

Special Issues Brief:

How Region 2 States Are Leveraging Innovative Strategies to Address Critical Shortages of Education Personnel

By Dana Chambers and Trang Hoang

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the fragility of education systems in this country, exacerbating gaps in equity of opportunity for historically marginalized student groups, including students of color, students from low-income families, students with special needs, and English Learners, among others. After more than a year of pandemic-induced disruptions to schooling and pivots to extended virtual or hybrid learning environments, most schools across the country had begun operating fully in person again by the fall of 2021¹—but emerging data indicate critical challenges such as incomplete learning,² skyrocketing chronic absenteeism,³ and heightened student mental health needs.⁴ To address these challenges, school districts have scrambled to implement comprehensive pandemic recovery plans. However, these plans require qualified personnel both inside and outside of the classroom. In the face of this increased need, many districts and schools report troubling staffing shortages in teachers,⁵ substitutes,⁶ mental health personnel,⁷ cafeteria workers,⁸ and bus drivers.⁹ These shortages often predate the pandemic and have only worsened in the last 18 months, particularly with the emergence of the highly contagious Omicron variant at the end of 2021.

Pandemic Education Personnel Shortages: By the Numbers

\$200 billion - federal relief funds for states and school districts to drive pandemic recovery

77% - school principals and district leaders across the nation reported challenges in hiring enough **substitute teachers** during the pandemic

70% - school principals said they **could not meet their students' growing mental health needs** due to the pandemic with the staff they had

24% - schools in rural regions reported having **no school nurse**

51% - recent national survey respondents described the **shortage of school bus drivers** in their area as "severe" or "desperate"

[For sources, see endnotes 11, 22, 29, 34, and 38, respectively.]

Without consistent access to these key personnel, districts may not have the human resources they need to effectively implement comprehensive recovery plans to address critical student needs, not to mention the staff to keep schools operating in person.¹⁰

To help meet the growing needs resulting from the pandemic, the federal government has infused nearly \$200 billion in federal relief funds¹¹ into state and district school systems, with significant flexibility on how to use the funds to drive recovery. While conventional wisdom cautions against using one-time funds for personnel, U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona recently encouraged school systems to leverage these federal funds to address staffing gaps through hiring and pay raises.¹² Some school systems are exploring how to make sustainable investments in human resources to meet short-term needs—a recent national scan by Future Ed of a sample of COVID relief spending plans found that more than half of sampled districts plan to use the funds on “hiring or rewarding teachers, academic specialists, or guidance counselors.”¹³

This brief provides an overview of the education workforce shortage trends both nationally and in Region 2 states (Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island). The brief also highlights examples of how Region 2 states are innovating to address these shortages and provides additional considerations for strategies to address shortages in both the short term and the long term.

National Staffing Shortages

Classroom teachers. Teacher shortages predate the pandemic, with dropping rates of enrollment in teacher preparation programs,¹⁴ leaky teacher production pipelines (i.e., sharp drop-offs between matriculation and graduation, completion and licensure, and licensure and hiring),¹⁵ and high attrition rates.¹⁶ A Learning Policy Institute report found teacher attrition rates were 50 percent higher in Title I schools, which serve greater numbers of students of color and students from low-income families, than in non-Title I schools.¹⁷ Recent research regarding the impact of the pandemic on existing teacher shortages points to a continued decrease in the supply of incoming teachers as well as increases in early retirement and resignations.¹⁸ Many reports (as well as anecdotal evidence) have highlighted the challenges teachers have had to endure during the pandemic, including longer hours,

inadequate support, additional burdens in enforcing safety guidelines and addressing lost instructional time, and strains on mental health.¹⁹

Substitute teachers. Substitute teachers have been in high demand during the pandemic, and the need grew even faster after schools reopened. COVID-19 protocols and precautions requiring teachers to quarantine after virus exposure or the emergence of mild symptoms have caused school administrators to scramble to identify adequate substitute teacher coverage.²⁰ Vaccine mandates in many states also put many teachers out of their classroom due to noncompliance, which again required substitutes to fill in for unvaccinated teachers and other staff.²¹ An *Education Week* survey reveals that 77 percent of school principals and district leaders across the nation reported challenges in hiring enough substitutes during the pandemic, shortages that have been more challenging than those of any other staffing positions (including bus drivers, full-time teachers, paraprofessionals, and custodians).²² The shortages have been so severe that some districts have had to temporarily close classrooms or revert to virtual learning.²³ Some states, districts, and schools have adopted the “all-hands-on-deck” process by deploying central office staff to fill in wherever they can²⁴ or by waiving certain standards for substitutes (standards that are already lower than those for full-time teachers).²⁵ However, these approaches may raise concerns over quality and consistency of instructional supports for students.²⁶

Seventy-seven percent of school principals and district leaders across the nation reported challenges in hiring enough substitutes during the pandemic, shortages that have been more challenging than those of any other staffing positions (including bus drivers, full-time teachers, paraprofessionals, and custodians).

