

# THE EDUCATOR PIPELINE: TURNOVER, FEWER APPLICANTS WILL IMPACT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

## LEARNING FIRST ALLIANCE MEMBERS LOOK TO BUILD STRONGER PIPELINES OF TEACHERS, SCHOOL LEADERS AND SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS

For decades, Fairfax County, Va. has served as a mecca for teachers and principals looking for opportunities: a large business tax base, communities that support public education, and an abundance of career opportunities, the 186,000-student school district hires hundreds of teachers each year, many from other states and rural areas.

But with teachers and administrators in short supply, even the Fairfax schools that traditionally would be considered “easy to staff” are seeing shortages. After the 2015-16 school year one elementary school lost nearly a dozen teachers to neighboring Arlington County, a growing school district that pays its early-career teachers annual salaries of up to \$8,000 more. Six elementary schools in the affluent McLean neighborhood opened doors in September with a combined 12 vacancies for special education teachers and no applicants, with principals concerned that another neighboring county was paying bonuses

to the prized recruits. And teacher salaries are not likely to increase soon—a meals tax that would have directed 70 percent of revenues to the school system failed in the November 2016 election.

With 90 percent of U.S. students in public schools, and more than 3 million teachers on staff, shortages and turnover are becoming chronic problems that will only get worse, according to new data. And because researchers agree that a good teacher is the most important school factor in student learning and achievement, and strong school leadership is key to attracting and keeping high-quality teachers, many experts believe these cracks in the fragile pipeline are the most urgent issue facing our nation’s schools and the economy.

“The quality of American public education will suffer if we continue to be challenged with low recruitment and retention numbers,” says Sharon Robinson, president and CEO of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. “Interestingly, even with lower enrollment in educator preparation, we are producing enough teachers overall, but shortage is still an issue in certain locations, grades, and subjects. Retention of the existing teacher workforce is a strategic point of intervention that must be part of the shortage solution.”

The administrative ranks—where some of these teachers are heading—is also in a state of churn. The average tenure of principals has dropped to just over three years, according to the Wallace Foundation and National Association of Elementary School Principals. As principals are leaving the field or being tapped to take on higher-level district administration jobs, assistant principals and teacher leaders are being recruited for leadership roles much earlier in their careers—sometimes before they have had time to master their current jobs.



The Learning Policy Institute (LPI) outlined the issue for teachers in a September 2016 report: Demand has increased in recent years, but between 2009 and 2014, the most recent data available, enrollments in teacher education programs dropped from 691,000 to 451,000, a 35 percent reduction. Retention rates are also problematic, about 8 percent leave each year (primarily early career teachers and those in high-poverty schools), with most teachers leaving because of dissatisfaction with their jobs, LPI reported. Prior research from the American Institutes of Research showed that 1.5 million teachers will be needed in the next decade—meaning that, with a total 3 million teachers in public schools, half of the teaching force will be relatively new to the job. And as the nation’s student population is increasing and becoming more diverse, the teaching field is not.

With these statistics on mind, many of the member organizations of the Learning First Alliance—a coalition of national education groups representing more than 10 million educators, administrators, policymakers, and parents—are promoting policies and building new initiatives and programs to help recruit, grow, and support their members. What has not been reported in the warnings about the pending teacher crisis is that most principals, district administrators, and other specialists begin their careers as teachers, and those professions will be undoubtedly affected as well. Several of the LFA organizations are working with researchers and foundations to focus on helping individuals grow into jobs in those critical areas.

**“IF WE CAN RETAIN TEACHERS WE WILL NOT HAVE TO RECRUIT AS MANY”**

But more is needed, these organizations agree. To build and maintain robust pipelines for these critical roles, teaching must be seen as a respected, professional career in order to attract more and better candidates. Teachers must have the skills needed to lead increasingly diverse classrooms and states and school districts must give them the resources—including pay—that they deserve.

In turn, the field must also view strong, effective principals and district administrators as key to

keeping good teachers: Research shows that teachers cite effective leadership as one of the most important factors in job satisfaction. School districts must ensure that their principals and school leaders are prepared to support all teachers, particularly their new hires, as demands on the system and policies to increase student achievement continue to grow.

“The profession hasn’t been this unstable in years,” said Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of Learning Forward. While her organization does not directly address the recruitment issue, she feels that a strong school structure and support system is a key element for teacher stability and success. Retention is higher in places where teachers support one another and share responsibility for the success of their students, she says.

