

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105180](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

For years, parents and policymakers have raised concerns about teacher shortages. These concerns escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic, amid reports of teachers leaving the profession, fewer new teachers entering, and schools struggling to hire teachers.

The Explanatory Statement accompanying the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 includes a provision for GAO to examine K-12 teacher shortages. This report examines (1) the prevalence of public K-12 teacher shortages and characteristics of the teacher workforce; (2) key recruitment and retention challenges contributing to shortages; and (3) the extent to which Education's efforts address these key challenges.

GAO analyzed nationally representative data for 2011-2021 (depending on dataset) to determine the prevalence and characteristics of shortages. GAO also conducted 19 non-generalizable focus groups, including with current and former teachers; hiring officials; and state officials. Further, GAO reviewed methodologically sound research and policy papers published in the last 12 years; relevant federal laws, regulations, and agency documents; and interviewed Education officials, researchers, and subject matter experts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations, including that Education develop a more comprehensive strategy to execute its vision. Education neither agreed nor disagreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105180](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (202) 512-7215 or nowickij@gao.gov.

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K-12 EDUCATION

Education Should Assess Its Efforts to Address Teacher Shortages

What GAO Found

Public K-12 teacher shortages occurred nationwide, but were more prevalent in specific geographic and demographic areas and specific subject matters, according to GAO's analysis of the most recent available national data. GAO found that shortages were most prevalent in the West, urban and rural areas (not suburban), schools predominantly serving non-White students, and subjects such as science and foreign languages. GAO also found that, as of school year 2017-18, the teacher workforce was mostly White (80 percent) and female (75 percent).

Negative perception of the teaching profession and perceived lack of support for current teachers are among key recruitment and retention challenges, according to GAO's literature review of research published from 2011-2021 (see figure). These same themes also surfaced repeatedly in all of 19 focus groups GAO held with current and former teachers, hiring officials, state officials, and officials from teacher preparation programs. GAO found that this perceived lack of support exists at the state, school district, and community level and increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Recruitment and Retention Challenges Contributing to Teacher Shortages



Source: GAO analysis of studies, Education data, and focus group transcripts. | GAO-23-105180

The Department of Education's plans for addressing teacher shortages do not have all of the elements GAO previously has determined as necessary for successful strategies. In summer 2022, Education announced an overarching vision for "Supporting and Elevating the Teaching Profession." The vision includes five specific strategies and various activities to support teacher professional development and address recruiting and retention challenges. While Education has taken important steps to develop a comprehensive strategy to address teacher shortages, it has not yet clearly communicated time frames, milestones, or performance measures to gauge results of their efforts. Education officials said that the agency's priority to date has been on the initiatives associated with their vision. By building time frames and measures into its overall strategy, Education would be better positioned to know whether its efforts to help schools, states, and districts address teacher shortages are working.