

November 2024



Attract, Develop and Retain a Sustainable Teacher Workforce



Recommendations from the RAISE:
Oklahoma Educator Roundtable

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This report was authored by the members of the Retaining and Inspiring STEM Educators in Oklahoma, or RAISE: OK Roundtable, with assistance from the Southern Regional Education Board.

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Executive Summary

A group of educators across nine Oklahoma districts came together over the course of a year to discuss the challenges with teacher recruitment and retention and how best to solve these issues. This group, hosted by the Southern Regional Education Board, who worked with these nine districts through a multi-year educator development grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education, became the Retaining and Inspiring STEM Educators in Oklahoma, or RAISE: Oklahoma Roundtable. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and math.



Having strong educators in all core subjects is imperative to improving student learning, student success and workforce development progress and pipelines. Teachers' impact matters for a healthy workforce and economy, so we should elevate educators as the vital workforce to maintain economic progress.

Summary List of Recommendations

The RAISE: OK Roundtable members gathered in-person and virtually for meetings from November 2023 to September 2024. During this time, they engaged in dialogue in various groups, disseminated an informal survey to teachers and faculty across Oklahoma, engaged in individual research, and discovered organizations, programs and school districts with models they could implement in their own schools. The Roundtable developed three goal statements and 10 recommendations to help address the teacher shortage issues in Oklahoma.

Goal 1: Help schools create a culture of engagement and respect with their communities.

Recommendation 1: Raise awareness around the importance of being a teacher.

Recommendation 2: Train all school faculty and staff in creating a positive school culture.

Recommendation 3: Increase family and community engagement in schools and practitioners, advocates, parents and students.

Goal 2: Improve quality pathways and access to the profession. Better support new teachers to enable instructional growth and increased retention.

Recommendation 4: Discover the root causes of decreasing teacher retention rates in each local district.

Recommendation 5: Identify or develop state and local systems of support to create quality pathways into teaching to help as many eligible individuals as possible enter the profession and earn a standard teaching certification.

Recommendation 6: Reform Oklahoma Educator Preparation Programs to include early clinical experience and a yearlong paid student teaching residency to ensure readiness for the job.

Recommendation 7: Provide novice teachers with mentor support during their first two years of teaching to ensure effective teacher induction and promote increased talent retention through quality mentorship programs.



Goal 3: Increase monetary and non-monetary benefits to enable increased recruitment and retention of qualified teaching professionals.

Recommendation 8: Work toward providing teachers with a professional wage.

Recommendation 9: Provide a flexible retirement package for today's generation of educators.

Recommendation 10: Cultivate creative local strategies for teacher compensation that increase recruitment and retention of talent.

The remainder of this report highlights current literature, examines and describes proposed solutions, and recommends actions for addressing the goals developed by the Roundtable. These resolutions to the ongoing teacher recruitment and retention problems in Oklahoma are not optional, but critical to improving the morale and overall state of the teacher workforce. Without a high-quality teacher in every room, how can the state of Oklahoma ensure a promising and fulfilling future for every student?

The **Roundtable of Educators** urge school leaders, local district leaders, state agency leaders, policymakers and other advocates, organizations and supporters to come together to make progress toward these recommendations across schools in Oklahoma for the betterment of our students, their families and our state's economic future.

Introduction

Teachers Matter

The recruitment and retention of teaching talent continues to be a persistent regional and national issue that affects student and economic success. Overall, the newest generation of adults are less interested in pursuing teaching as a career compared to previous generations, posing a threat to recruitment, retention and the quality of education for our students.

Educator preparation program enrollment initially started to decline at the end of the millennial generation and continued to drop lower in 2014 as Generation Z entered college. In fact, SREB's "[Elevating the Teacher Workforce and Our Regional Economy](#)" analysis of Title II data of the 16 states in the southern region revealed a 17.5% decline in teacher preparation program completers from 2013 to 2022.

Widespread [teacher shortages](#) across subjects and grade levels as well as challenges filling school vacancies are directly related to the declining interest in the teaching profession. SREB's [A Blueprint to Solve Teacher Shortages](#) describes how difficulties with recruitment and teacher retention result in shortages and recommends a set of actions developed through extensive research with several southern states. These shortages are directly connected to declines in quality, quantity and diversity of the teacher workforce as well as equitable access to said workforce. As more inexperienced, uncertified and emergency certified teachers are hired to replace certified teachers leaving the profession, this becomes a quality concern.

Retaining and supporting quality teachers is a workforce concern, and mitigating this issue requires sustainable solutions. The SREB *Blueprint to Solve Teacher Shortages* calls for making teaching more attractive by restructuring and reimagining the profession. Teaching must be seen as an attractive, fulfilling career that appreciates its people. The same publication emphasizes that steps must be taken to better prepare, develop and compensate educators. Therefore, recruitment and retention strategies should include many local and statewide initiatives such as scholarships, mentorships and opportunities for advanced teacher and leadership positions. No two states are alike and there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to solving teacher shortage issues. States and local school districts can determine how to ensure the sustainability of their teacher workforce by using a variety of data and research to make informed decisions.



The RAISE: Oklahoma Roundtable of Educators

The Roundtable was funded by a federal Supporting Effective Educator Development grant. The purpose of the SEED grants is to bolster the teacher workforce with highly effective teachers using research-based practices to develop educators' skills or to support the advancement of teachers across their careers. Through the grant, entitled RAISE: OK, or Retaining and Inspiring STEM Educators in Oklahoma, SREB worked with nine school districts to address three main priorities:

1. Supporting novice teachers, including those with nontraditional preparation and certification processes working in underserved school districts, specifically focusing on teachers who currently hold emergency or provisional credentials.
2. Professional development for new math and science teachers.
3. Additional advanced training for teachers to become effective mentors at their schools.

