

By Neal Morton

Teacher Shortage Crisis? UW Researcher Says It's Not That Simple, and Offers Some Fixes

Judging by the headlines, public schools in the U.S. are in crisis mode, struggling with the first major teacher shortage since the 1990s.

The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, National Public Radio and, yes, the *Seattle Times* have all contributed to a growing perception that there just aren't enough teachers to do the job. And since 2011, mentions of the phrase "teacher shortage" in U.S. news coverage spiked more than 1,300 percent to nearly 4,000 times last year, according to a new report by Dan Goldhaber, director of the Center for Education Data and Research at the University of Washington.

Last fall, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction surveyed principals across Washington state and found that 20 percent said they were in "crisis mode" when it came to hiring teachers. An additional 70 percent indicated they were struggling.

Goldhaber and co-author Thomas Dee, of Stanford University, however, say their research suggests the headlines obscure the real problem. They dispute the notion that there's a nationwide teacher shortage. Instead, they say, their research suggests a more persistent and acute shortage of teachers in certain subjects and schools.

Specifically, they found it's harder to fill classroom vacancies in math, science, and special education and to find enough teachers for campuses that serve a high share of students living in poverty.



“We don’t want to suggest there isn’t a problem,” Goldhaber said. “There is one. It’s just not a problem that’s national.”

“It’s a problem that remains particularly hard for disadvantaged schools and...for teachers with in-demand skills,” he added.

Goldhaber isn’t exactly sure why some teaching positions remain so hard to fill. In Washington state, his previous research found a high turnover rate among special education teachers, whereas math and science vacancies don’t attract enough well-trained candidates.

Still, Dee and Goldhaber offered specific ideas on how to tackle the acute shortage areas. Those recommendations are included in their new report and a policy brief released by The Hamilton Project, an offshoot of the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution.

The authors argue that school districts could use financial incentives to attract and keep more teachers in high-need subjects and hard-to-staff schools. But that’s not likely to happen in a state like Washington, where virtually all districts adhere to the same state-wide teacher salary schedule.

“It is not surprising in a place with a strong teachers union that you have relatively little differentiation in pay,” Goldhaber said. “It undermines the purpose of the union, which is to bargain on behalf of all members.”

He and Dee also recommend that districts start their teacher recruitment efforts earlier and more aggressively, while at the same time expanding student teaching slots in schools where they consistently have vacancies.

“That’s because student teachers



“Specifically, they found it’s harder to fill classroom vacancies in math, science, and special education and to find enough teachers for campuses that serve a high share of students living in poverty.”

tend to remain at the schools where they trained,” Goldhaber said.

At the state level, the authors propose making it easier for teachers to use their teaching licenses across state lines. Currently, the nation has a patchwork of licensing rules that require teachers to complete certain courses or tests before they can work in a new state.

The report also encourages states to expand or start so-called alternative routes to teacher licensure.

While many teachers get into the classroom through a college of education, fast-track licensing programs could be designed to place more candidates directly into high-need classrooms, the report said.

With each recommendation, the authors note that policymakers should carefully develop and evaluate their approaches to determine whether they work.

“Talking about this problem in a non-nuanced way is likely to create non-nuanced solutions that don’t get you very much in return,” Goldhaber said. ■

This piece was originally published in the Seattle Times on April 26, 2017.



Neal Morton is a staff writer for the *Seattle Times*.

Schools Should Tell Parents Whether Their Middle Schoolers Are On Track for College

Today's conventional wisdom says that kids are too stressed out by the burdens we parents are placing on them, and we need to help them relax. Maybe that's true for the tiny sliver of students who attend hothouse high schools in the bubbles where many of us happen to live. But for America at large, it's exactly the wrong advice. We need the majority of parents and kids to be *more* stressed out. We need to shake them out of their complacency and tell them: *You and your kids are heading toward a coming-of-age catastrophe, but you can avoid it if you act now!*

