

Closing the Educator Shortage Gap

A toolkit for growing, hiring, and
keeping talent in Michigan



Michigan Association of Superintendents & Administrators

Closing the Educator Shortage Gap

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The Challenge

Late in 2017, the Michigan Association of Superintendents & Administrators (MASA) convened a workgroup of superintendents to address Michigan's growing challenges in finding enough highly qualified candidates to fill leadership, specialist, and teaching positions in Michigan schools.

The Educator Shortage Workgroup (ESW) represented districts across the state and quickly came to realize there would be no easy answers in tackling this complex challenge. While Michigan is certainly not the only state facing critical shortages, it does bear some unique burdens which are not easily addressed, at least not in the short term. Among these unique challenges:

- Michigan's population has not fully rebounded from the Great Recession, lagging most states in population growth.
- Michigan's population is aging.
- Our student enrollment continues to decline, with some forecasts predicting another 15% drop in available students by 2030.
- Enrollment in educator preparation programs is down and declining.
- The number of certificates granted is down and declining.
- Shortages are uneven. Some districts are experiencing over-all declines in quality candidates. Some districts are reporting declines in certain certifications. Some districts easily fill their vacancies.
- The certificates granted by Michigan's educator preparation programs are a mismatch for the openings schools are reporting.

Short- and Long-Term Strategies

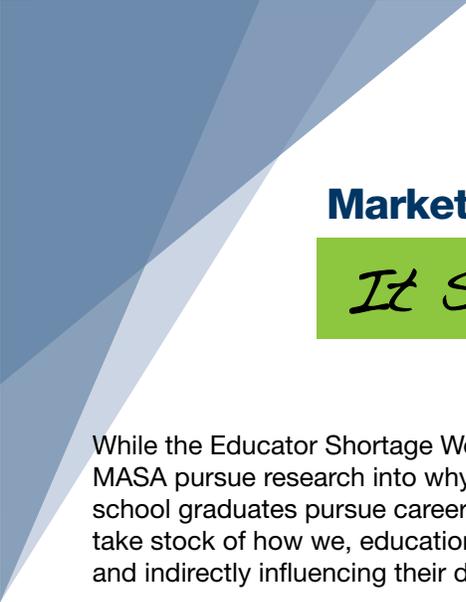
To tackle the challenge, the ESW decided on a two-prong approach:

- Identify short-term strategies districts can use now, requiring only local action and partnerships, and create a toolkit.
- Develop a mid- to long-term action plan to identify and address the policies and laws that act as barriers to cultivating and placing quality educators in our schools.

The ESW is developing the mid- to long-term action plan now and will review that work with members and stakeholders this year.

This is the toolkit. Admittedly, there are no silver bullets or quick fixes here. The toolkit is a collection of current options and promising strategies from around the state and nation. Links to resources are included where appropriate. These ideas are intended to offer food for thought and a starting point for discussion.

As the ESW acknowledged, no one is going to fix this problem for us. Only by sharing our successes, can we rebuild the profession and its luster for those who have the interest, ability, and qualifications to serve our children.



Marketing the Profession:

It Starts With Us

While the Educator Shortage Workgroup has recommended MASA pursue research into why fewer Michigan high school graduates pursue careers in education, we should take stock of how we, education professionals, are directly and indirectly influencing their decisions.

To be sure, we have challenging circumstances in our classrooms and schools. Understandably and appropriately, we have opined on how these challenges—poverty, trauma, transiency, inequity, bias—have made teaching a difficult profession.

Committee members acknowledged they have heard others (as well as themselves) at times discourage young people from pursuing the profession in these challenging times.

Could it be that our high school graduates are listening?

Until research can be conducted to better understand our students' decision-making when it comes to a potential career in education, it is inherent upon all of us to consider our own role in devaluing the call to serve as educators.

While we must continue to advocate for better conditions in our classrooms, schools, and communities, we must do so in a way that reinforces our educators as the heroes they are, not the victims we sometimes portray.

Marketing the profession begins with each one of us.

Emergency Strategies

The Michigan Department of Education has expanded its portfolio of substitute permits, giving districts wider latitude in filling vacancies. These include commonly used permits and newer options for shortage situations. Districts may be unfamiliar with these newer permit options which offer extended opportunities for districts to fill open positions. The more common permits are found on this page; the newer permits are described on the next page.



DAILY SUBSTITUTE PERMIT

Requirements:

- Used for intermittent daily substitute assignments when a teacher is temporarily unavailable.
- 90 semester hours of “C” or better college credit
- Limited to 90 calendar days*

WHO MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE:

- Retirees* (education & other professions)
- Parents
- Paraprofessionals & other staff
- Other area professionals who might be underemployed or unemployed

Did You Know?

