



TENNESSEE'S TEACHER PIPELINE: INITIATIVES TO INCREASE STUDENT ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Introduction

Over the last several years, Tennessee has developed innovative teacher pipeline solutions focused on staffing K-12 classrooms with the trained educators needed to improve student outcomes. Despite these initiatives, many local leaders express they still find it difficult to meet staffing needs every year. Further, there is little information about the short- and long-term impacts of recent initiatives, complicating the ability for state, district, and school leaders to make strategic decisions around next steps for teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention efforts. **In order to pursue effective and sustainable solutions grounded in the unique needs of each district, Tennessee needs information about its teacher pipeline and data to measure the impact of recent initiatives.**

This paper is the fourth in SCORE's Educator Labor Market (ELM) series, building on prior learnings about Tennessee's challenges and potential solutions to address them. The other papers in this series are:

1. [Understanding the Educator Labor Market: A Look at Tennessee's Data](#). SCORE partnered with Vanderbilt University's Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) and 15 school districts to provide participating districts with individualized ELM reports and comparison data. This paper shared aggregate analysis and findings from those reports and elevated the highly localized nature of teacher pipeline challenges.
2. [Rural District Leader Perceptions of the Educator Labor Market](#). SCORE sent an ELM survey to all Tennessee superintendents and sorted the rural

district responses to focus on the rural district experience. This paper shared aggregate analysis and findings from rural survey respondents.

3. [Strategic School Staffing: Tennessee's Opportunity to Sustain and Elevate Great Teaching](#). SCORE unpacked strategic staffing model research to build the case for an innovative approach, including positive impacts for supporting novice teachers, retaining effective teachers, and advancing student outcomes. This paper shared case studies of innovative staffing pilots and guiding principles for implementation.

To support Tennessee as it continues to innovatively respond to the educator labor market, this paper will:

- Offer an overview of the state's current teacher pipeline initiatives designed to reduce barriers to entering the teaching profession.
- Elevate key data on Tennessee's shortage areas and promising research on how to strategically support the pipeline.
- Highlight four Tennessee school districts, offering snapshots of their varied experiences in filling teaching positions.
- Demonstrate how **access to data and understanding the local context of staffing needs are essential to crafting solutions that make the profession more sustainable**, pointing the state toward crucial next steps to assess the efficacy of Tennessee's pipeline initiatives and plan for future generations of teachers.

State Initiatives To Improve the Teacher Pipeline

Teacher pipeline conditions have prompted Tennessee to consider new approaches to attract prospective teachers and better support candidates to licensure through **innovative teacher training, reduced financial barriers, and accelerated timelines to solve for shortages**. Key initiatives include:

INNOVATIVE TEACHER TRAINING

Developing multiple pathways to the teaching profession — pathways that reimagine traditional preparation and licensure — is important to improving and diversifying the pipeline.

- **Grow Your Own (GYO) teaching apprenticeships:** In 2022, Tennessee became the first state to establish a permanent GYO model, after which the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) launched the Tennessee Grow Your Own Center (GYOC) in partnership with the University of Tennessee System.¹ Tennessee's GYO program is a federally registered apprenticeship for aspiring teachers, offering low- to no-cost pathways for apprentices to work with mentor teachers and gain on-the-job experience as they complete licensure coursework.²
- **Teaching as a Profession (TAP) pre-apprenticeship:** Undertaken by the GYO Center, TAP is a career-and-technical education program of study for high school students interested in learning how to become a teacher that provides a fast-track to earning a degree.³ In 2023, TDOE announced a new TAP state-certified pre-apprenticeship pilot program that will provide high school students with teaching experience in their local communities.⁴
- **Alternative certification pathways:** Tennessee has several pathways for teacher candidates to obtain licensure through alternative certification, such as Teach For America Memphis, Teach For America Nashville-Chattanooga, the Memphis

Teacher Residency, and the Nashville Teacher Residency.⁵ In addition, most of Tennessee educator preparation providers (EPP) offer job-embedded clinical practice programs, where candidates must have a bachelor's degree and pass licensure assessments prior to serving as the teacher of record as they complete coursework.⁶

REDUCING FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Financial factors are leading concerns for both prospective and current Tennessee teachers, especially related to student loans and debt incurred from teacher training.⁷