School-based mental health personnel. The pandemic has impacted not just academics but also the broader health and well-being of students, increasing the need for mental health staffing that was already in short supply. Studies show the COVID-19 pandemic has had adverse psychological and social effects for children and adolescents, such as higher rates of depression and lower development of social and emotional skills.²⁷ Nationally, the number of young children and adolescents going to the emergency room because of a mental health crisis has increased substantially during the pandemic, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These alarming rates of behavioral health needs have come in the midst of an already severe mental health personnel shortage that school systems have long struggled with (see Table 1).²⁸ According to a survey conducted early in 2021 by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, nearly 70 percent of school principals said they could not meet their students’ growing mental health needs due to the pandemic with the staff they had.²⁹

Table 1. Lack of support staff in schools to serve students’ growing physical and mental health needs existed before the pandemic

Ratio	Recommended	Actual National Average
School Psychologist:Student	1:500	1:1,526
School Counselor:Student	1:250	1:444
Social Worker:Student	1:250	1:2,106

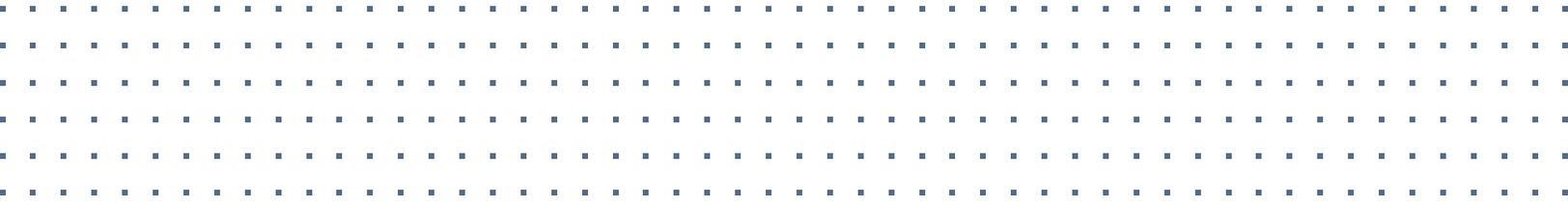
Notes: The “Recommended” staffing ratios are what the National Association of School Psychologists, the American School Counselor Association, and the National Association of Social Workers recommend for serving general education students. The recommended ratios can change depending on the level of student needs. The “Actual National Average” ratios are from the 2015–16 federal Civil Rights Data Collection data.³⁰

School nurses. With health screenings, testing and tracing policies, and quarantine requirements, the pandemic has ramped up the need for school-based health personnel, another area where schools have long struggled to maintain adequate ratios.³¹ Even prepandemic, the National Association of School Nurses advocated for, at a minimum, one full-time nurse in each school building,³² but only about half of the nation’s schools had a dedicated full-time nurse. A 2020 report from the National Center for Education Statistics brings attention to the fact that one fifth of high-poverty schools lacked even a part-time nurse.³³ A 2018 study

published in the *Journal of School Nursing* reveals the critical lack of school nurses, especially in rural regions, where 23.5 percent of schools reported having no nurse, in comparison with 10.3 percent in urban areas.³⁴ Nationally, the shortage of nurses—not just school nurses—has become so dire that the American Nurses Association has even urged the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to declare the nurse staffing shortage a national crisis.³⁵ Within that context, schools and districts have a hard time competing for qualified registered nurses due to a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, having no direct pipeline to connect nurses to schools and having lower compensation for school-based nurses compared with compensation for nursing roles in hospitals and other settings.³⁶

Bus drivers. Shortage issues are also a problem for positions that support schools, such as bus drivers. School bus driver shortages have made national and local news throughout the pandemic, leading to bus delays and, in some cases, school closures.³⁷ A recent survey conducted by The National Association for Pupil Transportation, the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, and the National School Transportation Association confirmed America’s shortage of school bus drivers. Specifically, more than half of survey participants—who included school administrators, transportation directors, bus drivers, mechanics, and other managers—described the driver shortage as “severe” or “desperate,” especially in rural areas.³⁸ Survey respondents also mentioned major hurdles in recruiting and retaining school bus drivers, which include low pay, licensing challenges, length of time to secure a commercial driver’s license (CDL), lack of benefits, and insufficient work hours. The situation is so severe that the U.S. Department of Education recently announced a joint action with the U.S. Department of Transportation to give states the option of temporarily waiving a portion of the CDL skills test in order to increase the number of qualified school bus drivers.³⁹

Fifty-one percent of respondents in a recent survey described their school bus driver shortage as “severe” or “desperate.”



