



Strategic Staffing: Staffing Schools for Success

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Since 2020, educators in the United States have left or intend to leave their positions at higher rates than ever before.^{1,2} The result, when paired with a dwindling recruitment pipeline,³ is a significant shortage of highly qualified educators across the country.

The Center on Strengthening and Supporting the Educator Workforce (SSEW) addresses this shortage by increasing the uptake and scaling of evidence-based practices. This series of briefs explores high-leverage solutions to improve the recruitment, preparation, and retention of American educators.

The Need

State and district leaders across the country are grappling with the persistent problem of attracting, recruiting, and retaining high-quality educators. Since 2020, teacher turnover in the United States has remained high and, in some periods, increased, with around 15 percent of teachers either moving between schools or leaving the profession entirely between the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years.⁴ A 2025 scan of state data indicates that the trend continues, with about one in eight teaching positions either unfilled or filled by a teacher who is not fully certified for the role.⁵

This brief provides an overview of strategic staffing initiatives, an innovative approach in which multiple teachers are responsible for a group of students. An emerging solution, strategic staffing shows positive outcomes for both students and educators, including increased student learning^{6,7} and improved teacher perceptions around advancement and compensation⁸ that can lead to improved teacher retention. This brief highlights three strategic staffing initiatives being implemented in districts and states, provides an overview of funding approaches, and concludes with recommendations and a list of relevant resources.

Breaking the Staffing Mold

Solving widespread teacher shortages requires thinking differently about the educator workforce. Strategic staffing offers one such innovative approach by moving away from the traditional school model where a single teacher is responsible for a classroom of students to one where responsibility for student learning⁹ is distributed among two or more teachers. It also takes a systems-level approach to developing teacher talent within schools and districts.

The U.S. Department of Education defines strategic staffing as “a team-based approach to school staffing that replaces the traditional one-teacher, one-classroom model. Through this model, at least two professional educators share responsibility for a common roster of students during the same blocks of time in the school day. Teamed educators have differentiated roles and distributed expertise.”¹⁰

Additionally, Education First (2023) identified six characteristics of strategic school staffing¹¹ that can address persistent challenges that teachers face, such as feelings of isolation, lack of support, or lack of growth and leadership opportunities.

Strategic staffing is an approach in which multiple educators share responsibility for a group of students using varied roles and expertise to collaborate, support one another, and improve teaching and learning.

- **Distributed leadership across a team.** Team teaching provides opportunities for distributed leadership as well as collaboration. Additionally, strategic staffing models can lead to teachers’ increased authority and control over teaching practice.¹²
- **Compensation structures differentiated by roles.** Leadership opportunities for highly effective teachers to become lead teachers or coaches typically offer corresponding increases in compensation.
- **Innovative teaming structures.** Teaming structures can maximize educator expertise, including in topics like [special education](#) and [math](#), by pairing or grouping teachers with complementary expertise.
- **Extended teacher reach through modeling, coaching, and co-teaching with team members.** Highly effective teachers can provide increased mentorship and support for newer teachers.
- **Staffing structures that intentionally cultivate teacher pipelines through differentiated support.** Embedded supports for newer teachers and teachers in training may be delivered through Grow Your Own programs, Registered Apprenticeship programs, and residencies.
- **Technology that optimizes educator roles/time.** Technology can streamline administrative tasks, support real-time data use, and enable differentiated instruction, allowing educators to spend more time on planning, collaboration, and direct student support.

States and districts are implementing strategic staffing to effectively allocate their existing educators to address students’ educational needs. When implemented with fidelity, strategic staffing can also improve educator retention, especially in developing and supporting the retention of highly effective teachers.^{13,14,15,16}

Strategic staffing approaches can complement alternative teacher preparation pathways.

State education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and Educator Preparation Programs are rethinking how they recruit, prepare, support, and license teachers through the use of innovative strategies for providing pathways to the educator profession, including Grow Your Own programs, teacher apprenticeship programs, teacher residencies, and teacher academies. These preparation pathway programs can operate within a strategic staffing model, pairing well with mentorship and other leadership opportunities inherent in co-teaching approaches.

How SEAs and LEAs Can Use Strategic Staffing

Strategic staffing approaches may require new flexibility around teacher of record, class size ratio, educator compensation, and other long-standing policies. The following table provides an overview of decisions that states and districts may need to address before implementing a strategic staffing approach.

SEA and LEA Decision Areas

DECISION AREA	SEA ROLE	LEA ROLE
Policy flexibility	Identify state policies that may enable or constrain team-based staffing, teacher of record rules, class size requirements, licensure, and compensation flexibility.	Identify district policies, collective bargaining provisions (if applicable), schedules, job descriptions, and staffing allocations that need revision.
Funding and sustainability	Clarify allowable uses of state and federal funds, and create incentives or grants for pilots.	Reallocate existing roles to better support instruction, coaching, collaboration, and new teacher development. Examine return on investment. Build compensation models into recurring budgets.
Workforce strategy	Align strategic staffing with educator pipeline, preparation, licensure, and retention strategies.	Strengthen mentoring and support novice teachers. Retain effective educators by creating a career pathway for experienced teachers.
Implementation infrastructure	Provide guidance, tools, technical assistance, and cross-district learning opportunities.	Engage stakeholders, design school-level models, monitor implementation, and adjust approach based on educator and student outcomes.

