

12-2022

The Nationwide Teacher Shortage: Factors Influencing Educators to Leave the Profession

Abby Keegan

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), [Elementary Education Commons](#), [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Other Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#)

This Capstone Project (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

The Nationwide Teacher Shortage: Factors Influencing Educators to Leave the Profession

Abby Keegan
Fall 2022
Senior Capstone
Advisor: Paoze Thao

Abstract

This senior capstone research examines the nationwide teacher shortage, which has been apparent in America since the early 1960's. However, this crisis did not begin to reach such levels of severity until recent years. There are currently thousands of vacancies in the teaching profession nationwide; not a single school across the nation is able to fill all the gaps. Research reveals that factors such as low salary, maltreatment from administrators, students, and parents, classroom safety concerns, a lack of teacher autonomy, and an overall societal disrespect for the profession can be to blame for this high resignation period. As these factors continue to plague the profession, administrators and state boards nationwide scramble to create solutions and resources to both retain current educators, and recruit fresh teachers. However, without quick, effective action, the shortage will continue to crumble America's public education system.

Introduction & Background

Teachers since the dawn of education have given their working lives to educate youth, adolescents, teens, and adults. By leading students to resources, they can find their own passion and career, become a functioning member of society, and commit to being a lifelong learner. Yet, even though they hold one of the biggest responsibilities of influencing past, current, and future generations, teachers have been underappreciated for decades, especially in the United States of America. However, it is unfathomable on why teachers are treated so poorly. Educators give away years of their lives, studying to gain needed degrees and credentials, only to further continue their higher education just to make an extra sum of money within the field. Teachers give us the resources and education we need to pursue our own lives and careers, but are still undervalued, maltreated, and overworked within their profession. And due to this severe subjection to unfavorable conditions, we find the teaching profession withering away.

For decades now, America has had one of the longest standing nationwide teacher shortages. And though it has only become apparent since the passing of the pandemic, since the 1960's, the population of the profession has continued to plummet. There has been a severe decline from 21% to 4% of people attempting to get their degree in education, with the hopes of becoming a teacher (Deen, 2022). But, not only is America struggling to recruit educators, they are failing to entice current teachers to stay in the profession. Forty-four percent of the current nationwide teaching population claim to be burnout, and 2 in 5 teachers claim that they plan to quit the profession within two years (Querolo et.al, 2022). But, what is driving teachers out of the profession, and steering away fresh faces? Through research, an ongoing, extremely long list of factors has been uncovered as to why no one wants to be an educator. Over the years, the list has altered and expanded, but many would point to an abundance of factors such as a low,

unlivable salary, maltreatment from administration, parents, and students, safety concerns such as heightened possibilities of school shootings, and the rise of political warfare on campus. However, there is no end in sight for this list of factors, and working conditions continue to worsen as does the national shortage.

As a future educator myself, it is terrifying to be heading straight into a career that is systemically broken. However, as someone who is passionate about education, I feel the duty to recognize what is wrong, and advocate for better conditions for teachers. Through my research, I will aim to answer the following question: Are there factors influencing teachers to leave the profession? I will also aim to answer a few secondary questions, which are as follows:

1. What are the factors causing teachers to leave the profession?
2. What does the literature say about teachers' leaving the classroom?
3. What will it take for the state and school districts to resolve the issues of the teacher shortage?
4. Are there resources to entice teachers to stay in their profession and at the same time attract college students into the teaching profession? If so, what are they?

Through research and talking with educators who have removed themselves from the field, I will be able to make suggestions on how at the district and state level this shortage can be resolved. I will also take a dive into what resources are available now for struggling, burnout teachers, and what resources we can put into place to retain veteran teachers, while also bringing in new faces.

Literature Review

Though the teacher shortage has been an issue within education for decades, it has never been more severe as it is now. The teacher turnover rate previously sat at 5.6%, but post pandemic, it now has ascended to 8% (Tran, 2022). However, the field is not only failing to maintain its current educators, but is struggling to entice new teachers. Over the past 50 years, the percentage of students earning a degree in education has dropped significantly, even though the overall number and share of Americans with college degrees has increased (Deen, 2022). The question arises of why anyone would want to enter the teaching profession? A poll in February claimed that K-12 educators were the most burnt-out segment of the US labor force (Querolo et.al, 2022). But what is causing this? After perusing several different scholarly articles, four factors were recurrent in the cause for the nationwide shortage: low pay, the escalation of cultural and political war in schools, concerns for safety in the classroom, and overall disrespect and maltreatment at the administrative, parental, and student level. All of these factors cultivate a societal disrespect for teaching, ultimately leading to a high turnover rate within the profession. These factors deter educators from wanting to remain in the field, and are the leading causes of the national teacher shortage.

