



Reimagining the teacher role: How some large and urban districts are enhancing appeal, addressing shortages

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School districts, charter management organizations, and other public school systems face timely and well-documented challenges with their teacher workforce. On the recruiting side, many systems have long struggled with a lack of high-quality candidates [hard-to-staff schools and subjects](#) (e.g. math, special education, bilingual)¹ as well as difficulties [recruiting more teachers of color](#). On the retention side, the pandemic and its prolonged recovery have exacerbated [teacher burnout](#). Teachers complain that the job is too stressful, that it is inflexible and isolating, and that there are few opportunities for growth other than moving into administration. [There is increasing worry](#) that because teaching is no longer seen as a desirable or sustainable job, young adults are shying away from the profession and feeding shortages.

Such big challenges call for big changes. School systems need to reimagine who they hire to educate students, how they design the job, and how they support educators to stay in the profession. With this frame in mind, we studied how large and urban school systems are taking steps to transform teaching into a more desirable and sustainable profession in ways that improve recruitment and retention and ultimately benefit student learning.

Of the 100 large and urban school systems we examined, 97 had strategies to address workforce challenges. But fewer than one in three of those districts were pursuing workforce strategies we would define as new or imaginative—and most focused on recruiting more candidates. Without addressing the root cause of teachers’ dissatisfaction by reimagining teaching, it’s hard to see how adding more candidates is a long-term solution.

What are new strategies for addressing teacher workforce challenges?

To distinguish “big changes” that could better recruit, support, and retain teachers, CRPE synthesized the latest thinking on workforce innovation into a *Typology of Strategies to Reimagine the Teacher Workforce* (see Table 1).² This includes eight broad categories of strategies that school systems are designing or using to address at least one of the big challenges.

This typology aims to capture *new* approaches that are most likely to support reimagining the job of teaching. But in compiling it, we noted that the level of innovation varied within each category.³ For example, while many school systems have long had “pipeline” collaborations with local teachers colleges, here we are working to identify new recruiting programs that are intentionally designed to recruit and train teachers toward a specific instructional vision to accelerate learning or recruitment programs that prioritize candidates with diverse backgrounds or specific expertise that support students’ education—even without a teaching credential. Beyond the common transition from classroom teaching to assistant principal and then school leader, we are looking for new leadership models where teachers participate in school-level decision making to build greater agency within the classroom or with their peers. We also are looking for system-wide approaches to identify and select teachers for leadership development in order to build more equitable access.

Table 1: Typology of strategies to reimagine the teacher workforce

Category	Reimagined Strategy	Traditional Strategy
Redesigned schedules and workload	School system allows all or a subset of schools to flex time, scheduling, and responsibilities.	School system maintains a uniform schedule and workload across schools and only adjusts schedules to create additional time for professional learning.
Redefined teacher requirements	School system removes barriers so that a broader range of individuals can staff or support classes.	School system maintains traditional credentialing for all teachers. School system offers tuition assistance for teachers pursuing credentials.
Collaborative teaching	School system redesigns the role of the educator from individual contributor to member of a collaborative teaching team with teachers, paraprofessionals, resident and specialized teachers dividing responsibilities across a larger roster of students.	School system maintains a model of one teacher, one classroom with a set roster of students.
Intentional teacher recruitment program(s)	School system intentionally recruits a broad range of teachers and other educator candidates (e.g., candidates of color or bilingual candidates) and/or trains educators in new ways of teaching.	School system recruits teachers through traditional means; may have a “pipeline” initiative with a local teacher preparation program but it is not connected to a broader instructional vision.
New teacher leadership roles	School system provides system-wide educator leadership opportunities that allow teachers to grow in their careers without leaving instruction.	School system does not systematically offer new roles to teachers, except through the traditional salary schedule.
Differentiated and personalized teacher development	School system provides system-wide differentiated teacher and educator development opportunities and programs that support leadership development and teachers’ daily work and personal growth.	School system uniformly provides development opportunities and programs to all teaching staff.
Investment in staff well-being	School system intentionally supports school leadership and staff to lead strategies that support staff well-being, inclusivity, and autonomy.	School system provides access to mental and physical health benefits; may provide on-demand counseling, etc. programs but does not systematically support schools to build inclusive or autonomous cultures.
Compensation	School system offers more money to current and new staff in alignment with additional responsibilities or performance that help achieve organizational goals.	School system maintains a traditional salary schedule; may provide one-time hiring or retention bonuses.

