

# Teacher Recruitment and Retainment Challenges Post- COVID-19 – Dissertation Findings, Themes and Next Steps

MREA Conference 11/13/2023



# Introduction

Education



Career



St. Francis Area Schools  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 15  
ST. FRANCIS, MINNESOTA



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## Presentation Overview

- Overview of case study
- Purpose
- Significance
- Data analysis
- Next steps



## Problem Statement

There is a problem in K-12 public education.

- Despite district's focusing on the need to recruit and retain teachers, a high teacher turnover rate continues across the nation (Pierce et al., 2020).
  - ▶ The demand for teachers is growing while the numbers of individuals entering the profession is declining (Redding & Nguyen, 2020).
  - ▶ Many teachers who enter the profession leave within the first five years (Pierce et al., 2020).
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional ramifications as teachers were required to teach in different ways.
  - ▶ The challenges faced by educators during the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the way teachers approach learning and going forward, teachers will need to shift traditional teaching practices and include ways to exercise empathy and flexibility for all students (Crosby et al., 2020).



## Research Questions

The research used qualitative methods using a case study approach to answer the following questions:

- ▶ What recruitment and retention challenges did K-12 school districts face prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and what strategies did they use to overcome these challenges?
- ▶ How has COVID-19 affected the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers in K-12 school districts and what strategies will they use to overcome these challenges post-COVID-19 pandemic?



## Purpose

This case study builds on the challenges faced by school districts related to recruitment and retention of teachers and specifically, how that will change post-pandemic.

- This area of study is a growing concern across the country as districts struggle to hire qualified teachers.
- School districts are now faced with hiring teachers who can teach and respond post-COVID.



## Significance

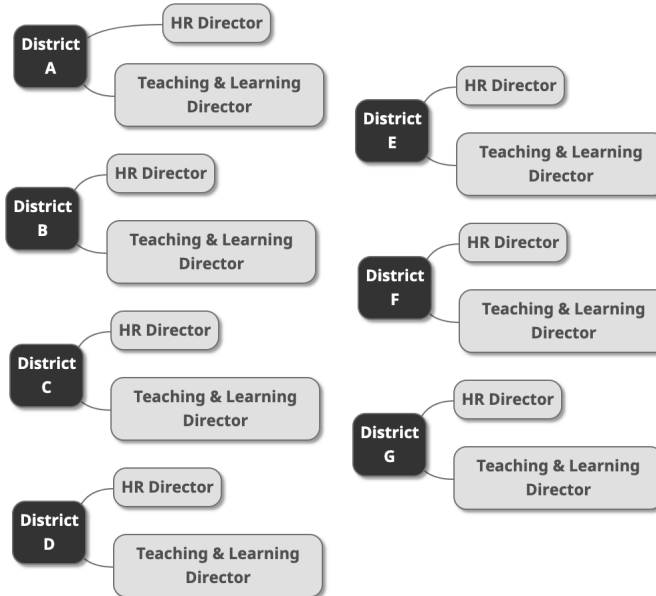
The experiences of students and educators during the COVID-19 pandemic will change future approaches to education.

- This case study expands current research related to teacher recruitment and retention challenges and incorporates strategies for hiring teachers post-COVID-19.
  - ▶ The insights gained from this study allow school districts to adjust and adapt their recruitment and retention practices in a post-COVID world.



## Case Study Overview

- I interviewed 14 participants; 7 participant pairs.
- Each participant pair was from the same K-12 public school district and included an administrator from the human resources department and an administrator from the teaching and learning department.
- The 14 participants selected represented a diverse cross section of the state of Minnesota which included an equal balance of demographical information (race, gender, etc.).





# Participant Data

- I utilized pseudonyms to protect participants' identities and the identity of the school district.
- The participants were assigned a gender-neutral name that follows the same letter as their district's assigned letter.
- Throughout the analysis of the study, I used they/their pronouns when sharing the findings to protect the identity of the participants.

