

In June 2024, the University of Nebraska at Kearney's Nebraska Department of Education Teacher Shortage Grant Committee convened a diverse group including teachers, parents, administrators, college professors, representatives from the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Nebraska Department of Education, and the Nebraska Education Association. The committee met to explore strategies and ideas for addressing the teacher shortage. They discussed how various stakeholders—such as parents, school boards, administration, service organizations (e.g., churches, Rotary, YMCA), foundations and nonprofits, school-based practices, and businesses/economic groups—can contribute to supporting efforts to alleviate the shortage of teachers. The goal was to gather information to support communities in their efforts to promote education during the current realities of the educator shortage. These are those results.

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Ideas to address...

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Created together by:







Stay Informed:

Immerse yourself: Spend time at the school! Volunteer, have lunch there, or just observe the environment.

Connect with everyone: Communicate with teachers, administrators, and staff.

Be in the know: Read newsletters, social media, and work assignments.

Spread Positivity:

Be a cheerleader: Share positive stories about the school district and schools on social media.

Support the School:

Help recruit: Participate in interviews as a parent to attract new families.

Get involved: Ensure the PTO/PTA is active and host events like teacher nights.

Show appreciation: Promote staff appreciation through aifts, notes, and events.

Boost Student Success:

Champion attendance: Encourage good attendance habits in your child and the community.

Share the good news: Highlight the amazing work happening in the schools.

Open communication: Advocate for town hall meetings to showcase the schools.

Partner with Your Child:

Set expectations: Discuss success goals with your child. **Be involved:** Attend parent-teacher conferences to stay informed about your child's progress.



WHAT CAN WE DO?				
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SUPPORT IN ACTION-

Sophia Carter, a passionate parent and proud advocate of Maplewood School District, decided to take an active role in supporting her local schools with recruitment efforts. She began by embodying her mantra, "Spread Positivity," and became a vocal cheerleader for the district. Sophia shared heartwarming stories of dedicated teachers, thriving students, and community-focused initiatives across her social media platforms. Her posts, filled with colorful photos and uplifting captions, showcased everything from classroom innovations to heartwarming tales of student success, sparking widespread engagement and painting Maplewood as a place where students truly flourish. The ripple effect was undeniable—her positivity inspired other parents to share their experiences, amplifying the district's reach and reinforcing its welcoming culture.



Making Your School Community Feel at Home:

New Teacher Nights: Host welcoming evenings for new teachers to meet colleagues, administrators, and families.

Veteran Teacher Appreciation: Show gratitude to veteran teachers with special events and recognition.

Connect School and Community:

Community Events: Encourage teacher participation in local events, fostering a sense of belonging.

Quality of Life Showcase: Highlight the community's amazing features (parks, restaurants, activities) to attract and retain talent.

Young Professional Networks: Connect new teachers with young professional groups for social connections.

Local Perks & Discounts: Offer memberships and discounts at local businesses and organizations.

New Teacher Welcome Baskets: Provide information baskets with details about services, activities, and community resources.

Promote Youth Activities: Publicize local youth organizations and activities to attract families with young children.

Childcare Discussions: Facilitate conversations about childcare options for staff with families.

Welcome Lunches: Organize informal lunches for new staff to connect with colleagues in a casual setting.

SUPPORT IN ACTION-

In response to the growing teacher shortage, the small but tight-knit community of Riverbend rallied together to ensure new teachers felt supported and valued from the moment they joined the district. The PTO, local businesses, and district leaders collaborated to launch "New Teacher Nights," a series of welcoming events designed to integrate new educators into the community. The first event was held at the local community center, where teachers were greeted with a warm welcome from students, parents, and administrators. The evening featured introductions to administrators, opportunities to meet veteran teachers, and informal conversations with families eager to share what made Riverbend special. With local favorites donated by area restaurants, new teachers felt embraced by the vibrant, caring community they were now a part of.

