

New data show 51 percent increase in US teacher vacancies in the past year

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A recently updated report on the teacher shortage crisis in the United States, based on a study from the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, reveals that teacher vacancies spiked 51 percent from 2022-23.

According to the newly released data, there are currently 55,000 unfilled teaching positions this year, compared to 36,000 reported last year. Additionally, enrollment in teacher preparation programs (TPP), a significant indicator of future teacher shortages, continues to languish.

While teacher turnover rates have slowed from 14 percent during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021-22, to a projected 12 percent this year, enrollment in teacher training programs remains stagnant.

A separate study conducted at Penn State found that there has been a 58 percent decline in enrollment in TPPs since 2008. Another report from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) shows that TPP completion rates have dropped 29 percent since 2010.

Factors such as the skyrocketing cost of higher education and stagnant and declining pay for teachers make a career in teaching a poor return on investment. Another factor behind the enrollment dropoff cited in the Penn State study is deteriorating working conditions for teachers. The study indicates that teachers' perception of their working conditions has been on a downward trajectory since 2004, with a precipitous drop from 2018 to 2022.

The Annenberg Report also reveals that the number of teachers hired last year without being fully certified is 270,512. The teacher shortage has enabled a host of alternative teacher preparation programs to be adopted in states and districts desperate to fill vacancies. According to the NCTQ, enrollment in alternative preparation programs rose 20 percent between 2018 and 2021.

"Grow Your Own" (GYO) programs are one way states are trying to fill the vacancies in their schools. Nearly

every state in the US has a GYO program except for North Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming, but only 15-percent of states directly fully fund their programs. GYO programs differ between states and local education agencies (LEA).

Seventeen states offer a program that puts school employees and community members without a college education in classrooms while they earn their degrees. Not surprisingly, the majority of these states are in regions with the highest number of under-qualified teachers. For instance, Florida and South Carolina have adopted the apprentice type of GYO program. States in the South Atlantic region of the US have 68,884 under-qualified teachers.

The teacher shortage crisis is sure to deepen once the pandemic-related Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) spending deadline hits next year. According to Marguerite Roza, a research professor and director of the Edunomics Lab, \$24 billion of the total \$122.7 billion in ESSER III funds are financing districts' annual labor. It is estimated that 250,000 education jobs will be cut once the money runs out.

However, ESSER funding was not only spent on hiring teachers but much needed support staff such as social workers, psychologists, and nurses. Leslie Fenwick, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's dean in residence noted, "Children's needs are not going to evaporate." It is unlikely states will pick up the tab on these supports for students.

The nation's most vulnerable students who undoubtedly benefit from the increased supports made possible by ESSER are also facing draconian cuts to Title 1 funding. The House Appropriations Committee is seeking to cut federal grants to schools with a high percentage of low-income families by 80 percent or \$15 billion.

The rationale for this proposal is that the vast amounts

of American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds did not get spent, therefore schools do not need the money provided by Title I grants. This is a gross oversimplification of the issue. Because of the limited and short-term nature of the money, schools were not able to spend it on what was really needed, which was teachers and support staff.

If legislators are successful in cutting back Title I, tens of thousands of teachers will lose their jobs in the poorest and most under-served communities in the country.

The deepening crisis of the teacher shortage and the attack on public education is a reflection of the ever-deepening social inequality in the US and internationally, which is fueling a major resurgence of the class struggle. As the WSWS wrote recently:

[T]he bipartisan assault against public education has only deepened, from the vast expansion of privatization schemes, to ongoing bipartisan budget cuts, to growing far-right censorship in schools. All of these attacks are creating the conditions for an explosive growth of struggles by teachers, parents and students to defend public education.

Educators must unite to form Educator Rank-and-File Committees independent of union bureaucracies and both capitalist political parties to unite the struggles of educators with other sections of the working class, across the US and throughout the world. Together with the rank-and-file committees of logistics workers, auto workers, health care workers, and others we will fight not only for improved working conditions, but an end to war, exploitation and inequality.



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