The members of the roundtable are from the rural, urban and suburban RAISE districts across Oklahoma including Colbert, Deer Creek, Durant, Glenpool, Mustang, Oklahoma City, Union City and Tulsa Legacy Charter. *See appendix for the full list of members.* The members include a combination of novice and veteran teachers, principals, superintendents and directors across K-12 settings.

The Roundtable members developed a charge statement:

For RAISE districts to collaborate, understand and take action to improve teacher recruitment, development, support and retention in Oklahoma.

To ensure the Roundtable members remained committed to the charge statement and the agreed upon norms, each participant in their opportunity group assumed a role such as agenda agent or community keeper. Members worked collaboratively to develop their own action and sustainability plans to improve teacher recruitment, support and retention within their districts and possibly across Oklahoma. Specifically, they focused on 1) assisting schools in creating a positive school culture and connecting with the community, 2) establishing and improving quality pathways into the teaching profession and better supporting and mentoring teachers to promote retention and instructional growth, and 3) improving monetary and non-monetary benefits to potentially increase recruitment and retention of qualified teaching professionals.



The remainder of this report outlines these goals, the Roundtables' recommendations for making progress toward a proposed solution, and action steps that various groups in the state can take to improve the state of Oklahoma's teacher workforce.

Goal 1

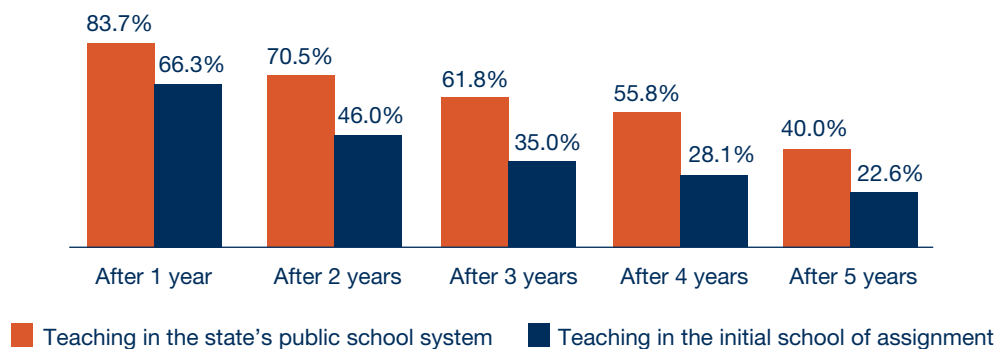
Help schools create a culture of engagement and respect with their communities.

Teachers want to feel valuable and respected as professional individuals with agency to do the jobs they trained for. Historically, the U.S. teaching profession has been largely critiqued and under supported with teaching described as a [semiprofession](#). A semiprofession is an occupation that requires advanced knowledge and skills but is not widely regarded as a true profession. Traditionally these have included social work, journalism, librarianship, teaching and nursing.

Uninformed and inaccurate rhetoric towards educators, such as “anyone can walk into a classroom and teach,” further diminishes the perception of the profession. The growing number of teacher vacancies, teacher retention issues and lack of teachers who reflect the communities in which they serve is a byproduct of this issue. The teaching profession continuously lacks the proper respect and positive attention it deserves. Educators themselves are also the standard bearers of the profession — their actions and language about the vocation should reflect pride in their profession.

A high prestige profession is considered one that requires advanced degrees, a wide range of autonomy and high compensation. It is not surprising that teaching does not fit into this category and affects the way educators are perceived. The Pew Research Center’s 2023 annual [evaluation](#) reveals that teachers express low levels of satisfaction with their job. Furthermore, over two-thirds (68%) of the P-12 public school teachers surveyed cited the stress level of their jobs as over-whelming. In addition to higher stress levels, many teachers believed parent involvement was less than satisfactory, citing 79% of parents do too little when it comes to holding their students accountable for their behavior and 68% believe parents spend little time assisting children at home with their homework.

Retention Rates of Public School Teachers
in the First Five Years



Source: 2021 Oklahoma Educator Supply and Demand Report

As teacher shortages and vacancies continue to climb, the Oklahoma Educator Supply and Demand [report](#) from 2021 reveals concerning figures regarding teacher retention.

According to the report, of all beginning educators between 2012-13 and 2019-20, 66% remained teaching — in their initial school — after one year, 46% after two years, 35% after three years, 28% remained in teaching after four years, and 23% taught after five consecutive years. While around one in five beginning teachers remained in the same school after five years, about two in every five were still teaching in Oklahoma public schools, regardless of whether it was in one of their initial schools of assignment or not.

Across previous cohorts studied, an average of 66% of beginning teachers continued to teach after the first two years was the highest for educators following the paraprofessional career path 7 while the lowest for professionals who teach in Oklahoma through the Teach for America program (25%).

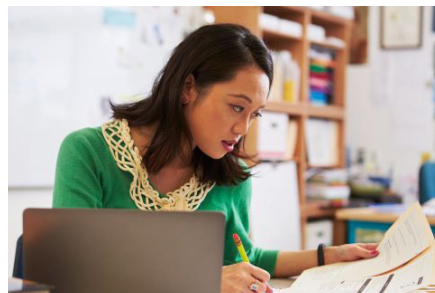
Further compounding the issue, the report noted that about 3% of schools did not have a principal while 10% did not have a counselor in 2020-2021.

To help solve these issues, the RAISE: OK Roundtable recommends three key action steps be taken across the state to elevate teacher value, enhance community engagement, and promote retention of high-quality teachers to better serve Oklahoma students.

Recommendation 1:

Raise awareness around the importance of being a teacher.