“If we can retain teachers we will not have to recruit as many,” she adds.

## **THE ISSUE: ENSURING EDUCATORS AND LEADERS ARE READY FOR THE JOB AND SUPPORTED**

In 2016, the Center on Education Policy released a survey of 3,328 teachers, which found the top reason for becoming a teacher, cited by 68 percent of those surveyed, was “to make a difference in students’ lives.”

But CEP found that 60 percent of teachers agree with the statement, “I don’t seem to have as much enthusiasm as I did when I first started teaching,” and that 49 percent agreed “The stress and disappointments of teaching in this school aren’t really worth it,” and “If I could get a higher paying job, I’d leave teaching as soon as possible.”

Another factor in teachers’ decisions to stay or leave the field hinges on the perceived lack of opportunity.

“We hear from teachers all the time, ‘I would stay in the classroom, but I want more responsibility, more opportunities,’” says Dyan Smiley, an assistant director in the American Federation of Teachers’ education issues department.

Many experts agree that teacher turnover would not be a significant factor if teachers were better prepared before they entered the classroom,

if they were given more experience in student teaching and working with mentors before taking the reins, and if they had strong systems of supports in their early years on the job. The same can be said for principals, assistant principals, and other leadership positions.

The Learning Policy Institute's research reaffirmed the variances in teacher attrition: Those with little preparation tend to leave at rates two to three times higher than those who have had a comprehensive preparation before they enter.

"Pedagogy matters," says Rod Lucero, vice president for member engagement and support with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. "The bottom line is, going through a pedagogy rich teacher prep program matters. It's not enough to be a great mathematician—you have to understand how to be a good teacher of math."

Better teacher preparation will boost the retention rate for teachers, AACTE and other experts believe, and a higher retention rate will go a long way toward easing critical educator shortages.

AACTE partnered with Stanford University and the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) to launch the edTPA performance assessment for prospective teachers, which is a rigorous, subject-specific assessment designed to better prepare teacher candidates for the job.

More than 800 colleges and universities are using the edTPA evaluation and more than 80,000 teacher candidates have taken the test, says Raymond L. Pecheone, executive director of SCALE. The passage rate is between 85-95 percent depending on where a state or college sets the bar, and students can re-take the test multiple times if needed. An October 2016 evaluation found that in its first two years, edTPA has been effective in assessing its three job-related tasks: planning, instruction and assessment of student learning.

AACTE also has supported Educators Rising, an arm of Phi Delta Kappa International that was formerly the Future Educators of America.

Educators Rising launched in 2015 with the vision to help communities cultivate and grow their own highly educated teachers, says co-director Dan Brown. The group helps state and regional affiliates to offer insight on careers in education through high school electives, career and technical classes, extracurricular clubs, and dual enrollment programs. These initiatives allow students to explore career pathways and in some cases, try out teaching.

"Educators Rising aims to build a gold standard program for engaging bright young people into teaching, elevating the profession by giving people more authentic opportunities," Brown says.

AFT has built programs that encourage mentoring, and it is developing an educator pipeline project, says Smiley. To address the recruitment challenge, several local affiliates have worked with school districts to build "grow your own" programs,

which recruit teacher candidates from paraprofessionals and staff members who have experience in the school setting and a desire to further their education to become teachers.

Some districts have used these programs to recruit minorities and men to the field, and district leaders believe these candidates are more committed to the field and, because of their experience, better prepared to handle the challenges.

Research has shown that other factors to boost professionalism within the field are opportunities for professional learning, time for planning and collaboration with colleagues, and autonomy to make decisions.

And, not surprisingly, pay continues to be a big thorn. The National Education Association reports that students who will have significant student loan debt are not considering teaching because they cannot pay back their loans.

NEA launched its "Degrees Not Debt" campaign asking Congress to increase grants and loan-forgiveness programs to future teachers and other public-sector employees and to allow students to refinance loans when interest rates drop.

**"IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO BE A GREAT MATHEMATICIAN—YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO BE A GOOD TEACHER OF MATH"**

A 2016 report by the Economic Policy Institute found that in 2015, “public school teachers’ weekly wages were 17 percent lower than those of comparable workers—compared with just 1.8 percent lower in 1994. This erosion of relative teacher wages has fallen more heavily on experienced teachers than on entry-level teachers.”

