

Summary of Actions and Recommendations

September 2022

Introduction and Background:

As part of the NEA Educator Voice Academy program, the Ohio Education Association convened a diverse team of members from around the state in January 2022 to investigate the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention and recommend actions for OEA, along with state policymakers, to address these challenges. The cadre, supported by OEA and NEA staff, met virtually five times between January and August 2022 and met in Columbus June 5-6, 2022, in conjunction with OEA's Educator Voice Academy cadre on Social and Emotional Learning.

Because the topic of teacher recruitment and retention was among several options provided by NEA, the OEA Educator Voice cadre focused exclusively on issues related to the recruitment and retention of teachers. However, the cadre believes attention also needs to be given to issues related to recruitment and retention of education support professionals and the broader education workforce to fully address the needs of the students in our public schools and all members of our Association.

The following OEA members participated in the cadre:

Hailey Batross, Elementary Education major, OEA Aspiring Educators

Samantha Bortz, Preschool Intervention Specialist, Hilliard Education Association

Anthony Coy-Gonzalez, Teacher of the Deaf, State Council of Professional Educators

Martha Davis, 8th grade English Language Arts teacher, Gallipolis Education Association

Ida Gorman, 8th grade English Language Arts teacher, East Canton Education Association

Marchell Josie, Middle School Intervention Specialist, East Cleveland Education Association

Eugene Mach, High School Business teacher, Warren Education Association

Debra McDonald, Early Childhood Education instructor, Wayne County Career Center Education Association

Brittany Mravec, 3rd grade teacher, Revere Education Association

Amy Neal, High School World Languages teacher, Springfield Education Association — Lucas County

Susan Randolph, Kindergarten teacher, Green Local Teachers Association

Eric Sottosanti, Adult Basic Education teacher, State Council of Professional Educators

Georgeanna Strohmeier, 6th grade Intervention Specialist, Upper Arlington Education Association

Merele Wilder, Peer Assistance and Review Consulting Teacher, Columbus Education Association

OEA Labor Relations Consultant Will Klatt and OEA President Scott DiMauro facilitated the cadre with support from OEA Director of Education Policy Research and Member Advocacy Nick Gurich, OEA Education Policy and Practice Consultant Ellen Adornetto, OEA Lobbyist Matt Dotson, NEA Executive Committee Member Hanna Vaandering, and other members of OEA and NEA staff.

Findings: Indicators and Causes

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were 21,000 fewer people employed in K-12 public schools in Ohio in September 2021 than in September 2019. This trend appears to be continuing into the 2022-2023 school year, with preliminary July 2022 BLS data showing a decrease of 17,000 employees versus July 2019 employment levels. While the data do not distinguish between teachers and others employed in the system, it is alarming that Ohio's public education workforce is 6% smaller now than three years ago. During the same period, public school enrollment in Ohio declined by 2%. Any impact of the COVID pandemic on enrollment and staffing appears to have disproportionately affected staffing levels, potentially leaving students underserved.

As the 2022-2023 school year begins, many districts around the state have reported difficulty filling open positions or finding fewer qualified candidates in their applicant pools. News reports from across the state have highlighted this issue. In mid-August, reports from northeastern Ohio indicated there were approximately 150 unfilled teaching positions in Cleveland and 70 teacher vacancies in Akron just two weeks before the start of the new school year. (Teacher shortage impacting some Northeast Ohio districts | wkyc.com) Another news report highlighting a surge in bus driver hiring in the Bowling Green district pointed out that six more drivers would have to be hired to reach the minimum staffing level of 20 drivers needed to offer busing outside a one-mile radius. (BG Schools working to overcome bus driver and substitute teacher shortages | BG Independent News, bgindependentmedia.org)

A critical shortage of substitute teachers has also wreaked havoc on school districts, straining educators' working and students' learning conditions especially during peak outbreaks of COVID-19. A diminished pool of substitute teachers has caused periodic acute shortages that have sometimes required districts to declare calamity days or transition to remote learning temporarily.

According to the Ohio Department of Education, there were approximately 13,000 substitute teachers as of 2019. By 2021, substitute teacher numbers fell to just over 5,000. The substitute teacher shortage has become so serious that Ohio lawmakers have acted twice (most recently in HB 583, enacted in June 2022) to temporarily suspend the requirement that substitutes hold a four-year college degree. While these temporary policy changes were necessary to get our students through the pandemic, we must not fix the problem of staff shortages by simply lowering licensure standards.

