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Abstract

In March, 2016, Kansas Commissioner of Education Randy Watson created the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Teacher Vacancies and Supply. The authors of this article were task force co-chairs. This article reports the key finds of the task force and then reports current research findings about teacher shortage from across the nation. We then list recommendations for teacher educators to improve the supply of teachers and retention of career teachers. The conclusion crystallizes the four challenges Kansas has to increase the number of teachers in the state.

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Abstract

In March, 2016, Kansas Commissioner of Education Randy Watson created the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Teacher Vacancies and Supply. The authors of this article were task force co-chairs. This article reports the key finds of the task force and then reports current research findings about teacher shortage from across the nation. We then list recommendations for teacher educators to improve the supply of teachers and retention of career teachers. The conclusion crystallizes the four challenges Kansas has to increase the number of teachers in the state.

Teacher Shortages in Kansas and the Nation In Kansas

In March 2016, the Kansas Commissioner of Education created the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Teacher Vacancies and Supply. Twenty-eight educators from around the state met four times and presented its final report to the Kansas State Board of Education at its July meeting (Kansas Commissioner of Education's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Teacher Vacancies and Supply, 2016).

Although there were 277 vacancies for the 2015-2016 school year, 99.28% of all teacher positions were filled. Of 286 school districts in Kansas, 220 reported no vacancies. The vacancies clustered in three geographic areas: 109 in the Southwest region of the state, 61 in Wichita, and 28 in Kansas City, Kansas.

Three other findings illuminate the state's teacher shortages. Education preparation programs receiving federal funding annually submit Title II reports with the counts of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs and the number of program completers. Based on Title II reports (see <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx>), program completers from the 25 teacher preparation programs in Kansas have declined from 2271 in 2011 to 1901 in 2014 (see Figure 1). The number of teacher education

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majors has decreased from 7752 in 2011 to 5379 in 2014, a loss of 2372 majors. Recruiting middle and high school students into teaching and then recruiting and retaining them in teacher preparation programs are high priorities.

Second, the state is experiencing a “greening” of the teaching profession (see Figure 2). Across all regions of the state, 20% of Kansas teachers have less than 5 years of experience, and 40% have less than 10 years of experience. Third, only 6 of 1095 graduating high school seniors in 2015 who selected a post secondary major in science indicated becoming a teacher (ACT, 2016c), exacerbating the current state shortage in STEM teachers.

Across the Nation

In 1996, the National Committee on Teaching and America’s Future issued its landmark report *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future*. The report’s top conclusion was that “the single most important strategy for achieving America’s educational goals: A blueprint for recruiting, preparing, and supporting excellent teachers in all of America’s schools” (p. 10).

Twenty years later, the single most important strategy for achieving America’s educational goals is not met. To the contrary, “shortages have been growing across the country, reaching crisis proportions in some teaching fields—such as mathematics, science, and special education—and in locations where wages and working conditions are least attractive” (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016, p. 1).

“Interest among ACT-tested graduates in becoming educators continues to decline at an alarming rate” (ACT, 2016a, p. 3). ACT (2016a) also reported that a) students interested in education have lower-than-average achievement levels, b) male interest in becoming a teacher is especially low, and c) there is a lack of diversity. Furthermore, despite a larger number of ACT-tested students in 2015, which translates into a larger number of STEM-interested students, just 606 (or 1%) graduating high school students selected a post secondary major in science education.

Although Hussar and Bailey (2014) project that the number of new teacher hires in the United States will increase 6% between 2016 and 2022, Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016) project that the national demand for teachers will substantially exceed supply over the next 10 years if current market trends persist. “By 2020, 300,000 new teachers will be needed each year, and by 2025, that number will increase to 316,000. Annual teacher shortages could increase to as many as 112,000 teachers by 2018” (Sutchter et al., p. 16). National Title II data of teacher education enrollment corroborate Sutchter et al.’s projections (see Figure 3). From 2008-2009 through 2013-2014 (most recent data available), there were 219,265 fewer teacher education majors across the nation.

