

January 24, 2018

# EDUCATION WEEK

## Teacher Recruitment and Retention: It's Complicated

By [Debra Viadero](#)

January 23, 2018

At a broad national level, statistics tell us there is no teacher shortage. In fact, the number of U.S. teachers has grown by 13 percent in four years, far outpacing the 2 percent rise in student enrollment during the same period.

But that doesn't mean teacher shortages aren't real.

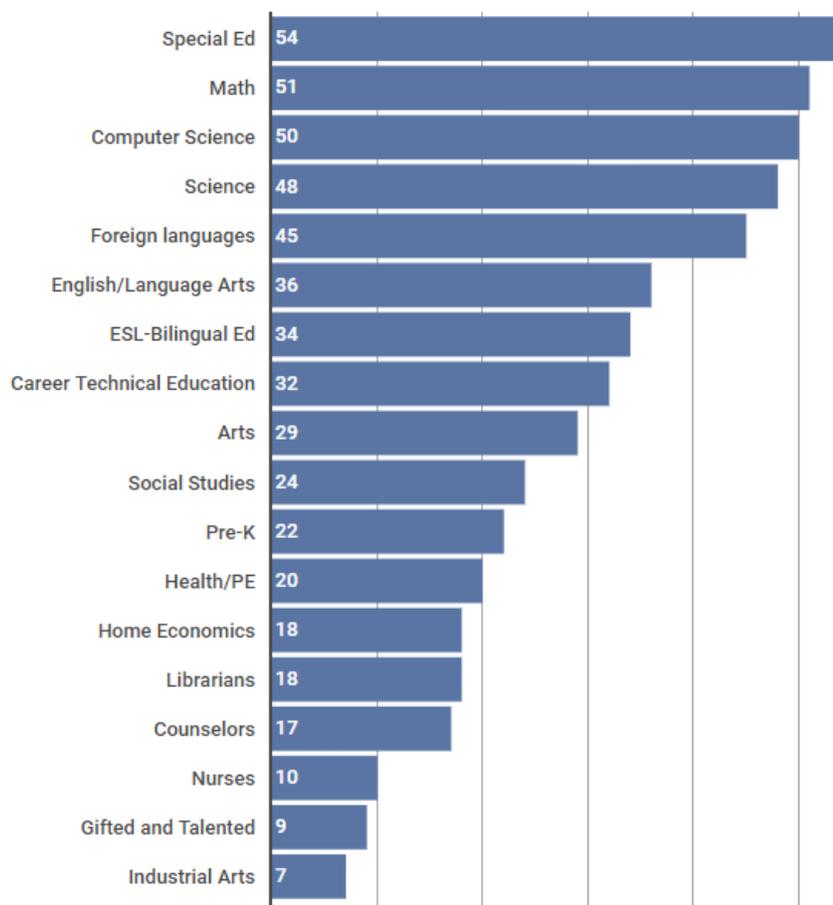
In certain states and districts, and in particular specialties like special education or foreign languages, teacher shortages are a recurring fact of life. An *Education Week* analysis of federal data finds that all 50 states and most territories reported experiencing statewide shortages in one teaching area or another for either the 2016-17 school year, the current one, or both. Besides special education and foreign languages, frequent problem areas included math, computer science, science, English/language arts, and English-as-a-second-language instruction.

But districts also struggle to find teachers who reflect the entirety of their student bodies—males and African-American and [Latino teachers are in particularly short supply](#).

[Rural districts are also perennially hard to keep fully staffed](#), though the problem is more acute in the remotest of rural districts than it is in those that are closer to cities.

As Dan Goldhaber, the director of the Center for Education Data and Research at the University of Washington, told *Education Week* last year, "it's not the case that we have a nationwide teacher shortage. It is the case that we have a shortage in particular schools and school systems. So, if we try to apply a generic solution to what is a nuanced problem, we're not very likely to move the needle very much."