Few large and urban districts have adopted big changes to reimagine their teacher workforce

Using our typology, in the fall of 2022, we looked at district information and local media reports regarding 100 large and urban districts’ teacher workforce strategies. As shown in Figure 1 below, we found that districts have adopted relatively few strategies that *reimagine* the teacher workforce. Of these districts, 97 reported having at least one strategy to support recruiting or retaining teachers. Because most districts reported more than one strategy, in total we counted more than 450 strategies across the 100 districts. However, when we reviewed the details of the 466 total policies, only 32% met our standards for a reimagined strategy.

Figure 1: Traditional vs. reimagined strategies to recruit, support, retain teachers in 100 large and urban districts

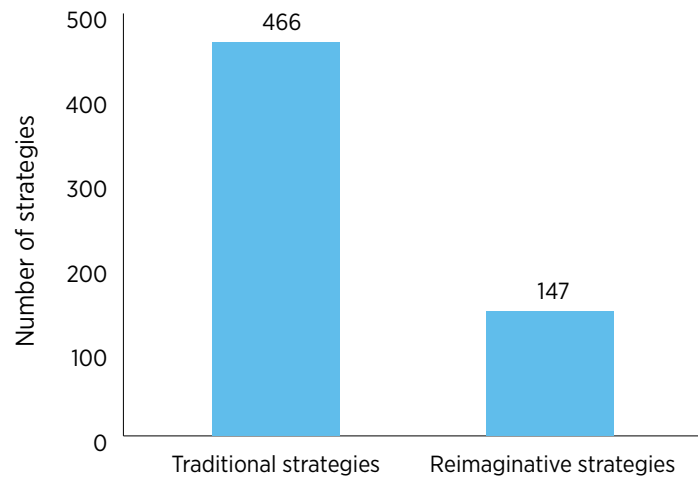
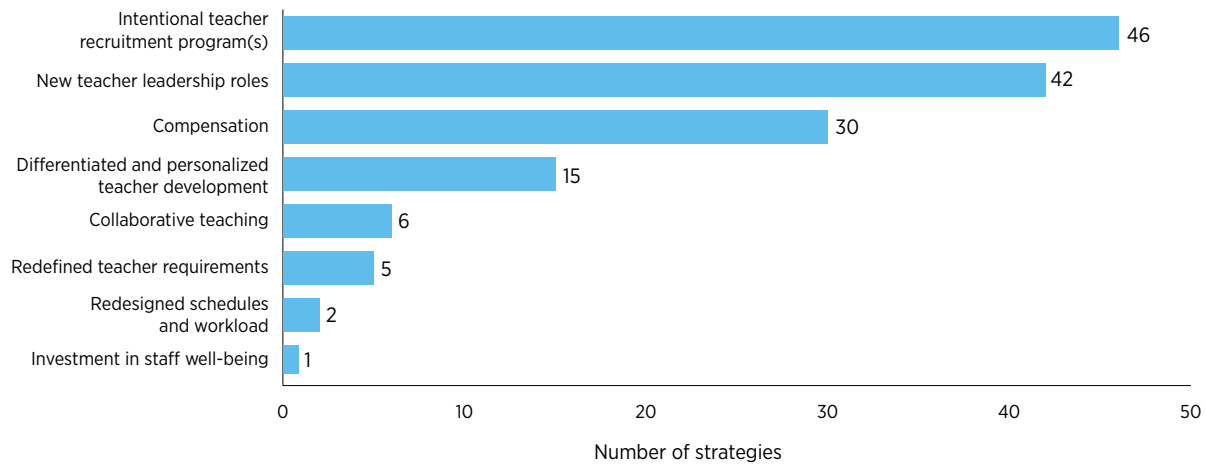


