

# OKLAHOMA EDUCATOR WORKFORCE SHORTAGE TASK FORCE

CONVENED *by the* OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT *of* EDUCATION

INITIAL REPORT • JANUARY 2014



**Educators and researchers agree that Teacher Effectiveness is the single most important school-based factor in student academic achievement.**

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## INTRODUCTION

In response to Oklahoma’s Educator Workforce Shortage, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) convened a task force in 2013 to study the conditions creating the shortage and offer recommendations to policymakers likely to eliminate the shortage. The task force was composed of a variety of stakeholders – legislators; representatives of the business community, higher education, career and technology education, and public education, including both teachers and administrators; and other government officials.

The following recommendations are designed to:

- Support and retain effective educators,
- Encourage continuous professional growth of all educators, and
- Recruit highly capable people into the education profession.

For the purposes of this document, educators include teachers, instructional specialists, administrators, and other school personnel; however, it is duly noted that the most significant and widespread shortages are among classroom teachers.

This initial report of the task force includes an executive summary of strategic recommendations, research and rationale behind the recommendations, budgetary implications, and additional resources and potential next steps as appropriate.

The task force stands ready to augment these recommendations upon completion of the 2014 Educator Supply and Demand Study and each iteration thereafter as recommended in this report.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

Educators and researchers agree that teacher effectiveness is the single most important school-based factor in student academic achievement. Recent research indicates that the U.S. educational system is in dire need of more educators who are effective in improving student learning. The inability of the system to produce and retain effective educators is causing a crisis in the classrooms of many children.

In the report, *The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America’s Urban Schools*, TNTP (formerly The New Teacher Project) analyzes the conditions that often cause teacher shortages in urban school settings, including policies that discourage great teachers from doing what they do best, administrators who do not support great teachers, and structures that do not capitalize on the commodity of effective teachers to mentor new and ineffective teachers (<http://tntp.org/irreplaceables>).

Oklahoma’s urban school districts are not alone in the educator workforce shortage they face. School districts across the state have found it difficult to hire and retain effective teachers, even in traditionally easy-to-staff positions and geographic locations.

The charge of the Oklahoma Educator Workforce Shortage Task Force was to establish strategic recommendations that would provide for an effective teacher in every child’s classroom. In order to meet that goal, the task force identified concerns and organized recommendations into strategic themes to address those concerns.

### Priority Concerns

- Persistent classroom vacancies in many school districts, particularly in traditionally hard-to-staff grades, subjects, and geographic regions
- Lack of personal and professional support for practicing educators
- Limited opportunities for advancement, challenge, and professional growth

### Strategic Themes to Address Concerns

- Attracting high-quality individuals into the education profession
- Developing and retaining current workforce
- Compensation

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The strategies recommended in this document are designed to provide a coherent model of career development for educators as represented in the figure.



## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations identified in this document are considered to be top priorities by a significant number of task force members. These recommendations are often interrelated, so they are presented in terms of strategic themes to address the concerns of the educator shortage. Research, rationale, and implications of the recommendations are provided in the next section of this document.

### Attracting High Quality Individuals into the Education Profession

- Replicate the Educator Supply and Demand Study regularly, perhaps every 3-5 years. Use the results to identify areas of shortage and apply the recommendations made within this document to the areas of most critical need where it does not make sense to apply the recommendations more broadly.
- Develop a paid internship with significant mentorship and support for teacher candidates from traditional and alternative routes while completing their program and/or certification requirements. This could include replacing the traditional student-teaching experience with a multi-semester internship emphasizing co-teaching and other supports.
- Provide flexibility to the Oklahoma State Board of Education to certify traditionally prepared teacher candidates through alternative pathways on a case-by-case basis when unusual circumstances arise.
- Allow districts to develop local policies that provide opportunities for retired educators to return to the education profession without loss of retirement benefits.