- **Free additional endorsements:** In 2021, TDOE developed a grant-funded additional endorsement program in the areas of English as a second language (ESL) and special education (SPED).⁸ Educators with professional licenses have been eligible to participate, and candidates must complete the required coursework and pass the corresponding content assessments.⁹
- **Teacher scholarships:** In 2023, the Tennessee Future Teacher Scholarship pilot was established to cover tuition and fees for HOPE-eligible teacher candidates attending a Tennessee EPP who agree to teach in a targeted setting — public schools in distressed and at-risk counties or critical shortage subjects — for at least four years.¹⁰ Similarly, the state offers an occupational educator scholarship that covers tuition and fees for occupational educators enrolled in an EPP who commit to teaching in Tennessee for at least four years.¹¹

ACCELERATING THE TIMELINE

In cases where a district or school leader is unable to recruit a qualified teacher for a vacant position, emergency credentials help quickly fill vacancies.¹²

- **Temporary teaching permits:** To be eligible for an academic permit, an individual must have a bachelor's degree but is not required to have completed educator preparation and licensure requirements.¹³ Academic permits may only be renewed

twice, but highly effective permit-holders may apply for a limited license, valid for two additional years. In recent years, permit eligibility has expanded to include elementary physical education (PE) and classes with end-of-course (EOC) assessments, but federal regulations prohibit permit issuance for SPED. Permits are also available to teacher candidates during their clinical practice and occupational teachers, neither of which require a bachelor's degree and may not be renewed.

- **Endorsement exemptions:** To be eligible to teach out-of-field, individuals must have a full, valid, and active teacher's license. Exemptions may only be renewed twice.¹⁴ The current content area and grade level taught by the teacher, previous coursework, and degree held, are all considered when issuing an endorsement exemption. Endorsement exemptions are not allowed for SPED vacancies or classes with an EOC assessment.

The Need To Bolster the Teacher Pipeline

Teachers matter more when it comes to student achievement than any other school-related factor.¹⁵ **Ensuring Tennessee has a reliable, effective, and diverse teacher pipeline should be a priority for the state and its students.** More specifically, this vision means:

- **Reliability:** School and district leaders should have a consistent pool of qualified teachers to fill open positions. For this to be true, state and local leaders must have timely access to information to understand staffing needs by endorsement area and locality. They also need to know they can rely on the availability of teacher candidates being trained through Tennessee's various pathways to the classroom — enabling anticipation of staffing needs and proactive strategies to recruit and retain.

- **Effectiveness:** Students should have access to effective teachers year after year, who meaningfully contribute to their growth and achievement, evidenced by student mastery of content and readiness for future educational and career opportunities. For this to be true, we must ensure teachers are well prepared for the classroom and well supported throughout their careers. Access to regular feedback through teacher evaluation will support professional growth and provide insights on the equitable distribution of effective teachers.
- **Diversity:** School communities should recruit and staff teachers with diverse backgrounds and identities. This is supported by research that suggests students of color see positive academic and nonacademic benefits to having same-race teachers, and students of other races also experience similar positive benefits.¹⁶ For this to be true, the racial identity gap between Tennessee's student and teacher populations must narrow and regular reporting of the retention rates and support provided for racially diverse teachers must be shared.

The pool of qualified teachers is not large enough.

For many local leaders, access to a reliable, effective, and diverse teacher pipeline remains out of reach. The 2022-2023 Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) revealed that three-fourths of administrators did not believe there was a sufficient pool of licensed applicants from which to choose qualified candidates for open teaching positions.¹⁷ Since 2020, statewide vacancies have hovered at 1,000 positions but teaching permits — a signal that a district could not recruit a licensed teacher — have increased substantially by 74% over two years.¹⁸ As a further complication, from 2010 to 2022, the number of Tennessee EPP cohort members fell by 45%, suggesting the traditional path into teaching is becoming an increasingly less common route and that there may be fewer candidates in the hiring pool in the future.¹⁹

Tennessee Administrators Express Challenges To Recruiting Prepared, Effective, and Diverse Teachers

Survey Prompt: In the last year, how challenging was it for you to recruit the following kinds of teachers to your school?	Percent of Administrators that Reported Challenges*
Instructionally effective teachers	65%
Teachers with necessary qualifications for my school’s vacancies	64%
Teachers who I think will stay in my school	52%
Racially/ethnically diverse teachers	71%

*From a five-point Likert scale, the sum percent of administrators that selected Challenging, Very Challenging, or Extremely Challenging. Nearly half of administrators responded to the 2023 TES.²⁰

Source: TES Administrator Core Data. TERA and TDOE, 2023.