Figure 2: Reimaginative strategies for the teacher workforce from 100 large and urban school districts



Looking inside those 147 strategies that reimagine teaching (see Figure 2), the most common strategies focused on drawing more and different candidates into the profession and then supporting their career growth, with 46 school systems offering intentional educator recruitment program(s). [Newark Public Schools](#) in New Jersey offers a [teaching academy](#) to high school students where they earn college credits in teaching and receive technical support from the American Federation of Teachers. Students who complete the academy receive a teaching contract to work in Newark, executable upon their college graduation. Likewise, 42 systems offer strategies to support new teacher leadership roles, including high-quality mentor roles and opportunities to participate in school decision-making. Systems like [Jefferson County Public Schools](#) in Kentucky offer [mentorship programs](#) where veteran teachers serve as mentors to new teachers and provide coaching, classroom observations, and other support.

Fewer systems reported strategies that make teachers' jobs more doable and sustainable. Only 15 systems offer differentiated and personalized educator development, with most of these systems subsidizing certification programs for educators in high-needs areas, such as special education or secondary math. Similarly, only six systems offer collaborative teaching, like [Mesa Public Schools](#) in Arizona, and only two systems have redesigned schedules and workloads. [Baltimore City Public Schools](#) in Maryland participates in the [Opportunity Culture](#) initiative, where multi-classroom teachers lead collaborative teacher teams and teachers receive tailored coaching and development.

Where to go from here?

These preliminary findings beg the question: while many large and urban school systems are doing something to address teacher workforce challenges, are they doing enough to transform teaching into a more desirable and sustainable profession? The strategies most districts describe are the same strategies they have had for years, often with inadequate results.

Big challenges likely require big changes, but what we see is mostly more of the same.

Further, as [we reported last fall](#), many of the strategies to recruit and compensate teachers are likely fueled by federal Covid-19 relief dollars, and therefore are likely to face cuts in the near future when districts lose these funds.

Our analysis suggests that districts appear to be focused on recruiting more teachers into the profession, but not necessarily on improving the profession itself. Until systems re-examine the role of the teacher and teachers' working conditions, they will not address the root problems driving teachers away from the profession in the first place.

Fundamentally shifting the role of the teacher and working conditions requires fundamental shifts in how districts do business, which can feel daunting to start. However, this is the time to pilot new ideas that reimagine what teaching means and see what “sticks” enough to seed long-term changes later. Districts would ideally work with teachers and students to identify core problems and solutions, and ultimately with partners who have expertise in the areas of greatest need. A [network of support organizations is emerging](#) to provide such guidance, from support in creating [differentiated teacher leadership roles paired with compensation](#), [reimagining the role of the teacher around collaborative team teaching](#), [providing teacher development and leadership](#) anchored on high-quality curriculum, and [reimagining the role of the substitute teacher](#).

Starting in early 2023, we are casting the net wider than these 100 districts to find examples of other school systems that are trying to innovate by reimaging the educator workforce and teacher roles. We will build a [crowdsourced database](#) that will capture emerging and ongoing practices in public school systems (school districts, charter management organizations, and other consortiums of schools) and help explain the current landscape of workforce innovations underway. We will use this database to inform the typology and our evolving definition of workforce innovation at the school system level.

Endnotes

1 There has been debate about not only the nature of teaching shortages, but also whether there is even a shortage of teachers, as many districts have used federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to add teachers and other instructional staff.

2 To create this typology, we reviewed recent news stories, research, and frameworks, as well as conducted interviews with over a dozen organizations, including Arizona State University Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College's Next Education Workforce, BEST NC, Charter School Growth Fund, EdFirst, Education Resource Strategies (ERS), Empower Schools, Empowered Schools, Innovate.edu, Leading Teachers, Learning Accelerator, New America, Opportunity Culture, Teach for America, Teachers 4 Excellence, TeachPlus, and Transcend. We then generated a draft typology of strategies that school systems are using, or could use, to address the teacher workforce challenges they face.

3 It is also worth noting that any typology, by nature of its standardizing and categorizing, [can mask the difference, nuance, and richness inherent in emerging innovations](#).

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