

Closing the Opportunity Divide

Addressing Michigan's Teacher Shortage Problem for Students Most in Need



Equity-Driven • Data-Centered • Student-Focused

EdTrust-Midwest works for the high academic achievement of all Michigan students in pre-kindergarten through college. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that disproportionately impact students who are the most underserved, with a particular focus on Black and Latino/a students and students from low-income backgrounds.

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This research result used data structured and maintained by the MERI-Michigan Education Data Center (MEDC). MEDC data is modified for analysis purposes using rules governed by MEDC and are not identical to those data collected and maintained by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and/or Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). Results, information and opinions solely represent the analysis, information and opinions of the author(s) and are not endorsed by, or reflect the views or positions of, grantors, MDE and CEPI or any employee thereof.

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I. Executive Summary

Decades of research underscore how important teachers are in students' lives. They are, in fact, one of the most important factors contributing to student success in the classroom.¹ Teachers, particularly highly qualified and effective teachers, are a key ingredient in achieving student success. Indeed, we know from research that a teacher's impact on their students' outcomes can be two to three times more powerful than any other school-based factor.²

However, as with many aspects of education, years of research show that access to highly qualified and effective teachers is uneven, at best.³ For this reason, teacher shortages make up one important component of opportunity gaps, and in turn achievement gaps.⁴ These gaps result in discrepancies in reading and math proficiency based on factors including race and socioeconomic status.⁵ In Michigan, such opportunity gaps for our students who have long lacked access to strong educational resources – Black and Latino students and children from low-income backgrounds across the entire state – are deep and persistent.

It is with this context that EdTrust-Midwest sought to examine Michigan's educator landscape to determine whether all students have similar access to experienced, credentialed, highly qualified and effective teachers. EdTrust-Midwest spent two years reviewing research, conducting focus groups across geographic regions, and securing, examining and analyzing hard-to-access public and non-public data.

The findings paint a troubling picture across Michigan's classrooms, demonstrating how Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds have far less access to credentialed, highly qualified teachers, experience far greater teacher mobility, and have access to far fewer experienced teachers than their white peers. Given how important teacher quality is to student success, it is especially troubling that Black and Latino students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students living in rural and urban areas systematically do not have equitable access

to teachers who are likely to be well-prepared and effective in the classroom. These inequities contribute to the devastating and persistent opportunity and achievement gaps for Michigan children and their public schools.

The research and findings are presented in this comprehensive report, *Closing the Opportunity Divide: Addressing Michigan's Teacher Shortage Problem for Students Most in Need*. **Among the findings and research cited in the report:**

- **Students with the greatest needs are far less likely to have teachers certified to teach in their subject area.** In districts serving higher concentrations of students experiencing poverty, too many Michigan children, particularly children from urban and rural communities, are learning academic content from teachers who do not hold certifications or endorsements for the subjects they teach. In 2022-23, more than 16.5% of teachers in high-poverty school districts were teaching out-of-field – twice the state average.
- **Students with the greatest needs are far more likely to learn from teachers with emergency or temporary credentials.** Students who attend school in [Opportunity Index band 6](#) – the school districts with the highest concentrations of poverty – are 16 times more likely to learn from a teacher with temporary or emergency credentials than their peers in Michigan's wealthiest school districts.

- **Students with the greatest needs are far more likely to learn from beginning teachers.** Students who learn in school districts with the highest concentrations of poverty are nearly three times more likely than their peers in low-poverty districts to learn from a beginning teacher with fewer than three years of teaching experience.
- **Teacher attrition in Michigan is worse than the national average, and teacher turnover is high in districts with students living in concentrated poverty.** Michigan is slightly worse than the national average for teacher attrition. In 2022-23, the attrition rate in Michigan was 10%.⁶ Consider that since 2004, national teacher attrition has held steady at approximately 8% per year.⁷ Across the country, schools serving students in high-poverty districts lose, on average, 20% of their teaching force each year – a pattern mirrored in high-poverty districts in Michigan.⁸ High teacher turnover rates can inhibit student educational progress by increasing the likelihood that their teacher is inexperienced or unqualified.⁹
- **Districts serving high populations of students from low-income backgrounds and Black and Latino students – particularly districts in urban and rural communities – face far greater challenges recruiting and retaining top educator talent for their children.** For example, in districts where a majority of students are Black, those students are nearly four times more likely to learn from an out-of-field teacher, four times more likely to learn from a teacher with emergency credentials, and nearly twice as likely to learn from a beginning teacher than in districts serving primarily white students. Data on this topic are hard to come by, yet research, anecdotes and focus groups paint a troubling picture. In one focus group of Michigan teachers led by EdTrust-Midwest, a teacher

summarized the current situation in many Michigan school districts: "We've had a number of our teachers already leave to go to other districts or leave for other jobs outside of education... it's the pay and it's the teacher conditions."

- **Low teacher salaries in Michigan contribute to the teacher shortage problem, worsening inequities in high-poverty districts that have trouble competing for talent with peer districts.** Between 1999 and 2019, Michigan's inflation-adjusted teacher salary fell more than 20%, representing the second largest teacher salary decline in the country.¹⁰ Had Michigan's teacher salaries kept pace with inflation, the average teacher salary today would be more than \$81,000.¹¹ Instead, Michigan's average teacher salary of \$64,000 trailed the national average in 2021-22, and for beginning teachers, the picture is even worse.¹² First-year teachers in Michigan earned, on average, about \$39,000 annually – an amount which landed Michigan a rank of 39th nationally and last among the Great Lakes states.¹³ At the district level, we see even more troubling disparities. Teachers in Michigan's wealthiest districts are paid just over \$4,000 more, on average, than teachers in Michigan's poorest districts.¹⁴
- **Data on several key facets of the teacher shortage problem are hard to access for the public or nonexistent:** For instance, until recently, Michigan school districts were not required to report vacancy data at all, and many chose not to. In 2021-22, nearly 90% of the school districts in Michigan reported **zero teacher vacancies**.¹⁵ This number represents a severe undercounting of the actual teacher vacancies in Michigan. Relying solely on this data to track vacancies would lead to the incorrect assumption that the entire state could solve teacher shortages with a few dozen new teacher hires each year, severely misdiagnosing the problem.

What We Can Do

Attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers is one of Michigan's top priorities to become a Top 10 state for education.¹⁶ Prior to the pandemic, a strong majority of teachers – 76% – described themselves as satisfied and happy in their employment.¹⁷ But that sentiment has changed, with more teachers across the country leaving the profession now than in the past.¹⁸ Schools across the nation and here in Michigan are experiencing teacher shortages across subjects and grades.¹⁹

Recognizing the urgency of the problem, state leaders have already begun making significant efforts and investments in Michigan educators through innovative programs like the [MI Future Educator Fellowship](#) and the [MI Future Educator Stipends](#), along with [mentoring and induction programs](#), and a state-funded [student loan repayment program](#). In addition to these existing efforts, our recommendations include five key priorities to address Michigan's inequitable teacher shortage problem. A summary of the priorities can be found below. Detailed supporting strategies and policy recommendations can be found on pages 36-41.

Priority 1: Fair and Adequate Funding Now

Put simply, districts cannot hire and retain high-quality teachers without adequate and fair funding. To improve teacher attraction and retention, Michigan needs to support competitive salaries for teachers, especially for those working in districts with higher concentrations of poverty. Fair and adequate funding leads to better outcomes for students. For instance, research shows that a 10% increase in per-pupil spending across 12 years of education results in a lower adult poverty rate, higher postsecondary earnings, and up to four additional months of school completed.²⁰

Priority 2: Improve State Education Data Systems

Policymakers cannot begin to solve the issues laid out in this report without meaningful, timely, and accurate data. Importantly, clear and effective data reporting helps parents easily access information about their district and make informed decisions about their children's education.

Priority 3: Prioritize Making Teaching an Attractive and Competitive Career Choice

Increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in the workforce begins with making the career a more attractive option that young people are excited to explore. When a career in education is associated with financial stability and robust professional growth opportunity, more bright and talented people will be drawn to the profession and compelled to stay in the field.

Priority 4: Invest in and Prioritize Supports for School Administrators, Which Will Improve Their Ability to Evaluate Teachers and Offer Effective, Actionable, Student-Centered Support for Staff Development

To support and grow teachers, administrators need the capacity to be fully present and equipped to conduct classroom observations and provide meaningful feedback. Administrators are often overburdened, and observations can become an exercise in compliance rather than opportunities for actionable feedback and professional growth.

Priority 5: Increase Access to High-Quality Professional Development for Educators

Educators, like many professionals, seek opportunities for professional growth and advancement. It is up to both the state and local districts to provide relevant, high-quality programming for teachers to learn new skills and increase career advancement opportunities.

This report paints a comprehensive picture of Michigan's educator landscape and focuses on the inequitable access students from low-income backgrounds and students of color have to highly qualified teachers. **For the purposes of this report "highly qualified" or "high-quality" teachers are those who are fully certified and with more than three years of experience teaching in their certification and/or endorsement area(s).** This report will examine how the distribution of these quality measures differs between districts serving Black and Latino students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students in rural and urban areas compared to districts serving fewer Latino and Black students, as well as more suburban districts.

The report includes analyses which examine the distribution of these quality measures across Opportunity Index bands to demonstrate how district poverty impacts teacher quality. The Opportunity Index is an important indicator of district concentration of poverty. To learn more about the Opportunity Index, see sidebar on page 14, "Opportunity Index: The Next Step in Michigan's Fair Funding Journey."

Many of the findings included in this report come from original research and analyses conducted by EdTrust-Midwest. The table on pages 8-9 summarizes the measures of quality analyzed, why those measures matter, accessibility of the data for those measures and key findings.

In conclusion, every Michigan student is bright and capable of achieving at high levels. Achievement gaps evident in state and national assessments, however, are the symptom of opportunity gaps in the state's public education system.²¹

The reality of Michigan's teacher shortage problem – and all the factors at play – are undoubtedly troubling. They build upon opportunity gaps that exist in the public education system, particularly for Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds. The result is that too many Black and Latino students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students living in rural and urban areas systematically do not have the same access to teachers who are likely to be well-prepared and effective in the classroom.

Yet, these problems are not insurmountable. The recommendations in this report are a roadmap for necessary change.

Every Michigan child deserves to learn from **highly qualified, highly effective, and diverse** teachers. It is up to all of us – advocates, community leaders, parents, educators and especially policymakers, to ensure that we close the opportunity divide in our classrooms so that every student can reach their full potential in school and experience a bright future ahead.

Many staff and partners contributed to the research and development of this report including Executive Director Amber Arellano, Senior Director of Strategic Communications and External Relations Jennifer Mrozowski, Communications Lead I Da'Stanza Murphy, and policy consultant Jacqueline Gardner. Special thanks to former Senior Data and Policy Analysts Bradley Kingston and Emily Hatch and to former Policy Fellow Karolyn Davis who contributed invaluable research, analyses, and insights for this report and to the Michigan State University Office of K-12 Outreach for providing data management and analytical support.

II. Summary Findings of Michigan Teacher Quality

The chart below summarizes findings about Michigan’s educator workforce. It includes a high-level summary of the impact of teacher experience, credentials, turnover and quality measures on student outcomes, as well as findings for Michigan’s schools. The charts also outlines whether data are available or publicly accessible for each workforce measure.

