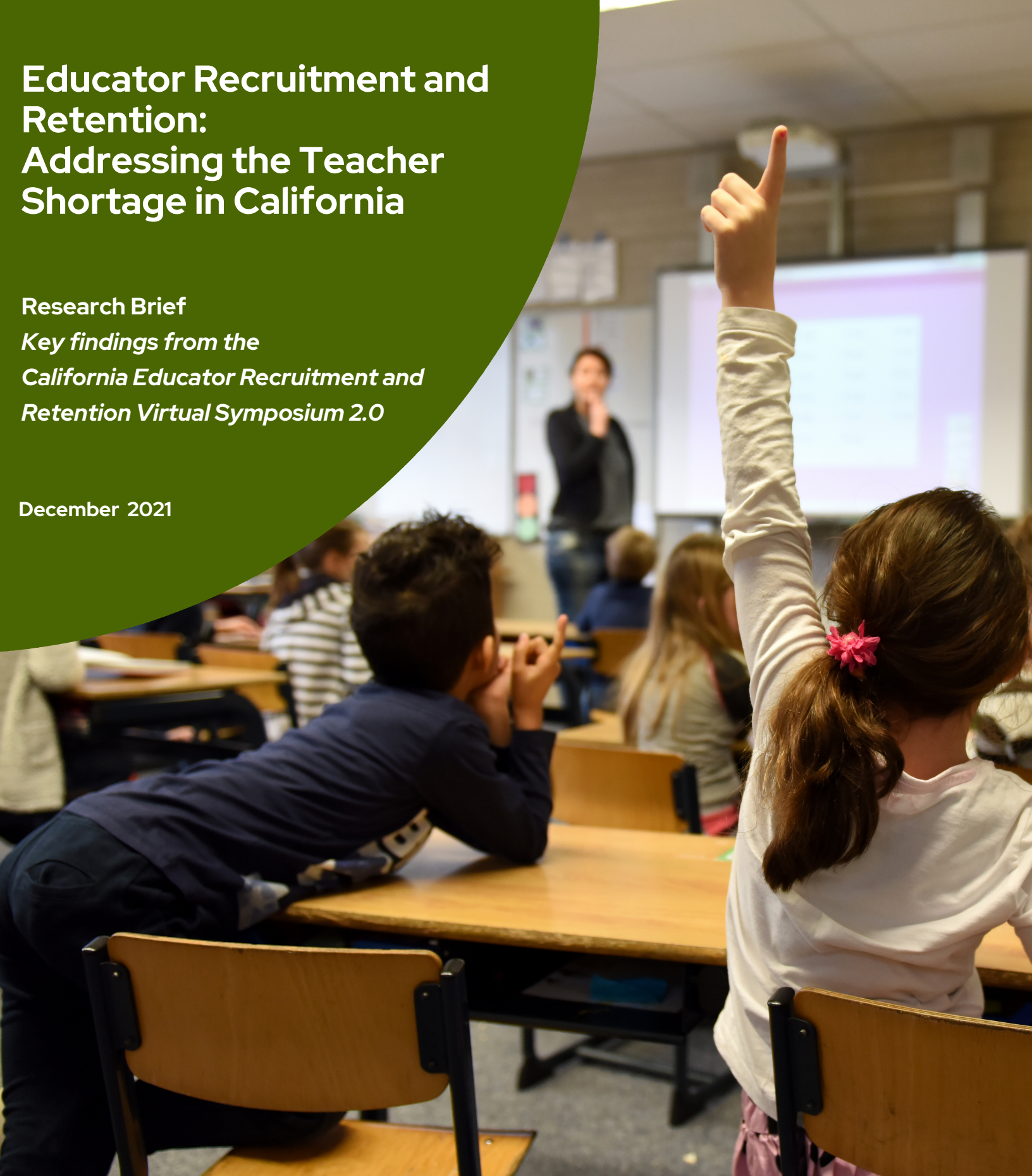


Educator Recruitment and Retention: Addressing the Teacher Shortage in California

Research Brief

*Key findings from the
California Educator Recruitment and
Retention Virtual Symposium 2.0*

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Abstract

This research brief highlights the findings from the **California Educator Recruitment & Retention Virtual Symposium 2.0, 2021**. Educational leaders committed to the recruitment and retention of California teachers shared their perspectives, experiences, and expertise around recruitment and retention. There is an acute need to fill vacant teaching positions, especially in areas such as math, science, special education, and bilingual education. In addition to filling vacancies, educational organizations around the state are committed to diversifying the teacher workforce. This brief concludes with recommendations to potentially guide action and funding.