Teachers are often viewed through a myriad of lenses. A news article may celebrate a teacher for grading papers from the hospital while a video circulating on social media may criticize teachers for asking for too many school supplies. The pandemic shined a distinctly different light on parents' and caregivers' [perspectives](#) of teachers. During this period, the public had a better appreciation of what teachers do and experience. However, this praise soon dwindled as the push to resume in-person instruction due to pandemic learning gaps took priority. In an online [survey](#) disseminated to over 1,000 educators, teachers indicated one of the top reasons for exiting the field was due to lack of respect for the profession, even more so than larger class sizes and student behaviors.



Teacher disrespect can be [reflected](#) in the dismissive comments from the general public and in the lack of trust in school leaders and teachers. Other examples of disrespect toward the profession include:

- Lack of understanding about what the teaching profession involves today
- Not considering external factors that impact teachers and students
- Conflicts between directives from parents, colleagues or leaders that go against their professional training and experience
- Increases in education funding that may not always lead to increased resources for students, instructional supports or compensation for teachers

The Proposed Solution

Teachers should feel empowered and supported. Their voices are essential to improve the public's perception of teaching as a profession, the conditions of the teacher workforce, and overall student growth. We should work to restore the dignity of teaching as a profession and increase the overall respect for teachers.

Recommended Actions

[Hsieh](#), a professor of teacher education at California State University, suggests that the following actions will lead to the solution:

- Develop a culture of respect and support of teacher agency.
- Ask questions to get teacher input.
- Invest in teachers and their expertise, and reconsider redistributing the budget to do so.
- Advocate publicly for teachers to make professional decisions.

To achieve this solution, the RAISE: OK Roundtable suggests schools should:

1. Listen to teachers and provide them with basic support such as an improved salary and benefits and physical, mental and emotional well-being support.
2. Include teachers in decision making processes that impact them and their students.
3. Build an environment of relational trust amongst teachers, students and staff.

Recommendation 2:

Train all school faculty and staff in creating a positive school culture.

The second opportunity suggested by the RAISE: OK Roundtable members is supporting schools in creating a culture of respect. Through an improved culture, the community and educators alike can focus on building productive relationships, creating a better learning environment for children and enhancing the morale and performance of staff.

The Proposed Solution

To increase mutual respect, engagement and communication between educators, families and the community, educators can be trained and equipped with the tools to create a positive school culture. This transforms the teaching and learning process, positively impacting student learning, faculty morale and teacher retention.

Recommended Actions

To reconceptualize teaching as a profession and create a sustainable positive school culture that supports the whole child, [Colorado's Department of Education](#) suggests four specific focal points:

1. Quality supports for teaching and learning (whole-child and whole-teacher supports, including academic or instructional, social-emotional, behavioral and civic)
2. Safety
3. Quality interpersonal connections and relationships
4. School improvement processes such as strengthening school and home connections

To achieve this recommendation, the RAISE: OK Roundtable suggests several important actions for all schools to take:

1. Foster meaningful, overlapping and cohesive connections amongst staff and students.
2. Create spaces and establish formal training to develop shared norms, practices, attitudes and boundaries for the community.
3. Promote this shared vision of culture where faculty, students and families feel valued and heard all year long.

Recommendation 3:

Increase family and community engagement in schools.

Finding innovative ways to engage caregivers in schools is a critical factor in developing and sustaining respect for the profession. [Families](#) must be seen as a crucial part of school culture. School leaders should find ways to engage parents rather than focusing on involvement alone, which usually involves parents attending school events. Instead, teachers should focus on building connections and fostering relationships of respect and trust with families. Engaging parents in schools is critical in developing and sustaining positive and meaningful relationships and increasing respect for the profession.

[Family](#) engagement in schools has risen and fallen in recent years. To bring back increased levels of support and engagement, [K-12 Dive](#) cites important steps in engaging families, including creating two-way communication between them and the schools.

Engaging parents in schools is critical in developing and sustaining positive and meaningful relationships and increasing respect for the profession.

The Proposed Solution

School districts, schools and teachers must find creative ways to engage with parents. Parent engagement is critical for fostering positive relationships of mutual trust and respect amongst districts, schools, students, families and communities. Research also shows increased student success when there is a positive dynamic between the school and families.

Recommended Actions

To achieve this recommendation, there are numerous ways to actively engage parents and guardians including:

1. Developing ways parents and caregivers can give constructive feedback as members of the school community.
2. Encouraging parents to support teachers as co-educators by working with children on continued skill development during non-school hours.
3. Considering ways parents can have a meaningful role in their child's education.
4. Equipping school educators and staff with the tools to connect and engage with busy families and their students, who come from varying backgrounds.

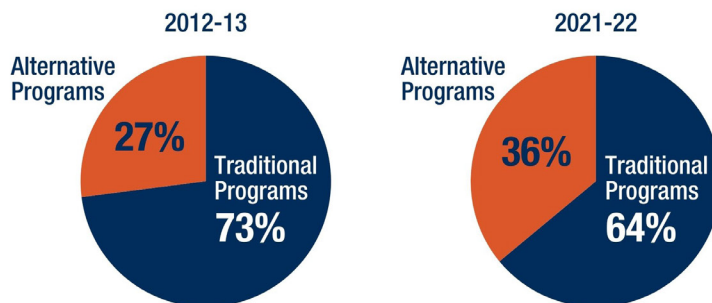
Goal 2

Improve quality pathways and access to the profession. Better support new teachers to enable instructional growth and increase retention.

Teaching is a human-centered profession, which requires significant skill and awareness in addressing the needs of those in a school and classroom. This demands high levels of flexibility, adaptability and relatability plus skill in communication, formal and informal assessment, data analysis and management, as well as the prerequisite knowledge in the content areas.

Those new to the profession should receive extensive training and development in these areas to facilitate their own classrooms and guide a group of students to progress throughout the year. Studies, surveys and qualitative [analyses](#) show that there is a decline in interest in the profession. Those who do become new teachers are increasingly less likely to receive enough robust teacher instructional (pedagogical) preparation and content knowledge training, depending on their background, than their experienced peers.