Teacher Workforce Measure	Importance for Student Outcomes	Data Availability & Accessibility in Michigan	Findings
Inexperienced Teachers	<p>Decades of research has found that teacher experience is positively related to student achievement.²² Inexperienced teachers are more likely to struggle with classroom management skills, unfamiliarity with curriculum,²³ and a lack of rapport with students.²⁴</p> <p>Teachers with emergency credentials can be a cause for concern, especially if they have no prior training or experience in the classroom, because because students are receiving instruction from individuals who may lack academic content area expertise and may not know age-appropriate teaching methods. In fact, one study found that these teachers are more likely to be rated as “unsatisfactory” or “needs improvement” compared to other new teachers.²⁵</p>	<p>Somewhat Publicly Accessible</p> <p>The number of inexperienced teachers and teachers with emergency or temporary credentials are available in each district’s Annual Education Report.</p> <p>Data regarding what subjects and/or grades are being taught by inexperienced and/or emergency credentialed teachers are not publicly available.</p> <p>The Annual Education Reports are only available as individual PDFs for each district, severely limiting their accessibility for statewide analysis or to understand how equitable – or inequitable – the distribution of experienced educators is between Michigan school districts.</p>	<p>Students learning in districts with the highest concentrations of poverty in Michigan often lack access to educators with the skills and experience most likely to help them succeed academically.</p> <p>Students who attend the state’s school districts with the highest concentrations of poverty – Opportunity Index band 6 – are 16 times more likely to learn from a teacher with emergency or temporary credentials and nearly three times more likely to learn from a beginning teacher than students in districts with the lowest concentrations of poverty.</p> <p>Urban and rural districts are more likely to have a higher percentage of inexperienced teachers compared to suburban districts.</p> <p>Statewide, 2.7% of teachers have emergency or temporary credentials. Less than 1% of teachers in low-poverty districts have emergency or temporary credentials compared to almost 8% of teachers in high-poverty districts.</p>
Out-of-Field Teaching	<p>Out-of-field teaching occurs when a teacher is assigned to teach a grade or subject they are not certified to teach. Out-of-field teachers may lack the content knowledge and skills needed to teach the subjects they’re assigned, and students who learn from out-of-field teachers tend to have less academic growth in that subject.²⁶</p>	<p>Somewhat Publicly Accessible</p> <p>The number of out-of-field teachers is available in each district’s Annual Education Report.</p> <p>Data regarding what subjects and/or grades are being taught by out-of-field teachers are available in the Michigan’s Education Staff Report.</p> <p>The Annual Education Reports are only available as individual PDFs for each district, severely limiting their accessibility for statewide analysis or to understand how equitable – or inequitable – the distribution of out-of-field educators is between Michigan school districts.</p>	<p>In the 2023-24 school year, 8.1% of teachers were teaching out-of-field in Michigan, but districts with higher concentrations of poverty are more likely than the rest of the state to have teachers teaching out-of-field.</p> <p>Students in Opportunity Index band 6 are over seven times more likely to learn from an out-of-field teacher than their peers in Opportunity Index band 1, or the school districts with the lowest concentration of poverty.</p>
Teacher Turnover	<p>Teacher shortages do not only refer to a lack of qualified teachers in a given classroom, but also to the phenomenon of teachers leaving the classroom, creating a potential vacancy in their wake. “Teacher turnover” is an umbrella term capturing both teacher attrition and mobility. Teacher attrition refers to teachers leaving the profession, and no longer working as a teacher in any traditional public or charter school. Teacher mobility refers to teachers moving between school districts.</p> <p>High turnover rates can inhibit student educational progress by increasing the likelihood that their teacher is inexperienced or unqualified.²⁷</p>	<p>Somewhat Publicly Accessible</p> <p>The Michigan’s Education Staff Report provides statewide, district, and school-level retention percentages, as well as retention information for certain demographic characteristics. Detailed data allowing for the calculation of retention rates based on other criteria (such as subject area taught) are not publicly available. Retention rates cited in this report were calculated using confidential data from the Michigan Education Research Institute (MERI). Analyses from the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) supplemented this report.</p>	<p>The truth is that the pandemic did not impact all districts equally. While many districts are facing teacher shortages, the acuteness of the crisis varies greatly by locale.</p> <p>Districts serving high populations of students from low-income backgrounds and Black and Latino students – particularly districts in urban and rural communities – are facing far greater challenges recruiting and retaining top educator talent for their children.</p> <p>The attrition rate for teachers in Michigan in 2022-2023 was 10% – slightly higher than the national average.²⁸ Yet the attrition rate within Michigan varied greatly based on teacher demographics and school characteristics.</p> <p>For example, the attrition rate for Latino teachers was 12.3%, about 2 percentage points above the state average and the attrition rate for Black teachers was 14.8% – nearly 5 percentage points higher than the state average.²⁹</p>
Teaching Vacancies	<p>Teacher vacancies are a major equity concern: research shows that teacher vacancy rates are often higher in urban or rural districts, schools serving higher proportions of students of color or students from low-income backgrounds, and districts with lower salaries or relatively poorer working conditions.³⁰</p>	<p>Not Publicly Accessible</p> <p>School districts have historically not been required to report these data to the state. Beginning on October 1, 2024, districts are now required to report certain vacancy information to the state, but those data are not currently publicly available.</p>	<p>Districts have not been required to report vacancies, which led to underreporting: nearly 90% of districts reported no vacancies in the 2021-2022 school year.</p> <p>This underreporting means that policymakers are unable to target interventions to the districts with the highest vacancy rates.</p>

III. Closing the Opportunity Divide:

Addressing Michigan's Teacher Shortage Problem for Students Most in Need

By: Jen DeNeal, Director of Policy and Research, Charlotte Pierce, Senior Policy Analyst and the EdTrust-Midwest team

The importance of teachers in students' educational journeys cannot be understated. In study after study, we see how they are one of the most important factors contributing to student success in the classroom.³⁷ When teachers are highly qualified, the difference they make is even greater. In fact, a teacher's impact on their students' outcomes can be two to three times more powerful than any other school-based factor.³⁸

However, as with many aspects of education, access to highly qualified and effective teachers is uneven across Michigan, with a significant impact on Black and Latino students and children from low-income backgrounds, in particular.³⁴ For this reason, teacher shortages make up one important component of opportunity gaps, and in turn achievement gaps,³⁵ which result in disparities in reading and math proficiency based on factors including race and socioeconomic status.³⁶

In Michigan, such opportunity gaps for our students who have long lacked access to strong educational resources – Black and Latino students and children from low-income backgrounds – are deep and persistent.

To assess the scope of the teacher shortage problem, EdTrust-Midwest engaged in a two-year undertaking to examine Michigan's educator landscape to determine whether all students have equitable access to experienced, credentialed, highly qualified and effective teachers. The work entailed a comprehensive review of research, conducting multiple focus groups across geographic areas and requesting, examining and analyzing hard-to-access educator workforce data from both public and non-public sources.

EdTrust-Midwest sought to unpack the research and underlying causes of the teacher shortage problem and to outline a roadmap for change. The research and

findings are presented in this comprehensive report, *Closing the Opportunity Divide: Addressing Michigan's Teacher Shortage Problem for Students Most in Need*.

The findings paint a troubling picture of inequities across Michigan's classrooms, demonstrating how Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds have far less access to credentialed, highly qualified teachers, experience far greater teacher mobility, and have access to far fewer experienced teachers. These inequities contribute to the devastating and persistent opportunity and achievement gaps for our students.

At the same time, as the findings demonstrate, the depth of the problem is difficult to assess due to a lack of data – either because the data are not easily accessible for the public, are not tracked with fidelity, or simply do not exist.

Yet, the inequities in the state's educator workforce and classrooms are not insurmountable. Michigan has already begun to improve certain data systems and made laudable investments in educators – investments which must be sustained to reach their full potential. To that end, in addition to the research and findings, this report includes five key priorities and recommendations that serve as a roadmap for sustained change.

IV. Defining Teacher Shortages:

A Complex and Multi-Faceted Problem

The phrase “teacher shortages” means different things depending on who is leading the conversation: policymakers, school leaders, parents, or the media. It encompasses many topics including teacher attrition, teacher mobility, a lack of properly credentialed or licensed individuals leading classrooms, and vacant positions.

Teacher shortages are rarely universal, but rather, vary by subject area.³¹ For instance, in a recent survey of 46 Michigan Intermediate School Districts (ISD), most ISD leaders identified special education teachers as a critical shortage meaning there aren't enough to fill the needs in classrooms.³² That challenge is not unique to Michigan. In 2022-23, 39 states reported special education as a shortage area, while 34 states reported science, and 31 reported mathematics.³³

As this report will demonstrate, educator shortages like those noted above are also highly localized and tend to be more acute in areas with high concentrations of poverty and students of color. The shortages, coupled with disparities, tend to exacerbate existing educational inequities.



V. Teacher Qualifications

Why do teacher qualifications matter?

To reach their full potential, all children deserve classrooms staffed with excellent and effective teachers. Before delving into the research and data, it's important to understand why having a highly qualified teacher matters.

While vacancy data can clearly show whether an adult is standing in front of a classroom full of students, it does not indicate whether that person is qualified to teach the class and, more importantly, to do it well. For the purposes of this report, "highly qualified" or "high-quality" teachers are defined as those who are fully certified and with more than three years of experience teaching in their certification and/or endorsement area(s).

The next section explores a set of teacher quality measures, including the distribution of inexperienced teachers and teachers with "emergency credentials" (examples include temporary credentials like substitute teaching credentials) and the distribution of "out-of-field" teachers – those teachers who are teaching subjects for which they do not hold certifications or endorsements.



VI. Teacher Quality Measure: Inexperienced Teachers

What is this measure and why does it matter?

As with many other professions, experience matters in teaching. Decades of research has found that teacher experience is positively related to student achievement.³⁹ Inexperienced teachers may face additional challenges in the classroom including a lack of classroom management skills, unfamiliarity with curriculum,⁴⁰ and a lack of rapport with students.⁴¹ For the purposes of this section, "inexperienced teachers" include beginning teachers and teachers with emergency or temporary credentials.

New teachers need different supports than their more experienced peers,⁴² but in schools filled with beginning teachers, defined in Michigan as those within their first three years of teaching, these teachers often lack opportunities for informal mentorship and on-the-job coaching from more experienced peers.⁴³ Lack of school-based support for new teachers can increase their risk of exiting the profession, often within their first five years of teaching, before they have a chance to develop into highly effective educators.⁴⁴

Temporary or emergency teaching credentials allow individuals without a teaching certificate to teach in classrooms. These types of credentials allow school leaders to hire individuals who are not fully certified or credentialed for their content to fill teacher vacancies when no permanently credentialed teachers are available. Teachers with emergency credentials can be a cause for concern, especially if they have no

prior training or experience in the classroom, because students are receiving instruction from individuals who may lack academic content area expertise and may not know age-appropriate teaching methods. Teachers with emergency credentials are more likely to be rated as "unsatisfactory" or "needs improvement" compared to other new teachers.⁴⁵ Michigan, like other states, offers a variety of emergency or temporary credentials.⁴⁶ For the analyses in this report, data on emergency credentials come from each school district's publicly available Annual Education Report.⁴⁷



What we found

Michigan students in districts with the highest concentrations of poverty are much less likely to be in classrooms with highly experienced teachers who are, on average, more likely to be effective.⁴⁸

In the districts with the highest concentrations of poverty in the state – Opportunity Index band 6 – one-third of teachers are in their first year of teaching while only a quarter of teachers have more than 10 years of experience. Conversely, in the wealthiest districts in the state, first-year teachers comprise only 16% of the workforce while nearly half of teachers have more than 10 years of experience. For more on the Opportunity Index, refer to the sidebar on page 14.

While districts in Opportunity Index band 6 – districts with the highest concentration of poverty – only employ 13.5% of all the teachers in the state, they account for 38% of all teachers with emergency credentials in Michigan.

Opportunity Index: The Next Step in Michigan’s Fair and Adequate Funding Journey

Passed in 2023, the Opportunity Index transformed the way Michigan allocates what is known as “at risk” funding, making Michigan among the first 10 states with funding formulas that include an index for concentrations for poverty.⁴⁹

The Opportunity Index divides school districts into six bands based on the concentration of poverty within each district. In each band, districts are given an additional percentage of the foundation allowance based on their concentration of poverty. Districts with higher concentrations of poverty are placed in higher bands and are given a larger percentage of the foundation allowance to be able to meet the additional needs of their students.⁵⁰

For instance, Opportunity Index band 1 includes Michigan public school districts that have 0%-19.99% of students living in concentrated poverty.

Band 6 includes districts where 85% to 100% of students are living in concentrated poverty.

Note that the law provides for higher funding weights amounting to an additional 35% to 47% based on districts’ concentration of poverty. However, the Opportunity Index is not fully funded. Instead, the legislature approved prorated rates for each band for Fiscal Year 2025. For instance, school systems in band 6, which include Michigan’s highest poverty districts, receive an additional 16.66% funding above the foundation allowance for each student. The goal weight for that band is 47%.

