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**Barriers to Hiring and Retaining Educators in New Hampshire**

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LD 850: Capstone

Professor Robert Levey

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**Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the teacher shortage; however, school districts across the country have faced shortages for many years. While the state of New Hampshire is not alone in the shortage of teachers, New Hampshire faces additional barriers when it comes to recruiting and retaining a diverse group of certified educators. This project explores barriers to hiring educators that include: the demand for teachers, the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching reciprocity challenges, budget constraints and low wages, and local competition. The methodology used includes a combination of research using online tools such as Google Scholar, the UNH virtual library, and a survey of local peers who work in School Human Resources in the state. The results of this paper show that the teaching shortage has continued to worsen since the great recession in 2008, and districts around the country are looking for creative ways to recruit and retain high quality educators (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019).

Keywords: Teacher Shortage, Retention, Education

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### **Introduction**

According to the Economic Policy Institute, there has been a nationwide teacher shortage since approximately 2012, and the shortage of teachers is projected to more than quadruple in just five years from 2019-2025 (Garcia and Weiss, 2019). This project focuses on the teacher shortage as well as some of the barriers to hiring a diverse workforce in the public preschool to grade twelve schools in the state of New Hampshire. In addition to the teacher shortage, the research shows that there are barriers when it comes to hiring and licensure, and these same barriers can contribute to the lack of diversity in New Hampshire schools. There are some recent researches on reducing these hardships, which include flexibility in granting licensure for educators, and increasing teacher salaries.

### **Literature Review**

As of 2023, November 28, roughly three months into the 2023-2024 school year, there are currently approximately 142 teacher openings in the State of New Hampshire (EdJobsNH, 2023). Many school districts in New Hampshire began posting their anticipated vacancies in the spring for the upcoming school year, with the hope that those positions would be filled at the start of the school year. Unfilled positions require districts to expend more resources on the hiring process and can lead to institutional memory loss as school teaching staff change year-to-year (Bartlebaugh, 2020). Some studies are showing that it is suggested that teacher mentoring may reduce the early attrition of new educators (Odell, & Ferraro, D. P, 1992).

### **Demand for Teachers**

Demand for teachers has risen over the years, with one reason being an increase in student enrollments (Ingersoll, 2003). The data may suggest that there are an adequate number of certified educators; however, in one study done by the National School Boards Association, it

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was found that not every student who completes a teacher prep program goes on to teach. It is estimated that between one quarter and one half of completers don't teach the year after graduating (Barth, P., Dillon, N., Hull, J., & Holland, B, DeMonte, 2016). Teacher attrition ranges from 20% to 50% of teachers leaving the profession within the first five years (Hughes, 2023; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Latham & Vogt, 2007; Perrachione, Rosser, & Petersen, 2008). Katrien Struyven and Gert Vanthournout noted that the reasons that teachers leave employment within the first five years include lack of job satisfaction, school policies, workload, future job prospects and relationships with parents. (Struyven, K., & Vanthournout, G. 2014).

On a national level, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that more than 270,000 public school teachers will leave the profession between 2016 and 2026 (Fung, 2022). Retention rates also differ among grade levels and content area. Elementary teachers are more likely to remain than secondary teachers (Guarino et al., 2006; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Murnane et al., 1989). Middle school teachers also leave at higher rates due to the problems associated with adolescence (Hughes, 2014; Brill & McCartney, 2008). Retention of teachers has been an issue since long before the pandemic, and the data shows that dating back to even the early 2000's (Ingersoll, 2001). The amount of turnover due to retirement is relatively minor when compared to that associated with other factors, such as teacher job dissatisfaction and teachers pursuing other jobs (Ingersoll, 2001).

### **The Role of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Teaching Profession**

March 15, 2020. A day that educators across New Hampshire will likely remember forever. NH Governor Chris Sununu, directs all public schools to temporarily close, turn to remote learning (Callery, 2020), Sununu himself tweeted "Today I am directing all schools in New Hampshire to transition to remote learning effectively immediately" (Sununu, 2020). The

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Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that there are currently 567,000 fewer educators in America's public schools today than there were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Jotkoff, 2022). The full impact of the pandemic and teaching will likely take years to research and truly see the impact of, however in one study of approximately 60 kindergarten teachers, there were four main reasons why the teachers were leaving:

- Health Concerns
- Environment and Stress
- School Personnel or Administration
- Financial Considerations

Source: (Miguel Dos Santos, 2021).

Meanwhile, in a separate study done by RAND corporation, about 44% of teachers who left voluntarily pre-retirement during COVID-19 cited the pandemic as the primary reason for their exit (Jagannathan, 2021). While it is true that some teacher will leave employment for retirement or to pursue other passions, the pandemic has shown to play a role in increased teacher turnover since 2020 (Jagannathan, 2021).

