

Modernize the National Apprenticeship Act to Support Teacher Recruitment and Retention

School districts face difficult workforce challenges that demand innovative solutions to recruit, prepare, and retain qualified educators. As universities, and in turn school districts, struggle with declining enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs and fierce competition from other sectors, modernizing the National Apprenticeship Act presents an opportunity to create new pathways into the education profession. By expanding apprenticeship programs to explicitly include education careers, we can provide structured routes for aspiring educators – particularly paraprofessionals seeking advancement – while maintaining high standards for teacher preparation. This approach would help districts address both immediate staffing shortages and long-term workforce development needs, creating a more resilient and diverse education workforce capable of serving all students effectively.

Policy Recommendations to Strengthen the National Apprenticeship Act

To address these challenges, the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) recommends modernizing apprenticeship programs to create structured pathways for entering and advancing within the education workforce. Key policy actions include:

- 1. Update the National Apprenticeship Act in 2025:** Ensure that updates to the Act prioritize innovative solutions for addressing education workforce shortages while maintaining high expectations for effective preparation. Explicitly include education sector careers as apprentice-able occupations and provide dedicated support and funding for school districts to implement locally developed apprenticeship programs tailored to their talent needs.
- 2. Support Paraprofessional Pathways:** Develop policies and allocate funding to enable paraprofessionals to pursue a teaching degree and teacher certification while maintaining their current positions and offer structured support systems to facilitate career advancement. Additionally, empower states to create parity among the Transition to Teaching and Pathway Permits so that more paraprofessionals can fill openings and perform more duties, especially in special education.
- 3. Establish a Public Sector Set-Aside:** Create a designated public sector allocation within federal apprenticeship funding to ensure education employers have access to these critical resources.
- 4. Issue Non-Regulatory Guidance:** Provide school districts with technical assistance and guidance to develop and implement locally customized apprenticeship programs.

About the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA)

AASPA serves as a voice for local education workforce leaders who shape staffing and human capital strategies in school districts across the country. Our members lead the recruitment, development, and retention of education professionals who serve millions of American students.

AASPA works to ensure that all schools have the talented staff needed to serve today's students, families, and communities.

By modernizing apprenticeship programs and implementing these policy recommendations, Congress can play a vital role in addressing the education workforce crisis and ensuring every student has access to a high-quality education.

Build Sustainable Talent Pipelines To Grow the Education Workforce

School districts nationwide grapple with shortages of teachers and essential staff. These challenges threaten the ability of schools to provide high-quality education to all students, particularly those in under-resourced communities. To help districts address this problem, Congress should prioritize policies that streamline pathways into education careers, support the development of a diverse and sustainable workforce, and reduce barriers to entry for aspiring educators. By modernizing workforce development initiatives and leveraging federal and state partnerships, school administrators can strengthen talent pipelines, improve retention, and ensure every student has access to skilled and dedicated education professionals.

Policy Recommendations to Strengthen Education Workforce Development and Training

To address these challenges, the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) recommends streamlining talent pipeline programs to maximize participation in the education workforce. Key policy actions include:

- 1. Expand Pell Grant Eligibility:** Cover short-term training programs, those lasting 8 or more weeks, for paraprofessionals and other critical education support roles.
- 2. Align Credential Transparency Policies:** Align state adoption of credential transparency policies with federal workforce development goals and ensure transparency of state approval standards, policies, and procedures for non-traditional alternative certification providers.
- 3. Help Candidates Understand Pathways to Education Careers:** Invest in comprehensive data systems to improve credential transparency.
- 4. Modernize the Higher Education Act:** Ensure that interstate teacher certification reciprocity is encouraged and facilitated by the federal government.
- 5. Create financial incentives for states:** Incentivize states to streamline and modernize certification requirements while maintaining high standards.

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Strengthen Professional Development and Support for Educators

School districts must not only recruit talented educators, they must also provide them with comprehensive, sustained support to help them most effectively serve students and families. Districts need help to invest in robust professional development, mentorship, and wellness support that enables educators to thrive in their roles and grow professionally. By strengthening these support systems, particularly in high-need areas like special education and learning recovery, schools can better retain experienced staff while creating collaborative, growth-oriented environments that attract new talent to the profession. Strategic federal investments in educator development and well-being represent a crucial lever for addressing both immediate workforce challenges and long-term educational quality.