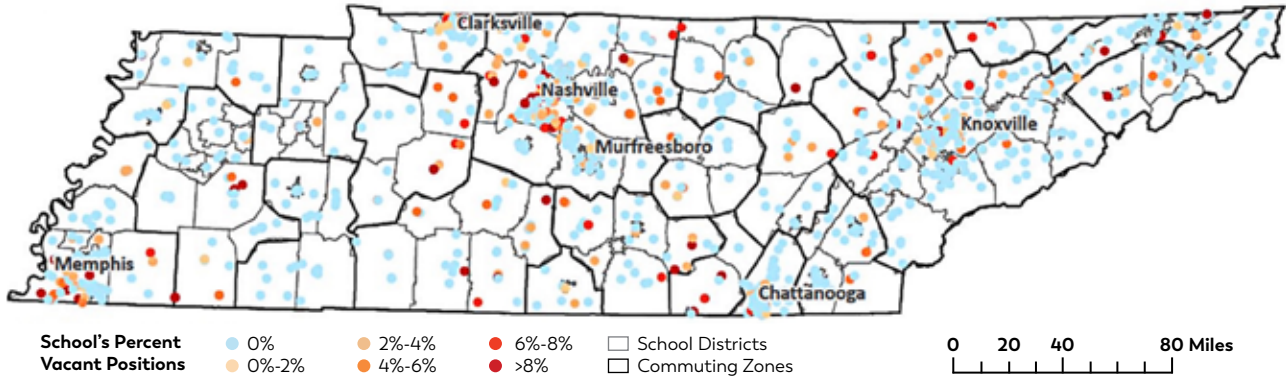
The shrinking traditional teacher pipeline is indicative of a growing demand for more flexible and supportive pathways to and through the teaching profession. **The status quo approaches to the teaching profession must evolve to support the next generation of teachers.** Research finds that younger generations prioritize careers that offer purpose, value alignment, flexibility, career development, and a supportive work environment — ranking these factors as even more important than compensation.²¹ Revitalizing the teacher pipeline and profession with these factors in mind will be essential for attracting and supporting Tennessee’s future teachers.

Though the shrinking pool of qualified teachers and ongoing shortages are very real challenges, it is also important to note that Tennessee’s vacancy rate is not an outlier and is reflective of the national average.²² Still, the current state of these challenges is worth addressing. Further, statewide snapshots obscure important variance, as some local challenges are much larger than others.

Teacher shortages vary by geography and endorsement area.

A recent study found that **in Tennessee, “teacher staffing challenges are highly localized, causing shortages and surpluses to coexist.”**²³ Together, cities and rural areas account for 75% of the state’s vacancies, but of Tennessee districts with zero vacancies, a mixture of all locale types — city, rural, suburb, and towns — were represented.²⁴ Notably, 70% of Tennessee’s districts that reported zero vacancies relied on emergency credentials in order to be fully staffed.²⁵ **These exceptions to statewide averages and trends indicate a need for enhanced data and more granular reporting.**

