

Schools in U.S. face shortage of 300,000 teachers and staff



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Washington, August 15 (RHC)-- In the U.S., National Education Association president Becky Pringle has warned that the teacher shortage has spiraled into a “five-alarm crisis,” with nearly 300,000 teaching and support positions left unfilled and policymakers taking desperate — and in some cases, questionable — measures to staff classrooms.

Pringle told ABC News that U.S. teachers unions have been warning for years that chronic disinvestment in schools has placed untenable pressure on educators as they face low pay and overcrowded classrooms. “We have a crisis in the number of students who are going into the teaching profession and the number of teachers who are leaving it,” Pringle told the outlet. “But, of course, as with everything else, the pandemic just made it worse.”

As a survey taken by the NEA earlier this year showed, 91% of educators said pandemic-related stress and burnout is a “serious problem” in the profession, and 55% reported they plan to leave their profession earlier than originally planned.

Chronically low pay is a problem in the profession which was well-documented prior to the pandemic, and educators across the country report it is a contributing factor as teachers leave schools. The national average salary for teachers is \$64,000, but in states including Mississippi, South Dakota, and Florida, many educators earn far less.

As *The Week* reported on Monday, teachers in Arizona are paid an average of \$52,000 per year as they face one of the highest teacher-to-student ratios in the nation. “I do think the main root cause of the teacher shortage is pay,” Justin Wing of the Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association told Fox 10 Phoenix, adding that the state has a “very concerning” shortage of 2,200 teachers.

While advocates have for years called on state lawmakers to invest heavily in schools in order to recruit and retain highly qualified educators — with Arizona teachers staging a walkout in 2018 after legislators passed corporate tax cuts that would have left the state \$100 million short — Republican leaders this year have turned to other methods of keeping classrooms sufficiently staffed.

On Thursday, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis unveiled the state’s official website recruiting veterans to help fill in the gaps in schools. Former armed service members do not need a bachelor’s degree to teach the state’s children — in keeping with a trend across the country, as at least 12 states have changed or eliminated their licensing requirements for educators in the last year, according to the National Council on Teacher Quality.

According to the Florida Education Association, students in the state are approaching the school year with 8,000 teacher vacancies compared with 5,000 in 2021. Andrew Spar, the union’s president, told NBC affiliate WPTV that the shortage is directly linked to other initiatives pushed by DeSantis, including H.B. 1557, commonly called the “Don’t Say Gay” law, which bars teachers from discussing gender identity and sexual orientation in classrooms up to third grade. DeSantis’s spokesperson said in March that anyone opposed to the bill was “probably a groomer” or wouldn’t “denounce the grooming of 4-8-year old children.”

The Republican governor also signed H.B. 7, which bars teachers from instructing students about racism and “white privilege.” “When the governor goes around the state vilifying teachers and staff in our schools — and, let’s face it, that’s what he’s doing — he’s sending a message to teachers and staff that you don’t matter,” Spar told WPTV. “They are then leaving the profession.”

Republicans in more than a dozen states have proposed laws controlling what teachers can talk about with their students, contributing to a teacher shortage that American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten called “contrived” earlier this month.

“The political situation in the United States, combined with legitimate aftereffects of Covid, has created this shortage,” Weingarten told *The Washington Post*.

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