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SUPPORT IN ACTION

The community of Oakridge was determined to address the teacher shortage by turning to its greatest strength: collaboration. Recognizing the critical role teachers played in shaping their children's futures, local leaders partnered with area foundations to tackle the issue head-on. At the heart of their efforts was the Educate for Tomorrow scholarship, a long-term solution designed to attract and retain educators in Oakridge. Funded by a mix of private donations and foundation grants, the scholarship offered tuition assistance for college students pursuing teaching degrees, with a focus on those willing to commit to working in the district for at least five years. The program also included a mentorship component, pairing scholarship recipients with seasoned educators for guidance and support. The initiative not only helped ease the financial burden on aspiring teachers but also strengthened their connection to the community.

Investing in the Future:

Foundation Collaboration: Partner with local foundations to address educational needs and community challenges.

Scholarship Power: Advocate for scholarship programs to attract and retain educators, ensuring long-term sustainability.

Empowering Educators: Support innovative teaching grants that foster creativity and elevate classroom experiences.

Welcoming New Staff:

New Teacher Resource Hub: Collaborate with foundations to create a comprehensive online or physical information center for new teachers, including details about local organizations, benefits, and community resources.

Benefits Brochures: Develop clear and concise brochures outlining benefits offered to educators by your school district/community.

Supporting Staff Well-being:

Utilities Connection: Partner with foundations to offer assistance programs to help new teachers connect with affordable utilities.

Teacher Scholarships: Advocate for scholarships specifically aimed at local graduates pursuing careers in education.

Grow Your Own Initiative:

Cohort Power: Explore the creation of a cohort of school foundations in your region to promote "Grow Your Own" teacher programs, nurturing local talent.

Building Community Connections:

PTO & Ministerial Partnerships: Connect with local PTAs/PTOs and Ministerial Associations to build a strong, collaborative network.

Housing Solutions: Collaborate with stakeholders to address housing concerns for educators in your community.

Teacher Welcome Events: Organize community tours, social events, and networking opportunities for new teachers to build connections and feel welcome.



Elevating Standards:

Positive School Culture: Set a clear and positive tone for the entire school district, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Attracting Top Talent:

Quality Recruitment:Be a leader in responsible recruitment practices, actively seeking high-caliber educators.

Competitive Compensation:

Salary and Benefits: Engage in open and transparent discussions about competitive salary schedules and attractive benefits packages.

Teacher Flexibility: Explore innovative salary structures that offer new teachers flexibility and growth opportunities.

Paid Student Teaching: Consider offering paid student teaching positions to attract future educators.

Investing in Professional Development:

Lifelong Learning: Continuously educate yourself on the latest best practices in recruitment and retention.

Collaboration for Success:

Committee Engagement: Actively participate in relevant committees to gain a deep understanding of recruitment and retention needs.

Community Advocacy: Be a strong public advocate for your school district, highlighting its strengths and accomplishments.

Bridging the Gaps: Build bridges between the business and education communities, fostering collaboration for mutual benefit.



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-Support in action-

The Mapleview Board of Education took a proactive approach to combat the teacher shortage by stepping out of the boardroom and into the classrooms. Recognizing the value of firsthand experience, board members began scheduling regular visits to schools across the district. These visits allowed them to observe the challenges and successes of daily life in education, from bustling kindergarten classrooms to advanced high school STEM labs. Board members actively engaged with teachers and students, asking thoughtful questions and taking notes to better understand the support educators needed. The visits not only deepened the board's appreciation for the hard work of teachers but also built trust and communication between educators and district leadership.

To amplify positivity and morale, the board introduced a new initiative during their monthly meetings: a dedicated time for teachers to share highlights from their schools. Educators were invited to speak during public comment periods about achievements, creative projects, or moments of connection that made a difference in their classrooms. Stories of students excelling in innovative programs or the success of a teacher-led mentorship group energized both the board and the community members in attendance. These efforts fostered a culture of recognition and collaboration, showing teachers that their voices mattered and their contributions were celebrated. By prioritizing school visits and highlighting positive experiences, the Mapleview Board of Education not only improved teacher retention but also strengthened the community's faith in its public schools.

Negotiation Strategies:

Open Communication: Advocate for a collaborative and results-oriented approach to negotiation, leaving all options on the table.

Community Leaders: Convene critical community leaders to brainstorm creative solutions to recruitment and retention challenges.

Flexibility and Incentives: Reframe negotiations as a chance to provide teachers with more flexibility and attractive incentives.