Educators have always been paid poorly. The National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) reports that the average salary for teachers was \$65,090 in the 2020-21 school year (Toch, 2022). And utilizing that number, according to the average livable wage in each state, a teacher's average salary is only livable in 58% (29 out of 50 states) of the country (Farkas, 2022). When compared to similarly educated professionals, teachers make around 20% less (Tran, 2022). However, this seems wildly contradictory seeing that educators have one of the most demanding and exhausting occupations. Several things can be to blame for low salary and funding. Teachers are paid on a salary grid, and the amount they are paid directly correlates to

the amount of degrees, credentials, college credits, and years of experience they have. This gives little room for teachers to expand their salary, as it only rises a few hundred dollars every year or so. The salary grid even caps out after a certain amount of time spent in the profession. Plus, with such a small salary, educators are not even given the opportunity to pursue higher education beyond a bachelor's and teaching credential. Low salary can also be a result of education being a women dominated field. In the 2017-18 academic year, the NCES recorded that around 76% of the 3.5 million US public school teacher population was female (Querolo et.al, 2022). And even though the United States is working towards a more equitable system for both men and women, women still only make 82 cents to each dollar a man makes (Dowell, 2022). It is also important to note that teachers are one of the lowest paid positions within education. An argument proposed by David Schaffer, author of the article *Readers React: Raise Pay to Solve Teacher Shortage*, captures the story of a superintendent who makes an annual salary of \$230,000. But as we look at the opposing side of the spectrum, a teacher in the same district makes on average \$58,950 (Schaffer, 2021). Schaffer (2021) goes on to claim that there definitely is not a shortage of people interested in working in school, district, or state administrations. But, if seasoned teachers were paid at the same rate, we would not continue to see a shortage of educators either (Schaffer, 2021). Excess allocated funding for education is also not equitably distributed. Taxpayer dollars that are supposed to be used to support public school teachers, their classrooms, and their campuses are being ripped away from the system for privatized institutions. Voucher programs in 15 states use taxpayer dollars to subsidize tuition at private or religious schools (Gambrell, 2022). Vouchers go into effect when students transfer to a better institution from a public school that is deemed low performing. Vouchers take away from the overall funding of public schools, and unfortunately, directly affect educators and their classrooms. Salary is one of

the number one causes of educator's anxiety, as it leads them down a cruel path of financial difficulty and serious economic problems (Nelson & Thompson, 1963).

It has been widely noted that salary is single handedly contributing to the national teacher shortage. Changes have been attempted to be made at both the administrative and state level. Districts nationwide have offered to increase wages, stipends, and bonuses, especially for hard to fill positions such as mathematics, science, special education, and foreign language (Carver-Thomas et.al, 2022). Some colleges and universities are even offering scholarships for those who go into education in areas heavily in need of teachers (Deen, 2022). Teachers in areas struggling to retain and hire new educators are also seeing more raises in pay. The Colorado Department of Higher Education is targeting the severe shortages in rural areas by offering \$10,000 stipends to teachers who work in a rural area for one year (Toch, 2022). Hawaii, who is struggling with hiring and maintaining special education teachers, is paying those who fill the positions an additional \$10,000 on top of their regular salary (Toch, 2022). Although some teachers are receiving better pay, it is not yet common in all states. There must be a national change to teacher salary in every state across the U.S., or else we will continue to see educators leave the profession.

Since the intensity of the most recent election and the start of a worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, schools have become the war ground for extreme political views and cultural discrimination. The stress and anxiety from these controversial topics has played a heavy role in why teachers continue to exit the profession. Natalia Alvarez, a former middle school Spanish teacher, interviewed by Nic Querolo et al (2022) for their article *Part 1: Why Teachers Are Quitting*, blames the intense shift in public opinion at her school for the reason she left the profession. Alvarez felt unsupported as a new governor was elected, who proudly voiced his

views to get rid of critical race theory in schools, and drop the mask mandate mid-pandemic (Querolo et.al, 2022). Recent elections were one of the main causes that sparked radical views from both sides of politics, which have invaded our K-12 public schools. Strong opinions to rid schools of curriculum and books containing topics on racism, critical race theory, gender, and sexual identity have swarmed the country. In the 2021-22 school year, 138 school districts in 32 states banned more than 2,500 books (Pendharkar, 2022). As more and more right leaning, conservative groups like Moms for Liberty form, a plethora of books are being taken off of school shelves. These bans not only have a negative impact on curriculum and teaching methods, but students are taking a direct hit as their literacy begins to decline, and fewer students see characters like themselves on the bookshelf. However, it has been reported that book banning numbers will only continue to increase into 2022 (Pendharkar, 2022). And further, no changes have been made to try and stop the entrance of extreme views into our public school systems. But, the overall stress and anxiety of being forced to teach a specific curriculum, while fearing the reprimands of teaching students important messages and ideas, will continue to push hundreds of teachers out of the profession.