Teacher Vacancy Rates by School Depict Local Staffing Variation Within Districts



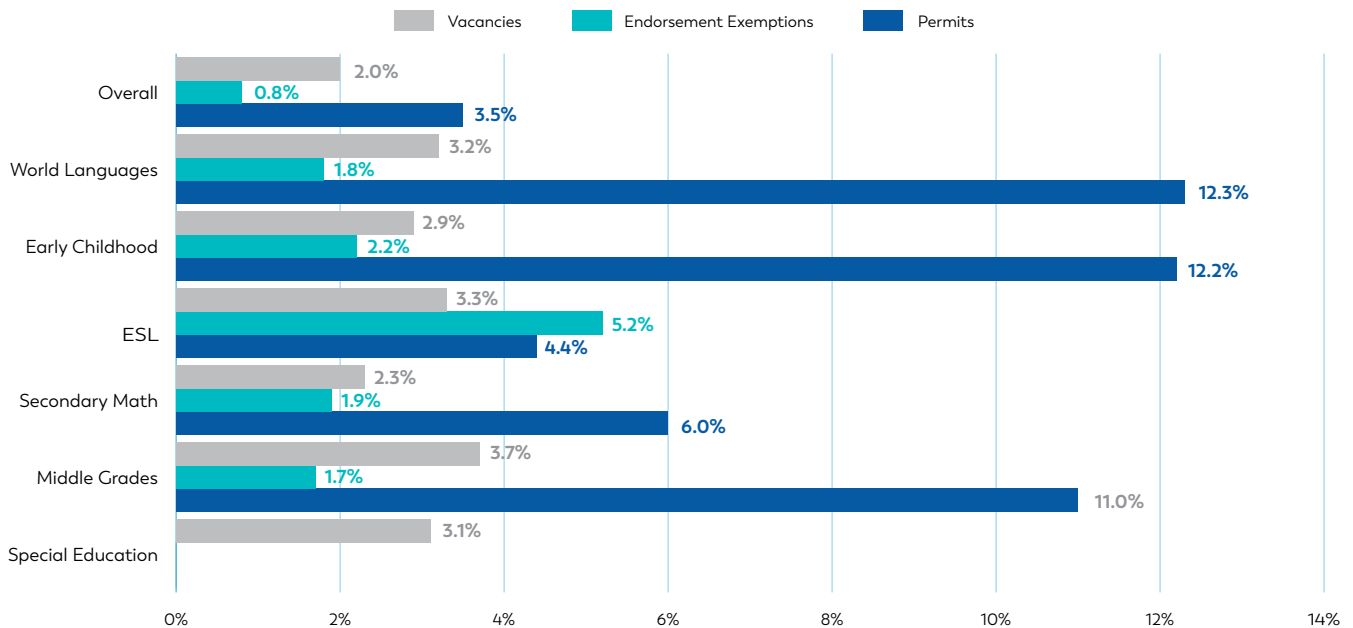
*Sample includes 1,085 (66%) traditional public schools that reported vacant teaching positions on the 2020 Tennessee Educator Survey.

Source: Edwards, Danielle S., Matthew A. Kraft, Alvin Christian, and Christopher A. Candelaria. "Teacher Shortages: A Framework for Understanding and Predicting Vacancies." Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 2024.

The 2022 state snapshot showed that vacancy rates were highest among a handful of endorsements: world languages, early childhood, ESL, secondary math,

middle grades, and SPED.²⁶ As a result, the issuance of emergency credentials has risen across these subjects.

Critical Shortage Subject Areas Show Above Average Rates of Vacancies and Teachers Using Emergency Credentials



*Educator vacancy, permit, and endorsement exemption rates shown by critical shortage subject area, 2022-2023. SPED positions are not eligible for emergency credentials.

Source: TDOE, 2023

The localized nature of teacher shortages leaves the state with a difficult challenge: **advancing policy to**

support a strong teacher pipeline when staffing hurdles and strategies vary significantly by district.

There is inequitable access to excellent teachers.

Student access to experienced and qualified teachers in Tennessee varies considerably across schools by income level, contributing to an inequitable distribution of teachers.²⁷

Concerningly, research shows that students of color and low-income students in Tennessee are 5 to 15 percentage points less likely to have highly effective teachers, reflective of national data where students of color in low-income schools are three to 10 times more likely to be taught by unqualified teachers than their white peers.²⁸

Students attending high-poverty schools in Tennessee are taught by teachers who are generally:

- **Less experienced:** Students attending high-poverty schools are almost twice as likely to have teachers with fewer than three years of classroom experience.
- **Less qualified:** High-poverty schools are nearly twelve times as likely to staff teachers on temporary permits who are not yet licensed and more than four times as likely to have teachers teaching outside of their subject area and/or grade-level endorsement.²⁹

Tennessee Students Attending High-Poverty Schools Are Much Less Likely To Have Qualified Teachers		
Teacher Experience and Licensure	High-Poverty Schools	Low-Poverty Schools
Inexperienced teachers	24.1%	13.3%
Teachers with temporary permits	3.6%	0.3%
Teachers with endorsement exemptions	0.7%	0.2%

Source: 2020-2021 TDOE Educator Experience and Licensure Data

Disparate access to experienced and qualified teachers undoubtedly contributes to persistent achievement gaps that exist for students of color and economically disadvantaged students in Tennessee. And until all students have access to qualified and effective teachers, these achievement gaps may not improve.

Learnings From District Staffing Case Studies

To better understand staffing at the local level and which pipeline initiatives are most utilized by districts, SCORE interviewed four Tennessee public school districts of varied size, student population,

and location — covering all three of Tennessee’s grand divisions. **Not surprisingly, variation was clearly reflected in district staffing needs going into the 2024-2025 school year,** including how close the districts were to being fully staffed and whether staffing relied on the issuance of temporary teaching permits. Interview questions aimed to capture a holistic picture of staffing in each district, to understand the capacity and effort required of district staff to fill open positions with qualified teachers, and what factors influenced their unique needs (size, geography, compensation, proximity to EPPs, retirees, etc.).

