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Reimagining Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Innovations for the Future of K-12





Introduction

School leaders have grappled with the challenge of teacher recruitment and retention for a long time—and, according to the data, that won't change anytime soon. This is a systemic problem that quick-fix solutions, like one day of training or a staff appreciation party, simply can't fix.

At Class, we believe it's time to stretch beyond band-aid solutions and rethink the fundamentals of recruitment and retention strategies. In this e-book, we'll share innovative ideas that K-12 leaders should consider as they re-envision education—with teachers in mind.

Rethinking Recruitment

Despite the surplus of trending headlines on the teacher shortage, teacher recruitment and retention are not new challenges.

One study from 2019 shows that [nearly 14% of teachers](#) left their schools or the profession entirely, and the number of schools reporting vacancies they couldn't fill tripled from 2011 to 2016. The pandemic exacerbated the problem, though, with a [148% increase in teacher resignations](#) in 2021 and [declining enrollment in teacher preparatory programs](#) that foretell an ongoing teacher shortage that may last for the next decade—or longer.

With teacher shortages on the rise, education leaders are focused on recruiting new employees. They are rethinking approaches to expand beyond the traditional teacher education pipelines to fill positions and mitigate the impact of the teacher shortage by recruiting community members, aspiring teachers, and retired educators for part-time support. Here are some creative solutions that select school districts have already employed and forward-thinking approaches that haven't been tried yet but can propel districts into the future.

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How can school districts reimagine teacher recruitment and diversify their hiring pipeline/pool? Here are some of the solutions available today.



Grow Your Own initiatives

Grow Your Own initiatives, like the one [piloted in Washington state](#) from 2016 to 2019, aim to **increase diversity among school employees by tapping into the local workforce**. These initiatives are [based on data](#) showing that while teachers tend to work in schools near their hometowns, Black and Latino teachers are still vastly underrepresented—even in communities with high minority populations. Typically, these programs target high school students and recent graduates who need financial support and coaching to receive certification.



College and university partnerships

Many school districts have discovered that working closely with colleges and universities with teacher prep programs can help them **fill critical gaps and build lasting relationships with aspiring teachers**. For example, Portland Public Schools partnered with Portland State University's teaching program in 2015 to create the [PPS & PSU Dual Language Teacher Partnership](#). This program allows candidates to earn a master's degree in elementary education and an ESOL certificate while working as a classroom teacher, paraprofessional, or full-time sub.



Lateral entry programs

Several state boards of education, such as in [Illinois](#), offer lateral entry programs (also called alternative licensure), making it **easier for people with a bachelor's degree to switch careers and become a teacher**. Some lateral entry programs require candidates to complete a teacher preparation program, which they can finish while getting hands-on experience in the classroom.

Here are some of the solutions for the future.



Pair community experts with instructional coaches

To address gaps in the curriculum, schools might consider recruiting a content expert from a local business and pairing them with an instructional coach to **ensure they have the skills to make content engaging and accessible for students**. For example, districts might recruit local business owners to teach courses on marketing or entrepreneurship or ask a chef from a nearby restaurant to join the culinary program part-time. These opportunities will be even more appealing if offered virtually, so community members don't have to commute to and from the school multiple times a week.



Make space for retired and aspiring teachers

Many retired and aspiring teachers want to work with students but only have the time and energy to do it part-time. **School districts should find ways to plug these teachers into their existing programs to fill critical gaps**. For example, a student in an undergraduate teacher prep program might "intern" under a classroom teacher and offer support grading papers or leading discussion groups a few times a week. Similarly, retired teachers who have knowledge to share but may not want to manage an entire classroom could offer tutoring support for small groups of students.



Use a memorandum of understanding (MOU) model

Districts could design a memorandum (or multiple memoranda) of understanding (MOU) with regional service centers and other districts that **allow teachers to work across districts**. The San Diego Education Association offers a few [examples](#). This model might afford more flexible compensation for teachers based on the number of students they are serving in their courses. If courses are designed for virtual attendees, the reach and flexibility increase.



Recap: Rethink Recruitment

Solutions available today

- Grow Your Own initiatives
- College and university partnerships
- Lateral entry programs

Solutions for the future

- Pair community experts with instructional coaches
- Make space for retired and aspiring teachers
- Use a memorandum of understanding (MOU) model

Improving Retention with Flexible Career Paths

Recruitment may be top of mind for school districts, but retention is just as critical.

The Learning Policy Institute estimates that, on average, school districts spend [\\$20,000 on each recruit](#)—money that is lost when those teachers leave the district or the profession a few years later. Reducing turnover also mitigates the recruitment burden and has been shown to [improve student success](#).

