught by teachers of color in grades K-12. Teachers of color also have a positive effect on attendance, drop-out rates, suspension and expulsion rates, and college aspirations for students of color.

Given this research and the data pointing to a worsening crisis in educator staffing in Pennsylvania, it is urgent that the legislature implement short-term and long-term measures to improve both recruitment and retention of a qualified and diverse teacher workforce in Pennsylvania. Specifically, we urge the Committee to consider the following measures, many of which were co-developed with the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium:

- 1. Invest in Grow Your Own programs and pathways to recruit youth, paraprofessionals, and other community members into teaching.**
 - Provide funding to districts for high school students to take dual enrollment courses in education with Pennsylvania educator preparation programs.
 - Provide funding and authorization for a Career & Technical Education course of study in K-12 teaching (see SB 99), and expand the Early Childhood Education CTE program into more high schools.
 - Create a Grow Your Own/Diversification of the Education Workforce competitive grant program modeled after [successful models across the country](#) (see [Tennessee](#)).
- 2. Invest in high-retention pathways into teaching, including teacher residency programs and other innovative teacher preparation models that attract and prepare diverse teacher candidates.**
 - Fund the [existing Teacher Residency Grant program](#), prioritizing high-need areas such as special education, STEM, and secondary instruction.
 - Invest in registered apprenticeships for teaching (see [Tennessee](#) and [Iowa](#)).
- 3. Reduce the cost of college for future teachers.**
 - Provide up to \$5,000 per teacher in loan forgiveness, layered onto federal loan forgiveness (see [Illinois](#)).
 - Create a Pennsylvania Teaching Fellows program with scholarships of \$5,000 per year for students who pursue a teacher certification at an eligible Pennsylvania college or university; recipients commit to teaching in a Pennsylvania public school for one year for every year of funding received (see [Tennessee](#) and [North Carolina](#)).

- Increase funding for teacher residency programs and other innovative teacher preparation models that attract and prepare diverse teacher candidates.
- 4. Improve data collection and transparency around educator staffing and diversity**
- Publish on an annual basis existing teacher diversity data at the school, district, state, and teacher preparation program levels (see SB 99).
 - Collect and publish disaggregated data on teacher certification test taking and pass rates, teaching certificates granted, new teacher applicants and hires, and teacher retention (see SB 99).
- 5. Remove barriers from Pennsylvania’s teacher preparation and certification processes**
- Require in-state teacher preparation programs to develop articulation agreements with community colleges to accept credit for education coursework from transfer students.
 - Allow DACA recipients and green card holders to apply for certification (see SB 165).
 - Develop reciprocity agreements with other states to allow out-of-state educators to more easily become certified in PA (see SB 224).
 - Study disparities in certification test passing rates and recommend alternatives or next steps for achieving equity in certification approval.
- 6. Invest in teacher retention**
- Raise minimum educator salaries and fund hiring and retention bonuses for high-need subjects.
 - Fund a grant program for local education agencies to implement and evaluate strategies to improve retention of new and existing teachers, such as mentoring, “shelter and develop” rookie teacher models, affinity groups, career ladders, and financial incentives.

Teaching is the profession that makes all other professions possible, and if we do not act urgently to address educator shortages in Pennsylvania, they will threaten not only the stability of our educational system but the futures of our children, our workforce, and our economy. We would welcome the opportunity to partner with you to continue to explore solutions to this problem. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,



Laura Boyce
Executive Director
Teach Plus Pennsylvania
lboyce@teachplus.org