

TEACHERS' RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN TEACHERS IN COLORADO



TEACHPLUS.ORG

TEACH
+PLUS

+++++ **AUTHORS** +++++

Jennifer Armstrong (lead author)

Mary Hulac (lead author)

Nathan Pearsall

Jennifer Wiggins

Copyright 2018, Teach Plus
All rights reserved

+++++ INTRODUCTION +++++

In 2017, the Colorado Legislature revised the Colorado Statutes to require the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) “to examine recruitment, preparation, and retention of teachers and to prepare a strategic plan to address teacher shortages in school districts and public schools within the state.”¹ Following this, in December 2017, CDHE and CDE published a “Strategic Action Plan” to address the new law’s provisions, including four strategic goals and 34 strategies categorized based on cost.²

The four goals are:

1. Retain educator talent by increasing teacher retention.
2. Retain and attract educator talent by increasing teacher compensation and benefits.
3. Attract educator talent in content shortage areas by developing targeted programs in areas of need.
4. Attract educator talent by creating programs to increase enrollment and completion of Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs)

Since these four goals and the 34 strategies have funding implications, the authors of the Strategic Action Plan aligned costs with each strategy.

We are a group of Teach Plus Colorado Policy Fellows who teach in public schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas in our state. While the authors of the plan noted in their report that they had convened a series of town hall meetings across the state, we felt that the voice of teachers, those who would be directly impacted by the implementation of these policies, were missing from the forefront of the conversation.

In this brief, we share the findings from a survey administered to Colorado teachers in January 2018 and the recommendations on the most cost-effective strategies. Our goal is that these recommendations help to inform state policy aimed at remedying teacher shortages.

FINDINGS

1. Teachers desire strategies that will reduce financial barriers towards becoming a teacher, including student loan forgiveness and increased compensation.
2. Teachers need more support. Well-trained paraprofessionals are needed to assist in the classroom. Teachers need opportunities for career advancement and leadership roles that allow experienced teachers to stay in the classroom, and novice teachers need a reduced teaching load.
3. Teachers are retained in schools with positive leadership and school climate.
4. Teacher preparation programs need to effectively prepare teacher candidates to be ready upon graduation to meet the diverse needs of Colorado’s students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve compensation for teachers.
2. Improve induction programs to remove barriers to becoming a teacher.
3. Better equip school administrators to create positive and productive building climates.
4. Reduce fees associated with becoming licensed and offer additional compensation for National Board Certification.

+++++++ METHODOLOGY ++++++

Our research was designed to rank the strategies aligned to cost as proposed by the CDHE and CDE Strategic Action Plan. We wanted to know which strategies teachers felt would be the most effective based on cost. The Strategic Action plan categorized estimated cost using five categories:

1. High Cost
2. Moderate/High Cost
3. Moderate Cost
4. Low Cost [none of the strategies listed aligned to this category]
5. Non Cost

To collect teachers' recommendations, we invited teachers from rural, suburban, and urban schools from K-12 grades from across the state to participate in a survey conducted between January 11th and 26th, 2018. The survey was distributed by Teach Plus Colorado Policy Fellows and supporting organizations.

- + Three hundred elementary, middle, and high school educators from rural, suburban, and urban areas offered their perspectives on the Strategic Action Plan.
- + These educators represent a broad cross-section of Colorado teachers. Eighty-nine percent of the teachers represented non-charter public schools, and 11 percent are from charter schools.³
- + Forty-four percent of the teachers had ten years or less experience, with 56 percent had more than 10 years of experience.⁴
- + Twenty-seven percent of teachers reported teaching in rural school settings, 47 percent in suburban settings, 23 percent in urban settings, and three percent in other types of settings.⁵

+++++++ FINDINGS ++++++

Because the CDHE and CDE Strategic Action Plan categorized strategies based on cost we decided to organize our findings in the same manner. Our findings follow the "high cost," "moderate/high cost," "moderate cost," and "no cost" categories. The CDHE and CDE Strategic Action Plan was purposefully ambiguous as to cost ranges since actual costs can be difficult to pinpoint. We analyzed what options had the highest percentage of "strongly support" responses along with which strategy teachers thought would be most effective. We also looked at the teachers' general thoughts in the comments section under each cost category. From this, we extracted general themes which we call findings. For each cost category there is a general finding, a chart outlining teachers belief in the most effective strategy presented, and a narrative section summarizing comments voiced by respondents.