Case Studies Sample Represented Districts Varying by Size, Type, Economic Status, and Staffing Entering the 2024-2025 School Year

Case Study Participants*	District Type	County Economic Status**	Black, Hispanic, Native American Students	Economically Disadvantaged Students	Staffing Entering the 2024-2025 School Year***	Percent of Teachers on Permits 2024-2025 School Year***
District A	Small rural	Distressed	8%	40%	Fully staffed with a decrease in permits	0%
District B	Large city	Transitional	50%	37%	99% staffed with a decrease in permits	5%
District C	Midsize city	Transitional	49%	28%	Fully staffed with an increase in permits	7.5%
District D	Midsize rural	At-risk	51%	45%	96% staffed with an increase in permits	20%

*Districts are listed in order relative to how challenging they perceived it was to staff open positions with licensed teachers entering the 2024-2025 school year, A (least challenging) to D (most challenging).

**The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) prepares an index of all U.S. counties by economic status represented by five designations: Distressed, At-risk, Transitional, Competitive, and Attainment. For fiscal year 2025, 9 Tennessee counties were designated distressed and 31 designated at-risk.³⁰

***District-provided staffing data.

Across the four districts, six specific themes emerged:

- **Staffing needs, challenges, and initiatives**

vary: Local leaders described a variety of unique staffing experiences, reflecting the contextual nature of staffing needs. Even with a sample size of four districts, there was notable variation in uptake of state initiatives, the success and usefulness of the programs, and the staffing challenges that remain.

- **Staffing improvements seen by most districts this year:**

Three of the four districts reported some improvement in their ability to fill open positions this year compared to greater challenges experienced in the years immediately

after the COVID-19 pandemic, even if that has meant still relying on emergency credentials.

- **Quality concerns are top of mind with the rise in emergency credentials:**

All four districts take serious consideration prior to issuing a temporary permit or endorsement exemption, only making those choices when there are not enough qualified teachers to fill open positions. As one district described it, allowing an unlicensed teacher to staff a classroom is a gamble on teacher quality and effectiveness. And while investments in mentoring and training are proactive measures to ensure new or out-of-field teachers are supported, this is an additional cost and capacity burden for school districts.

- **Special education remains one of the toughest subjects to staff:** SPED positions remain the toughest subject area to staff for all four districts. Several teachers pursued the free SPED endorsement from TDOE, which has been helpful for some districts. For others, few switched to teaching in that position. Further, with emergency credentials not available for SPED, per federal restrictions, these vacant positions can be difficult to fill.
- **Shifts in hard-to-staff endorsements add to challenges:** Though there are some subject areas and grade levels that are consistently challenging to staff, such as secondary math and science, local leaders have noticed surprising trends, where hard-to-staff endorsements have changed over time.

District leaders have noticed PE, elementary grades, secondary ELA, and middle grades recently emerging as difficult positions to fill.

- **Asks around continued investments in teacher salary and licensure flexibilities:** Districts appreciate increases that have been made to the minimum state teaching salary, and districts ask for the state to continue discussing future investments in compensation. Districts also request consistency across licensure flexibilities — so that pathways to the classroom are open to effective teachers and mitigate barriers to licensure. Finally, better communication between districts, EPP partners, and the state is desired. Without it, local needs are not captured, and state pipeline initiatives may or may not resolve ongoing staffing issues.

A Closer Look At District A: Small, Rural, Distressed, and Fully Staffed With Licensed Teachers

Staffing experience: District A entered the 2024-2025 school year **completely staffed with certified teachers**, including job-embedded candidates, and does not currently have any teachers on permits. Now fully staffed, the district has shifted its focus to quality.

Initiatives used: District A has utilized many supports to bolster their teacher pipeline. The district has fostered multiple postsecondary partnerships to recruit job-embedded teaching candidates and the alternative certification program iTeach has been a tremendous help to staff their classrooms. Flexible emergency credential policies have positively contributed to their ability to staff effectively in the past and allowed candidates time to enroll in iTeach. This will be District A’s first year to partner with the Tennessee GYOC, and they have begun the TAP pre-apprenticeship program with 20 high school students enrolled. A handful of teachers from the district signed up for the free additional SPED endorsement program, but this opportunity has not yet yielded

completers. Autonomy from the state to make strategic compensation decisions for staff has proven a major value-add for current and new hires, as they offer hiring bonuses, equity pay distributed from the state to rural areas, day care services, mental health resources, and an increased salary scale, among other benefits.