## Number of states and territories reporting specialty-specific statewide teacher shortages from 2016–2018



NOTE: Data include all 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

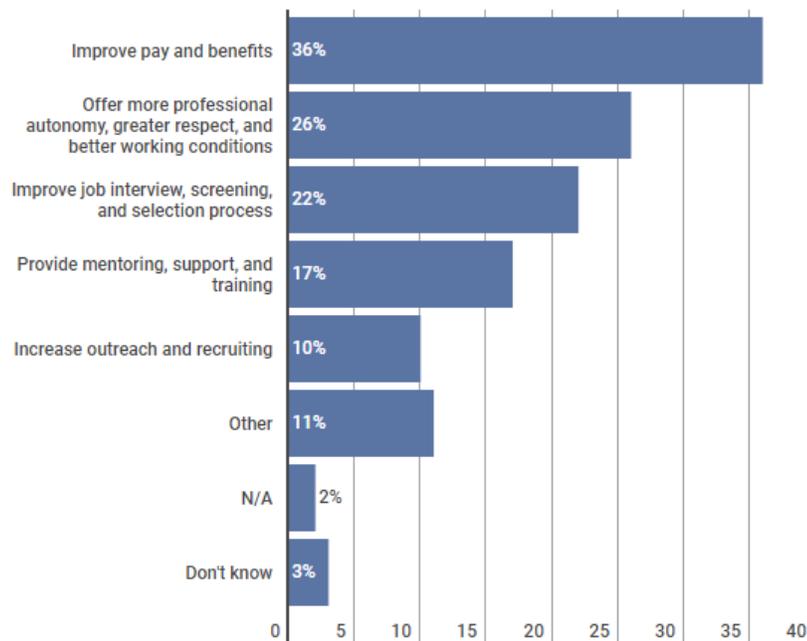
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education

So, what should districts do to better recruit teachers in the face of such complexity? The simplest answer, of course, might be to pay teachers more. U.S. teachers make less than 60 cents for every dollar paid to people with the same level of education in other professions, according to a 2017 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. That ratio puts the United States at the bottom of the more than two dozen industrialized nations in the study.

Short of offering top-dollar salaries, a handful of districts are experimenting with perks designed to appeal to teachers' wallets. The Niles Township district in Skokie, Ill., for example, [built day-care centers for its employees](#). And, in California's Santa Clara Unified District, teachers are

on a waiting list to get into **one of the 70 townhouse units at Casa del Maestro**. The below-market-rate units are available to district employees for up to seven years.

## What should districts do differently to find and hire high-quality teachers?



NOTE: These results are based on a September 2017 online survey of a nationally representative sample of more than 500 K-12 teachers. The margin of error is plus or minus 4 percent.