Recruitment challenges

The decline in the number of university students pursuing careers in education is alarming. A report from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education showed that traditional teacher-preparation programs experienced a decline of 35% in enrollment over the ten-year period from 2008-09 to 2018-19. And that does not include an expected drop due to the pandemic. (AACTE's National Portrait Sounds the Alarm on Declining Interest in Education Careers — American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)). An August WKYC report highlighted "a big drop off" in enrollment in teacher preparation programs at northeast Ohio universities (Northeast Ohio universities say fewer students are choosing education as a profession | wkyc.com). According to the National Council of Education Statistics, completion of education programs by Ohio's higher education graduates decreased 30% between 2003 and 2021. A federal Title II report reveals 16,982 students enrolled in teacher preparation programs at Ohio's 50 college and university providers in 2019-20. In 2011-12, there were 28,502 enrolled at 51 colleges and universities in the state, representing a 40% drop.

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Anecdotally, members of the cadre have noted that their colleagues are less likely to encourage their own children to choose careers in education than in the past. National polling data reflects this shift in attitude. The 2022 results of the annual Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) poll on public attitudes toward schools and teachers includes red flags for anyone concerned about the future of the teaching profession. Asked if they would want a child of theirs to become a teacher, 62% of respondents said no. That is an all-time high. PDK has asked the question 13 other times in the poll since 1969, when only 15% said no; the average over the previous responses is 33%. (PDK Poll: People Trust Their Public Schools, But They Don't Want Their Children to Work There, forbes.com)

One OEA member from a high-poverty urban district reports that she has witnessed a startling drop in the number of candidates attending job fairs for prospective teachers at Northeastern Ohio universities. When making recruitment visits to the University of Akron, she would previously find upwards of five hundred potential applicants; however, in 2022, she found less than one hundred. The member reported a proportionate drop off at John Carroll University when making recruitment visits. Districts in high-poverty areas like hers have always had difficulty competing with better-resourced suburban districts when hiring candidates. But the overall pool of qualified candidates is sharply declining. Even suburban school administrators report more significant challenges in recruiting candidates for positions that in the past may have had hundreds of applicants.

Retention challenges

Recruitment is just one part of the educator shortage equation. Mounting pressures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, under-resourced schools, politicization of education, and lack of respect for educators and the education profession are leading to growing challenges with teacher retention.

During the 2021-2022 school year, NEA surveyed members across the country. A whopping 90% reported feeling burnt out, and 55% expressed an interest in retiring early or leaving the profession. The numbers are even worse among members of color. While a mass exodus of experienced educators from the teaching profession has not yet materialized, it is cause for significant concern when so many are expressing deep frustrations over what they believe is a lack of support and respect for the work they do with students. There has long been a struggle to retain educators in their first five years of teaching, but pressures of the past three years are taking their toll on those with more experience as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated problems that had been evident prior to 2020, including deep levels of inequity that place significant pressure on educators in high-poverty communities and communities impacted by systemic racism. Inequitable access to non-academic supports, including mental health services, as well as greater needs for nutrition, after-school care, access to technology, and physical health and safety create challenges particularly for educators in marginalized communities. Layered on top of that, especially during the early phases of the pandemic, were threats to educators' personal health and safety, concerns about their own vulnerable family members, and intense pressures related to the transition to remote learning. Perhaps not coincidentally, educators have also reported having greater unmet mental health challenges than before the pandemic.





Educators were hailed as heroes in the spring of 2020 for adapting quickly to the remote learning needs of students. Subsequent battles at the local and state level over reopening plans and health and safety protocols made them feel they had gone from heroes to scapegoats in months. Compounding the problem have been the stressful effects of period surges of the virus, acute substitute teacher shortages, unpredictable modes of instruction (in-person, remote, hybrid, sometimes all at the same time), and mounting pressures to “catch kids up” and pass standardized tests in the wake of significantly disrupted learning. Even since learning settings began to stabilize by 2021-2022, the long-term effects of the pandemic have manifested themselves in student behavior issues related to a loss of socialization during remote learning, when chronic absenteeism hit record-high levels.