Introduction

As 2021 closes, EdJoin.Org (2021) displayed 24,826 job postings in California. By applying *certificated-teacher* for the search criteria, 243 job postings were displayed for a total of 1,707 job vacancies. Additionally, using *certificated-teacher-special education* for the search criteria, 1,208 job postings were displayed for a total of 1,704 job vacancies.

The demand for certificated, credentialed teachers is apparent and urgent (Carver-Thomas, Leung & Burns, 2021). A similar brief was produced earlier this year to disseminate findings from interviews conducted with key human resource leaders at the county office of education level across the state, including rural and urban areas, all seeking to diversify, recruit, and retain teachers with appropriate state credentialing.

The findings for this brief are based on audio recordings and transcripts from the *California Educator Recruitment & Retention Virtual Symposium 2.0 in June 2021*. The last in-person convening of the conference was November 2019, just months before the pandemic shutdowns, and the latest convening was June 11, 2021, virtually over the Zoom platform. The brief will review findings from Spring 2021 interviews and dive into the latest findings and recommendations based on panel and participant discussions from the June 2021 symposium via Zoom.

Previous Findings

A preceding manuscript titled *Educator Recruitment and Retention Research Brief: Key Findings in California* (Neumann & Somoza-Norton, 2021) revealed the significance of:

1. grant funding and flexibility,
2. fostering collaboration and partnerships across the K-16 educational system,
3. building community for new cohort of teachers,
4. generating new avenues for teacher credential pathways,
5. cultivating mentor support,
6. innovate in data collection and monitoring,
7. use virtual platforms to attract recruits, and
8. grow your own and second-career candidates in recruitment and retention.

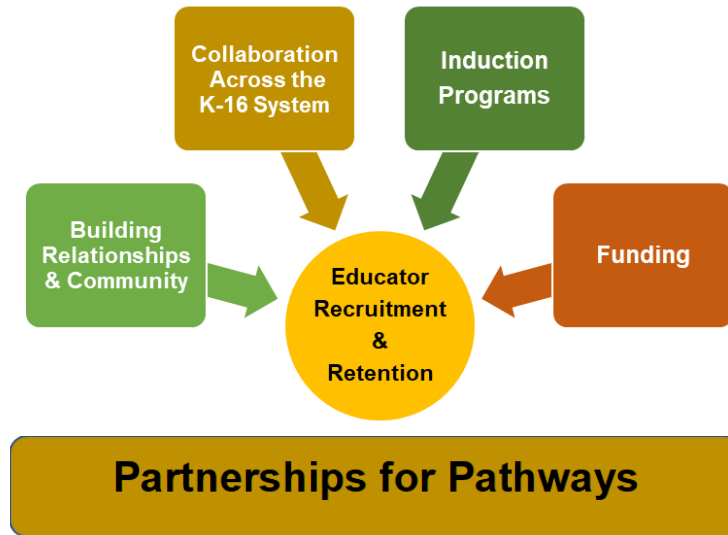
These findings emerged from the interviews with high-ranking county offices of education and school district administrators across California, promoting discussions about chronic teacher shortages, recruitment, and retention, particularly of diverse educator force. The ideas presented in this current brief do not intend to replace previous findings, rather, it adds to the menu of much-needed effective practices and strategies on these topics.

Methodology

This investigation examined the perspectives and suggestions from human resources specialists, educational leaders, and stakeholders (N=200) from the state of California on effective and successful practices associated with educator recruitment and retention. This information was gathered at the *California Educator Recruitment & Retention Virtual Symposium 2.0 in June 2021*. The research questions guiding this analysis are as follows:

1. What innovative LEA practices show promises of efficacy in recruiting education employees?
2. How can other LEAs replicate, adapt and scale these effective practices in their unique geographic, economic, and demographic settings?
3. What would you advocate with our legislators regarding successful strategies for recruitment and retention?
4. What are the characteristics of LEAs that successfully recruit and retain education employees?

