

2022 Legislative Session Issue Brief

School staffing shortages

Staffing shortages in our schools was already a growing problem before COVID-19 hit. The pandemic just made it worse, reaching crisis levels where districts are scrambling to hire and keep teachers and other school staff.

This isn't merely a problem that can be solved by finding more substitutes to fill in for teacher absences. Minnesota needs more adults working in our schools — counselors, social workers, teacher aides, nurses — to better serve our students' needs.

Nearly one-third of teachers said they are considering leaving the profession because of burnout from the pandemic. Education assistants, bus drivers, food workers and custodians are leaving because they can find better pay and job security in the retail sector. Fewer substitutes are willing to put themselves at risk for infection for the low pay and unpredictable schedules they get in return for their work.

A lack of bus drivers means longer rides, crowded buses and sometimes no transportation for students and caregivers. Minneapolis raised wages and offered \$3,000 signing bonuses this year with hopes of recruiting more drivers, but routes remain unfilled.

School districts across the state are begging parents and community members to get their substitute teaching licensing to fill in massive staffing gaps. Teachers On Call, a Bloomington company that contracts with 103 Minnesota districts to provide substitutes, told the Star Tribune in October 2021 that demand has increased by 40 percent since 2019-20. The company can fill just over 70 percent of the vacancies compared with 90 to 93 percent before the pandemic.

The Osseo school district had 50 open positions for education support professionals in January after winter break — twice as many during a normal year. ESPs are also filling in for open teaching slots if they have a bachelor's degree, leaving students without the support they usually provide. The mental and emotional toll has contributed to the disintegration of morale.

And there are no signs school staffing shortages will end anytime soon. In fact, they will only get worse unless the Minnesota Legislature acts now. While the situation is evolving and more solutions will surface, here's what the Legislature can do to start addressing these unsustainable shortages.

All educators

- Extend paid COVID-19 leave for school staff who are sick, quarantining or caring for a loved one who is quarantining.
- Increase prep time by 50 percent so educators can talk with students and parents, grade homework and plan the next day's lesson during their contract day.
- Offer free or reduced college tuition to attract more teachers to the profession.

Continued on back

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www.educationminnesota.org

Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.  2504



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

Education support professionals

- Pay them like professionals with a starting wage of at least \$25 an hour.
- Provide hiring bonuses to attract new educators to the profession.
- Offer more programs and financial assistance for paraprofessionals to be licensed educators.

Substitutes

- Allow retired teachers to return as substitutes without impacting their pension benefits.
- Provide schools with full-time substitutes based on their student enrollment numbers.
- Raise substitute pay to at least 90 percent starting wage salary for teachers.
- Pay teachers who cover a class for absent colleagues double their hourly rate and expanded prep time.

Other proposals

- Require school administrators to sub at least one day a semester.
- Expand co-teaching models that have a teacher and teacher candidate work collaboratively to meet the needs of students.