Educating the Public:

Community Awareness: Actively educate the community on the realities of teacher recruitment and retention, empowering informed voting decisions.

Board Collaboration: Work with boards to avoid micromanagement and prioritize student needs.

School Visits: Encourage board members to visit classrooms and schools to gain a firsthand perspective on the daily experiences of educators and students.

Positive Reinforcement: Facilitate opportunities for teachers to highlight positive school experiences during public comment periods.

Financial Investment:

Financial Incentives: Consider strategic financial incentives to attract and retain high-quality teachers.

Supporting Educators:

Mentorship Programs: Actively promote and support mentoring programs for new teachers.

Teacher Advocacy:

Be a Vocal Champion: Publicly advocate for teachers and address the national teacher shortage, both on social media and in traditional media outlets.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO GET THE BEST FOR OUR STUDENTS?	



Investing in Our People:

Mentorship Matters: Implement a robust mentoring program that pairs experienced teachers with early career educators, providing valuable support and guidance.

Building Connections:

Culture of Collaboration: Foster a culture of connection and strong relationships between teachers, staff, and administrators. This creates a supportive network for everyone.

Supporting Success:

Navigating the Job: Equip teachers and staff with tools and resources to address the complex challenges of the educational profession.

Spreading the Word:

Social Media Savvy: Leverage social media platforms to tell a positive and engaging story about your school district, attracting talented new teachers.

Grow Your Own: Target and maintain positive relationships with students who show potential for future careers in education.

College Connections: Actively participate in college and university recruitment events to connect with future

Partnerships for Progress: Develop collaborative partnerships with colleges and universities to create seamless pathways for aspiring educators.

Onboarding Excellence:

Mentoring & Onboarding: Streamline a comprehensive onboarding process that includes mentoring support for new teachers.

Public Advocacy:

The Power of Storytelling: Engage in public outreach initiatives to share the unique and compelling story of your school district. Be proud of what you offer!

Setting Expectations:

Behavior Management: Provide clear and consistent expectations for student behavior, creating a positive learning environment for all.

Positive Culture is Key:

Cultivate Positivity: Continuously work to build a positive school culture that fosters collaboration, respect, and inclusivity.

Open Communication:

Effective Communication: Establish clear and consistent communication channels with staff and the community.

Embrace Feedback: Utilize communication tools to spread positive messages about your schools. Regularly survey staff and be receptive to constructive feedback.

Instructional Leadership:

Lead by Example: Serve as an instructional leader who inspires continuous improvement and professional growth.

Professional Development:

Engaging Learning: Offer high-quality professional learning opportunities that are positive and beneficial to staff.

Building Relationships:

Relationships Matter: Prioritize building strong relationships with all stakeholders - teachers, staff, students, parents, and the community.

Creating a Positive Environment:

Fun & Connection: Implement initiatives like breakfast clubs, school-wide fun days, and teacher/staff lunches to foster connection and boost morale.

Childcare Considerations: Explore options for schoolbased childcare solutions to support the needs of staff with families.

Positive Parent Engagement: Cultivate positive relationships with parents through effective communication and engaging activities.

School Culture Activities: Organize regular school culture building activities to foster a sense of community and shared purpose.

Mentorship is **Key**:

Investing in New Teachers: Implement a strong mentoring program for new teachers, providing them with the support they need to thrive.

SUPPORT IN ACTION-

Faced with the challenge of a growing teacher shortage, the leadership team at Sunrise Valley School District knew they needed a proactive solution to support earlycareer educators and help them thrive. They launched the Mentorship Matters program, pairing seasoned teachers with new hires to create a network of support, guidance, and professional development. To recognize the additional time and effort required, the district offered mentors a stipend, demonstrating their commitment to valuing and compensating the contributions of veteran educators. The program matched mentors and mentees based on grade levels, subject areas, and personal interests, ensuring the partnerships were meaningful and effective. Veteran teachers welcomed the opportunity to share their expertise, offering advice on everything from lesson planning and classroom management to balancing the demands of teaching with personal well-being. Weekly check-ins, classroom observations, and collaborative problem-solving sessions created a strong foundation of trust and camaraderie.