*Study Participants*

Name	District	Admin Role	Years in Role
Alex	District A	Human Resources	4-6 Years
Avery	District A	Teaching & Learning	7-9 Years
Brady	District B	Human Resources	4-6 Years
Brooks	District B	Teaching & Learning	7-9 Years
Charlie	District C	Human Resources	1-3 Years
Casey	District C	Teaching & Learning	4-6 Years
Dani	District D	Human Resources	1-3 Years
Devin	District D	Teaching & Learning	7-9 Years
Eddie	District E	Human Resources	7-9 Years
Emery	District E	Teaching & Learning	4-6 Years
Fritz	District F	Human Resources	7-9 Years
Fin	District F	Teaching & Learning	1-3 Years
Gill	District G	Human Resources	7-9 Years
Glyn	District G	Teaching & Learning	4-6 Years

# Participant Data

- Each district was assigned a letter of the alphabet in alphabetical order.
- To determine classification of districts geographically, I utilized the definitions and information provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).
- NCES classifies territory in the United States based on four types –rural, town, suburban and city and then divides each of the types into three subtypes based on population size or proximity to populated areas (*Geographic*, n.d.).

*Participants District's with Demographics*

District	Classification	Total Enrollment	Demographics
District A	Suburban, Large	6653	2.1% EL 12.9% SPED 9% FRL 0.1% Homeless
District B	Rural, Distant	734	0.1% EL 18.3% SPED 24.3% FRL 0.7% Homeless
District C	Rural, Fringe	5068	2.3% EL 19% SPED 21.3% FRL 0.2% Homeless
District D	Suburban, Midsize	4364	1.1% EL 20.5% SPED 22.2% FRL 0.6% Homeless
District E	Suburban, Large	8481	4.5% EL 17.8% SPED 22.2% FRL 0.6% Homeless
District F	Town, Fringe	5958	0.1% EL 18.3% SPED 24.3% FRL 0.7% Homeless
District G	Rural, Distant	1906	2% EL 18.5% SPED 36% FRL 0.4% Homeless