At the same time, many local school districts were the focus of intense public debates over masking, other COVID protocols, and remote instruction, and a national effort was underway to use education as a political wedge issue. Conservative activist Christopher Rufo and others sowed seeds of mistrust over diversity, equity and inclusion strategies and curricula related to race and gender issues. Attacks on honesty in education have taken the form of state legislation (including House Bills 322, 327, and 616) to restrict the teaching of “divisive concepts” and debates waged at the local level over book bans and other forms of censorship. These culture war issues cultivate fear and apprehension among an already-stressed population of teachers who just want the freedom to do the jobs they were trained and hired to do with students. The debate over arming teachers in the aftermath of another tragic mass school shooting has added to that stress.

Since the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind law in 2002, underlying education policy issues, including an outsized emphasis on standardized testing, have taken the joy out of teaching and learning for many educators. A constant struggle to win a constitutional system that fully and fairly funds all public schools in Ohio and to stop the diversion of resources to unaccountable charter and private schools adds to the frustration. OEA member polling has consistently revealed that a large majority of members from across the political spectrum feel demoralized by politicians who pass laws affecting public schools without listening to the voices of educators who have dedicated their professional lives in service to their students.

Meeting the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Challenge — A Systems Approach

The educator shortage problem did not emerge overnight. It will take time and concerted effort by policymakers at all levels—local, state, and national—in collaboration with the public education community, higher education institutions, our union, and our members to solve the problem. A comprehensive approach to effectively recruiting more caring, qualified, and committed people into the education profession and retaining them depends fundamentally on giving educators the respect and support they need and deserve.

Ensuring all educators are compensated at a level that reflects their value is a vital first step. Competitive salaries and benefits are especially critical to address the growing national pay gap between educators and comparably educated individuals in other fields. A recent Economic Policy Institute (EPI) study breaks down this growing gap over the last 18 years. The EPI study highlights that addressing this gap by providing “teachers with compensation commensurate with that of other similarly educated professionals is not simply a matter of fairness but is necessary to improve educational outcomes and foster future economic stability of (educators and their families).” (The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high, Sylvia Allegretto, August 16, 2022, Economic Policy Institute)





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Supportive educator working conditions are necessary for conducive conditions for student learning and represents a second essential element for educator retention. Providing manageable class sizes that allow for individualized support for students, safe and healthy learning spaces, adequate planning and instructional time, and supports for students with unique needs are all essential conditions for retaining educators as well.

Quality job-embedded support systems are a third essential element for educator retention. To be successful, new and experienced educators alike need quality professional development and mentoring support that empowers them with relevant guidance and feedback tailored to meet their individual circumstances.

Finally, any approach to improving teacher recruitment and retention must reflect a fundamental respect for educators and their professional autonomy. Educators need to know their voice matters in the critical decisions that affect their students and schools.

Recommendations:

A. Policy Recommendations — Call on policymakers at the state and federal levels to take the following actions:

1. **Immediately increase Ohio state minimum teacher's salary to \$40,000, and pending approval of a change in OEA Legislative Policy by the OEA Representative Assembly, increase the state minimum salary to \$50,000.**

Ohio's current statutory minimum base salary is \$30,000, established by the 133rd General Assembly as part of House Bill 166, the state budget bill passed in 2019. Prior to 2019, the last time the legislature had increased the state minimum teacher's salary was in 2001, when it was increased from \$17,000 to \$20,000 per year.

For the 2021-2022 school year, Ohio's average starting salary for professional educators with a bachelor's degree and no prior experience was \$38,942, ranging from \$28,000 to \$49,585. Of the 566 districts with salaries in OEA's database, 351 (62%) had starting salaries below \$40,000, and 215 (38%) had starting salaries above \$40,000.

Increasing starting pay for educators serves several purposes, including addressing the educator pay gap that impedes hiring talented people into the education profession. According to the EPI study released in August 2022, Ohio teachers make, on average, 14.4% less per year than comparably educated peers working in other professions. Raising starting pay makes the education profession more competitive from a recruitment standpoint and improves career earnings, which assists in retaining educators. Higher starting salaries likewise allow for condensed salary indexes, making it easier for educators to move between school districts.

Salaries and benefits are mandatory subjects of collective bargaining. Specific pay levels above the state minimum and the impact of increasing starting pay will need to be negotiated at the local level to ensure no teachers are penalized for their experience and available resources are distributed fairly. The bargaining process must address adjustments to the salary index, retention bonuses, and other compensation issues.