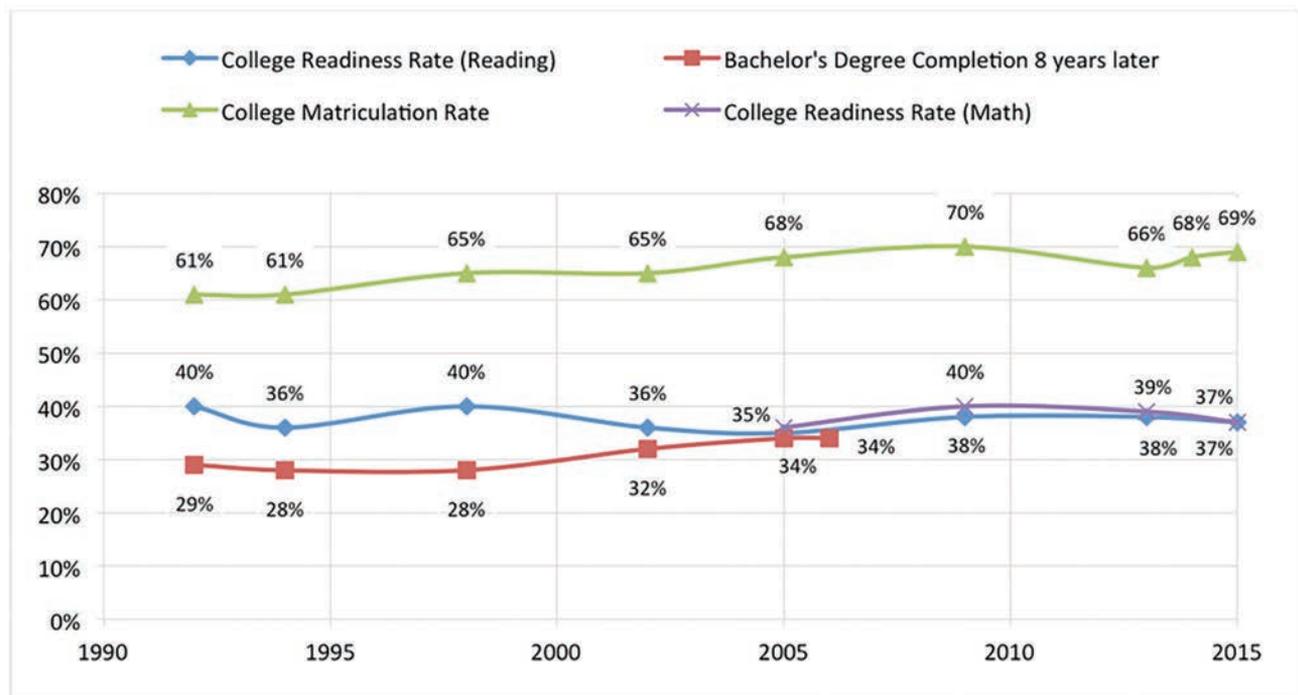
I'm referring to the fact that only about one-third of American teenagers leave the K-12 system ready to succeed in postsecondary education. Another third go to college unprepared, where they hit the brick wall of remedial coursework, and many of them—including

almost all of the low-income students—drop out. That amounts to more than a million kids a year seeing their dreams dashed before they are old enough to legally drink a beer.

That's tragic enough. What's worse is that neither these young people nor their parents see it coming. Yet “we” know—we policy experts, we school district leaders, we state officials, we educators. We can see it, clear as day, in the data, starting as early as the sixth grade. We know with reasonable precision which students are likely to leave high school ready for college, and which are not. We just don't bother to tell the families.

Don't believe me? In the states that contract with analytics software firm SAS to manage their accountability data—including Fordham's home state of Ohio—teachers,

Chart 1: College preparedness, college matriculation, and college completion



*2005 marked the beginning of a new NAEP assessment framework for math.

principals, and superintendents can see a projection of a student's ACT score as early as the sixth grade. Any district using NWEA's MAP exam can receive the same via a nifty tool. Equating any standardized test score result to an ACT or SAT projection is reasonably doable. This is a straightforward use of the type of "predictive analytics" sweeping across so many fields. And while college readiness is about much more than test scores, it's also the case that low test scores will keep you out of the best colleges, and land you in remedial education.

The point is not to peer into an unalterable, deterministic, or pre-determined future, or to tell kids or their parents that they are destined for failure. Rather, it's to change the future. Just like doctors must deliver stern warnings to the parents of obese children—help them lose the weight or else diabetes or worse lies ahead—educators must be prepared to deliver stern warnings about educational underperformance. In both cases, the hope is to alter behavior.

I'm now convinced that this lecture probably has to come from someone who parents trust—one of their child's educators. I was hoping that wasn't necessarily the case. I wrote last year for *Education Next* that it might be interesting to test out an online tool that delivered this news directly to parents of middle schoolers, early enough that they could do something about it. They could enter their child's test scores into a website; it would spit out an ACT projection and list the types of colleges their kid might be able to get into. For many children, the news would be disconcerting, as it would predict remedial education in the offing. This might catch parents' attention and spur them to action.