“A lot of teachers transition into administration because they need the greater financial resources,” says Dwight Rhodes, the strategic initiatives resident at Educators Rising and a former school principal. “Had I seen a rewarding path financially inside the classroom, chances are I would have stayed there, but if I wanted more financial resources, I could not stay in the classroom.”

One former state teacher of the year recalls that his award came with a crystal apple—a nice gesture, but as a teacher who was struggling to make ends meet and who couldn’t leverage such an honor into the ability to earn more money, he eventually left the field.

The biggest indicator of teacher longevity could be tied to school leadership, where numerous studies have shown dissatisfaction with school leadership and working conditions as the top reason teachers leave.

**“HAD I SEEN A REWARDING PATH FINANCIALLY INSIDE THE CLASSROOM, CHANCES ARE I WOULD HAVE STAYED THERE”**

The Learning Policy Institute reports that, “Administrative support is the factor most consistently associated with teachers’ decisions to stay in or leave a school. Authors’ analysis found that teachers who find their administrators to be unsupportive are more than twice as likely to leave as those who feel well-supported. Many other factors that emerge from research on attrition are also associated with the quality of school leadership, including professional learning opportunities, instructional leadership, time for collaboration and planning, collegial relationships, and decision-making input.”



## **THE ISSUE:** **SHORTAGES IMPACT CANDIDATES FOR PRINCIPALS AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS**

While the teacher pipeline has made recent headlines, the issues brewing for school principals and district administrators have not. But the cracks in the pipeline for those jobs, coupled with the statistics for teaching, point to impending and widespread shortages in the field.

“The teacher shortage will impact principal ranks as well,” says Beverly Hutton, deputy executive director for programs and services at the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Administrators are already seeing turnover and spending more time hiring and working with new teachers, she adds, “so attracting and being selective in hiring and being very purposeful in hiring teachers certainly strengthens our pipeline.”

Just a decade ago most principals stayed at the same school for 10 or more years, but principals’ tenures at their schools now average about three years, says Gail Connelly, executive director of the National Association for Elementary School Principals.

AASA, the School Superintendents Association; the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and other LFA members are working with the Wallace Foundation to determine not

---

only how to recruit better applicants but ensure that those leaders are able to handle the fast-paced job. In a recent report on the principal pipeline, the Wallace Foundation noted the importance of strong school leadership to impact student learning: “Moreover, principals strongly shape the conditions for high-quality teaching and are the prime factor in determining whether teachers stay in high-needs schools. High-quality principals, therefore, are vital to the effectiveness of our nation’s public schools, especially those serving the children with the fewest advantages in life,” according to the Principal Pipeline Initiative, which is helping six large school districts build effective principal pipelines to ensure there is a large pool of qualified individuals.

For superintendents, it’s not a shortage of principal candidates, says Mary Ann Jobe of AASA, the School Superintendents Association. It’s that there are too many programs that certify principals and produce candidates who lack basic skills for school leadership, improving instruction and the day-to-day duties of the job.

“We have found that there are many, many certified people out there—they will take online courses and online masters courses—and they will get themselves certified to be a principal but they really don’t have the competencies,” she says.

Hirsh notes that many school districts have not helped their assistant principals become fully integrated into the school structure, which creates a steeper learning curve if they are tapped to become principals. “The assistant principal is a role that is often overlooked,” she says.

The assistant principal role is ideal to use as a stepping stone to the principals’ office, Connelly says. But instead of being used as a residency to learn the ropes of the job and the importance of the instructional component of the job, assistant principals are often consumed by the day-to-day “buses and building” issues. Further, with high principal turnover, assistant principals are being tapped to take on the leadership role in a shorter time frame, giving them less time to prepare.

School leaders “need a continuum of professional development beginning when they first enter as teachers all the way through the pipeline,” says Connelly.

Working with NAESP, the Wallace Foundation research found that effective principals are able to engage their assistant principals and teacher leaders to lead the instructional aspects of their schools.

“The more open a principal is to spreading leadership around, the better it is for student learning. Effective leadership from a variety of sources—principals, teachers, staff teams, and others—is associated with better student performance on math and reading tests,” the Wallace Foundation reported.

The Wallace Foundation also has worked with AASA for the past 10 years on a principal pipeline initiative. That program has successfully helped school districts develop a pipeline from teachers and teacher leaders up to the superintendency.

“This has helped these school districts to start a succession plan and have a bench—with not only certified but highly qualified individuals,” says Jobe.