FINDING 1: TEACHERS DESIRE STRATEGIES THAT WILL REDUCE FINANCIAL BARRIERS TOWARDS BECOMING A TEACHER, INCLUDING STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS AND INCREASED COMPENSATION.

The first cost category are the highest cost strategies that would require the most funding. The majority of these strategies address issues related to teacher compensation in some

way. Not surprisingly, teachers overwhelmingly supported strategies that would increase pay or help to pay down student loan debt. Figure 1 shows all the strategies provided by CDE's

Strategic Action Plan in this cost category and the percentage of teachers who thought that strategy would best solve the issue of teacher recruitment and retention (see Figure 1).⁶ Analysis of these numbers and the open response comments lead us to believe that

teachers desire strategies that will increase compensation, pay off outstanding student loan debt, or allow for the use of increased compensation to incentivize teachers to teach in hard-to-staff schools.

Figure 1. Question: “If you had to pick one strategy from this cost category that you believe would be the most effective, which one would you choose?”

High Cost

Recruitment and retention strategy	Percentage of those surveyed who chose the strategy as the most effective solution
Offer student loan forgiveness.	23%
Consider state salary equalization aid to incentivize districts to voluntarily raise minimum teacher and early child care provider salaries and wages.	22%
Provide supplemental compensation for teachers working in hard-to-staff schools (particularly remote rural schools).	10%
Consider implementing a differentiated pay scale for teachers in low-income districts and schools teaching in shortage areas.	9%
Increase the number of teachers trained through traditional and alternative educator preparation programs that include teacher residencies and grow your own programs.	8%
Explore the possibility of minimum teacher and early child care provider salaries.	7%
Offer scholarships that attract teachers of color to complete licensure requirements and enter teaching.	6%
Offer housing incentives.	6%
Institute tax credits for early child care providers and education professionals.	4%
Offer scholarships for content in teacher shortage areas to complete licensure requirements and enter teaching.	3%
Establish subsidies for early child care and education businesses to increase the salaries and wages of early child care.	2%

A vast majority of all respondents refer to compensation including higher wages, housing incentives, wage equalization, and student loan forgiveness as barriers to the profession and to retaining teachers. This was not surprising as the strategy in this category that was most strongly supported dealt with wages. One individual wrote that, *“There is no way that as a 24 year-old, third year teacher with a Master’s Degree that I could live in the city or the surrounding cities within my school district without a roommate.”* This type of sentiment was repeated many times. This causes teachers to have to live farther away from the communities in which they teach and/or take on the added stress of having adult roommates. Another teacher commented that, *“Teachers do not have*

a living wage in Colorado, and excellent teachers are leaving the profession because it is unsustainable.” Teaching is a stressful profession and the lack of compensation is adding to that stress load.

Roughly a quarter of teachers specifically mentioned student loan forgiveness. The cost of secondary education has skyrocketed in the past decade, placing an immediate financial burden on those who enter the teaching profession. A teacher shared these concerns: *“College is so expensive, and many people can find higher paying jobs after graduating that will help to more quickly pay back their loans. Loan forgiveness would help to take this concern away from educators.”*

FINDING 2: TEACHERS NEED MORE SUPPORT. WELL-TRAINED PARAPROFESSIONALS ARE NEEDED TO ASSIST IN THE CLASSROOM. TEACHERS NEED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND LEADERSHIP ROLES THAT ALLOW EXPERIENCED TEACHERS TO STAY IN THE CLASSROOM, AND NOVICE TEACHERS NEED A REDUCED TEACHING LOAD.

The next cost category is moderate/high cost. While these strategies would still be a significant financial investment, they address concerns around the working conditions of teachers. These strategies cover a wider variety of issues from classroom support to professional development. Figure 2 shows all suggested strategies from CDE and the percentage of teachers who indicated that the given strategy was the most

effective in this category (See Figure 2).⁷ Thorough study of the respondents’ selections and comments showed that teachers need more support in the classroom from well-trained paraprofessionals, as well as career advancement and leadership roles that allow experienced teachers to stay in the classroom, and reduced workloads for novice teachers.