**The State Superintendent can extend the Daily Substitute Permit if the substitute is assigned a mentor teacher and has received a formal satisfactory observation. The length of the extension and any other requirements will be determined by the State Superintendent.*

FULL-YEAR BASIC SUBSTITUTE PERMIT

Requirements:

- 90 semester hours of “C” or better college credit
- If assigned to teach core content, must have a corresponding major OR pass the subject area test
- Must be assigned a mentor teacher
- Can be used up to 1.0 FTE
- Can be renewed for one year if candidate is rated effective/highly effective and enrolls in a teacher prep program
- Can be extended an additional two years (maximum of four years) if candidate completes six credit hours toward certification or endorsement in years two and three, for a total of 12 credits

WHO MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE:

- Teachers who want to add an endorsement
- Retirees (other professions)
- Parents
- Paraprofessionals & other staff
- Other area professionals who might be underemployed or unemployed

** Retirees should always contact the Office of Retirement Services to determine their eligibility and pension cap before returning to service.*

Emergency Strategies

FULL-YEAR SHORTAGE SUBSTITUTE PERMIT

Approved for up to .5 FTE per teacher, not in special education. Designed for teachers with professional or continuing certifications who want to teach outside of their certification.

Requirements:

- If the assignment is in a core subject area, must have corresponding major or pass subject area test.
- Limited to up to three subject areas per permit.
- Can be renewed with effective or highly effective ratings.

WHO MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE:

- Retirees (education)
- Teachers who are certified to teach in one area but are interested in and willing to teach in another area. For example, a certified elementary teacher who has a major in math or passes the appropriate subject area test can teach high school math.



Idea: Identify current teachers who might be interested in a new opportunity (i.e. an elementary teacher who loves science and would consider teaching high school biology.) Support them as they work to pass the subject area exam, and job share their elementary assignment, where candidates are more plentiful.

EXPERT SUBSTITUTE PERMIT

Approved for up to .5 FTE assignment.

Requirements:

- Candidate has demonstrated distinction or unusual talent and worked five years in the field that will be taught.
 - If teaching a foreign language, candidate is exempt from the work requirement but must pass appropriate state exam.
 - If assigned to teach core content, candidate must have a bachelor's or higher degree and either:
 - a corresponding major
- OR-**
- pass the subject area test

If in a non-core assignment:

- Candidate must have a bachelor's or higher degree
- OR-**
- Have completed 90 college credits and hold a business or industry license
 - Assigned a mentor teacher (recommended)
 - Can be renewed with effective/highly effective rating

WHO MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE:

- Retirees (other professions)
- Parents
- Paraprofessionals & other staff
- Other area professionals who might be underemployed or unemployed

For more information on Michigan Substitute Teacher Permits, please see: [Facts About Michigan Substitute Permits](#) [Permits: How They Work](#)

Increase the Candidate Pool



KNOW WHO'S LEAVING

If you know you are going to be experiencing hard-to-fill openings, consider:

Working with a neighboring district to share a teacher. [Over 500 teachers in Iowa are employed this way, especially in rural areas.](#)

Assuming favorable contract parameters, you can make the “split shift” financially advantageous for the teacher—a bonus for recruitment and retention.

Ask a teacher/administrator who retired at least one year ago to return to work, even in a part-time capacity. As long as the opening is on the [state's critical shortage list](#), the teacher's pension will not be reduced. Even if the job is not on the shortage list, a teacher/administrator retired at least one year can earn up to 30% of their final average compensation.*

GROW YOUR OWN

Encourage YOUR students to pursue a career in education—nothing like a captive audience!

Consider:

A teacher cadet program. This can be as simple as a middle school “future teachers club” or a high school CTE program such as the one at [Chippewa Valley High School](#).