Shortages in Region 2 States and Selected Strategies to Address the Shortages

Staffing shortages in the states that the Region 2 Comprehensive Center serves (Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island) reflect the national trends in many ways. In fact, governors in all three states issued one or more executive orders to address various types of educator personnel crises for teachers, substitutes, and bus drivers.

The region faces chronic teacher shortages in specific subject areas and specialties, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); special education; world languages; English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education; and early childhood education—shortages that have worsened during the pandemic. For example, a district vaccine mandate worsened teacher shortages in New York City, leading the district to deploy 1,000 central office staff to various school-based positions to fill in the vacancies.⁴⁰ In Rhode Island, Providence Public School District reported the mass exodus of teachers to other districts before the 2021-22 school year started,⁴¹ which left many open positions filled by temporary substitute teachers.⁴²

In Connecticut, a worsening teacher shortage led Governor Ned Lamont to issue an executive order in January 2021 to relax restrictions on retired teachers returning to the classroom and enable them to continue receiving retirement benefits.⁴³

The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) plans of all three Region 2 states note increased substitute teaching needs during the pandemic.

Substitute shortages in Connecticut⁴⁴ forced some schools to pivot to remote learning, then led to a December 2020 executive order that allowed districts more autonomy to waive certain requirements in hiring short-term substitute teachers.⁴⁵ In New York, school districts have long struggled to find adequate daily and long-term substitute teachers, even before the pandemic. In 2019, the New York State School Boards Association reported that more than 60 percent of superintendents had difficulties finding qualified substitute teachers in all areas due to low pay or lack of preparation to deal with student behaviors.⁴⁶

Spotlight on Selected Region 2 Strategies for Addressing Teacher and Substitute Shortages

Connecticut's NextGen Educators Program. The Connecticut State Department of Education partners with the School of Education and Professional Studies at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) to bring cohorts of teacher candidates in to support K-12 classrooms. They work closely with The Black Leaders and Administrators Consortium and the Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents to connect each NextGen Educator with a professional mentor.⁴⁷ For more information, see the initiative's [downloadable flyer](#), available online.

New York Governor's proposals to address the teacher shortage.

In her January 2022 State of the State address, Governor Kathy Hochul announced several actions she plans in response to the school personnel shortage in the state. These include waiving the income limit for certain retirees (i.e., teachers, counselors, school bus drivers) to incentivize them to return to work, accelerating the teacher certification process, connecting a student service corps with community groups, building a state teacher residence program, upskilling teacher support staff in the certification process, and increasing K-12 education funding.⁴⁸

Rhode Island Governor's Executive Order to rehire retired teachers.

In efforts to address state teacher shortages, Governor Daniel McKee signed an executive order that allowed retired teachers to return to the workforce without forfeiting their pensions.⁴⁹

For more Region 2 examples, see the appendix.

The region also struggles with shortages of school-based mental health staff, with needs increasing in the wake of the pandemic.

The New York City Department of Education announced the use of an expanded city budget flush with state and federal cash to hire 500 new social workers along with new counselors and school psychologists.⁵⁰ This ambitious hiring campaign lured social workers away from local nonprofit clinics to similar jobs with higher pay, leading to a staffing crisis at those school-based nonprofit mental health clinics.⁵¹ Worse still, these zero-sum recruitment strategies happened on top of a

long-standing shortage of psychologists as well as other mental health workers in the state even before the pandemic, particularly in small, rural districts.⁵² In Connecticut, the role of school psychologist is also recognized among the statewide shortage area designations, as reported in both the state's ARP ESSER plan⁵³ and the April 2021 State Board of Education report.⁵⁴ This shortage is not new in the state, as a 2018 Behavioral Health and Economics Network report highlighted that Connecticut would need a more than 50 percent increase in the behavioral health workforce to meet the needs of children, families, and underserved individuals.⁵⁵

Shortages in school-based cafeteria staff affect the region as well, leading to challenges with delivering much-needed meal services for students. In New York, a school in Brooklyn had to suspend lunch provisions to students due to staffing shortages, which then raised concerns for children living in poverty who might go hungry.⁵⁶ In Connecticut, ongoing disruptions in supply chains left many districts and schools operating with a "skeleton crew" in efforts to provide nutritious meals for students.⁵⁷

The national bus driver shortage also has affected the region, worsening a labor shortage that predates the pandemic. A lack of bus drivers has led to combined bus routes and longer travel times in some Connecticut school districts.⁵⁸ In Rhode Island, bus driver shortages are so severe that the governor issued an executive order to permit drivers with licenses from neighboring states to drive school buses in Rhode Island and for bus drivers to use alternatives to yellow school buses for school transportation.⁵⁹

Despite these pervasive shortages, some education leaders have expressed concerns about creating a budget cliff if they use federal relief funds to fill existing vacancies. For example, districts in Connecticut, though planning to deploy federal grant money for hiring more staff, are worried about how to sustain those positions after the money runs out.⁶⁰ Region 2 states are exploring a multitude of human resource strategies to tackle these persistent shortages across personnel types—in some cases expanding existing approaches and in other cases testing new programs and policies. Some of these strategies are highlighted in text boxes here, and the appendix provides a more comprehensive list of strategies being used in the region.