### **Teaching Reciprocity Challenges**

Teaching certification reciprocity is the ability to transfer a teaching certification from one state to another (Gallant, 2022). The New Hampshire Department of Education states that licenses issued by state agencies other than the state's Department of Education are generally not reciprocal for a NH Department of Education teaching license (New Hampshire Department of Education, n.d.). While it may be true that an out of state certification preparatory program or university prepares students to be eligible for a New Hampshire certification, that is not always

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the case, as requirements vary from state to state. To add to the timeline for certification, as of 2023, January 11, all first-time applicants must complete and pass a criminal history record and Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Central Registry check prior to issuance of a credential (New Hampshire Department of Education, n.d.). This adds to the timeframe when a job offer is contingent upon current licensure, since RSA 189:13-a requires criminal history records check on every selected applicant for employment in any position, whereas each individual district is also responsible for completing a background check (State of NH, n.d.).

### **Budget Constraints and Low Wages**

Along with the lengthy process to obtain a teaching credential in the State of New Hampshire, there are also barriers to hiring in k-12 public education due to budget constraints. One component is where the state gives funding directly to local schools called the Adequate Education Aid. This aid is based on student population, free and reduced lunch numbers, and special education students. For the 2022 and 2023 years, the base rate is \$3,786.66 per admitted student. (NH Department of Education Division of Education Analytics, 2022). This means that the department of education gives this money to schools based on their data. In addition to state funding, local taxpayers also pay into school funding. Oftentimes, a large portion of property taxes go to public schools (Bryant, 2023).

In addition to budget constraints, teacher pay has been a highly researched topic. One study found that there is an inadequate number of qualified individuals willing to offer their services under prevailing wages and conditions (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019). The National Institute for Early Education Research shows that low wages and benefits for preschool teachers is the single most important factor in hiring and keeping good teachers (Barnett, 2003). The Economic Policy Institute reports that teachers are paid less in their weekly



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wages and total compensation than their nonteacher college-educated counterparts (Allegretto, 2022).

### Local Competition

Competition with local school districts plays a large role in hiring educators. The competition is not just with other public schools, but local private and charter schools as well. Salary data is publicly available for New Hampshire teachers, published by the Department of Education, which could further lead to our competitive disadvantage since educators are able to choose a higher paying district. A sampling below demonstrates schools all within 10 miles of each other and the discrepancy in average teacher pay.

District Name	Teacher Average Salary
Goffstown	\$ 61,647.00
Merrimack	\$ 64,431.00
Bedford	\$ 68,509.32
Londonderry	\$ 69,894.00
Amherst	\$ 74,537.00

Source: NH DOE Salary Reports, 2022

The Government Accountability Office (GAO), states that public K-12 teacher shortages occurred nationwide but were more prevalent in specific geographic and demographic areas, specifically western states, rural and urban communities, and high-poverty communities, as well as specific subject matters, such as special education, physical science, and foreign language (Government Accountability Office, 2022).

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Due to attrition and the inability to hire for certain positions, the NH DOE releases what they call a “Critical Shortage List”, in which hard to fill positions are put on a list and are eligible to be on a Site-Based Learning plan, where they work with an on-site mentor in a school district so that they can hold the position without the full certification. The most recent list is from April of 2022 and includes positions such as, School Counselors, Math Specialists, multiple science credentials, Special Education Teachers, and more (Critical Shortage List, n.d.). The full list can be found in appendix A.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology used for this paper includes combination of research using online tools such as Google Scholar, the UNH virtual library, the Department of Education website, and a survey of Human Resources Directors who work in New Hampshire Schools. The survey had a response rate of approximately 20% and asked about whether or not district have been able to fill all of their open positions, whether or not the COVID-19 pandemic has played into teacher turnover in their district, and the reasons that educators are citing as their reason for leaving. The author of this research was seeking to understand if teacher turnover and shortages are existing only locally or statewide.

### **Findings**

This research shows that the process for educator certification in New Hampshire is a timely process, and the added requirement of a criminal record check adds to the timeline for an educator to be hired for their first role in the State of New Hampshire. In addition to initial certification timelines, retention continues to be a longstanding issue due to multiple factors, which include low pay, high workloads, student cooperation, and parent relations (Hughes,

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2014). With teacher salaries lower than non-teachers, it is not surprising that teachers are leaving within the first five years for other employment (Struyven, K., & Vanthournout, G. 2014).

In a survey that this author created and sent out to New Hampshire school Human Resource Directors, whereas 8 local school districts responded, most Directors share that teacher turnover has increased since the pandemic, one district has not seen an increase, and one shared that turnover was higher in 2022, but is leveling out in 2023. In one district alone, they had a turnover rate of 15%, and 40% of those open positions remain unfilled, when school is due to start in just four weeks. Reasons for leaving were mixed, from better pay, retirement, and student behaviors.