The impact of Mentorship Matters was immediate and transformative. New teachers reported feeling more confident and less overwhelmed, citing their mentors as instrumental in helping them navigate their first year. Experienced teachers found renewed purpose in their roles, inspired by the fresh perspectives and energy of their mentees. School administrators further supported the program by hosting quarterly workshops where mentors and mentees could collaborate, celebrate successes, and discuss strategies for overcoming challenges. By investing in mentorship and rewarding the dedication of veteran educators, the district not only reduced teacher turnover but also fostered a culture of collaboration and continuous growth. Sunrise Valley's commitment to its educators ensured that students would benefit from a dedicated, skilled, and supported teaching staff for years to come.

BRAINSTORM IDEAS		
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Investing in Educators:

The Power of Mentorship: Highlight the critical need for mentorship programs to support early-career teachers, fostering their growth and success.

ESU Partnerships: Forge strong partnerships with local Education Service Units (ESUs) to leverage their expertise and resources.

Professional Development:

Quality Matters: Prioritize high-quality professional development opportunities that are relevant, engaging, and contribute to teacher effectiveness.

Teacher Voice: Actively seek teacher input when developing and implementing educational policies.

Supporting Growth:

Induction & Advancement: Develop comprehensive induction programs for new teachers and promote opportunities to pursue Master's degrees for salary advancement. Consider offering financial support for relevant college credit.

Positive Classroom Management:

Empowering Policies: Implement supportive policies and resources to address classroom behavior and student engagement effectively.

Wellbeing Matters:

School Climate Focus: Make school climate a top priority, fostering a positive and inclusive environment for all.

Mental Health Support: Partner with local health systems to provide accessible mental health resources for staff and students.

Creative & Engaging Environment:

Positive Energy: Cultivate a creative and positive school environment that inspires both students and educators.

Mentorship in Action:

Strategic Mentorship: Establish a strategic mentorship program that matches mentors with mentees based on needs and expertise.

Incentivize Mentorship: Offer incentives (e.g., time off, professional development stipends) to attract and retain high-quality mentors.



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Onboarding Success:

New Teacher Orientation: Streamline a comprehensive new teacher orientation program that equips educators with the tools and resources they need to thrive.

Empowering Staff:

Empower Hour: Dedicate time for "Empower Hour" where teachers can focus on professional growth activities of their choice.

Open Communication:

Feedback Loop: Regularly survey staff, actively read and review results, and demonstrate a commitment to acting on constructive feedback.

Work-Life Balance:

Leave Practices: Review leave policies to ensure they support staff needs and allow them to attend important student events.

Attracting Talent:

Student Teaching Appeal: Enhance the student teaching experience by offering attractive housing and stipends, making it a more appealing career pathway.

Signing Bonuses: Consider offering signing bonuses to attract top talent, particularly in hard-to-staff areas.

-SUPPORT IN ACTION-

Meadowbrook High School faced a growing teacher shortage, but its leadership team tackled the challenge by focusing on creating a positive and inclusive school climate. They began by partnering with a local health network to provide free, on-site mental health counseling for both staff and students, ensuring support was always within reach. To foster a welcoming environment, the school launched a "Wellness Wednesdays" initiative, including mindfulness workshops, staff appreciation lunches, and student-led activities that celebrated diversity and inclusion. Teachers felt valued and supported, knowing their well-being mattered just as much as their work. This focus on mental health and community transformed the school climate, making their school a place where educators wanted to stay and thrive.



Addressing Key Needs:

Housing & Childcare Conversations: Facilitate open conversations about supporting teacher housing needs and access to childcare options.

Housing Solutions:

Beyond Spec Homes: Explore alternative housing solutions beyond traditional spec homes to offer a wider range of housing options for educators.

Community Tours: Organize community tours for new teachers to showcase neighborhoods, parks, and other desirable aspects of your community.

Promoting Remote Work:

Broadband Boost: Advocate for increased broadband internet access to facilitate remote work opportunities for educator spouses.

Connecting New Teachers:

Young Professionals: Actively engage with young professional organizations to connect new teachers with social and networking opportunities.

Community Engagement:

Plan Community Events: Organize events that introduce new teachers to local attractions, restaurants, and cultural experiences.