Best practice: To support the growth required for new teachers, the district has invested significant resources into regular coaching and mentoring, and they are proud to see academic growth in their schools. They are also proactive in communicating with staff about future retirement plans or returning to their same position and school the next year, which enables early posting of job openings.

What district leaders say:

“They [principals] need to have conversations with their people, and why they want them to stay — especially high-quality people. Quality people should be aware that we want to keep them.”

“Encourage people to go into education and pay them well.”

A Closer Look At District B: Large, City, Transitional, and Nearly Fully Staffed With a Decrease in Permits

Staffing experience: District B entered the 2024-2025 school year with **99% of teaching positions and 96% of vacancies filled** — a tribute to the significant effort of their team as last year the district did not reach 95% of positions filled until well into the school year. Local economic conditions may be enticing more individuals to turn toward teaching and timely local budget approval enabled this district to meet hiring needs sooner. This district issued about **10% fewer permits compared to last year.**

Initiatives used: District B has engaged in all pipeline initiatives offered by the state. They have used emergency credentials to fill open positions, despite concerns about instructional quality. Approximately 200 permits were issued last school year, and by January 2024, about 75% of their permitted teachers were working on obtaining licensure. Many teachers on permits are in the process of enrolling in job-embedded programs through the district's GYO program or on their own. For this district, policy flexibilities such as removing the edTPA assessment for job-embedded candidates and relaxing requirements for occupational teachers with professional backgrounds have had positive impacts on staffing. Initial institution-level investments in GYO were instrumental in recruiting a high-quality, diverse teaching cohort that has been retained.

Best practice: District B offers extensive benefits to staff members, including phone-based mental health services and no-cost pharmacy services. Thanks to recent local policy changes that expanded school leader hiring autonomy, they have

seen improvements. They also widened their recruitment window to begin earlier, which solicited a larger applicant pool.

Ongoing challenges: State initiatives continue to offer meaningful ways to provide a quality pipeline of incoming teachers, but this district still struggles with “having *enough* teachers and *enough teachers for the right positions.*” Limited access to GYO partnership data related to staff progress to licensure has created a barrier to proactively triage staffing levels. Improvement in partnership data sharing and communication between the state and local leaders will enable stakeholders to unpack challenges and propose solutions together.

What district leaders say:

“With appropriate checks and balances on quality, permits can be a positive thing ... the right person taking their first shot at teaching is better than a vacancy. Rural counties really need this.”

“I do wonder if the state has a responsibility to be responsive to local conditions. If the state is putting forward state apprenticeships and partnerships, they need to gather local pipeline data and more frequent feedback from the districts about what our need is.”

A Closer Look At District C: Midsized, City, Transitional, and Fully Staffed With an Increase in Permits

Staffing experience: District C entered the 2024-2025 school year having **filled all teaching positions** with an increase in teaching permits issued for new hires from last year to fill hard-to-staff vacancies. While fully staffed, the district faces **ongoing challenges stemming from turnover, retirees, and a lack of qualified applicants.**

Initiatives used: District C utilized licensure policy flexibilities, including endorsement exemptions and the new clinical practice teaching permits for student teachers. They leverage differentiated pay to offer stipends for hard-to-staff positions alongside engagement in free additional SPED endorsements. Their postsecondary Tennessee GYOC partnership has helped them develop a unique certification program for candidates with a bachelor's degree, which has also helped them fill positions.

Ongoing challenges: Fewer individuals are showing interest in the teaching profession overall, leading to heightened recruitment challenges. Positions outside of the classroom — academic coaches, ESL and SPED coaches, and behavior interventionists — are also enticing current teachers to leave their positions, leading to turnover and vacancies. Nearly half of District C's permitted teachers are in their first year. This alone puts a strain on sustainable staffing exacerbated by the three-year maximum for permit issuance if the teacher does not either complete licensure requirements or qualify and apply for a limited license.

What district leaders say:

"We need more data on trends and initiatives that are leading to high retention rates across the state."

"Challenges are related to a combination of staff turnover, retirees, and a lack of applicants. The lack of applicants issue becomes more and more concerning the closer we get to the start of the school year."