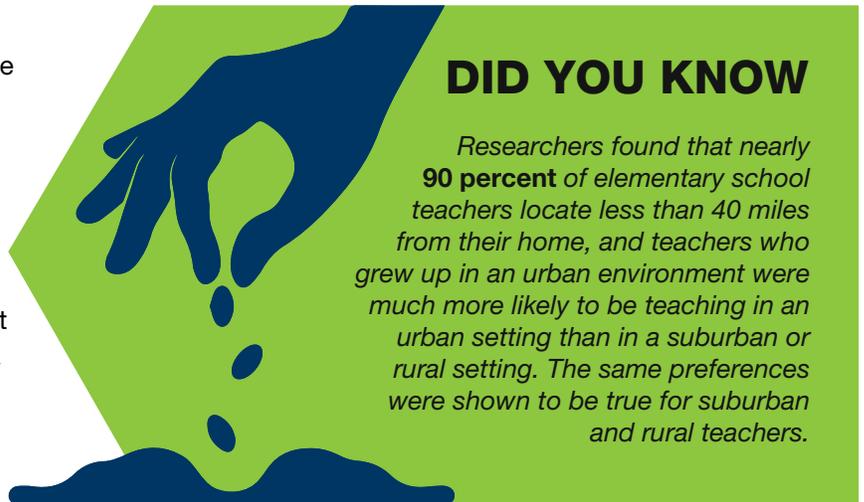
-OR-

A regionalized CTE program with articulated college credit, such as this distributed model at [Berrien RESA](#) or centralized model at [OAISD's Careerline Tech Center](#).

-OR-

A local district/university early college partnership such as this offering from [Grand Rapids Public Schools](#).

While the payoff might be a few years away, encouraging students to pursue education careers and facilitating their easy entrance into college programs is a wise investment.



DID YOU KNOW

Researchers found that nearly 90 percent of elementary school teachers locate less than 40 miles from their home, and teachers who grew up in an urban environment were much more likely to be teaching in an urban setting than in a suburban or rural setting. The same preferences were shown to be true for suburban and rural teachers.

** Retirees should always contact the Office of Retirement Services to determine their eligibility and pension cap before returning to service.*

Increase the Candidate Pool

ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

The Michigan Department of Education has established an [Alternative Route to Michigan Certification and Endorsement](#) and has approved multiple providers. There are programs for both teachers and administrators. The non-traditional teacher preparation program is for individuals who hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree and are seeking to complete an expedited program while employed as a teacher under an Interim Teaching Certificate (ITC). Individuals may complete this pathway regardless of whether they are seeking initial certification in Michigan or are already certified and wish to add an endorsement. Candidates must:

- Have a bachelor's degree (3.0/4.0 scale)
- Pass the appropriate certificate exam

Career & technical education, early childhood, and special education endorsements are not available through this pathway.

[MDE-Approved Alternative Route Providers:](#)

Teachers:

- Davenport
- Professional Educators in Teaching (MAPSA)
- Michigan Teachers of Tomorrow
- Schoolcraft College
- University of Michigan M-ARC
- University of Michigan-Flint

Administrators:

- MASA
- MASSP
- MASCD
- MEMSPA



The Interim Teaching Certificate allows an individual to be fully employed as a teacher for five years while pursuing a standard teaching certificate or an additional endorsement. This “residency” style alternative could be attractive to:

College graduates who are underemployed in other professions.

College graduates who left the work force but are ready to get back in.

College graduates who pursued other degrees but can't find employment.

More information can be found [here](#).



THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

In some states, districts are looking to non-traditional sources for educator candidates. The pragmatic, political, and cultural challenges of these options notwithstanding, they are at least worth knowing about.

Use online courses, such as those provided by Michigan Virtual, which offers over [200 middle and high school courses](#).

Consider [Teach for America](#). While the two-year commitment can mitigate the appeal, [principals report high satisfaction with TFA teachers](#), on par with traditional novice teachers.

Recruit from outside of the U.S. [For instance, several districts in Nevada have started recruiting teachers from the Philippines](#).

Michigan also has [teacher exchange programs](#), primarily for Chinese, Spanish, and tribal language teachers.

Attract Quality Candidates

We're Not Alone

Attracting high-quality and well-prepared candidates is a challenge for all Michigan employers, not just school districts. With stagnant population growth overall and continuing declines in rural areas, a shrinking number of high school graduates, and a statewide campaign to encourage technical skill careers, employers seeking college graduates of any kind are experiencing a lack of quality candidates.

Further complicating schools' recruitment efforts is speculation the profession is less attractive as a career option due to changes in compensation and a decline in public support. In addition, rural and urban districts face their own distinct barriers in attracting candidates. Consequently, districts hoping to recruit into difficult-to-fill positions and in difficult-to-fill places will likely need to exercise creativity to close the gap.

RECRUITMENT IS MORE THAN ADVERTISING THE JOB—ESPECIALLY FOR MILLENNIALS AND BEYOND

Young job seekers are looking for more than just work. They want amenities and connections.

Consider [Grand Rapids Public Schools' efforts](#) to recruit Wayne State University teacher candidates by showing off the city and treating them to those amenities.