Six forty-five-minute virtual Zoom breakout sessions (N ≤ 25), plus a forty-five-minute panel of experts' session from the symposium (N=7), were recorded, and audio was transcribed, coded using Provalis ProSuite (2021), a qualitative text analysis software, to determine trends and emerging patterns in the transcripts. All data has been de-identified, and findings were reported in aggregated form to maintain anonymity for conference participants and speakers. The encompassing themes from this analysis are represented in the next graphic.



Findings from the California Educator Recruitment & Retention Virtual Symposium 2.0

Following the structure of the June symposium, which facilitated six unique breakout rooms around the topics of efficacy in recruiting education employees in rural settings, urban settings, and diversity recruitment strategies, the findings are also categorized by the same three topics. The common denominator across the six discussion rooms is what works in recruitment; **partnerships for pathways** between Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs), county offices of education, and school districts. Collaboration, communication, and focused efforts across educational organizations to provide a clear pathway for a teacher to complete education and credentialing requirements to ultimately accept a job offer was discussed vigorously by symposium panelists and participants.

Small and Rural Contexts

Participants and panelists shared several innovative Local Education Agency (LEA) practices that show promise of efficacy in recruiting education employees, including certificated and classified positions. **The use of virtual spaces** such as Next Door, Patch, Indeed, and social media to post classified positions are enabling LEAs to reach a wider audience beyond their local communities while also recruiting from their neighborhoods. Virtual job fairs continue to play a role in recruitment for small and rural contexts. Radio advertisements and recruitment videos have also been created to promote the local areas and recruit teachers. **Creating a teacher pathway through partnerships** to help candidates navigate the credentialing requirements was also discussed. In-person strategies such as focusing on retention support were also reported as key.



Small and Rural Contexts Continued

Retention of permit teachers and support through credentialing within the LEA and partnership with county offices was further discussed through the lens of communication. Finally, the small and rural context group discussed **working with local businesses and banks** to help support new teachers with housing.

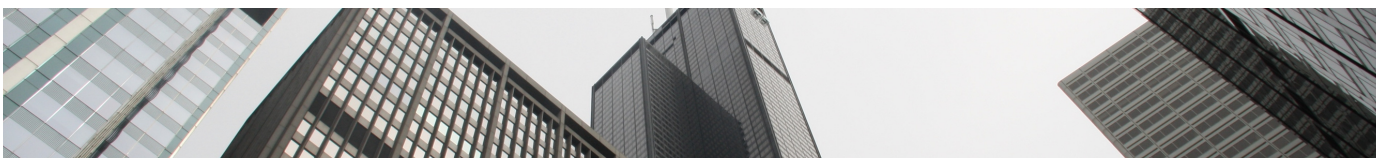
In order to scale up recruitment and retention efforts, the common theme was partnerships and communication across education agencies to support teacher candidates along the pathway to obtaining a credential and signing their first teaching job contract. **In order to scale up recruitment and retention efforts, participants would advocate with legislators for continued funding for local solutions grants, rural resident programs, rethink testing requirements and flexibilities, and funding for mentor models and networking.**



Large and Urban Contexts

Similar to small and rural contexts, participants in the large and urban contexts underscored the **need for fostering relationships** across education organizations from IHEs to county offices of education to LEAs. **Efforts to demystify the credentialing process and teacher pathway were discussed as a means of making the credentialing process clear, attainable, and attractive to teacher candidates.** Funding for paid induction, student loan forgiveness, teacher residency programs, and payment during student teaching were all discussed as strategies to recruit teacher candidates.

According to panelists and participants, continuous collaboration among educational leaders to **support teacher candidates along their pathway and into the early years of the profession beyond induction** is key to retention. Well-prepared teachers will also result in teacher leaders who may eventually grow into administrators. The need for district and site leader stability was also discussed as part of the teacher pathway and career longevity in education. Mentorship, paid mentoring, and support beyond induction were also named as key strategies to invest in to retain teachers during their early career.



