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May 25, 2022

House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20015

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who teach 50 million students in 14,000 communities throughout America, we appreciate this opportunity to submit comments for the record for the subcommittee's hearing, "Tackling Teacher Shortages."

While we applaud the subcommittee's examination of the teacher shortage, the educator recruitment/retention crisis cannot be fully understood or addressed without also focusing on Title I and Title II and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These laws provide resources for vulnerable students and the dedicated professionals who teach them and nurture their growth. Therefore, we ask again for a robust and sustained federal investment in them to help support all students and address the serious educator workforce challenges we face.

America's unprecedented educator shortage existed before the pandemic and has intensified since it began. Educators have had to work longer hours than ever and adjust to new models of teaching while also struggling to protect themselves from illness and care for loved ones who have fallen ill. [According to a survey of NEA members released in February](#), 55 percent of educators are ready to leave the profession earlier than previously planned—a significant increase from August 2021, when 37 percent were thinking of leaving earlier than planned. A disproportionate number of those weighing other options are Black and Hispanic/Latino educators (62 percent and 59 percent, respectively), who are already under-represented in the profession.

Educators have been leaving the profession for decades for many reasons, including salaries that are drastically out of step with the education, expertise, and experience they bring to the classroom. The [2022 NEA Rankings & Estimates report](#) released in April found that, when adjusted for inflation, teacher salaries have declined by almost 4 percent over the past decade. According to the [2022 NEA Teacher Salary Benchmark report](#), starting teacher salaries, when adjusted for inflation, have fallen to their lowest levels since NEA began tracking them.

While the #RedforEd movement, fueled by the voices of unionized educators and aided by parents, students, and other allies, led to modest salary increases, those gains have steadily eroded in the last two years. Inflation is pushing many educators to financial disaster and forcing them to take on second and third jobs and desperately search for other ways to earn more money. The *Washington Post* recently detailed [the struggles of a Louisiana special education teacher](#) who gives plasma twice a week to earn \$400 monthly. The single mother of two suffers through pain, high blood pressure, and dangerously low protein levels to do this, yet she has little choice. "My paycheck wasn't enough to keep us alive...there is nothing left after I pay bills," she said.

Although educator pay is a state and local matter, we want to alert members of this subcommittee that NEA has joined other organizations in calling on the Department of Labor to eliminate the teacher exclusion from the Fair Labor Standards Act. This exclusion means that teachers, even in places where they are paid on an hourly basis, are denied overtime. We remain committed to raising salaries so that educator pay reflects the value of their work. However, at the very least, teachers who are paid on an hourly basis should be eligible to earn overtime for hours worked beyond the regular workweek.

In NEA's [January survey](#), educators rated raising pay as the most important factor in keeping them in the profession. However, Congress can support legislation and other measures to cultivate, produce, and retain educators.

- Teacher residencies offer classroom experiences and mentorships that help reduce the overwhelming stress that prompts many early-career educators to leave the profession within the first five years. NEA asks that Congress provide \$132 million for the Teacher Quality Partnership Program to help fund residencies.
- Residencies are crucial to educators' success, but they are often unpaid. We ask you to support the Teacher, Principal, and Leader Residency Access Act (S. 3171/H.R. 3244), which would expand Federal Work-Study funds to pay for a portion of the costs associated with residencies. This legislation would give more aspiring educators access to residencies.
- The Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program's mission is to increase the number of minority educators by expanding teacher education programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and minority-serving institutions. NEA asks Congress to provide \$20 million for the program because it is critical to diversifying the educator workforce.
- Grow-your-own programs help find and cultivate would-be educators who want to teach and work in their local communities. Some programs even focus on encouraging high school students to begin considering careers as teachers or other education professionals, helping them prepare for these careers as early as possible.
- High-quality professional development opportunities recognize the importance of continuous learning and skill development to teachers at all experience levels.
- Educators frequently take money from their own household budgets to buy the supplies their students need. The Educators Expense Deduction Modernization Act (S. 3992/H.R. 7395) would increase the amount educators can deduct from their taxes for out-of-pocket classroom expenses to \$1,000, quadrupling the current \$250 deduction.

These measures will help make the teaching profession more attractive and offer support to teachers at every stage of their careers. Students deserve caring, qualified, and committed teachers, and this means working together to ensure that all educators have everything they need to do their jobs well.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
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