### Developing and Retaining Current Workforce

- Reinstate the Teacher Residency Program, or offer a modified form of support, mentorship, and coaching for new teachers (including alternatively certified teachers) and those with professional growth needs. Consider current research on mentorship when making modifications to the Teacher Residency Program. See paid internship recommendation as one possible component.
- Provide opportunities for teacher career advancement, such as mentor/master teachers, teacher coaches, and instructional leaders, including additional state funds for stipends paid by districts that implement such strategies.
- To retain effective teachers, there must be additional professional development related to implementation of current initiatives and reforms. Without limiting funds provided to districts for discretionary professional development, target additional state funding for professional development to statewide academies and competitive grants. Provide research and best practices to districts in selecting high-quality professional development.

### Compensation

- Increase teachers' base salaries as identified on the State Minimum Salary Schedule by at least \$2,000, with a plan to continue to increase the base salaries annually until they are competitive with bordering states.
- Identify a sustainable funding stream dedicated to increased salaries and other strategies for addressing shortages.

**Upon completion of the 2014 Educator Supply and Demand Study and each iteration thereafter, additional strategic recommendations may be necessary to address priority concerns.**

## **RESEARCH, RATIONALE, AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **ATTRACTING HIGH QUALITY INDIVIDUALS INTO THE EDUCATION PROFESSION**

The four recommendations within this category provide a strategic approach to increasing the number of people in the education workforce with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the field.

**Replicate the Educator Supply and Demand Study regularly, perhaps every 3-5 years. Use the results to identify areas of shortage and apply the recommendations made within this document to the areas of most critical need where it does not make sense to apply the recommendations more broadly.<sup>1</sup>**

The Educator Supply and Demand Study was last completed in Oklahoma in 2001-2002. That report indicated that Oklahoma produced enough teachers but was unable to hire and retain enough of them to fill all vacancies. It also indicated that Oklahoma was likely to experience greater shortages in certain subjects and geographic locations by 2005. This report can be found at <http://www.okhighered.org/studies-reports/teach-supply/>. In order to fully understand the current and future conditions of the classroom teacher shortage in Oklahoma, this study needs to be replicated regularly, perhaps every 3-5 years, as was previously the practice. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) has formed a collaborative with the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation (OCTP), the Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition (OBEC), the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE), and the Oklahoma Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (OACTE) to support The Educator Supply and Demand Study of 2014, reflecting the production and retention of teachers within the state.

A regular cycle of study replication would allow for an ongoing understanding of the current landscape of producing, hiring, and retaining Oklahoma teachers. Information from the study should inform decisions regarding application of a variety of strategies, including some of the recommendations in this report. For example, if the 2014 study produces a result similar to

those from the 2002 study — namely, that hiring and retention, rather than production, are the primary concerns — recommendations for solving the shortage should lie more in areas of compensation and retention than in recruiting. If the 2014 study indicates that production is not sufficient to meet the current or projected need, however, then additional recommendations around recruitment may be warranted.

**Develop a paid internship with significant mentorship and support for teacher candidates from traditional and alternative routes while completing their program and/or certification requirements. This could include replacing the traditional student-teaching experience with a multi-semester internship emphasizing co-teaching and other supports.**

This recommendation is closely connected to recommendations in the category of Developing and Retaining Current Workforce, in that it draws on research that highlights the need for mentoring relationships early in and throughout one's career.

Currently, Oklahoma identifies student teachers as individuals who are participating in a "nonsalaried internship under the supervision of a certified teacher" (70 O.S. § 1-116). Teacher candidates from alternative routes do not have the benefit of a student-teaching experience, and teacher candidates from traditional routes often cite shortness of the experience as its primary downfall. In order to increase the amount of time student teachers receive in the classroom, many university teacher-preparation programs have begun offering full-year student-teaching opportunities. Financially, most student teachers cannot afford to avail themselves of this incredible, multi-semester opportunity due to the requirement that they not be compensated for their time in the public school setting.