The proportion of candidates completing teacher preparation programs via **alternative pathways** has grown across the South.



Source: SREB.org using U.S. Department of Education Title II database

Today's new educators are increasingly more likely to enter the profession through non-traditional pathways, including alternative preparation at private, nonprofit, school district-hosted, college-hosted entities, master's degree programs, apprenticeships or job-embedded programs. In the South, [36%](#) of education program completers come from non-traditional or alternative routes into the profession, meaning that one in three new educators do not have a degree in education.

Some educators who do not have a degree in education have success and growth with students. But some who enter the education profession — from non-traditional and traditional pathways alike — do not receive quality training and extensive practice. Recent [studies](#) say that more new teachers and their supervisors find novice teachers' skills to lead a classroom of students are insufficient. This lack of preparation in instructional skills or content leads to declines in learning achievement, mismanaged classrooms, discipline issues, teacher and student stress. In turn, it compromises school management and student growth potential.

To solve these issues in recruitment and preparation, the RAISE: OK Roundtable recommends four key objectives to improve new teacher capacity, morale, performance and retention:

- Discover the root causes of teacher turnover rates in each local district.
- Identify and create state and local systems of support to create multiple quality pathways to help as many individuals as possible earn standard certification.
- Increase the amount of practice-based learning provided to all new teacher candidates and improve the evidence-based content and pedagogical learning of those candidates.
- Provide a quality, multi-year teacher mentor support system to all new teachers, regardless of pathway or background, to ensure that new talent is developed, coached and supported comprehensively.

To achieve these four objectives, the RAISE: OK Roundtable recommends the following four action strategies based on research, data and practical evidence.

Recommendation 4:

Discover the root causes of decreasing teacher retention rates in each local district.

Oklahoma's teacher turnover rate in 2022-23 was 24% — the highest it has been in 10 years. This equals approximately 11,000 teachers who left their positions in 2023 out of the just over 46,500 teachers in the state, according to [state data](#). Too many teachers are leaving the profession, changing districts or moving out-of-state year after year, costing districts enormous amounts of time and funding to find and onboard replacements. Districts pay on average nearly \$11,860 to replace a teacher in small districts and \$16,450 per teacher in midsize districts, according to Learning Policy Institute's 2024 turnover cost [research](#). Calculating costs for Oklahoma's 540 public and charter districts, SREB found that Oklahoma taxpayers contributed an estimated \$166 million in teacher turnover costs in 2023 (as calculated by SREB using Oklahoma Department of Education teacher data and the LPI calculator). If turnover rates continue to increase, so will this cost to the state and its citizens.

Many districts know they need to increase retention rates but do not always rely on specific data or reliable information to make evidence-based strategic decisions. Districts often determine action steps based on local anecdotal information or ideas rather than using local data and regional or national research and recommendations.

In 2022-23, Oklahoma saw:

- 24%** teacher turnover
- 11,000** new teachers needed
- \$166 M** estimated in taxpayer funding to replace these teachers

The Proposed Solution

Oklahoma school districts should utilize data tools to collect quantitative and qualitative data to conduct a root cause analysis for the local district to determine why teachers leave or stay. Conducting a root cause analysis increases the likelihood that decisions about programming and systems are evidenced-based rather than anecdotal. Results can be utilized in future decision making when determining system changes to support increased retention.

Recommended Actions

To achieve this recommendation, local districts should take the following steps:

1. Determine what data needs to be collected at the district level. Data may include:
 - ◆ Number of teachers who have left the district as compared to the whole
 - ◆ Number of teachers who have stayed in the district as compared to the whole
 - ◆ Demographic information of teachers who left *and* stayed:
 - ◆ Years of experience
 - ◆ Type of certification (emergency certification, alternative, provisional, standard, etc.)
 - ◆ Area of certification
 - ◆ Grade level
 - ◆ Site
 - ◆ Most important reason teachers stayed or left the district (If they stay in the profession, why are they moving to another district?)
2. Utilize validated and reliable surveys to conduct stay and exit interviews of district faculty and staff.
3. Analyze all data to determine what action steps, district policy changes or programs could be implemented to positively impact teacher retention based upon the results and local context and authority.

Recommendation 5:

Identify or develop state and local systems of support to create quality pathways into teaching to help as many eligible individuals as possible enter the profession and earn a standard teaching certification.

Interest in the teaching profession is [declining](#) at a time when teacher vacancies and turnover is [increasing](#). More new teachers are needed today, yet district and school leaders report that it is getting [harder](#) to find and recruit talent.

Increasing access to quality teacher preparation programs and positive exposure to the profession is key to attracting more potential talent. However, all educator preparation roads should lead to the same result — a qualified, well-prepared educator who can confidently lead the classroom, positively impact student learning, and work collaboratively with the other educators in the building. This, combined with more effective new teacher induction and mentor support (see Recommendation #4), will provide desirable conditions to entice more talent to come in and stay in the profession longer than a few short years.

The Proposed Solution

Oklahoma colleges, universities, private for-profit and not-for-profit entities and school districts should work individually and collectively to develop high-quality pathways into the teaching profession to increase access to more interested and qualified candidates. Furthermore, these entities should ensure that every teacher candidate from any pathway or background receives quality, practice-based preparation that readies them for the current realities of the job.