Community Partnerships: Forge strong partnerships with community organizations to offer resources to schools, such as meal programs and memberships.

Highlight Resources: Proactively promote available resources to local schools, such as teacher discounts and business memberships.

Supporting Spouses:

Employment Opportunities: Communicate with local businesses about educator spouse job needs and explore options for hiring spouses with relevant skill sets.

Building a Supportive Network:

Teacher Appreciation Programs: Implement teacher discount and business incentive programs to show appreciation.

SUPPORT IN ACTION-

In the face of a teacher shortage, Brookhaven School District realized that attracting and retaining educators required addressing challenges beyond the classroom. Many teachers cited rising housing costs and limited childcare options as significant barriers to staying in the community. To tackle these issues, the district initiated Housing & Childcare Conversations, a series of forums designed to gather input from educators and collaborate on practical solutions. Administrators, teachers, local housing authorities, and childcare providers came together to brainstorm ways to support teachers' needs. Through these discussions, the district partnered with local landlords and developers to secure affordable housing units specifically for educators, offering reduced rental rates and streamlined application processes.

On the childcare front, the district worked with community organizations to expand access to quality childcare. They negotiated discounted rates for teachers at local childcare centers and explored the possibility of opening an on-site childcare facility at one of the schools. These initiatives were coupled with a listening campaign, ensuring teachers could voice their concerns and ideas throughout the process. The result was a stronger sense of community and support for educators, many of whom expressed gratitude for the district's efforts to address their challenges. By focusing on housing and childcare, Brookhaven not only alleviated stress for its teachers but also reinforced its commitment to making the district a place where educators could build both their careers and their lives.

Shared Responsibility:

Community Sense: Collaborate with schools to foster a strong sense of community where everyone feels invested in education.

Chamber Collaboration:

Scholarship Opportunities: Work with the Chamber of Commerce to establish scholarship programs that support future educators.

Business Partnerships: Develop partnerships with local businesses to promote careers in education within their companies.

Grants & Funding:

Grant Opportunities: Explore grant funding opportunities to support teacher housing initiatives and other education-related projects.

Teacher Voice Matters:

Inclusive Representation: Ensure that not only administrators but also teachers are included in discussions about educational needs and strategies.

Career Pathways:

Career Ed Permit: Advocate for the Career and Education permits to attract more individuals to the teaching profession.

Welcoming Touches:

Welcome Baskets & Gift Cards: Provide welcome baskets or gift cards to new teachers to show appreciation.

Teacher Recognition:

Special Discounts & Recognition Events: Secure special discounts from local businesses and organize breakfast/lunch events to celebrate educators.

Teacher of the Year Award Sponsorship: Partner with local businesses to sponsor a "Teacher of the Year" award.

Media Partnerships:

Local News Collaboration: Work collaboratively with local newspapers to highlight positive stories about teachers and schools within the community.

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Together we can help our school!

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The University of Nebraska at Kearney offers a comprehensive range of academic opportunities, including 81 undergraduate majors, 32 graduate majors, 23 preprofessional programs, 7 undergraduate certificates and 4 graduate certificates across dozens of disciplines. Whether you're interested in science, technology, business, arts, social sciences, humanities or education, UNK provides the programs to jumpstart your future and position you to enter your career with less debt and more experience.

Power of the Herd

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While one can be strong, together we are unstoppable. That's the Power of the Herd.



College of Education

UNK began preparing teachers in 1905 and the reputation of the College of Education as the premiere institution in Nebraska for future teachers is more true today than ever! Our five departments prepare talented young people from around Nebraska and the region to become athletic trainers; family scientists; early childhood, elementary, middle or high school teachers as well as offer opportunities in recreation and event management, exercise science, health and physical education, sports management, and communication disorders.

In addition, our graduate programs offer pathways to careers in speech-language pathology, clinical mental health counseling, school psychology, counseling, and higher education student affairs.

Departments & Programs

Communication Disorders Counseling, School Psychology and Family Science Educational Administration Early Childhood Inclusive Family Science Kinesiology and Sport Sciences Teacher Education Transitional Certification Program





Brainstorm: what are we currently doing?

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Brainstorm: what can we do moving forward?



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