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- Fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan in the 2023-2025 state biennial budget and provide state support to local school districts with the resources to fund necessary salary increases.**

Requiring an increase in starting pay for educators must not be solely placed mandated on local school districts without support from the General Assembly. The Fair School Funding Plan partially enacted as part of the 2021 state budget bill represents an important first step in providing an equitable, adequate, and constitutional level of funding. The legislature must act now to finish the job.

- Extend Public Service Loan Forgiveness deadlines and expand student loan forgiveness, grants, and scholarship programs to provide meaningful financial relief for those who commit to serving students in our public schools.**

Programs to provide financial support for new educators should include non-traditional students, ensure targeted support for economically disadvantaged individuals, and enhance racial, cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity in the education workforce.

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness waiver program provides anyone with ten years of public sector experience, including public school educators, with the opportunity to have their student loans forgiven. The current deadline of October 31, 2022, must be extended to ensure all who qualify receive the relief they need. That, along with the recently announced broader relief of \$10,000 to \$20,000 per qualified borrower, will ease pressure on educators to leave teaching to take on more lucrative jobs to pay off their student loans.

Removing financial barriers to entry into the profession is key to attracting talented, diverse aspiring and future educators into our ranks.

- Strengthen educators' retirement security by supporting a fully funded State Teachers Retirement System of Ohio and repealing the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).**

Attracting and retaining caring, qualified, committed educators throughout the state requires appropriate compensation in the form of competitive salaries, healthcare benefits, and supportive working conditions. It also means ensuring a safe and secure pension and fairness for those who have earned Social Security benefits prior to entry into the public education workforce. Keeping STRS Ohio solvent so no educator will ever outlive her retirement benefit has always been and will continue to be a top priority for our Association. Eliminating unfair penalties for Social Security recipients and their beneficiaries will also allow more people from the private sector to enter education without losing their benefits and provide all educators with the respect and support they need and deserve.

- Remove financial barriers for completion of pre-service requirements for teacher licensure.**

It is essential to remove unnecessary impediments that create hardships for aspiring educators to attract a diverse population of teachers, including people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. One way to accomplish this is to establish pilot programs modeled after states such as Oklahoma to compensate those completing student teaching requirements for licensure. Financial relief may also take the form of tuition waivers and/or cost-of-living stipends funded through work-study payments or other funds. Establishing paid residency programs in lieu of traditional student teaching may be another





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way of eliminating financial barriers to licensure while providing meaningful clinical experiences with mentoring support for those transitioning from college to full professional status.

Carefully analyzing tests and performance assessments required for licensure for cultural bias is an important strategy for ensuring Ohio's students have teachers who reflect their diversity and are responsive to their needs. Another important strategy is providing waivers or reimbursement of testing fees based on financial need.

6. **Require the state to complete a comprehensive assessment of the alignment of Ohio's teacher preparation programs with the realities of PK-12 schools.**

Comprehensive educator preparation programs must ensure profession-ready educators and should include expert mentorship, quality coursework and clinical experiences on content and teaching methods, cultural competence, and differentiated instruction. Ensuring that pre-service coursework and field experience align with their day-to-day experiences once employed in licensed positions is a prerequisite for their success and that of their students. Seeking and acting on feedback of early career educators, cooperating teachers, field experience supervisors, mentors, administrators, and others with first-hand knowledge of how well teacher preparation program requirements match real-life classroom experience is critical. It assists in ensuring consistent standards across institutions of higher education that provide those programs. We recommend a coordinated effort led by the Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Department of Higher Education to identify areas needing improvement and make any necessary programmatic changes. OEA and other organizations representing the voices and interests of aspiring and licensed educators would support this effort.

7. **Seek feedback from educators on their working conditions and create systems for school leaders to act on that feedback to make necessary changes to policies, practices, and culture in schools.**

Preventing teacher burnout requires actively listening to educators, giving them a voice in their schools, and respecting their professionalism in their work with students. Far too many educators leave the profession early because they feel they do not have a voice. One tool that may be useful in facilitating the collecting of feedback on working and learning conditions is the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Ohio Survey. TELL was initially established using federal Race to the Top funds to help districts and schools analyze and respond to their current teaching and learning conditions. We recommend that the Ohio Department of Education reinstate this tool or develop a comparable way of facilitating the process for educators to provide feedback to superintendents, principals, and boards of education and set the stage for collaborative problem-solving to improve school culture as needed.

