Michigan’s Educator Pipeline: A Look at the Crisis

When it comes to addressing Michigan’s educator shortage, there are many common factors at play:

- Wages are inadequate to meet the level of student loan debt many teachers must incur to be fully trained and effective, and don’t compete with the starting salaries of other, similarly-educated jobs.
- Educators lack strong career pathways and opportunities for advancement if they want to remain in the classroom.
- The work is arduous, stressful, and demanding—and the rewards are simply inadequate to reflect this reality.
- Students deciding whether to pursue careers in teaching often are discouraged by the observed experiences of the educators in their own lives.

A Damaged Teacher Pipeline

College students choosing their future careers opt out of teaching in favor of what they perceive as more flexible, lucrative professions they see as promising robust opportunities for growth and personal expression.

The challenges faced by newly-minted teachers force many of them (44%) to abandon the job within the first five years.

Many candidates opt out when they realize they must pay for extra time in college to obtain their student teaching experiences, and/or when they recognize the true nature of the work during their field placements. Students need to have exposure to practical teaching experiences in diverse places earlier in their training—and be able to declare education as a major in year one.

Those who make it into the profession quickly recognize there is a huge gap between their wages and the student loan debt they incurred getting there.

Seeking greater autonomy and impact, many classroom educators take advantage of opportunities to become school and district administrators or pursue other opportunities outside of K-12.

Mid-career, educators feel they have lost the joy they once found in their work. Their cynicism is transmitted to newer educators.

What’s needed today:

- While deep systemic changes will take years—if not decades—to achieve, there are some critical inflection points that can deliver strong results very quickly:
  - Teaching fellowships, similar to those implemented successfully in other states, can help offset the cost of teacher preparation for willing candidates.
  - The state’s investment in teachers will send the strongest possible message that the profession is valued and necessary for a stronger Michigan.
- Support effective teacher retention incentives, such as stipends and research opportunities.
- Create a public service campaign to help attract and retain skilled educators.
- Support upskilling and credentialing opportunities for those already working with students in schools (e.g., para-pros).

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