To improve retention, schools have to answer a critical question: **Why are teachers leaving in the first place?** The answer, particularly in the pandemic era, is complex. Many teachers leave the profession due to [burnout and stress](#), while others seek higher-paying jobs with clearer career pathways in the private sector (on average, teachers are paid nearly [20% less than other college-educated employees](#) with comparable experience). Other educators want to relocate or work from home and seek the flexibility of remote work—flexibility that is often hard to come by in K-12 education.

Teachers want flexibility, opportunities for growth, and the ability to teach subjects that energize and inspire them.



While the reasons behind teacher turnover are nuanced, they share some common themes. **Teachers want flexibility, opportunities for growth, and the ability to teach subjects that energize and inspire them**—and school districts need to redesign their programs to create those opportunities if they hope to retain staff. Here are some strategies K-12 leaders can implement to meet teachers' evolving needs.



Offer remote and hybrid work options

The pandemic revealed that **many teachers enjoy teaching virtually**. According to a [study by Rand](#), at least one-third of teachers surveyed said they would be open to staying remote at least part of the time. Other teachers may have relocated during the pandemic but want to keep working for their district—which means virtual teaching is the only solution that makes sense. Districts should consider launching (or continuing to support) [virtual academies](#), which offer both students and teachers remote and hybrid learning options. If remote teaching is an option, teachers can also gain some of the flexibility they might find in the private sector. For example, they might be able to flex their synchronous instructional hours to meet their family needs rather than work a typical 7-to-3 schedule.



Expand career pathways with shared resource models

Unlike in the private sector, K-12 education has only one clear career pathway: the educator-to-administrator pipeline. But not every teacher wants to become an administrator. **Shared resource models support teachers in embracing their passions and sharing their expertise with colleagues across the district**, allowing them to grow and learn without taking them out of the classroom.

Under a shared resource model, job possibilities and configurations are numerous. Many districts need instructional coaches and designers, high-intensity tutors, and virtual learning specialists. These roles might be full-time, rotating (so a teacher can leave the classroom for a year or two and then return when their job is done), or part-time (allowing a teacher to tackle new responsibilities while they teach part-time). Teachers could also grow into

more minor roles that are paid with stipends, like serving as the school's virtual field trip organizer or as a master teacher or coach. By offering incremental opportunities for career growth—which should always be compensated with additional pay—districts can show teachers they value their learning and development.



Disaggregate responsibilities to reduce burnout

One of the other primary causes of teacher dissatisfaction is administrative burden. According to *EducationWeek*, [43% of teachers](#) say that reducing administrative responsibilities would improve retention. Meetings, hall duty, and paperwork contribute to burnout and pull teachers away from what inspired them to join the profession in the first place. By disaggregating teacher responsibilities, school districts can **open teachers' schedules so they have more time to focus on what they love**. This might take the form of hiring aspiring teachers to grade papers and homework assignments (as noted previously); relying on instructional coaches and designers to help with lesson prep; and investing in more paraprofessionals to help with parent meetings, hall duty, and other responsibilities.



Spark teacher passion with subject specialization

In the same article in *EducationWeek*, [40% of teachers](#) reported that they stay in education because they love their students and what they teach. To retain teachers, districts need to create more opportunities for teachers to share their passions with their students. Subject specialization, or aligning Common Core standards with content in a teacher's area of expertise, allows educators to **meet state requirements while teaching content they genuinely care about**. For example, teachers might choose to develop a course on pop culture and movies that aligns with Common Core standards for English language arts but gives them space to be creative and share their passion with their students.



Increase earning potential

According to a survey conducted by Educators for Excellence, [67% of teachers](#) have or have had a second job to make ends meet, with substantial majorities willing to trade tenure for better pay or benefits. If some teachers desire to teach an online course that is offered beyond the traditional school day and are provided a stipend based on course or enrollment, then earning potential can be enhanced—while keeping people inside the profession. Additional responsibilities might include supporting new teachers with virtual advisory and mentoring, adjunct roles for virtual courses, social media support, instructional design, and many other extensions that support the needs of learning communities. [Launch program in Springfield, MO](#) and [Outschool](#) have created marketplaces for teachers to deliver online instruction. **District leaders should consider creative ideas for their most valuable resources—teachers—to have incremental earning opportunities** that support the needs of the learning community they serve and work in.