Several teacher preparation programs have begun to implement co-teaching approaches to the student-teaching field experience. Co-teaching, as defined for student-teaching field experiences, presents the student teacher and mentoring teacher as collaborative professionals. St. Cloud State University has been researching best practices in co-teaching since

receiving The Teacher Quality Enhancement Partnership Grant in 2003. The Academy for Co-Teaching and Collaboration provides research and best practices on co-teaching, available at <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/soe/coteaching/>.

A multi-semester paid internship that focuses on co-teaching approaches could capitalize on best practices in mentorship, field experience, and classroom collaboration for those newest to the profession.

**Provide flexibility to the Oklahoma State Board of Education to certify traditionally prepared teacher candidates through alternative pathways on a case-by-case basis when unusual and/or extreme circumstances arise.<sup>2</sup>**

On rare occasions, teacher candidates complete all or nearly all of the requirements for traditional certification, but due to unusual and/or extreme circumstances are unable to be certified through the traditional route. Because these individuals have a bachelor's degree in education, rather than in a subject-specific content area, they are unable to become certified through alternative pathways (70 O.S. § 6-122.3).

For example, the OSDE was recently notified by a school district that they would like to hire an individual who completed a program of teacher preparation in Oklahoma but did not complete his student-teaching experience. Instead, the young man left Oklahoma to play professional sports. Upon retiring from professional sports, he returned to Oklahoma and wanted to teach. Because he did not complete student teaching, he could not be recommended for traditional certification. Because his bachelor's degree was in educational studies, he could not be recommended for alternative certification. Although this young man was deemed the best candidate by the school district based on his undergraduate degree and life experiences, the Oklahoma State Board of Education had no authority to grant him a certificate— despite his having passed all certification exams.

**Allow districts to develop local policies that provide opportunities for retired educators to return to the education profession without loss of retirement benefits.**

In the first three years following retirement, state law (70 O.S. §17-116.10) prohibits retired educators from earning more than \$15,000 (if less than 62 years of age) or \$30,000 (if at least 62 years of age) or ½ of the previous annual salary, whichever is lesser. It also prohibits them from being reemployed within the first 60 days of retirement. The task force believes that retired educators are an untapped resource for potential employees due to these limitations.

States that have allowed retired educators to re-enter the workforce while maintaining their retirement benefits have found these educators to be a positive solution for meeting shortages in specific areas of need. For example, in Indiana, retired educators are allowed to return to teaching without loss of benefits after 30 days under certain conditions (<http://www.in.gov/inprs/files/TRFMemberHandbook.pdf>). As a result of Indiana's plan, districts have been able to keep quality employees with valuable experience while saving money, since the plan does not require districts to contribute to the retirement system on behalf of retired educators. Moreover, the retired educators are often willing to work for a lower salary since they are also receiving retirement benefits.

To maintain the effectiveness of the Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System, specific rules and regulations around implementation likely will need to be developed; however, districts should be encouraged to use retired educators returning to the profession in creative ways (e.g., full-time subs, mentors, mentor principals/superintendents) in addition to traditional positions or the positions that they vacated.

**DEVELOPING AND RETAINING CURRENT WORKFORCE**

The three recommendations within this category provide a strategic approach to improving the effectiveness of people in the education workforce. By providing teachers with the tools and supports needed

to be successful, the State will encourage the current workforce to remain in the profession.

**Reinstate the Teacher Residency Program, or offer a modified form of support, mentorship, and coaching for new teachers (including alternatively certified teachers) and those with professional growth needs. Consider current research on mentorship when making modifications to the Teacher Residency Program. See paid internship recommendation as one possible component.**

The Oklahoma Teacher Residency Program, which is no longer required for certification, provided a mentor teacher, administrator, and university faculty member to support new teachers. Without funding to continue Residency Committees, most districts and universities have been unable to offer new teachers the same level of support. Mentoring networks have been established in the state in order to continue as many supportive services as possible. Although many districts have implemented a variety of induction strategies, very few can provide the type of mentorship encouraged by research. Without appropriate levels of support and coaching in the first years of teaching, many new teachers feel unsuccessful and choose to leave the profession.