In the last two years, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Dakota (see the Appendix for Internet links to these reports) have commissioned state task forces similar to Kansas' to examine and make recommendations to alleviate their respective teacher shortages. The states' findings are consistent with one another and corroborated by recent national studies (e.g., ACT, 2016a; Education Commission of the States, 2016; Podolsky et al. (2016); Sutchter et al., 2016):

- fewer students entering teacher preparation programs
- attrition resulting in a teacher workforce with a preponderance of early career teachers
- low public esteem for the teaching profession and teaching as a career
- persistent vacancies in rural and urban areas
- persistent shortages in certain teaching fields
- increased demand for teachers as districts rebound from cuts during the 2009 recession
- funding challenges preventing increased teacher salaries and the hiring of retired educators
- limited professional development for early career teachers
- uncertain state funding

Advocacy: What Can Kansas Teacher Educators Do?

The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Teacher Vacancies and Supply Final Report presented the Kansas State Board of Education 61 recommendations. The recommendations for teacher educators included:

1. Develop statewide agreements through the Kansas State Department of Education that counts completing the teaching/training pathway and passing the pathway exam for college/university credit.
2. Present to middle, high school, and community college students and teacher education majors the information about Rural Opportunity Zones for Kansas income tax waivers and student loan repayments (<http://www.kansascommerce.com/index.aspx?NID=491#Student>). The program will pay 20% of outstanding student loans up to a maximum of \$3,000 per year (\$15,000 maximum benefit over five years).
3. Present to middle, high school, and community college students and teacher education majors the information about teacher loan forgiveness for federal student loans (<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/teacher>).
4. Bring to the attention of all teacher education majors the Kansas Teacher Service

Scholarship

(http://www.kansasregents.org/resources/PDF/Students/Student_Financial_Aid/Teacher.pdf).

5. Self-inventory institutional support for students preparing for Praxis tests both initially and after they do not pass. Forward these supports to the Association of Teacher Educators-Kansas for ATE-K to recommend guidance for institutions to improve support.
6. Advertise on all teacher preparation campuses those programs available to Kansas students interested in teaching careers, including the Kansas tuition reimbursement programs and the federally funded TEACH grants.
7. Offer the bachelor's in special education degree.
8. Create 2+2 partnerships with community colleges to prepare more teachers.
9. Restructure the student teaching model so it takes into account differing experience levels and possible compensation/support for student teachers. Promote programs that reduce the need of districts to hire long-term subs with little to no experience in the teaching area.
10. Examine why the proportion of program completers to total number of candidates is increasing (see Figure 1) and why the number of candidates is declining.
11. Survey first-year teachers and their employers to assess preparedness for teaching.
12. Present to P-12 students, parents, and other community members in their respective communities the importance and value of becoming a Kansas teacher.

Additional recommendations include

- Establish a relationship with the local state representative and senator to advocate for teaching as a profession and funding to provide competitive salaries
- Monitor the House and Senate Education Committees and testify orally or in writing to bills relevant to teacher professionalism
- Lobby representatives and senators to change the Work After Retirement rules for retired teachers and administrators so they can return to the classroom
- Lobby representatives to fund a stipend for teachers earning the Teacher Leader endorsement to support professional development of early career teachers in order to retain them in the profession
- Establish a relationship with local board of education members
- Bring students to meet elected leaders
- Work with school leadership colleagues to ensure that school leaders are prepared to create the optimal school environment for attracting, supporting, and retaining teachers
- Support the local high school's efforts to start an Educators Rising chapter

Conclusion

Of the 38,000+ Kansas teaching positions in 2015-2016, only 277 were unfilled; however, those vacancies clustered in Kansas City Kansas, Wichita, and southwest Kansas. While across the state there was not a teacher shortage, the loss of 2,373 teacher education majors in four years and a teaching force dominated by early career teachers reflects supply fragility.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force identified four challenges to teacher supply:

1. Low salaries deter students and others from entering the profession, especially in teaching fields (e.g., STEM) where other career options are better remunerated.
2. Low esteem for the teaching profession deters students and others from entering the profession and retaining them if they do.
3. Current and ongoing instability of education-related funding and policies in the Legislature exacerbates the perception of low esteem for the teaching profession.
4. Work After Retirement rules instituted during the 2016 legislative session are preventing career educators from returning to the classroom after retirement.