We at Fordham decided to give it a

try, so a few weeks ago our partner, the Gigawatt Group, held focus groups in Columbus to test it out on middle school parents. It was not encouraging. Unsurprisingly, parents hate state standardized tests, but what they hate even more is the notion that test scores could tell them whether their children are on track for college—especially when their kids are still so young. These moms and dads would eventually concede that it would be interesting to know what ACT scores their kids are likely to receive, since colleges do in fact consider these scores in

admission decisions. However, they really want to be able to talk over all of this with their kids' teachers. Furthermore, they put very little stock in test scores alone, whereas they completely trust the feedback they get from school. If their kids' report cards are full of As and Bs, and their teachers tell them at parent-teacher conferences that everything looks good, that's what they are going to believe. They don't know what "we" know—that the vast majority of kids in America get As and Bs, whether or not they are on track.

"They don't know what 'we' know—that the vast majority of kids in America get As and Bs, whether or not they are on track."



I'd still like to test out the website idea, but there may be no getting around the schools on this one. States can send beautifully designed test score reports showing that students aren't on track. However, parents will ignore or rationalize them if they contradict their kids' report cards. The most common refrains at the focus groups were "my child just doesn't test well" and "they just had a bad day."

What we need then is for schools to step up. Ideally, starting in sixth grade or so, middle schools would have someone sit down with parents once a year to give an annual check-up. (The "someone" is tricky, as by middle school kids have six or seven teachers instead of one. Should it be the English teacher? Math? Both? A counselor?) At the check-up, the educator should go over the child's report card, state test score results, and any other data available, such as results from vendor assessments like the MAP or iReady. The script might go like this:

It's not too early to think about college for your child—whether that means a four-year university or a technical or trade school. To get into a good school and not have to retake basic courses, your child is going to need to have good grades, take challenging classes in high school, and get good scores on the ACT or SAT. We can already see some warning signs that Maya has some gaps that she needs to work on. (Explain)

There's time to catch up, but not much time to waste. She needs to be putting more effort into her homework, and should think about signing up for tougher classes next year. You can also help her at home. One great site is Khan Academy, where she can view online lessons that are pinpointed directly at her challenge areas. Let me stress that, at her current trajectory, she is likely to either not get into college or get in and

struggle. We need to change that trajectory!

For educators out there: Are schools already doing this? What would it take for them to embrace this role? Do we need to pass laws mandating these kinds of annual check-ups?

And for the rest of us: Let's keep brainstorming ideas to share the hard truth with parents and kids. Many American teenagers are simply not working hard enough. They would work harder, and smarter, if we asked them to. A shot at the American Dream is at stake. Let's not waste it. ■

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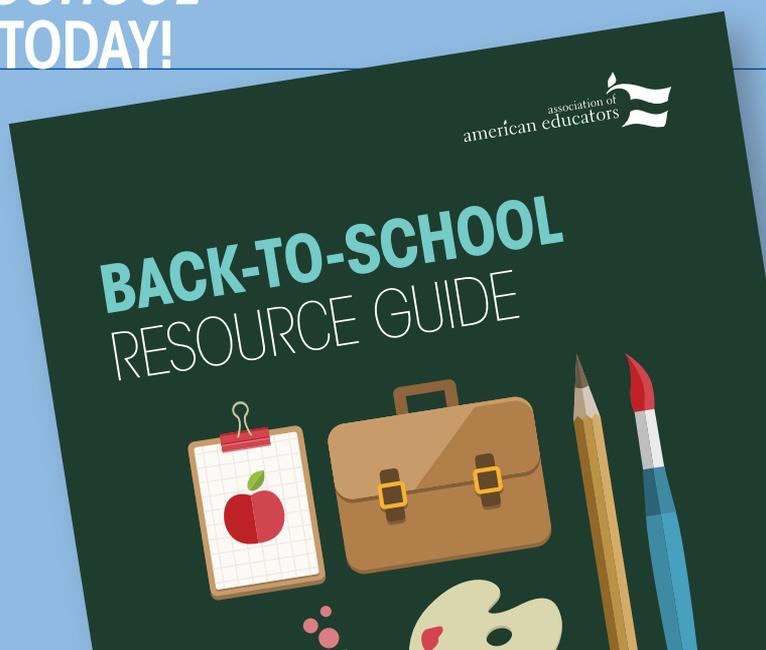
Michael Petrilli is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and an AAE Advisory Board member.

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Back to School: Preparing for Day One



I've had first days in the classroom that were pure poetry and others that were pure... well, you know. There are things out of our control that can make that first day a tough one for sure. However, there are also things we can do beforehand to set the stage for success.

As I reflect, those great first days were usually after a summer where I spent extra time setting up, designing bordering for student work displays, dusting each individual book in the classroom library, fine-tuning and perfecting those beginning lessons: the handouts, the pacing, and the mini lessons.