Figure 2. Question: “If you had to pick one strategy from this cost category that you believe would be the most effective, which one would you choose?”

Moderate/High Cost

Recruitment and retention strategy	Percentage of those surveyed who chose the strategy as the most effective solution
Provide district funding to increase paraprofessional support for teachers and students.	17%
Support teacher National Board certification to encourage remaining in the classroom, professional recognition, career and leadership advancement, and increased salary and compensation.	13%
Provide reduced teaching loads for novice teachers.	13%
Provide financial support to teacher candidates through student teaching stipends.	10%
Provide reduced teaching loads for mentor teachers to work more strategically with novice teachers.	9%
Support peer review and mentorship as an advancement opportunity for distinguished teachers.	9%
Allow retired teachers to re-enter the profession in rural, suburban, and urban districts.	8%
Provide improved educational leadership preparation and professional development to assist principals in creating positive school climate and culture.	7%
Provide transportation and technology stipends for rural teachers and student teachers placed in rural schools.	5%
Create and provide funding for districts to provide teacher induction programs for initial licensed teachers.	4%
Develop and fund statewide competitive grant programs to support professional development and recognition for educators.	3%

Teachers find themselves with larger class sizes and more needs than ever before. One respondent said, *“With so many special education, ELL, and low learners, teachers are left with so many levels of students, they have a difficult time meeting all the needs. Well-trained paras would help this problem.”* Having well trained paraprofessionals to support teachers as they differentiate their practice based on student need in the classroom would increase student success and reduce feelings of burnout for teachers. Seventeen percent of teachers surveyed indicated that more funding for paraprofessionals in the classroom would increase teacher retention.

Professional recognition is also important for teachers, reflected in this teacher’s comment: *“Supporting teachers through NBCT [National Board Certification Training] will be a move to help retain our highest quality educators and ensure they are properly recognized/ rewarded for their contributions and effort.”* However, while teachers supported National Board certification (13 percent), they stated that presently there is not enough financial

incentive to make the cost and work load of this certification worthwhile. This creates an environment where further learning is a financial burden rather than a way to advance in the field. As a result, many feel stymied in the field of education and choose to pursue other careers.

New teachers recognize the need to be supported in their first years through reduced teaching loads and mastering teaching before taking on non-teaching duties like club sponsorship or committee membership. This new teacher said: *“As a newer teacher, I was strapped with three preps [class subjects to prepare for] and two of the classes were subjects where I was the only teacher. I looked up jobs every night and wanted to get out of the profession.”* Teachers believe this support will help new teachers feel better prepared and more successful in their day-to-day experiences and allow them to gain a strong foundation before increasing their responsibilities. Thirteen percent of respondents indicated that this alone would decrease “new teacher burnout.”

FINDING 3: TEACHERS ARE RETAINED IN SCHOOLS WITH POSITIVE LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL CLIMATE.

The third cost category shows the responses of teachers to strategies that CDE anticipates will have a moderate price tag to implement. These strategies deal primarily with fees incentives and school culture. A resounding 54 percent of respondents indicated that

improved building and district leadership would have a positive effect on teacher retention (See Figure 3).⁸ Many also discussed the financial roadblocks to becoming a teacher as a major hindrance to recruitment.

Figure 3. Question: “If you had to pick one strategy from this cost category that you believe would be the most effective, which one would you choose?”

Moderate Cost

Recruitment and retention strategy	Percentage of those surveyed who chose the strategy as the most effective solution
Provide improved educational leadership preparation and professional development to assist in creating school and district cultures that support educators.	54%
Provide financial support to prospective education majors through licensure exam fee waivers.	32%
Provide incentives for early notification of retirement to facilitate accurate projections.	14%

The majority of respondents do not feel supported by the culture in their districts or schools. Fifty-four percent of teachers surveyed think that a positive climate and culture would lead to a higher retention rate among educators and would keep experienced teachers in the classroom longer. As one teacher put it: *“Finding a school in which a teacher feels supported, invested in, and has room for growth—all from the top down, could be one of the deciding factors as to whether or not a teacher stays in the profession.”* Teachers would like to see more distributive leadership in their schools that would lessen the weight from one person and have more teacher input into school wide decisions.