As teacher educators, we have a call to action that transcends the essential work of preparing teachers in our colleges and universities. What are we doing professionally and personally and individually and collectively to increase the supply of teachers in Kansas?

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- Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coming-crisis-teaching>

Appendix

State Reports on Teacher Shortages and Their URLs

Arizona Educator Retention and Recruitment Initial Report (2015),
<http://www.azed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/err-initial-report-final.pdf>

Arizona Educator Retention and Recruitment Second Report (2016),
<http://www.azed.gov/public-relations/files/2016/01/az-educator-retention-and-recruitment-second-report.pdf>

Arkansas Department of Education Academic Shortage Areas for 2016-2017 (2016),
http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/HR_and_Educator_Effectiveness/HR_Educator_Licensure/CSA_PPT_from_Dec_2015_FINAL_with_Notes-11266.pdf

Addressing California's Emerging Teacher Shortage: An Analysis of Sources and Solutions (2016),
http://www.learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/LPI-Report-AddressingCA_TeacherShortage.pdf

[Delaware] Committee to Advance Educator Compensation and Careers: Provisional Recommendations,
<http://caecc.us/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CAECC-Provisional-Recommendations-June-2015.pdf>

Illinois Teacher Recruiting and Retention Task Force Report (2015),
<http://www.isbe.net/TRRTF/pdf/TRRTF-final-rpt-2015.pdf>

Indiana Blue Ribbon Commission on the Recruitment and Retention of Excellent Educators (2016),
<http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/news/blueribbon-report-1142016.pdf>

Indiana's Demand & Supply Issues for K-12 Educators (Ball State University, 2015),
<http://projects.cberdata.org/reports/TeacherSupply2015-1026.pdf>

Kansas Commissioner of Education's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Teacher Vacancies and Supply Final Report 2016,
<http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Communications/Publications/BRTF%20Final.pdf>

Oklahoma Teacher Shortage Task Force Preliminary Report (2015),
<http://okpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/Prelim.-report-Dec.-11-2015.pdf>

Oklahoma Educator Workforce Shortage Task Force Initial Report (2014),
http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/documents/files/OK_Educator_Workforce_Shortage_Task_Force_Initial_Report.pdf

South Dakota Blue Ribbon Task Force Final Report (2015),
<http://blueribbon.sd.gov/Blue%20Ribbon%20Report%20-%20Final.pdf>