The next section of this brief offers considerations for education leaders who want to explore new strategies for strengthening their education workforce beyond the strategies described in this brief.

Spotlight on Selected Region 2 Strategies for Addressing Other Personnel Shortages

Connecticut state bus driver task force. The state convened a task force with representatives from the Departments of Education, Children and Families, and Motor Vehicles to address this issue. Several solutions have been implemented, including deployment of drivers and vans from Veyo, a transportation vendor, to help transport students receiving special education services, and outreach to 9,000 drivers in the state who are already licensed to drive school buses.⁶¹

Partnership between NYC Health + Hospitals and the city's public schools. NYC Health + Hospitals (H + H) formally partnered with the city's public schools to connect schools in those neighborhoods hardest hit by the pandemic to outpatient mental health clinics. Each school will have a designated coordinator to work directly with H + H to ensure students can promptly receive referrals to access therapy, psychiatric evaluation, medication management, and other services.⁶²

Rhode Island's additional school nurse teacher pathway. An additional pathway to becoming a school nurse, called the All Grades School Nurse Teacher Preliminary Certificate, allows Registered Nurses to work in schools when they are not eligible for a Full Rhode Island Certification of School Nurse Teacher Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 (PK-12) but have met specified criteria that qualify them to provide nursing services in schools while completing full certification requirements.⁶³

For more Region 2 examples, see the appendix.

Other Considerations

States and districts that are traditionally averse to investing one-time funds in personnel should consider how to invest ARP ESSER stimulus funds to meet emergency needs now through creative strategies while simultaneously launching long-term investments in programs that expand the talent pool over time. Although robust investments in strategies such as grow-your-own teacher pipeline programs or strategic compensation reform are important to any school system's talent development strategies (for more on those, see, for example, the [Learning Policy Institute's site on solving teacher shortages](#)), states and districts might consider the following less conventional

strategies to meet more urgent personnel needs. A [recent brief by WestEd](#) shares some additional suggestions for how education leaders can leverage federal funds to address staffing needs.⁶⁴

1. Offer more flexible part-time instructional roles to attract more certified, nonemployed educators back into the candidate pool.

The pool of certified teachers is far broader than the active teaching workforce, with many certified teachers having recently retired, taking breaks from teaching to attend to child and family responsibilities, or working in education-adjacent fields such as education policy or research. If states and districts offered more flexible instructional roles with a less stringent full-time commitment, they could potentially attract these experienced and certified personnel back into classrooms. For example, they could employ the following strategies:

- » **Offer “job share” or other flexible work arrangements for retired teachers and other certified, nonemployed teachers.** At the elementary level, schools could offer “job shares” to split the workweek or workday between two certified teachers who work part-time and collaborate on planning. A law in North Carolina was passed in 2003 to permit these types of job share arrangements.⁶⁵
- » **Offer “adjunct” teaching or substitute roles for retired teachers and other certified, nonemployed teachers at the secondary level.** Middle and high schools could consider “adjunct” instructor roles similar to those at the college level—having a certified teacher teach just a section or two of a course to address a shortage without being expected to teach a full course load.

These types of part-time arrangements would require flexibility at the state and district levels, such as enabling retired teachers to continue collecting their pension while working part-time in a school or negotiating with teacher unions to permit job shares. But these approaches have the potential to reduce the reliance on substitute teachers and to provide expanded access to certified, experienced educators during a time of great need.

2. Think about efficiencies or staggered schedules to meet increased demand for noninstructional personnel.

Districts can explore administrative or operational changes to extend the reach of personnel more effectively. For example, they can enact the following measures:

- » **Stagger school bell schedules to allow for multiple bus route cycles.** School systems struggling with bus driver shortages may consider more significantly staggering their school bell schedules to permit bus drivers to complete additional morning and afternoon routes in a given school day. Although doing so may be logistically complicated, it could have the added benefit of making the role of bus driver a more full-time role, which could attract more candidates. School systems could further stagger the start and end times of elementary, middle, and high school campuses. Secondary schools could also extend the school day to offer one additional instructional period in the afternoon, with some students arriving to begin their school day during first period and other students arriving to begin their school day during second period and ending their day later.
- » **Create K-12 efficiencies for contact tracing to reduce the burden on school nurses.** While some school systems are shifting to a more limited approach to tracing, schools serving larger populations might consider how to pair up nurses across smaller and larger schools to consolidate contact tracing. When a COVID case is identified in a larger school and the student has a sibling enrolled in a smaller school, the district could consider coordination between those two schools’ nurses for the family notification and follow-up processes to reduce the burden on school nurses.

