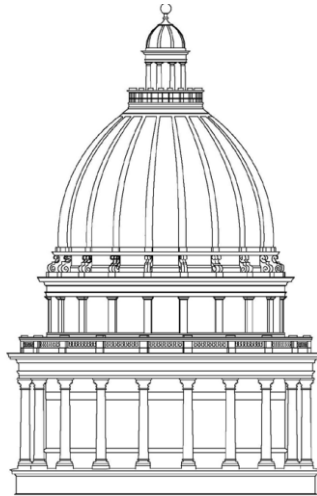


REPORT TO THE  
**UTAH LEGISLATURE**

Number 2021-13



**A Performance Audit of Teacher Retention  
Within Utah's Public Education System**

December 2021

Office of the  
**LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR GENERAL**  
State of Utah





STATE OF UTAH

# Office of the Legislative Auditor General

315 HOUSE BUILDING • PO BOX 145315 • SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84114-5315  
(801) 538-1033 • FAX (801) 538-1063

## Audit Subcommittee of the Legislative Management Committee

President J. Stuart Adams, Co-Chair • Speaker Brad R. Wilson, Co-Chair

Senator Karen Mayne • Senator Evan J. Vickers • Representative Brian S. King • Representative Mike Schultz

KADE R. MINCHEY, CIA, CFE  
AUDITOR GENERAL

December 7, 2021

TO: THE UTAH STATE LEGISLATURE

Transmitted herewith is our report, **A Performance Audit of Teacher Retention Within Utah's Public Education System** (Report #2021-13). An audit summary is found at the front of the report. The objectives and scope of the audit are explained in the Introduction.

We will be happy to meet with appropriate legislative committees, individual legislators, and other state officials to discuss any item contained in the report in order to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kade minchey".

Kade R. Minchey, CIA, CFE  
Auditor General





## PERFORMANCE AUDIT

### ▶ AUDIT REQUEST

This is the fourth of six public education audits stemming from the comprehensive audit request we received in 2019.

This audit report is an overview of teacher retention, shortages, recruitment, and teacher perspectives in the state of Utah.

### ▶ BACKGROUND

**Utah Code** outlines the importance of maintaining a public education system that attracts, prepares, inducts, and retains excellent teachers for every classroom. It further asserts that the Legislature expects every classroom to be staffed by a skilled and effective teacher. Quality data, analysis, and reporting are needed to ensure the state is achieving these goals. There is currently little available published data on teacher retention, recruitment, and shortages, leaving knowledge gaps for both the Legislature and the public in these areas. Research surrounding these topics is often done on a national level, but understanding teacher shortages on a local level helps to drive targeted policy.

Future audits will be conducted in the following areas:

- Student, educator, and administrator performance
- LEA administrative costs

# Teacher Retention Within Utah's Public Education System



## KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ At a state level, Utah's teacher turnover is one of the lowest in the country. However, new teacher turnover is higher than most national averages in studies we reviewed.
- ✓ Teacher shortages are local and occur more frequently in rural school districts.
- ✓ USBE has done very little formal and publicly available analysis on teacher retention and shortages. Other neighboring states report more complete information on teacher retention and shortages.
- ✓ Teacher salaries remain a priority for state and local leaders, making Utah teacher salaries in line with national averages. Also, given low per-pupil spending, Utah students still perform exceptionally well.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ We recommend USBE work with the Legislature to determine which teacher retention analyses are needed and, in cases where data is not available, which need better collection and reporting.
- ✓ We recommend USBE and LEAs establish a common method to evaluate and track teacher shortages and vacancies.
  - USBE should report shortage information to the Legislature to create better targeted policies.
- ✓ We recommend the Legislature consider targeted policy options to address teacher stresses and concerns.



## REPORT SUMMARY

### *Retention Efforts Should Primarily Focus on New Teachers*

While overall teacher turnover is low in Utah, teacher turnover in the first five years is generally high. The average teacher turnover for the first five years of the 2016 cohort is 42 percent. This is higher than national averages which range between 17 and 46 percent. Nonprofessionally licensed teachers have higher turnover rates than those with a professional license. Additionally, turnover rates vary by Educator Preparation Programs. We recommend USBE work with USHE and the Legislature to determine how to transparently share and improve teacher retention in the state.

[Teacher Turnover Dashboard](#)

### *Better Data on Teacher Shortages Can Guide Targeted Policies*

Teacher shortages exist in many parts of the state and mostly in rural LEAs. USBE defines a teacher shortage as

an LEAs inability to fill a vacancy with a professionally licensed teacher. We used the same definition for our report. There has been no comprehensive tracking of teacher shortages or vacancies up until this point; therefore, the Legislature has little evidence to quantify the teacher shortage and provide targeted polices to LEAs.

[Teacher Shortage and Vacancy Dashboard](#)

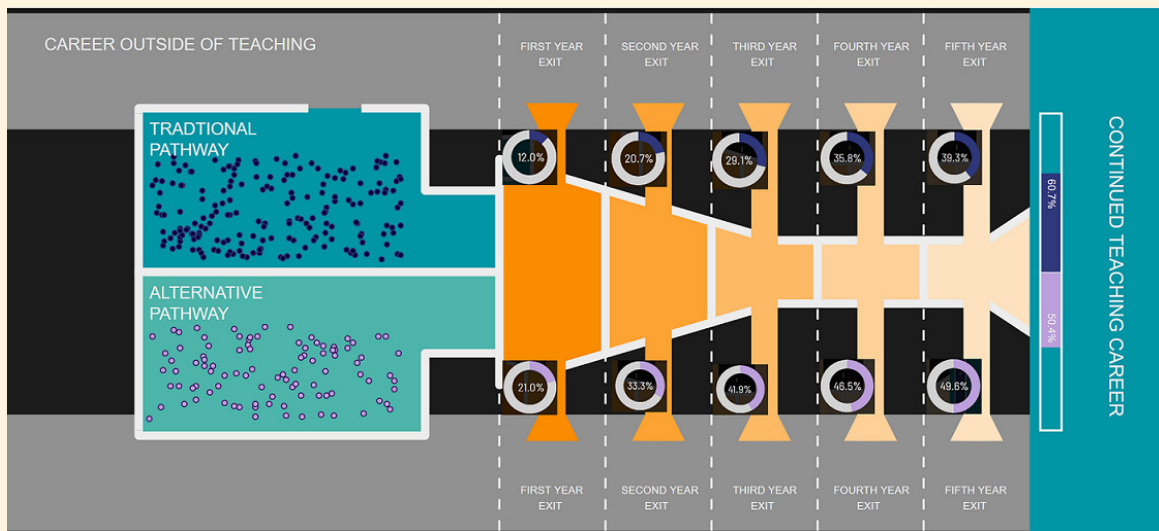
### *Teachers Report Stress and Workload Concerns Above Pay*

We conducted 212 interviews with teachers about their perspectives on the teaching profession. Our analysis found that most teachers were concerned with stress, workload, administrative support, and salaries. The Legislature and districts often prioritize funding for teacher salaries, making Utah’s starting salaries for teachers competitive nationwide. We recommend the Legislature consider other policy options to address teacher stresses and concerns.

[Teacher Interview Dashboard](#)

### *Utah’s Teacher Career Pipeline*

A high percentage of teachers leave Utah’s public education system during the their first five years. Turnover rates vary by pathway and college-based preparation programs. Teachers coming from non-traditional pathways often have higher turnover rates.



Click on figure to access dashboard

# REPORT TO THE UTAH LEGISLATURE

Report No. 2021-13

## **A Performance Audit of Teacher Retention Within Utah's Public Education System**

December 2021

Audit Performed By:

Audit Manager	Leah Blevins, CIA
Audit Supervisor	Matthias Boone, CFE
Audit Staff	McKenzie Cantlon Skylar Scott
Data Analyst	Wei Li





# Table of Contents

Chapter I  
Introduction..... 1

    Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Shortages  
    Are a Relationship of Supply and Demand..... 1

    The Legislature Is Interested in Attracting and Retaining Excellent Teachers ..... 3

    This Report Is the Fourth in a Series of Public Education Audit Reports ..... 5

    Audit Scope and Objectives..... 6

Chapter II  
Retention Efforts Should Focus Primarily on New Teachers ..... 7

    Utah Generally Does Well at Retaining Teachers at the Aggregated  
    State Level, but Turnover in Some Local Areas Is High ..... 7

    Retention Efforts Should Be Focused on Teachers’ Early Years ..... 11

    Further Data Analysis Can Reveal  
    Targeted Ways to Support Teachers ..... 16

    Recommendations..... 20

Chapter III  
Better Data on Teacher Shortages Can Guide Targeted Policies..... 23

    Utah Statute Focuses on the Need for  
    Prepared Teachers in Every Classroom ..... 23

    Data on Vacancies and Shortages Indicate More  
    Nonprofessionally Licensed Teachers in Certain Districts ..... 24

    Regional Teacher Shortages Lead to Recruitment Challenges ..... 31

    Policymakers Need Additional Data on Supply and  
    Demand to Fully Address Teacher Shortages..... 32

    Recommendations..... 36

Chapter IV  
Teachers Report Stress and Workload Concerns Above Pay ..... 37

    Interview Results Identify Work Stressors as Major Concerns ..... 37

Teacher Salaries Are a Priority for State and Local Leaders.....	41
Recommendation .....	46
Appendix.....	47
Agency Responses .....	51

# Chapter I

## Introduction

Utah lacks adequate data to fully understand how to attract and retain excellent teachers. Recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers is critically important to the success of all students in the public education system. Legislative, state, and local education stakeholders all play an important role in collaboratively providing support to maintain the most qualified teacher workforce possible.

### **Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Shortages Are a Relationship of Supply and Demand**

National teacher shortages and low teacher retention rates are often highly publicized issues, and a great deal of research is conducted on these topics. For example, sources predict the United States will face a shortage of 200,000 teachers by 2025 if policy makers and public education leaders do not act. However, such estimates are difficult to measure and predict due to the complex and interrelated nature of teacher recruitment, retention, and shortages. Further, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions at a national level for issues that may be more rooted at the local level.

**Research Demonstrates the Critical Role of a Teacher.** Several studies show that little within the school system plays a stronger role on positive student outcomes than a teacher. Other studies we reviewed specific to teacher recruitment, retention, and shortages find the following:

- Higher turnover leads to shortages within the teacher workforce and increased prevalence of teachers with limited experience and temporary licenses.
- Teacher turnover is disruptive and is more pronounced in economically disadvantaged schools and districts and in specialized subjects.
- One study found that the estimated cost to replace each teacher who leaves an urban school exceeds \$20,000.

---

**Teacher retention and shortages are often highly publicized topics, but it is difficult to draw conclusions at a national level for issues that are more locally rooted.**

---

---

**Generally, teacher turnover is disruptive, costly, and can lead to teacher shortages within LEAs.**

---

---

**We surveyed LEAs throughout the state and interviewed over 200 teachers to understand their perspectives.**

---

The concepts of recruitment, retention, and shortage, therefore, have implications on the availability of teachers at the state and local level. Because of this, during this audit we interviewed as many teachers as possible to gain insights into their teaching experience. We sampled school districts throughout the state and interviewed more than 200 teachers, counselors, and principals. These interviews, coupled with available data on teacher supply and demand, have been valuable in understanding these concepts and could prove useful in future policy consideration.

**Concept Definitions Are Separate but Related.** Concepts surrounding the teacher workforce can be understood through the principles of supply and demand. Teacher supply consists of new, retained, and out-of-state teachers. Teacher demand is created by teacher turnover and variations in student enrollment. A change in any of these variables can lead to either a shortage or surplus of teachers. Definitions of teacher retention and shortages are important and can vary from state to state and study to study. Figure 1.1 details the definitions we use in this report.

---

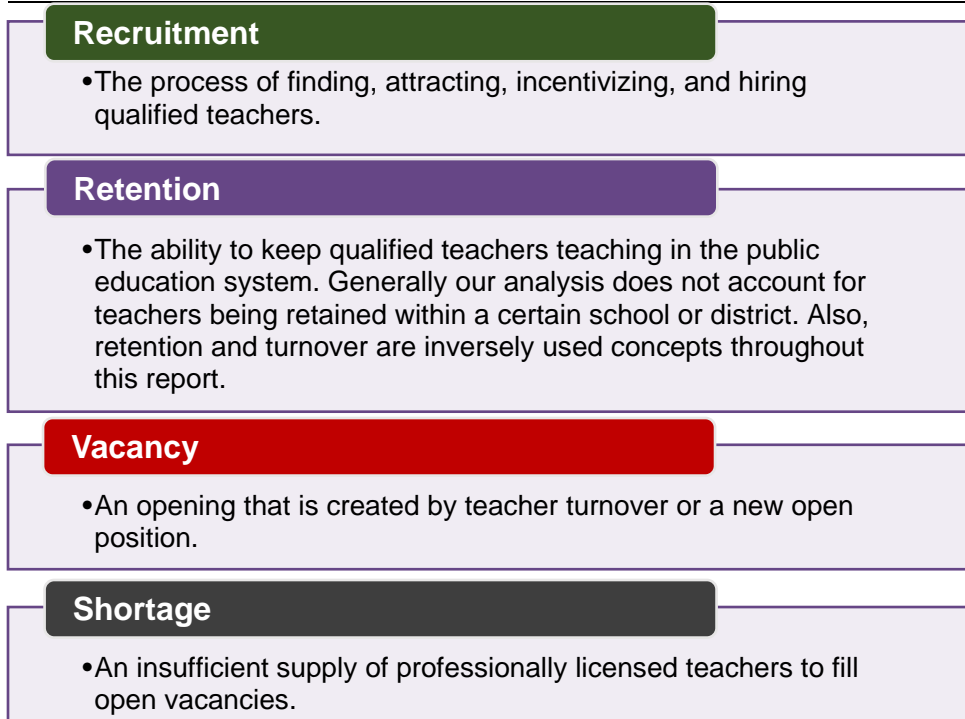
**Figure 1.1 Terminology Used in This Report Is Distinct but Related.** These concepts may be defined differently by other entities.