Questions for Consideration

To adopt strategic staffing approaches, states and districts can ask themselves:

- Do current licensure, teacher of record, and accountability policies allow teams of educators to share responsibility for students?
- Do state funding formulas or local budgeting rules permit districts to braid funds or redesign roles to support differentiated compensation?
- Are class size rules, scheduling requirements, or collective bargaining agreements flexible enough to support team-based staffing?
- Are educator preparation, apprenticeship, residency, and induction programs aligned with new team-based roles?
- What data will the state or district use to assess whether strategic staffing improves retention, educator effectiveness, student access, and sustainability?

Examples of Strategic Staffing Initiatives

Three prominent models for strategic staffing being implemented in states and districts include North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's (NC DPI) **Advanced Teaching Roles**, Public Impact's **Opportunity Culture**, and Arizona State University's **Next Education Workforce**.

Advancing Teaching Roles™

Since 2016, NC DPI's Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) initiative has provided grants for districts to design and implement new staffing and educator compensation models. These models provide compensation to highly effective teachers who take on career-advancing roles to lead and mentor peers while remaining closely connected to classroom instruction. Each approved district designs an ATR model that works best for their community, with school-level design teams deciding how ATR roles will be leveraged at the school level.

ATR elevates expert educators into leadership roles to extend their instructional reach, take responsibility for team-level student outcomes, and provide embedded, day-to-day coaching and mentorship for novice and developing teachers. By distributing instructional leadership across schools, the initiative reduces principals' supervisory burden, strengthens educator collaboration, and ensures that professional learning is job embedded and responsive to student needs. At the same time, ATR offers leadership pathways, increased compensation, and opportunities to grow professionally without leaving teaching. As of 2026, 37 districts in North Carolina have implemented an ATR approach in more than 600 schools. For more information about ATR, explore resources from [NC DPI](#) and [BEST NC](#).

Opportunity Culture®

In Public Impact's Opportunity Culture model, educators and students are organized into teaching teams led by a highly effective teacher known as a Multi-Classroom Leader, or MCL. The MCL receives increased compensation, leads small-group instruction, and provides guidance and on-the-job coaching to teachers on their team. Teaching teams also include Team Reach Teachers and Reach Associates. Team Reach Teachers earn higher pay for taking on larger student loads, enabling them to extend their reach and impact. Reach Associates are advanced paraprofessionals who support the teaching team by managing classroom logistics, tutoring small groups, and supervising students, allowing teachers to focus on instruction. These teams are able to effectively manage and instruct larger groups of students than in a traditional one-teacher classroom model.

Other operational features include:

- **Co-planning and instruction:** daily or weekly planning, co-teaching, and modeling lessons.
- **Data-driven decisions:** regular analysis of student data to make immediate instructional adjustments.
- **Accountability:** MCL accountability for the student results of all team members.
- **Professional development:** constant, on-the-job coaching; feedback; and professional growth for all team members.
- **Technology to support student learning:** learning labs, small-group digital instruction, and educator use of AI tools.

Several states across the United States, including North Carolina and Texas, are implementing Opportunity Culture. Public Impact reports increased learning growth as a result of using the model.¹⁷ The [Opportunity Culture](#) website describes the model and its results in detail.

Next Education Workforce™

The Next Education Workforce initiative developed by Arizona State University (ASU), deployed in 28 districts across multiple states, organizes schools around team-based staffing models that distribute educators' expertise, leadership, and responsibilities across multiple classes. Grounded in shared accountability for student outcomes, Next Education Workforce differentiates roles within educator teams, supporting teachers in specializing and deepening their expertise and taking on leadership and mentoring responsibilities aligned to their strengths while they continue to teach. Experienced educators lead and coach peers through embedded, team-based professional learning, while novice and specialized educators receive sustained, on-the-job mentorship and support. Teachers working in this model report increased levels of authority over classroom activities.¹⁸

In this model, teams of two to six educators serve 50 to 150 students in redesigned learning spaces. The team includes a Lead Teacher and Professional Educators, which include a special education teacher and other instructional support such as a resident or paraprofessional. In one school, for example, all ninth graders are served through this model in which a team of educators collectively supports 90 to 120 students. The core team of three or four educators is composed of content specialists (e.g., English language arts, math, science, and social studies). School schedules provide opportunities for embedded team and individual planning time.¹⁹ ASU's [Next Education Workforce](#) website provides news, information, and results for the model.

Funding Approaches for Strategic Staffing

Funding for strategic staffing efforts often involves a combination of internal resource alignment, supportive policy frameworks, and external partnerships. Districts may leverage existing resources by examining current staffing structures, roles, and investments to identify opportunities for greater coherence and impact. By assessing positions and initiatives for alignment with instructional priorities and evidence of effectiveness, systems can redistribute resources toward roles and functions that strengthen instruction, support educator development, and enhance collaboration.