School recruiters should consider including non-education related amenities when they advertise openings. For instance:

- Area outdoor and recreational attractions
- Distance from a core city
- Social & young professionals' groups
- College alumni groups
- Opportunities to volunteer
- City amenities



Districts can leverage their recruitment efforts by partnering with other districts in the region, within ISDs, or with community leaders similarly interested in recruiting young people to an area. Chambers of commerce, economic development groups, and other large employers, for instance, share a similar need.

CONSIDER CREATIVE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

With stalled starting wages and significant college debt, education job seekers are looking for some financial relief. Make sure you know about the [federal student loan forgiveness program](#) and tell prospective candidates if they might qualify in your district. There are loan forgiveness programs for teaching at low-income schools, as well as teaching in math, science, special education and in other content areas.

Attract Quality Candidates

ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO ATTRACT CANDIDATES

Consider creative financial incentives that will minimize the “cost of relocation” to your district in the short term. While the legislature might eventually add budget incentives, there’s no guarantee those carrots will be sufficient or long lasting. If possible, pursue private and corporate donors who will share your interest in ensuring your school district (and the community it serves) attracts the best and brightest talent.

Locally Offered Loan Forgiveness/Loan Reduction Programs

- Privately funded by local donor(s) and/or the district
- Staged over multiple years of employment

Salary Considerations

- Stipends for hard-to-fill vacancies
- Graduated stipends in years one through five
- Salary schedule recalibration to reflect hard-to-fill vacancies

Other Financial Incentives

- Signing bonuses
- Subsidized housing or housing stipends for one to three years of employment
- Stipends for student teachers
- Referral bonuses for current employees who successfully refer candidates for any position. Here’s a [step-by-step guide](#) to setting up an employee referral bonus program. Here’s a model from a [school district in Virginia](#).

PARTNERSHIPS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION

Michigan’s EPPs (the colleges and universities that prepare our teachers, specialists, and administrators) have shown interest in how they can help districts tackle two big challenges: the number of successful program completers and the kinds of certificates earned. While MDE and the ESW pursue strategies with higher education, local districts can individually or in regions design targeted recruiting programs.

Early college and teacher cadet initiatives are one example. More targeted partnerships that focus on the quantity, diversity, and quality of teacher candidates are on the rise around the nation. This [report from Education First](#) highlights many of these initiatives, chronicles their success, and provides a work plan for starting your own discussion.

TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR HIRING: FIRST IMPRESSIONS TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Hiring can be a highly autonomous function within a school district. School leaders need to ensure principals and other administrators tasked with hiring have been trained and are using hiring practices and models that both identify the best candidates as well as market the school district.

Every interaction a potential candidate has with the district is an opportunity to set yourself apart. Pay close attention to details: the ease of your online application process, the warmth with which candidates are greeted and treated on site, even how your team notifies candidates they have not been chosen for the job.

Also consider auditing your hiring process for best practices and consistency. Here are three resources that offer a starting point for your review:

[Hiring Good Teachers: The Interview Process](#), NAESP

[Using a Group Process in Teacher Hiring](#), AASA

[Teachers Hiring Teachers](#), ASCD



Attract Quality Candidates

HARNESS THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Talent recruitment has gone digital. Common social media platforms can be strategically optimized to announce openings and attract candidates. Encourage staff, parents, and other supporters to share digital announcements with their followers and friends to amplify the reach.

Regional recruitment at an ISD/RESA level could provide additional bandwidth or augment the activities of smaller districts with no HR staff.

Ask new hires how they heard about the job posting. Tracking the success of various recruitment methods—referrals, social media, website, etc.—will help you focus your efforts.



Employment opportunities should be prominent on every district's website. A home page "badge" or instant access in a side column should be easy to see and use.



DON'T LET THE GOOD ONES GET AWAY: A DEGREEED PARA PROGRAM

Sometimes you get more than one high-quality teacher candidate for the job. If it's in a certification area you know you'll need to fill soon, consider this:

Elkton-Pigeon-Bay Port Laker Schools has created a degreeed para job category for promising degreeed teachers at a higher rate of pay than the district's regular paras. The degreeed paras work alongside teachers in the district while they wait for the teacher spot to open. When it does, they hit the ground running, already acclimated to the district, the students, and the community.

An additional benefit of having degreeed paras who are certified teachers is that they can provide "spot duty" for regular teachers, or even fill in as knowledgeable substitutes when the need arises. They can also provide instructional support to students outside of the regular classroom.

Retention: Keep the Staff You Hire

While we lack good research in Michigan on why teachers leave schools early in their careers (and national data varies by state), we do know there are promising strategies that encourage educators to remain in their districts.