Recommended Actions

To increase access to quality preparation pathways, Oklahoma state leaders, higher education leaders, school district leaders and other organizations in the educator preparation space can work together to:

1. Ensure all preparation pathways provide the curriculum, content, training and support necessary to adequately prepare future teachers for the realities of teaching today and includes all necessary skills and knowledge development required to obtain a standard professional teaching certificate in the first several years of teaching.
2. Strengthen comprehensive partnerships between institutions of higher education, at all levels, and school districts. These partnerships are crucial for developing, implementing and improving teacher preparation according to SREB's [Teacher Preparation Commission report](#).
3. Utilize the strong higher education and local school district partnerships to provide improved teacher prep and localized grow-your-own programs that attract local individuals and provide a quality pathway to be a prepared, effective teacher.
4. Develop and apply for a federally registered apprenticeship pathway, similar to states in the South like [West Virginia](#) and [Tennessee](#) that have pursued this financially supported, job-embedded route into teaching. Numerous states and groups can help guide state leaders to achieve this goal, such as the National Center for Teacher Residencies, the National Center for Grow Your Own, U.S. Department of Labor.

Recommendation 6:

Reform Oklahoma Educator Preparation Programs to include early clinical experience and a yearlong paid student teaching residency to ensure readiness for the job.

Several national and regional studies reviewed by [SREB](#) show that newly hired teachers feel less prepared for their teaching position, and their supervisors find that newly hired teachers, from multiple preparation routes, need more support and professional development than in previous times. This puts an enormous strain on school leaders and colleagues to support these educators. And it prevents students from having a ready and skilled educator to propel their learning on pace for the school year.

A yearlong residency program has shown to be the most effective aspect of teacher education programs.

To ensure that traditionally prepared teachers are receiving a balance of education theory, content, pedagogy and practice-based learning, research shows that teachers need extensive clinical experience in their preparation program. A yearlong residency program has shown to be the most effective aspect of teacher education programs according to a 2023 Annenberg [report](#), giving future teachers an average of four days in the school per week while completing their final coursework.

The Proposed Solution

All educator preparation programs — traditional and non traditional — should provide early and extensive clinical experiences to teacher candidates. Traditional preparation programs should provide clinical, on-the-job exposure from day one, including tutoring and internship opportunities for those interested in teaching in high school and the early years of college, extensive practicum experiences during junior year and a yearlong, full-time paid teaching residency in the senior year. Non-traditional programs can also offer similar exposure to the classroom to candidates-in-training and through more supportive and extensive on-the-job training that connects with trained and experienced mentors and program supervisors.



Recommended Actions

To achieve this recommendation, the state can reform policies to encourage and even require increased clinical, on-the-job, practice-based experiences for incoming teachers. Steps to achieve this could include:

1. Align the needs of local districts and schools to the coursework and expectations at the college or program.
2. For traditional programs, limit junior-level courses that require on-campus presence during P-12 school hours to increase availability for clinical experience time in school buildings.
3. Provide a classroom management course during the junior year simultaneously with the clinical experience sessions. Junior-level students should meet weekly to discuss classroom management issues and solutions.
4. Align the preparation requirements of all traditional and alternative educator pathways to require a paid, yearlong teaching residency for all candidates, no matter the pathway. A good example of this policy is the one instituted in [West Virginia](#).
5. Provide teacher residents with the opportunity to sign on to a paid position in the district in which they complete their residency requirements, giving a direct pathway from preparation to employment. This also provides the school district with the opportunity to onboard and support the teacher for an additional year before they become the teacher of record.

Recommendation 7:

Provide novice teachers with mentor support during their first two years of teaching to ensure effective teacher induction and promote increased talent retention through quality mentorship programs.

Most new teachers [struggle](#) within their early years of teaching, which in turn lowers student learning growth and achievement, as well as educator retention rates. As new teachers enter the profession, especially but not exclusively for those who enter without enough practical and application-based preparation, these skills must be developed and cultivated with the support of seasoned professionals in the first few years of teaching. [Studies](#) show that the most critical factor in growing and retaining effective new educators is to provide a highly effective teacher mentor to each new candidate who can provide weekly coaching, guidance, modeling, co-teaching, unbiased feedback, and professional development.

The Proposed Solution

School districts should establish strong teacher mentor programs to onboard, develop, coach and support new teachers with less than three years of classroom experience as the teacher-of-record. Oklahoma state entities or organizations should provide guidance, assistance, support and resources to local districts to achieve this goal. This statewide support can begin with providing continued guidance and recommendations on the elements needed to offer effective novice teacher induction programs based on research. However, funding support is needed for many districts to be able to implement quality teacher mentor programs.

Recommended Actions

To develop and implement a quality teacher mentorship program and new teacher induction support, school districts should take the following key steps:

1. Develop a robust, sustainable, and multi-year mentorship program framework and implementation plan based on evidence and research.
2. Determine the necessary criteria for success, such as the minimum qualifications of a quality mentor, the requirements to hold a mentor position, the responsibilities and expectations of mentors and new teachers in the program, the responsibilities and supports that school leaders will provide to mentors, and how the mentorship program will be funded.
3. Plan how school leaders and teacher mentors will implement and manage the mentorship program annually.
4. Develop a thorough mentorship selection and training process.
5. Make continuous improvements to enhance success regularly within the school year and over time.

The most critical factor in growing and retaining effective new educators is to provide a highly effective teacher mentor to each new candidate who can provide weekly coaching, guidance, modeling, co-teaching, unbiased feedback, and professional development.

Districts will need guidance and financial support to implement essential elements of a quality mentorship program, such as mentor selection, training, program requirements and processes. Essential elements from the research on teacher mentorship include:

- A. Provide a carefully selected mentor to each new teacher with less than two to three years of experience.
- B. Provide weekly feedback, coaching, modeling, and professional development to new teachers.
- C. Provide each teacher mentor with the advanced training and certification needed to excel at the job.
- D. Provide a repository of quality professional development materials and instructional support resources online for all program mentors and new teachers to access.
- E. Provide each mentor-teacher and novice teacher with the time and flexibility needed to allow for collaboration, instructional modeling, coaching and co-teaching.
- F. Provide an increased salary for mentor teachers to compensate them for their additional skills and responsibilities as instructional leaders in the school building.