And then there have been a few times where I really, I mean really, dove headfirst into enjoying my summer, returning from an island or road trip just days before the start of the new school year.

And you know what? Both scenarios are great.

Although we're probably a lot less nervous that first day the more prepared we are, I also know students will have a better initial impression of me with that first scenario.

If we are rested, relaxed, and ready, it will show, and it helps keep the kids calm and focused. (And let's face it, as anxious as we teachers are that first day, the students are much more nervous than we could ever imagine.)

And oh, those first impressions—they stick like gum on hot asphalt. So here are some tips for giving the



best impression, Day One:

1 Be Organized, Tidy, and Ready

This will immediately stand out to students. Wow, supplies are all organized and labeled, books are on shelves, and look at her desk! Everything has its place and all is in order.

Be sure to also have ready your procedures and hard rules (no gum chewing or cell phones) so you can share them at the very start of the day. This will avoid that preventable and awkward moment with a new student.

2 Have Too Much and Too Many of Everything

Make extra copies, just in case. There is really nothing worse than being one or two copies short. Panic! Need name tags or construction paper? Get the extra large pack. (You can use the leftovers for another project.) Have a surplus of pens or pencils handy for those kids who have already misplaced or lost theirs.

3 Overplan the Lesson

Timing is everything. And the last thing you want is for there to be

six minutes left before the lunch bell and have little to nothing for students to do. You don't want them to see you scrambling for a sponge activity not connected to the prior teaching, so overplan the day. And the best part about this? You'll have most of the next lesson already done.

4 Rehearse

If your “welcome to this class” speech includes new material (a new procedure or content—something you’ve never introduced before), practice. If you are a new teacher, this is imperative. By rehearsing, this gives you an idea on pacing, one of the greatest challenges for most beginning teachers.

If you are using technology, arrive early to make sure all is in place and working.

5 Be Ready for Anything and Everything

Don't think you will need the dean's or assistant principal's phone extension that first day, or that replenished first aid kit, or have to directly address name-calling with a student five minutes after the bell? We wish we did not, but unfortunately, it happens. I had the experience one first day of breaking up a fight between two students—such a bummer, but sometimes a sad fact. Students will be impressed if something goes awry and you handle it quickly, and with wisdom and grace.

6 Start Learning Names Immediately

The sooner you dive in on this task the better! I am a visual learner so making a seating chart right away and using their names as much as possible helps. Here's some further

“If we are rested, relaxed, and ready, it will show, and it helps keep the kids calm and focused.”

suggestions and techniques that you might find helpful. Many teachers will tell you that getting names down as soon as possible helps with discipline and, sure, this is true. However, I believe that rather than assisting in an authoritative way, it more importantly sends the message loudly and clearly that you are interested and that you care.

First Impressions of Students

That first day, a student sometimes enters the room too loudly, says something slightly abrasive, or ignores an instruction. Then comes Tuesday morning, and it's my job to wipe the slate clean. Modeling forgiveness and kindness and giving a kid a second (third, fourth...) chance is part of the job of a teacher.

Over the years, I've also heard a good number of teachers talk about how they don't like to get any information from former teachers about incoming students. I was one of those teachers as well. Every child deserves a chance to make a new first impression. ■

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Rebecca Alber is an instructor at UCLA's Graduate School of Education, a literacy specialist, and consulting editor at Edutopia.org.





Actively Defend Your Career: Legal Tips to Avoid Trouble

It is often said that teachers are truly selfless. There is no doubt that those called to the teaching profession share a gift for compassion, artful instruction, and a dedication to young people that is rarely surpassed.

Many of you are fortunate to work in an environment where you find yourself supported by administrators and parents alike. That kind of support goes a long way.

Even in the best of work situations, the rapidly changing teaching environment can make you vulnerable.

Be aware of your vulnerabilities and take steps to shore up your defenses.

Here are a few legal tips that will help protect you this year:

1. Practice Confidentiality

Follow Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to the letter. While it might seem easy to comply with FERPA, teachers often unwittingly violate this law. One of the most common mistakes is making a comment on social media about student conduct or grades.

Other potential danger zones include:

- Circulating a class list with grades or student ID numbers to take attendance
- Leaving graded tests at the front of the class for students to pick up
- Posting grades in public locations
- Talking in front of the class about specific test scores of students
- Using another student's achievement to motivate. For example, asking John if he would like to do as well as Sally on a test may seem benign unless you tell John that Sally got an A+
- Emailing grades or private information about a student can land you in hot water. Always verify that the email address goes only

FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) is a federal privacy law that gives parents certain protections with regards to their children's education records including privacy and right to review.
—U.S. Department of Education

to a person authorized under the law to view the grade.