A Closer Look At District D: Midsized, Rural, At-Risk, and Mostly Staffed With Significant Reliance on Permits

Staffing experience: District D entered the 2024-2025 school year with about **96% of positions filled, but had to rely significantly on temporary permits**, comprising about 20% of their teaching staff. District leadership described staffing challenges as "desperate times" and consistently expects 40 to 50 new teachers to be hired in their district every year.

Initiatives used: Leaders say the free additional SPED endorsements have been immensely helpful and a cost saver for candidates. District D hopes this opportunity will continue to be offered. This district's immediate focus has been issuing emergency credentials to fill open positions and working to support permitted teachers to licensure. This district has concentrated its capacity and resources on permits, which disqualifies a candidate from being a registered teaching apprentice, so the GYO program has not yet been as beneficial for this district.

Ongoing challenges: This district is concerned that staffing challenges will not improve but will worsen with time. Commuters who are hired to teach in District D are difficult to retain, as many leave when teaching positions open closer to home. Persistent turnover and the lack of applicants with a teaching license presents significant challenges for this district. While this district staffs a significant portion of classrooms with temporary permit holders, passing licensure assessments has been difficult for those educators, adding to the cost burden for teacher candidates.

What district leaders say:

"With so many school systems in need of teachers, retention of commuters is almost impossible."

"How do you make gains when you start over [with new teachers] each year? It is simply defeating."

How Initiatives Have Impacted the Teacher Pipeline

Tennessee's investments have established several innovative and responsive solutions to improving the teacher pipeline. **Now we must invest in understanding the impact of these investments to assess their effectiveness.** Tennessee should continue building on the extensive work that has been done and utilize its robust infrastructure to capture teacher pipeline data and move to analysis, reporting, and making refinements where needed.

Teacher pipeline reporting must be more granular to assist with state and local decision-making. Tennessee does publicly share some insights on the impact of its teacher pipeline initiatives that are instrumental in guiding policy discussions:

- **Growth trends of vacancies and emergency credential issuance:** Annual snapshots of state and regional growth trends for vacancies, permits, and endorsement exemptions — including their prevalence across content areas and grade-level bands — have enabled an understanding of aggregate need and solution uptake to fill open positions. For instance, knowing that less than half of permits convert to licensure after three years helps policymakers consider what support is needed to complete licensure requirements for those candidates.³¹ Importantly, growing the number of permitted teachers who obtain full licensure is a goal of the Tennessee State Board of Education.³²
- **Engagement with free additional endorsements:** Updates on participation in the free additional endorsement offering in SPED enabled stakeholders to analyze whether offering a no-cost endorsement pathway at the state level lessened SPED vacancies. Across grade bands, 1,024 additional SPED endorsements have been earned, but to date only about 9% of SPED endorsements obtained filled a vacancy.³³ This could suggest that to address SPED

vacancies, other strategies need to be used in combination with offering a free endorsement or the program should be revised to be available only to those who plan to teach in that subject area.

- **Teacher apprenticeships and partnerships:** The Tennessee GYOC provides granular reporting through their annual report on the state's teaching apprenticeships.³⁴ Metrics include a roll-up of each EPP-district partnership and apprenticeship program enrollees and completers by district and provide stakeholders with data-driven information on how the GYOC intends to keep improving. Public reporting has shown Tennessee's apprenticeship programs attract a higher percentage of diverse educator candidates, which can, for example, help inform future decision-making to support and expand these pathways.³⁵
- **Tennessee Educator Preparation Report Card:** Annual statewide and EPP-level metrics on teacher candidate cohorts are provided that allow for year-over-year comparisons for candidate enrollment, assessment passage rates, employment retention, and impact on student achievement. The most recent state report showed that about 30% of candidates obtained a high-demand endorsement, about 61% were rated highly effective, and about 16% were racially diverse. The EPP Report Card provides crucial insights into Tennessee's pipeline growth.³⁶

Deeper analysis and reporting of initiative effectiveness on local challenges first relies on accessible, timely data. A recent study showed that nearly half of states, including Tennessee, do not report how individual district staffing data compare to the state average — a key missing element for understanding the teacher pipeline.³⁷ And while aggregate descriptions of staffing are useful, they can mask the variation of staffing needs between schools and subjects within districts. Research tells us that “shortages depend critically on whether one takes an aggregate or local perspective,” and Tennessee's staffing variation calls for an understanding of both perspectives.³⁸

**State and Regional Reporting Provide a Summative View of Staffing,
but Granular Information Is Needed To Drive Strategic Decision-Making***

