

# Schools in Crisis: School Staffing Shortages

## **Survey: Teacher Shortage Worsens; 20% of Teachers Having to Quarantine**

One in five teachers said they had to quarantine because of COVID-19 over the past month, according to [a survey from Morning Consult and EdChoice](#). About one-third of private school educators said they had to quarantine, which was a higher level than reported by school district or charter school teachers. However, it is interesting to note that the survey also showed private and charter school teachers were more likely to recommend the teaching profession compared to district teachers.

In addition, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy [released an issue brief](#) for states considering test-to-stay programs in K-12 schools in efforts to increase in-person attendance. The resource offers practical guidance on technical and health equity strategies to inform planning, design and implementation efforts.

To learn more from K-12 Dive, [click here](#).

## **U.S. Schools Struggle Under Strain of Staffing Shortages**

Clark County, Nevada, was short nearly 2,000 teachers in a week. The district had 400 substitutes to cover them. That simple math problem forced central-office staff into classrooms, students into auditoriums, and eventually led one of the largest districts in the U.S. to halt instruction. “It was putting a real strain on the operations of the school district,” said Superintendent Jesus Jara, who spoke with White House officials about securing personal protective equipment and implementing a test-to-stay program. Across the country, schools are in a mad dash for substitutes and staff, thanks to covid-19 cases that have broken records every day since the beginning of the year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont signed an order giving retired teachers flexibility to work without losing benefits; a similar move is underway in New Jersey Gov. North Carolina’s governor gave state employees permission to use paid volunteer days to work in schools, while districts in Texas have asked parents to step in.

In New York, where Gov. Kathy Hochul estimates a need for 180,000 new teachers over the next decade, the state is waiving income limits for retired teachers and reducing a lengthy certification process for new ones.

The Austin, Texas, district has announced a pay increase for substitutes, boosting top rates to as high as \$225 a day. With about 500 requests for substitutes each day in a week, officials are appealing to parents, retired teachers, people considering a career in education or just about anyone else who is willing to go through a background check and wrangle a classroom full of kids.

Federal stimulus funding is helping some schools. About 12% of 2,400 schools analyzed planned to spend American Rescue Plan funds on bonuses, hazard pay or overtime, according to Burbio,

a company that provides school data. Still, many plans were drafted before the recent case surge. According to Supt. Jara, Clark County's (NV) board approved a \$2,000 retention bonus for staff, funded by federal dollars.

Chicago Public Schools, which has been embroiled in a clash with the teachers' union over virus safety, has tapped federal funds to recruit substitutes and is shifting schedules to plug staffing holes. The district introduced incentives, like a \$45-per-day bonus for substitutes in hard-to-fill schools.

In one Oklahoma City suburb, local police officers were recently [assigned to cover 6th grade classes](#) due to staff shortages their department said in a Facebook post.

Ahead of students' return to classes from winter break, Fairfax Public Schools in Virginia took steps to ensure in-person instruction continues in the event educators get sick. According to WTOP, schools in the state's largest district will try to pull an available substitute teacher from the district's pool. If one isn't available, they'll have other teachers, staff members or volunteer substitutes step in. In a worst-case scenario, the district plans to pair two classes with one teacher or group multiple classes to be supervised for asynchronous learning. To learn more on what Fairfax has done, [click here](#).

Officials in rural districts have also had to get creative. The Hays Consolidated Independent School District, southwest of Austin, Texas, put out a plea on social media for parents to work as guest teachers. Officials waived a rule requiring subs have 30 college credit hours, so long as they have a referral from the principal.

Near Dallas, the Plano Independent School District was short 190 substitutes one day, so understaffed that the superintendent Sara Bonser covered a fourth-grade class. "We were all hands on deck," Bonser said at a school board meeting.

For more from Triblive, [click here](#).

### **States Pass New Laws in Efforts to Ease Substitute Teacher Shortages**

States have increasingly passed legislation and executive orders to help ease the shrinking labor supply of substitutes. In December, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf signed a bill [expanding the pool of eligible substitutes](#). The law extends this flexibility through the 2022-23 school year, permitting retired teachers, eligible college students and recent education program graduates to all serve as substitute teachers.