Goal 3

Increase monetary and non-monetary benefits to aid recruitment and increase retention of qualified teaching professionals.

While “just pay the teachers more” is a common rallying cry for teacher retention, more pay alone does not necessarily equate to better outcomes, according to a 2023 Education Week [report](#). Teacher salary is just one part of the teacher compensation package, and roundtable members suggested multiple compensation strategies that a district can use to enhance its appeal as a place of employment. Primary to the focus on compensation is the reminder that teachers are human beings with hopes and dreams of the future — they want homes, they want families, they want control over their finances, which every hardworking professional deserves.



Some of these items require a financial investment from the district and the state, but several are possible without dipping into the district budget at all. A comprehensive teacher compensation package should meet the real financial needs of today’s teachers while also addressing their needs as humans. The three components of the comprehensive teacher compensation package include:

1. A salary appropriate for a fully trained, highly qualified professional that enables a professional to pursue the basic aspects of the American dream, including having a home and starting a family. On today’s payroll, many Oklahoma teachers struggle to find enough funds in their budget to accomplish one or the other, let alone both.
2. Additional retirement options that acknowledge teachers as rational consumers capable of making their own decisions about their financial future. The current teacher retirement package in Oklahoma is typically limited to a pension system, but some educators would like to have some autonomy over their retirements with 401(k)-style accounts and other investment options.
3. Community-oriented and locally controlled strategies to improve teacher recruitment, retention and school culture. Each district in Oklahoma is as unique as the next, with a wide variety of opportunities and challenges that can influence a teacher’s capacity to do his or her job. By providing a toolbox of creative and flexible strategies for compensation and a positive environment, each district can mold their compensation package to entice talent and meet their needs for retention.

Recommendation 8:

Work toward providing teachers with a professional wage.

The RAISE: OK Roundtable recommends a professional wage that provides teachers the ability to reach their chosen American Dream: purchasing a home, starting a family, accessing quality child-care, pursuing further education and more. As times change and the economy shifts, that professional salary should adjust regularly to ensure teachers are continuously receiving a professional base level of pay that allows teachers and their families a middle-class life.

Advanced teachers, not in years served, but those who have mastered instructional skills and devoted significant time and hard work to their students and colleagues should be rewarded, as they are the lighthouses that help guide novice teachers and school culture. Advanced teachers can serve in a variety of leadership roles, such as mentor teachers, lead teacher to a team of colleagues at various levels of expertise or certification level, coaches to pre-service teachers, content leaders, and more. To retain these advanced teachers, a salary schedule should reward and acknowledge their increased responsibilities, impact and dedication to their craft.

For Oklahoma to be a top-tier state in teacher compensation, it must be competitive with other national and regional teacher compensation packages. During the 2022 academic year, the national average for teacher salaries for \$66,745, while the average in the South was \$59,145. However, the average for Oklahoma teachers was only \$54,804. In fact, the average first-year teacher in Oklahoma brought home only \$28,554 of their pay, while a 15-year and 35-year veteran only bring home \$30,615 and \$32,510, [respectively](#). While teachers in Oklahoma received a \$3,000-6,000 pay increase in 2023, it was not enough to reach the national average or slow [resignations](#).

These figures are not compatible with some individuals' dreams of home ownership. With a median listing price of nearly \$300,000 dollars for a home, [Realtor.com](#) estimates that the minimum required annual income to purchase a home is over \$70,000. By these figures, two teachers who are married to each other would not be able to afford to buy a home together even after 35 years of employment.

Childcare is also inaccessible to many teachers in Oklahoma, with an average monthly cost for infant daycare ringing up at \$715 per month according to one report by the [Economic Policy Institute](#). Average health insurance premiums for teachers to cover themselves and their families in Oklahoma is \$1,366 per month, as reported

In Oklahoma:

Average teacher salary

\$54,804

National: \$66,745
Southern region \$59,145

Minimum annual income needed
to purchase a home

\$70,000

Average health insurance for family
coverage

\$1,366/month

Average child care cost

\$715/month

Average take home pay

\$30,615/year

\$2,551/month

by [SREB](#). For an early- to mid-career teacher who is in the stage of life to pursue these basic tenets of success, they need to make more money. When teachers can't make enough money to achieve these goals, they either give them up or leave the profession, contributing to the 24% teacher turnover rate in Oklahoma in the 2022-23 school year.

The Proposed Solution

Rather than spending time, energy and money recruiting teachers only to lose them a few years later, Oklahoma can design a salary schedule that incentivizes novice teachers to grow, learn and advance in the profession.

Recommended Actions

The RAISE: OK Roundtable respectfully requests the formation of a legislative study committee on novice, professional and advanced teacher salaries to provide data and evidence that would inform a salary schedule that enables all teachers to pursue the American dream while still bringing opportunity and growth to their students. The creation of this salary schedule should also include a provision for regular reconvening of the committee to evaluate current cost-of-living based on economic change and to update the salary schedule so that general standards, such as the ability to buy a home and afford childcare in addition to other basic needs, are met.

Recommendation 9:

Provide a flexible retirement package for today's generation of educators.

While a pension plan used to be a basic tenant of American jobs, it is no longer the norm. For many states, it comes at such high [cost](#) that public service pension benefits, and even pay, are significantly reduced for new teachers in order to maintain the pension and retirement healthcare system.

[Bellwether](#) ranked Oklahoma's teacher retirement system 30th in the nation for teachers who have been in the field long-term, partially due to a lack of variety in retirement options. Across the SREB region, [six states](#) have portable investment or hybrid options, which are particularly beneficial to younger teachers who want to save more money for the future.

Subpar pension plans for educators are [rooted in history](#). Elementary and secondary schools designed their pension plans to meet the needs of veteran educators who devoted their lives to the profession, as they assumed that anyone who left the classroom left to marry and would have another source of retirement income.