In order to attract new teachers to the profession, thirty-two percent of respondents believe there should be grants or monies to help with the cost of becoming a teacher. *“Added costs, especially in a profession*

that doesn't pay well, deters people from entering,” commented one teacher. The expense of teacher preparation programs is significant, especially since some teachers enter teaching as their second profession. This contributes to the increasingly overwhelming amount of student loan debt. While student teaching is a necessary part of the pathway to teaching, pre-service teachers find it difficult to balance a full-time job along with their student teaching experience since there is no compensation involved. The additional cost is that of exams a teacher takes to gain the necessary license. The exam costs are due upfront and are hard to pay when preservice teachers are not generating income. These licenses are required before employment, and there could be grants based on financial need available through ESSA Title II part A, to help defray the costs. These grants could be temporary, until the issue of adequate school funding is further addressed by the state.

FINDING 4: TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS NEED TO EFFECTIVELY PREPARE TEACHER CANDIDATES TO BE READY UPON GRADUATION TO MEET THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF COLORADO'S STUDENTS.

The final cost category are strategies set forth by CDE's Strategic Action Plan that would be investments of time and energy rather than money. Many of these strategies have to do with the collaboration of districts and teacher preparation programs and the way preservice teachers are trained. Based on comments

made and strategies with the most support, we found that there is a misalignment with what districts actually expect of new teachers and how teachers are trained. Figure 4 shows which strategies those surveyed most supported (See Figure 4).⁹

Figure 4. Question: "If you had to pick one strategy from this cost category that you believe would be the most effective, which one would you choose?"

No Cost

Recruitment and retention strategy	Percentage of those surveyed who chose the strategy as the most effective solution
Align educator preparation program content and endorsements with the needs and expectations of school districts.	25%
Prepare teacher candidates for teaching and living in geographically and socio-economically diverse areas, e.g., rural, remote rural, urban, and suburban.	19%
Waive student teaching practicum employment restrictions for teacher candidates in good academic and dispositional standing.	16%
Align student teaching practicums with anticipated district teacher position openings.	12%
Cultivate partnerships with in-state and out-of-state educator preparation programs based on hiring projections.	8%
Forge public and private partnerships to develop a marketing campaign.	7%
Create educator preparation program policies that require teaching methodology course practicums in geographically diverse districts over the course of the program.	6%
Expedite approval of targeted programs for traditional and alternative educator preparation programs in content shortage areas.	6%

Aligning district and school needs to the content of teacher preparation programs would better prepare new teachers for workplace conditions and available jobs. As one teacher said, “[It] *Makes sense to plan ahead.*” This strategy is comparable to a business inventory; when a company anticipates that a particular product will be in higher demand, they stock more of it. Being better prepared to meet diverse needs also reduces feelings of burnout for teachers in their early years and could lead to better retention rates. Twenty-five percent of teachers indicated that this would be the most impactful non-cost strategy.

Since we know that rural districts in particular struggle with teacher shortages, educator

preparation programs should include content that prepares pre-service teachers to teach in these rural communities. This would better ensure that when teachers are hired in these districts they have the tools needed to be successful and thus more likely to stay. A teacher expressed the frustration of not being prepared by saying, “*Many times, training for teaching in these areas occurs AFTER the school year begins, rather than before. It’s much better to go into a situation well informed and prepared to deal with specific challenges surrounding the area.*” Adequate preparation of new teachers reduces the “shock” of being a new teacher and subsequent attrition.

+++++ RECOMMENDATIONS +++++

RECOMMENDATION 1: IMPROVE COMPENSATION FOR TEACHERS.