Examples of districts in band 6 during the 2023-24 school year include: Godfrey-Lee Public Schools, Detroit Public Schools Community District, Whittemore-Prescott Area Schools, Muskegon Public Schools, and Hartford Public Schools.

Analyses throughout this report refer to the Opportunity Index bands to demonstrate how districts in the higher bands – or areas where there are higher concentrations of poverty – experience greater inequities on several important measures of educator quality.

Opportunity Index Band	% Economically Disadvantaged Students (Minimum)	% Economically Disadvantaged Students (Maximum)	FY25 Prorated Funding Weights*	Goal Funding Weights**
OI Band 1	0%	19.99%	12.41%	35%
OI Band 2	20%	43.99%	12.76%	36%
OI Band 3	44%	58.99%	13.29%	37.5%
OI Band 4	59%	72.99%	13.83%	39%
OI Band 5	73%	84.99%	14.89%	42%
OI Band 6	85%	100%	16.66%	47%

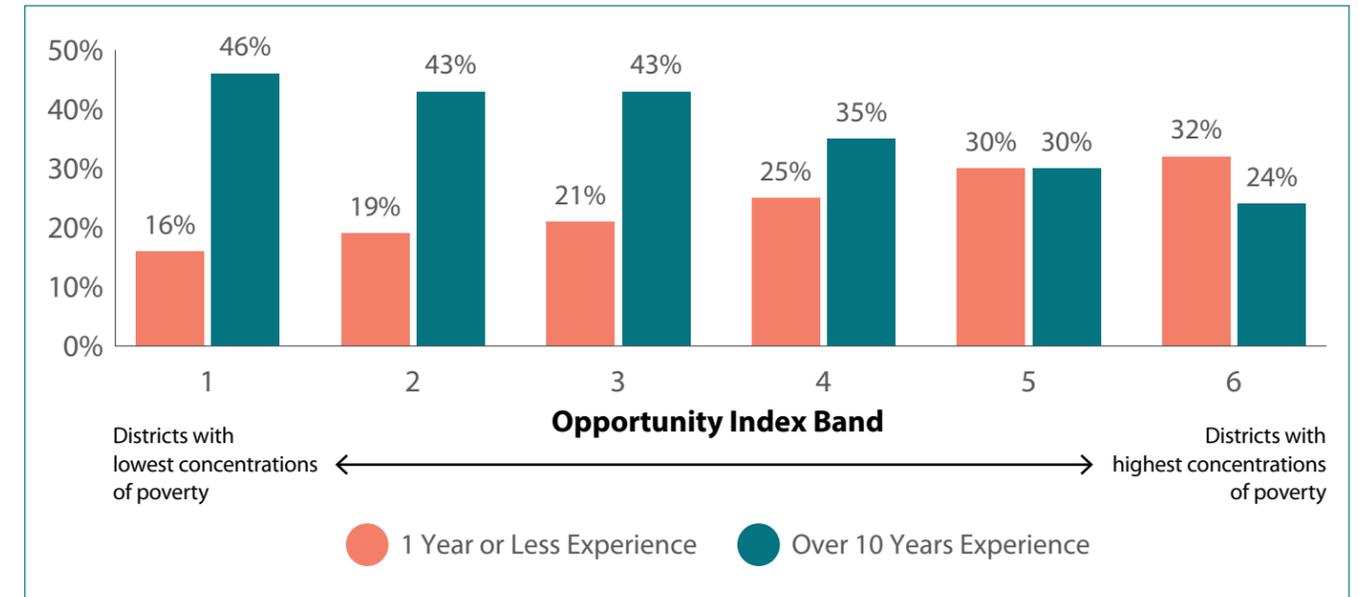
Source: 2025 School Aid Budget & Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency

*This column includes the weights districts will actually receive in fiscal year 2025. They are prorated versions of the goal weights (see next note) calculated based on current funding available for the Opportunity Index.

**These weights are established in law as the “goals” for each Opportunity Index band. Current funding is not sufficient to provide these weights to school districts in fiscal year 2025.

As seen in the chart below, the analysis of Michigan’s teacher workforce reinforces evidence of a pattern where new, inexperienced teachers start their career in higher poverty schools only to move to more affluent districts later in their careers as vacancies become available.⁵¹

Distribution of Most and Least Experienced Teachers Across Michigan by Opportunity Index Band (2024)



Source: MI School Data 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports

Like beginning teachers, the distribution of teachers with emergency credentials varies dramatically depending on a district’s concentration of poverty.

Distribution of Beginning and Emergency-Licensed Teachers Across Michigan by Opportunity Index Band (2023)

Opportunity Index Band	Number of Students	Number of Teachers (FTE)	Beginning Teachers	Teachers with Emergency Credentials
OI Band 1	121,058	7,110	11.4%	0.7%
OI Band 2	382,908	22,256	13.5%	1.2%
OI Band 3	289,705	16,673	15.5%	2.2%
OI Band 4	236,387	13,591	18.5%	2.6%
OI Band 5	154,063	8,747	23.4%	3.5%
OI Band 6	193,572	10,650	27.9%	7.7%

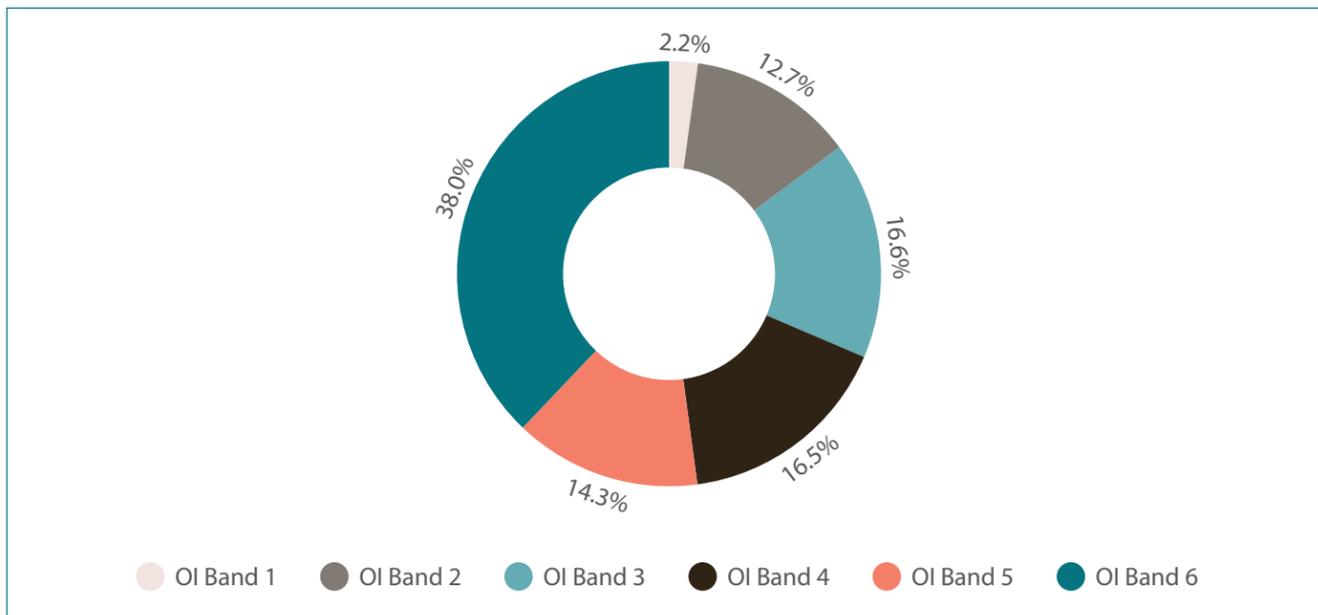
Source: MI School Data 23-24 Annual Education Report & 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports



Statewide, 2.7% of teachers hold emergency credentials. In the wealthiest districts in the state, however, the percentage of teachers holding emergency credentials is less than 1%. Yet in districts with the highest concentrations of poverty, nearly 8% of teachers hold emergency licenses. Taken together, this means that students who attend school in Opportunity Index band 6 – the school districts with the highest concentrations of poverty – are **16 times more likely to learn from a teacher with emergency credentials and nearly three times more likely to learn from a beginning teacher.**

What's more, while districts in Opportunity Index band 6 only employ 13.5% of all the teachers in the state, they account for 38% of all teachers with emergency credentials in Michigan.

Districts with Highest Concentration of Poverty have Greatest State Share of Teachers with Emergency Credentials (2023)



Source: MI School Data 23-24 Annual Education Report & 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports

Notes: OI = Opportunity Index, Districts in OI Band 6 are those with the highest concentrations of poverty. The pie chart in this table represents 100% of Michigan teachers with temporary or emergency credentials and in which OI band those teachers work.

The inequitable distribution of experienced teachers is apparent across different geographic areas in Michigan as well. Students in rural and urban areas are more likely to learn from beginning teachers and teachers with emergency credentials than students learning in town or suburban school districts.

Distribution of Beginning and Emergency-Licensed Teachers Across Michigan by Locale (2023)

Locale	# Students	# Teachers	Beginning Teachers	Teachers with Emergency Credentials
Urban	323,330	18,341	21.4%	3.9%
Suburb/Town	805,746	45,899	15.6%	2.2%
Rural	248,168	14,768	19.1%	2.9%

Source: MI School Data 23-24 Annual Education Report & 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports

Key Takeaway

Students learning in the highest concentrations of poverty in Michigan – in both rural and urban areas – often lack access to enough educators with the skills and experience most likely to help them succeed academically.



VII. Teacher Quality Measure: Out-of-Field Teaching

What is this measure and why does it matter?

Teachers who teach the grades and subjects listed on their teaching certificate are teaching in-field, while those who teach classes outside their listed grades and subjects are considered out-of-field. When school buildings do not have enough teachers to cover all subjects, administrators may turn to out-of-field placements in order to ensure that students are learning from a licensed educator rather than a long-term substitute or a revolving door of short-term substitutes. Out-of-field teachers may lack the content knowledge and skills needed to teach the subjects they're teaching, and students who learn from out-of-field teachers tend to have less academic growth in that subject.⁵² The distribution of out-of-field teaching tends to be inequitable. Nationally, teachers in rural schools and Black teachers are more likely to be assigned out-of-field classes, and students with disabilities and Black students are more likely to be enrolled in classes taught by out-of-field teachers.⁵³

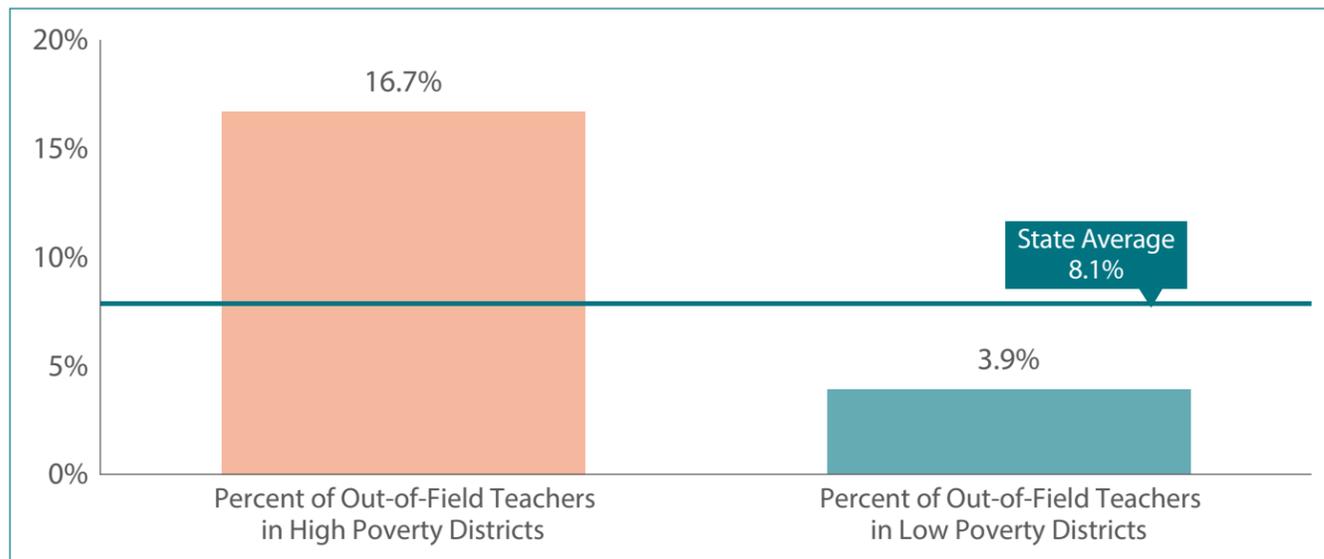


What we found

In Michigan, roughly 8% of all Michigan's teachers were out-of-field in 2022-2023.⁵⁴ The rate of out-of-field placements varied across subject areas. In core academic subjects, the most out-of-field placements occur in science classes, where approximately 7.8% of teachers lacked the appropriate science certifications for their assigned classes. Conversely, in social studies, only 3.4% of teachers were teaching out-of-field.⁵⁵

In Michigan, students in high-poverty districts are much more likely to have an out-of-field teacher than students in low-poverty districts. In 2022-23, more than 16.5% of teachers in high-poverty school districts were teaching out-of-field – twice the state average. On the other hand, the out-of-field teacher rate for low-poverty school districts was less than 4% – well below the statewide average for Michigan.