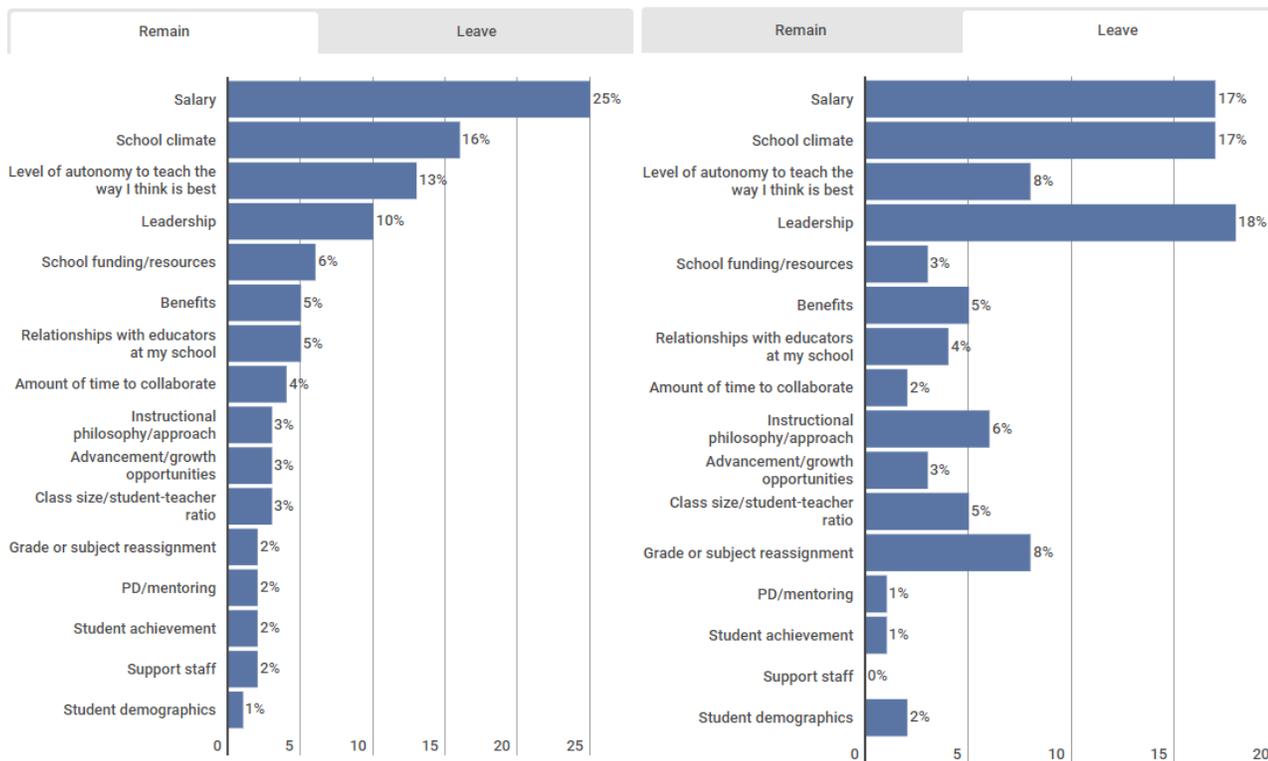
Data does not add to 100 percent. Respondents were asked to select all answers that applied.

SOURCE: Education Week Research Center

### EDUCATION WEEK

Across the country, in Guilford County, N.C., the school system has responded to a nagging shortage of teachers for science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM, classes by **creating its own licensure program**—the first district in the state to do so. The new certification pathway allows the district to recruit professionals or graduate students steeped in those disciplines and train and mentor them to work in Guilford County schools.

And what keeps teachers around once they're hired? An *Education Week* survey of a nationally representative group of 500 teachers suggests that leadership may be even more important than salary in keeping teachers on the job. Eighteen percent of respondents saw leadership as a key factor in any decision about whether to go or stay on the job, while 17 percent cited salary considerations. School climate was also named by 17 percent of teacher-respondents.



NOTE: These results are based on a September 2017 online survey of a nationally representative sample of more than 500 K-12 teachers. The margin of error is plus or minus 4 percent. Data does not add to 100 percent. Respondents were asked to select all answers that applied. SOURCE: Education Week Research Center

NOTE: These results are based on a September 2017 online survey of a nationally representative sample of more than 500 K-12 teachers. The margin of error is plus or minus 4 percent. Data does not add to 100 percent. Respondents were asked to select all answers that applied. SOURCE: Education Week Research Center

Leadership support may be especially important for special educators, who arguably have the highest turnover rate. Conventional wisdom often suggests that challenging students, prickly parents, and crushing paperwork drive that attrition. But **special educators also complain about a lack of support** from principals, difficulty balancing competing priorities from various supervisors, and ignorance (and sometimes disrespect) about what they do from peers, among other factors.

In the end, what special educators want to spend their time doing is the same as what all teachers want to be doing: teaching children. The cross-cutting theme in this report may be that anything school leaders and districts can do to enable teachers to focus on teaching—rather than finding child care or getting principal support—is time well spent.

*Data Specialist/Staff Writer Francisco Vara-Orta and the Education Week Research Center contributed to this report.*

Vol. 37, Issue 18, Pages 4-5

Published in Print: January 24, 2018, as **Teaching Shortages: Many Answers for a Complex Problem**