



A supported workforce is a strong workforce

MISSOURI CENTERS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN ITS PLAN TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN TEACHERS

BY PAUL KATNIK

Like most U.S. states, Missouri is struggling with teacher shortages. In our public schools, which serve nearly 900,000 students, shortages have typically been concentrated in urban and rural

areas, and in content areas of special education, math, and science. Recently, however, shortages have begun broadly impacting more schools in more parts of the state and more content areas.

As sobering as these challenges are, Missouri is committed to efforts that

will result in real change to ensure a well-prepared, stable, satisfied, and high-quality workforce so that all children have access to an excellent education. High-quality, standards-aligned professional learning is a key part of our multifaceted strategy.



UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES

In data collected through Missouri's Core Data Collection System (dese.mo.gov/data-system-management/core-datamosis), three-year trend data for educator vacancies shows a 3% increase of overall vacancies. The shortage issues become more challenging when coupled with a drop of over 30% in appropriately certified applicants for those vacancies — and closer to 40% for our state's top 20 shortage areas.

Some of this shortage can be attributed to declining numbers of teacher candidates entering and graduating from certification programs. The number of teacher candidates who have completed their programs and are now eligible for certification is about 30% less than a decade ago (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022). Although that has increased slightly in recent years, it is still far below where it used to be.

But teacher attrition is a contributing factor as well. In data provided by the Public School Retirement System (PSRS) of Missouri, there was nearly a 10% increase in the number of retirements over

the previous year and close to 23% increase over the year before that. Furthermore, according to a survey by one of Missouri's teacher associations, more than 50% of teachers say they often or very often consider leaving the profession, citing the stresses of poor compensation, student behavior and motivation challenges, and shortages of substitute teachers (MSTA, 2021).

Of particular concern, workforce data, collected through Missouri's Core Data Collection System, highlights low retention rates among early career teachers. Averaging trends from the last six years, half of new teachers have left at or by the end of their third year of teaching, and about 60% have left at or by the end of their fifth year of teaching. As a result, according to data from the Core Data Collection System, 26% of Missouri teachers have fewer than five years of teaching experience and an additional 21% have less than 10 years of teaching experience. This is concerning, given that research has consistently maintained that, on average, students get better learning outcomes from more experienced teachers (Kini & Podolsky, 2016), and almost half of the Missouri teacher workforce has 10 years of teaching experience or less (Missouri

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022).

SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE

These challenges are daunting, but not insurmountable. To address them and strengthen our workforce, Missouri is taking steps to recruit, support, and retain teachers. The State Board of Education established a commission focused on teacher recruitment and retention, and nearly \$55 million has been directed toward recruitment and retention grants to directly address the supply and demand issues of teachers in the state.

This funding includes \$11 million to create and develop grow-your-own programs in 85% of school districts and charter schools, all educator preparation programs, and all community colleges, to develop a cadre of new teachers who will be engaged and invested for the long-term. Forty million dollars in grant funds are being used to increase retention of current teachers through strategies such as mentoring for new teachers and expanding teacher voice and leadership opportunities. Professional learning is a key part of this investment, as research has consistently maintained the positive correlation between high-quality professional

learning, including mentoring, and increased teacher retention (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

The simple truth is that professional learning matters because it improves teachers' knowledge and skills and helps strengthen their problem-solving skills, encourage new and innovative approaches, and revitalize their growth mindset (McCann, 2022). Just as importantly, it shows teachers that we are invested in them and their growth in the profession. We believe it can improve teacher retention as well.

Although professional learning has always been important for improving instruction, providing teachers with effective strategies for managing student behaviors, and addressing the social and emotional needs of students, these areas have become particularly important in the three years since the pandemic started and exacerbated teacher retention issues. The past several years have had a profound impact on students' learning and teachers' working conditions.

Even after students and teachers returned to in-person learning after school buildings closed in 2020, it was anything but business as usual. To address the growing and changing needs of our students, our teachers and leaders must have professional learning and support to be successful with strategies such as intensive tutoring, more effective use of technology, and identifying and addressing student trauma.

ENSURING HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING

Too often, states, districts, and school administrators fail to establish the necessary conditions to ensure that professional learning is high-quality. To ensure that the professional learning we support embodies best practices and impacts teaching and learning, Missouri has established professional learning guidelines.

These guidelines provide information on the mission, mandates, and regulations for professional learning, including the requirement that school districts spend 1% of their

annual state funding on professional learning for their teachers and leaders, information about statutorily required professional development committees, and direction on how to budget funds that will support high-quality professional learning, with resources, tools, and examples of best practices. The guidelines also include information about professional learning roles, responsibilities, and standards, guided by Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

Consistent with the standards, we want to ensure that professional learning is:

- Sustained: extends beyond just the learning activity itself with continued follow-up learning and opportunities for application;
- Intensive: concentrated, thorough, and vigorous;
- Collaborative: includes opportunities for teachers to engage, learn, and interact together to improve teaching and learning;
- Job-embedded: directly focused on the day-to-day teaching practices of teachers and their work with students;
- Data-driven: guides adjustments and modifications to instruction based on formal and informal assessment data; and
- Classroom-focused: is intent on improving the teaching and learning that goes on in students' lives in their classrooms.