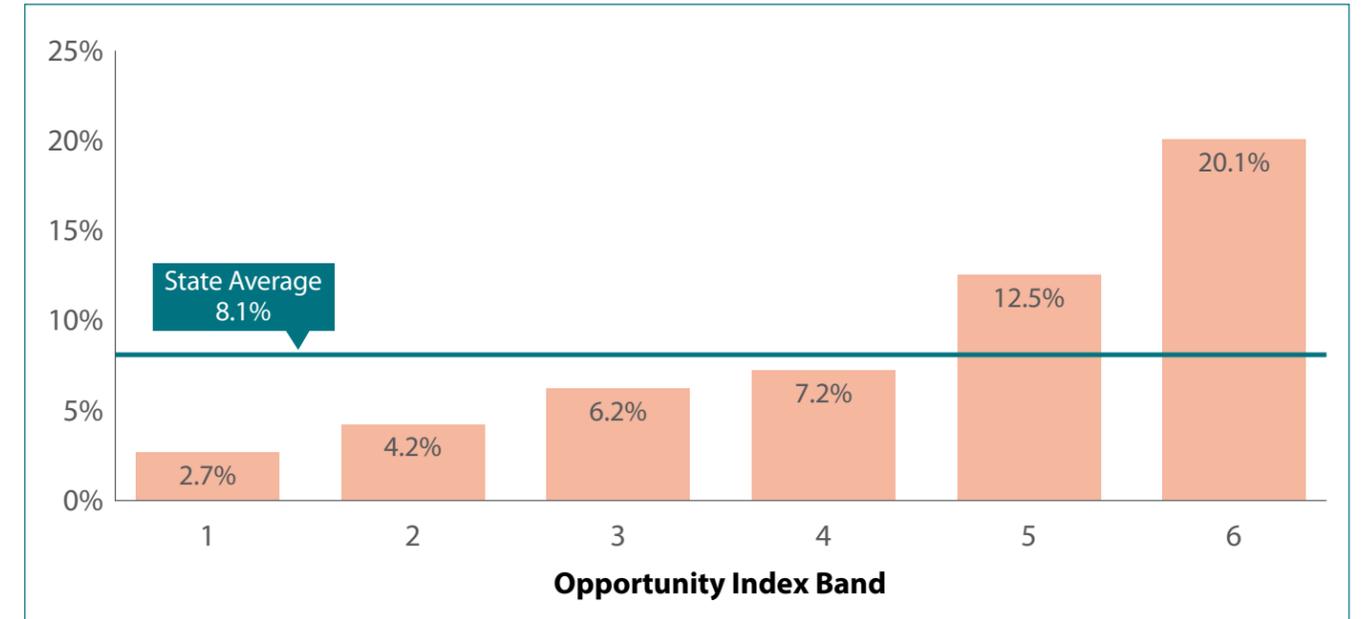
Teachers in High-Poverty Districts Far More Likely to Teach Out-of-Field (2023)



Source: MI School Data 23-24 Annual Education Report & 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports

And again, districts with higher concentrations of students living in poverty are far more likely than the rest of the state to employ teachers teaching out-of-field in their schools. Students in Opportunity Index band 6 are **over seven times more likely** to learn from an out-of-field teacher than their wealthier peers in Opportunity Index band 1 – the districts with the lowest concentrations of poverty.

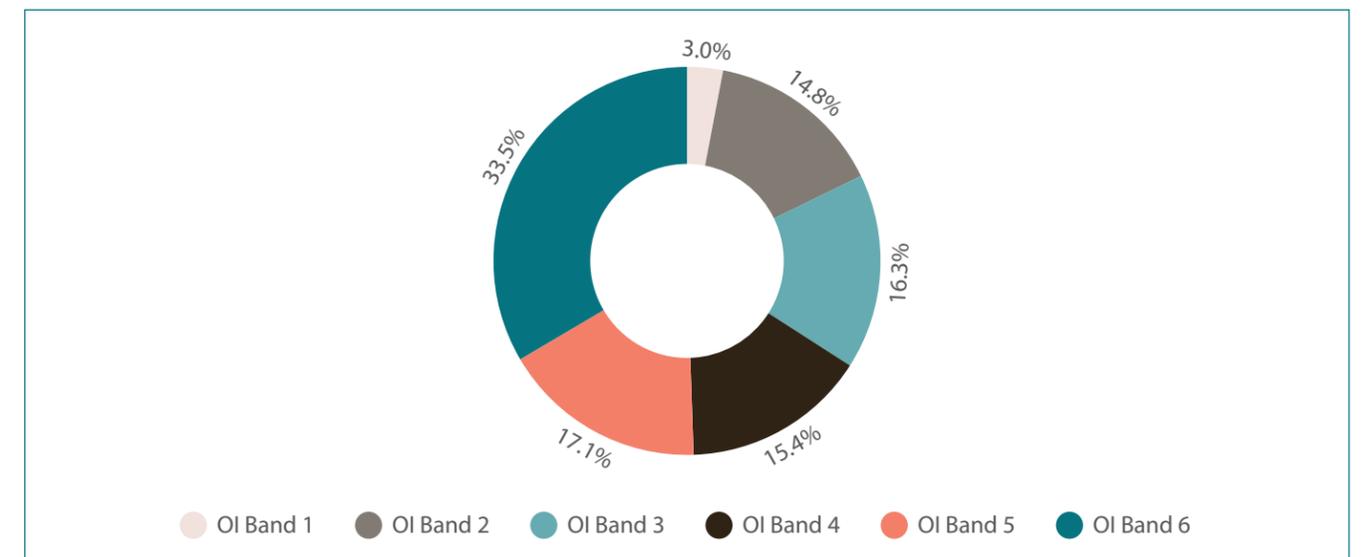
Percent of Teachers Teaching Out-of-Field by District Concentration of Poverty (2023)



Source: MI School Data 23-24 Annual Education Report & 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports

Again, districts in Opportunity Index band 6 accounted for 33.5% of all out-of-field teachers in the state despite only employing 13.5% of all teachers in the state.

Districts with Highest Concentration of Poverty have Greatest Share of Out-of-Field Teachers (2023)



Notes: OI = Opportunity Index, Districts in OI Band 6 are those with the highest concentrations of poverty. The pie chart represents 100% of Michigan teachers teaching out-of-field and in which OI band those teachers work.

Source: MI School Data 23-24 Annual Education Report & 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports

Out-of-field teaching is a bigger challenge for urban and rural districts in Michigan with over 13% of teachers in urban districts and almost 8% of teachers in rural districts teaching out-of-field in 2023-2024. That's compared to around 6% in suburban communities or towns.

Distribution of Out-of-Field Teachers by Locale (2023)

Locale	# Students	# Teachers	Out-Of-Field Teachers
Urban	323,330	18,341	13.2%
Suburb/Town	805,746	45,899	6.1%
Rural	248,168	14,768	7.9%

Source: MI School Data 23-24 Annual Education Report & 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports

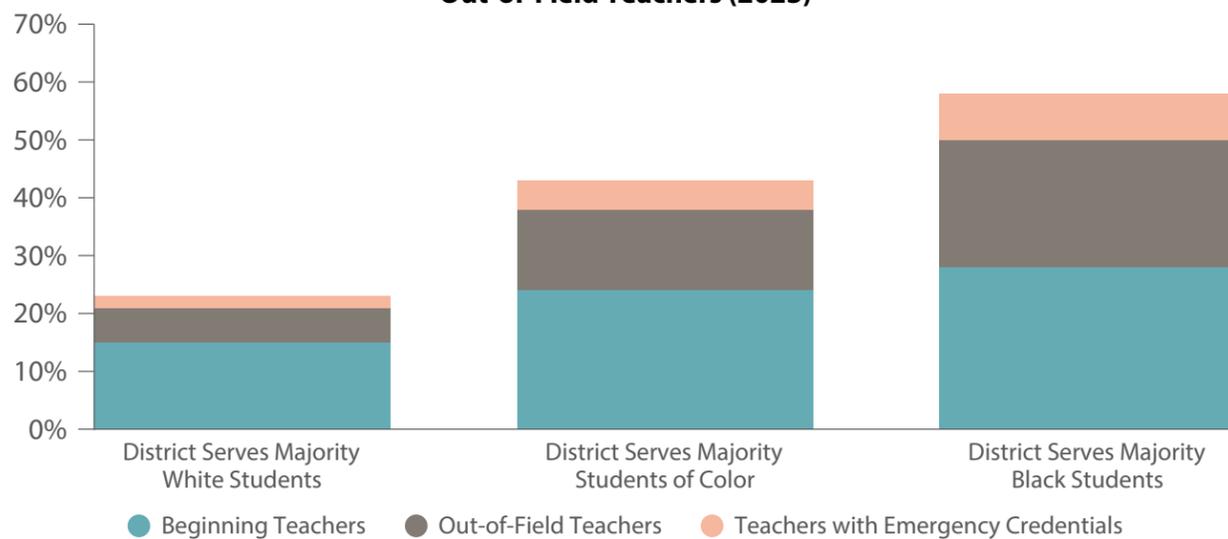
Key Takeaway

In districts serving higher concentrations of students experiencing poverty, too many Michigan children, particularly children from urban and rural communities, are learning academic content from teachers who do not hold certifications or endorsements for the subjects they teach.

Access to High-Quality Teachers for Students of Color

Michigan students of color are far more likely than their white peers to learn from beginning teachers, teachers with emergency credentials, and out-of-field teachers. The difference is particularly striking for districts where the majority of students are Black. In these districts, students are nearly four times more likely to learn from an out-of-field teacher, four times more likely to learn from a teacher with emergency credentials, and nearly twice as likely to learn from a beginning teacher than in districts serving primarily white students.

Students of Color are More Likely to Learn from Inexperienced or Out-of-Field Teachers (2023)



Source: MI School Data 23-24 Annual Education Report & 23-24 Staff and Student Headcount Reports

VIII. Teacher Shortage Measure: Teacher Turnover

What is this measure and why does it matter?

Teacher shortages do not only refer to a lack of qualified teachers in a given classroom, but also to the phenomenon of teachers leaving the classroom, creating a potential vacancy in their wake. “Teacher turnover” is an umbrella term capturing both teacher attrition and mobility. Teacher attrition refers to teachers leaving the profession, and no longer working as a teacher in any traditional public or charter school. Some teacher attrition is normal and expected in any given school year as teachers retire or change careers. However, high turnover rates can inhibit student educational progress by increasing the likelihood that their teacher is inexperienced or unqualified.⁵⁶ Whereas teacher attrition focuses on individuals who have left the teaching profession altogether, teacher mobility refers to the movement of teachers between schools, districts, or states.

Attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers is one of Michigan’s top priorities to become a Top 10 state for education.⁵⁷ In order to accomplish that goal, it’s important to understand which teachers are leaving their school or the teaching profession altogether.