Percentage of Teacher Turnover June 2023	Positions Still Unfilled as of July 30th	Has teacher turnover in your district increased since the pandemic?	If you do exit interviews/surveys, what is the most common reason teachers are leaving your district?
20%	21%	Higher in 2022 but back to normal in 2023	N/A
20%	16%	yes	students behavior, parents, not feeling supported
15%	9%	No	Retirement and Advancement Opportunities
15%	40%	Yes	Pay
11%	4%	Yes	Retirement and and leaving education
9%	19%	yes	financial

- *See full data and survey results in Appendix A*
  - *Source: Survey to HR Directors in the State of NH*

### **Recommendations**

It is important to note that with 142 teacher openings posted on EdJobsNH for local school districts, New Hampshire schools are not fully staffed three months into the school year. The impact on unfilled positions may not be known immediately, however would be interesting to research in the future. Another important finding through this research is teacher mentorship.

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If mentorship can aid in teacher retention, could it also influence recruitment efforts if districts have their own mentor program? Mentor programs should be further researched for educators.

In addition to mentorship, salaries, and the demand for educators, another topic that would be fascinating to research further is the lack of diversity in New Hampshire schools. Educator diversity, in its broadest terms, is associated with age, gender, sexual orientation, race, abilities, religion, language, and socioeconomic class (Ellerbrock and Cruz, 2014). In addition to barriers to hiring and retaining educators in a general sense, there is a further shortage when it comes to teacher diversity in New Hampshire schools. Mackenzie Verdiner is a student at West High School in Manchester, New Hampshire, and was recently interviewed by Sarah Gibson with New Hampshire Public Radio. Mackenzie told Sarah that if she were to grab a fistful of kids randomly, it would be a different color on each finger, all different colors, different backgrounds,” she says. “And then all the teachers are all the same- which Gibson related to the fact that she meant “white” (Gibson, 2022). Every other year, Human Resource professionals are required to report statistical information to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on race/ethnicity, sex, job category, and salary. The company Great Schools has compiled all this information and it shows that 98% of New Hampshire teachers are white, while 86% of students are white (Great Schools, 2022).

Diversity goes beyond gender and race, but about the challenges that educators in other states face when working in education in the State of New Hampshire. Given the limited opportunities for licensure, some educators from out of state; even a bordering state, may not qualify for licensure in the state of New Hampshire due to the lack of reciprocity. This limits the diverse skillsets, backgrounds, talents, and ideas, when bringing educators from other states is a lengthy and tedious process.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to highlight the challenges that schools face when hiring and retaining certified teachers for their district. The local survey concluded that most districts were not able to fill for all their vacant positions, COVID-19 has impacted their turnover ratings, and reasons for teachers leaving included low pay, student behavior, and retirement.

A surprising finding is that 20% to 50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Hughes, 2023; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Latham & Vogt, 2007; Perrachione, Rosser, & Petersen, 2008). This information is an alarming statistic that will certainly play a large role in retention for teachers. It is my hope that mentorship, as well as adequate wages, will continue to improve in all schools.

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**Appendix A**

Critical Shortage List - Credentialing HD Knowledge Base - Confluence ([atlassian.net](https://atlassian.net))

Survey:

## Teacher Recruitment and Retention Challenges

1. Approximately how many full-time educators (teacher contract) work in your district (both filled and unfilled positions)?

2. How many teachers resigned in your district at the conclusion of the 2022-2023 school year?

3. If you have been unable to fill any of those teacher positions, how many remain vacant?

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4. Has teacher turnover in your district increased since the pandemic?

5. If you do exit interviews/surveys, what is the most common reason teachers are leaving your district?

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### Survey Responses:

Approximately how many full-time educators (teacher contract) work in your district (both filled and unfilled positions)?	How many teachers resigned in your district at the conclusion of the 2022-2023 school year?	If you have been unable to fill any of those teacher positions, how many remain vacant?	Has teacher turnover in your district increased since the pandemic?	If you do exit interviews/surveys, what is the most common reason teachers are leaving your district?
165	25	10	Yes	Pay
127	25	4	yes	students behavior, parents, not feeling supported
140	28	6	Last school year there was a large increase in resignations. This school year ending 6/30/2023 it was average.	We do not do exit interviews
250	28	1, which we are in the process of interviewing	Yes	Retirement and leaving education
355	32	6	yes	financial
210	32	3	No	Retirement and Advancement Opportunities

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<https://www.education.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt326/files/inline-documents/sonh/2022-200-ip-rule-ed-501.02-506.01-506.09.pdf>