



A Union of Professionals

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?

What America Must Do to Attract and Retain the
Educators and School Staff Our Students Need

Report in Brief



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[Our Mission](#)

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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Report in Brief

Teachers and school staff are exhausted and fed up, yes—by the conditions they work under, *not* the kids they teach and work with. What we have seen in survey data and conversations with members across the country is, if conditions change, they will stay. That’s because every day, they see it as their mission to come to nurture, love and teach our kids. Briefly, we don’t have a shortage of people who want to teach and support students, our nation has a shortage of respect, working conditions and compensation for the people who do this work.

The AFT Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force brought together 25 leaders from our state and local unions across the country who worked intensively with leading researchers in the field, surveyed our membership, and sought frontline input from many of AFT’s 1.7 million members. They identified four key areas that need to change if we are to reverse the teacher and school staff shortages: **climate, culture, conditions and compensation.**

Below is an abridged list of the recommendations of the taskforce. Read the complete list of recommendations, as well as the research to support them in the full report: <https://bit.ly/shortagereport>.

- **Treat teachers and school staff like professionals.**

Our task force heard from countless members about how important it is for them to be trusted and treated as professionals: to be given the time in their workday to plan and prepare for classes; to be able to collaborate with colleagues; to have authority to make day-to-day school decisions based on their professional judgment; and to have ongoing, job-embedded professional development so they can grow in their careers.

- **Teachers and school staff must be respected.**

Nothing better encapsulates this than the recent debate on gun violence. Some of the very same people who are proposing arming teachers have also proposed banning books or limiting curriculum. If you trust educators enough to carry firearms, why are they not trusted to do what they are trained to do—teach kids, decide curriculum, and answer hard questions?

- **Increase salaries and benefits to attract and retain education professionals.**

Money matters. Too many teachers and school staff must work multiple jobs just to make ends meet, and too many are burdened with heavy student debt. (People shouldn’t have to go into decades of debt to become teachers or school staff and to stay in these jobs.) We will never successfully recruit and retain enough diverse, highly qualified teachers until we significantly raise the salaries of American teachers—especially in these times of increasing inflation.

- **Lower class sizes.**

As we focus on academic recovery this coming year, what better way to meet students' academic needs than by lowering class size? The federal government should also expand its support for class-size reduction through Title I and other federal programs. As our schools continue to expand their effort to address social and emotional needs, small classes are essential—ideally, no larger than 20 students in prekindergarten through third grade, 23 students in grades 4-8, and 25 students in grades 9-12.

- **Increase planning time.**

For every two minutes of instruction, a teacher should have one minute of planning time for both individual and collaborative planning. In many places, this 2:1 ratio of instruction to planning would help ensure teachers and other educators have the time to properly prepare lessons, provide meaningful feedback, and meet the individual needs of their students.

- **Turn schools into community hubs that serve the needs of the whole child and the whole family.**

This means investing in thousands of community schools with wraparound services—a model that is working across the country. This model strives to make all schools safe and welcoming places with a culture of parent and family engagement and strong partnerships between home and school. Especially after the past two pandemic years, public schools should have a well-staffed program that addresses the well-being of students and staff.

- **Curb the nation's current "test-and-punish" obsession.**

Replace low-quality, time-consuming standardized tests, in favor of educator-led, curriculum-linked assessments, project-based learning, and true measures of what students know and can do. The obsession with standardized testing and its impact on teaching and learning is killing the joy of teaching and learning.

- **Reduce the endless paperwork.**

Teachers and school staff are required to provide an increasing amount of data and written reports that document classroom activities—but to what end? Paperwork should help teachers and school staff do their jobs—not be part of their jobs. In a recent survey we conducted, 95 percent of AFT K-12 members chose "less paperwork and fewer non-teaching duties that take away from student needs" as a top answer for how to fix the shortage crisis.

- **Diversify the educator workforce.**

We must strengthen ties with the community through promising practices such as grow-your-own programs; a minimum of a year in clinical experience; and comprehensive, sustained mentoring. Increasing diversity will take a multipronged, strategic approach.

- Programs should provide candidates with extensive clinical experiences that offer real-world practice alongside a skilled practitioner.

Ideally, this clinical experience would cover an entire school year. Candidates need to experience the rigors of the profession in an authentic classroom environment. They should start with setting up their classroom and meeting students on the first day, and they need to be with those students throughout the different experiences of the whole school year.

- Consider ways to Increase roles and responsibilities without leaving the classroom.

To move up in American schools, teachers often leave the classroom and become administrators. We must break this cycle of moving up by moving out. Unions, working with their local jurisdictions, should consider ways to create career ladders that provide greater roles and responsibilities without having to leave students.

- Expand the scope and reach of collective bargaining.

Some districts do not have collective bargaining; others limit its scope. Collective bargaining is the best way for teachers and school staff to have a voice to advocate for what their students need and for what they need as professionals. It is the best way to solve problems, and truly change conditions, climate, culture and compensation.

The good news—this is solvable. Some countries have no problem retaining their teachers and have few problems recruiting new teachers and staff. We can do this, too. That is why the AFT brought together what's probably the most important task force we have ever convened in our history: the AFT Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force. We need to listen to the people who work in schools every day, the people who are closest to the issues that are driving teacher and school staff shortages. They will guide us to solutions that will improve **climate, culture, conditions and compensation.**



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