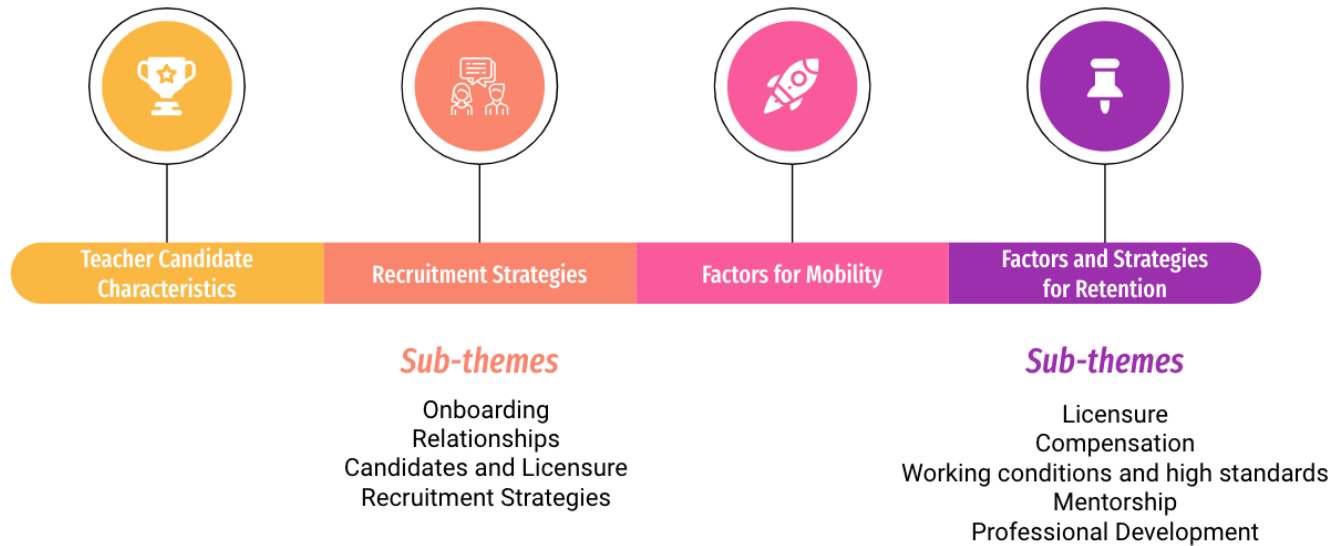
# Participant Data

- The Minnesota Department of Education collects demographic and staffing profile data on each school district.
- Experienced teachers are defined as having more than three years of teaching experience.
- Teachers considered to have advanced degrees possess a master's degree or more.
- Licensed teachers have a license or permission in the subject area of the courses being taught (*MDE*, n.d.).

*District Licensed Staffing Profile*

District	Total Teachers	Percent of Experienced Teachers	Percent of Teachers w/ Advanced Degrees	Percent of Licensed Teachers	Number of Students per Licensed Teacher
District A	378	87.5%	66.8%	99.2%	18
District B	47	74.07%	44.44%	90.18%	17
District C	268	90.07%	41.44%	94.87%	19
District D	290	82.14%	52.60%	96.28%	16
District E	555	90.57%	75.47%	99.17%	16
District F	295	86.86%	57.37%	98.04%	21
District G	115	93.89%	51.15%	93.76%	15

# Findings Overview





## Teacher Candidate Characteristics

All seven participants pairs shared that the characteristics districts are looking for in potential teacher candidates has not changed.

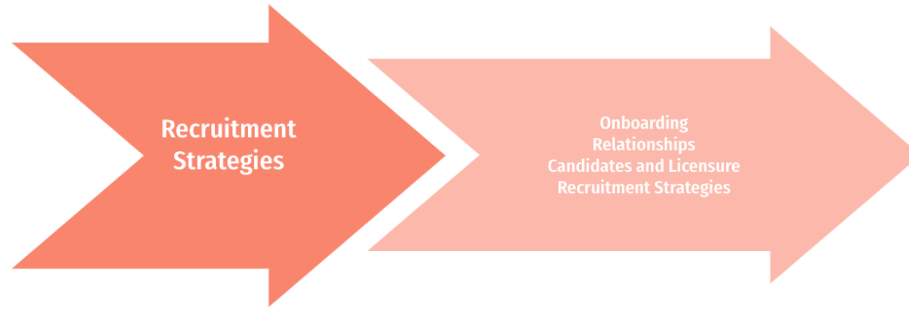
A common theme amongst interview participants was the lack of candidates in applicant pools as all seven participant pairs expressed the same sentiment. This limits what characteristics you are looking for. On average, post-COVID-19 applicant pools are thin.

To address the need for trauma-informed teaching, districts must employ teachers who are flexible and adaptable.

In general, having teachers who understand the needs of students, have a passion for working with children, and are willing to be a positive part of building culture are all key characteristics for teachers post-COVID-19.



## Recruitment Strategies



The main outlook on recruiting from a human resources perspective is to help and assist and be a liaison for administrators who are hiring. The Human Resources department trains administrators and supervisors to be professionals and gives them the resources they need to lead the hiring process in their own buildings.

Themes that emerged within the area of recruitment included the onboarding process, the lack of candidates, building relationships, and creative strategies for recruitment.



# Onboarding

The human resources department spends time trying to recruit and retain and manages the job cycle process from the moment the application is submitted to extending a contract to the prospective teacher candidate.

Handling the onboarding process through one department, like human resources, allows candidates to get onboard and connect with the right people as they build relationships within the building and district.



## Relationships

Recruitment happens through the personal relationships and connections made in various networking or recruitment programs.

