



**Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Education Committee Members**

Testimony on Teacher and School Personnel Shortage

presented by

**The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
March 15, 2022**

Good morning Chairman Sonney, Chairman Longietti and distinguished members of the House Education Committee. My name is Dr. John Sanville, Superintendent of the Unionville-Chadds Ford School District and President Elect of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). I am here today representing PASA, whose members include school district superintendents, assistant superintendents, executive directors and other public-school system leaders from across Pennsylvania. I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the teacher and school personnel shortage that is negatively affecting our schools across the Commonwealth.

The Economic Policy Institute reports that Since February 2020, the two major industries that have suffered the largest losses in the economy have been (1) leisure and hospitality and (2) state and local government—with the lion's share of state and local government losses occurring in K–12 education. As of December 2021, public elementary and secondary school employment was down 376,300 (or 4.7%) from its February 2020 level on a seasonally adjusted basis. This would be devastating under normal circumstances; it is even worse in this moment when schools likely need *more* staff than usual to operate with pandemic safety protocols, to try to make up for lost learning over the past two years, and to provide counseling and support to millions of children traumatized by loss and isolation. The Institute further projects there will be a demand for approximately 300,000 new teachers nationwide by 2024 but just over 100,000 trained teachers to fill those positions.

Enrollment in Pennsylvania Teacher Preparation Programs is down about 67% over the past decade according to the U.S. Department of Education. In the 2010-11 academic year, Pennsylvania granted 21,045 new education certifications. By the 2019-20 academic year, that figure had dropped to just below 7,000. That drop wasn't fueled by the pandemic. In the three years before COVID arrived, Pennsylvania granted an average of 7,350 education certifications per year. Pennsylvania was once one of the largest exporters of certified teachers to other states. Today, our colleges and universities are barely certifying enough teachers to fill the openings in the Commonwealth.

The United States Department of Education (USDE) provided a list of the highest teacher shortage certification areas earlier this year. Several subject areas have been troublesome to fill prior to the pandemic such as special education, secondary mathematics, secondary science, English as a second language and world languages. Surprisingly, early childhood education and elementary education certifications have now been added to the list, which is a stunning development. A few years ago, it would have been common to receive well over a hundred applications for an elementary teaching opening in most districts and now many states are reporting a shortage in this certification area. This speaks to the gravity of the teacher shortage.

In my district, the number of qualified applicants for our elementary positions has declined. Additionally, we have had to continue to repost positions in special education, business and computer science, and English as a Second Language to find qualified candidates. All the while, having to make due with substitutes teaching these classes that are not certified in the subject area for an extended period of time.

USDE further defines some of the more problematic data regarding the teacher shortage. Teacher turnover rates are 50% higher in Title I schools. Those teaching in schools with a student population that has more than 25% students of color are more likely to leave teaching and turnover rates are 70% higher for teachers in these schools.

The Department also reports that teachers working in a district with a maximum salary greater than \$72,000 are 20%-31% less likely to leave their schools than districts with a maximum salary under \$60,000. The Economic Policy Institute states that inadequate pay is a long-standing issue for teachers. Their research indicates that K-12 teachers are paid 19.2% less than similar workers in other occupations. The pay issue coupled with the recent health and

safety issues associated with the pandemic has given pause to individuals considering teaching as a profession or caused current educators to look for employment in other career areas.

In addition to the teacher shortage, substitute teachers have become very difficult to employ. This was an issue before the pandemic and has been exacerbated by the pandemic. The same reasons as to why individuals are leaving teaching or not entering teacher preparation programs are causing a steep decline in those willing to serve as a substitute teacher. The pay tends to be very low for the education required to serve as a substitute teacher and the added health concerns related to working in schools during the pandemic caused many individuals to seek work elsewhere, often at higher pay.

At Unionville-Chadds Ford we have had to continue to raise substitute teacher compensation as districts compete against one another for this limited resource, leaving school districts with fewer financial resources with even greater substitute needs. Our substitute fill rate is down to a daily average of nearly 80%, even with increased compensation. Even more challenging for us has been finding substitutes to fill longer term absences for medical or child rearing leaves. These positions are typically 8-12 weeks in duration and require substitutes to teach, assess, and move forward in the curriculum - when these substitutes may not always be certified in the specific subject. Coupled with the lower rates of pay for substitutes across the board, it is very challenging to find substitutes willing to teach, plan, and assess for a longer duration without close to equivalent daily pay for the job and/or benefits. Finally, some of our openings have required substitutes to plan, write, and implement IEP and/or LIEP plans, hold IEP meetings, and monitor student progress as required by the contracted staff member. Many substitutes do not have the skill or background to fill these important positions. This is not sustainable and we anticipate it will continue to get worse.

