



SUMMARY – TEACHER WORKFORCE: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Nationally, research suggests that a widespread supply of teachers is not a perennial problem for most districts and schools. Instead, individual districts and schools may discover that there is a shortage of qualified teachers in varying subjects and grade levels. This multi-step evaluation focused on the processes in place combined with what we know through current and historical data.

WHAT WE FOUND

ACES identified inaccuracies in data published and provided by ALSDE for analysis.

The number of out-of-field teachers reported in ALSDE's report card data is inaccurate. The identified inaccuracies preclude quantifying the current status and needs of certified teachers by subject and grade level. The extent to which the data is inaccurate is unknown, however this information appears to be a leading indicator which informs teacher workforce concerns.

The teacher shortage in Alabama is not a statewide issue rather an issue concentrated at the local level.

ALSDE uses a mix of information to inform the needs of Alabama's teacher workforce. In union with out-of-field teachers, the number of emergency certificates is a leading indicator of workforce concerns. In total, 8.6% of Alabama schools have more than 10% of teachers on emergency certificates. Conversely, 52.5% of Alabama schools have no emergency certificated teachers, indicating the shortage of teachers is heavily localized not statewide.

Improved student-to-teacher ratio tied to the use of alternative and emergency certificates may prove costly.

Retention of non-traditionally certified teachers is substantially lower than those of the traditional route. Over a 13-year study period, 51.6% of all teachers who began with an emergency teacher certificate became licensed professional teachers. Only 32% of teachers entering under an emergency certificate in 2018 are still employed in public education. Alternative and emergency certificated teachers are leaving the profession at the highest rate. Additionally, more first-time teachers are changing districts and leaving the profession faster than the national average. The estimated cost to replace a teacher is between \$9,000 and \$40,000.

Policy decisions drive demand for Alabama teachers; the state responds with certification changes to increase the supply.

Expansion of Alabama's First-Class Pre-K program and the Alabama Literacy Act increased the demand for teachers in the youngest grades. While not surprising, policy decisions to expand the availability of non-traditional certificates and extend the length of emergency certificates resulted in greater use.

A teacher shortage occurs when a school or district does not have the ability to staff vacancies with individuals who are qualified to teach in the fields needed.

Common approaches used to address the shortages caused by inequitable distribution include financial awards, alternative teacher certifications, mentorships, and leadership programs. Alabama has followed suit and made even more administrative changes to increase the pipeline of teachers including the AMSTEP loan forgiveness program to specifically address the hard-to-staff positions within the state.



Programs and initiatives are not implemented with clear, measurable outcomes in mind.

A closer look into three initiatives aimed at the recruitment and retention of Alabama teachers revealed a deficiency of meaningful data collection to inform the stated goals. Moreover, the initiatives examined did not report clear and measurable outcomes at the time of implementation.

At the heart of understanding teacher workforce is the clear accounting of the needs within the local districts and schools. As the state continues to expand the menu of initiatives to address the teacher workforce, Alabama needs to emphasize more meaningful data collection that accurately informs that understanding.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

The Governor and Legislature should consider:

- Designating an entity to publish an annual teacher workforce report which includes teacher retention and teaching vacancies by school and by subject.
- Targeting state efforts and dollars to school districts and subjects demonstrating the greatest teacher shortage.
- Exploring opportunities for targeted programs to recruit and retain special education teachers.
- Increasing the Hard-to-Staff supplemental award to increase recruitment of math, science, and computer science teachers to areas of greatest need.
- Increasing maximum award amounts or the maximum number of annual awards for the base AMSTEP program to cover up to \$30,000 of student loan debt. (**Accomplished in Act 2022 – 396, 2022 regular session of the Alabama Legislature**)¹
- Evaluating principals on their ability to recruit and retain first-time teachers.

The Alabama State Department of Education should:

- Provide teachers with a queryable database of job vacancies by grade and subject.
- Provide districts with a recurring list of recent professional teacher certifications to facilitate recruitment.
- Establish evaluation criteria in advance of implementing any program changes.

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education should:

- Increase marketing and recruitment efforts of the program by marketing directly to students in teacher education programs or other education related degree programs.
- Begin planning to conduct an evaluation of the first cohorts of AMSTEP to determine the impact of the program.
- Closely monitor and report the outcomes the recent rule changes have made on Alabama's teacher recruitment and retention efforts.

¹ While AMSTEP loan forgiveness is available to computer science teachers, no licensed teachers have received awards as of the time of this evaluation. For that reason, the awards for computer science teachers should maintain at their current amount until an evaluation is performed on its impact.