Diversification of the Teacher Force

Panelists and participants of the June Symposium overwhelmingly expressed the need and desire to diversify their organizations from instructional assistants to teachers to leaders. Several innovative practices demonstrating efficacy in the recruitment of diverse candidates were shared. First, **the written and spoken commitment from the organization's leaders to diversifying teams** was recognized as paramount for focused efforts to recruit diverse candidates. An analysis and reflective **evaluation of current recruitment materials with a lens for diversity, equity, and inclusion** were also recommended to be a directive from top educational leaders within an organization. **Bias and equity training for hiring teams** through outside organizations was another innovative strategy to be intentional about diversifying recruitment efforts. **The theme of collaboration and partnerships** was again revealed as participants shared their efforts to partner with community colleges, IHEs, county offices of education, and LEAs to establish clear pathways for diverse teacher candidates to successfully complete credentialing programs and accept teaching positions in welcoming settings. Additionally, the focused efforts to diversify the teacher workforce included reaching out to specific diverse college clubs as well as the Chamber of Commerce. The theme of mentoring and mentorship in a diverse context was also discussed as new teachers will likely feel most comfortable and confident with a mentor from a similar background.



Overall, participants spoke most frequently about recruitment over retention efforts demonstrating the need and urgency to fill vacant positions. Hard to fill credential areas such as math, science, special education, and multilingual positions continue to persist. The need for a clear, attainable, affordable teacher pathway was discussed as a reason to collaborate across the credential pathway to ensure teacher candidates complete their credentials and ultimately sign on to teaching positions where they will continue to be mentored and supported beyond induction. All discussion rooms underscored the urgency to diversify the teacher workforce. The power in relationships to foster mental health and wellness while supporting candidates along their path was a look to the near future as we continue to make sense of educational settings while the pandemic persists.

Recommendations

The qualitative analysis results from the discussions at the conference provided a wealth of recommendations to address recruitment and retention issues and mitigate the loss of educator talent over time.

Coincidentally, several of these suggestions have been voiced in the recent past in the media and research as well.

Therefore, policy and educational leaders may consider exploring the following suggestions with their teams and investigate practices and policies that could be use as leverage points to move towards change and implementation on the items below:

- **Contemplate covering the cost of induction programs.** This step could offer relief for recent graduates' debt as many struggle to pay for student loans (NEA News, 2021) and also be used as a recruitment tool and incentive.
- **Offer home-buying incentives,** particularly in competitive real estate markets or remote areas. Early career educators interested in purchasing a home have to compete with investors and professionals with high incomes. For example, *"educators in the Bay Area often share apartments with roommates and partners, live with family, or commute long distances to find affordable housing"* (The Mercury News, 2021).
- **Increase starting salary and provide incentives.** As clearly stated in a Learning Policy Brief (2017), *"In sum, teachers in districts with the strongest salary scales, those who are better prepared, and those who feel the most supported by their school leaders are least likely to leave their schools or teaching altogether."*
- **Pay for exams required to achieve add-on credentials.** Test registration costs range between \$250-\$500, not including preparation materials or coursework. These fees are cost-prohibitive for teachers pursuing an additional credential in some cases.
- **Fund scholarships for high school students** by engaging in partnerships with university teacher preparation programs to generate pathways leading to teaching credentials.



Additional Recommendations

- **Create employee affinity groups to reduce teacher isolation.** Spaces for teachers, especially teachers of color, can positively impact sustaining diversity in the workplace. During the global pandemic, social unrest, emotional distress, and tumultuous political context have exacerbated teachers' sense of isolation. Networking can mitigate burnout and generate a sense of belonging.
- **Provide equity and inclusivity training to leaders.** Educational leaders must be aware of themselves and their values, beliefs, and dispositions to serve their community (Khalifa M. A., 2016). For example, hiring processes can be hindered by misconceptions and inequities. Consider having at least one leader in search committees and interviews with candidates trained in equity facilitation, Title IX policies, and anti-racist practices.
- **Assist educators with their career development and future pathway.** Foster professional growth beyond the classroom to site level or district. Investing in teacher capacity and efficacy will help retain and grow educational leaders.
- **Decrease leadership turnover.** As one conference participant pointed out, "*People stay because of leadership.*" Nurturing school administrators is also vital in teacher retention, for when teachers feel supported by happy leaders, everyone wins and stays.



Conclusion

Communication, collaboration, and partnership across educational organizations to collectively provide a clear, affordable, and attainable pathway for teachers to enter and stay in the profession was the prominent theme across all discussion rooms. When teachers feel supported, nurtured, and invested in, they will most likely stay and grow into leaders, principals, and administrators who will in turn be equipped to support new incoming teachers. As thousands of vacant teaching positions remain unfilled across the state, it is critical to heed the expertise of the participants and continue to strategize the removal of any potential barriers in the teacher pathway.

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Acknowledgement

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