Connelly notes that her organization has a National Mentor Training and Certification Program that offers a highly structured professional development program, and a National Principals Resource Center that provides a range of resources, including custom trainings on trending topics such as teacher evaluation and college- and career-ready standards. “These professional learning experiences emphasize systematic solutions for not just fixing pipeline ‘leaks,’ but ensuring solid pipelines that provide a continuum of leadership support for generations of principals,” she says.

NASSP has partnered with the McKinsey Academy to launch the McKinsey Management Program for School Leaders, which offers five- to eight-week courses for principals and other school leaders on organizational management through an online program. The program is designed to give busy principals a convenient and collaborative platform to get help in targeted areas, Hutton says.

Some principals are turning to social media, using Twitter chats and Voxer to build professional learning networks. Twitter handles include #CPchat, #APchat, #ECEchat, #ThankAPrincipal, and #NAESPChat.

## THE ISSUE: CHRONIC SHORTAGE AREAS

Educator shortages are not evenly spread across the U.S.: There are persistent teacher shortages nationally in certain subjects: special education, math, science, and English as a Second Language. Regionally, schools in the South have seen higher turnover and greater shortages than schools in other regions of the U.S., based on the Learning Policy Institute's research.

In 2016, the National School Board Association's Center for Public Education found that the number of teaching certificates issued has dropped in 20 states. Oklahoma, Washington, Minnesota, Virginia, and New York have all seen certificates drop by one third to almost one half in the last four years. Other states, such as South Dakota, struggle to find enough teachers to keep up with increases in student enrollments. The STEM fields, special education, and bilingual education teachers were still chronic shortage areas, and middle and high schools see more shortages than elementary.

The most significant administrator shortages have occurred in high-poverty and rural school districts, and of the candidates, many are ill-prepared to become instructional leaders, having instead focused on "buildings, boilers, and buses" in their training, according to the Wallace Foundation.

And Jobe routinely hears from rural superintendents who are having great difficulties recruiting principals and other administrators.

AIR researcher Jenny DeMonte recently wrote a blog aptly titled, "Critical Shortages in Special Education Teachers. Sound Familiar?" DeMonte notes that 47 states reported special education shortages in 2013-14. The job is especially challenging because of the nature of the work, the bureaucracy and legal documentation and paperwork that accompanies each student with a disability, and the isolation of the job. Turnover is even higher than general education.

To help recruit, support, and retain teachers, she recommends that state agencies, teacher

preparation programs, and school districts build partnerships that allow special educators and general educators to study then work together, to improve all educators' abilities to teach students with different abilities. She also recommends that school and district leaders focus on instruction rather than the legal requirements to build and maintain inclusive schools and classrooms.

Other school districts are using the "grow your own" concept, for special education paraprofessionals and other chronic hard-to-staff fields. That strategy gained traction after a 2005 Stanford University report found that 85 percent of New York state teachers took their first job within 40 miles of their hometown and that teachers most often gravitated to the type of school district and schools that they had attended.

Fairfax County, for example, is using social media in addition to college job fairs to recruit teachers, and has found its greatest needs are

special education, ESOL, math and upper elementary (grades 4-6) teachers. FCPS has partnered with three local universities for candidates, including George Washington University for special

education teachers and Howard University for diverse candidates, says spokesperson John Torre. The district also is looking at ways to help instructional aides become teachers, he adds.