---

---

**Although definitions vary from study to study, this report focuses on broad definitions for teacher recruitment, retention, vacancy, and shortages.**

---



*Source: OLAG generated, based on a review of applicable literature.*

Teacher vacancies, and how they are filled, are indicative of a teacher shortage. Shortages happen when the supply of new, returning, or retained qualified teachers does not meet the demand of schools and districts in the state.

**Teacher Shortages Are a Local Issue.** While the concepts of teacher shortages, vacancies, retention, and recruitment are often researched on a national or state level, these challenges are specific to regions, districts, schools, subject areas, and local demographics. For example, research shows that schools in rural areas or with higher percentages of low-income students often face greater difficulties in finding and keeping teachers. Our review supports this finding, as rural Utah communities are more likely to experience a teacher shortage.

Additionally, due to differences in funding, state demographics, and the structures of a states' public education systems, comparisons among states and between districts may not always be appropriate. Nevertheless, this audit report includes some comparisons to provide context to policymakers.

## **The Legislature Is Interested in Attracting and Retaining Excellent Teachers**

The Utah Legislature has great interest in maintaining “excellent” teachers to teach in the classroom. By statutory design, education stakeholders at the state and local level are charged with affecting improvements in these areas. Utah-specific research on this topic is limited but provides additional insight.

### **Education Stakeholders Should Be Invested in These Concepts**

*Utah Code* notes that “...the public education’s mission is to assure the best educated citizenry in the world.” Statute further outlines how this is to be accomplished, as shown in Figure 1.2.

---

**Due to important differences between states, some comparisons may not always be appropriate; however, this audit seeks to provide context to policy makers, where possible.**

---

The Legislature has codified the need to attract and maintain excellent teachers, which requires investment from stakeholders at each level.

**Figure 1.2 Utah Code Specifies the Legislature’s Desire To Support Excellent Teachers for Utah Classrooms.** This goal is accomplished at many levels, including thorough data analysis, reporting, and funding.

**“The Legislature shall assist in maintaining a public education system that...attracts, prepares, inducts, and retains excellent teachers for every classroom in large part through collaborative efforts among the state board, [USHE], and school districts...”**

Source: Utah Code 53E-202(7) with emphasis added.

This report focuses on the roles of the Legislature, the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE), and local education agencies (LEAs). We believe these stakeholders are, and should continue to be, invested in the concepts highlighted in this report.

### **Utah-Specific Information on These Topics Is Emerging**

Although this report highlights gaps in the data available to policy makers, there are some recently published reports specific to teacher recruitment, retention, and shortage in Utah. Below is a summary of entities that have produced additional information on these topics.

- **The Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC)** most notably released, in partnership with USBE, two reports: *Teacher Turnover in Utah Between 2013–14 and 2014–15* and *Why Do Teachers Choose Teaching and Remain Teaching?*<sup>1</sup>
- **Engagement and Exit Surveys** were created by HB130 in the 2019 General Legislative Session and are intended to ask teachers—those that are leaving and others that are staying—

<sup>1</sup> Y. Ni, R. Yan, A. K. Rorrer, and A. Nicolson. *Teacher Turnover in Utah between 2013–14 and 2014–15*. Utah Education Policy Center (Salt Lake City: Utah Education Policy Center, 2017).

Y. Ni and A. K. Rorrer. *Why Do Teachers Choose Teaching and Remain Teaching? Initial Results from the Educator Career and Pathway Survey (ECAPS) for Teachers* (Salt Lake City: Utah Education Policy Center, 2018).

about their experiences as a teacher. Work is also ongoing to set baselines to compare future responses over time.<sup>2</sup>

- **Utah Leading Through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic Education (ULEAD)** released a report in May 2019 that discusses “strategies, policies, and incentives” that help support teacher recruitment and retention efforts.<sup>3</sup>
- **Envision Utah’s Teacher Compensation Task Force** released a report in 2019 focused on strategies to attract and retain teachers, with a prominent focus on increasing teacher compensation.<sup>4</sup>

These reports, and others, provide Utah-specific information and strategies to help support teachers. While we did not audit this information, we occasionally draw from this research to provide additional commentary throughout this report.

## **This Report Is the Fourth in a Series of Public Education Audit Reports**

In its August 2019 meeting, the Legislative Audit Subcommittee prioritized a “...comprehensive audit of the performance outcomes of the public education system.” Legislative leaders further outlined their desire for our office to specifically review recruitment and retention practices, both monetary and non-monetary. In response to this request, this report represents the fourth in a series of six audit reports on public education. Additional public education audits will be released in 2022 that include a review of 1) student, educator, and administrator performance and 2) administrative overhead costs in traditional and charter schools.

Student, educator, and administrator performance is a larger concept that is closely related to teacher retention in Utah. An analysis of this relationship will provide insights to better understand how Utah is doing at attracting and retaining high-quality and high-

---

<sup>2</sup> K. Dupree, J. Hernandez, and J. Throndsen. *Educator Engagement and Exit Survey Report* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Board of Education, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Utah State Board of Education: *Teacher Recruitment and Retention, A Best Practices Report* (Salt Lake City: Hanover Research and ULEAD, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Envision Utah. *A Vision for Teacher Excellence* (Salt Lake City: Envision Utah, 2019).

---

**There is some existing Utah-specific literature; however, this report highlights the need for ongoing analysis to better inform policy.**

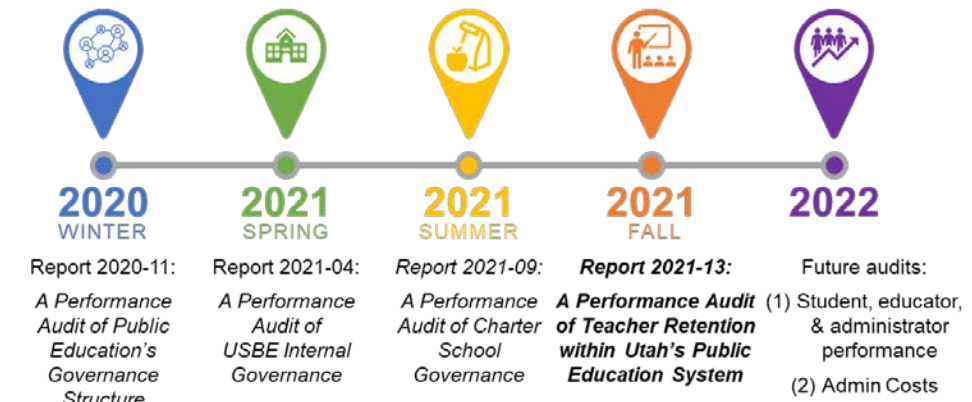
---

**This audit is the fourth of a series of audits of public education. Two remaining audits will be released next year.**

performing teachers in the system. Because of the large scope of both audits, performance and evaluations needed further review and will be released next year.

Figure 1.3 provides an overview of completed and projected audit reports related to the Legislature’s original audit request.

**Figure 1.3 This Is the Fourth Audit Report in a Series of Six Projected Reports.** Future audits will focus on student and educator performance and administrative costs in schools.



Source: OLAG generated.

## Audit Scope and Objectives

The Legislative Audit Subcommittee requested this audit to review the status of teacher recruitment and retention throughout the state. This report focuses on the following questions related to teacher recruitment, retention, shortages, and perspectives.

Chapter II: Is there a teacher retention issue at the state or local level? Do policymakers have the most accurate, up-to-date information to best inform policy decisions and keep teachers in the classroom?

Chapter III: Is there a shortage of qualified teachers in the state? What barriers exist to understanding teacher shortages?

Chapter IV: What are the primary concerns of teachers as they consider whether to stay in the classroom or leave? How well does Utah compensate teachers, compared with compensation in other states?



## **Chapter II**

# **Retention Efforts Should Focus Primarily on New Teachers**

Because misperceptions about teacher retention are common among education stakeholders, it is important to provide context. Utah’s overall teacher turnover rate is encouraging and is among the lowest in the country. However, a deeper look shows that the turnover rate for those in their first five years of teaching is 43 percent, which is at the high end of the national range (17 to 46 percent) for new teachers.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, retention of new teachers is an important policy issue for the Utah Legislature and for education leaders at the local level.

This chapter highlights opportunities to better implement comprehensive, “data-driven strategies” to recruit and retain effective teachers. The Legislature identified this need in 2001 and subsequently codified it in statute. We recommend that the Legislature determine if more analysis and transparency on these topics are warranted in efforts to provide better teacher support where needed.

### **Utah Generally Does Well at Retaining Teachers at the Aggregated State Level, but Turnover in Some Local Areas Is High**

Among teachers, there is a misperception that teacher turnover is high. Approximately 78 percent of teachers we interviewed believe retention is an issue. While some states experience teacher turnover that exceeds 20 percent, Utah’s average turnover rate of 9.2 percent since 2012<sup>6</sup> is one of the lowest in the country. In Utah, teacher retention also compares favorably against the state employee turnover rate (14 percent), and two-thirds of school districts do not report turnover as a problem. However, at the local level, teacher turnover is

---

<sup>5</sup> Teacher retention/turnover was calculated by reviewing teaching status within the public education system from year to year. This included whether the teacher received wages and had an active license each year. Further analysis on “educator” retention at the district and school level, which includes administrators, counselors, and other staff, may be helpful.

<sup>6</sup> We distinguish cases where charter school data was not available by referring to the entities only as “districts” instead of “LEAs.”

---

**This chapter provides context for Utah’s teacher turnover and identifies areas where data can better shape policy to support teachers.**

---

---

**In 2001, the Legislature identified the need for data driven strategies to better recruit and maintain teachers; however, this is not being fully accomplished.**

---

an issue in some areas. While statewide averages are favorable, some rural districts struggle with higher turnover; targeted policies in these areas may warrant further consideration.

### **There Are Misperceptions About Teacher Turnover**

While retention data suggest that the teacher turnover rate in Utah is lower than that of other states, Utah teacher perceptions of the severity of the problem differ greatly from actual numbers. In interviews with 212 Utah teachers, we asked “In your opinion, is retention an issue among teachers?” Of those who responded, 78 percent indicated that retention is an issue to some degree. Local news agencies have also reported on teacher turnover but often fail to clarify that statewide turnover compares well against what is seen nationally. This misalignment of perception may present challenges for the profession and necessitates further context and analysis.

While turnover within any job and industry is an expected reality,<sup>7</sup> we acknowledge that turnover is often disruptive and, for public education leaders, can make it difficult to fill vacated positions.

### **Utah’s Turnover Rates Are Comparatively Low**

Surrounding states that publicly post their turnover numbers have higher rates than Utah in years available for comparison. In Utah, teacher turnover averaged 9.2 percent from 2012 through 2021. This number has remained relatively constant, ranging from 8.7 to 9.8 percent over the last nine years, demonstrating that Utah’s workforce of approximately 32,000 teachers is fairly stable. Surveys administered by the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), first conducted in the 2019-2020 school year, found that teachers planning to leave the

---

**Despite low overall numbers, many believe that turnover is a problem for all Utah teachers.**

---

---

**Utah’s nine-year average teacher turnover rate is 9.2 percent, demonstrating that Utah’s long-term workforce of 32,000 teachers is relatively stable.**

---

---

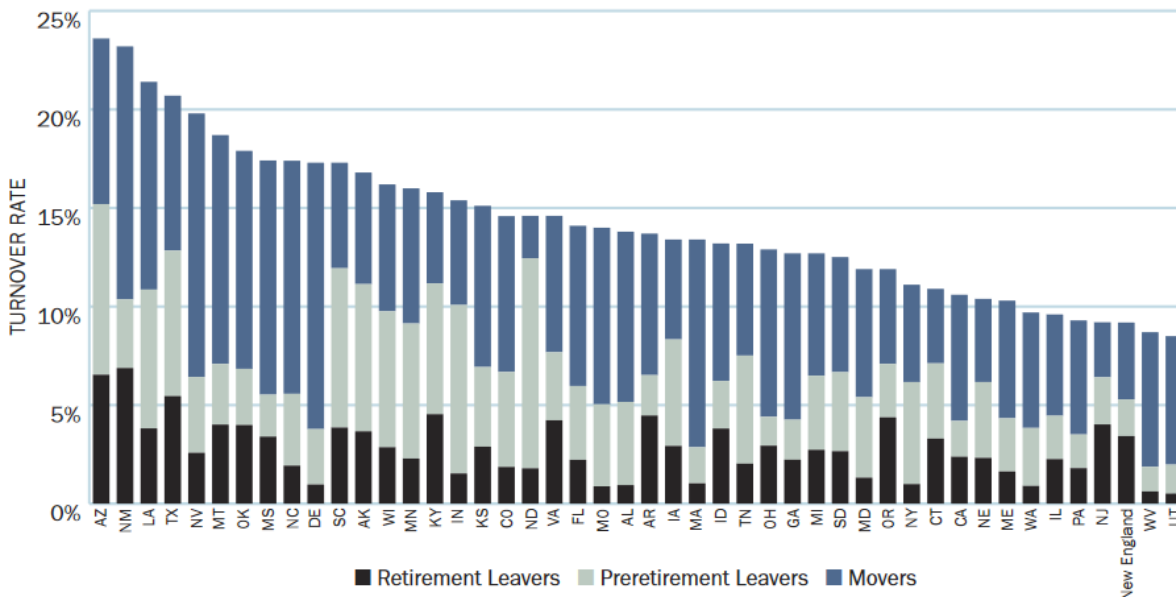
<sup>7</sup> Turnover is not always negative and can, at times, be healthy. Teachers may start teaching, then determine that it is not what they want in a career, and quit. Others, who have been identified by school leaders as less effective or unfit for the job, may have not had their teaching contracts renewed. Even though teachers who leave under these circumstances may not be well suited for the classroom, their departures are nonetheless reflected in the turnover numbers.

profession do so between 7 and 10 percent, similar to the historical 9.2 percent turnover rate.<sup>8</sup>

In a separate study from 2017, the Learning Policy Institute compared state teacher turnover among all states, based on retirees, preretirement leavers, and movers, and found that Utah had the lowest turnover rate. Interestingly, Utah’s surrounding states were among those with some of the highest turnover rates. Summary findings from this study are shown in Figure 2.1.

**A recent study found that among all states Utah had the lowest turnover rate. Utah’s 9.2 percent teacher turnover rate is also lower than the 14 percent state employee turnover rate.**

**Figure 2.1 Utah Teacher Turnover Rates Compare Favorably against Those of Other States.** One study found that Utah had the lowest teacher turnover rate in the country.