2. Practice Kindness

Be vigilant about kindness, not just from you but from your students and coworkers. Turning a blind eye towards anything that might be construed as bullying or sexual harassment could get you sued. The biggest mistake teachers make in this area is failing to intervene in a sexually harassing situation because it seems as if the other student is not objecting. Do it anyway. Give constant attention to kindness; strictly enforcing the rules with respect to bullying and sexual harassment will help you avoid student and parent complaints.

3. Practice Free Speech

Students can say horrible things. It might hurt but speech is free. While your classroom should be controlled and students are not allowed to use speech to disrupt the learning environment, let go what you can. Be careful, however, not to let your practice of free speech trump your obligations towards safety.

4. Practice Safety

The number one area in which teachers accidentally get into trouble is safety. Never leave your classroom unattended. Make sure a student who is sent to the office actually gets there. Do not be alone with a student behind closed doors and never allow a violent student to remain in your classroom. You should always immediately report any threats of violence made by a student. Strictly adhere to your mandated reporter obligations and do not assume reporting something to your administration fulfills this obligation.

5. Practice Handwriting

There is no better way to defend your conduct, actions, words, or deeds than to document each and every incident with a student. Keep it factual. Try your best to document contemporaneous to any incident and make sure you retain a copy of your documentation at home or in a location other than school.

Documentation has saved many a teacher and will help you defend your actions if you are taken to task. You can choose to create documents electronically or on paper listing the following information:

- Date
- Time
- Individuals Present
- Summary of Event

While there is no guarantee you will avoid a legal issue in your teaching career, following the tips above may just help you avoid one and will situate you better should you face one.

As you go back to school this year, we wish you the very best year possible and thank you for all that you do. Remember, if you have any problems or concerns, contact your professional association. ■



Sharon Nelson is the director of legal services for the Association of American Educators.

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Georgia School Raises Morale and Builds Togetherness

High-stakes testing, a charter renewal, and accountability for student performance can all have a negative impact on student and staff morale. Statesboro STEAM Academy Director Corliss Reese understands how stress can affect academic achievement, and he decided to do something about it! Corliss put a plan in place that created a supportive leadership team and positive school climate. Motivating teachers and students and building morale became and continue to be priorities at Statesboro STEAM Academy.

Statesboro STEAM Academy begins

each day with a daily Morning Mingle. Morning Mingle is a time for them to come together as a school community and start the day off with a little fun, fellowship, and dancing. Research has shown that music and dancing help to improve mood and increase happiness while decreasing stress and anxiety. Knowing that some students come to school each day with a little additional baggage, this activity creates a time and space to find a release from those issues. During this time students can talk to one another about what is bothering them or even meet with a teacher to discuss a way to shake off a possibly negative ride to school or the cobwebs of a restless

night's sleep. The DJs are the principals and on some of the mornings they take requests, do giveaways, and even allow students to call in from their cell phones for prizes. It is a great way to kick off the day with laughter and fun. Everyone even participates in some of the popular line dances like the Wobble and Cupid Shuffle.

“Morning Mingle for Statesboro STEAM Academy is a wonderful way for us to build community and comradery, and it is our time to come together and support each other toward a positive start to the school day,” says Mr. Reese.



“Morning Mingle is socially interactive, builds confidence and trust, and creates a cohesive, successful school community.”

The staff shares this infectious mingle wherever they go! I saw this firsthand while attending the 2017 Georgia Charter Schools Conference in Atlanta this past March. The Statesboro STEAM Academy was the highlight at the After Dark Party, and the General Session, when they got up and led several line dances. Educators got an opportunity to see what the Statesboro crew does each morning, and many joined in! Although I initially felt somewhat awkward, I too was drawn to this nonthreatening, harmonious group and joined the dance. It was amazing to see and participate in this positive social connection of ages and cultures spending time together. It's about the community and everyone enjoying each other's company.

As Corliss Reese and Student Services Director Benji Lewis shared, the focus on morale, group interaction, and supportive relationships has proven to be successful for students and staff. Statesboro STEAM is doing great things. It just had its charter renewed for another five years and it continues to build and retain students and staff each school year!

Morning Mingle is socially interactive, builds confidence and trust, and creates a cohesive, successful school community. These elements are crucial to student and staff performance. Statesboro STEAM exemplifies the positive attitude AAE looks for and I am proud to have the entire staff as AAE members! ■



Dana Williams is an AAE regional membership director in Georgia.

“Research has shown that music and dancing help to improve mood and increase happiness while decreasing stress and anxiety.”



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