



Where Will We Find Teachers?

By Mark Taylor, Christian School and College/University Representative

This is the time of the year when schools advertise and interview potential staff for the next year. However, school systems across the country are experiencing a critical teacher shortage. Everyone is wondering, “Where will we find teachers?”

How bad is it?

In recent years, schools across the country have been facing challenges with recruiting teachers. According to the state education departments, agencies, and associations, “28 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands reported ongoing shortages” (Jones II, 2023). The shortage was so bad in New Mexico in 2021 that the state had to send the National Guard to help short-staffed schools. Many states have created a task force to address the shortages. Some states such as Tennessee have created “Grow your own programs.” The Florida Department of Education recruited retired veterans and first responders and issued them temporary teaching certificates.

A team of researchers led by Tuan Nguyen from Kansas State University has been collecting data about teacher shortages now and in the future. They have learned that “over the last two years, teacher vacancies seem to have been increasing substantially since the onset of the pandemic. Vacant positions have increased from 36,000 to 55,000” (Will, 2003). They “also learned that the number of underqualified positions is around 270,000 nationally, which is a substantial portion of teachers—about 9 or 10 percent of teachers in the United States. The researchers believe there is a substantial number of vacant positions and positions filled by teachers who do not have a

standard license or who are under emergency certification or who teach out of subject expertise” (Will, 2023).

“The biggest issue districts face in staffing schools with qualified teachers is.... a chronic and perpetual misalignment of teacher supply and demand” (Turner & Cohen, 2023). “Qualified special education, science and math are among the hardest to find, according to federal data.” Some other challenges include: “high-poverty and high-minority districts are often hit harder by teacher shortages; teacher pay has stagnated, while the cost of a four-year degree has nearly doubled; for nearly a decade, fewer people have been going to school to become teachers; interest in teaching has fallen among high school seniors and college freshman” (Turner & Cohen, 2023).

Where will our teachers come from?

As I mentioned earlier, some states or schools are adjusting standards and recruiting underqualified teachers with temporary certificates. According to New America, at least 35 states have some sort of GYO (Grow Your Own) policy (Turner & Cohen, 2023).

While this has impacted our public schools, it has impacted some of our Christian schools even more. I have contact with many schools, both public and private, including Christian schools. All face challenges in finding staff for their schools. A year and a half ago, I had a second-year teacher education student who was hired to teach middle school social studies on a temporary certificate.

I know of Christian schools that are hiring individuals with college degrees that have a background in a content area but without certification. Some schools plan to have larger class sizes and hire aides. Some other schools have cut special programs when they were unable to find teachers.

Some thoughts!

In our Nazarene schools, we must look at ways that we might attract more teachers. We need to connect with our Nazarene colleges and churches. We need to work to increase our salaries and benefits. We need help with tuition debts. Could we help with housing or moving expenses? To help with retention, we need to ensure that our teachers feel appreciated and encouraged.

What is your school or district doing?

I would love to hear from you to learn what your needs are and how you are addressing the teacher shortage. We must pray and work together to address our teaching needs. We should never forget that God knows our needs and cares. “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19, NIV). I remind myself and others that we must “pray our staff in.” God knows what we need!

Bibliography

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