Source: Learning Policy Institute, *Teacher Turnover, Why it Matters and What We Can Do About It*. August 2017.

In addition to the state-by-state comparison of turnover rates, we compared teacher turnover rates against statewide data provided by Utah’s Division of Human Resource Management. Although not a perfect comparison, Utah’s 9.2 percent teacher turnover rate is below the overall 14 percent turnover rate among state employees.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Teacher Exit and Engagement Surveys were required with the passage of HB130 in the 2019 General Legislative Session. The purpose of these surveys is to allow USBE to collect more data to better assess why teachers leave the profession.

<sup>9</sup> This comparison was made between permanent “core” state employees who were in permanent job schedule codes.

---

**Because districts experience teacher turnover differently, turnover is more appropriately observed at the local level rather than in statewide retention numbers.**

---

Click or Scan for  
Teacher Turnover, Shortage,  
and Vacancy Map



## **Teacher Retention Is a Local Issue**

Two-thirds of the local education agencies (LEAs) we surveyed are not concerned with teacher turnover. We administered a survey to all LEAs in July 2021 about several topics, including their experience in recruiting and retaining teachers. When asked, “Does your LEA/district have an issue retaining teachers?” 67 percent of respondents<sup>10</sup> did not express concern with teacher turnover or consider it a significant issue.

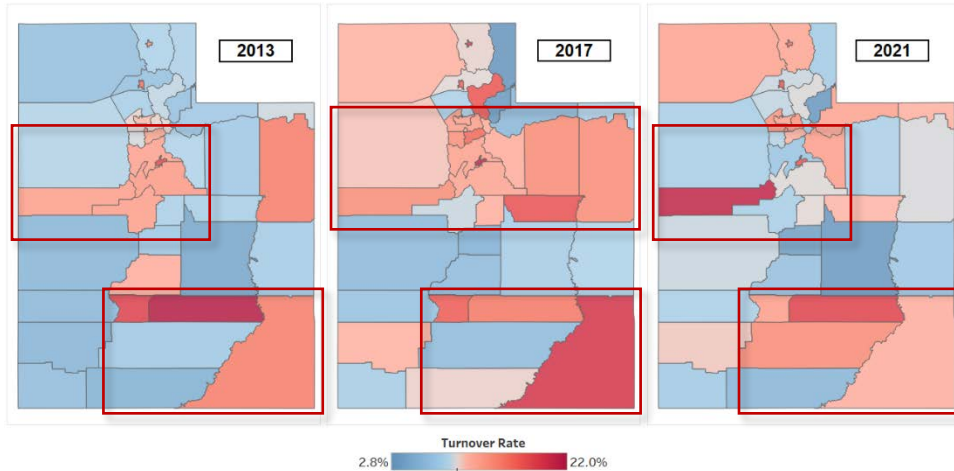
However, while most LEAs surveyed did not express concern about teacher turnover, 33 percent did. Concern was slightly higher in rural districts than in urban districts. These findings suggest that teacher turnover may be more appropriately observed at the local level rather than in statewide retention numbers.

This point is further confirmed by USBE’s numbers, which show that turnover rates vary among districts and often are higher in some rural counties. Figure 2.2, and the interactive dashboard linked to the left, show those districts (in red) with higher turnover rates than the state average (9.2 percent), spanning every four years between school years 2013 and 2021.

---

<sup>10</sup> Survey respondents were district human resources directors.

**Figure 2.2 Though Not Strictly a Rural Issue, Higher Teacher Turnover Rates Are Evident in Outlying Areas of the State.** The teacher turnover dashboard (see link on previous page) shows district-by-district numbers, including those districts with high turnover, such as in central and southeastern Utah. Areas in pink/red show the highest turnover.



Source: OLAG-generated from LEA survey responses.

Data within the interactive dashboard show higher turnover rates in some rural counties, including Juab, Piute, Wayne, and San Juan counties in central and southeastern Utah. However, some rural counties—such as Emery, Rich, and Washington county—experience some of the lowest turnover in the state. The data displayed in Figure 2.2 illustrate variation in how LEAs experience teacher turnover, reinforcing the importance of evaluating retention at the local level. We believe this data can help both rural and urban districts identify ways to better retain their teachers.

## Retention Efforts Should Be Focused on Teachers' Early Years

Detailed analysis reveals specific areas in which there are more severe problems with teacher retention. For example, turnover is high in the first five years of a teacher's career. The average turnover rate for the first five years of a recent cohort of new teachers is 43 percent. This is higher than most national studies we reviewed for new teachers, which range from 17 to 46 percent. Also, teachers entering the profession through pathways other than a traditional college preparation program have higher turnover rates. Rates also vary depending from which university a teacher graduated. We recommend

**Publishing local level turnover rates may assist some districts, including those in rural areas, in determining the best ways to retain teachers.**

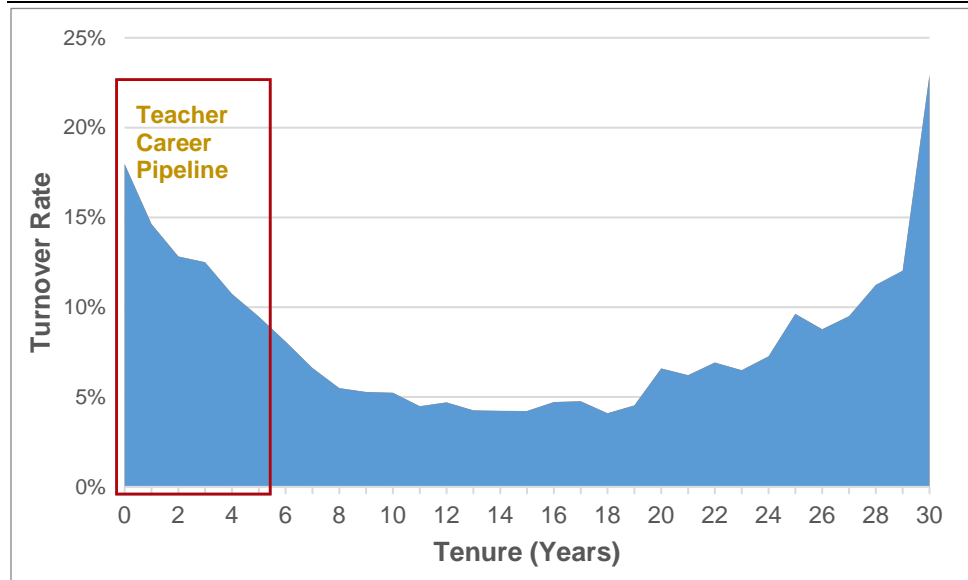
**Contrastingly, new Utah teachers leave at high rates compared to national studies we reviewed. There are opportunities to better support teacher in their early years.**

the Legislature, USBE, and the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) focus their policy efforts on improving retention in the first five years of a teacher's career.

### **Policymakers Should Increase Efforts to Support Teachers in Their Early Years**

For the 2016 cohort of beginning teachers,<sup>11</sup> the turnover rate in the first five years averaged 43 percent. The literature is mixed on national turnover rates for teachers in their first five years, but some reports place the average range between 17 and 46 percent. This suggests that the turnover rate for new teachers in Utah is on the high end of the average range. Figure 2.3 shows the turnover rates of Utah teachers at various points in their tenure, indicating particularly high rates among new teachers.

**Figure 2.3 USBE Data Shows High Turnover at the Beginning and End of a Teacher's Tenure.** This analysis shows the percentage of teachers, by years of service, who left their tenure between 2014 and 2019. Our teacher career pipeline visualization focuses on the first five years of Utah teachers' careers.



Source: USBE's Comprehensive Administration of Credentials for Teachers in Utah Schools (CACTUS) Teacher Licensing System for those who taught from 2014 to 2019.

As can be expected, teachers leave after a long career, often for retirement considerations. The red outline in Figure 2.3 indicates that a high percentage of teachers also leave within their first five years of

<sup>11</sup> A cohort is a group of new, incoming teachers. We used the 2016 cohort of teachers because it is the most recent for which we have a full five years of data.

The most recent teacher data suggests that 43 percent of Utah teachers leave after five years of teaching, which is high compared to many studies we reviewed.

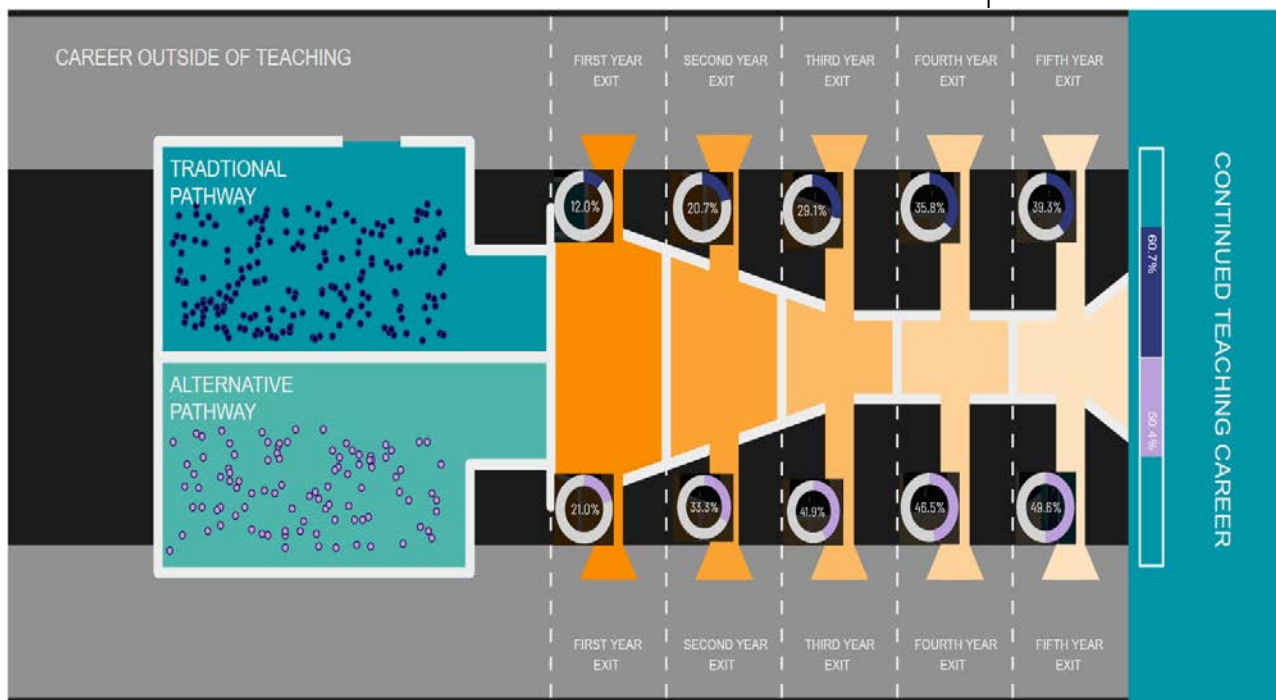
A large number of teachers leave teaching in the first five years, and this pattern is consistent over time.

Click or Scan for Teacher Career Pipeline



teaching. This pattern is consistent among cohorts. Because turnover is notably higher in the first five years, we analyzed the 2015-16 cohort of teachers to view five years of data. To illustrate this period of high turnover for new teachers, we created a visualization of Utah’s teacher career pipeline to show both the progression and turnover of new teachers within Utah’s public education system. The link to access this figure is located on the previous page.

**Figure 2.4 The Teacher Career Pipeline Illustrates That a Large Percentage of Teachers Leave the Profession within Their First Five Years.** Also, traditional teachers leave at a lower rate compared to those who took an alternative pathway to teaching.



Source: OLAG analysis of USBE CACTUS data.

The interactive figure shows a high percentage of teachers leaving public education in years one through five, separated by the pathway they took to become teachers. As discussed in the next section,

**USBE data shows that new teacher turnover varies significantly depending on which path they took to teaching.**

teachers pursuing non-traditional pathways generally have much higher turnover rates than other teachers.<sup>12</sup>

**Retention Varies Significantly Depending on a Teacher’s Pathway to Teaching.** USBE data show that professionally licensed teachers remain in the teaching workforce at much higher rates than nonprofessionally licensed teachers who entered the teaching workforce via other pathways.<sup>13</sup> We reviewed turnover differences among the 2015-16 cohort based on these two pathways. Five-year turnover rates for this cohort are shown in Figure 2.5.

**Figure 2.5 Turnover Rates for Professionally Licensed Teachers Are Historically Much Lower Than Rates of Those Initially Permitted to Teach without This License.** In this 2015-16 cohort, 92 percent of teachers are professionally licensed.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Professionally Licensed</b>	8.7%	15.5	20.7	25.2	29.5
<b>Initially Nonprofessionally Licensed</b>	23.0%	35.1	42.6	46.9	50.0

Source: USBE CACTUS data by school year.

\* Retention rates may be impacted due to the nature of some nonprofessional licenses. For example, some nonprofessional licenses may be approved for only three years and teachers may decide to not renew their license.

<sup>12</sup> Initially we had envisioned including data showing salaries for those who left versus those who remained in teaching careers. We also wanted to indicate teachers who earned their license, but never taught. To do this, we worked with the Utah Data Research Center (UDRC). Unfortunately, through no fault of UDRC, we were unable to accurately match the UDRC data to USBE teacher data, and thus we were unable to provide the information originally envisioned. If we were able to access UDRC data and align it with the USBE CACTUS data within this report, we could have made those connections and provided the intended information to policymakers.

<sup>13</sup> Professionally licensed teachers are those who have completed a traditional university Educator Preparation Program or have finished an USBE-approved alternative program and have been granted a professional license.

Nonprofessionally licensed teachers are people who have entered the teaching workforce via other pathways and can hold any of the other license types, including the associate and LEA-specific licenses created in 2020.



As Figure 2.5 illustrates, in each of the last five years, turnover rates for the 2015-16 cohort show a difference of nearly 20 percentage points between professionally licensed and nonprofessionally licensed teachers. Chapter III discusses how Utah's teacher workforce is increasingly composed of higher proportions of these nonprofessionally licensed teachers. We believe hiring more of these teachers, given the patterns of higher turnover, may be a compensatory tradeoff. In other words, if the turnover trends in this cohort continue and more nonprofessionally licensed teachers are hired, then retention of teachers may become more of a concern. Further analysis would be required to fully understand how licensure level impacts retention. We recommend that USBE compare the impacts of new licensure changes on teacher retention and review turnover rates by teacher pathway over time.