With a drastic change in the amount of politics associated with education, teachers have also started to fear for their safety inside the classroom. Megan Rudy, a former elementary school teacher, interviewed for the article *Part 1: Why Teachers Are Quitting*, blamed her fear surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic for why she left the profession. When Rudy and her staff voiced concerns about their safety returning to the classroom amidst a serious pandemic, the right-leaning parent community “lashed out” (Querolo et.al, 2022). They claimed it was safe for kids and teachers to go back into the classroom (Querolo et.al, 2022). Rudy felt this was highly inappropriate, and also felt unsafe walking back into a classroom of 30 unvaccinated students for

less money than she made the year prior (Querolo et.al, 2022). Parents across the country rioted to send their children back into the classroom, unmasked and unvaccinated, during the height of the pandemic, putting hundreds of teacher's lives in danger. This put classroom safety into perspective for many educators. Alongside the pandemic sparking fear amongst teachers nationwide, America had also been dealing with another fear-mongering epidemic, gun violence in schools. Something America has been shamefully dealing with since 1999, there have since been 346 recorded school shootings in this country (Cox et.al, 2022). And in 2021, we witnessed the worst of it, as we saw 42 more school shootings recorded than any other previous year (Cox et.al, 2022). A total of 188 students and educators have been brutally murdered by on campus gun violence (Cox et.al, 2022). And how are state administrations nationwide dealing with this? By suggesting that we train educators so they are able to carry guns as defense weapons on school grounds. A study shows 42% of Americans want teachers to carry guns, however, only 18% of teachers nationwide want training so they would be able to do so (Gambrell, 2022). Putting guns in schools just passes the high occurrence of school shootings off as a minor inconvenience, and does not truly solve the issue at hand. But do not fear, school districts are actively forcing educators to go through bare minimum active shooter training, where they are taught how to play dead, and reminded to put their student's lives over their own. A change needs to be made at the government level for the sake of teachers nationwide, but right extremist groups favor their rights to bear arms over the lives of innocent students and teachers. When the only safety measures being offered are locking up the classroom and increasing security on school grounds, it further proves how invaluable and disrespected the teaching profession is to America.

Educators experience a constant disrespect for their profession, and receive severe maltreatment from state boards, district administrations, parents, and students everyday. Robert

Nelson and Michael Thompson (1963), authors of the article *Why Teachers Quit: Factors Influencing Teachers to Leave Their Classroom After the First Year*, go into depth on the unfair stresses put on first year teachers, and why most educators do not make it past their first year or few of teaching. When comparing the amount of work load carried by first year teachers versus experienced teachers, it was found that new educators carry about 10% more weight than veteran teachers (Nelson & Thompson, 1963). Outside of that, teachers are also expected to attend committees, school programs, and faculty meetings while also participating further on campus by taking on hall duty, bus duty, and after school study halls (Nelson & Thompson, 1963). Even with all those commitments under their belts, educators are still expected to complete all work assignments on time, whether that be grading, evaluating, or creating lesson plans. And majority of the time, due to teachers already busy schedules, they end up completing much of their work off the clock and on unpaid time, which typically contributes to mental health issues, burnout, and loss of passion for the profession. The poor hiring process for administrators and school board officials is also a top factor in teacher maltreatment. School board officials often hire principals who are more concerned with pleasing the board, rather than solving issues within the teaching staff (Nelson & Thompson, 1963). The inferior practices of the school boards and administrations nationwide, which go over the heads of educators, affect the entire public school system (Nelson & Thompson, 1963). But besides the missteps being made at the administrative level, parents and students also play a big factor in why teachers decide to leave the profession.

A survey of 15,000 educators uncovered an on the rise trend of not only students verbally and physically harassing teachers, but parents also engaging in online harassment and retaliatory behaviors against educators (Tran, 2022). Student behavior, which has worsened since schools reopened post pandemic, has become a huge issue that teachers tackle daily. A study shows that

56% of schools reported a rise in classroom disruptions because of student misconduct (St. George, 2022). Educators become exhausted and burnt out when they constantly have to deal with students arriving late to class, fighting with other students and teachers, interrupting lessons, and ignoring teacher's directions (Lambert, 2022). Students have struggled making the adjustment post pandemic, and teachers were not prepared to deal with the social-emotional trauma students displayed, along with their reactions to a shift in regular classroom routines (Lambert, 2022). With educators attempting to manage worsened behavior from students, they also have parents hounding them. Families who are stressed and worried about the success of their child, often take out their frustrations on teachers (Lambert, 2022). Parents are constantly bombarding educators with emails and messages about their child's grades or behavior. Parents continually overlook the preparedness and knowledge of educators. But, now with parents going over the heads of educators, and taking their concerns to the government level to ban the teachings of specific curriculum and the reading of certain books from schools, teachers are feeling powerless and more disrespected than ever.