State policy support can include programmatic and funding support for educator development and advancement, funding flexibility and guidance for advanced teaching roles, and professional learning and coaching. Federal funds can also be leveraged to support strategic staffing. The federal Title II Part A program includes funding for activities central to strategic staffing such as differentiated roles and compensation for educators who assume additional responsibilities, induction and mentoring activities for novice educators, establishing or revising educator pipeline pathways, and providing job-embedded professional learning and team-based collaboration activities. Partnerships with external providers such as colleges, universities, and technical assistance providers can bring additional resource capacity such as funding or in-kind resources. Philanthropy is another potential source for funding support, as major foundations have invested in strategic staffing research and pilot programs.



Recommendations

To implement strategic staffing initiatives, states and districts can:

- » **Explore different strategic staffing approaches** and consider which best suit the local context.
- » **Engage stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, local school boards, unions, and teacher associations**, to increase awareness and buy-in. Raise issues pertaining to the integration of strategic staffing solutions into policies and labor or collective bargaining agreements.
- » **Use data** about educator workforce shortages, trends, and projections to support the need for strategic staffing approaches.
- » **Engage strategic staffing expertise** from technical assistance providers, states, and districts implementing strategic staffing approaches.
- » **Review relevant policies and infrastructure** that would impact the initial implementation of innovations in staffing, student-to-teacher ratios, and educator compensation. Where appropriate, adopt or adapt policies and infrastructures that would align with new teaching and leadership roles and differentiated compensation.
- » **Determine the reallocation of human and fiscal resources** needed to implement the model.
- » **Develop state-supported pilot opportunities** that provide policy flexibility where necessary.
- » **Align strategic staffing initiatives with educator preparation pathways** (e.g., Registered Apprenticeship programs, residencies, or other career pathways) to provide increased mentorship, guidance, and support for teachers who are new to the classroom.



Conclusion

When designed and implemented effectively, strategic staffing can maximize the instructional resources within a school or district to better meet students' learning needs by a team of educators. The approach provides for a variety of roles and responsibilities from lead teachers to paraprofessionals working collaboratively, increasing educator effectiveness, job satisfaction, and retention. Teams of teachers working together to serve students through flexible scheduling and grouping builds staff capacity, ownership, and accountability for student outcomes.

Strategic staffing requires buy-in and support from numerous stakeholders because long-standing policies, such as those around teacher of record and class size ratios, may need to allow for more flexibility. Forming partnerships can also assist with the exploration of the strategy with stakeholders and the design, implementation, and plan for sustainability. Strategic staffing offers a systematic view for reimagining and redesigning the classroom experience and the roles and responsibilities of the adults within that classroom.

Resources

Explore these resources for more information about strategic staffing.

LETTER 

[Dear Colleague Letter on Strategic Staffing](#)

This Dear Colleague letter from the U.S. Department of Education describes flexibilities in the use of Title II funds to support strategic staffing approaches.

WEBSITE 

[Advanced Teaching Roles](#)

The website from BEST NC provides profiles, guides, and reports to support Advanced Teaching Roles, a strategic staffing approach currently being implemented in North Carolina.

WEBSITE 

[Next Education Workforce](#)

The website of the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation, Arizona State University, includes resource collections on the initiative, teaming, opportunities, and results.

WEBSITE 

[Opportunity Culture](#)

The website from Public Impact includes a variety of resources about Opportunity Culture, including how and why the model works, results, and getting started.

GUIDE 

[Breaking the Mold Without Breaking the Bank: A Guide to Transforming the Teaching Job](#)

The 2022 guide from Education Resource Strategies focuses on the economics of implementing and sustaining staffing innovations.

RESOURCE 

[Realizing Reimagined Teaching: A Framework for Strategic Staffing Implementation](#)

A 2026 resource from Bellwether offers a seven-part implementation framework for system leaders interested in moving strategic staffing from idea to practice. The framework and related case studies in the report demonstrate how the implementation of strategic staffing initiatives across the country are successful.

RESOURCE 

[National Landscape Snapshot](#)

This 2024 resource from the National Council on Teacher Quality, *Reimagining the Teaching Role: How Strategic Staffing Can Attract and Retain Effective Teachers*, provides an analysis of state-level policies (including compensation, teaming and staffing structures, extended teacher reach, and funding) that may support or hinder the district-level development of innovative staffing approaches.

WEBSITE 

[Strategic School Staffing Landscape Scan: Transforming School Staffing to Improve Student Learning and Reimagine the Role of Teachers](#)

The 2023 landscape scan from Education First builds a shared understanding of strategic staffing models, including the development of a framework.

WEBINAR 

[Strategic School Staffing and Reimagining the Teaching Role](#)

A 2024 webinar hosted by the National Governors Association provides an overview of strategic school staffing, initiatives underway across the country that are showing impact, and how states and governors can support these efforts.

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