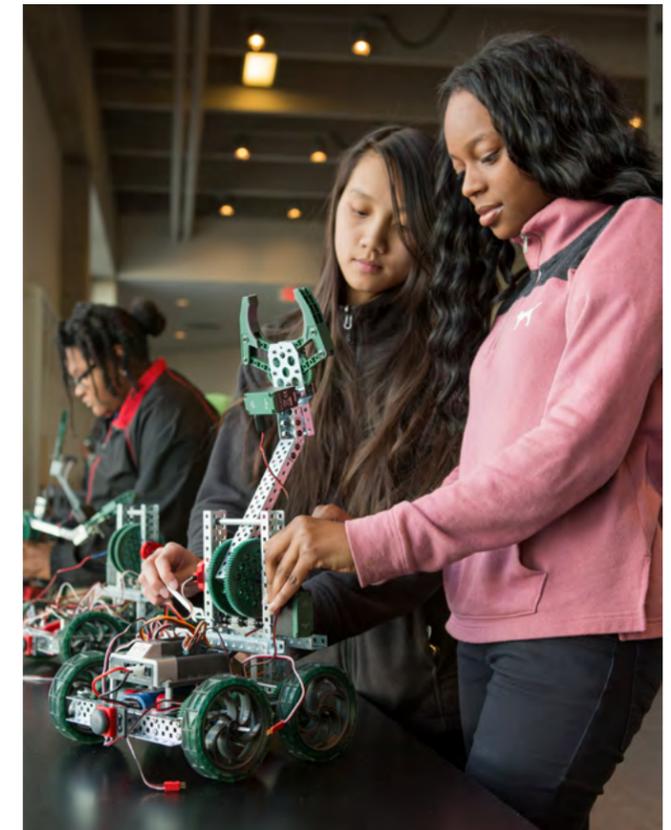


What we found

Teacher attrition rates across the country have increased since the early 1990s when roughly 5% of teachers left the profession annually, to the current rate of roughly 8% annually.⁵⁸ The attrition rate for teachers in Michigan in 2022-2023 was 10% – slightly higher than the national average.⁵⁹ The attrition rate within Michigan varied greatly based on teacher demographics and

school characteristics. For example, the attrition rate for Latino teachers was 12.3%, about 2 percentage points above the state average, and the attrition rate for Black teachers was 14.8% – nearly 5 percentage points higher than the state average.⁶⁰

Teacher mobility is an important measure for understanding teacher shortages because teachers generally do not stay in one job for their whole career. In fact, about 25% of teachers in the U.S. will cross state lines at some point in their career.⁶¹ In Michigan, just over 4% of teachers transferred to another district between fall of 2020 and fall of 2021.⁶²



Attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers is one of Michigan’s top priorities to become a Top 10 state for education.

This table examines patterns in teacher mobility and attrition by locale. Urban districts saw a slightly higher rate of teachers leaving the profession than the rest of the state, while both urban and rural districts were above the state average for employing first-year teachers. Additionally, rural districts were more likely to have “new to the district” teachers than the state average and saw far fewer “within district” transfers than any other region.

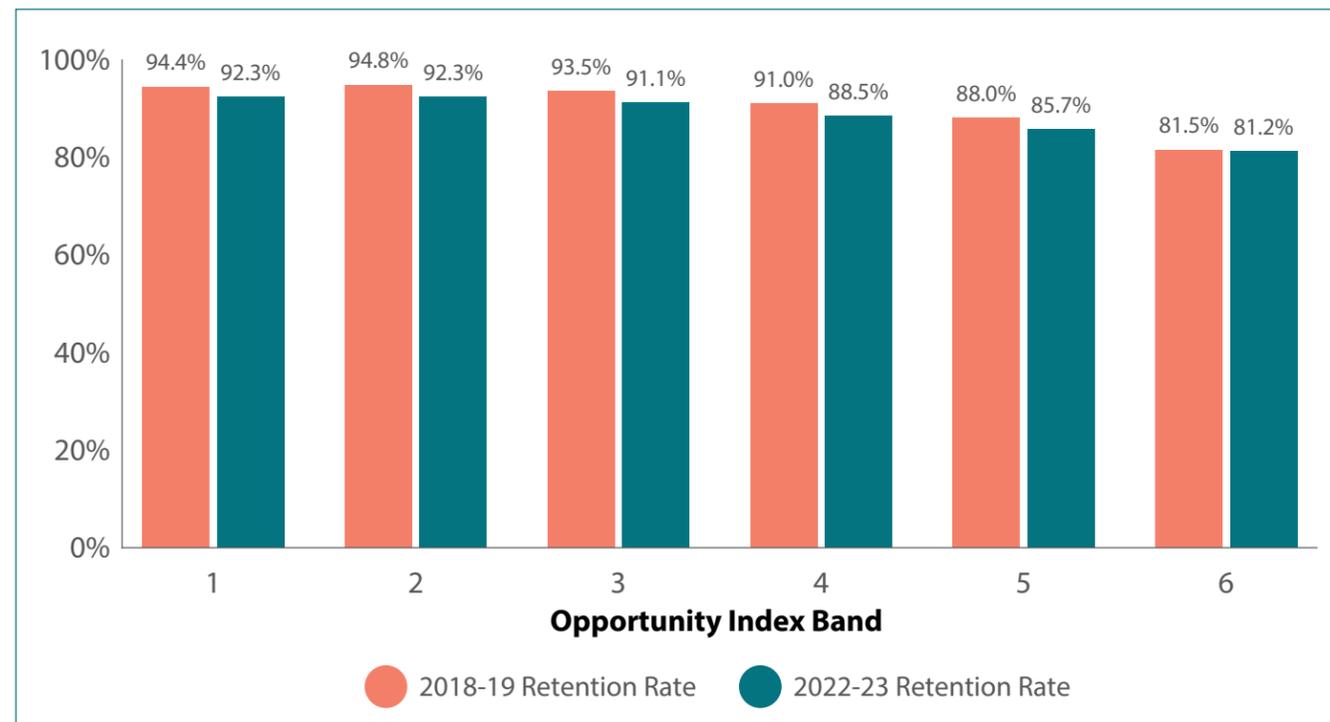
Teacher Mobility and Attrition in Michigan by Locale (2021)

Locale	Exited from Teaching	Were in Their First Year	Were New to Their District	Transferred Within Their District	Transferred to Another District
Statewide	9.0%	5.2%	7.8%	2.8%	4.3%
Urban	10.2%	6.2%	7.9%	3.1%	3.9%
Suburb/Town	8.5%	4.4%	6.9%	3.2%	4.1%
Rural	9.0%	6.1%	9.0%	1.4%	4.5%

Source: Education Policy Innovation Collaborative, “Michigan Teacher Shortage Study: Comprehensive Report,” January 2023

Across the country, schools teaching students in high-poverty districts lose, on average, 20% of their teaching force each year – a pattern mirrored in high-poverty districts in Michigan.⁶³

Teacher Retention Declines Following COVID-19 Pandemic



Source: Michigan Education Research Institute; 2018, 2019, 2022, 2023

Note: Chart includes only teachers employed as at least 0.5 FTE or greater.⁶⁴

Pre-pandemic, districts in Opportunity Index band 6 saw an average retention rate of approximately 81%, while districts in bands 1-5 had better retention rates of 88%-94% of their teachers each year. In 2022-23, following the turmoil and upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic, districts in Opportunity Index band 6 retained teachers at approximately the same levels as they did pre-pandemic. However, districts across the state in Opportunity Index bands 1-5 had a harder time retaining their teachers after the pandemic.

While districts in Opportunity Index band 6 have wrestled with teacher retention and attrition for years, wealthier districts are now beginning to experience those circumstances to a lesser scale, perhaps prompting the rise in attention and urgency surrounding teacher shortages.

Additionally, while it is true that student enrollment has declined slightly in Michigan, those declines do not explain the differences in teacher attrition seen between districts. Between the fall of 2021 and the fall of 2022, Michigan districts serving majority students of color and majority white students both saw slight declines in student enrollment of between 0.5% and 1%. Those districts serving majority students of color, however, lost 1.9% of their full-time teachers during that same period while districts serving majority white students saw an overall increase in full-time teachers of 0.8%.⁶⁵

While these percentages seem small, they illustrate that there are winners and losers in the market for teacher talent and too often, Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds are losing out. In fact, in Michigan schools with high rates — 30% or more — of teacher turnover for the 2018-19 school year, nearly three quarters of the students were from low-income families. **Additionally, Black students, who account for only 18% of the statewide student enrollment, make up 45% of enrollment in schools where teachers were most likely to leave.**⁶⁶

In fact, as was noted on page 15 of this report, there is often a long-established and well-known pattern where new, inexperienced teachers start their career in higher

poverty schools only to move to more affluent districts later in their careers, as vacancies become available.⁶⁷ That means that the cost and hardship of developing new teachers falls more often on schools with limited resources, creating double the burden for school leaders when those teachers leave for more affluent districts.

Key Takeaway

It is a common narrative that all school districts are suffering teacher shortages in the wake of the pandemic. The truth, however, is that the pandemic did not impact all districts equally, and while many districts are facing shortages, the acuteness of the crisis varies greatly by locale. Districts serving high populations of students from low-income backgrounds and students of color – particularly districts in urban and rural communities – are facing far greater challenges recruiting and retaining top educator talent for their children.



IX. Teacher Shortage Measure: Teacher Vacancies

What is this measure and why does it matter?

One of the most common and straightforward ways to understand teacher shortages is through teacher vacancies — or open positions for which schools are trying to hire. Concerningly, teacher vacancies are a major equity concern: teacher vacancy rates are often higher in urban or rural districts, schools serving higher proportions of students of color or students from low-income backgrounds, and districts with smaller salaries or relatively poorer working conditions.⁷²



What we found

Until recently, Michigan school districts were not required to report vacancy data at all, and many chose not to. In 2021-22, nearly 90% of the school districts in Michigan reported **zero teacher vacancies**.⁷³

This number represents a severe undercounting of the actual teacher vacancies in Michigan. If we were to rely on this data to track vacancies, we would incorrectly assume that the entire state could solve teacher shortages with a few dozen new teacher hires each year, severely misdiagnosing the problem. As evidenced in Illinois, accurately reporting teacher vacancy data can help policymakers target solutions to the districts that need the most intervention, something that has historically been impossible in Michigan.⁷⁴

Please see the sidebar “Leading State Example: Illinois” on this page for more on best practices.

There is also a lack of transparency, which leaves policymakers and the public largely without access to this necessary information. For instance, although the [Parent Dashboard for School Transparency](#) does provide the percentage of teachers at any given school who are certified and teaching in their content areas, detailed data that clearly illustrate where long-term

Leading State Example: Illinois



Illinois requires districts to report all unfilled positions as of October 1st of each year.⁶⁸ This reporting requirement allows for much more detailed analysis of teacher vacancies and teacher mobility than in many

other states. In reviewing state data, University of Illinois researchers found that teacher vacancies between 2017 and 2022 were indeed not universal. They found the average student from a low-income background attended a school with a vacancy rate twice that of their peers from more advantaged backgrounds. They also found similar disparities when considering student racial demographics. For example, the average Latino student attended a district with a vacancy rate 1.7 times higher than the districts attended by the average white student.⁶⁹ When considering the average Black student, the rate increases to 2.5 times higher than the average white student.⁷⁰ These findings have important and timely policy implications, including the distribution of federal aid and state support for Grow-Your-Own programs in communities with high teacher vacancy rates.⁷¹

substitutes are teaching, and what subjects and grades they are teaching, are not readily publicly available. Even for the small number of districts which do report their vacancy data, the state does not make those data publicly available, so parents and other key education stakeholders are unable to see information about the teacher vacancy situation in their local school district.

Key Takeaway

The anecdotal nature of Michigan’s historic vacancy information has resulted in a landscape where policymakers allocate resources inefficiently to where they believe problems exist, rather than using a systematic, targeted, data-informed approach ensuring that resources get to districts, and children, with the greatest needs.