Figure 1. Kansas Teacher Education Candidate Supply Trends from Title II Data

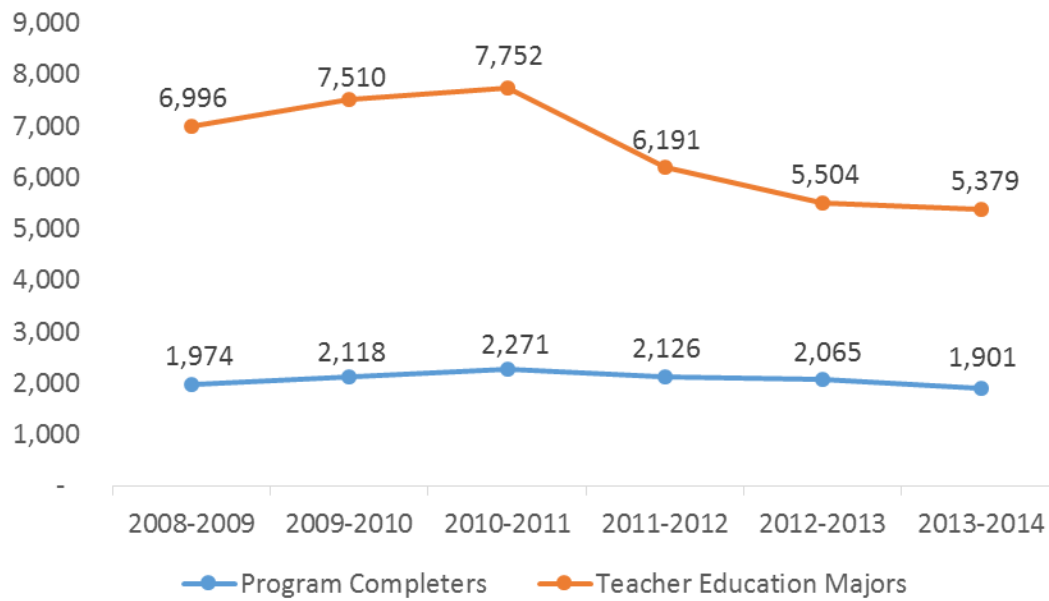


Figure 2. Percent of Kansas Teachers by Years of Experience and Region 2015-2016

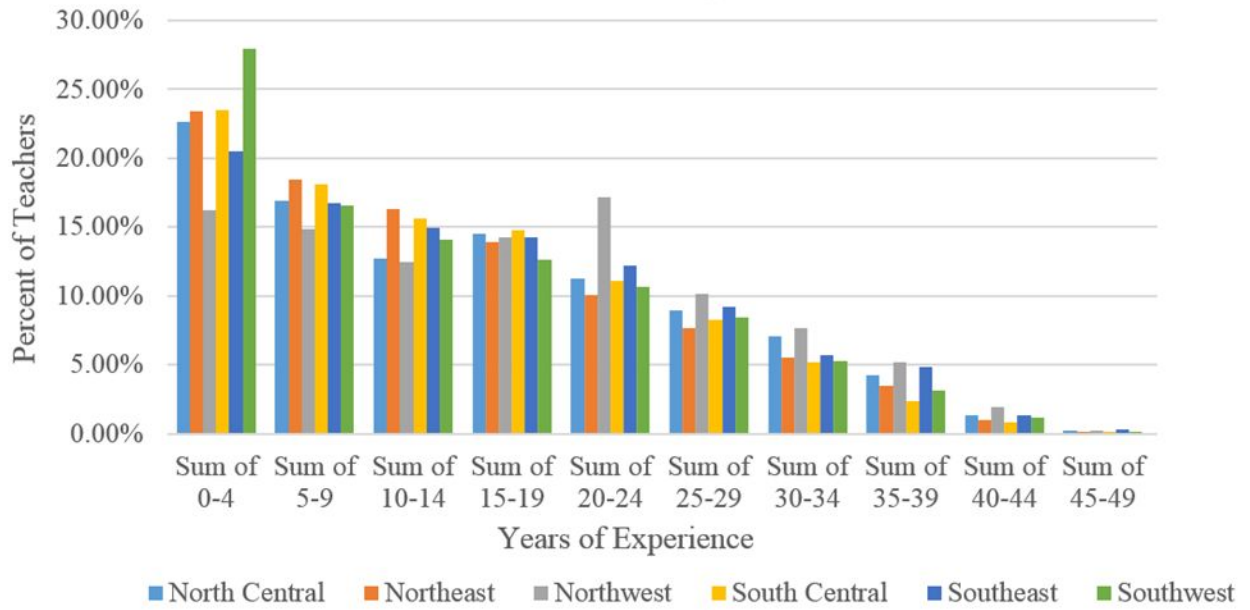


Figure 3. National Count of Teacher Education Majors from Title II Data