3. Leverage one-time ARP ESSER funds to provide “hazard pay” or one-time incentives.

School systems might consider investing one-time funds in temporary increases to educator pay given the increased demand and increased burden and risk on teachers during the pandemic. For example, they might take the following measures:

- » **Offer meaningful one-time incentives for teachers who commit to serve in roles that are currently experiencing shortages.** These incentives could be used to retain effective personnel in these roles and potentially attract retired personnel and other certified, nonemployed personnel into these roles to fill short-term needs.

» **Significantly increase pay for teachers, substitutes, or noninstructional personnel on a temporary basis as a form of hazard pay.** In many fields, hazard pay is offered for personnel willing to take on high-risk roles that pose a threat to safety or well-being. Offering hazard pay to teachers, substitutes, or other district and school personnel during the pandemic as a way to supplement low salaries could both incentivize current employee retention and attract retired personnel and other certified, nonemployed personnel to fill gaps.

A recent Future Ed scan of a nationally representative sample of local COVID relief spending plans found that 12 percent intend to use pandemic relief funds on incentives or hazard pay for educators.⁶⁶

4. Form new partnerships to meet short-term needs while potentially attracting new talent to the profession in the long term.

States and districts might explore partnerships with other child-serving organizations or postsecondary institutions to both broaden the emergency candidate pool and cultivate a broader talent pipeline. For example, they might take the following actions:

» **Form partnerships with the community organizations that provide out-of-school-time services to provide supplemental instructional support or expand the substitute teacher pool.** While many out-of-school-time programs (e.g., after-school and summer learning programs) have a learning or tutoring component, these programs may have limited staff who are trained to effectively provide instructional supports. With training, existing staff from community-based organizations who provide out-of-school-time programming could provide more robust instructional supports to the students they work with, or they could recruit and oversee a cadre of tutors as part of their daily programming. An additional benefit of training staff from community-based organizations to provide instructional services is the possibility that once trained, they may consider a longer term career in education. Districts might also consider tapping into the out-of-school-time talent pool to identify additional substitute teachers who could provide classroom coverage during the regular school day.

» **Form partnerships with graduate schools of education, nursing, school social work, counseling, or psychology to create residencies for developing staff.** These partnerships could fill emergency short-term needs with support personnel who are in training while also establishing potential long-term relationships for future permanent placement in districts with the greatest need.

» **Form partnerships with career and technical education programs to identify students to fill noninstructional support roles.** For roles that do not require a postsecondary degree, school systems might consider leveraging their own student body as part of a broader career pathways initiative, providing students with on-the-job training in fields such as food services, custodial services, or after-school care. A school district in Missouri recently took this approach to fill critical vacancies in a competitive labor market.⁶⁷

Appendix: Strategies for Addressing Shortages in Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island

Connecticut

Personnel Shortages in Connecticut—Teachers

Subject area shortages. The state has experienced staffing shortages of bilingual education teachers, teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), special education teachers, speech and language pathologists and psychologists, mathematics teachers, science teachers, and world languages teachers. In Connecticut’s 33 lowest performing districts, known as Alliance Districts, there have also been shortages of school library and media specialists and technology education teachers.⁶⁸

Shortage of educators of color. The teaching workforce is predominantly White and non-Hispanic and does not correspond to the changing student demographics across different school districts with varying levels of poverty.⁶⁹ In 2018, more than 40 percent of public school students in Connecticut were students of color, whereas only around 9 percent of educators were people of color.⁷⁰ The state made progress on its 5-year goal (2017–2021) to increase the percentage of educators of color from 8.3 to 10 percent.⁷¹

State and District Strategies in Connecticut—Teachers

TEACH Connecticut. The [Teach Connecticut](#) website offers resources and supports for prospective teacher candidates along the pathway to becoming a teacher. It also acts as an online marketing and branding platform to promote teaching careers in Connecticut,⁷² especially in subject-specific shortage areas, and helps the Connecticut State Department of Education in its efforts to diversify the state’s teaching workforce.