Policy Recommendations to Provide Quality Support to Educators

To address these challenges, the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) recommends accelerating quality professional development opportunities and strengthening personnel support. Key policy actions include:

- 1. Continue to Support ESEA Titles II and IV:** ESEA Titles II and IV provide comprehensive support to the education sector including access to quality teachers and school leaders for low-SES students, quality instruction in literacy and civic education, and support for student safety, technology, and family engagement in education.
- 2. Improve the Mental Health and Well-being of School Personnel:** Identify the most effective strategies for improving educator mental health and well-being.
- 3. Establish Micro-credentialing in High-need Areas:** Provide funding and assistance for current staff to develop new competencies in high-need areas such as special education, learning recovery, and in best serving high poverty students.
- 4. Establish Educator Mentor Programs:** Create and expand programs that pair experienced educators with new staff members and provide additional compensation for mentoring staff members.
- 5. Develop and Implement School Leadership Residency and Pipeline Programs:** Support local school districts as they build and implement residency and pipeline programs aligned with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

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By accelerating quality professional development opportunities, strengthening personnel support, and by implementing these policy recommendations, Congress can play a vital role in

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Use Strategic Tax Incentives to Boost Recruitment and Retention

As the education workforce challenges continue, innovative policies and strategies are needed to attract and retain talented educators in our nation's classrooms. While schools struggle to compete with private sector wages and benefits, strategic tax incentives represent an underutilized tool for addressing critical staffing shortages, particularly in high-need areas and subjects. By implementing targeted tax credits and benefits, policymakers can reduce financial barriers to entering the profession, reward long-term commitment to teaching, and create meaningful incentives for educators to serve in our highest-need communities. These tax-based approaches offer a practical pathway to strengthen the education workforce while providing tangible financial relief to both current and aspiring educators.

Policy Recommendations to Accelerate Educator Recruitment and Retention:

To address these challenges, the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) recommends using tax incentives as a strategic tool to address workforce challenges in the education sector. Key policy actions include:

1. **Establish a Federal Income Tax Credit for Educators:** Provide a federal income tax credit of up to \$5,000 for educators who commit to teaching in underserved communities.
2. **Create a Progressive Tax Credit Structure for Educators:** Provide a progressive tax structure that increases with years of service, incentivizing long-term retention in hard-to-staff positions.
3. **Develop Federal Tax Credits to Offset Educator Preparation Costs:** Provide tax credits up to 50% of tuition expenses for those who commit to teaching for five or more years, and for paraprofessional staff who seek additional education for licensure and certification.
4. **Provide State Matching Funds:** Issue matching funds for states that implement complementary tax credit programs for education personnel.
5. **Extend Tax Benefits to Support Staff:** Include tax benefits for school support staff and specialized instructional support personnel serving in underserved schools.
6. **Include Provisions for Underserved Schools:** Ensure that rural and urban schools and economically disadvantaged school districts are prioritized in tax incentive policies to enhance their ability to attract and retain qualified staff.

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By incentivizing educator recruitment and retention via strategic tax policies and implementing these policy recommendations, Congress can play a vital role in addressing the education workforce crisis and ensuring every student has access to a high-quality education.

Enhance Data Privacy and Protect School District Networks

School district leaders face myriad complex privacy and cybersecurity challenges. Districts must protect confidential student and personnel data – including academic records, financial and employment-related records, and other personal identifiers – while simultaneously maintaining open, collaborative learning and work environments. The rising frequency and sophistication of cyberattacks targeting educational institutions has created an urgent need for robust network security infrastructure and incident response protocols. Schools must also navigate a complex web of privacy laws like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) while managing the integration of new educational technologies, each introducing its own privacy implications. Equally critical is the task of educating teachers, administrators, and staff about privacy best practices, data handling procedures, and their legal obligations, as human error remains one of the leading causes of data breaches.

Policy Recommendations to Improve Data Privacy and Technical Infrastructure

To address these challenges, the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) recommends that Congress provide additional support to help school districts protect their networks and build capacity to protect student and personnel privacy. Key policy actions include:

- 1. Modernize the Privacy Technical Assistance Center:** Increase the capacity of the Privacy Technical Assistance Center in the U.S. Department of Education to expand the center’s ability to help school districts navigate privacy and cybersecurity challenges.
- 2. Improve School District Human Resources and Information Systems:** Provide funding to local school districts and other educational service agents to improve cybersecurity and enhance pre-employment criminal background checks and employment history searches.
- 3. Develop Secure Data Systems:** Support the development of interoperable and secure data systems that facilitate workforce planning.
- 4. Assist School Districts with Data Privacy Best Practices:** Provide technical assistance and create resources to help school personnel enable necessary information sharing and establish guidelines for protecting staff data.

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