X. What Do Teacher Shortages Mean for Children, Schools, Families, and Communities?

The data present a troubling picture regarding the Michigan teacher workforce – particularly with regard to the inequitable access to high-quality and effective educators experienced by Michigan children from low-income backgrounds and Black and Latino children. While the numbers and percentages certainly tell part of the story, they cannot fully express the personal, professional, and academic impacts these shortages have on children, teachers, parents, schools, and communities. To better understand these deeply personal impacts, EdTrust-Midwest conducted three focus groups with teachers. For more information on the focus groups, see the sidebar “Talking with Teachers” below.

Talking with Teachers

In the spring of 2023, EdTrust-Midwest conducted three focus groups with educators working in Michigan school districts. These teachers represented urban, rural, and suburban areas in multiple geographic regions across the state. Across all the focus groups, teachers identified common ideas.

First, teacher shortages are wearing on Michigan educators. They’re working more with less planning time because they’re called on to substitute teach as well. Classrooms are overfilled, and they have less time to spend one-on-one with students. Teachers said these challenges leave them feeling guilty and professionally unsatisfied, leading some to consider early retirement or professional opportunities outside of Michigan schools.

Shortages are also taking a toll on Michigan students. Long-term substitutes serve as replacements across K-12 classrooms. Students are learning less and acting up more – a problem teachers attribute to students failing to form critical relationships with itinerant teachers.

Teacher shortages are exacerbating and shining a light on fundamental problems with the teaching profession. Teacher salaries are too low for the education, experience, and work that schools expect from professional educators. Teachers feel disrespected, mistrusted, and unsupported by administrators, parents, and society.

Despite all these challenges and more, teachers repeatedly stated that they love what they do, but they were reluctant to recommend the profession to others. In fact, several teachers said directly that they will dissuade their own children from becoming teachers.

We thank the Michigan educators who generously took time to inform this report and its recommendations. In the focus groups, all teachers were guaranteed confidentiality.

XI. Impact of Teacher Shortages on Students and Educators



The reality is that, despite the availability of emergency credentials and out-of-field placements, districts and schools still do not have enough teachers, resulting in difficult cuts to course offerings for students. A high school English teacher in a suburban Metro Detroit district had to watch her son retake the same elective for three years due to a lack of diverse course offerings. When asked how shortages were impacting her district, a teacher in a rural district outside of Traverse City responded, **“We are short an English, a math, and a woodshop teacher. So, we dropped woodshop [and] have long-term [substitute teachers] in the other positions.”**

The results of these tough choices have had profound impacts on students and their learning. As one teacher in an urban district on the west side of the state puts it, **“Our students aren’t learning because they don’t have people who are...qualified to teach.”** Shortages often mean that current teachers lose their prep periods to cover other classes, as one teacher explains, **“We have to sub during our prep time, and we do get paid for**

it. But, you know, it’s not really worth anything. So, it’s affected us in our school a lot...It’s been a really difficult year.”

Relying on long-term substitute teachers can create an unstable learning environment for students, which has both social-emotional and academic impacts. As a high school teacher in an urban district in west Michigan explained, **“[the students] don’t know who’s going to be in the classroom when they go in there. They don’t know if that teacher is going to be there until the end... And so that causes a lot of social-emotional issues. And it causes them not to perform as well academically.”**

The social-emotional impacts are not limited to high school students. In elementary classrooms, experienced teachers know the importance of taking the time to build strong relationships. **“I have kids in my fifth-grade class that in previous years, their entire year they had an awful year because [they didn’t have] a certified teacher,”** said a 5th grade teacher in a suburban Metro Detroit district, noting how relationships with students can be compromised without consistent effort. **“There were just so many behavior issues and things weren’t handled right building those relationships.”**

The negative impacts of teacher shortages on the teachers who remain in the classroom also compound the already immense challenges of learning recovery following a global pandemic. In the words of a 2nd grade teacher in an urban district on the state’s west side, teachers are **“overworked, underpaid, [and] underappreciated,”** and that feeling is trickling down to future potential teachers. Many teachers reported that they have actively discouraged their children from becoming teachers. **“My daughter is 11. I told her, ‘You can choose anything but a teacher. You may not become a teacher. I will not pay for you to go to college to be a teacher.’ And that’s sad because I love what I do.”**

XII. The Role of Public Policy

State and federal policies, systems, and structures have the power to either encourage or inhibit positive working conditions for teachers resulting in more, or less, welcoming and effective schools for children, families, and communities. Specifically, policies around teacher salaries, teacher effectiveness, as well as innovative incentives and career pathways, represent high-leverage opportunities to transform the Michigan teacher workforce.

Teacher Salaries

“Why would you go and spend \$50,000 to \$80,000 to go in student loan debt to become a teacher when you qualify for the Bridge Card?”

This question, posed by a teacher in an EdTrust-Midwest focus group, succinctly identifies a challenge that educational leaders know all too well: Michigan has a teacher salary problem and a teacher salary gap problem.

“Growing up, teaching was always an esteemed career, and it was something that you could look forward to being able to provide yourself with the middle-class experience in terms of living.”

Unfortunately, that vision – articulated by a teacher during one of the EdTrust-Midwest focus groups – simply is not realized by most teachers today. To start, teachers earn relatively less compared to their peers who pursued other college degrees. In fact, there is a teacher wage penalty in Michigan of 20.7%, meaning that teachers in Michigan earn approximately 21% less than other college graduates with similar levels of education and experience.⁷⁵

Between 1999 and 2019, Michigan’s inflation-adjusted teacher salary fell more than 20%, representing the second largest teacher salary decline in the country.⁷⁶ Had Michigan’s teacher salaries kept pace with inflation, the average teacher salary today would be more than \$81,000.⁷⁷

Instead, Michigan’s average teacher salary of \$64,000 trailed the national average in 2021-22 and for beginning teachers, the picture is even worse.⁷⁸ First-year teachers in Michigan earned, on average, about \$39,000 annually – an amount which landed Michigan a rank of 39th nationally and last among the Great Lakes states.⁷⁹

At the district level, we see even more troubling disparities. Teachers in Michigan’s wealthiest districts are paid just over \$4,000 more, on average, than teachers in Michigan’s poorest districts.⁸⁰ That’s concerning, considering what we know about the importance of high-quality teachers in closing the achievement gap that persists between students from low-income backgrounds and students from more affluent backgrounds.⁸¹ In a May 2021 report by EdTrust-Midwest, half of school district leaders interviewed estimated they would need to increase starting teacher salaries by \$10,000 to be competitive and attract the best teachers to their schools.⁸²

Vision: Ensuring all children in Kent County have an equitable path to economic prosperity through family, quality education, and community supports.

By: Katie Adrianse, Director of Communications, Maegan Frierson, Director of System Building, and Mark Woltman, Vice President

[KConnect](#) is a collective impact organization dedicated to ensuring all children and families in Kent County, Michigan, have equitable opportunities to thrive from cradle to career. Rooted in collaboration and systems change, KConnect is working with cross-sector partners to address the gap in diverse educators, in alignment with our comprehensive [workplan](#). With the use of a [360-degree framework](#), which seeks to inspire, train, recruit, and retain, the KConnect network’s goal is to double the number of educators of color by the year 2033 to approximately 442 Black educators and 334 Latine educators.

Over the past year, Kent County has made significant strides in diversifying its educational workforce. Since 2019, there has been a 35% increase in Black teachers and a 30% increase in Latine teachers in the district, as reported on KConnect’s publicly available [data dashboard](#). Even with the increase, a significant gap still exists.

Kent County is made up of approximately 30% people of color, while Kent ISD is approximately 6.5% educators of color. In order for Kent ISD to mirror county demographics, we would need to hire 1,973 more educators of color. (KConnect, n.d.) To put that into perspective, there are 1,691 Latine educators in the state of Michigan (MI School Data, 2024). Kent ISD would have to hire nearly 50% of them to close the gap. This illustrates the stark reality that we cannot simply hire our way out of this situation; instead, we need to rely on tools such as the 360-degree model to solve this systemic issue.

As a region with a growing and diverse student population, the underrepresentation of educators who reflect the cultural, racial, and ethnic identities of the students creates barriers to fostering inclusive and affirming school environments. Studies consistently show that students benefit academically and socially when taught by educators who share similar lived experiences, as it enhances cultural understanding, representation, and student engagement (Gerber, 2022).

In addition to the gap in the teacher pipeline, significant pay gaps exist between districts in Kent County. A new teacher with a master’s degree earns \$6,500 more in their first year at the highest-paying district compared to the lowest (KConnect, 2024). For veteran teachers, the gap widens, with potential yearly differences reaching over \$18,000 (KConnect, 2024). Over a career, this disparity can amount to approximately \$320,000 in lifetime earnings for those in the highest-paying districts compared to the lowest-paying. This is a statewide issue that is not unique to Kent County, and will require systemic, multifaceted solutions at every level of educational leadership and policymaking.

KConnect has two system-level recommendations to improve the diversity of the educator pipeline:

- 1. Improve teacher pay, specifically in lower-paying districts.** To address this gap, KConnect prioritizes “Equity in Teacher Compensation” on its [Shared Policy Agenda](#). We recommend that community leaders advocate at a local, state, and national levels for policies and practices that support an increase in teacher pay.

2. Develop initiatives that support educators of color. In 2023, KConnect helped to launch the [Shades of Strength Collaborative](#), a network of educators and system leaders who are committed not only to providing support, but also developing actionable solutions to address disparities for educators of color in our community. KConnect recommends that other communities develop similar supports, especially for new educators entering the workforce.

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Case Study: Detroit

Detroit provides a glimpse into how transformational salary increases can improve recruitment and retention. In the fall of 2017, Detroit faced 300 teacher vacancies and a starting salary of \$38,000. Post-pandemic, Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) prioritized investing in its teacher salaries to better compete with more affluent neighboring districts. Starting in the 2021-22 school year, DPSCD used American Rescue Plan funds to raise its starting teacher salary to \$51,000, a more than 30% increase.⁹⁴ Additionally, the district offered \$15,000 raises to teachers in STEM and special education, the highest-shortage areas.⁹⁵ As a result, DPSCD teacher vacancies fell from 300 to 40 between fall 2017 and the 2021-2022 school year.⁹⁶

Case Study: Battle Creek

In Battle Creek, declining enrollment, and subsequently reduced funding, meant that Battle Creek Public Schools (BCPS) struggled to offer competitive salaries in the region.⁹⁰ Robust support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has resulted in transformational salary increases across BCPS. In July 2022, BCPS began offering signing bonuses and tuition reimbursement, in addition to significant salary increases across the board.⁹¹ Currently, teachers can receive up to a \$1,500 signing bonus and \$5,250 in tuition reimbursement per year.⁹² In 2023-2024, BCPS began the school year with seven vacancies, down significantly from 46 vacancies the year before.⁹³

Despite these impressive efforts and wins in Detroit and Battle Creek, long-term success in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers across Michigan will require sustained state investments, not only one-time federal dollars or philanthropic support. Michigan has already taken the first steps down the road to sustained investment through innovative programs like the [MI Future Educator Fellowship](#) program, which provides scholarships to future teachers, the [MI Future Educator Stipends](#), which ensure that student teachers

in Michigan are paid for their hard work, and a state-funded [student loan repayment program](#).⁸³

Legislative changes to the Opportunity Index provide a unique opportunity for districts serving high concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds to take advantage of new flexibility in their Opportunity Index dollars specifically to recruit and retain teachers. Starting in the 2024-25 school year, districts in Opportunity Index bands 5 and 6 can use up to 30% of their at-risk dollars “to support retention and

recruitment efforts that help reduce staff turnover and vacancies of instructional and support staff.”⁸⁴

This new flexibility provides a key opportunity for districts serving students with the greatest needs to improve their positions in the teacher recruitment and retention market.