Educators Rising. The [Educators Rising](#) program offers curriculum, teacher training, and “Beginning to Teach” micro-credentials for high school students to help them develop knowledge and skill to embark on teaching careers. This initiative was based on research showing that precollege engagement of prospective teachers allows districts to invest in current students of color and cultivate a more diverse pool of future educators.⁷³

NextGen Educators. The Connecticut State Department of Education partners with the School of Education and Professional Studies at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) to bring cohorts of teacher candidates in to support K–12 classrooms. The state also works closely with The Black Leaders and Administrators Consortium and the Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents to connect each NextGen Educator with a professional mentor. In the 2020–21 academic year, there were 18 CCSU students in the NextGen Educators program. These students were from the classes of 2022 and 2023, and they supported K–12 classrooms in person and virtually throughout the year.⁷⁴ For more information, see the initiative’s [downloadable flyer](#).

Personnel Shortages in Connecticut—Substitute Teachers

Districts in Connecticut reported challenges in finding daily and long-term substitutes to fill in for teachers’ absences, which caused stress and further burden among other staff and may in some cases preclude in-person operation of schools.⁷⁵ Major reasons that have been cited for substitute shortages in the state are low pay, lack of support, and fears about virus exposure.⁷⁶

State and District Strategies in Connecticut—Substitute Teachers

Governor’s executive order. Governor Ned Lamont’s 90th executive order, signed in December 2020, allows the short-term hiring of substitute teachers who have not yet received bachelor’s degrees.⁷⁷

Alumni outreach. The Cheshire Public Schools Superintendent reached out to graduates from previous years to encourage them to apply for substitute positions in the district. The initiative hopes to tap into a pool of energetic people to serve their community and to alleviate current shortages in substitute teachers.⁷⁸

Personnel Shortages in Connecticut—Mental Health Staff

School psychologist positions have been among the state's certification shortage areas for preK-12 statewide since the 2020-21 school year.⁷⁹ Many Connecticut schools opened in fall 2020 with unfilled positions for psychologists.⁸⁰

State and District Strategies in Connecticut—Mental Health Staff

District partnership with Community Mental Health Affiliates. Consolidated Schools District of New Britain used federal grant funds to source mental health professionals from Community Mental Health Affiliates (CMHA).⁸¹ CMHA is a private, nonprofit treatment provider headquartered in New Britain, with other locations in central Connecticut. CMHA offers a continuum of services dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals with mental illness and substance abuse in Connecticut.⁸²

Personnel Shortages in Connecticut—Bus Drivers

A shortage of bus drivers led to combined bus routes and longer travel times in some Connecticut school districts.⁸³

State and District Strategies in Connecticut—Bus Drivers

State bus driver task force. The state convened a task force with representatives from the Departments of Education, Children and Families, and Motor Vehicles to address this issue. Several solutions have been implemented, including deployment of drivers and vans from Veyo, a transportation vendor, to help transport students receiving special education services, and outreach to 9,000 drivers in the state who are already licensed to drive school buses.⁸⁴

New York

Personnel Shortages in New York—Teachers

Subject area shortages. The state has had shortages of teachers in bilingual education, special education, health science, ESL, language arts, and world languages.⁸⁵

Decline in teacher pipeline. A New York State Educational Conference Board report warns of declining enrollment in the state's undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs (53% drop between 2009 and 2017, from more than 79,000 students to about 37,000). The report also reveals that school districts statewide will need around 180,000 new teachers over the next decade.⁸⁶

Shortage of teachers of color. According to the Educator Diversity Report for New York State in 2019, while students of color have made up more than half of the total enrollment since the 2011-12 academic year, the percentage of teachers who are Black, Latino, or Asian hovers around only 20 percent as of the 2016-17 academic year. The state's five biggest city school districts (Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers) have the highest enrollment of students of color and teachers of color in the state. New York City had the most diverse teacher workforce, with almost 42 percent teachers of color (2016-17). However, the imbalance between the diversity of student population and teacher workforce is more acute for schools outside of these cities, particularly in rural high-need districts.⁸⁷

Increasing need for early childhood educators. New York State has announced a multiyear expansion of full-day, universal preK programs for 4-year-olds. The resulting increased demand for early childhood educators was identified as a teacher shortage area in New York's ARP ESSER plan.⁸⁸

State and District Strategies in New York—Teachers

Governor's proposals to address the teacher shortage. In her January 2022 State of the State address, New York Governor Kathy Hochul announced several actions she plans in response to the school personnel shortage in the state. These include waiving the income limit for certain retirees (i.e., teachers, counselors, school bus drivers) to incentivize them to return to work, accelerating the teacher certification process, connecting a student service corps with community groups, building a state teacher residence program, upskilling teacher support staff in the certification process, and increasing K-12 education funding.⁸⁹

Teacher Opportunity Corps II (TOC II). As part of the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, the TOC II will offer grants to public and independent higher education institutions in the state to deliver high-quality training programs for preservice and new teachers (with mentors, support systems, and clinical models involving partnerships with high-need schools and community-based organizations). To be eligible to receive a TOC II grant, a prospective teacher must be a New York resident from a historically underrepresented group in the teaching field or satisfy certain other requirements.⁹⁰