Recent research indicates that systematic mentorship relationships are needed for at least the first two or three years of a teacher's career in order to have significant effects on student achievement and teacher retention. The New Teacher Center partnered with The National Association of State Boards of Education to create a discussion guide that examines the role of teacher induction programs in developing effective teachers and reducing teacher turnover. It provides current research related to teacher induction, elements of comprehensive teacher induction programs, examples of state-level action, and a guiding framework for policymakers to participate in meaningful conversations about new teacher mentorship and development (<http://www.newteachercenter.org/products-and-resources/policy-briefs/nasbe-discussion-guide-teacher-induction-improving-state-system>).

**Provide opportunities for teacher career advancement, such as mentor/master teachers, teacher coaches, and instructional leaders, including additional state funds for stipends paid by districts that implement such strategies.**

Related to the previous recommendation, this recommendation focuses on career advancement opportunities for effective educators who mentor and coach new and struggling teachers. Many great teachers create vacancies when they leave the classroom for positions in administration that offer professional advancement and chances for increased salary. Given an opportunity to advance their career without leaving the classroom and reducing their direct impact on classroom instruction, many teachers would choose not to take the route of becoming an administrator.

Additionally, many mentorship and coaching activities are conducted outside of the traditional school schedule. Very few districts can afford to offer stipends for work done outside of the traditional school schedule or to provide release time for mentoring and coaching during the school day. Both strategies require financial support for full implementation and sustainability.

A plethora of structures exist that partner the opportunity for career advancement through mentorship and coaching with the need for teacher induction and support. One such structure is TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement, managed and supported by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (<http://tapsystem.org/>). In the TAP framework, effective educators are given opportunities to take on mentoring responsibilities while maintaining full classroom responsibilities or to serve as full-time mentors and coaches of other teachers.

**To retain effective teachers, there must be additional professional development related to implementation of current initiatives and reforms. Without limiting funds provided to districts for discretionary professional development, target additional state funding for professional development to statewide academies and competitive grants. Provide research and best practices to districts in selecting high-quality professional development.**<sup>3</sup>

Teachers who feel successful and supported are most likely to remain in the profession. Teachers who leave often cite lack of administrative support or burden in implementation of new programs as reasons for their departure. Providing high-quality professional development can re-energize and re-equip.

Current funding for professional development is limited but incredibly valuable. The structures in the law ensure that these funds are targeted toward activities that will improve student learning while providing flexibility to districts for professional learning experiences most needed by their staff (70 O.S. § 6-192 through 6-194).

This recommendation focuses on providing additional professional development through continuous learning academies and competitive grants for development of innovative approaches to professional growth. Optional professional learning opportunities might come in a variety of delivery methods, including online learning, social networking and peer mentorship, advanced coursework, weekend academies in leadership development, and much more. The options are limitless for providing additional support to effective and developing teachers as they adapt to changing classroom characteristics and professional demands.

Standards for high-quality professional development have been provided by Learning Forward, an association devoted exclusively to advancing professional learning for the ultimate goal of student success (<http://learningforward.org/standards/>).

## COMPENSATION

The two recommendations within this category provide a strategic approach to retaining the current workforce through compensation that recognizes and rewards the contributions of educators to the State.

**Increase teachers' base salaries as identified on the State Minimum Salary Schedule by at least \$2,000, with a plan to continue to increase the base salaries annually until they are competitive with bordering states.<sup>4</sup>**

Education majors who choose other professions upon graduation and students who choose non-education majors often explain that potential salary is a major factor in determining their career pathway. Even stronger evidence exists for the number of education majors and certified teachers who leave Oklahoma to pursue teaching careers elsewhere. This is most common among teachers who live in "border districts" where the drive or move into another state is not prohibitive. In order to encourage more people to enter and stay in the teaching profession in Oklahoma, the State Minimum Salary Schedule needs to be more competitive. At a minimum, base salaries should increase by \$2,000, with a plan to continue to increase annually until salaries are competitive with bordering states.