Hiring teachers and filling positions builds the school team and the culture of the school district. Connections made through student teaching, job fairs, and people sharing positive attributes about a building or district will bring candidates to the school district for open positions

Brooks stated, “they want to develop strong relationships as that builds loyalty to the district and helps retain staff.”

Fritz shared: We go to the job fair; we start building relationships right there on the floor as we walk up to people who are innocently milling around and talk to them to share about the district and make the connection. Often, they apply for positions because they were approached.

Glyn shared in their district, “they start by driving the candidates around town and even helped a few candidates with housing, connecting to similar age peers and finding outside resources.”





## Candidates and Licensure

The lack of licensed teacher candidates plays a role in recruiting. Hiring candidates with little to no educational experience takes its toll on the school district as they must exert more time and money into providing support to the teacher.

This is a necessary shift to find applicants to fill open positions. As we have moved post-COVID-19, this has spread to all licensure areas as fewer teachers are applying who are licensed.

This necessity has led to shifting to creative strategies to increase recruitment of teacher candidates.



# Recruitment Strategies

Participants discussed creative strategies used by their districts to recruit potential candidates and fill vacancies.

## **Charlie, Glyn, Gill, Emery and Avery:**

All highlighted attending job fairs both in-person and virtually in order to share openings and information regarding the district.

Gill stated, "making sure the district is represented and making personal connections helps build a relationship with potential candidates."

## **Charlie, Glyn and Emery agreed:**

Using relationships with colleges has helped to share information with prospective candidates.

Charlie discussed that, "having a working relationship with several nearby colleges has helped find prospective teaching candidate."

Glyn explained that, "they sit on committees and boards at the nearby college to mentor students which helps recruitment."

Emery also mentor's student teachers through student teaching supervision.

## **Emery, Brooks and Devin shared specific examples:**

Emery shared, "they have an informal grow your own program with, so they work with staff members as they are enrolled in a teacher preparation program and then partner with the university to have field experiences within the school district."

Brooks shared in their district they, "started a "finder's fee" for teacher referrals made by current staff.

Devin stated, "the substitutes were able to earn stipends once they reached a certain number of hours."



## Factors for Mobility

There are teacher shortages because staff are leaving positions or the profession. People have been frayed emotionally for a long time and it is prevalent in every school district.

Now that there are more job openings, it allows teachers to choose which districts to apply to and some can find districts closer to where they live. These potential teacher candidates negotiate a starting wage on the teacher contract and receive all their years of service from other districts, which was unheard of pre-COVID-19. This creates the ability for teachers to be mobile and find positions and districts that fit their needs.

Districts that fail to meet potential candidate demands due to budget constraints feel the strain when losing veteran teachers and then not being able to recruit veteran teachers who are looking for higher salaries.



# Factors and Strategies for Retention

Staff moving to other districts is a statewide, and possibly nationwide, issue because of the underlying structural issues surrounding the funding formula and given the teacher shortage.

Districts are now needing to look to strategies of retainment that can be done in-house, within budget parameters, to keep teachers in their current classroom.

Factors and  
Strategies  
for  
Retention

Licensure  
Compensation  
Working conditions and high standards  
Mentorship  
Professional Development



# Licensure

Potential candidates are being hired when they have a four-year degree and districts are needing to support them in becoming classroom teachers, while they potentially enter a teacher preparation program or pathway.

This avenue has allowed districts to fill vacant positions, however, it does lead to new teachers needing additional support and creates a strain on veteran teachers.

The Minnesota Department of Education system outlines the multiple avenues to teacher licensure and allows districts to utilize creative options to fill open positions.