Not all teachers want traditional pension plans. In fact, pensions are more expensive to maintain and pay out, with retirement costs for districts rising over 350% since 2004. By comparison, health care and salary costs rose approximately 100% and 50%, according to one report by teacher workforce economist [Chad Alderman](#). Pensions are costly, and they are frequently the [second choice](#) of retirement plan for educators who would prefer a defined-contribution retirement plan or even a 401(k)-style investment plan.

Currently, Oklahoma does permit districts to offer investment plans if they agree to manage their administration. Expanding investment plans as a standard option for Oklahoma teachers offers many benefits to employees, to district retention numbers, to state finances, and particularly to special prospective teachers, such as military families and career-changers.

Benefits to Employees and Retention

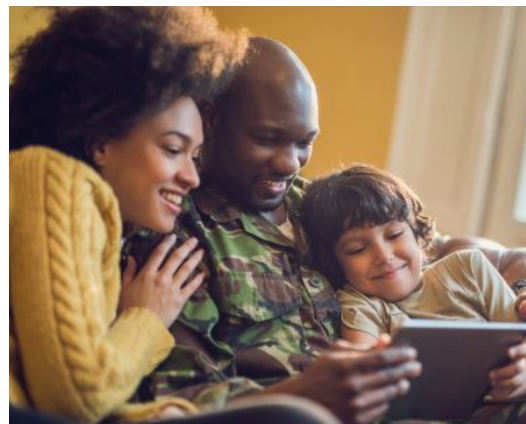
- As novice teachers enter the workforce, it is important to remember the incentives that will attract and retain them in the field. Millennial and Gen-Z teachers both value autonomy and flexibility in their jobs, and retirement plans are one area to provide choice. By offering 401(k) and defined contribution plan options, younger generations of teachers feel control over their financial future. In fact, one [study](#) found that younger teachers' main concerns with pension plans include an inability to transfer benefits with them if they move to a new location. However, control over retirement plans yielded “significant, large, and direct effects on career commitment.”
- According to the [Calder Center](#), teachers will invest more in their retirement plans than the bare minimum. This is particularly true when they are given portable and hybrid retirement plans.
- By one analysis of Washington teachers' retirement plans, [hybrid plans benefit teachers](#) by providing “a level of retirement security for a typical teacher that is comparable to or greater than that provided by the state's pure defined benefit plan.”

Benefits for State Finances

- According to the [Internal Revenue Service](#), defined benefit plans are complex retirement plans that are typically more costly to maintain than other options. By offering other options for retirement for Oklahoma teachers, the state may be able to reduce some of its overhead cost on the pension system.
- Oklahoma's public pension system is only 83% funded, with over [\\$8 billion](#) in unfunded liabilities or the money that is owed to the pension fund by the government. Defined contribution plans, on the other hand, cannot incur unfunded liabilities.
- Between 2009 and 2021, 26% of states have converted their public retirement plans or offered flexible retirement plans such as defined contribution plans or hybrid plans to new employees. According to [RAND](#), these conversions have significant benefits, including reducing the cost of maintaining pensions and reducing or even eliminating future liabilities.

Benefits to Military Families and Career Changers

- The state of Oklahoma hosts five military installations — three air force bases and two army bases with over 20,000 personnel assigned throughout. Service members living in Oklahoma often come with their own families, yet their spouses may struggle to find employment due to frequent moves. Oklahoma does offer reciprocity for teacher licenses, so an additional option for a portable retirement account associated with teaching may be an incentive for military spouses to work in Oklahoma schools during their family's time in the state.



- Portable retirement options may incentivize career-changers to choose the teaching profession. People who transfer into teaching with 10 to 15 years left until retirement may find individual contributions to a 401(k)-style defined contribution benefit of more value than the pension system.

Portable, 401(k)-style retirement plan options that provide additional financial autonomy and flexibility may incentivize younger generations and career-changers to choose the teaching profession.

Teachers are “[economically rational decision makers](#)” who can determine the best choices for their unique situations, but they must be given the information necessary to do so, according to an often-cited study by Neil Theobald of the University of Washington. One [survey](#) of a nationally representative sample of teachers through RAND’s American Teacher panel found that while most teachers are engaged in retirement planning, many do not actually understand the process well enough to plan effectively. Therefore, it is imperative that any changes to teacher retirement and any variety in teacher retirement plans comes with sufficient education and information for teachers to make rational decisions.

The Proposed Solution

While a pension is still an enticing component of a retirement package, there are teachers who want more autonomy and variety in their financial planning portfolios, especially younger generations. Portable investment plans offer more flexibility, which can entice younger teachers and those who will not achieve a full career of teaching but can still offer valuable time and service to the students of Oklahoma.

Recommended Action

The RAISE: OK Roundtable respectfully recommends the creation of a legislative study committee to investigate potential options for retirement plans that will attract and retain new talent in classrooms. This committee should look to other states for models of investment plan and hybrid retirement plan options, such as Florida, South Carolina, Virginia or Tennessee, that can incentivize recruitment and set up all teachers for a successful financial future. This committee should include ample educator voice, including teachers and school leaders.

Recommendation 10:

Cultivate creative local strategies for teacher compensation that increase recruitment and retention of talent.

The idea of creating a district compensation package can be a stressful one for many district leaders. When budgets are tight and there are questions about what is permitted versus what is prohibited, it may be easier to follow the status quo than it is to try out innovative ideas for recruitment and retention.

Schools and districts are unique pockets of culture and protocol. What works in one building does not necessarily work five miles down the road due to all the factors that make up that space — the facilities, demographics, students, staff, resources and more. Therefore, it is critical that districts have leeway to create flexible compensation and recruitment packages with their communities.