Although salary gaps certainly exist between more and less affluent districts, it is nearly impossible to understand the full scope of the problem. In a recent study, researchers found that Detroit Public Schools Community District had an average teacher salary in 2022-2023 which ranked 24th out of the 35 school districts in the same intermediate school district, meaning that many nearby school districts offer more competitive salaries and can more easily attract high-quality teacher talent.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, such studies do not exist for all communities across the state. Anecdotally, local stakeholders report the salary gaps that they see and experience in their local public schools. These gaps have a profound impact on students and families, especially in urban and rural schools with high concentrations of poverty. **To better understand this from a local perspective, we have invited community leaders to share more about this issue. To learn more, please see pages 29-30, and 34-35.**

Additionally, publicly available average salary data does not include teacher years of experience, meaning that it is impossible to determine whether a district pays teachers more, hires more experienced (and therefore more expensive) teachers, or a combination of both factors.⁸⁶ While the State School Aid Act requires all public schools to publish certain financial information on their website, the requirement does not include comprehensive teacher salary data, including pay scales or steps which would allow for comparisons across districts.⁸⁷

The bottom line: salaries matter. Ensuring that teachers are competitively compensated, particularly in districts serving high proportions of students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, is critical to recruiting and retaining top educator talent.

Teacher Effectiveness Data and Support

Regardless of whether these data are used for accountability purposes, student growth data is another measure that can be helpful for districts to use for informing professional development and to understand the distribution of teachers within the district. It is also helpful in providing state leaders with an understanding of the statewide distribution of teachers and equitable access to the most highly effective teachers. Michigan could improve its current growth data reporting by making transparent aggregate data regarding teacher effectiveness for individual schools and districts while maintaining safeguards to protect the privacy of individual teachers.

It is especially critical that students from low-income backgrounds and Black and Latino students have equitable access to highly qualified and effective teachers to ensure they reach their potential. Importantly, parents, policymakers, education researchers and advocates should be able to understand the current state of equitable access to effective educators for all Michigan students.

One major challenge to understanding the distribution of effective teachers in Michigan is the reality that the way Michigan districts assess teachers is not entirely consistent and comparable across districts. When it comes to classroom observations, the state maintains a list of approved tools that districts may choose but are not required to use. If a district decides to use a tool not on the approved list, the district must publish information on its transparency reporting site about the tool’s research base, including its reliability, validity, and efficacy.⁸⁸ Regardless of the tool districts choose, observer bias is a serious concern with classroom observations. Multiple studies have recorded differences in observation scores for teachers based on characteristics like race, gender, and even the types of students they teach.⁸⁹ For this reason, the recommendations section of this report addresses the need for more training and support for principals on this and other topics.

Leading State Example: Tennessee

 A pioneer in measuring educator effectiveness and providing support to teachers, Tennessee made mandatory the monitoring of student academic gains annually through the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) more than 30 years ago in 1992.⁹⁷ While principals and teachers received TVAAS reports annually, the data were not used in teacher evaluations until 2010.⁹⁸ In a 2016 report, Tennessee teachers and administrators reported using TVAAS data in meaningful ways. According to a report from Tennessee SCORE (State Collaborative on Reforming Education), “Teachers use growth data to reflect on instructional strategies with their colleagues. Principals consider teacher TVAAS data when making grade and subject assignments, reflecting on where teachers show greatest effect on student growth.”⁹⁹ Today, Tennessee makes district- and school-level data publicly available so that families can better understand how their student’s school compares to that of other schools, districts and the state.¹⁰⁰ To learn more about what data are available in Michigan, see box “Dig Deeper: Publicly Available Student Growth Data in Michigan” below.

A more objective measure to assess which students are learning from the most effective teachers is student growth data – or how much students are improving academically each year. Michigan makes multiple types of student growth data available to the public. For accountability purposes, Michigan uses Student Growth Percentiles which compare a student’s academic growth to a group of similar students who performed similarly on a previous test.¹⁰¹ Michigan also provides school and district-level data from the Educator Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) Value-Added Model, which measures the extent to which a student’s growth is different from the statewide average growth for a given test and grade level.¹⁰² To learn how your local schools and district perform, visit the links in the box “Dig Deeper: Publicly Available Student Growth Data in Michigan.”

Even with the availability of different types of school and district-level student growth data, it is challenging to understand which students have access to the most effective educators. There is at least one tool which could help make this information more accessible to the public. Teacher-level EVAAS reports highlighting whether a teacher is growing students at, above, or below expected levels are available, but districts must opt in to receive teacher reports.¹⁰³ Although districts can choose to have access to these teacher-level reports, the public has no way of knowing whether they have high-growth teachers in their districts. While individual teacher data should never be made public to protect teacher privacy, aggregate data from schools and districts can allow the public, policymakers, school leaders, researchers, and teachers themselves to understand the access different groups of students have to effective educators.

Dig Deeper: Publicly Available Student Growth Data in Michigan

MI School Data Student Growth Report:
<https://www.mischooldata.org/student-growth/>

MI School Data School Index Reports:
<https://www.mischooldata.org/school-index>

School and District-Level EVAAS Reports:
<https://mi.sas.com/welcome.html>

Innovative Incentives and Career Pathways

In hard-to-staff school districts, such as districts in many rural and urban communities, district and state leaders should seek innovative solutions to make teaching more attractive. In addition to traditional levers including increased compensation and improved building amenities, districts can consider other quality-of-life benefits like housing assistance. Particularly in communities where affordable housing is less accessible, district- or state-sponsored housing assistance is a form of community investment by helping teachers live in the communities in which they work.

In Battle Creek, a diverse community in southwest Michigan, the city’s school district is using creative strategies to attract and retain teachers, in addition to salaries and incentives, as noted on page 30 above. Recognizing that teacher support goes beyond salary, the district provides housing benefits to its teachers.



In partnership with the City of Battle Creek, the Kellogg Foundation matches down payment funds or remodeling costs for teachers buying a home in Battle Creek or surrounding communities.¹⁰⁴

Up north, legislators allocated \$5 million in state funding towards a project to supply rental housing for teachers in the Traverse City area.¹⁰⁵ A consortium of four educational institutions in the area – Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS), Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools, Interlochen Center for the Arts, and Northwest Education Services – have been working for two years on the project to build affordable housing units to address staffing shortages and attract more teachers to the area.¹⁰⁶ The project is the largest subsidized educator housing program in the state.

To keep the best educators in the classroom, state leaders and districts should offer innovative career pathways which allow teachers additional compensation to grow in their careers and share their knowledge with other professionals while continuing to impact students directly in the classroom. Innovative programs across the country are doing just that. Other states provide models that Michigan can consider.

For instance, [Next Education Workforce](#) is an Arizona State University program focused on creating educator teams, where individual teachers and other educators bring together their areas of expertise and work together to provide a well-rounded education to students, rather than one teacher struggling to provide it all.¹⁰⁷ The Next Education Workforce is already on its way in Michigan, with nearly a dozen districts in Michigan exploring the model beginning in the 2024-2025 school year.¹⁰⁸

In the [Opportunity Culture](#) model, teachers work in teams with one teacher serving as the Multi-Classroom Leader.¹⁰⁹ Opportunity Culture’s teaching team model allows for additional time teachers can use to plan and prep.¹¹⁰ The program also specifically includes additional compensation with Multi-Classroom Leaders earning supplements averaging 20% of their teacher salary.¹¹¹

Community Organizing for Teacher Compensation

By: *kyle lim - Urban Core Collective*

The Urban Core Collective exists to support the self-determination and agency of historically marginalized communities by engaging in advocacy, community organizing, and leadership cultivation. We do this to transform living conditions and the distribution of power in the greater Grand Rapids area. Our Education Justice team supports students, parents, and building-level staff in organizing to bring about a vision of Healthy and Healing schools in Grand Rapids, MI.

Like all good things should, we begin by listening. The questions are always open-ended: “What are the issues going on at your school?” “If you could do something differently, what would it be?” And perhaps most importantly, “How do you want to get involved?” It’s amazing how much people open up when they’re offered a warm meal and an opportunity to be heard.

As we listened, we worked with students, parents, and caregivers to analyze and research the dynamics being raised. There are many issues that need solving in our schools - food quality, reliable transportation, aging infrastructure, school safety - all critical components to a healthy and healing educational experience. However, one issue in particular seemed completely at odds with the very notion of school: many of our buildings lack access to certified teachers.

According to data we received from the Grand Rapids Education Association (GREA), there were more than 230 vacant classroom positions last year, and unqualified substitutes were used to cover roughly twelve thousand days of vacancies. These shortages disproportionately affect school communities suffering from a legacy of neglect and social inequity. Like many school districts, Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) is caught in a social landscape rife with racial and economic segregation. In 2023, one quarter of GRPS’ Black students were concentrated in a specific neighborhood-school feeder pattern (elementary → middle → high). Not only were the schools in this feeder pattern chronically

understaffed, they were also staffed by mostly new and inexperienced teachers. This means that a student within this predominantly Black school feeder pattern could spend the entirety of their K-12 experience with brand new teachers or without a qualified teacher at all, according to data as of June 2023.

GRPS Director of Communications and Community Liaison Luke Stier shared that the district is “proud of the progress they are making to have qualified teachers in every classroom.” As of December 2, 2024, they were down to 95 teaching position openings districtwide, Stier said. In the specific neighborhood school feeder pattern of Campus > Alger > Ottawa Hills, there is a combined total of 6.5 teaching position openings in those three schools, Stier added.

The issue of staffing is complex. Nationally, teachers continue to be among the lowest-paid professionals requiring advanced education. A teacher with a bachelors degree in Grand Rapids Public Schools must work approximately sixteen years within the district to earn a wage that would support a family of four in Kent County.⁽²⁾ Local districts like GRPS, however, are being asked to do more than ever while school funding remains largely insufficient. Most urban public schools do not have the funds to increase pay immediately. As a state, we need to pressure our legislators to increase education revenue for schools. We cannot simply ask schools to provide the level of service our students deserve if they do not get more money. Advocacy groups like the Michigan Education Justice Coalition, Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity, EdTrust-Midwest, and labor groups like the Michigan Education Association are great examples of people coming together across the state to advocate for increasing education funding. We invite you to join us in the near future as we find ways to come together to support our schools.

Lastly, it is essential you begin to get organized.

Local districts need to be held accountable to ensure that additional funding is invested in their greatest resource: their building-level staff. In Grand Rapids, our communities WANT to be involved in decision-making that affects our schools. We continue to advocate for spaces where local stakeholders can be actively involved in district and building-level decision-making, including critical decisions like how money is spent.

Remember that your community needs you. They need you to push for equitable funding for your schools. They need you to make sure that money is spent wisely. They need you to make space to listen, to build power, and to enact change. Here are a few ways you can get involved:

- 1. Connect:** Reach out to your local teacher union to find out what staffing looks like in your district’s schools. Pay attention to the schools with the lowest (or least experienced) staffing rates. Talk to other parents, students or staff to begin to identify what your local issues might be.
- 2. Research:** Build your knowledge around the

revenue gap that exists for schools. If you’re in Michigan, here are some great resources:

- a. SFRC
- b. EdTrust-Midwest Research

3. Organize: Begin building power to address your school issues. This could be to advocate for more school funding, or it could be for local accountability. If you need help, see if any local organizations might be willing to support you! (Michigan folks see here)

- (1) This data comes from a UCC analysis of public information from MISchool Data and nonpublic Grand Rapids Public Schools staffing data.
- (2) The Household Survival Budget (HSB) reflects the minimum cost to live and work in the current economy and includes housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, technology, and taxes. The 2022 HSB for a family of four in Kent County was \$69,348 (2022). Estimates on the number of years it would take an educator with a bachelors degree to meet that threshold in GRPS were created by UCC using GRPS salary step information provided by GREA.

Long-term success in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers across Michigan will require sustained state investments, not only one-time federal dollars or philanthropic support.

XIII. Where do we go from here?

Policy Recommendations

Educator Workforce Priorities Michigan Should Adopt Now

We believe that state leaders in Michigan recognize the need to address teacher shortages and it is our hope that the data and analyses included in this report both bring more light to the complexity surrounding Michigan teacher shortages and provide a solid foundation of information on which to build a policy strategy. Given the complexity of the issue and the fact that Michigan students deserve a strong educator at the front of the class, district leaders should focus their efforts to recruit and retain qualified teachers for all students.