## TIER 1 REQUIREMENTS

BACHELOR'S DEGREE  
FOR ALL SUBJECTS EXCEPT CAREER & TECHNICAL ED (CTE)  
OR CAREER PREPARATORY COURSE OF STUDY (CPS)

OR

\*CTE OR CP CANDIDATES MUST  
HAVE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

AA degree

Professional certification

Five years of relevant work experience

Candidate must have a BA degree unless teaching Career and Tech Ed or Career Pathways, in which case must have AA degree, professional certification, or five years of relevant work experience.

- Good for one year and can be renewed three times, though there are conditions under which districts can renew further.
- District and teacher apply jointly. District must show it could not find a Tier 2, 3, or 4 teacher.
- These teachers are not in the teacher bargaining unit and are not earning credit toward probation. Teachers at Tier 1 do not have continuing contract rights.

Anticipated transition details can be  
found at [www.educationminnesota.org/  
resources.aspx#credentials-licensure](http://www.educationminnesota.org/resources.aspx#credentials-licensure).

Revised April 22, 2021. Subject to change. 10000 100

## TIER 2 REQUIREMENTS

BACHELOR'S DEGREE  
FOR ALL SUBJECTS EXCEPT CTE OR CP\*

AND

MINNESOTA APPROVED TEACHER  
PREPARATION PROGRAM ENROLLMENT

OR

MASTER'S DEGREE  
IN CONTENT AREA

OR

TWO OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Completed teacher preparation program
- Eight upper-division credits in subject area
- Training in subject-specific teaching methods
- Passing scores on state subject area and pedagogy tests
- Two or more years experience teaching in subject area

Candidate must be enrolled in a teacher preparation program. OR have a master's degree. CP have two of the following: completed teacher preparation program; eight upper-division credits in subject area; training in subject-specific teaching methods; two years of experience teaching in subject area; passing scores on state tests in subject area.

- Good for two years and can be renewed three times.
- District and teacher apply jointly.
- These teachers are in the teacher bargaining unit and are not probationary. However, if these teachers get to Tier 3, then two years of successful teaching at Tier 2 can count toward the Tier 3 requirement of three years of probation. Teachers at Tier 2 do not have continuing contract rights.

## TIER 3 REQUIREMENTS

BACHELOR'S DEGREE  
FOR ALL SUBJECTS EXCEPT CTE OR CP\*

AND

PASSING SCORES  
CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY

AND

ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Completion of a Minnesota-approved teacher preparation program (traditional or alternative, if accredited)
- Completion of a prep program from another state that includes field-specific student teaching equivalent to requirements of MN programs
- Portfolio in a given licensure field
- Three years teaching experience at Tier 2 without being placed on an improvement plan
- Professional teaching license from another state, license in good standing, and two years of teaching experience

Candidate has BA degree for all subjects except CTE or CP, passing scores on content and pedagogy exams, and ONE of the following: Completion of a Minnesota-approved teacher preparation program (traditional or alternative, if accredited); completion of a prep program from another state that includes field-specific student teaching equivalent to requirements of MN programs; portfolio in a given licensure field; professional teaching license from another state, license in good standing, and two years of teaching experience; three years of teaching experience under a Tier 2 license and evidence of summative evaluations that did not result in placement on an improvement plan.

- Good for three years and can be renewed indefinitely.
- Teacher applies for the license.
- These teachers are in the bargaining unit and must complete three years of probation. If a teacher at Tier 3 got to Tier 2 via Tier 2, two years of teaching at Tier 2 can count toward the three-year probationary requirement. Teachers at Tier 3 have continuing contract rights after completion of the probationary period.

## TIER 4 REQUIREMENTS

BACHELOR'S DEGREE  
FOR ALL SUBJECTS EXCEPT CTE OR CP\*

AND

COMPLETION OF  
PREPARATION PROGRAM

AND

PASSING SCORES  
CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY

AND

PASSING SCORES ON BOARD-  
APPROVED SKILLS EXAM

AND

THREE YEARS TEACHING  
EXPERIENCE IN MINNESOTA

AND

MOST RECENT SUMMATIVE EVALUATION MUST NOT  
HAVE RESULTED IN AN IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The candidate must meet all Tier 3 requirements, have completed a preparation program or portfolio, have passing scores on content and pedagogy exams and passing scores on board-approved skills exam. In addition, the most recent summative evaluation must not have resulted in placing the teacher on an improvement plan.