Teacher Diversity Pipeline Pilot. This pilot provides funding for a model program that assists teacher aides and teaching assistants with a pathway to becoming fully credentialed teachers. The program seeks to leverage the diverse pool of support staff to improve the diversity of the teaching workforce while also addressing shortages in hard-to-staff schools and districts.⁹¹

Teachers of Tomorrow. This grant program provides incentives for prospective teachers to teach in a school district experiencing a teacher shortage or subject shortage, especially low-performing schools (Teachers of Tomorrow schools).⁹²

NYC Men Teach. The initiative was first announced in 2015 with a budget of \$16 million to recruit 1,000 men of color into teaching by 2018. It was created in collaboration with the New York City Department of Education, the Office of the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative, and the City University of New York. The program provides academic and financial support to its participants throughout the certification and hiring process.⁹³

Personnel Shortages in New York—Substitute Teachers

Schools and districts in New York State cite challenges with finding substitutes since the pandemic began, reportedly due to low pay, lack of consistency, and reduction in supply during the pandemic.⁹⁴ These shortages have increased due to the vaccine mandate, resulting in 3,700 openings for substitute teachers at the start of the 2021-22 academic year.⁹⁵

State and District Strategies in New York—Substitute Teachers

Emergency standard waiver (substitute teaching flexibility). A change in hiring rules allows for substitutes who are not certified or are working toward certification and who hold a high school diploma or its equivalent to be employed beyond a 40-day limit for up to an additional 50 days. This change gives substitutes the ability to work up to 3 months or, in rare circumstances, even longer.⁹⁶

Personnel Shortages in New York—Mental Health Staff

Given the pandemic's impact on students' mental health, the New York City mayor announced the historic expansion of mental health support and funding for all schools and for a range of summer school initiatives and community schools, all aiming to build a sustainable staff pipeline to meet the need.⁹⁷ However, efforts to attract social workers from local nonprofit clinics by offering more competitive compensation has unintentionally led to a staffing crisis at the school-based nonprofit clinics.⁹⁸

State and District Strategies in New York—Mental Health Staff

Short- and long-term recruitment efforts coordinated by New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH). OMH uses federal funding from the Mental Health Block Grant and Federal Medical Assistance Percentages to invest in flexible short-term workforce recruitment, capacity-building initiatives, and retention strategies to address the mental health workforce shortage.⁹⁹ Long-term strategies also include partnering with universities and departments of social work across the state as well as approving enhanced pay for nurses through a program called Geographic Pay Differentials for Registered Nurses.

Partnership between NYC Health + Hospitals and the city's public schools. NYC Health + Hospitals (H + H) formally partnered with the city's public schools to connect schools in those neighborhoods hardest hit by the pandemic to outpatient mental health clinics. Each school will have a designated coordinator to work directly with H + H to ensure students can promptly receive referrals to access therapy, psychiatric evaluation, medication management, and other services.¹⁰⁰

Personnel Shortages in New York—Bus Drivers

New York's bus driver shortage predates the pandemic and has since worsened. Many districts in the state have 15 to 20 percent fewer drivers than they need.¹⁰¹

State and District Strategies in New York—Bus Drivers

Referral stipends and bonus. General Brown Central School District in rural upstate New York has provided \$500 referral stipends and a bonus of up to \$2,500 depending on whether the driver holds a commercial driver's license with a school bus endorsement prior to employment.¹⁰²

Rhode Island

Personnel Shortages in Rhode Island—Teachers

Subject area shortages. The state has reported shortages of special educators and related service personnel and paraprofessionals as well as bilingual, ESL, STEM, CTE, and early childhood educators.¹⁰³

Shortage of teachers of color. In the state's largest district, Providence Public School District, 80 percent of roughly 24,000 students are people of color, whereas only about 20 percent of teachers are.¹⁰⁴

State and District Strategies in Rhode Island—Teachers

Praxis content support. Following recommendations from Rhode Island Department of Education's (RIDE) Educators of Color Committee, RIDE outlined a plan to use part of ARP funds in Praxis¹⁰⁵ content support for teacher preparation candidates at the end of their preservice training, with special attention to educators of color. More information about this initiative can be found in Rhode Island's [ARP ESSER plan](#) (page 38).

Governor's Executive Order to rehire retired teachers. In efforts to address state teacher shortages, immediate past governor Gina Raimondo and current governor Daniel McKee consecutively signed executive orders that allowed retired teachers to return to the workforce without forfeiting their pensions.¹⁰⁶ The latest extension of Executive Order 21-96, "Increasing Teaching and Administrative Staff Capacity," was signed by Governor McKee in December 2021 and was in effect through the end of January 2022.