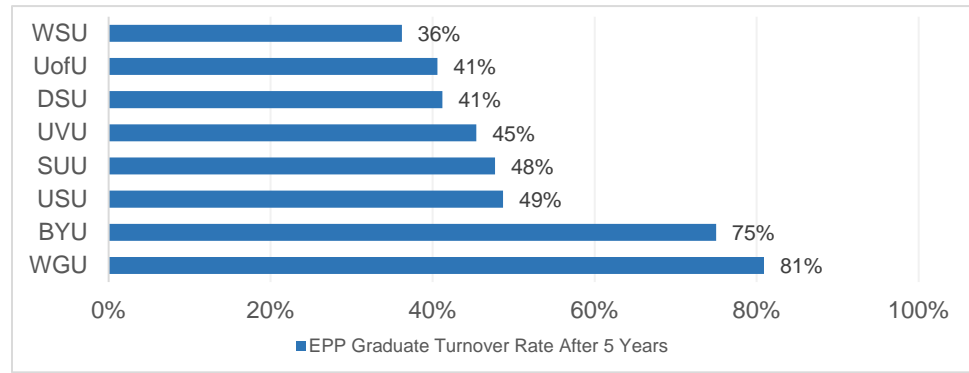
**Turnover Rates Vary Greatly among Graduates from Different Universities.** Teacher retention varies depending on the university where the teacher completed their Educator Preparation Program (EPP). Figure 2.6 depicts turnover rates after five years of working as a teacher, by university EPP.

---

**There is a significant difference in turnover between those who start teaching with a professional license and those who start without one. We recommend USBE further review this trend.**

---

**Figure 2.6 Education Preparation Programs Are Associated with Different Turnover Rates among Teachers.** Though valid explanations exist, this may be an area of focus for future research and improvement. Weber State graduates had the lowest rates of teacher turnover for the time period we studied.



Source: USBE CACTUS data. EPPs with 50 or fewer graduates were not included in this analysis.

Differences in teacher turnover rates among EPPs listed in Figure 2.6 may be the result of different student populations. Furthermore, proportional differences of out-of-state students (who may go on to work out of state), student demographics and backgrounds, and career paths may not be evenly distributed among each university. The locality of turnover (mentioned previously) can also affect retention from each university. As this data is already captured by USBE, we recommend that USBE continue to work with USHE to provide additional work in this area, including performing this study on a regular basis. Doing so will help policy makers determine whether this is a persistent issue.

Although there have been efforts to target support for new teachers, we believe these data show that continued focus on the first five years of a teachers' career is an area that can best help teacher retention over the long term. We recommend the Legislature, USBE, and USHE focus their efforts on improving retention in the first five years to determine if improvements should be made.

### Further Data Analysis Can Reveal Targeted Ways to Support Teachers

Little ongoing analysis is being performed to better understand teacher supply and demand issues within the state. Some existing Utah data could be used to better drive the Legislature's desire for

**There are also differences in turnover rates depending on from which college-based educator preparation program the teacher graduated. We recommend USBE and USHE provide additional analysis in this area.**

“...comprehensive...data-driven strategies” that are focused on supporting teachers. As demonstrated in this chapter, deeper analysis of teacher retention, recruitment, and shortages may help target policy to areas of need. For example, most of the information in this chapter came from USBE’s CACTUS database but was not consistently analyzed or transparently shared. Among the states we reviewed, Utah reports comparatively little information on teacher retention. We recommend that the Legislature determine if more analysis and transparency on these topics are warranted to make better system-wide decisions.

### **Utah’s Data Analysis Is Insufficient to Target Policy**

*Utah Code* 53E-2-301 notes the Legislature’s desire to help maintain a public education that “...attracts, prepares, inducts, and retains excellent teachers...” In 2001, the Legislature also codified a need in *Utah Code* 53E-6-103 for a “...comprehensive continuum of data-driven strategies” focused on teacher recruitment, induction, and other supports. However, we believe the lack of comprehensive data on these topics prevents this mission from being fully realized. Instead, statewide policy may be based on the needs of a single LEA, outside associations, or bills passed by other states.

Since the 2016 General Legislative Session, the Legislature has considered approximately 45 bills directed at assisting teachers. Bills that were proposed include initiatives related to salary supplementals or bonuses, scholarships, classroom supplies, loan programs, retirement, data collection, mentorship, and licensing.<sup>14</sup> However, without sufficient and transparent data, there is a risk of not fully addressing or directing funding to actual needs. We believe that if better analysis were available, policymakers would be able to better determine which of the many bills and proposed bills from prior Legislative Sessions are most effective at helping retain teachers.

Consideration of specific monetary or nonmonetary methods to attract and retain teachers may be inadequate until more data are available to understand specific statewide and local concerns.

---

<sup>14</sup> Of the 45 bills, 33 were enrolled, while 12 did not pass.

---

**Because retention data are limited, we recommend the Legislature consider if more comprehensive data and analysis are needed to better target policy to areas of need.**

---

---

**Consideration of methods to attract and retain teachers may be inadequate until more data are available to understand what issues exist.**

---

## **USBE and the Legislature Could Collaboratively Determine What Information Is Needed to Impact Overall Policy**

Local-level data are not sufficient to understand overall trends in teacher retention and shortages. While some LEAs maintain recruitment and retention data at the local level, nearly 30 percent do not. However, USBE's current information<sup>15</sup> may be sufficient to provide meaningful trends in teacher retention data at the state and local level. Although not required to do so, USBE has neither analyzed, nor reported in an ongoing and transparent manner, some of the available teacher data. This includes a comparative analysis of which existing Legislative programs have best helped teacher recruitment and retention over time. By contrast, in a 2021 audit<sup>16</sup> we reported that USBE is tracking vast quantities of measures and recommended that they identify areas where measures could be streamlined without compromising accountability. We believe USBE, in consultation with the Legislature, should determine which teacher retention information would be helpful to make system-wide decisions.

Importantly, USBE has independently identified areas of need, particularly with regard to supporting new teachers. USBE recently published an induction manual that helps orient new teachers and is in the process of implementing a teacher mentorship program. We applaud USBE's efforts to target and support areas of need and believe such efforts should continue on a larger scale with collaboration from the Legislature.

In addition to the analysis provided in this audit report, we identified areas where more detailed analysis could help policy makers. Figure 2.7 lists several analyses that could be performed to address knowledge gaps on teacher retention, recruitment, and shortages.

---

**Although not required to do so, we recommend USBE evaluate what legislative programs best impact teacher retention on an ongoing basis.**

---

---

**We recommend USBE, in consultation with the Legislature, determine which information would be most helpful to make system-wide decisions.**

---

---

<sup>15</sup> USBE is in the process of upgrading their legacy CACTUS system to the new USIMS system, to be completed in 2023. It is anticipated that this data system will provide better functionality and reporting.

<sup>16</sup> *A Performance Audit of USBE's Internal Governance* (Report #2021-04).

**Figure 2.7 There Are Gaps in Our Understanding of Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Shortages.** Examples of areas needing greater understanding are enrollment numbers in Educator Preparation Programs and retention rates by job position.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher retention and mobility at the LEA level (including for high-poverty, low-performing schools)</li> <li>• Enrollment numbers in college-based EPPs over time</li> <li>• Retention by teacher qualification, experience, and effectiveness</li> <li>• Long-term retention rates for nontraditional pathways</li> <li>• Retention rates by subject, including for high-burnout positions</li> <li>• A comprehensive analysis of existing Utah programs intended to help retention and recruitment and whether they are leading to desired outcomes</li> <li>• Retention rate comparison of in-state vs. out-of-state teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retention rates by job position, including administrators, counselors, paraprofessionals, and other staff</li> <li>• Teacher retirement numbers over time, including early retirements</li> <li>• Magnitude of the gap between the supply of new in-state teachers and the demand for new teachers</li> <li>• Per-pupil ratios over time</li> <li>• Teacher retention by diversity (race, gender, etc.)</li> <li>• The true costs of teacher recruitment and retention</li> <li>• Number of new teachers hired and their percentage of the teacher workforce over time</li> </ul>
---	--

Source: OLAG observation of other states' data collection and gaps in Utah data.

USBE indicated several constraints limit their ability to provide the Legislature with ongoing analyses, such as limited personnel. Although we have not examined the related costs or existing capacity, we recommend that USBE and the Legislature discuss the items in Figure 2.7 to determine which warrant further analysis and, for data not available to USBE, which need better collection and reporting.

**Other States Provide Examples of How Data Informs Policy at the Local Level**

Many of the necessary elements for teacher recruitment, retention, and shortages identified in Figure 2.6 are currently being tracked by other states. For example, our review of surrounding states identified that Arizona, Colorado, and Idaho report state-level retention data, while Colorado, Idaho, and Wyoming report local-level information.

Colorado's Department of Education provides retention data, including the number of new and returning teachers, at the LEA level.

**Some other states, including surrounding states, have done better to track teacher mobility and retention.**

Figure 2.8 shows their data by job category, such as for administrators, paraprofessionals, principals, and teachers.

**Figure 2.8 Colorado Provides a Good Example of Reporting Local-Level Retention.** This district-by-district data provides turnover rates by job category and includes specific counts of new, returning, and leaving persons.

Position (Job) Categories	2019-2020 Head Count	2020-2021 Head Count	Difference	People Returned	People Left	New People	Turnover Rate
<b>District 1*</b>							
Administrators	61	49	-12	42	19	7	31.1%
Crafts/Trades/Services	765	811	46	612	153	199	20.0%
Instructional Support	421	339	-82	294	127	45	30.2%
Office/Administrative Support	613	547	-66	469	144	78	23.5%
Other Support	430	430	0	372	58	58	13.5%
Paraprofessional	1,747	1,548	-199	1,248	499	300	28.6%
Principals	128	126	-2	116	12	10	9.4%
Professional-Other	217	225	8	118	99	107	45.6%
Teachers	3,405	3,484	79	3,046	359	438	10.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,787</b>	<b>7,559</b>	<b>-228</b>	<b>6,317</b>	<b>1,470</b>	<b>1,242</b>	<b>18.9%</b>

Source: Colorado Department of Education website comparing school years 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Some of the states we interviewed noted that this level of information provides hard numbers to inform policy and also helps LEAs compare best practices among their peers. USBE provides some LEA-level retention data on their Utah School Report Card, but we believe more work is needed for it to be a reliable resource. In addition to surrounding states, other states also track retention data. For example, some states provide teacher mobility reports at the LEA level. This information indicates which LEAs a teacher chooses to move away from and toward, along with potential incentives that can be targeted to help teachers stay. One benefit of publishing this data would be to close the gap between the perception and reality of teacher turnover rates in Utah.

We believe Utah data could be better used to provide data-driven strategies to target areas of need. We recommend that the Legislature determine if more analysis and transparency on these topics are warranted to provide better teacher support where needed, and consider providing support and resources to accomplish this.

## Recommendations

1. We recommend that the Legislature, the Utah State Board of Education, and the Utah System of Higher Education focus additional efforts on improving retention in the first five years of a teacher's career.

2. We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education evaluate the impacts of new licensure changes on teacher retention and review turnover rates by teacher pathway to determine areas of need.
3. We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education work with the Legislature to determine which teacher retention analyses are needed and, in cases where data are not available, which need better collection and reporting.
4. We recommend that the Legislature determine if more analysis and transparency on teacher recruitment, retention, and shortages is warranted to provide better teacher support in areas of need.





## Chapter III

# Better Data on Teacher Shortages Can Guide Targeted Policies

There is a teacher shortage in many parts of the state. Information in this chapter, which demonstrates this shortage, has not been previously analyzed or made publicly available. Teacher shortages were recently defined by the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) as the inability of a local education agency (LEA) to fill a vacancy with a professionally licensed teacher.<sup>17</sup> We use a similar definition in this report. We recognize that a teaching license does not always measure the quality of a teacher, and some districts report success with well-supported, nonprofessionally licensed teachers. Still, research indicates that teacher preparation (generally defined through licensure) can strongly impact student outcomes.

Until recently, there has been a scarcity of accurate, comprehensive data published to provide context about where teacher shortages exist in Utah. We believe it is important for policy makers to have reliable information on the complexities of teacher shortages and what may cause these shortages. This chapter highlights the shortage data we could identify and recommends potential areas where improved tracking and reporting are needed.

### Utah Statute Focuses on the Need for Prepared Teachers in Every Classroom

*Utah Code* 53E-6-103(2)(iii) notes that “[the] state and its citizens expect every classroom to be staffed by a skilled ... and effective

---

<sup>17</sup> A nonprofessionally licensed teacher (someone with an Associate or LEA-specific type license, or a teacher with no license at all) is a teacher who did not graduate from an approved Educator Preparation Program (EPP). USBE quantifies shortages based on the percentage of teachers with LEA-specific licenses as reported in the federally required Teacher Shortage Area (TSA) report. The preparation and qualifications of these teachers are varied. USBE explained that such teachers may have industry-specific expertise or be among those with limited classroom experience. Because of the recent licensure change, the full impacts of these licensed teachers on student outcomes in Utah are unknown. Nonprofessionally licensed does not mean the teacher will never have a professional license; teachers who complete certain alternative routes to licensure can receive a level 1 professional license.

---

**We define a teacher shortage as a local education agency’s inability to fill a vacancy with a professionally licensed teacher.**

---

---

**There has been little publicly available statewide data on teacher shortages in Utah.**

---

---

**Studies show there is a link between teacher preparation and student outcomes, underlying the importance of a well-prepared teacher.**

---

teacher.” However, there is not much reported evidence to signify whether this is the case. USBE uses teacher licensure as proxy for their skills and preparation. We generally adopt that standard for our analysis in this chapter. Multiple studies<sup>18</sup> demonstrate the link between teacher preparation and student outcomes, reporting that certified teachers are more effective than uncertified teachers at driving positive student achievement.