- Good for five years and can be renewed indefinitely.
- Teacher applies for the license.
- These teachers are in the bargaining unit. Teachers at Tier 4 have continuing contract rights after completion of the applicable probationary requirement.



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## Compensation

Compensation is a focal point to retain teachers. Teacher candidates look at different factors when negotiating. Now, compensation is a key driver, and the teacher is in the driver seat in the series of negotiations that districts find themselves in post-COVID-19 since there are fewer applicants.



## Working Conditions and High Standards

The teaching and learning departments continue to provide support to staff through the teacher evaluation process, so teachers know whether their teaching aligns with expectations. The department also provides support to teachers, so they feel supported in their working environment. Part of this support includes districts being cognizant of demands placed on teachers.

Connecting teachers to others within the building so they are not working in isolation helps maintain a positive building culture.

Teachers want to stay in districts that continue to have positive working environments and high standards for their staff and students.



# Mentorship



All participants shared the importance of retaining teachers by providing professional development and offering a mentorship program to new teachers. Although unique to each district, the mentorship programs discussed had a variety of options and outlets of support for new teachers.

Districts also discussed ways they have expanded their mentorship program, so it lasts longer than one year, and some districts are providing a mentorship program through year three for new teachers.





# Professional Development

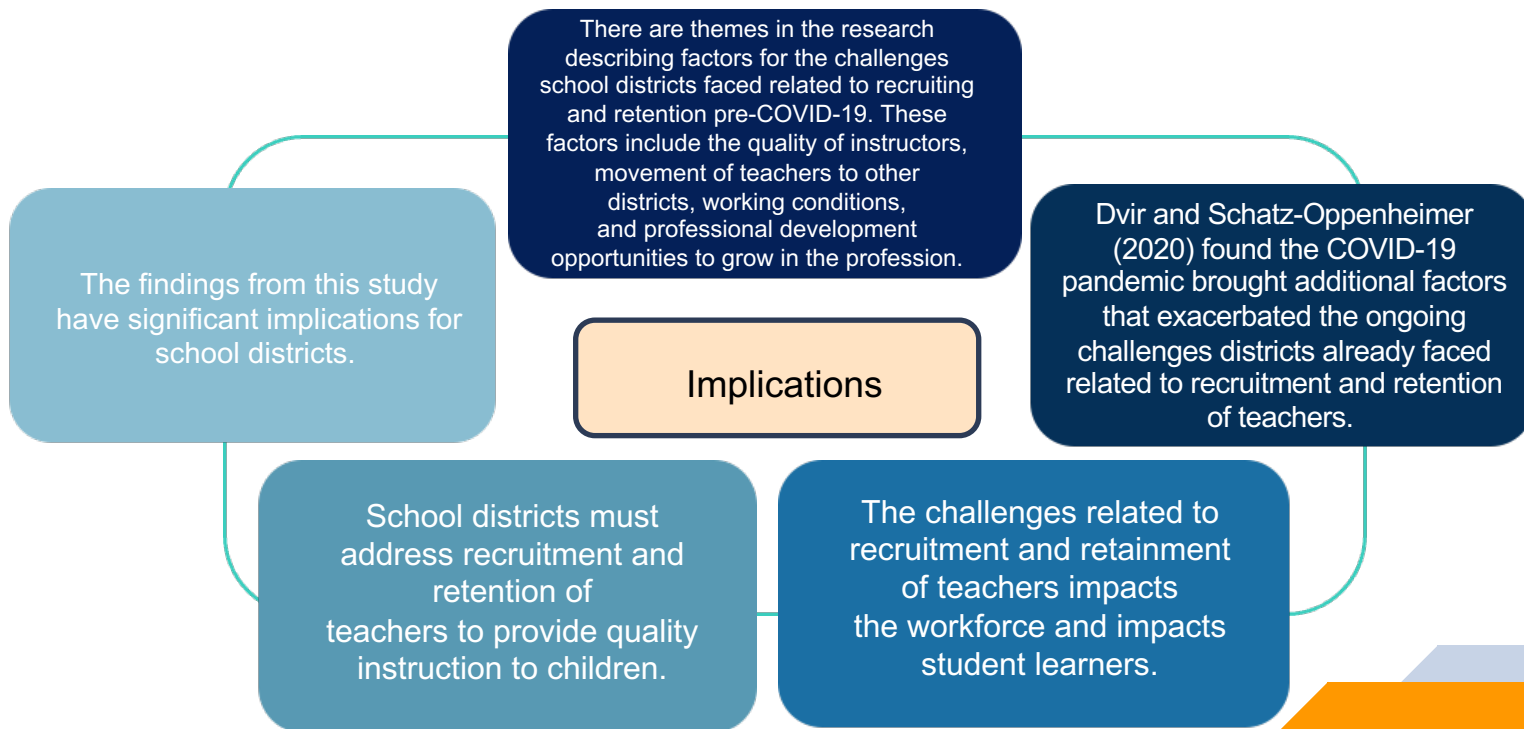
Beyond the mentorship program, teachers require ongoing training and support.