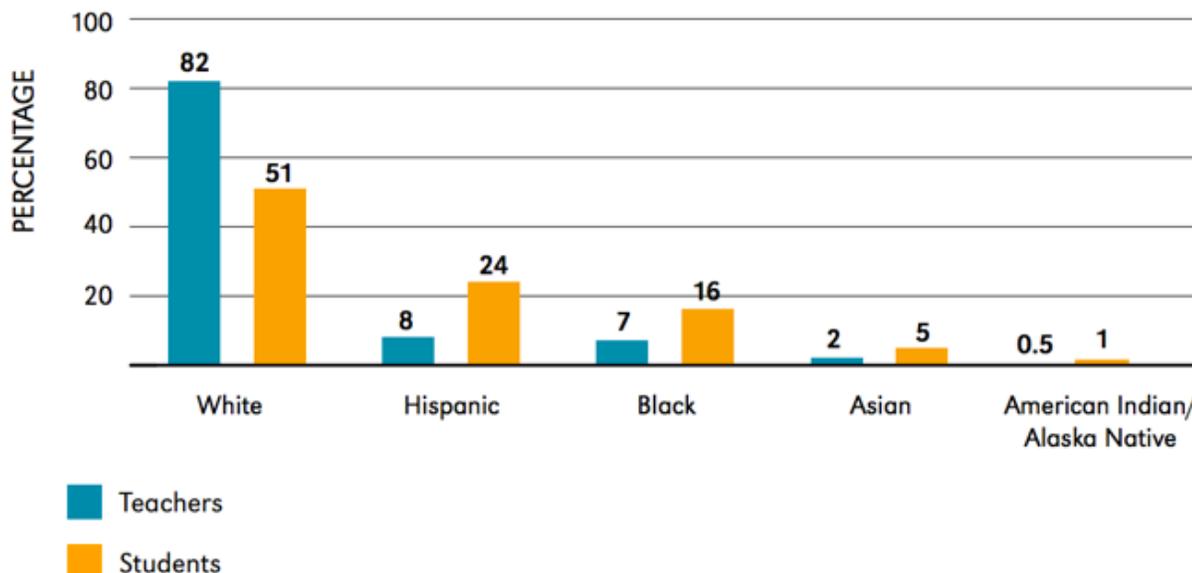
The Learning Policy Institute has proposed a drastically different idea: a national teacher registry that would match teachers from areas that have surpluses to districts with shortages, and the organization wants states to streamline certification policies to help make teaching a more "portable" profession.

## THE ISSUE: DIVERSITY WITHIN TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The numbers of minority students continue to increase—the latest statistics from the federal government show that in 2013, 50 percent of students were white, 16 percent black, 25 percent

**"MOST STUDENTS WHO HAVE LIVED IN POVERTY AND MANAGE TO GET THROUGH COLLEGE WANT HIGHER PAYING JOBS TO HELP LIFT THEM OUT OF POVERTY."**

## A demographic mismatch between public school teachers and their students, 2011-12



SOURCE: SASS 2011-12; NCES, Condition of Education, 2015

(Chart courtesy of the Center for Public Education)

Hispanic, and 5 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. By 2025, the number of white students is predicted to drop to 46 percent.

But according to AACTE, 80 percent of teachers are white, and they are predominantly women.

“What we really need to do is recruit young black and Hispanic males into the profession,” says AACTE’s Lucero. “The problem is, most students who have lived in poverty and manage to get through college want higher paying jobs to help lift them out of poverty.”

Teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools tend to have higher rates of attrition, as do teachers of color, who are disproportionately represented in these schools.

To attract more teachers of color—and hopefully steer them to the high-need areas—NEA recommends creating college fellowship programs that pay all or part of a student’s tuition in exchange for a commitment to teach a specified number of years; high school cadet programs that give students elective courses and practice teaching opportunities; high school teacher academies which allow students to take a series of classes in child development, teaching and

learning, and perform an internship; and working with community college, which allow students to stay close to home and save money while earning a degree.

The need for minority teachers and leaders goes back to the need for more professionalism in the field, Lucero says.

Smiley of AFT points to an initiative by Boston Public Schools that recruits men, particularly minorities, to teach in Boston schools. The cohort meets regularly to discuss issues in the classroom, and graduates typically stay in the teaching field. The school district continuously recruits new candidates by working with local universities, and the program’s graduates also recruit new candidates for the program.

Programs such as these can be replicated, Smiley says, adding that research shows “word of mouth” recruitment tends to be one of the most successful strategies.

At the district leadership level, AASA is concerned that women are not well represented—although the vast majority of teachers are women, only about 24 percent of superintendents are women, Jobe says. AASA now has an initiative in women’s leadership

that convenes a consortium of leaders to discuss issues that may prevent or discourage women from seeking the top school district job, such as a perception that they may not understand the financial aspects or athletic programs.

When women do seek the top job, Jobe notes, “We find that women enter the superintendency at a later date, and they often come from school districts where they were the chief academic officer or worked in curriculum. Their paths usually take a different trajectory from men’s.”

But coming from a different background—particularly academic—can be a benefit to the teaching and learning components of the field, she adds.

AASA recently launched a certification program that seeks to give prospective and new-to-the-job leaders about issues they will face but may not have learned about in graduate school, Jobe says.

AASA also runs two urban superintendents’ academies with Howard University and the University of Southern California that offer certification to incoming and experienced superintendent candidates who complete a curriculum tailored to the unique issues in urban school districts.