We recognize that there is variation among nonprofessionally licensed teachers, and that actual preparation levels may vary from teacher to teacher. However, licensure level provides one way to assess the qualifications and preparation of teachers and is USBE’s most recent measure to indicate teacher shortages. Chapter II of this audit report mentions additional differences between license levels and notes high turnover rates among nonprofessionally licensed teachers. We recognize that nonprofessionally licensed teachers fill open and critically essential positions for some LEAs. However, in response to the legislative expectation to have a skilled and effective teacher in every classroom, we recommend that USBE and LEAs improve their tracking of teacher shortages and report that information to the Legislature so that better policies can be achieved to promote educational excellence.

### **Data on Vacancies and Shortages Indicate More Nonprofessionally Licensed Teachers in Certain Districts**

Vacancies are a result of teacher turnover. Even though Utah experiences relatively low rates of teacher turnover,<sup>19</sup> vacancies are still a reality in the workforce. The way in which vacancies are filled, however, indicates the extent of a teacher shortage. USBE is beginning

---

<sup>18</sup>American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. *What We Know: How Teacher Preparation Affects Student Achievement* (Washington, DC: AACTE, 2012).

Se Woong Lee. “Pulling Back the Curtain: Revealing the Cumulative Importance of High-Performing, Highly Qualified Teachers on Students’ Educational Outcome,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 40, no. 3 (September 2018): 359–381.

N. Burroughs, J. Gardner, Y. Lee, S. Guo, I. Touitou, K. Jansen, and W. Schmidt. *Teaching for Excellence and Equity: Analyzing Teacher Characteristics, Behaviors and Student Outcomes with TIMSS* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed analysis of teacher turnover and retention, see Chapter II.

to collect information on teacher shortages based on how vacancies are filled. Previously, this metric was not quantified. Based on limited analysis prior to this report, shortages do not appear to be a statewide issue but are most prevalent in rural districts. Recognizing that data on teacher vacancies are limited, we are concerned that districts are filling vacancies with teachers who are not fully prepared.

---

**Teacher shortages are not prevalent statewide, but exist in certain, mostly rural districts.**

---

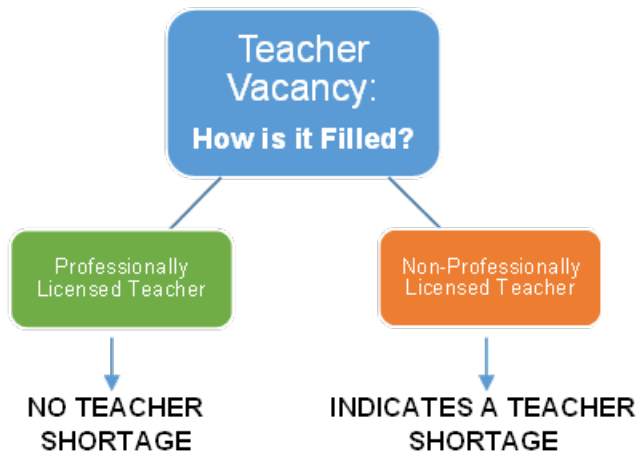
### **Teacher Vacancies Do Not Appear To Be a Prevalent Statewide Issue**

While the state does not track vacancy information, the small amount of available data shows that most schools and districts do not often start the school year without a teacher in the classroom. However, our concern is that this finding does not reflect whether the LEA has a professionally licensed teacher in every classroom—which, if not, would indicate a shortage. A teacher vacancy, and how it is filled, determine whether there is equilibrium between supply and demand and, in turn, if a teacher shortage exists.

---

**Figure 3.1 Teacher Vacancies and Shortages Are Related.** A shortage exists when LEAs fill vacancies with nonprofessionally licensed teachers. USBE has recently begun to report a teacher shortage when a position is filled with a nonprofessionally licensed teacher.

---



Source: OLAG generated.

Currently, one of the only ways to evaluate the preparation of classroom teachers is to review whether they are professionally or nonprofessionally licensed. The presence of nonprofessionally licensed teachers in the workforce suggests that supply is not able to meet the demand of teachers needed. When this is the case, it prompts LEAs to

---

**Licensure is one of the few ways to evaluate teacher preparation.**

---

---

**Historically, teacher vacancies have not been comprehensively tracked.**

---

use LEA specific licenses<sup>20</sup> and other temporary licenses to fill vacancies. To further assess teacher preparation and quality, our office is conducting a separate audit on teacher evaluation and performance, which will be completed in early 2022. Figure 3.2 provides a snapshot of vacancies and illustrates the limited number of districts with unfilled positions on the first day of school.<sup>21</sup>

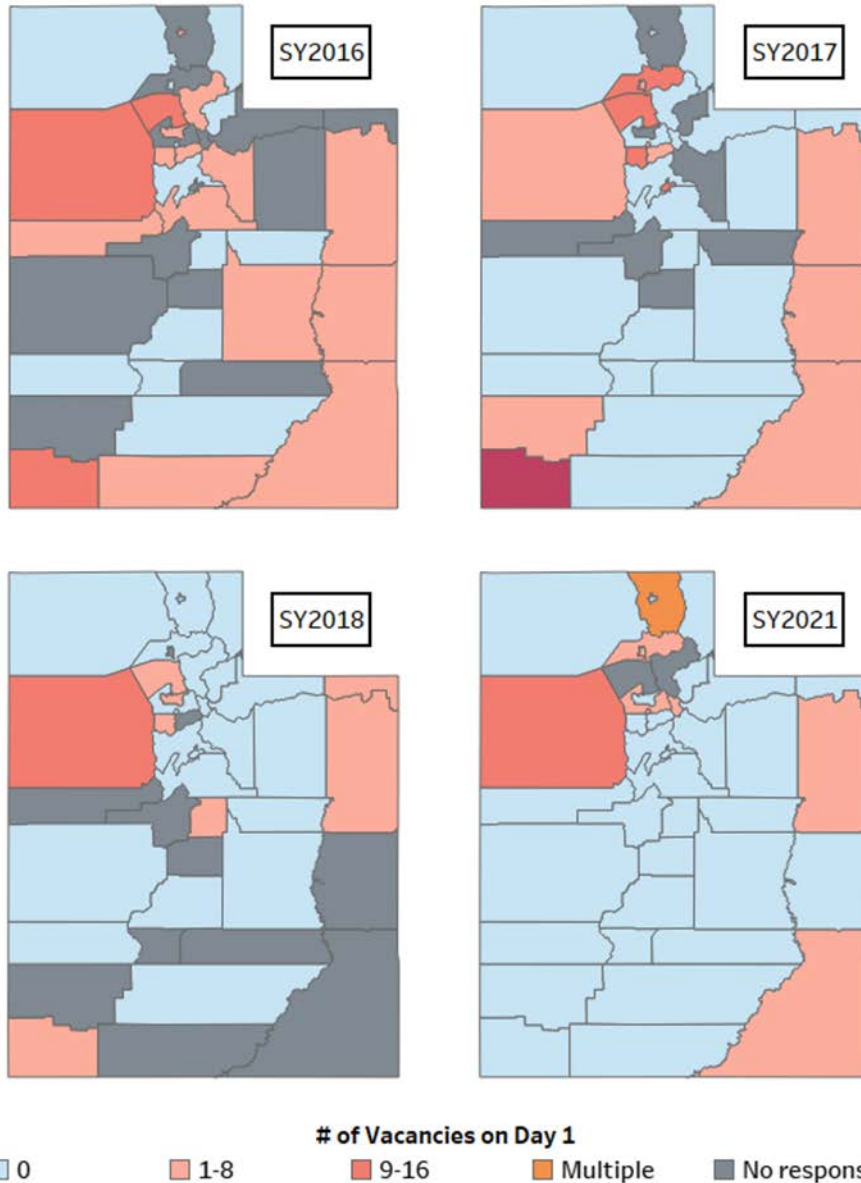
---

<sup>20</sup> An LEA specific license, including areas of concentration and endorsements, is issued by the state board at the request of an LEA's governing body (i.e., the local school board) and is valid for an employee to fill a position in the LEA if other licensing routes for the applicant are untenable or unreasonable.

<sup>21</sup> This information was collected by the Utah School Superintendents Association (USSA) and our survey on teacher vacancies.

**Figure 3.2 Districts Generally Report Few Teacher Vacancies.**

The maps show school districts that reported vacancies on the first day of school during school years 2016-18 and 2021. Additional information on teacher vacancies can be found in the dashboard.



Source: USSA and OLAG survey data.

While the data used in Figure 3.2 are not comprehensive (e.g., not all districts responded to the surveys, nor was the survey instrument previously tested), they are instructive in helping to quantify teacher vacancies and how the vacancies are filled. As discussed later in this chapter, inconsistent reporting and gaps in data collection prevent us from fully quantifying the issue of teacher vacancies. To better

Many districts fill open vacancies with substitutes, teachers out of subject, paraeducators, and LEA specific licensed teachers.

Click or Scan for Teacher Turnover, Shortage, and Vacancy Map

The most recent year of vacancy data shows very few districts started the year without a teacher.

understand where teacher vacancies exist, additional and consistent data collection is required. That said, available data demonstrate that in 2021, only nine of the thirty-nine reporting districts started the school year with vacant teacher positions. The largest concern was in Tooele, which reported 15 teacher vacancies at the beginning of the school year.

### **Some Districts Are Filling Vacancies With Nonprofessionally Licensed Teachers**

Examining the methods used to fill vacancies is one way to understand a shortage. Our dashboard (see link at left of page), visualizes the vacancies in the beginning of the school year and how districts filled them. We found that when vacancies exist, schools often fill them with nonprofessionally licensed teachers. Many of the districts that reported vacancies are in more rural areas, affirming the difficulties in recruitment based on geographical differences. The most common methods of filling teacher vacancies include substitutes, teachers out of subject, paraeducators, and LEA-specific licensed teachers.<sup>22</sup>

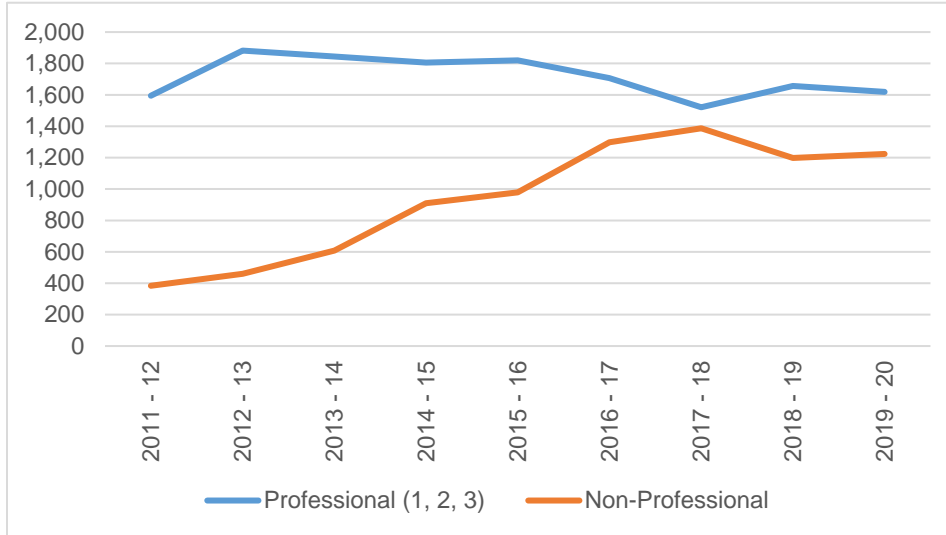
Further evidence shows a growing trend of new teachers entering the workforce without a professional teaching license. Figure 3.3 illustrates the increasing number of first year, nonprofessionally licensed teachers in Utah's public education system.



---

<sup>22</sup> Other methods for filling vacancies include modifying class structures; working with technology; and using administrators, out-of-state/international teachers, and teachers without licenses.

**Figure 3.3 A Growing Number of First Year Teachers Do Not Hold a Professional License.** Nonprofessional teachers include those who have not graduated from a USBE approved Education Preparation Program (EPP).



Source: USBE CACTUS data.

Nonprofessionally licensed teachers are continuing to make up a larger proportion of the teaching workforce each year. The rise in nonprofessionally licensed teachers indicates that students are increasingly being taught by underprepared teachers. This trend is evident in our teacher career pipeline presented in Chapter II, which examines a cohort of professionally and nonprofessionally licensed teachers through the first five years of their career.

### **Nonprofessionally Licensed Teachers Are More Prevalent in Rural Districts**

We found that teacher shortages are a local level, rather than a statewide concern. Figure 3.4 shows the location of teacher shortages,<sup>23</sup> with rural districts containing a higher proportion of nonprofessionally licensed teachers than what is seen in other districts.

<sup>23</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, we define a shortage as an LEA at which nonprofessionally licensed teachers constitute more than 10 percent of the teaching workforce.

**From 2012 to 2018 there was an increase of nonprofessionally licensed first year teachers in the Utah workforce.**

**Teacher shortages are more generally found in rural districts.**

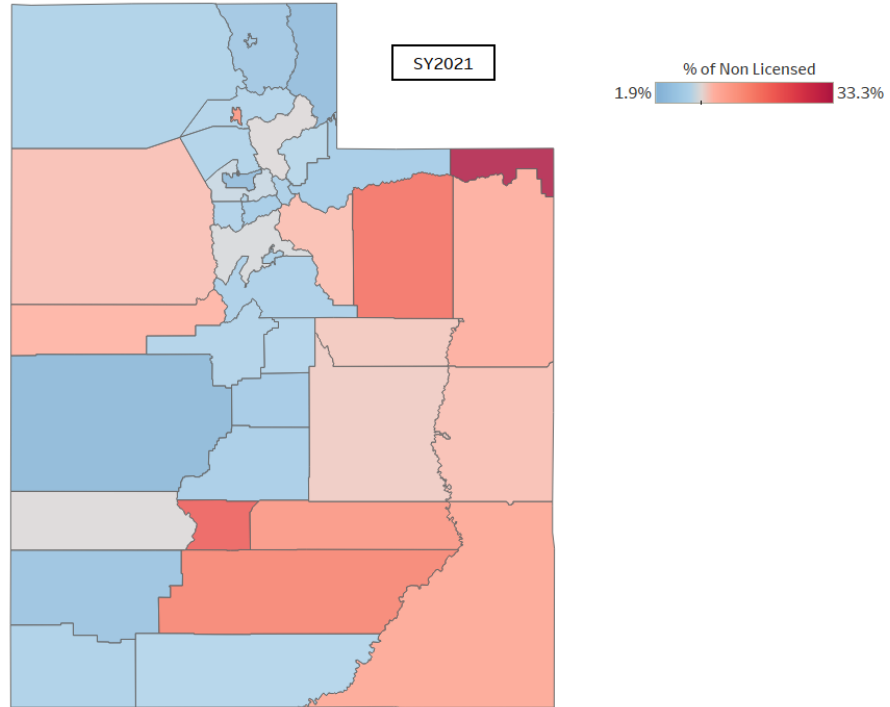
A district with a workforce containing 10 percent or more of nonprofessionally licensed teachers indicates a teacher shortage.