CORE Region	Total Staffed Positions	Vacancies	Percent Vacant	Percent of All TN Vacancies	Emergency Credentials	Percent Emergency Credentials	Percent Unfilled Positions**
Northwest	2704	38	1.4%	4%	99	3.7%	5.07%
Southwest	12989	343	2.6%	19%	1197	9.2%	11.86%
Mid Cumberland	19890	333	1.7%	29%	813	4.1%	5.76%
South Central	4235	72	1.7%	6%	196	4.6%	6.33%
Upper Cumberland	4921	60	1.2%	7%	194	3.9%	5.16%
Southeast	5108	40	0.8%	8%	207	4.1%	4.84%
East TN	12542	82	0.7%	19%	127	1.0%	1.67%
First TN	5064	41	0.8%	8%	63	1.2%	2.05%
TN Total	67453	1009			2896		

*Most recent state vacancy snapshot representing October 2022 staffing levels.

**Unfilled positions are defined by the state to include positions not staffed by a licensed teacher endorsed in the subject and grade level being taught — the sum of vacancies, permits, and endorsement exemptions.³⁹

Source: TDOE, 2023

By regularly assessing the efficacy and impact of all teacher pipeline initiatives — and how they solve local pipeline challenges — state and local leaders, advocates and policymakers, will have the necessary data to answer questions such as:

- Have increased investments in the teacher pipeline provided hard-to-staff schools and/or subject areas with qualified and effective teachers?
- Have the expanded flexibilities in teacher licensure and preparation — such as emergency credential or licensure assessment policy changes — provided schools with enough effective teachers?
- Which teacher pipeline initiatives are having the strongest impact and resulting in positive gains for high-poverty schools and schools with challenging staffing needs?
- How are teacher pipeline initiatives helping Tennessee progress toward a more reliable, effective, and diverse teacher pipeline overall?

As the state considers future pipeline innovation, we must strive to build a stronger teacher pipeline that supports student success by both eliminating barriers and upholding quality. **Transparent and thorough analysis will ensure that we do not compromise quality as we consider pipeline flexibilities but rather amplify and support what leads to effective teaching and attracts passionate individuals to careers in the classroom.**

Recommendations Moving Forward

Tennessee has advanced several initiatives and investments to bolster the teacher pipeline and support districts who are experiencing teacher shortages and staffing challenges. **Many of the policy levers available have been put to work, but there are opportunities for the state to optimize its resources by bringing light to what is working and where improvements are needed.** For policymakers and state and local leaders to make informed decisions about future investments or expansion of existing strategies to staff schools, we must have better access to information. We recommend the following:

- 1. Evaluate the efficacy of current teacher pipeline initiatives.** Tennessee should use data to understand the impact of teacher pipeline initiatives on vacancies at the state, district, and school level. Further, the state should examine how these initiatives contribute to a diverse teacher workforce and student access to effective teachers.
- 2. Report on state and local educator labor markets.** Tennessee's teacher pipeline challenges are highly localized and therefore state and local leaders need individualized data to identify targeted solutions that are appropriate for each district's unique context. Tennessee should provide district leaders with personalized reports so they can better understand their teacher pipeline and labor market at the district level.
- 3. Prioritize quality across the multiple pathways into the teaching profession.** Tennessee offers many pathways to the profession, and more information is needed to understand which pathways are best preparing teacher candidates to serve the state's students. Using Tennessee's teacher evaluation and state assessment systems will be vital in understanding which licensure and preparation requirements and pathways to teaching are most impactful for student success and will help ensure future policymaking decisions have student outcomes in mind.

- 4. Make the teaching profession more attractive and sustainable.** To bring more prospective teachers into the pipeline, develop strong district mentoring programs and support innovative staffing model pilots as opportunities to grow new teachers and increase retention of effective teachers.

Closing

Tennessee has led the way in innovative investments to bolster the state's teacher pipeline, and we have heard that for some these initiatives and investments have helped solve short-term staffing challenges. Teacher pipeline initiatives must continue and be assessed routinely at a very local level after being given ample time to take root and have an impact. Understanding which initiatives are working will better enable us to address pipeline challenges, which will require understanding both state and local pipeline dynamics and how they intersect. It is critical that we create an environment where local leaders feel confident their teacher workforce is prepared to meet student needs.

With deeper understanding and in close partnership with the state, Tennessee districts will have the resources to effectively and strategically staff their schools with qualified teachers. And students — regardless of where they attend school — will all have access to excellent teachers.

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