Notably, the strongest response across the board was that teachers need to be able to earn a livable wage. Recent events throughout the nation involving teacher walkouts for more state education funding, including an increase in teacher compensation, have raised the issue. Colorado ranks in the bottom third in teacher compensation. The fact that teachers are finally standing up and demanding more pay is a nationwide phenomenon and will continue to gather steam as more and more teachers are being emboldened by others around the country. There are multiple ways to increase compensation for teachers besides increased salaries, with the survey respondents strongly supporting the idea of student loan forgiveness. By reducing the monthly loan payments, teachers can keep more of their salary which nets a pay raise. Loan forgiveness might even encourage early career teachers to stay in the profession.

RECOMMENDATION 2: IMPROVE INDUCTION PROGRAMS TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO BECOMING A TEACHER.

Access to high quality induction programs doubles the length of time teachers are retained as compared to teachers who do not have access to these programs.¹⁰ The framework for these programs provided by CDE should be modified to include stipulations about the reduction of responsibilities outside of the classroom for novice teachers. The cost of student teaching is high in both time and money. Student teachers often work another job in order to afford the tuition payments and licensure requirements that come with entering the teaching profession. We recommend supporting student teachers by reducing the costs or by providing compensation for their work.

RECOMMENDATION 3: BETTER EQUIP SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS TO CREATE POSITIVE AND PRODUCTIVE BUILDING CLIMATES.

Leadership is a vital component in teacher retention. According to “The Influence of School Administrators on Teacher Retention Decisions,”¹¹ the most frequently-cited reason identified by teachers who had left their position was a lack of administrative support. Improved teacher retention requires increased training for administrators in research-based methods to create positive climate and culture, collaborative work environments, and to develop teacher leadership roles. HB18-1367, Leadership Professional Development for School Principals, was a bill that would have provided opportunities for districts to support principals to address these needs. Unfortunately, the bill failed in the Senate. We recommend the bill be brought up again next session and passed.

RECOMMENDATION 4: REDUCE FEES ASSOCIATED WITH BECOMING LICENSED AND OFFER ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION.

In order to become a teacher, one must purchase a professional license with endorsements by passing costly exams to enter the classroom. These fees should be reduced or eliminated for those that cannot afford them. More grants or scholarships should be available. For example, the TEACH grant that gives teachers who are interested in teaching in a Title 1 school a stipend for their loans could be expanded upon. This loan is distributed upfront with an agreement to serve a subsequent number of years in the classroom. More funding for Teacher Cancellation programs, in which a percentage of the loan is cancelled for each year of teaching experience, would also make teaching a more attractive profession. We suggest that these funds come from ESSA Title II part A, or annual state allocations. Additionally, teachers may increase mastery of teaching by having opportunities to increase their compensation with National Board Certification or advanced degrees.

+++++ **CONCLUSION** +++++

Teaching is a unique profession with many challenges. The state is taking needed steps to address recruitment of new teachers with solutions like the Colorado Quality Teacher Recruitment Grant Program, investing in Teacher Cadet, and “grow your own” programs. However, more needs to be done to retain teachers and those who are already participating in teacher preparation programs. Based on the responses that were gathered from current duty teachers, the state needs to take action to provide better/more access to professional development for administrators in order to create more positive school climates, modify the framework for induction programs to include reducing workloads for novice teachers, and provide more grant availability for license fees.

+++++ ENDNOTES +++++

¹ Colorado General Assembly. (2017, April 21). Strategic Plan To Address Teacher Shortages. Retrieved May 17, 2018, from <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb17-1003>

² O'Neil, C. (2017) Educator Shortage Strategic Action Plan. Retrieved from http://cosfp.org/HomeFiles/EducatorShortage/BOE_EducatorShortagePlan_Nov2017.pdf

³ Question 3: School Type (N= 300) "I am currently a teacher in a Colorado public school (district) (89 percent), "I am currently a teacher in a Colorado public school (charter)" (10 percent). Results may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

⁴ Question 4: Years of Experience (N=300) "Less than 4 years (13 percent), "4-9 years (27 percent), "10-14 years (16 percent), "15 or more years" (40%), "None Reported" (4%).

⁵ Question 5: "Which of the following best describes your school setting?" (N=299) "Rural setting" (28 percent), "suburban setting" (47 percent), "urban setting" (23%), "other" (3%).