Click or Scan for Teacher Turnover, Shortage, and Vacancy Map



A majority of responding school districts reported that the pool of “qualified” candidates is shrinking.

**Figure 3.4 Proportion of Nonprofessionally Licensed Teachers, by District, in 2021.** For districts in red, 10 percent\* or more of the teaching workforce are nonprofessionally licensed teachers, suggesting a shortage of professionally licensed teachers.



Source: USBE CACTUS data.  
\*The 10 percent threshold was set by the audit team.

The single-year snapshot in Figure 3.4 shows that teacher shortages were not a statewide concern in school year 2021. However, in more than half of all rural districts and in one urban district, nonprofessionally licensed teachers constitute 10 percent or more of the teaching workforce. While charters were not included in this analysis, they contain, on average, workforces with 26 percent nonprofessionally licensed teachers. Additional information on teacher shortages can be found in this dashboard.

In surveys issued from 2016 to 2018, at least 75 percent of responding school districts reported that the pool of “qualified” candidates is shrinking.<sup>24</sup> In 2021, 51 percent of responding LEAs

<sup>24</sup> From school years 2016 to 2018, USSA issued a survey to the 41 school districts and the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind to gather information on teacher shortages. Responses from these surveys are only available state-level data on teacher vacancy we could identify. Therefore, part of our audit process included replicating and updating this survey information for school year 2021.



(districts and charters) reported hiring fewer quality teachers than they wished; the percentage increases to 74 percent when just looking at reporting districts. These findings suggest that districts in rural and other areas struggle to fill positions with qualified teachers.

## **Regional Teacher Shortages Lead to Recruitment Challenges**

Given the shrinking pool of teachers with a professional license, LEAs likely compete with one another for professionally licensed teachers. We found in interviews with LEAs, administrators, and teachers that LEA recruitment methods include incentivizing teachers through higher pay, salary bonuses, and a supportive climate and culture. However, the shortage problem may be more deep-seated than realized. USBE data shows that the number of teachers in demand may be higher than the number of graduates from Utah Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). The total number of recommending licenses from EPPs decreased from 2015 to 2020. This means fewer teachers are graduating from Utah universities. Western Governors University (WGU) has the only EPP in Utah that has seen an increase in license recommendations, and many WGU graduates never teach in Utah. The statewide decreases in recommending licenses from EPPs result in LEAs seeking teachers who do not have a Utah teaching license or those who may be underqualified or not professionally licensed.

During this audit, we identified many methods to better affect teacher recruitment. However, besides our interviews with more than 200 teachers, along with responses from multiple LEA surveys, Utah-specific data on recruitment practices are not available. For example, we could not identify a comprehensive dataset to evaluate recruitment practices being deployed throughout the state, and which are most effective. Still, our surveys<sup>25</sup> provide insights regarding recruiting practices used by LEAs. We found that districts most often use traditional recruiting mechanisms such as job boards and job fairs to

---

<sup>25</sup> Our office distributed two surveys, one to Superintendents and one to HR Directors and Business Administrators. 156 LEA Superintendents, Directors, and Principals received our survey. 106 responded: 33 school districts and 73 charter schools. The data reported in this summary demonstrates trends and was self-reported. 156 LEA HR Directors and Business Administrators received our survey. 82 responded: 39 school districts and 43 charter schools.

---

**The number of teachers graduating from Utah's Educator Preparation Programs does not meet the demand of needed teachers in the state.**

---

---

**Utah does not track ongoing teacher recruitment efforts throughout the state.**

---

---

**LEAs reported barriers to implementing recruitment best practices. These barriers include funding restrictions, lack of legislative understanding, lack of mentorship programs, and others.**

---

recruit teachers. In charter schools, traditional recruitment mechanisms, as well as institutional and community relationships are used to recruit teachers.

LEAs use a variety of methods, both monetary and non-monetary, to hire and keep teachers. Competitive salaries, bonuses, and benefits are common monetary incentives. Popular non-monetary incentives included providing a supportive climate and culture. While LEAs are aware of best practices for recruitment, they often face barriers that prevent them from implementing these practices. Reported barriers faced by LEAs are numerous and include funding restrictions, lack of state support, lack of understanding about what is needed to recruit and retain teachers, lack of mentorship programs, high student enrollment, limitations for smaller districts, lack of qualified candidates, and licensing structure changes.

USBE is in the process of implementing numerous programs to address teacher recruitment, shortages, and retention. Improved tracking for these programs will be necessary to understand program impact and effectiveness.

As a local control state, many LEAs may have found recruitment methods that work well for them. However, as emphasized in Chapter II and in this chapter, we caution against statewide implementation of practices based only on existing data, which are lacking. A better understanding of teacher recruitment in Utah could lead to improved outcomes and could more effectively direct limited resources to areas of greatest need.

## **Policymakers Need Additional Data on Supply and Demand to Fully Address Teacher Shortages**

Other states have more comprehensive data on teacher shortages than Utah does. For example, reporting from USBE and individual districts regarding shortages and vacancies is limited and does not provide adequate information for policymakers. Because of these limitations, our audit process represents the first time most of the information in this chapter has been collected and reviewed. We found no comprehensive information on teacher supply and demand in the state; we therefore had only a small amount of quantifiable, previously reported evidence of Utah's teacher shortage. USBE has made efforts in publishing supply and demand data but these efforts lag behind

---

**USBE does not perform adequate analysis on supply and demand factors to fully inform the Legislature on teacher shortage issues.**

---

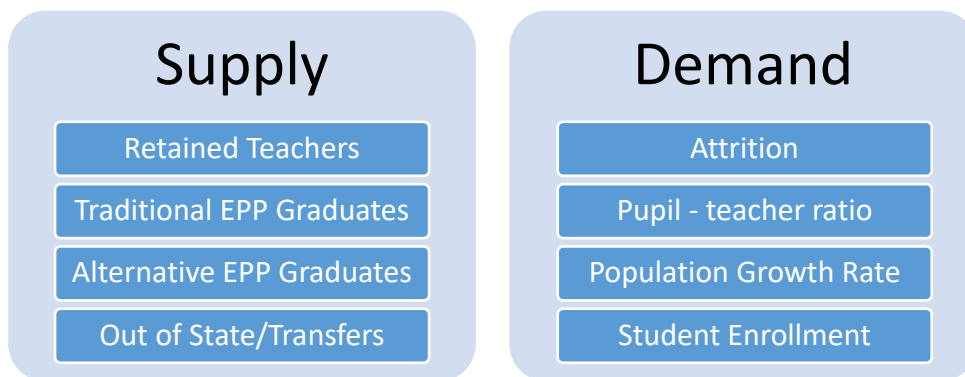
what surrounding states have accomplished. To better understand the scope of Utah’s teacher shortage, including areas where shortages are most prevalent, we recommend USBE analyze and publicly report the indicators of teacher supply and demand that have already been collected.

**USBE and LEAs Should Improve Accuracy and Scope of Information on Teacher Shortage**

Previously used methods to identify teacher shortages lack essential elements for policymakers to make informed decisions. Most of the findings in this chapter are the result of collecting and reviewing surveys and data from USBE and USSA. No other policymaking entity has collected or analyzed these data.

Figure 3.5 lists information that is currently collected but is not analyzed by USBE to understand teacher supply and demand.

**Figure 3.5 Components of Teacher Shortage Are Tracked but Need to Be Analyzed.\*** This table lists the factors that could be used to quantify a teacher shortage.



Source: Developed by OLAG from literature review<sup>26</sup>  
 \* Other components include lack of respect for the teaching workforce, curriculum changes, and school budgets.

The factors included in Figure 3.5 are necessary to fully understand and better affect policy regarding teacher shortages. USBE collects and

**No other entity has collected and analyzed data on Utah teacher shortages beyond this report.**

<sup>26</sup> L. Sutchter, L. Darling-Hammond, D. Carcer-Thomas. *A Coming Crisis in Teaching?* (Learning Policy Institute, September 2016).  
 Sutchter, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. *Understanding and Solving Teacher Shortages* (2019).  
 J. Levin, A. Berg-Jacobson, D. Atchison, K. Lee, E. Vontsolos. *Massachusetts Study of Teacher Supply and Demand* (December 2015).

---

**USBE lacks the capacity to perform much of the recommended analysis.**

---

has access to much of the data needed to fully understand the relationship between supply and demand. However, USBE has reported that constraints in personnel and bandwidth have limited its ability to analyze and report much of this information in a comprehensive way. We acknowledge that in recent years the Legislature, USBE, and various audit reports have recommended reducing the reporting burden on USBE and LEAs. It is incumbent on the policymaking bodies to determine whether data on teacher supply and demand are important enough to be prioritized. The recent decision to change USBE's teacher licensure model, implemented in part to remedy the teacher shortage, was seemingly not based on data, and may lead to additional difficulties for future analysis.

The most prevalent statewide information on teacher shortages is the federally required Teacher Shortage Area (TSA) report. Information for the report is collected from LEAs via a self-reported survey. USBE recently identified that this method for determining teacher shortage contains inaccuracies. Although USBE is making changes to its data collection and analysis of shortage information, the information currently available limits our ability to quantify Utah's teacher shortage.

The TSA report requires all states to report subject areas where there is a teacher shortage. The information is then used to inform funding for both federal and state programs.<sup>27</sup> Utah uses a survey to collect the required TSA information. The survey contains five categories: critical shortages, moderate shortages, minimal shortages, no shortages, and oversupply of teachers. Recently, USBE discovered that self-reported information from the TSA survey is inconsistent with USBE data.

For example, some districts self-reported a given area as having a shortage, even though licensure data showed most or all positions in the area were filled with professionally licensed teachers. Going forward, USBE will begin to determine shortage areas by the number of nonprofessionally licensed teachers in a given subject area. This will provide a more accurate picture of which subject areas are experiencing shortages.

---

<sup>27</sup> This includes the state funded T.H. Bell Teaching Incentive Loan program. However, we did not review this incentive program in detail during this audit.

---

**Historically, the state's only shortage data was the federally required Teacher Shortage Area report, which details subject area shortages.**

---

Other efforts to quantify the teacher shortage are apparent in some of USBE's recent reporting. In 2020, USBE began publishing additional information on teacher qualifications in their school report cards. The information highlights the percentages of teachers with temporary credentials and those teaching "out-of-field" by district and school. However, the information does not provide a statewide perspective; nor does it specify the nature of the temporary credentials, or the subjects being taught by out-of-field teachers. Although this progress is encouraging, we recommend that USBE report comprehensive information on teacher shortages, highlighting the most affected regions and districts, so that policies may be targeted to reduce shortages.

### **Available Demand Side Data Should Fully Estimate Teachers Needed**

To understand teacher shortages and target policy accordingly, it is necessary to report and analyze data about teacher demand. Utah does not produce a report or analyze indicators of supply and demand in a public or comprehensive manner. This makes it difficult to estimate the number of teachers needed statewide so that each classroom is staffed with a professionally licensed teacher.

The Department of Workforce Service (DWS) produces outlooks and projections for the teaching workforce, which provide context but do not offer a full picture of teacher demand. These projections are regionally based by metro area and are viewable by elementary, middle, and secondary education. However, DWS explained that these projections, which do not precisely estimate teacher demand or account for retention, are unable to fully address supply and demand issues at the local level. USBE should collect additional information to more fully understand how teacher demand impacts teacher shortages.

### **Other States Compile Data on Teacher Shortage**

Other surrounding states define, collect, and publish teacher shortages and have taken steps to collect pertinent information beyond self-reported data. State education offices, universities, and education associations in Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico all provide teacher shortage information beyond what is federally reported. For example:

---

**USBE has begun to quantify shortages in their school report cards. However, our audit discovered inaccuracies in this reporting.**

---

---

**Current teacher demand projections do not account for retention and other local factors.**

---

---

**Other states have publicly quantified teacher shortages and vacancies for years.**

---

- **Colorado** collects information on the number of vacancies in each district and the methods used to fill them.
- **Arizona** quantifies shortages as the number of positions that either remain vacant or are filled by individuals not meeting standard teacher requirements.
- **Nevada** reviews shortages by vacancies (meaning unfilled positions) and stratifies them by subject area and district.
- **New Mexico** tracks shortages by looking at vacancies. However, there is a push to better understand the teacher shortage by evaluating the number of unqualified teachers in the system.

While other states' data on teacher supply and demand may be similarly limited, some states' approach to collecting and reporting is more comprehensive than Utah's. Neighboring states provide examples of what reports on teacher shortage and vacancy could look like if the Utah Legislature determines that publishing this information is a priority.

## **Recommendations**

1. We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education and local education agencies establish a method to evaluate and track teacher vacancies to better target recruitment policies.
2. We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education report comprehensive shortage information to be determined by the Legislature, highlighting regions and districts that experience greater levels of shortage so that policies may be targeted.

# Chapter IV

## Teachers Report Stress and Workload Concerns Above Pay

Teachers we interviewed for this audit are most concerned about stress, workload, administrative support, and salaries. This chapter summarizes concerns reported by teachers, including the factors that influence their decision whether to continue teaching. For example, teachers cited large class sizes and heavy workloads as leading concerns. Teachers are also concerned with low salaries. We found that the Legislature and districts continue to prioritize funding for teacher salaries, making Utah’s starting salaries for teachers competitive with national averages. While competitive pay for teachers is important and will always be a top consideration for education leaders, the findings in this chapter provide additional insights for review.