Methods & Procedures

Upon the start of the semester, I had an educated discussion with my Father about the severity of the teacher shortage in America. Our brief, yet detailed conversation left me yearning to learn more about the specifics of this shortage. Therefore, I drafted a plan for my capstone project with my advisor, Dr. Paoze Thao, surrounding the topic of the teacher shortage. Again, I will restate the primary question I am attempting to answer through my research: Are there factors influencing teachers to leave the profession? And further I will aim to answer what are the factors that cause teachers to leave the profession? What does the literature say about

teachers leaving the classroom? I will also answer what it will take for state boards and school districts across the country to resolve issues of the teacher shortage, and expose resources that both entice teachers to stay in the profession while attracting college students into the field.

To begin answering my primary and secondary research questions, I immediately began pulling together articles, news reports, books, studies, and other scholarly accessible sources that are related to my topic. Since my chosen topic is fairly current, it was not difficult to find a plethora of studies and opinions on said topic. However, there definitely was a surplus of information surrounding the teacher shortage, so I knew I had much reading to do. I dove into reading and notetaking, and spent my first few weeks of research gathering information from many different articles and written resources. However, through my weeks of collecting intel from other people's studies and articles, I realized to understand this shortage I needed to sit down and chat with some ex-educators. Luckily, being an avid social media user, I remembered that there is a community on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter that openly speak on the effects of teacher burnout and the nationwide shortage. Many have been a part of what social media is referring to as the "Great Teacher Resignation" or the switching of careers from teaching to something new.

I began looking through TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media platforms, gathering as many emails and methods of contact from people all over the nation. The influencers I was most interested in talking to were those openly speaking about their experiences within the public education system, and why they decided to exit the profession. I was specifically searching for men and women who were past educators, and have left the profession recently (within the past 2-3 years during the severity of the teacher shortage). I ended up reaching out to about 25 different past educators. I sent each prospective interviewee an

introduction of who I was, why I was reaching out to them, and asked them if they would be willing to participate in an interview for my project. Even though I reached out to an abundance of people, I only received 9 responses, and only 5 of those followed through with scheduling and participating in an interview. I interviewed 4 women (3 past educators and 1 past school counselor) and 1 man (a past educator), all residing in different states across the U.S., and all ranging in age from 28-42 years old. All interviewees were required to sign both an adult consent form, which alerted them to the contents of my project and how the interview would be conducted, as well as an audio, video, and photographic consent form, which allowed me to record our interviews for the convenience of being able to refer back to them.

I created 12 interview questions (See Appendix A for the Interview Questions for Ex-Educators), which I asked all 5 of my interviewees. Each question required a detailed answer beyond just yes or no, and were all aligned with answering my primary and secondary research questions. The questions posed uncovered the identity of each educator, why they were involved with the profession, and what ultimately led them to exit the field. These questions were stored in a secure Google document, which was utilized for each interview. All of the interviews were set up via email correspondence, and each was scheduled on specific days, where a 1 hour time block could be met by both the interviewees and myself. Each interview was done and recorded on Zoom, and I took brief notes throughout each interview on GoodNotes. All 5 interviews took no more than 40 minutes each to complete. After the interviews were completed, I went back and analyzed each of the recordings, and reviewed the interviewees answers to each question. I then formulated my results and findings.

Results, Findings, & Discussion

After conducting all my interviews, it was proven that there are factors which significantly influence teachers to leave the profession. Although the factors I mentioned previously still hold influence over the shortage, new ones have arisen in light of interviewing ex-educators. And these newly uncovered factors may hold more significance; when asked, 100% of my interviewees said they would never consider going back into education. The most commonly listed factors that pushed these teachers out were a lack of teacher autonomy, severe problems within administration, and rises in poor mental health. Throughout this section, I will uncover not only new significant factors causing the shortage, but also make recommendations on issues that need to be addressed, as well as open up the conversation in an effort to create more resources to entice, recruit, and keep teachers.