⁶ Question 2: "If you had to pick one strategy from this cost category [high cost] that you believe would be the most effective, which one would you choose?" (N=292) "Offer student loan forgiveness" (23 percent), "Consider state salary equalization aid to incentivize districts to voluntarily raise minimum teacher and early child care provider salaries and wages." (22 percent), "Consider implementing a differentiated pay scale for teachers in low-income districts and schools teaching in shortage areas" (9 percent), "Provide supplemental compensation for teachers working in hard-to-staff schools (particularly remote rural schools)" (10 percent), "Increase the number of teachers trained through traditional and alternative educator preparation programs that include teacher residencies and grow your own programs" (8 percent), "Explore the possibility of minimum teacher and early child care provider salaries." (7 percent), "Offer scholarships that attract teachers of color to complete licensure requirements and enter teaching" (6 percent), "Offer housing incentives" (6 percent), "Institute tax credits for early child care providers and education professionals" (4 percent), "Offer scholarships for content teacher shortage areas to complete licensure requirements and enter teaching" (3 percent), "Establish subsidies for early child care and education businesses to increase the salaries and wages of early child care" (2 percent). Results may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

⁷ Question 4: "If you had to pick one strategy from this cost category [moderate/high cost] that you believe would be the most effective, which one would you choose?" (N=299) "Provide districts funding to increase paraprofessional support for teachers and students" (17 percent), "Support teacher national board certification to encourage remaining in the classroom, professional recognition, career and leadership advancement, and increased salary and compensation" (13 percent), "Provide reduced teaching loads for novice teachers" (13 percent), "Provide financial support to teacher candidates through student teaching stipends" (10 percent), "Provide reduced teaching loads for mentor teachers to work more strategically with novice teachers" (9 percent), "Support peer review and mentorship as an advancement opportunity for distinguished teachers" (9 percent), "Allow retired teachers to re-enter the profession in rural, suburban, and urban districts" (8 percent), "Provide improved educational leadership preparation and professional development to assist principals in creating positive school climate and culture" (7 percent), "Provide transportation and technology stipends for rural teachers and student teachers placed in rural schools" (5 percent), "Create and provide

funding for districts to provide teacher induction programs for initial licensed teachers" (4 percent), "Develop and fund statewide competitive grant programs to support professional development and recognition for educators" (3 percent). Results may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

⁸ Question 8: "If you had to pick one strategy from this cost category [moderate cost] that you believe would be the most effective, which one would you choose?" (N=284) "Provide improved educational leadership preparation and professional development to assist in creating school and district cultures that support educators" (54 percent), "Provide financial support to prospective education majors through licensure exam fee waivers" (32 percent), "Provide incentives for early notification of retirement to facilitate accurate projections" (14 percent). Results may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

⁹ Question 11: "If you had to pick one strategy from this cost category [non cost] that you believe would be the most effective, which one would you choose?" (N=282) "Align educator preparation program content and endorsements with the needs and expectations of school districts" (25 percent), "Prepare teacher candidates for teaching and living in geographically and socio-economically diverse areas, e.g., rural, remote rural, urban, and suburban" (19 percent), "Waive student teaching practicum employment restrictions for teacher candidates in good academic and dispositional standing" (16 percent), "Align student teaching practicums with anticipated district teacher position openings" (12 percent), "Cultivate partnerships with in-state and out-of-state educator preparation programs based on hiring projections" (8 percent), "Forge public and private partnerships to develop a marketing campaign" (7 percent), "Create educator preparation program policies that require teaching methodology course practicums in geographically diverse districts over the course of the program" (6 percent), "Expedite approval of targeted programs for traditional and alternative educator preparation programs in content shortage areas" (6 percent). Results may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

¹⁰ Ingersoll, R. & Smith, T.M.(2004, January 03). Do Teacher Induction and Mentoring Matter?.Retrieved May 17, 2018, from http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/134

¹¹ Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wykoff, J. (2011). The Influence of School Administrators on Teacher Retention Decisions. *American Education Research Journal*,48(2), 303-333. Retrieved May 1, 2018, from www.jstor.org/stable/27975291.