“We are trying hard to build a pool of candidates who are not only certified but highly qualified,” Jobe says.

## **IN CONCLUSION: HOW CAN THE EDUCATION PROFESSION ADDRESS THESE NEEDS?**

Teacher and school leadership shortages will not be solved by simply encouraging more individuals to enter teacher education programs. The root of the issue is the attrition rate: State and local education policies must address the reasons why teachers are leaving the field. Further, policymakers address the chronic shortage areas that increasingly impact more districts: recruiting and supporting professionals who want to teach students with disabilities, language-minority students, or children living in poverty.

These cracks in the pipeline will require a multifaceted approach. Some issues reflect both local and national issues. For instance, a local

issue arises when one school district pays better than a neighbor, or when one school district supports its teachers with more tools. Nationally the shortage is seen in school districts where most students are high-need students. Additionally, the teacher shortage is also part of a pipeline that effects the number of potential principals and superintendents.

Policy recommendations often require significant new funding: Training, mentoring, and induction programs are key for ensuring teachers, principals, and school district leaders are supported and will thrive in their jobs. Working conditions must be addressed, and school staff must be given time for planning, collaboration, and professional learning. The Learning Policy Institute recommends offering teachers “competitive, equitable compensation packages” that may include child care and health care supports and housing allowances.

Education advocates don’t expect to get any help from Washington in coming years—many efforts will be redirected to staving off budget cuts and calls to end federal programs. That puts the burden on those representing the professions to bring about the needed recruitment and ensure that those candidates are prepared to handle the challenges of the job.

“I continue to believe that the LFA coalition has the power to design real solutions,” says Robinson. “Rather than focusing our energies on fighting ill-advised policy proposals on education workforce issues, it would be deeply gratifying to promote well-considered solutions from the profession.”

It will take local schools working together, teacher education programs to better educate new teachers, and a change in working conditions to keep new teachers in the classroom. One without the other would be ineffective, but working collaboratively, we can solve this problem.

The **Learning First Alliance** is a partnership of leading education organizations representing more than 10 million members dedicated to improving student learning in America’s public schools. We share examples of success, encourage collaboration, and work toward the continual and long-term improvement of public education based on solid research.

---

## RESOURCES:

**Wallace Foundation:** School Leadership  
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/pages/default.aspx>

**Wallace Foundation:** “Building Principal Pipelines” <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/Building-Principal-Pipelines-A-Strategy-to-Strengthen-Education-Leadership.aspx>

**Wallace Foundation:** “Ensuring Productive Leadership Succession—Learning From Leadership” [http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/2\\_4-ensuring-productive-leadership-succession-learning-from-leadership.aspx](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/2_4-ensuring-productive-leadership-succession-learning-from-leadership.aspx)

**Learning Policy Institute:** “A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.” <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coming-crisis-teaching>

**AIR, Education Resource Center,** “Critical Shortages in Special Education Teachers. Sound Familiar?” <http://educationpolicy.air.org/blog/critical-shortages-special-education-teachers-sound-familiar>

**AASA Urban Superintendents Academy**

<http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=36289>

**Economic Policy Institute,** “The Teacher Pay Gap is Wider Than Ever”

<http://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-pay-gap-is-wider-than-ever-teachers-pay-continues-to-fall-further-behind-pay-of-comparable-workers/>

**National Education Association,** “Strengthening and Diversifying the Teacher Pipeline”

<http://www.nea.org/home/35085.htm>

**NAESP Principal Mentor and Training Center**

[www.naesp.org/mentor](http://www.naesp.org/mentor)

**NAESP National Principal Resource Center**

<http://www.naesp.org/samples/nprc2>

**NASSP McKinsey Institute**

<http://www.principalsmonth.org/mckinsey/>

**Center on Education Policy:** “Listen to Us: Teacher Views and Voices”

<http://www.cep-dc.org/displayTopics.cfm?DocumentTopicID=30>

**Center for Public Education:** “Fixing the Holes in the Teacher Pipeline: An Overview of Teacher Shortages”

<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/An-Overview-of-Teacher-Shortages-At-a-Glance>

**Educators Rising**

<https://www.educatorsrising.org/>

**Stanford University Graduate School of Business,** “The Surprising Reason Urban Schools Attract Less Qualified Teachers”

<https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/surprising-reason-urban-schools-attract-less-qualified-teachers>