Many of my interviewees cited a lack of teacher autonomy as a major influence over their resignation. According to The Glossary of Education Reform, teacher autonomy refers to professional independence of educators (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). Having teacher autonomy gives educators the freedom to make autonomous decisions on what they teach, how they teach, and how they manage their classrooms (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). The lack of teacher autonomy is caused by an abundance of things, much of which came with the commonality of maltreatment from administration, parents, and students. One of my interviewees, Interviewee M, is a prior 6th grade English and social studies teacher from Georgia. Interviewee M claimed she made the decision to leave the field after she recognized an extreme shift in power and authority, which resulted in low respect for teachers. Much of which was caused in the recent escalation of poor behavior in students. Interviewee M can recall when the blame for poor classroom behavior was shifted onto her; administrators and parents even deemed her as having poor classroom management skills, even though she had 8

years of experience under her belt. This became routine for her, as she continued to deal with administrators and parents conducting what went on in her classroom, and further how she chose to manage it. This lack of teacher autonomy also resulted in a lack of authority, which solely shifted to administration, parents, and students. No educator wants to work in an environment where they are micromanaged and made to feel inferior to those around them. Especially by those who do not understand how tough it is to manage a classroom of children. Teachers spend years of their lives receiving (and paying for) education that prepares them for the classroom. Not to say that educators go into the field 100% prepared, however, teachers are educationally trained professionals who know how to manage their classrooms and teach curriculum. But, parents, administrators, and students still seem to doubt this, and would instead creep over the shoulders of educators to ensure they are doing their jobs in what they feel is correct and efficient.

Poor behavior in students is not the only thing educators are concerned about, because teachers receive the same treatment from parents and administrators as well. All of which severely diminishes teacher autonomy. Interviewee J, a previous middle school drama and English teacher, left the profession because she felt she lacked rights in the classroom. After a parent inquiring about a student's grade escalated to a situation where she was told by her district she would need an attorney, Interviewee J felt staying in the profession was no longer worth it. Interviewee J was not protected by administration, who are solely hired to support and assist educators. She instead was verbally abused and attacked out of the profession by parents. Educators are making the choice to leave because their teacher autonomy is no longer appreciated, nor protected by institutions that were created to stand in solidarity with teachers. Educators have become afraid and hesitant to step into their classrooms everyday, because they

are ridiculed for what they teach and how they teach it, which seems heavily redundant for years they spend in training. If teacher autonomy continues to be disregarded, the shortage will continue to worsen.

Not only do issues within administration lead to other influential resignation factors such as a lack of autonomy, but in general, these problems within administration also highly influence resignation rates. As previously mentioned, administrators who are hired by the district or state board often only concern themselves with pleasing the board (Nelson & Thompson, 1963).

Seeing that administration is brought on to make schools and districts run more smoothly, while also offering support to educators, the lack of professionalism within administrations heavily affects the school system as a whole. We see this happening at many public schools throughout the country. Interviewee A, an ex-school counselor from Indiana, took the brute force of effects caused by a poor administration. Not only did Interviewee A experience redistricting during the worldwide pandemic, she was also promoted to a more authoritative position immediately upon schools reopening. A positive promotion quickly turned negative when it was discovered that her administration lacked support. And not only was the administration not helpful or supportive, their treatment of surrounding counselors and educators was appalling. Administration was not mindful of Interviewee A's life outside of school, much of which was being consumed due to the high amounts of work they were forcing upon her. Interviewee A revealed she was working 13-15 hour days, where she would come in as early as 3:30am, and not leave until 5pm.

Interviewee A constantly had so much work she needed to complete each week, and then on top of that was counseling and offering supportive services to students. Administration was no help in lightening her load or providing resources to assist with her work load, and instead ridiculed her when the extensive amount of work was not getting done each week. Interviewee A decided

she would be better off without the education profession, and made an appointment to meet with administration to let them know she was resigning. Administration showed up 2 hours late, and requested that the meeting be rescheduled as they did not have the time to meet with Interviewee A. After finally resigning, Interviewee A points to failures within administrative, district, and state leadership being a definitive factor for exiting the profession. Reform is desperately needed within administrations across the country. Administrations and state boards hold too much power in the public school system, and with power, comes responsibility, which they are severely abusing. Educators should not be enduring extremely heavy work loads that affect their wellbeing outside of the profession. Administrators need to change their plan of action from impressing the school board, to valuing teachers and offering support where needed. We need to put our educators first and administrations need to treat the profession with the utmost respect, instead of just expecting teachers to work themselves into the ground for a positive reaction from the school board. Failing administrations combined with the most severe teacher shortage our country has ever endured, will only lead to the crumbling of America's public school system.