EVALUATING OUR EFFORTS

As part of our commitment to ensuring effectiveness, we set up a four-phase external evaluation process for the teacher recruitment and retention grants, which is being conducted by the Community Training and Assistance Center. To date, the phase one and phase two evaluations have been completed (Liang & Slotnik, 2022a; 2022b). Phase one focused on building an initial understanding of the strategies selected by local education agencies

and teacher education institutions, and phase two examined the initial implementation of the grants and early indicators of success. Here are highlights of the phase two evaluation.

The vast majority (95%) of lead contacts at local education agencies reported that teacher retention is essential or high priority in their district. They also indicated that this is a challenge, with about two-thirds saying it is extremely or very difficult to retain teachers in specific content areas and racially/ethnically diverse teachers, and around half saying it is extremely or very difficult to retain male teachers, experienced teachers, and teachers for schools in hard-to-staff locations.

When asked about their approaches to improving retention, local education agencies reported a range of strategies and supports that include professional learning in the form of mentoring and leadership opportunities. They focused not only on instrumental factors such as higher pay and more availability of substitutes, but also creating a culture where teachers feel appreciated and valued, have higher morale, and increased job satisfaction. The following are some of the local education agency lead contact comments noted in the report:

- “We have prioritized giving teachers voices through a teacher leadership team that allows them direct impact on their work environment. Mentor/mentee programs have also been a priority. Having a support system is key.”
- “Teachers feeling supported helps us to retain quality teachers, which ultimately works as a recruitment effort for new staff.”
- “We focus on showing our teachers that they are valued and heard. We intend to promote pride in the profession in our efforts to attract and retain our staff.”

Evaluators examined how many local education agencies reported that they are using the 11 research-based

strategies that the state education department provides for teacher retention, including four that are directly related to professional learning. Forty percent said that they are implementing professional learning to teachers based on needs identified by staff; 27% said they are strengthening mentor programs for early career teachers, and 15% said they are using the funding to provide or increase stipends to the mentors; and 6% said they are implementing professional learning for teachers on strategies addressing the social and emotional needs of their students. Local education agencies with high vacancy rates were particularly likely to focus on the mentoring and needs-based professional learning strategies.

Local education agency lead contacts are generally positive about the quality of implementation of their teacher retention grants so far. Nearly all (93%) said that their local education agencies are implementing the grant as designed. Most (72% to 87%) also believe they are using research-based strategies and technology, assigning sufficient personnel, collaborating with partners for the grant implementation, and using data and evaluation to monitor implementation and impact of the grant. For example:

- “Our qualitative measures include a survey to determine if teachers stayed, in part, because of our retention efforts. The quantitative measures include documenting the number of teachers who stay in the teaching profession at our district each year.”
- “We will monitor the number of participants and retention data of participants. Additionally, survey data will be collected from participants that assess benefits of participation, impact on work satisfaction, and impact on future career plans.”
- “We will compare our teacher retention percentages at the end of next school year to our previous years. We will also look

at how many paras utilize the opportunity to pursue teaching certifications in the next couple of school years.”

Half of local education agencies said they have started to collect the data to measure the impact of their teacher retention grants, and some say they are already seeing early indicators of success, particularly in retaining experienced teachers, teachers in specific content areas, male teachers, and teachers in hard-to-staff locations. These findings should be interpreted with caution because most local education agencies are early in the implementation process and some have not yet begun implementation. Percentages reported in the report therefore do not represent all grantees’ efforts.

In interviews, local education agency lead contacts shared some specific early indicators of success, including the following:

- “A couple of teachers stayed after being recruited by other districts. One factor was the efforts we are making to improve morale and offer another discipline option.”
- “The strategies we have implemented have been beneficial. Exit interviews reflect a high level of satisfaction of teachers with the district and the profession.”
- “Early indicators tell us both teacher satisfaction and student achievement has increased.”

ENCOURAGING RESULTS

Although we are in the early stages of implementing and evaluating our state’s teacher recruitment and retention efforts, we are encouraged by the results so far. The fact that the vast majority of local education agencies, working closely and collaboratively with Missouri’s teacher education programs and community colleges, believe teacher recruitment and retention are high priorities tells us that we have strong partners who are committed to strengthening the teacher workforce.

The third phase of evaluation will take place in spring 2023 when we

compile and analyze the data being collected by local education agencies, teacher education programs, and community colleges. As we move forward with these efforts and with evaluating their impact, we invite other learning professionals to follow along and learn with us.

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- Paul Katnik (paul.katnik@dese.mo.gov) is assistant commissioner in the Office of Educator Quality for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ■**