	<b>Minimum First Year Teacher's Salary</b> (According to State Statute or Rule)	<b>Average Starting Teacher's Salary</b> (As reported by National Education Association)	<b>Average Teacher's Salary</b> (As reported by National Education Association)
Oklahoma	\$31,600	\$31,600	\$44,343
Missouri	\$25,000	\$29,857	\$45,321
Arkansas	\$29,244	\$32,478	\$46,500
Kansas	N/A	\$32,964	\$46,598
New Mexico	\$30,000	\$32,092	\$46,888
Texas	\$27,320	\$34,234	\$48,638
Colorado	N/A	\$32,095	\$49,228

**Identify a sustainable funding stream dedicated to increased salaries and other strategies for addressing shortages.**<sup>5</sup>

In order to develop a long-term, statewide solution to the Educator Workforce Shortage, a dedicated funding stream needs to be identified. Using one-time funds and short-term funding streams may create a temporary solution that cannot be sustained and might ultimately

spur more devastating shortages in years to come. While the bulk of the dedicated funding stream would likely be applied toward increasing salaries, other recommendations also have financial implications. The OSDE has estimated that the nine recommendations of the task force fall into four categories of expense: No Cost, Minimal Cost, Moderate Cost, and Substantial Cost.

<b>Attracting High Quality Individuals into the Education Profession</b>	Replicate the Educator Supply and Demand Study regularly, perhaps every 3-5 years. Use the results to identify areas of shortage and apply the recommendations made within this document to the areas of most critical need where it does not make sense to apply the recommendations more broadly.	<b>Minimal Cost</b>
	Develop a paid internship with significant mentorship and support for teacher candidates from traditional and alternative routes while completing their program and/or certification requirements. This could include replacing the traditional student-teaching experience with a multi-semester internship emphasizing co-teaching and other supports.	<b>Moderate Cost</b>
	Provide flexibility to the Oklahoma State Board of Education to certify traditionally prepared teacher candidates through alternative pathways on a case-by-case basis when unusual circumstances arise.	<b>No Cost</b>
	Allow districts to develop local policies that provide opportunities for retired educators to return to the education profession without loss of retirement benefits.	<b>No Cost</b> (Potential Impact to Teacher Retirement System)
<b>Developing and Retaining Current Workforce</b>	Reinstate the Teacher Residency Program, or offer a modified form of support, mentorship, and coaching for new teachers (including alternatively certified teachers) and those with professional growth needs. Consider current research on mentorship when making modifications to the Teacher Residency Program. See paid internship recommendation as one possible component.	<b>Moderate Cost</b>
	Provide opportunities for teacher career advancement, such as mentor/master teachers, teacher coaches, and instructional leaders, including additional state funds for stipends paid by districts that implement such strategies.	<b>Moderate Cost</b>
	To retain effective teachers, there must be additional professional development related to implementation of current initiatives and reforms. Without limiting funds provided to districts for discretionary professional development, target additional state funding for professional development to statewide academies and competitive grants. Provide research and best practices to districts in selecting high-quality professional development.	<b>Moderate Cost</b>
<b>Compensation</b>	Increase teachers' base salaries as identified on the State Minimum Salary Schedule by at least \$2,000, with a plan to continue to increase the base salaries annually until they are competitive with bordering states.	<b>Substantial Cost</b>
	Identify a sustainable funding stream dedicated to increased salaries and other strategies for addressing shortages.	<b>Substantial Cost</b>

## APPENDIX: NOTES, RESOURCES, AND NEXT STEPS

<sup>1</sup> Upon completion of the Supply and Demand Study, analyze results to determine next steps. Possible next steps could include some of the following options:

- Refine P20 data system to determine how many Oklahoma teacher education graduates enter Oklahoma public schools, ascertain professions/geographic locations of teacher education graduates who do not enter Oklahoma public schools, evaluate effectiveness of recruitment programs, and examine effectiveness of preparation and support programs.
- Provide funding for districts to access a nationwide candidate pool for hardest-to-staff areas.
- Develop a statewide job application tool or posting portal.
- Scale existing alternative programs with proven results by recruiting additional individuals and determine whether additional strategies to recruit and attract non-traditional teachers are warranted (e.g., recruiting retirees from other professions, Teacher for America/ Teach for Oklahoma).
- Allow for alternative certification into areas that currently do not exist (e.g., elementary education) if warranted by the study.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to Oklahoma-prepared teacher candidates with unusual and/or extreme circumstances, the OSDE is often approached by individuals who have been certified in other states that do not offer certification areas comparable to what is available in Oklahoma. Examples include such situations as the following: (1) states that issue “Science” certifications at the secondary level, whereas Oklahoma issues certifications based on specific courses, and (2) states that issue “U.S. History and Government” certifications, whereas Oklahoma issues “U.S. History/Oklahoma History/Government/Economics” certification. The OSDE and the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation have committed to examining the steps needed to increase the range of ability to honor certification issued in other states without additional coursework or exams. This may be able to be addressed through rulemaking, policy, and procedure without legislative changes.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to statewide academies and competitive grants, some districts continue to need assistance in developing professional learning plans that maximize the resources available for district discretion. Questions that arose during Task Force discussions included:

- How do district and school leaders know what professional learning opportunities exist and which are most valuable?
- What is the role of district and school leadership in developing a culture of continuous learning and professional growth?
- How can professional development strategies at the local level replicate successful statewide strategies, such as the Math and Science Partnership Grants, C3 Grants, and Oklahoma Data Review Models?

These questions can be addressed through statewide professional learning opportunities, networking possibilities, and competitive grants designed to improve leader effectiveness. They can also be addressed through pilot programs that are shared with all districts following their implementation.

Strategies for delivering professional development include: providing time for teachers to collaborate with their peers, analyze data, and plan; adjusting instructional responsibilities during the school day; providing stipends for time outside of school; and accessing 24/7 on-demand professional development resources.

<sup>4</sup> After raising base salaries for all educators to a competitive level, provide additional state funding for school districts to develop differentiated pay structures. Many states allow individual districts to create their own salary schedules or offer a variety of bonuses and stipends. To accomplish offering anything above the minimum salary schedule, districts would need additional revenue. This could come in the form of grants, pilot programs, or a percentage of funds designated for salary incentives.

Differentiated pay structures would provide district flexibility while encouraging innovative thinking about compensation. Such differentiated pay structures could include bonuses and stipends for a variety of educator

achievements and responsibilities. Examples for district consideration include, but are not limited to, bonuses for increasing student scores on AP exams or bonuses for every student achieving a 3, 4, or 5 on AP exams; stipends for serving as mentor/master teachers, teacher coaches, or teacher leaders; bonuses for attaining professional recognitions; signing bonuses for teachers of shortage subject areas and/or geographic locations; and stipends for hard-to-staff positions and high-challenge schools.

Another option for districts may be to modify the annual step increases so teachers attain comparable salaries to other fields in a timelier manner, for example bigger gains less frequently. In considering this possibil-

ity, districts may look to competing industries that start employees low on the salary schedule but allow for very swift advancement in the early years. This may require the State to remove some lines of the minimum salary schedule in order to provide flexibility to districts (e.g., at year 1, by year 3, by year 5...).

<sup>5</sup> In order to fund competitive compensation models and strategies that prevent shortages, many states allow districts to use local tax revenue for teacher salaries. Currently, Oklahoma law does not allow local tax revenue to be spent on salaries. Allowing the use of local taxes for salaries could provide one alternative to a statewide dedicated funding stream.