Teachers are maltreated and overworked, which much of the time, leads to extreme levels of stress and anxiety. Poor mental health has grown to be one of the top factors influencing educators to leave the profession. 100% of my interviewees experienced problems with their mental health leading up to their resignations. Interviewee C, a prior high school English teacher in Arkansas, started having recurrent panic attacks when he returned to school post pandemic. Interviewee C was dealing with such high levels of stress due to poor administrative treatment and escalation of political views on his campus. Interviewee C felt he was being stripped of his teacher autonomy and constantly being ridiculed by administration for things such as his teaching methods and taking sick days. The stress and anxiety began to take a toll on him, as his

mental health plummeted from daily panic attacks. “Part of the expectation of teaching is sacrifice” Interviewee C claimed was a motto he reluctantly followed for years, before deciding the stress levels were not worth it. Another Interviewee, Interviewee S, an ex-art teacher also from Arkansas, endured such traumatic events in her classroom, she was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder and severe anxiety. The respect she received from administrators, parents, students, and society in general created such a high amount of stress that she felt she could not be herself. Interviewee A also claimed she experienced high stress-related symptoms such as weight and hair loss. She was told by a medical professional it was either time to quit her job, or she was going to be admitted to a hospital. Our public school educators should not be enduring anything that affects their quality of life, but unfortunately with the surplus of issues in the educational system, mental health issues are almost unavoidable. Mental health problems in the teaching profession can be caused by a variety of things such as being severely overworked, being constantly ridiculed and maltreated by admin, students, and parents, and fearing for their safety in the classroom. It is time that districts and state boards nationwide realize the toll our public education system has on our educators. The mental health of educators not only needs to be advocated for, but teachers need to be offered resources and support at all professional levels. There are currently zero resources made available to educators nationwide. Several changes need to be made to alleviate heightened levels of stress, or else teachers will not have a choice when it comes to remaining in the profession.

Naming and knowing the factors responsible for the teacher shortage is not enough to reverse and stop its effects. Instead, it is important that we advocate for change in specific areas in order to resolve the issues causing the shortage. One area that is desperately in need of significant change is pay and funding. Educators do not nearly make enough money in respect to

the educational training they endure and the work they do inside public schools. As aforementioned, an educator's salary is not liveable in many places throughout the U.S.. In many cases, teachers are working multiple jobs outside of the classroom just to make ends meet. This is unacceptable. Educators do too much work within the public school system to be undervalued and paid poorly. And on top of that, teachers do not get funding for their classroom materials. Much of what you see in a typical public school classroom is funded through the use of the educator's salary. Excess funds allocated for education are not utilized wisely, and end up in the pockets of undeserving administrators or are implemented in ways that do not benefit the public school system. Teaching salaries across America need to be significantly raised, and money needs to be provided to fund classroom materials.

Better school, district, and state board leadership needs to be established. Administrators and state board officials play a huge role in the ongoing teacher shortage. Too many educators are leaving because of a poor work environment bred off the maltreatment they receive from administrators. Administrators treat educators with zero respect, and tend to only value their career in relation to fostering a great school environment. When hiring administrative and state board officials, it should be of utmost importance that those being hired will make it their number one priority to support the teaching staff. It is also important that administrators fully accept their role as a leader, and find ways to alleviate stress in educators caused by being overworked. This means fostering respect for contract time, another issue that needs to be addressed in order to relieve the shortage. Educators severely overwork themselves because administrators hold extremely high standards when it comes to completing work on time. Administrators also value less important things such as preparing for standardized testing in opposition to just letting educators teach valuable curriculum. Educators should be able to

complete all work within typical contract hours. And if not, educators should be compensated and those with administrative power should be utilizing their position of leadership to reevaluate the standards they are pushing upon teachers.

Societal respect for the teaching profession has plummeted, and many educators decide to leave the profession because no one shows respect for the career. Disrespect is fostered by a plethora of things such as escalated political opinions, excused maltreatment at all professional levels, advocating for safety concerns, and women domination of the profession. Society constantly comments on how easy the profession must be, and that educators just lack mental toughness which causes them to complain so much. Society has degraded teaching, making it out to be some joke. Educators across the country spend years preparing to enter the classroom, and then they are expected to effectively manage and teach hundreds of students each year. The societal disrespect makes parents, students, and administrators also feel like it is acceptable to treat educators poorly. But, nobody wants to work in a career where they feel undervalued for the hard work they do. So, societal disrespect is pushing educators out. It is time we revert back to appreciating our educators for teaching our future generations, and appreciate all the hard work they do to make people successful. If we keep fostering this severe disrespect, there will no longer be enough educators to teach our future generations.