Recap: Improve Retention with Flexible Career Paths

- Offer remote and hybrid work options
- Expand career pathways with shared resource models
- Disaggregate responsibilities to reduce burnout
- Spark teacher passion with subject specialization
- Increase earning potential

Upskilling Teachers, Breaking Down Barriers

As K-12 leaders know, recruitment and retention aren't solved with one-and-done solutions.

Attracting and retaining teachers require investment in their ongoing success. This is particularly true for new teachers who don't have a teaching certificate. According to the Learning Policy Institute, beginning teachers are [2.5 times more likely](#) than their "well-prepared" peers to leave the profession after one year. Preparation and professional learning opportunities can improve teaching effectiveness while reducing stress and burnout. And right now, teachers need to keep developing their skills and embracing technology to truly thrive in education.

Preparation and professional learning opportunities can improve teaching effectiveness while reducing stress and burnout.



How can school districts support the continued upskilling of teachers and break down barriers to innovation? Here are some of the strategies we recommend.



Embrace microlearning and employee choice

During the pandemic, many districts did an incredible job of upskilling teachers for virtual learning by developing microsessions and modeling personalized learning and employee choice. Teachers could choose which sessions to attend based on their interests and experience and apply that knowledge right away in their classrooms. Because adults are [competency-based learners](#), that application is crucial—adult learners are more likely to retain information if they can use it right away. Rather than falling back on the old model for professional development, districts should expand their offerings using the same microlearning approach, allowing teachers to **learn the skills they need the most when they have the time.**



Integrate technology into teaching practice

As noted previously, application is critical for knowledge retention in adult learners. That means the more teachers can apply their learning, the more likely they are to retain it. By integrating technology into teaching practice, educators will **gain valuable hands-on experience using innovative software and tools.** Instructional designers should develop lesson plans that incorporate technology, and teaching coaches can help educators brainstorm how to improve their lessons with EdTech tools. Fortunately for education leaders, most teachers are already on board with this approach—according to [HMH's Annual Educator Confidence Report](#), 66% of teachers today feel extremely confident using technology, and 77% believe that tech will help them be more effective teachers.



Encourage teachers to own (and share) their knowledge

Many districts [invested](#) hundreds of hours of time and energy into upskilling teachers during the pandemic—but now it's time to take it one step further and hand teachers the reins. Rather than taking a top-down approach to professional development, consider breaking down barriers by encouraging teachers to do what they do best: *teach*. Many teachers are now experts in virtual learning strategies, and they have knowledge to share with their peers, both inside and outside the district. **Consider incentivizing teachers to host their own microlearning sessions.** Districts could even use synchronous learning technology to knock down even more walls and sponsor sessions from teachers across the country—or the globe. Educators in New York City might have a lot to learn from teachers in Iowa, and vice versa. Virtual learning tools enable that information exchange and make it easier than ever for educators to crowdsource knowledge.

Recap: Upskill Teachers, Break Down Barriers

- Embrace microlearning and employee choice
- Integrate technology into teaching practice
- Encourage teachers to own (and share) their knowledge

Conclusion: Redesigning K-12 For Teachers—and Students

If you read the many articles on [teacher retention in K-12](#), you'll find a common thread: most teachers don't want to leave.

They love their students, and they love their profession. But they are also exhausted, overwhelmed, and uncertain about the future. All those challenges are driving them to seek opportunities elsewhere, creating a vicious cycle: teacher attrition results in even larger class sizes, causing further burnout and attrition. To keep our teachers in the jobs they love, we can't keep relying on old techniques. And teachers—the professionals on the front lines—must be part of the process of redesigning processes and staffing models in K-12.

Many of the strategies in this e-book require a complete rethinking of the system. That can feel daunting, especially if something has never been done before and there are ideas that may be met by opposition from unions and collective bargaining groups if they are not brought to the table early as co-creators of this work. Educators have long been pioneers—in fact, educators just pioneered a whole new world of virtual learning in a matter of weeks. **With the right tools and training, districts can reimagine what it means to be a teacher in America, from the bottom up.** And ultimately, that doesn't just benefit teachers. It also benefits students, families, and communities as a whole.

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About Class Technologies Inc.

Class is software developed by Class Technologies Inc., a company founded by education software pioneer Michael Chasen. Class is built on the Zoom platform and adds teaching and learning tools to teachers' workflow to make the virtual classroom feel like a real classroom. It helps teachers take attendance, hand out assignments, give a quiz or test, grade work, proctor exams, talk one-on-one with a student, and more. Class is headquartered in Washington, DC with staff around the world. Schedule a demo at class.com and follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @WeAreClassTech.

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