### Interview Results Identify Work Stressors as Major Concerns

Teachers report<sup>28</sup> that job stress, heavy workloads, and poor administrative support are among their largest concerns.<sup>29</sup> The results of our interviews generally align with findings from a recent USBE survey, which confirm that stress, in various forms, is the primary concern for most teachers, even above teacher pay. Further, we found several driving factors—including items such as large class sizes and difficult communications with parents—contribute to stress but may be costly or difficult to affect. However, another leading cause of stress for teachers that we believe can be influenced is their relationship with school administration. We believe there is an opportunity to better train and educate principals. This critical issue will be addressed

---

**Stress, heavy workloads, and administrative support were among teachers’ primary concerns expressed during interviews.**

---

---

<sup>28</sup> Our survey instrument was designed to obtain teacher feedback that can be used to inform policymakers on key issues affecting the classroom and educational system. We carefully designed the questions and personally interviewed a cross-section of teachers across the state. Our office sampled 25 schools and interviewed 212 teachers throughout the state. These teachers were eager to have their voices heard. However, the survey was not designed as an academic research tool. Results can be found in our interactive dashboard linked on the next page.

<sup>29</sup> Teachers’ concerns about pay are discussed later in this chapter.

While discussing many areas related to their jobs, nearly one in four teachers reported that stress was their leading concern.

Click or Scan for Teacher Interview Dashboard



A report issued by USBE found that stress was the most common reason teachers left the profession.

further in an audit on teacher performance, scheduled for release in Spring 2022.

### Teachers Frequently Cited Stress as a Primary Concern

When asked to choose from a menu of favorable options, nearly 24 percent of teachers we interviewed indicated “less stress” as their top choice.<sup>30</sup> This was the most frequently chosen option, surpassing other choices such as more gratitude or recognition (15.6 percent), better base pay (14.6 percent), and more schedule flexibility (10.4 percent). Figure 4.1 shows teachers’ overall responses to this question.

**Figure 4.1 “Less Stress” Is the Most Frequently Cited Improvement to Encourage Teachers to Stay in the Profession.** This was followed by “more gratitude” and “better base pay.”



Source: OLAG interview with teachers throughout Utah. There were 212 responses to this question. Note, because teachers could only select one of two options for this question, not all options were offered equally with one another.

Teachers’ desire for less stress was also a major finding from USBE’s 2020 Engagement Survey. Their report found that “emotional exhaustion/stress/burnout” was a very or extremely influential factor for 68.1 percent of active teachers in deciding whether to continue teaching. Significantly, USBE’s survey found that this category was the most common reason cited for those who actually left the teaching profession.

Burnout is a reality for employees in many professions. Some teaching subjects within education are known to have high-burnout rates. However, there are gaps in our understanding of these subjects,

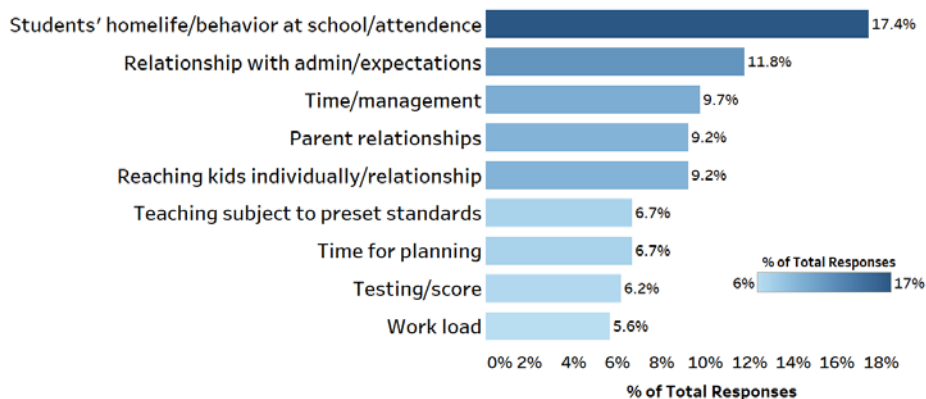
<sup>30</sup> We acknowledge the possibility of question order bias where the sequence of the questions may unintentionally impact overall responses. In this study we did not randomize the order of our survey questions to teachers and encourage future study to improve upon this element to gain further insight.



and with only limited analysis, the solution has often been to provide additional funding. We believe Chapter II recommendations for USBE to study these subject areas of high burnout could lead to better, more targeted solutions.

As a follow-up to the question in Figure 4.1, we asked teachers to identify their major sources of stress. Figure 4.2 shows their top responses.

**Figure 4.2 Teachers Report That Student Behavior Is Their Top Source of Stress.** The other eight top answers are listed below.



Source: OLAG Interview with teachers throughout Utah. There were 195 responses to this question. Responses receiving less than five percent of votes were excluded from this figure but can be viewed in the dashboard.

In identifying their major sources of stress, teachers most often indicated factors seemingly outside their control, including students, administrators, and parents. While it is difficult for state and local leaders to address some of the issues listed in Figure 4.1 and 4.2, they can influence the training and education of administrators, which is tied to the second leading cause of stress. We believe this is an important area for policy makers to consider. More information will be presented on this topic in an audit scheduled for release in spring 2022.

### Teachers Are Concerned with Heavy Workloads and Large Class Sizes

Many teachers identified workload as a source of stress. The menu of options that we asked teachers about (summarized in Figure 4.1) led to a discussion about why their top options were the most important to them. When explaining why they chose their response to the question “What makes this [option] the most important consideration for you as a teacher?” illustrated in Figure 4.1, over 30 percent of teachers mentioned overwhelming workloads in their

**Among all stressors, teacher cited student behavior and their relationship with their administrator as leading concerns.**

response. The second most common response, insufficient compensation, was mentioned in 21 percent of responses.

Large classroom size was sometimes cited as one reason for large workloads. Utah continues to rank among states with the largest classroom sizes in the nation. Using 2017-18 data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Utah's class sizes ranked second highest in the nation for elementary schools, third highest for middle schools, and third highest for high schools.

Despite the concerns they reported, teachers are generally satisfied in their jobs. We asked teachers to rate their satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most satisfied. A "4" was the most common response (41 percent), followed by "3" (26 percent), and then "5" (25 percent). These results present an interesting dichotomy: Teachers feel overworked but are generally satisfied with their jobs. One possible explanation for this may be due to only surveying teachers who are still in the field. Our concern, however, is that as stress levels and workload continue to increase, the calculus of the decision to continue teaching may shift, and Utah may risk losing teachers who had previously liked their jobs.

We acknowledge that the Legislature has previously considered many methods to address these issues and has funded classroom reduction efforts since 1978. While we believe efforts to manage classroom size are important, we also believe that improvements could be achieved by focusing policy efforts on other stressors such as administrator training, which may have a more immediate and direct impact while being more fiscally feasible.

### **School Administrators Play a Key Role in Teacher Retention and Satisfaction**

Better training, education, and support for school administrators may result in a more immediate and direct impact to teacher retention, compared with other, more costly options. From our interviews, multiple teachers indicated "better base pay" as the factor most likely to keep them in the profession. These same teachers said that they chose better pay only because they already had a supportive administrative team. Other teachers said they were going to leave the school or district the next year because they lacked support from their administrator.

---

**Utah teachers generally expressed satisfaction with their jobs; however, large classroom sizes and heavy workloads were often cited as additional concerns.**

---

---

**In addition to our interviews, one study identified that the quality of a school's leadership is among the most important predictors of teacher turnover.**

---

National studies confirm the importance of quality administrators in a school. The Brookings Institute<sup>31</sup> notes “...the quality of a school’s leadership is among the most important predictors of teacher turnover.” A follow-up Brookings report<sup>32</sup> emphasizes that administrative support “...strongly influences teacher turnover.” Further, a report by the Wallace Foundation<sup>33</sup> that reviewed 20 years of data on principals and their effect on students and teachers concluded “...the importance of school principals may not have been stated strongly enough in prior work, particularly from the perspective of state and district leaders and policymakers seeking to move the needle on student achievement.”

Administrative support and performance are crucial to teachers’ job satisfaction and their decision to remain teaching. These concepts, though important, are mentioned only briefly in this report. Because of the significant nature of this topic, our review of administrator performance and evaluations requires further development and will be released in 2022.

## **Teacher Salaries Are a Priority for State and Local Leaders**

Although teacher pay is not the leading concern, those interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with their salary. Utah spends more on public education, as a percentage of the overall state budget, than do most other states. Because of the state’s large population of children, Utah has one of the lowest per-pupil funding rates nationally. However, teacher pay is higher than that of most surrounding states, and school districts in Utah often pay teachers beyond their formalized pay scales. This suggests that teacher pay appears to be a high priority at the state and local level. Despite low per-pupil funding, Utah performs well nationally in student outcomes—a credit to teachers, parents, and other education stakeholders.

---

<sup>31</sup> Jason A. Grissom, as cited in Fred Dews. *Charts of the Week: Teacher Retention*. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, May 3, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Tuan D. Nguyen and Matthew G. Springer. *Reviewing the evidence on teacher attrition and retention*. (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institute, December 4, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Jason A. Grissom, Anna J. Egalite, and Constance A. Lindsay. *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research* (New York: Wallace Foundation, February 2021).

---

**We believe there is an opportunity to better train and educate principals within public education.**

---

---

**Teachers also expressed dissatisfaction with their salaries, primarily with the state’s historically low per-pupil funding.**

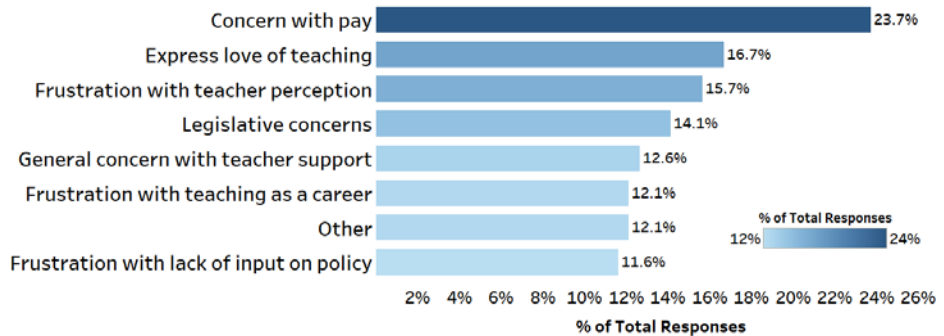
---



## Teachers Expressed Concerns about Salary

In addition to concerns about stress, workload, and administrators, teachers expressed concerns regarding their pay. In our interviews, we asked teachers “What would you like the Legislature to know about your experience as a teacher?” Figure 4.3 shows that when directing their responses to the Legislature, teachers’ responses shifted from stress and workload to pay.

**Figure 4.3 When Directing Their Responses to Legislators, Teachers Emphasized Concerns about Pay.** Nearly one in four teachers highlighted salary as a top concern.



Source: OLAG Interview with teachers throughout Utah. There were 198 responses to this question. Responses receiving less than 10 percent of votes were excluded from this figure but can be viewed in the dashboard.

Some teachers expressing concern with their pay did so in the context of rising housing prices. This concern was shared within specific urban districts. However, there appears to be some disparity in views on pay depending on in which district the teacher is employed. Nevertheless, teachers’ overall concerns with salaries were consistent among districts.

## Utah’s Legislature Has Made Public Education Spending a High Priority

In 2020, Utah spent 22 percent of the state budget on primary and secondary education.<sup>34</sup> This places Utah as 14<sup>th</sup> highest nationally in the percentage of state budget spent on education, in line with Idaho (10<sup>th</sup>) and Colorado (13<sup>th</sup>) and higher than education spending levels among all other surrounding states. From 2018 to 2019, the

<sup>34</sup> Based on data analyzed from the *2020 State Expenditure Report*, published by the National Association of State Budget Officers.

**Utah’s Legislature has prioritized funding for teachers and is among the states with the highest percentage of the state budget spent on public education.**

Legislature also funded the largest increase to teacher wages in at least 15 years.

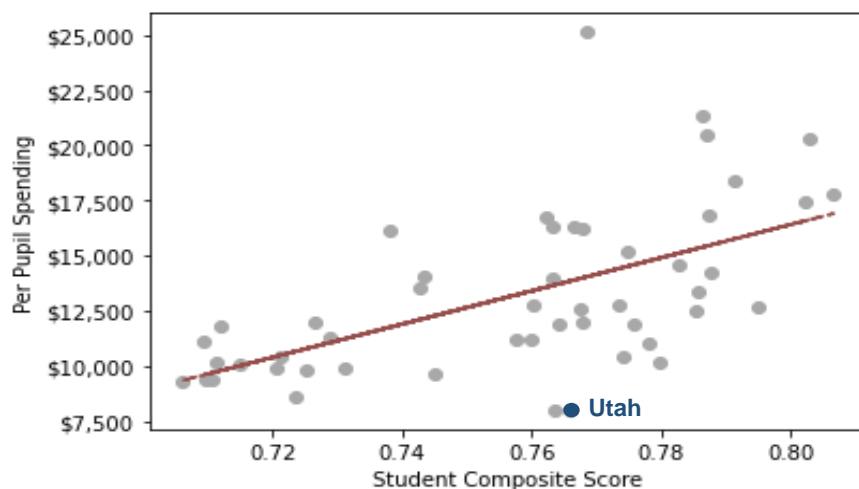
As mentioned in Chapter II, the Legislature has also considered approximately 45 bills directed at assisting teachers since the 2016 General Legislative Session. Proposed bills include initiatives related to salary supplementals or bonuses, scholarships, classroom supplies, loan forgiveness, retirement, and mentorship. Of these, 33 bills were enrolled, suggesting that Utah’s Legislature has made funding public education a high priority.

### Utah Performs Exceptionally Well, Given Per-Pupil Spending

Conversations about teacher pay often center on the state’s low per-pupil spending rate. Utah’s large number of children, growing population, and large classroom sizes contribute to heavier teacher workloads. Using national data from NCES, Utah ranked second to last in per-pupil spending at \$8,014 per pupil—ahead of only Idaho. Despite low per-pupil spending, however, Utah ranks higher than average in success metrics. Figure 4.4 shows the relationship between per-pupil spending and a student success composite score we created based on student graduation rates, ACT scores, and college attendance.