There are currently very few resources available to make current educators want to stay in the profession, and at the same time recruit college students and future teachers. However, many of these resources have only been created in an effort to control the severity of the teacher shortage. But, we hope to see an increase in resources aimed at supporting educators, in an effort to make them want to stay at their current job or enter the field. One resource that is beginning to slowly become more common is increased compensation. However, it is only currently being

offered in harder to fill positions such as special education, math, science, foreign language, and those teaching in rural or lower income areas (Carver-Thomas et.al, 2022). But, some districts have begun to start offering more money for typical teaching positions, solely to combat the shortage. Many are outraged that higher salary offers are only becoming more common because the teaching profession is crumbling. However, we hope to see a continuation of bonuses, stipends, and wage increases out of necessity to compensate teachers for their hard work. Schools, districts, and state boards are also working to create high retention pathways. These pathways are established in order to recruit future educators. It has become more common for schools, districts, and state boards to be present at local job fairs, to attempt attracting those looking for work (Carver-Thomas et.al, 2022). Also in attempts to recruit more educators and make people want to enter the teaching profession, many districts and state boards across the country are relaxing hiring requirements (Deen, 2022). Some places are hiring uncredentialed teachers, with no higher academic background in education, to work as teachers on an emergency permit while the district or state puts them through credentialing. Other institutions are relaxing their requirements for entrance exams as well. One of the only other incentives schools and districts statewide are providing is hiring additional support staff. Several schools and districts across America are beginning to hire high school and college students, college educated individuals, and even military service members to assist with the shortage (Natanson, 2022). These individuals are brought into classrooms with unbalanced student to teacher ratios, and provide assistance wherever it is needed. Although this is a great way to reduce student to teacher ratios, many of these support staff members have little to no experience in the classroom.

Problems & Limitations

Luckily I did not run into too many problems while conducting my senior capstone research project. However, like many other research projects, I did hit a few bumps in the road. The first having to do with the negativity surrounding my chosen topic. I have aspired to be an educator ever since I could remember. And now as I get closer to entering the field, it is quite off-putting hearing so many stories about how challenging it is being a teacher. It is really tough knowing that there are so many current teachers exiting the profession because they have been dealing with a plethora of problems. And, it was even harder hearing horrific stories straight from ex-educators, many of which experienced severe maltreatment and verbal abuse. Of course my goal is still to be an educator, but I feel like I will be entering the field with a different type of motivation. A motivation that is not only to educate the future generations of America, but also to advocate for change and make sure my fellow teachers receive the support and value they deserve.

The only other problem I ran into while conducting my research occurred during my interview phase. I found it quite difficult to find ex-educators who were willing to speak on their previous experiences in the public school system, and more so focus on why they chose to leave the teaching profession. First of all, I struggled finding people to reach out to. I personally do not know anyone who recently has left the teaching profession, and there are not many people who openly advertise themselves as an ex-educator. When I turned to social media to start looking for possible interviewees, the population of previous educators was very small. I reached out to as many ex-educators I could find on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. But, the next issue I ran into was getting responses back from those I reached out to. Many of the people I reached out to have an extremely large social media following, therefore, were either too busy to answer my email or did not have the time to sit down for an interview. Many were also

understandably reluctant to speak about their experiences of leaving education, the bulk of which had just resigned. I sent out about 25 emails, and received about 9 responses. Five of those nine responses ended up following through with scheduling an interview. However, 5 interviewees gave me more than enough insight. I will forever be grateful to those 5 interviewees who wanted to contribute to my project, and I hold so much respect for them for wanting to continue to advocate for change within the public education system.

Recommendations

My recommendation goes out to school and district administrations, state education boards, parents and students. Change within each piece of the educational system desperately needs to happen. Educators are deserving of better pay and funding. The excess funds allocated for education should be utilized to increase teacher's salaries and stipend funding for classroom materials. School, district, and state leadership needs to improve. Educators should not have to deal with the maltreatment brought on by administrators who only value pleasing the school board. Instead, administrators at all levels should prioritize supporting and working with their educators, not against them. Working conditions for teachers need to drastically improve. Educators should not be forced to work in unfunded classrooms, or be surrounded by administrators, parents, and students who spew verbal abuse and maltreatment. Respect also needs to be re-fostered for the profession. Teachers work extremely hard to educate our future generations, we should value them in our society. Unless severe change is reached, the shortage will continue to worsen. And before we know it, there will not be enough teachers, and the public school system will crumble.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the nationwide teacher shortage is a real epidemic that has been plaguing America's public education system for decades now. Through this research project, I have confirmed that there are factors influencing this mass resignation. The factors I named must be taken seriously, and altered in a positive, beneficial way, in order for educators to want to stay in the field. It is imperative that we resolve the issues causing this shortage and make resources available to retain current teachers and recruit future educators. Actions need to be taken in order to put an end to this worsening shortage. The teaching profession has continued to lose so much societal respect, that nobody in their right mind would want to work in the field.