- ▶ Three districts shared they have added teacher support roles to provide direct support to teachers in a peer-to-peer interaction instead of the building principal trying to provide constructive feedback to all teachers in the building.





# Implications





## Next Steps

It is evident that school districts must invest in teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that we no longer can operate the same way we have in the past. It is evident that the current practices are not working, and we must move forward with intention as school districts focus on strategies to address the challenges related to recruitment and retention of teachers.



## Practices and Recommendations for Districts

- ▶ Administrators in the human resources departments must be well versed in the rules surrounding teacher requirements and licensure.
- ▶ Being able to provide alternative pathways to teacher licensure through formal and informal grow your own programs will help districts fill positions.
- ▶ School districts must utilize a variety of strategies to recruit and engage candidates, so they apply for open positions.
- ▶ School districts should share communication about potential openings in a variety of ways through social media platforms, website posting and word of mouth.



## Practices and Recommendations for Districts

- ▶ Having a consistent process for hiring and providing an efficient onboarding system for teacher candidates allows for more efficient hiring.
- ▶ Intentionally building relationships with candidates at the beginning is crucial.
- ▶ The human resources department must be intentional when negotiating with teacher bargaining units.
- ▶ It is a competitive market. Districts must remain competitive by offering benefits packages to teachers that include competitive salaries and benefits.



## Practices and Recommendations for Districts

- ▶ Building a positive culture and working environment for staff, students and families will recruit and retain staff
- ▶ As they work to build relationships with new teachers, schools are also focusing on providing support through professional development and mentorship programs.
- ▶ Staff stay in districts when they feel like the district is focused on building a relationship and providing working conditions that are collaborative and positive. In addition, teachers need support through professional development opportunities.
- ▶ School districts need to focus on providing support for the health and well-being of staff.
- ▶ Expanding the mentorship program to include additional support for teachers in the classroom and the profession will allow for school districts to build capacity within their teaching staff to meet the needs of students.



## Conclusion

The impact of COVID-19 forever changed students, families, teachers, schools, and communities. Staffing challenges were present pre-COVID-19. These challenges are exacerbated post-COVID-19 as there is a lack of candidates applying for open positions. The impact of recruitment and retainment challenges school districts face has an impact on the workforce and will impact student learning if not addressed.

## Group Takeaways and Additional Q and A

- Group reflection and takeaways
- Additional Q and A



**Thank You for attending!**

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