TA to BA Fellowship program. Launched by the Equity Institute and College Unbound in 2020, the fellowship provides support by covering tuition (\$1,000 maximum) for teaching assistants and paraprofessionals who are working to complete two college classes per semester toward obtaining a bachelor's degree and a teaching certification from a local college. This grow-your-own initiative also aims to strengthen the diversity of the teacher workforce, drawing upon the more diverse paraprofessional workforce.¹⁰⁷

College loan repayment incentive program. To help newly hired full-time teachers of color with college debts, this program provides up to \$25,000 in loan repayment incentives during their first 3 years in Providence Public School District.¹⁰⁸

Personnel Shortages in Rhode Island—Substitute Teachers

There was a shortage of substitute teachers in Rhode Island even before the pandemic—with school administrators struggling to provide classroom coverage.¹⁰⁹ The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, leaving some schools to revert to remote schooling due to an inability to fill staff absences.¹¹⁰

State and District Strategies in Rhode Island—Substitute Teachers

Highlander Institute's fast-track substitute teacher training program. The Highlander Institute of Providence runs a 10-hour asynchronous training for individuals who have applied to become a substitute teacher in the state. The 10-hour training covers online classroom management, lesson planning, and teaching practices for use in racially and culturally diverse classrooms. The Highlander Institute also provides a help desk to offer support for new substitute teachers. The fast-track training program is the result of a partnership between the Highlander Institute of Providence;

Freedom Dreams, founded by Simona Simpson-Thomas; and the state Department of Education to address the substitute shortage during the pandemic.¹¹¹ The [Highlander Institute's website](#) has more information about this initiative.

Warrior Teaching Fellows program in the Central Falls School District. This fellowship program, initiated by the Central Falls School District, is a residency-like, urban teaching experience that provides graduates from schools of education and those interested in entering the field the opportunity to work as full-time substitute teachers for a year and receive professional training. Following the yearlong fellowship, they can become certified teachers.¹¹² The [district's website](#) has more information about this initiative.

Personnel Shortages in Rhode Island—Nurses

Prior to the start of the fall semester of 2021-22, school districts in Rhode Island were competing with one another to fill certified school nurse-teacher positions. Superintendents from several districts across the state (North Providence, Jamestown, South Kingstown, Cranston, Burrillville, and Coventry) reported that they needed to hire at least one additional nurse before the start of the 2021-22 school year.¹¹³

State and District Strategies in Rhode Island—Nurses

Additional school nurse teacher pathway (All Grades School Nurse Teacher Preliminary Certificate). An additional pathway to becoming a school nurse, called the All Grades School Nurse Teacher Preliminary Certificate,¹¹⁴ allows Registered Nurses to work in schools when they are not eligible for a Full Rhode Island Certification of School Nurse Teacher Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 (PK-12) but have met specified criteria that qualify them to provide nursing services in schools while completing full certification requirements. To ensure that the participating registered nurses have the qualification to work in school settings, they must demonstrate school-based practice competencies during the first renewal cycle from Initial to Professional level. The regulation also requires attestation from superintendents that either a School Nurse Teacher was not available or that the position does not involve teaching.¹¹⁵

Personnel Shortages in Rhode Island—Mental Health Staff

Rhode Island did not report specific shortage numbers for the school counselor, school psychologist, and social worker roles in the state's ARP ESSER plan. However, the state's plan mentions a smaller applicant pool of school counselors than in the past and the fact that there is only one preparation provider in Rhode Island for school counselors.¹¹⁶

State and District Strategies in Rhode Island—Mental Health Staff

Partnership between state agencies. The Rhode Island Department of Education, in partnership with the Department of Children, Youth & Families, won a Health and Human Services grant to work with districts and community partners to provide staffing and necessary training for school mental health personnel to connect students and families with the mental and behavioral health services they need.¹¹⁷

Personnel Shortages in Rhode Island—Bus Drivers

Shortages of bus drivers in Rhode Island have caused disruptions to school schedules and longer waiting times and have been associated with a drop in students' attendance.¹¹⁸

State and District Strategies in Rhode Island—Bus Drivers

Changes in bus driver licensing requirements and flexibility in student transportation. Governor Daniel McKee issued an executive order in August 2021 allowing bus drivers licensed in Massachusetts and Connecticut to work in Rhode Island. The order also allows students to be transported on vehicles other than yellow school buses.¹¹⁹ Bus service companies have also approached other support staff who hold the required licenses to cover the bus routes.¹²⁰

Financial Incentives. First Student—a contract bus service company in Rhode Island—raised wages from about \$17 per hour prepandemic to more than \$20 per hour after the pandemic began and offered \$4,000 signing bonuses to licensed drivers.¹²¹

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