PASA is grateful to the General Assembly and the Governor for the passage and signing of Act 91 of 2021 that provides temporary flexibility for retired educators to serve as substitute teachers without affecting their pensions and educators with inactive certificates to substitute teach for 180 days per school year instead of limiting it to just 90 days. It also allows students enrolled in teacher preparation programs to substitute on a limited basis by meeting some minimum course requirements. This legislation is helping to provide some relief to the substitute teacher dilemma in many Pennsylvania schools but is not the long term answer.

As we look at other school personnel shortages, the hardest hit group has been school bus drivers where we have seen a nationwide reduction of more than 14% in our bus drivers. School custodians have also seen a reduction of 6% in their workforce. Many of the individuals working in these positions tended to be older and had concerns about working in schools and with children who were mostly unvaccinated for much of the pandemic. Again, other employment opportunities became available to many of these workers at higher pay and in a lower health risk environment resulting in them leaving school district employment.

In my district, we have multiple vacancies for bus drivers, custodians and food service workers that we cannot fill. These roles are integral to the daily operations of our schools. We are down approx 20% of our second shift custodial staff. These are the staff that ensure the buildings are clean and healthy for staff and student use the following day. Our administrators are driving vans and serving food to pick up the slack.

We are not seeing any applicants for these positions. Disparity of starting hourly rates at neighboring districts, creates a rotating shift of staffing out of lower paying districts and into higher paying districts. Local private businesses (Walmart, Target, etc.) raising starting rates above school districts rates, deters any would be candidates. Increased inflationary pressures are more likely to force additional support labor towards leaving, for increased pay, in order to support their families as the basic cost of living increases

Take home pay is further reduced by required pension contributions. In our current inflationary environment, our lowest paid staff are just looking to survive day to day and need money in their pocket not in their future pension fund, so they are taking jobs elsewhere. Less school district employees contributing to the pension puts added fiscal pressure to meet future pension obligations.

The critical shortage of mental health professionals is also concerning. Students' mental health needs are growing exponentially - COVID-19 has only exacerbated these needs. Pennsylvania has 422 child psychiatrists for its 2.7 million children and youth.

In Chester County, legislative delegation and commissioners recently met with school superintendents to discuss solutions to address the critical shortage of mental health professionals. We asked the legislators in attendance to create incentives for those who go into the mental health field. Consider loan forgiveness programs, and provide scholarships to college students enrolled in mental health professional programs. Encourage the use of integrated care

models, develop additional psychiatric residency programs, increase funding and availability of tuition repayment programs, consider limiting increases in tuition at Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Schools, encourage educational institutions to recruit students from communities that are underserved, and provide affordable or subsidized housing options and tax incentives to practice in Pennsylvania.

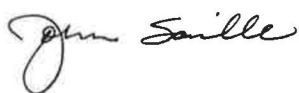
Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the compounding effect of the teacher shortage on school leadership positions. Just as there are fewer individuals wanting to become or remain teachers, there are fewer teachers interested in becoming building principals. The National Association of Secondary School Principals projects that 38% of principals will leave their positions in the next three years and there is concern that it will be very difficult to fill that many positions.

PASA has reported that 97 of the 500 superintendent positions turned over in the 2021 calendar year and it is projected that 2022 will result in a higher turnover rate. Consequently, with fewer teachers wanting to become principals, there are fewer principals and central office administrators wanting to become superintendents. Many superintendent search consultants are reporting that it is becoming more difficult to secure a sufficient pool of qualified candidates for superintendent openings.

We understand that there are no quick fixes to the school personnel shortage situation. Our hope is that some of the shortage will be corrected once the pandemic has finally subsided and we are able to return to a more normal work and school environment. We also believe that efforts need to be made at the national, state, and local level to spotlight the education profession as a noble career choice for those seeking a fulfilling career. There is no greater honor than helping to educate the next generation of America's children and we need to provide the appropriate incentives to attract bright, motivated, and dedicated people into the profession.

I appreciate the opportunity to share this information with the Committee and PASA looks forward to working with the General Assembly to improve and advance the education of our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Sanville".

John Sanville, D.Ed.