I have outlined several things that are desperately in need of change within the public education system. An increase in salary nationwide, as well as additional funding for classroom materials must go into effect immediately. Political ideas must be removed from campuses; education is no place for extremist views that affect its wellbeing. On campus safety must be taken more seriously. We need to value the health of educators, as well as advocate for changes in gun laws to take action against the school shooting epidemic. Maltreatment of educators by administrators, parents, and students can no longer be tolerated. Teacher autonomy needs to be restored by allowing teachers the freedom to educate and manage their classroom how they want. Administrators at the school, district, and state level need to recheck their priorities, and value supporting educators. The importance of mental health in teacher's needs to be recognized and handled more seriously. It is also important we continue to create resources that support teachers and make them want to continue staying in the profession. It is also critical for the recruitment of future teachers. The lack of current resources is outrageous, we must work harder at the state level to make resources available to all educators.

Use my research as an advocate for change; educators deserve better. Teachers work tirelessly to educate the future generations of America. Though rewarding, teaching is extremely difficult, and as a society we need to value the extreme efforts we receive from public educators. The factors I have repeated have a serious impact on this shortage. Those factors need to be met with change, instead of continuing to be ignored. Every state across the country also needs to create and implement resources that support our public educators. Teachers should not be searching for reasons to stay in the profession, they should want to stay due to the support and respect fostered at all levels. The teacher shortage should be proof enough that our public education system is failing educators. We must continue to advocate for change in the treatment of all teachers, or we will be at risk of facing a much different level of severity within this shortage.

References

- Carver-Thomas, D., Burns, D., Leung-Gagné, M., & Ondrasek, N. (2022). Teacher shortages during the pandemic: How California districts are responding. *Learning Policy Institute*.
- Cox, J., Rich, S., Chiu, A., Thacker, H., Chong, L., Muyskens, J., & Ulmanu, M. (2022). More than 320,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine. *The Washington Post*.
- Deen, A. (2022). The teacher shortage problem has been going on for 50 years. why are so few entering the profession? *Grid News*.
- Dowell, E. (2022). Women consistently earn less than men. U.S. Census Bureau.
- Farkas, J. (2022). This is the living wage you need in all 50 states. *GOBankingRates*.
- Gambrell, D. (2022). Part 2: How we are failing schools. *Bloomberg*.
- Lambert, D. (2022). Covid challenges, bad student behavior pushes teachers to limit, out the door. *EdSource*.
- Natanson, H. (2022). “Never seen it this bad”: America faces catastrophic teacher shortage. *The Washington Post*.
- Nelson, R., & Thompson, M. (1963). Why teachers quit: Factors influencing teachers to leave their classrooms after the first year. *The Clearing House*, 37(8), 467–472.
- Pendharkar, E. (2022). As book bans escalate, here’s what you need to know. *EducationWeek*.
- Querolo, N., Ceron, E., & Rockeman, O. (2022). Part 1: Why teachers are quitting. *Bloomberg*.
- Schaffer, D. (2021). Readers react: Raise pay to solve teacher shortage. *Tribune Publishing Company, LLC*.
- St George, D. (2022). Behavioral issues, absenteeism at schools increase, federal data shows. *The Washington Post*.

Teacher Autonomy (2014). *The Glossary of Education Reform*.

Toch, T. (2022). One way to ease the teacher shortage: Pay more, some districts say. *New York Times*.

Tran, H. (2022). The most recent efforts to combat teacher shortages don't address the real problems. University of South Carolina.

Appendix A

Interview Questions For Ex-Educators

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself,
 - a. For ex: Name, where you're from, what you do, etc
 - b. Feel free to include as much or as little as you'd like
2. When did you know you wanted to be a counselor/teacher/educator?
 - a. Why did you want to be a counselor/teacher/educator
3. What went into becoming a counselor/teacher/educator?
 - a. For ex: how many years of schooling, how many tests did you have to take/pass, how long did it take you to find a job, etc
4. Once you got a job as a counselor/teacher/educator
 - a. Did you stay at that one facility, or did you work at more than one public/private school?
 - b. How many years were you there for? OR How many years did you spend at each facility?
5. What were the best parts of your job?
 - a. What did you enjoy the most?
6. When did the breakdown & burnout start to begin?
 - a. What was going on that made you feel like counseling/teaching wasn't something you wanted to spend the rest of your working life doing?
7. Was there a specific event that tipped you over the edge? Or did you just end up making the decision based on a plethora of factors?
8. Why did you make the decision to leave the profession?
 - a. What are the factors that led to you leaving
 - b. Out of all the factors you named, what was the biggest one that convinced you to leave the field?
9. Do you feel you made the right decision switching careers?
10. What are you doing now career wise?
 - a. What are the benefits to your new career vs teaching?

11. Hypothetically speaking, what changes would have to be made for you to go back into counseling/teaching?
12. Would you ever consider going back into education?
 - a. With or without changes