Some of the items that can be included in a compensation package include:

- Four-day work weeks or flexible scheduling such as late start or early release days
- On-campus, affordable or free childcare
- Transportation and housing allowances
- Student loan forgiveness and tuition reimbursement
- Part-time employee contracts
- Guaranteed support staff
- Release from non-academic or extra duties or offer compensation for additional time spent on non-academic duties

There are also several programs and policies that districts can enlist which have no cost, but make employment enticing for teachers, including:

- All children of staff may transfer into the district regardless of residence
- Staff lunches included in the cafeteria, free of charge
- Free passes to school events
- Sick bank for sick leave donations
- Discounts at local businesses through local partnerships

The Proposed Solution

District and school leaders share much knowledge about their staff and community, which they can leverage to develop creative strategies that improve culture and teacher recruitment and retention. Many of these strategies do not require financial disbursement (or a very minimal one) but do have a positive impact on teacher morale and school culture.

The strategies can be developed in partnership between the district and the local community, allowing districts to demonstrate flexibility to meet the needs of their student and teacher populations. Strategies may include flexible schedules, perks packages such as discounts of local businesses, or policies packages that prioritize employee health and wellness.

To be clear, this recommendation is not designed to change a specific policy. Rather, it seeks to promote collaboration between superintendents and local communities so that they can create flexible, innovative designs that improve school culture, community relations and teacher retention. Therefore, this is not something the legislature or the Department of Education would need to design or implement but for individual districts to work with their communities and parents to create individual solutions.

Collaboration between district and school leaders and local communities can lead to creation of innovative designs that improve school culture, community relations and teacher retention.

Recommended Action

The RAISE: OK Roundtable respectfully recommends that districts convene to share ideas and solutions that raise morale and culture within their schools. The Roundtable specifically encourages districts to utilize their communities to develop these plans and seek support from the state in the form of convening space and communication portals such as websites, email communication and social media sharing.

Request for Action

To increase the supply of qualified, ready-for-the-job educators for our students, it is imperative for Oklahoma to shift its investments to support, train and retain our incoming and existing teacher workforce. Teaching is a human endeavor, and all humans need encouragement, support and opportunities to grow. They need to feel respected, valued and rewarded for their hard work and impact.

We, the RAISE: OK Roundtable members, who are educators in Oklahoma schools, believe these recommendations will attract talent to the profession, support new teachers' instructional growth and the growth of their students, to improve the retention of new teachers and career professionals who will have the opportunity to advance in the teaching profession as mentors and lead educators.

We, the RAISE: OK Roundtable members, urge school leaders, local district leaders, state agency leaders, policymakers and other advocates, organizations and supporters to come together to enact these recommendations across schools in Oklahoma. This will help provide the conditions and support necessary to ensure every Oklahoma student has access to excellent educators in all classrooms, robust and high-quality instruction and comprehensive support for success.

Our students deserve your support. So do our educators.

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Appendix A

Positions and schools reflect the positions held by members in the 2024-25 school year.

Colbert Public Schools:

Wesley Schreier, Principal, Colbert Middle School
Kim Poteet, District STEM Coordinator
Jancey Weger, Novice Teacher

Deer Creek School District:

Jenny Richards, Principal, Deer Creek Middle School
Jill Bailey, Middle School Math Teacher, Mentor
Dr. Jason Perez, Superintendent

Durant Independent School District:

Josh Perrin, Principal, Durant Middle School
Valerie Crabtree, Principal, George Washington Elementary School
Molly Pierce, Third Grade Teacher and Administrative Intern

Glenpool Public Schools:

Mava Goddard, Director of Teaching & Learning
Kristin Morris, Assistant Principal, Intermediate School
Tina McGuire, Eighth Pre-Algebra/Algebra 1 Teacher and Team Leader

Mustang Public Schools:

Chris Tobler, Executive Director of Human Resources
Ryen Muralt, Assistant Principal, Mustang Middle School
Jill Echalk, Sixth Grade English Language Arts Teacher, Mentor

Oklahoma City Public Schools:

Rabia Aslam, Middle School Math Teacher, Mentor
Aaron Moseley, Middle School Math and Science Teacher
Dr. Scott Paul, Curriculum Coordinator, Secondary Mathematics
Dan Covey, Secondary Science Coordinator
Kara Cordell, Manager of Staffing

Union City Public Schools:

Dr. Becky Slothower, Superintendent
Kerri Griggs, Principal, Union City PK - 12
Kassandra Brothers, Sixth Grade Math and Science Teacher, Mentor

SREB Supporting Staff

Dr. Amanda Merritt, Division Director, Development and Innovation
Debbie Barnett, Leadership Coach, School Improvement
Megan Boren, Project Manager
Sheniqua Pierce, Analyst II
Jessica Nadzam, Research Associate

Appendix B

Oklahoma Project Description

The RAISE: OK (Retaining and Inspiring Stem Educators in Oklahoma) project: An SREB awarded federal grant to support Oklahoma districts in addressing the high rates of teacher turnover, specifically with new teachers teaching math and science in grades 4-8. This SEED grant (Supporting Effective Educator Development) focuses on the following issues: 1) supporting novice math and science teachers with critical pedagogy and content support, 2) further crafting the role of the mentor teacher, and 3) assisting in the development of an inclusive, responsive classroom environment.

The RAISE: OK Roundtable of Educators consists of principals, novice and veteran teachers, mentor teachers, superintendents, and human resources employees. This federal SEED grant specifically supports new teachers in grades 4-8 math and science classroom. SEED grants seek to better prepare educators by supporting teachers in utilizing research-based practices to develop and improve their skills.

In Oklahoma, both math and science have experienced substantial teacher turnover due to the lack of available induction and mentoring programs and resources for new teachers and the overwhelming percentage of provisionally or emergency certified teachers placed in middle grades math and science classrooms.