8. **Create and maintain an accessible statewide database of education job openings to facilitate the matching of educators seeking employment with available positions and to provide a reliable source of information for the public to monitor trends in education employment in Ohio.**

There is currently no central source of information to allow for accurate, real-time tracking of educator shortages or surpluses at the state level. Enacting sound public policy to address educator shortage issues depends on reliable data that helps pinpoint by job and location hard-to-fill positions and monitor trends to allow for long-term strategic planning. We recommend that the Ohio General Assembly





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assemble appropriate stakeholder groups to identify the specific data that needs to be tracked and then pass legislation requiring the Ohio Department of Education or another appropriate agency to build and maintain a publicly accessible educational employment database.

Note: A source of proposed policy approaches to addressing several of these issues, namely educator pay and recruitment, were recently proposed by the Biden Administration in its August 31, 2022, release, “Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Public and Private Sector Actions to Strengthen Teaching Profession and Help Schools Fill Vacancies.”

The Biden Administration announced policy proposals to assist states in their ability to attract and retain educators. Included in this announcement are calls by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) Secretaries for states and local school districts to utilize emergency funds from the American Rescue Plan to increase educator pay. Finally, in collaboration with NEA, the USDOL and USDOE, and other education advocacy partners, have announced that they will work together to identify best practices and support state affiliates in developing registered apprenticeship programs to ensure educator quality while offering increased pathways for entrance into the and growth in the education profession. OEA and other partners should explore this policy solution as a potential means of improving Ohio’s teacher recruitment programs.

B. Organizing Recommendations — OEA should work to address recruitment and retention challenges by taking the following actions:

1. **Strengthen and align OEA’s continuum of support for educators and aspiring educators at all levels of experience with a particular focus on supporting educators of color:**

- a. Organize members to expand the number of Educators Rising chapters in Ohio high schools and career-technical programs
- b. Expand the number of OEA Aspiring Educator chapters to support college students who have chosen careers in education.
- c. Strengthen Ohio’s New Educators (O.N.E.) program to engage and support early career educators and link early career educators with aspiring educators and more experienced educators.
- d. Develop programming specifically designed to engage educators with more than 10 years of experience in OEA and their locals with retention of educators in the profession as a clear goal of the work.
- e. Support OEA-Retired in increasing its membership and engaging retired members in recruiting and retaining active educators.

A comprehensive approach to teacher recruitment and retention depends on identifying, recruiting, supporting, and engaging people from diverse backgrounds at all stages of their professional journeys. Active OEA members serve as role models to their students and can strengthen the education profession by inspiring and encouraging them to choose educational careers. OEA is structured





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uniquely with divisions specifically designed to support college students who have chosen to major in education as well as active and retired educators. OEA should create seamless ways of transitioning from one membership level to another and cultivate new relationship-building opportunities between experienced and retired educators with potential and aspiring educators. By doing so, OEA will recruit, engage, and retain more people as Association members while strengthening our union and our profession.

Fortunately, OEA is not alone in this work. At the national level, NEA has entered into a new partnership agreement with PDK International, the parent organization of Educators Rising (formerly Future Educators of America). The relationship will support new and continuing Educators Rising chapters for middle and high school students who are exploring careers in education. PDK International and Educators Rising have endorsed NEA's Aspiring Educator program, which serves pre-service teachers at the college level, allowing NEA first right of refusal when organizing new campus chapters. This mutually supportive arrangement provides promising opportunities to grow the teacher recruitment pipeline in Ohio.

Building on the work of the Educator Voice Academy Cadre, the OEA Board of Directors has charged the Standing Committee on Organizing Strategy Committee with identifying school districts and college campuses that provide opportunities for creating or expanding Educators Rising and/or Aspiring Educator chapters. In partnership with OEA Aspiring Educator leadership, this is a part of OEA's efforts to address the educator shortage crisis in Ohio. This work may also include advocating for funding for more teacher pathways career-technical programs.

2. **Provide bargaining and organizing support to local associations for the creation and execution of successful Labor-Management committees.** Nurturing collaborative relationships between the union and administration at the local level provides opportunities for meaningful educator voice in their working conditions and their students' learning conditions. Strong administrative support is essential for educators to feel valued and connected to the profession. Effective labor-management committees provide a framework for dialogue to ensure that educators receive the support they need.
3. **Continue to support local organizing strategies to maintain and improve competitive salaries and benefits and supportive working conditions through the collective bargaining process.** A comprehensive approach to attracting and retaining educators in the profession requires systematically addressing compensation, support systems, and working conditions. There is no stronger tool at our disposal for organizing for necessary improvements than the local collective bargaining process.