**Despite large numbers of children and big classroom sizes, Utah is a significant outlier by achieving strong student outcomes with low per pupil rates.**

**Figure 4.4 Utah Is an Extreme Outlier, with High Student Outcomes Relative to Low Per-Pupil Spending.** Utah has one of the lowest per-pupil funding rates in the nation but generally has good student outcomes, making it one of the most efficient states for outcomes per dollar expended.



Source: NCES wage data. OLAG used NCES student outcome data to create a student success composite score.

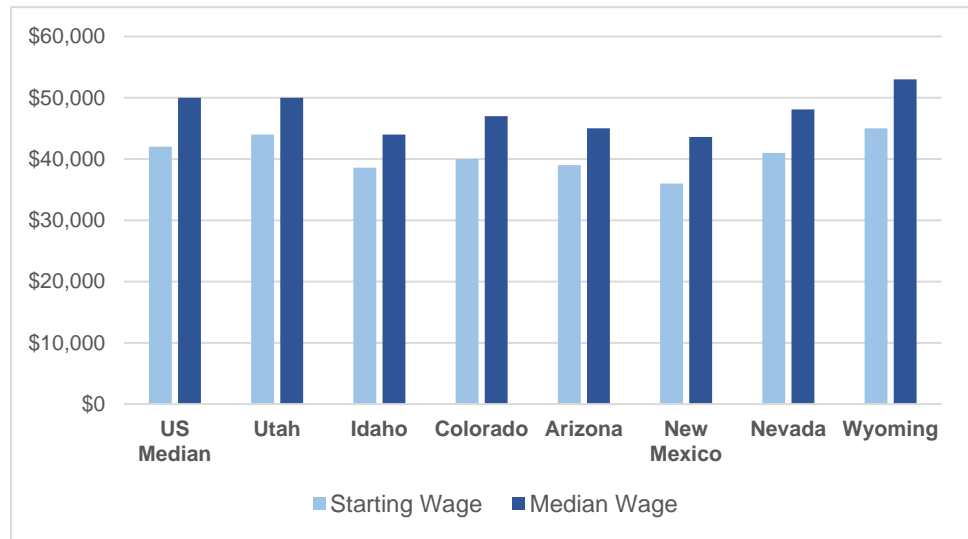
Figure 4.4 shows that Utah has one of the lowest levels of per-pupil spending, matching student outcomes for states that spend approximately between \$2,000 and \$17,000 more per pupil. Utah is an outlier in this regard, and we believe credit goes to teachers, parents, and others for this accomplishment. Despite a focus on the state’s low per-pupil spending, additional indicators show that Utah’s salaries compare favorably with those of other states and national averages.

**Utah Teacher Salaries Are in Line With the National Average**

Utah’s teacher salaries<sup>35</sup> –both starting and median–are comparable with what is seen nationally and in surrounding states. Data from the American Community Survey (see Figure 4.5) shows how Utah’s median teacher salary compares with that of surrounding states and the national median.

Although pay conversations often focus on low per pupil funding, Utah’s teacher salaries compare favorably with other states and the national average.

**Figure 4.5 Based on Federal Data, Utah’s Teacher Salaries in 2019 Were Higher Than Those of Most Surrounding States.** Utah’s median teacher wage also compares well against the US median wage.



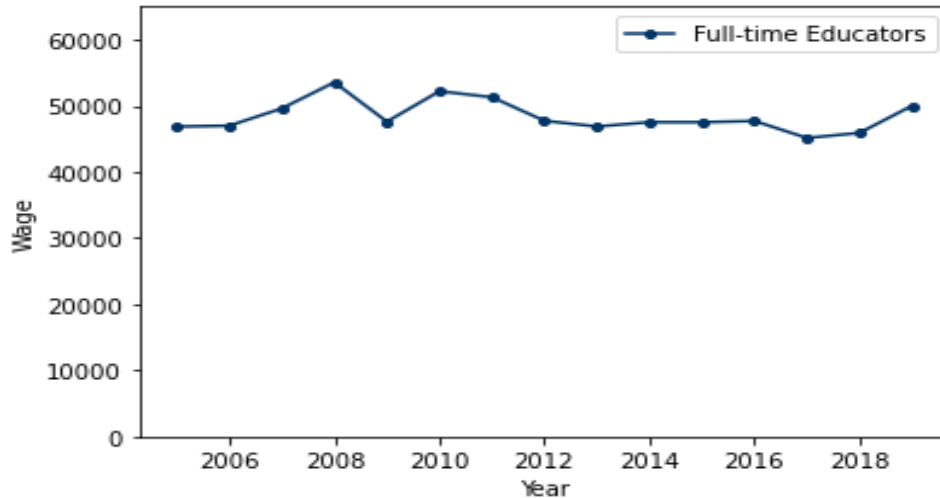
Source: OLAG analysis of the 2019 American Community Survey.

Utah’s teacher wages are higher, statistically speaking, than those of Idaho, Arizona, and New Mexico and do not vary significantly from

<sup>35</sup> Our analysis from the American Community Survey data includes preschool and kindergarten, elementary and middle School, secondary school, and special education teachers. Starting salaries are calculating as the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of all wages.

wages in other surrounding states and the national median wage. Additionally, Utah’s teacher wages have kept pace relatively well with inflation. Figure 4.6 shows the real median teacher wage<sup>36</sup> from 2005 to 2019.

**Figure 4.6 Adjusting for Inflation, Median Teacher Wages in Utah Remained Relatively Consistent between 2012 and 2019.** Utah teachers’ median pay increased significantly between 2018 and 2019.



Source: OLAG analysis of American Community Surveys.

The Legislature increased teachers’ pay in the 2018 General Legislative Session by 2.5 percent, the largest increase since the 2009-10 school year. In conclusion, while per pupil rates are often cited, teacher pay compares favorably with that of other states and has kept pace relatively well with inflation. Nevertheless, teachers remain concerned with pay, including their ability to afford increases in housing prices.

**Districts Often Pay Teachers Beyond Their Pay Scale Range**

A review of teacher pay demonstrates that many districts are paying teachers beyond their formalized pay scales. Figure 4.7 uses dark bars to depict the pay scale for each district, with circles representing individual teacher wages in relation to the pay scale. Further details are also provided in the interactive dashboard linked on the right.

Utah teacher pay also appears to keep pace relatively well with inflation. However, teachers remain concerned with pay including their ability to afford increases in housing prices.

Click or Scan for Teacher Pay Scale Dashboard



<sup>36</sup> Adjusted based on the US Consumer Price Index (CPI) in 2019 dollars.

**Figure 4.7 Comparison of District Pay Scales and Actual Teacher Pay.** While teachers' salaries in some districts mostly fall within the pay scale range (dark bars), others extend well beyond the range.



Source: District pay scales and Utah State Auditor Project Kids pay data. Some of these data points may not be accurate because some personnel, such as administrators, may have been incorrectly categorized as teachers.

While district pay scales range in starting and ending pay, the salaries of many teachers are beyond those ranges. In fact, some districts have a much larger spread in pay than what is found in other districts. On the whole, it appears that many districts prioritize teachers' pay, even beyond the limits of their own pay scales. The dashboard provides more detail on bachelor's, master's, and district-level pay.

More analysis on teacher wages may be warranted to better support teacher concerns regarding wages, stress, workload, and administrative support.

### Recommendation

1. We recommend that the Legislature consider targeted policy options to address teacher stresses and concerns.

**Although this chapter attempts to provide context, more analysis may be warranted to determine how to best support teacher needs.**



# Appendix



## **Appendix:**

### **Complete List of Audit Recommendations**

This report made the following seven recommendations. The numbering convention assigned to each recommendation consists of its chapter followed by a period and recommendation number within that chapter.

#### **Recommendation 2.1**

We recommend that the Legislature, the Utah State Board of Education, and the Utah System of Higher Education focus additional efforts on improving retention in the first five years of a teacher's career.

#### **Recommendation 2.2**

We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education evaluate the impacts of new licensure changes on teacher retention and review turnover rates by teacher pathway to determine areas of need.

#### **Recommendation 2.3**

We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education work with the Legislature to determine which teacher retention analyses are needed and, in cases where data are not available, which need better collection and reporting.

#### **Recommendation 2.4**

We recommend that the Legislature determine if more analysis and transparency on teacher recruitment, retention, and shortages is warranted to better provide teacher support in areas of need.

#### **Recommendation 3.1**

We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education and local education agencies establish a method to evaluate and track teacher vacancies to better target recruitment policies.

#### **Recommendation 3.2**

We recommend that the Utah State Board of Education report comprehensive shortage information to be determined by the Legislature, highlighting regions and districts that experience greater levels of shortage so that policies may be targeted.

#### **Recommendation 4.1**

We recommend that the Legislature consider targeted policy options to address teacher stresses and concerns.



## **Agency Responses**





# UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Mark Huntsman, Chair    Laura Belnap, First Vice Chair  
Cindy Davis, Second Vice Chair

Randy Boothe                      Scott L. Hansen                      Carol Barlow Lear  
Janet A. Cannon                  Molly Hart                              James Moss Jr.  
Natalie Cline                      Stacey Hutchings                  Kristan Norton  
Jennie Earl                          Matt Hymas                              Brent J. Strate

Sydnee Dickson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Cybil Child, Secretary to the Board

November 12, 2021

Kade Minchey, CIA, CFE  
Auditor General  
Office of the Legislative Auditor General  
W315 State Capitol Complex  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Dear Mr. Minchey:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to report 2021-13 “A Performance Audit of Teacher Retention Within Utah’s Public Education System.” The Utah State Board of Education is appreciative of legislative support for public education and as recognized in the audit, “excellent teachers for every [Utah] classroom.”

### Teacher Retention Efforts

As is evident in the Board’s strategic plan goal of Effective Educators and Leaders (shown below), we concur with the recommendation to focus additional efforts on improving teacher retention.



### **Effective Educators & Leaders**

Each student is taught by effective educators who are supported by effective school leaders

- 2A: Support districts and schools in providing effective mentoring for beginning educators and leaders
- 2B: Assist districts and schools in providing continuous personalized professional learning for each educator and leader
- 2C: Evaluate and support educator preparation programs in meeting requirements established by the Board while providing room to innovate
- 2D: Lead in changing the perception of teaching as a profession
- 2E: Promote equitable access to highly effective teachers
- 2F: Increase the supply of transformational school leaders across the state

In support of the strategies listed above, we have several initiatives in-process; the data in the audit reflects some of the successes of these efforts.

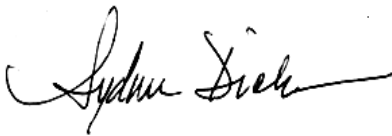
Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Shortage Data

The Utah Schools Information Management System (USIMS), which we are currently developing, with support of the Legislature, emphasizes the USBE's commitment to reliable, efficient, and transparent data. The first module in USIMS that will be available in the coming months will replace the current educator related systems, such as CACTUS. USIMS will enhance our ability to analyze and report data.

The audit notes that an important focus of the Legislature and the USBE in recent months has been consideration of the reporting burden for local education agencies. If the Legislature determines there is a need for more data and analysis, we look forward to collaborating to identify the necessary data to be collected, analyzed, and reported. We also appreciate the acknowledgement by the auditors that we would need additional human resources to engage in more comprehensive analysis and reporting.

We appreciate the professionalism of the Legislative Auditor General and his staff in conducting this audit. We also acknowledge the significant effort of the legislative auditors to conduct an extensive number of interviews with teachers to obtain ground level information for this audit.

Sincerely,



Sydnee Dickson, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Utah State Board of Education

cc: Mark Huntsman, Utah State Board of Education (USBE), Board Chair  
Laura Belnap, USBE, Vice Chair and Audit Committee Chair  
Cindy Davis, USBE, Vice Chair and Audit Committee Vice Chair  
Patty Norman, USBE Deputy Superintendent of Student Achievement  
Darin Nielsen, USBE Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning  
Debbie Davis, USBE, Chief Audit Executive





# Utah School Superintendents Association

860 E. 9085 S. Sandy, UT 84094  
(801) 878-0660

November 9, 2021

Kade Minchey, CIA, CFE  
Auditor General  
Office of the Legislative Auditor General  
W315 State Capitol Complex  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Dear Mr. Minchey:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to report 2021-13, *A Performance Audit of Teacher Retention Within Utah's Public Education System*. The Utah School Superintendents Association (USSA) appreciates the hard work that went into this report and are grateful that your office is working to understand how we can collectively work to recruit, support, and retain teachers. We find the report to be comprehensive and helpful as we look for ways to retain teachers.

The USSA looks forward to studying the recommendations and determining how we can support teacher retention. We look forward to working with the Utah State Board of Education (USBE). As the Legislature and USBE focus on efforts to retain teachers in their first five years of service, USSA would like to be a part of those conversations. Our members schools have been working hard to retain our new teachers and they can provide input on what is working and what can be replicated. USSA is also willing to provide feedback on the new licensure changes. Local Education Agencies are ready to support USBE as they develop a method to evaluate and tract teacher vacancies. USSA is also prepared to find solutions to alleviate teacher stress and address teacher concerns.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to read and respond to this report. USSA is committed to supporting teachers across the state. This report, when published, will be shared with our members and we will schedule time to discuss the findings at an upcoming meeting. We also look forward to working with USBE and the Legislature to ensure that we are doing all that we can to support teachers.

Respectfully,

Ben Dalton  
USSA President

Lexi Cunningham  
USSA Executive Director



# Utah School Superintendents Association

860 E. 9085 S. Sandy, UT 84094  
(801) 878-0660

cc: Reid Newey, USSA 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
Cade Douglas, USSA 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President  
Rick Nielsen, USSA Past President



November 5, 2021

Kade Minchey, CIA, CFE  
Legislative Auditor General  
W315 State Capitol Complex  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Mr. Minchey,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the recommendation made to the Utah System of Higher Education in the Chapter II of Audit 2020-13, A *Performance Audit of Teacher Retention Within Utah's Public Education System*.

The Board of Higher Education and the Commissioner's Office concur with this recommendation and we appreciate the opportunity to continue to work with the Legislature and the Utah State Board of Education to improve retention for aspiring teachers in the state.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Woolstenhulme", with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dave Woolstenhulme  
Utah Commissioner of Higher Education