Retention has, minimally, two faces:

- Educators who leave the profession altogether
- Educators who move to a “more desirable” district

While the ESW is considering research on retention, every district can conduct its own research into better understanding why their own educators are leaving early. A simple two-question exit interview can provide important indicators for how a district can tackle its retention challenges.

1. Why are you leaving? Possible answers:

- Personal/life situation
- Don't like the work
- Didn't feel supported; felt isolated
- Took an education job that's less stressful
- Took an education job for more money; need a job that pays more
- Don't like the community/area
- Took a job outside of education



2. What, if anything, could the district have done to keep you? Possible answers:

- Nothing, the district is great!
- Provided more coaching/mentoring/support
- Higher wages; financial incentives

Obviously, districts can't mitigate all these challenges in each individual case, but tracking the reasons for educator departures will help districts focus their retention efforts. Nationally, retention strategies have generally fallen into two categories: financial incentives and coaching support. Some of the financial incentive strategies mirror those used for recruitment.



FINANCIAL INCENTIVES CAN HELP ATTRACT AND ALSO RETAIN

- Locally offered loan forgiveness/ loan reduction programs
 - » Privately funded by local donor(s) and/or the district
 - » Staged over multiple years of employment
- Graduated stipends in years one through five
- Subsidized housing or housing stipends for one to three years of employment

Did You Know?

National research indicates educators who stay at least three years in a district are more likely to make a long-term commitment, as they have established community roots and better understand the district's students.

Retention: Keep the Staff You Hire

COACHING & MENTORING SUPPORT

As we know, novice teachers and administrators are only partially prepared for their first assignment. Research in other states indicates the amount and quality of support and coaching they receive in the first two years has a direct impact on their decision to stay in their district specifically and/or in education generally. Districts can improve the novice educator's experience through intentional and consistent coaching. Here are some ways:

Start at the Top: Coaching is Key

Whether it's a principal coaching a novice teacher or a veteran administrator coaching a new colleague, the quality of professional development for the coach matters. [The Learning Policy Institute published this brief](#) in 2017 offering guidance and strategies for coach development.

State associations and intermediate school districts can also play a significant role in preparing principals and administrators by offering ongoing professional development targeted at helping administrators help other novice educators succeed. Strategies include:

- Convene coaching cohorts that meet regularly to share challenges and successes in working with new hires and share resources and knowledge.
- Add the topic "coaching new hires" to standing local and regional meetings of principals.
- Sponsor professional development opportunities for in-depth learning.
- Ensure mentor teachers have access to these same discussions and training.

Take a Residency Approach to New Hires

Newly hired teachers and administrators face a challenge different from their more seasoned colleagues: They don't know exactly how to do their jobs. While coaching is key, giving these educators an opportunity to learn and grow from each other can also provide support, build confidence in a safe environment, and improve culture over time. Much like a residency in the medical world, cohorts of newly hired teachers and newly hired administrators can create a life-long practice of professional responsibility and camaraderie. Here are some ideas:

- Convene a cohort of newly hired teachers and/or administrators every year in your district.
 - » If you don't have a lot of new hires, ask your ISD to convene a regional cohort.
 - » Each cohort should meet quarterly for at least two years, discussing challenges and successes of being a "new" educator and adjusting to the building/district. Indicate at hiring that participation is mandatory.
 - » This year's cohort can provide encouragement, ideas, and "tricks of the trade" to next year's cohort, etc.
- Host a monthly coffee with new hires in your building/district. Build relationships and culture through simple dialogue.
- Conduct a mid-year satisfaction survey with new hires and act on the results. Consider these three questions:
 1. What are the three most enjoyable aspects of your job?
 2. What are the three least enjoyable aspects of your job?
 3. What can the district do to improve your satisfaction?Repeat this satisfaction survey in years two and three.

End Note & Acknowledgments

While no single set of strategies or ideas will work in every district, the Educator Shortage Workgroup hopes this toolkit will help districts think about their own unique barriers to attracting, hiring, and retaining educators. Districts partnering with neighboring districts, higher education, and business and community leaders can create powerful narratives, pathways and supports for candidates—traditional and non-traditional—to explore, pursue, and succeed in an education career.

While complimentary legislation, budgets, and rules will augment and accelerate the possibilities, local districts should not wait for outside help. In Michigan’s unique employment and economic landscape, districts already focused on their own strategies will be better prepared to incorporate these statewide solutions when, and if, they materialize.

MASA would like to thank the members of the Educator Shortage Workgroup for their willingness to lend their time, talent, and insights to this work.

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