

The Future of Education:

MODERNIZING THE LEARNING PATHWAYS OF NEW TEACHERS

By Janet Pilcher, Robin Largue and Pat Greco

Raising the quality of K-12 education in the U.S. is complex, with state and local agencies facing a convergence of challenges, including budget shortages, overcrowding, social and economic inequities, and curriculum disparities. Among the most serious issues thwarting progress — teacher shortages and access to candidates well prepared to meet teaching standards and performance expectations.

In the U.S., we are failing to attract and welcome people to the teaching profession. Reports put teacher [attrition as high as 40%](#) for those in their first five years of teaching, with most leaving the field because they feel [unprepared](#) or lack support from mentors.

Now, powerful internal and external factors and competition from new entrants into the market are reshaping the landscape of teaching, causing teachers to face challenges that the K-12 system is struggling to address. At higher education institutions, [declining enrollment](#) and budget cuts exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic are forcing critical and extreme changes, including [decisions to close traditional teacher education programs](#).

To have any chance at alleviating the [growing number of teacher shortages](#), traditional and nontraditional institutions responsible for educating teachers have to consider new business models that meet potential teachers where they are in their lives, careers and educational journeys.

It's time for a wholesale rethinking of how we recruit, educate and support teachers for the workforce of the future. That includes modernizing teacher credentialing programs to focus on what future teachers need in a constantly changing world.

Meeting Students Where They Are in Their Lives

Designing new models for educating teachers starts with understanding what future teachers want and need, then building an infrastructure capable of supporting and customizing their journeys.

Designing Programs for a Different Kind of Teacher

People who choose teaching later in their professional lives are critical to filling shortages and closing quality gaps. Yet, the cost and time of traditional university programs often preclude second-career professionals and military service members from seeking teaching jobs.

People who enter teaching after years of working in other fields expect to be able to transfer their professional experiences and expertise to the classroom. Also, once second-career teachers make the decision to switch roles, they expect to be able to do so without restarting their college education.

Typical university teaching programs are not designed as accelerated opportunities for people with four-year degrees who want to make a transition from their current positions to the teaching profession. As a result, professionals are either unable to leave their jobs to gain their professional teaching certificate, or transitioning professionals accept teaching positions without opportunities that prepare them for the classroom.

Alternative paths to teacher certification allow motivated candidates to pursue careers in education without putting their current careers on hold while expediting the transition to teaching. Because of teacher shortages, school districts hire second-career professionals who have yet to gain a teaching certificate. Alternative pathways provide school districts with a way to credential and support their teachers while they gain classroom experience.

Economic and Social Conditions Drive Urgency for Change

Economic uncertainty is fueling the urgency to streamline new teacher recruitment and training. While other fields see jobs disappearing, the [outlook for teaching jobs](#) is steady. People working in nonteaching fields may embrace job loss in their current field as an opportunity to fulfill a passion for teaching or use their experience in a new career. On the other hand, economics can deter people from entering traditional education programs or teaching as a career. Those hoping to pursue teaching will need more certainty in their career paths and confidence that they won't accrue debilitating debt upon graduation. Otherwise, the likelihood of selecting or sticking with a career in teaching will remain low. Modern teaching programs should be designed for affordability and outcomes, including a clear and certain path to employment.

Now more than ever, diversity is part of the strategy for better equity and outcomes in K-12 education. As districts seek to show they are building a more racially diverse workforce, they will have to look outside of traditional training programs for teachers. Alternative teacher certification programs are accessible and affordable, two attributes that attract more males and minority students to a field that has traditionally lagged in diversity.

Modernizing When, Where and How Teachers Are Trained

Across higher education, the shift toward lifelong learning, greater collaboration between academic institutions and employers, and microcredentials are requiring institutions to rethink the student experience. Teacher education programs are no exception.

Curriculum and field experience requirements at traditional schools of education tend to be strictly sequenced and based on cohort models that only enroll a set number of students at the same time every year. Internships are still limited to on-site teaching at brick-and-mortar schools, which will continue to cause setbacks for all stakeholders in a post-pandemic world where K-12 schools are increasingly embracing virtual or hybrid models.

The rigidity of these traditional programs is not consistent with how students need and want to learn in the future of education. The journey of a modern teacher should be agile, digital and personalized. Programs that offer continuous enrollment, self-directed learning and online classrooms stand the best chance of attracting and retaining students, as well as preparing them to pass certification testing and thrive in the real world.

Teachers leave when they are unprepared to manage a classroom, which in today's world could mean the physical or virtual classroom. By training in a virtual environment — receiving and giving virtual

instruction — teachers will be better prepared for modern life in schools.

Another key to preparing for the classroom is mentorships. Student teachers should also have support from instructors or mentors, not just at defined points in their education like internships inside classrooms, but through their entire training and into the first year of teaching. Ongoing feedback further personalizes the learning experience and helps new teachers to understand their performance strengths and gaps at the start of their careers.

Key Takeaways

Filling teacher shortages in the U.S. will require changing how teachers are recruited, trained and welcomed into the field.

Think differently.

New models for educating teachers start with understanding what future teachers want and need, much of which is not available through traditional education programs.

Plan differently.

Build an infrastructure for teacher education that prioritizes accessibility, affordability and immediate field experience over rigid, static curriculum.

Act differently.

Design teacher education programs to be flexible, digital and personalized with attributes such as continuous enrollment, self-guided learning and ongoing mentorship and feedback.



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