Later in December, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer [signed a law](#) that also expands eligibility for who can be a substitute. The new Michigan law allows any staff member already working at a school, such as secretaries and paraprofessionals, to substitute teach this school year even if they are not certified.

On January 12th, the Kansas State Board of Education [approved an emergency declaration](#) lifting a requirement through June 1, 2022 that substitute teachers have at least 60 semester credit hours from a regionally accredited college or university to obtain an emergency substitute license. For now, substitutes only need a high school diploma and must be at least 18 years old, have a verified employment commitment from a school district, and pass a background check.

To learn more from K-12 Dive, [click here](#).

### **CA Gov. Eases Process for Hiring Subs**

On January 11, 2022, California Governor Gavin Newsom [signed an executive order](#) lowering state barriers that delay the hiring of qualified short-term substitute teachers. The order, which expires March 31st, would permit substitute teachers to have their assignments extended and give additional flexibility to support retired teachers who have returned to the classroom, as well as eliminate barriers that may prevent additional retired teachers from returning to instruction. To view the order, [click here](#).

### **USDE and Transportation Dept. Join to Address Bus Driver Shortage**

On January 6, 2022 The U.S. Department of Transportation announced, in coordination with the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) is giving states the option of waiving the portion of the commercial driver's license (CDL) skills test that requires applicants to identify the "under the hood" engine components. All other components of the written and road test will remain.

This announcement aims to alleviate some of the labor shortage challenges schools are facing and is one of many resources the USDE continues to provide to safely keep schools open for full-time, in-person learning. The announcement is also aimed at providing states flexibility in order to help increase the pool of school bus drivers. American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds can be used to hire drivers. Drivers receiving a CDL under this temporary waiver are permitted to operate intrastate school buses only.

The waiver, which became effective Jan. 3, 2022, expires March 31, 2022.

For more from MyChesCo, [click here](#).

### **Education Sec. Cardona Sends "Dear Colleagues" Letter Addressing Labor Shortages in K-12 Education**

US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona sent a "Dear Colleagues" letter addressing labor shortages in K-12 education. According to letter, "The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) is committed to supporting districts and schools across this country in addressing teacher and staff shortages, minimizing disruption to in-person learning, and meeting student needs. That is why we are urging you to use resources from the \$122 billion made available through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) (Pub. L. 117-2) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund and a portion of the \$350 billion made available through the ARP's Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to ensure that students have access to the teachers and other critical staff they need to support their success during this critical period. This includes moving quickly to implement short-term strategies while also considering longer-term investments.\

According to the letter, ARP provides vital resources to hire additional educators and school staff and to improve compensation to recruit and retain educators and school staff. School districts should act with urgency to keep schools open for in-person learning and ensure they do not waste this opportunity to make critical investments. The letter also describes (1) evidence-based and promising short- and long-term strategies for addressing teacher and staff shortages that can be funded through ARP ESSER and (2) examples of how ARP and previous relief funds are already being used to attract and retain teachers and staff. These strategies can help to fill currently open

positions and add and fill new roles, such as providing one-time initial hiring incentives, or short-term investments in additional staff to support students and educators and increased needs.

To read the letter in full, [click here](#).

### **Many School Districts are Restricted from Using Remote Learning Options**

Bus driver shortages and teacher absences are making it difficult to maintain in-person instruction, and virtual is no longer an option in some locations. To make matters worse, school districts in states with tight restrictions around remote learning are finding themselves unable to pivot to online instruction amid the latest surge of COVID-19 infections and school shutdowns. Instead, some schools facing staffing shortages or high absence rates from the spread of the omicron variant are relying on inclement weather or emergency days to close schools altogether. These days in some cases must be made up at the end of the school year or by eliminating spring break days.

For example, Enfield Public Schools in Connecticut, which faced bus driver shortages as employees tested positive for COVID-19 or awaited test results had to adhere to guidance from the state department of education and governor that required that the district to shut down with no virtual learning options despite the availability of devices for every student from pre-K through grade 12.

To learn more from K-12 Dive, [click here](#).