Priority 1: Fair and Adequate Funding Now

Put simply, districts cannot hire and retain high-quality teachers without fair and adequate funding. If school districts – particularly those serving high concentrations of students living in poverty – do not have fair and adequate funding, they cannot afford to pay competitive salaries and therefore recruit and retain top educator talent. To improve teacher attraction and retention, lawmakers need to support fair and adequate funding to ensure competitive salaries for teachers, especially for those working in districts with higher concentrations of poverty. Fair and adequate funding also leads to better outcomes for students. For instance, research shows that a 10% increase in per-pupil spending across 12 years of education results in a lower adult poverty rate, higher postsecondary earnings, and up to four additional months of school completed.¹¹² Teachers, particularly those highly qualified and effective teachers, are a key ingredient in achieving student success. In fact, research indicates that a teacher’s impact on student outcomes can be two to three times more powerful than any other school-based factor.¹¹³ To ensure teachers remain in the school where they can have that critical impact, teachers must feel professionally supported, for which, districts need sufficient funding.¹¹⁴

The findings of this report make it clear that districts serving high concentrations of students living in poverty are disproportionately affected by educator workforce challenges. The Opportunity Index is a key tool to address funding inequities and ensure all students have access to high-quality teachers. Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, higher-poverty districts have additional flexibility to use up to 30% of their Opportunity Index funding specifically for teacher recruitment and retention, making its funding that much more imperative for developing a strong and sustainable teacher workforce.¹¹⁵

Unfortunately, the Opportunity Index is currently underfunded by approximately \$2 billion dollars. To make a transformational difference, state lawmakers should fully fund the Opportunity Index in the next five years. In the most recent two state school aid budgets, state lawmakers invested an additional \$287 million into the Opportunity Index, bringing the total investment in students from low-income backgrounds to more than one billion dollars.¹¹⁶ This is a step in the right direction, but far more is needed: unless policymakers invest dramatically more in the Opportunity Index, foundation allowance increases will outpace the gradual Opportunity Index increases, meaning that the Opportunity Index will never be fully funded.¹¹⁷

Policymakers should take the bold and necessary step of increasing Opportunity Index funding at a minimum of \$400 million annually to achieve truly fair and adequate funding by 2030.¹¹⁸

Priority 2: Improve State Education Data Systems

Policymakers cannot begin to solve the issues laid out in this report without meaningful, timely, and accurate data. Importantly, clear and effective data reporting helps parents easily access information about their district and make informed decisions about their children’s education.

1. Enhance existing vacancy reporting requirements and require districts to report vacancies to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) on both the first day of school and fall count day of each school year to better understand which districts are struggling to fill open positions at the beginning of the school year.
 - a. Subsequently require MDE to publish annual district-level vacancy information in a timely manner so that parents, policymakers, and education researchers can understand how teacher shortages are impacting different communities in Michigan.
2. Improve accessibility and clarity of district-level Annual Education Reports to allow the public and education researchers to better understand the nuanced impact of teacher shortages across the state.
 - a. While the [Parent Dashboard for School Transparency](#) includes more easily accessible charts using staffing information, MI School Data should include multiple years of each district’s Annual Education Report in a downloadable accessible format similar to other reports on MISchoolData rather than in single-year PDF documents.
 - b. Clarify the number of teachers with “Emergency or Provisional Credentials” including information on types of substitute permits included and excluded and in which subject areas these teachers are assigned.
 - c. Provide more in-depth information on out-of-field teachers such as summary data on which subjects are staffed by out-of-field teachers.
3. Improve teacher exit surveys to better capture the reason teachers are exiting the profession.
 - a. Elevating teacher voices in state policy and practice conversations around teacher shortages and issues with recruitment and retention is a critical step in truly understanding why teachers choose to stay or leave their roles.
4. Fund a state-wide teacher survey focused on job satisfaction and employment concerns.
 - a. Publish the results and adjust state education policy based on responses.

Priority 3: Prioritize Making Teaching an Attractive and Competitive Career Choice

Increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in the workforce begins with making the career a more attractive option that young people are excited to explore. When a career in education is associated with financial stability and robust professional growth opportunity, more bright, talented people will be drawn to the profession and compelled to stay in the field.

Michigan has already made progress in this arena through important initiatives including stipends for student teachers, college scholarships and student loan forgiveness for teachers, and increased support for Grow Your Own programs.¹¹⁹ While the state continues to grow and improve, the following recommendations are designed to provide high-leverage opportunities for success.

One of Michigan's challenges and opportunities is the need for the state to move into a stronger leadership role in areas of systems change related to the equitable access to strong and diverse educators and related issue areas outlined below. While the Michigan Department of Education and other branches of state government have demonstrated strong leadership on a variety of teacher issues in recent years, continued strong state leadership is needed in the educator space.

Michigan needs to create a new system of opportunity and compensation through a robust career ladder that considers for a variety of components including: competitiveness with other states, competitiveness in local teacher salary markets, and ensuring that teachers can pursue greater opportunities for leadership and career growth, including while remaining in classroom roles. Such a structure should include compensation for greater responsibilities, strong performance, and the level of challenge of local teaching conditions – including additional compensation for accepting hard-to-staff positions and teacher leadership roles, among other factors. The state should carefully consider multiple options that will allow teachers to progress in their careers and earn higher salaries as their responsibilities increase.

In the meantime, individual districts can and should investigate innovative staffing models to begin developing additional career pathways for teachers. For instance, programs like Opportunity Culture and Next Education Workforce, which promote models featuring educator teams with distributed expertise, aim to improve student learning outcomes and create better pathways for teachers to “enter the profession, specialize and advance.”¹²⁰ Programs like these could provide a roadmap for Michigan to follow. State leaders should invest in such staffing models as a way of piloting innovative new models for districts and policymakers to learn from.

One important recommendation on how the state can start on such a system: benchmarking teacher salaries with other states to better understand how Michigan needs to evolve to make itself competitive in terms of educator salaries. Benchmarking should also be done to create a common understanding of what salary levels are competitive based on local and regional talent markets. This work should inform the creation of a statewide salary floor for all Michigan teachers, which is needed to address the acute educator shortages that are increasingly dire, especially in rural and urban communities. The first benchmarking study should assess how much it would cost to create such a floor and bring up salaries in school districts that fall beneath it. It should also determine how much funding local Michigan school districts would need to support increased salaries and make Michigan a competitive state in terms of teacher salaries once again.

In short, it is clear that Michigan has an acute teacher salary gap and a problem keeping up with other states. In the coming years, state leaders should seriously consider how to address both issues. The state should begin closing salary gaps by prioritizing districts in those teacher salary markets with the largest gaps. It is incredibly difficult to have clarity around these regional salary gaps due to a lack of transparency and available data. The state should take a leadership role in closing those knowledge gaps, play a more proactive role on these issues, and carefully consider the pathway forward.

More detailed recommendations include:

By 2030, all teachers should be receiving a competitive salary determined by rigorous benchmarking analyses such as:

- Benchmarking with other states at least every three years to determine a minimum salary floor target goal for all districts and develop funds and strategy to ensure all districts reach that goal. The benchmarking should also propose appropriate cost-of-living raises for school districts to consider when creating their budgets. The results of these benchmarking studies should be made public along with data on how current district salaries compare to the state's recommendations.
- Additionally, the state should prioritize keeping teacher salaries competitive between districts by benchmarking salaries in regional talent markets on the same three-year schedule and make public the findings from the benchmarking analysis.
- The state should allot funds for a one-time teacher compensation study to gain a better understanding of how Michigan teachers are compensated across districts based on their education level and years of experience. This study should also compare real teacher salaries to advertised salary ranges and step increases and assist districts in understanding the market for professional talent.

In the meantime, many Michigan teachers are earning salaries so low that they are not even making \$50,000 annually.¹²¹ State leaders should start there and create a minimum salary floor of at least \$50,000 annually and then raise the floor accordingly using evidence from the benchmarking analyses. Options to increase teacher salaries may include:

- state-level incentives for individual districts to increase teacher salaries;
- the creation of a statewide salary schedule;
- a small pilot with state supports to increase the salary floor for districts at a competitive disadvantage in their regional teacher salary market, or other state-level intervention to address regional teacher salary gaps.

State leaders should carefully consider the pros and cons of available options while keeping equitable access to strong teachers for all Michigan students at the core of their deliberations.



Priority 4: Invest in and Prioritize Supports for School Administrators Which Will Improve Their Ability to Offer Effective, Actionable, Student-Centered Support for Staff Development

To support and grow teachers, administrators need the capacity to be fully present and equipped to conduct classroom observations and provide meaningful feedback. Administrators are often overburdened, and observations can become an exercise in compliance rather than opportunities for actionable feedback and professional growth.

1. The state should benchmark at least every three years with other states and develop funds and strategy to ensure Michigan administrator pay is competitive. Additionally, the state should prioritize pay equity by benchmarking administrator salaries in regional talent markets across the state at least every three years. The results of these benchmarking studies should be publicly available.
2. Beginning in 2023, Michigan began requiring principals to complete rater reliability training provided by local school districts, charter schools, or intermediate school districts at least every three years.¹²² The state should require this type of training - aimed at norming observation scores and feedback, to reduce the subjective nature of observations and offer better, actionable feedback for teacher development - annually, rather than on a three year basis, audit trainings offered by local districts for rigor, and provide funding to ensure districts offer high-quality training opportunities for administrators.
3. Hold administrators to high, demonstratable standards which include student achievement.
4. Pilot a model for teacher evaluation that takes a student-centered approach in recognizing the individual learning styles and backgrounds for each student.
 - a. Incorporate multiple measures of teacher success and adopt a holistic approach to both teacher craft and student learning.
 - i. Include student voice through surveys, observation, or open feedback as well as data from student assessments and other measures of academic growth.
 - ii. Consider metrics related to differentiated instruction and lesson planning, pedagogical observations, classroom environment, staff relationships and collaboration, community engagement, or other measures of teacher success.

Priority 5: Increase Access to High-Quality Professional Development for Educators

Educators, like many professionals, seek opportunities for professional growth and advancement. It is up to both the state and local districts to provide relevant, high-quality programming for teachers to learn new skills and increase career advancement opportunities. The state should consider playing a more robust leadership role in the most essential topics for teaching and learning in addition to the following recommendations.

1. In fiscal year 2024, the state allocated \$140 million dollars in one-time funding for school districts and intermediate school districts to improve literacy instructional practices.¹²³ And in fiscal year 2025, the state allocated \$500,000 to support teacher professional development in computer science and computational thinking content.¹²⁴ The state should build on these precedents to provide recurring dollars to districts for the purpose of funding teacher-selected professional development.

- a. Such funding would allow teachers to select professional development opportunities which address the most pressing topics they face in the classroom today. Topics could include leading virtual classrooms, utilizing A.I. in lesson planning, managing difficult parental relationships, implementing restorative justice techniques, incorporating trauma-informed teaching, and designing inclusivity paradigms for LGBTQ+ students, students of color, immigrant students, multilingual learners, and students in special education.
 - b. The state should fund MDE to strengthen, modernize, and better advertise the existing [SCECH catalogue of professional learning programs](#) to reduce the likelihood that teachers miss out on professional development due to district communication challenges.
2. Strengthen required new teacher mentoring programs by providing sufficient funding to compensate all mentor teachers in Michigan.
 - a. Districts are required to provide structured mentorship opportunities for new teachers with guidance from the MDE. Section 27h of the 2023-2024 State School Aid Act provided \$50 million dollars in one-time competitive grant funding for mentorship and induction programs.¹²⁵ The legislative intent is to allocate \$10 million dollars of this funding each year until no funding remains.¹²⁶ The Michigan Legislature should make mentorship and induction funding a permanent, recurring budget item allocate sufficient funding to pay for stipends for **all** mentors through direct payments to districts. The state could make additional funds available through a competitive grant process to support additional mentoring and induction activities.

XIV. Conclusion

Every Michigan child deserves to learn from highly qualified, highly effective and diverse teachers. As a society, we know teaching quality is one of the most important factors in student success, and we also know that too many Black and Latino students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students living in rural and urban areas systematically do not have equitable access to teachers who are likely to be well-prepared and effective in the classroom.

Fortunately, we have the power to change that reality. A truly fair and adequate funding system would ensure that all districts have the resources needed to recruit and retain top educator talent for their classrooms. We need to invest now, fully funding the Opportunity Index by 2030 with investments of no less than \$400 million dollars annually. Additionally, policymakers should prioritize the policy recommendations presented in this report to create the strong and supportive learning environment that Michigan teachers and students deserve.



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