Several other strategies for addressing recruitment and retention issues have not been investigated in depth by the Educator Voice Academy cadre but deserve further consideration. They include the following:

1. **Investigate models for developing and expanding "Grow Your Own" and Apprenticeship programs in Ohio.** "Grow Your Own" programs identify promising teacher candidates from local communities and school systems and then provide them tuition, time, and materials as they train to become teachers. Apprenticeship programs target individuals serving as paraprofessionals or in other education support professional roles who wish to gain licensure to teach without sacrificing their job and income to complete the process. The OEA Professional Efficacy Committee has been charged with further





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investigating these kinds of programs and making recommendations on advocating for those with promise while adhering to professional standards and collective bargaining principles.

- 2. Continue to support the Educators Leading the Profession pilot program in Ohio to experiment with ways of building union-led professional support systems for early career educators.** Advocacy for high-quality comprehensive induction and mentoring programs—and the funding to make them possible—has been a longtime priority of OEA. The Columbus Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program is one example of a longstanding member-led program to support the success of new educators and provides a model for other districts and local unions to consider replicating. Experimentation with new models of professional support will increase the likelihood of retaining educators while strengthening their connection to their union.
- 3. Continue to support and, if feasible, expand the Pathways program as a model for recruiting and nurturing talented students of color on their journey into the education profession.** Ohio has a striking lack of diversity when comparing the educator workforce to our student population, and improved diversity leads to better student outcomes. While small, the Pathways program that began in 2021 through a partnership with Eastern Gateway Community College, Central State University, OEA, and the Ohio Federation of Teachers offers a model for student support and member engagement that may be replicated with other universities.
- 4. Advocate for increased reciprocity in licensure to remove barriers to qualified educators from other states being able to fill needed educational roles in Ohio.** Also consider bargaining strategies that remove barriers that prevent educators from moving between districts within the state.
- 5. Continually seek opportunities to celebrate the education profession** using all available means of communication (social media, news media, paid advertising, public events, etc.) as a way to enhance the image of educators for recruiting new talent into the education profession and as a way of invigorating educator morale. Members need to see tangible evidence of how OEA is supporting them. We commend the Ohio Department of Education for its “I Educate Ohio” social media campaign to celebrate, elevate, recruit, and diversify people serving in the teaching profession. We recommend that OEA find new ways to amplify this campaign using its platforms.
- 6. Form a new Educator Voice Academy cadre to engage OEA members who are education support professionals in developing solutions to ESP recruitment and retention challenges.** We recognize that addressing teacher issues solves only part of public schools’ problems. Schools across Ohio have also faced critical shortages of bus drivers, cafeteria workers, skilled tradespeople, paraprofessionals, and other essential educational staff. Providing ladders of opportunity for achieving teacher licensure and certified positions may be one potential strategy for improving the system and supporting members and students. There are certainly others. Fundamentally, education support professionals need and deserve respect, support, and a voice in shaping their future and that of the students they serve.





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Summary and conclusions:

Ohio is at a crossroads. The future of our state depends on providing ALL students, regardless of their background, with a high-quality public education that ignites their curiosity, imagination, and desire to learn. That is only possible when every classroom is led by a caring, committed, qualified teacher. Suppose we are to reverse the trend of fewer people choosing education as a career and more people retiring early or leaving the profession altogether. In that case we must unite with fellow educators, school leaders, parents, students, community members, and policy makers to raise the level of respect and support provided for educators.

Like any system, our public education system will yield the results it was designed to produce. Unsupported and under-resourced teachers who leave the profession early usually do so because the system failed, which comes at a cost. A loss of experienced teachers deprives students of opportunities for quality instruction. It also costs school districts tens of thousands of dollars in recruitment, hiring, and training expenses. Failing to invest in strategies to support and retain quality educators is short-sighted and counterproductive.

If unchecked, the growing educator shortage crisis will lead to larger class sizes, fewer course offerings, less individual attention, and lower quality instruction for our students. Investing in the recruitment and retention of educators will create a brighter future for our students, communities, and state.

Now is the time for action. We call on policymakers from the governor to legislators to school board members to work with Ohio's educators on meaningful, comprehensive solutions to our state's existential challenge. We also call on our union to lead the way by organizing our members to find their voice and reclaim their profession. Our students are counting on us.

