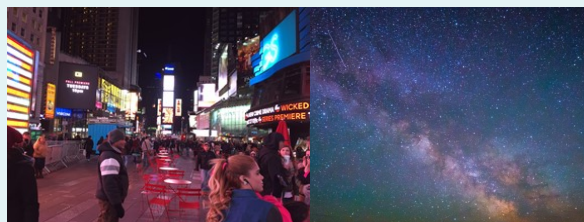




RSA TODAY

News for New York State's
Rural Schools

April 2019



I don't live in New York,

I live in New York

"Communities Committed to Educational Excellence"

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RURAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM TO HOST NATIONAL RURAL WORKFORCE FORUM

In 2017 the federal administration created the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity. Their intent was to identify legislative, regulatory and policy changes to increase the prosperity of rural communities. Not surprisingly, initial findings of the Task Force identified the need for job opportunities to be filled by qualified individuals as the key to the issue. In response, the U.S. Department of Labor and Agriculture are collaborating to create the Rural Workforce Innovation Network (RWIN) to address the national decline in the rural economy.

The network seeks to:

The network seeks to:

1. Conduct a gap analysis to identify opportunities for greater partnerships and collaborations to support rural workforce training and placements. Using a member from the network, survey network members to better understand needs and resources.
2. Convene listening sessions and roundtables to provide network members with an opportunity to identify and share resources and best practices and to identify future action steps for Rural Development to consider.
3. Improve Federal coordination with agencies such as the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Affairs, EPA, etc., which all have their own workforce initiatives. Integrate rural specific resources into existing the Department of Labor framework where possible and explore joint funding opportunities or priorities for rural communities.

The Rural Schools Association of New York State and its affiliate, the Rural Schools Program (RSP) at Cornell University have been asked to help lead this effort in the northeast region of the country. On September 13th in Room 401 of Warren Hall, RSP will host the northeast regional convening of network participants. The keynote speaker is slated to be Richard Mayfield, New York State Director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Experts in rural development from New England, the Eastern seaboard surrounding states will work to identify productive approaches to improving rural workforce opportunities and the development of rural communities.

Space will be limited but those with an interest in this subject area should contact Natalie Mitchell, 275 Flex in Warren Hall, nam33@cornell.edu



State Budget Advocacy

State Budget Analysis

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Testimony

YOUR RSA HOLDS THE LINE ON DUES

We like to think it's the best \$750 investment your district can make. Membership in RSA provides advocacy, professional development and the latest information tailored specifically to the rural educational community. Nine years ago, RSA Directors Larry Kiley and Denny Sweeney laid out a timetable that would set RSA's annual membership dues at \$750 per school district. They wanted to be sure that RSA was affordable, while able to provide the programs and services needed by its members. After all these years, through careful budgeting and the expansion of our partnerships, sponsorships and programming, RSA's dues are still \$750 per year.

\$750

At last week's RSA Board of Director meeting, dues were set for 2019-2020 at...wait for it...\$750. Maintaining such a longstanding dues structure hasn't been easy. We're providing more information, more advocacy and more training opportunities than ever before; not to mention the number of local and regional and national presentations we provide to advance understanding of rural school challenges and enlist support for rural schools and the communities that host them.

With the help of an outstanding Board of Directors representing all areas of rural New York State, we've kept close tabs on our mission and expanded our work to coincide with opportunities to expand our non-dues revenue. That revenue now amounts to close to 30% of RSA's revenue. We know that keeping the lid on local district costs is just as important as providing high quality advocacy and programming for our members. So in planning your upcoming local school budgets, you can put that RSA membership number on the sheet in pen. Still the best \$750 investment your district can make!

GIVING RURAL SCHOOLS A VOICE

Coming Soon to a Location Near You!

There is no question that our rural schools and communities are being challenged like never before. As National Rural Teacher of the Year Wayne Owlette says, we're doing the hard work of staying. Some of those challenges are increasing. Rural New York's population has dropped significantly since the last U.S. Census. That means there'll be fewer legislators representing our interests in the future. We already see that all of our statewide leaders and all of our legislative leaders already come from highly populated areas. The recent state budget would indicate that we have more work to do in informing them about rural issues and concerns. So we're going to do just that!

Based on work RSA recently did for the State of Georgia, this coming fall we will travel the state to hear from you. We want to make sure that we know the depth and breadth of rural school issues going into the all-important 2020 legislative season when that new census will be done. We will hold a Rural Issues Forum in every rural region of the state, partnering with BOCES and the New York Schools Insurance Reciprocal to make your voices heard in Albany and Washington, D.C.

At each forum, we'll hear from everyone who wants to relay rural challenges and issues. We'll be recording them on screen so that everyone knows we got it down. When the forums have concluded, we'll empanel an expert task force to reform those concerns into a policy brief to provide state and federal leaders. Then, based on the theory that you never tell government about a problem without also telling them the solution, RSA will create an advocacy plan to carry out the recommendations.

With your help, we can overcome the numeric odds that seek to reduce the political impact of rural New York and its schools. Look for a Rural Issues Forum in your area in early fall!

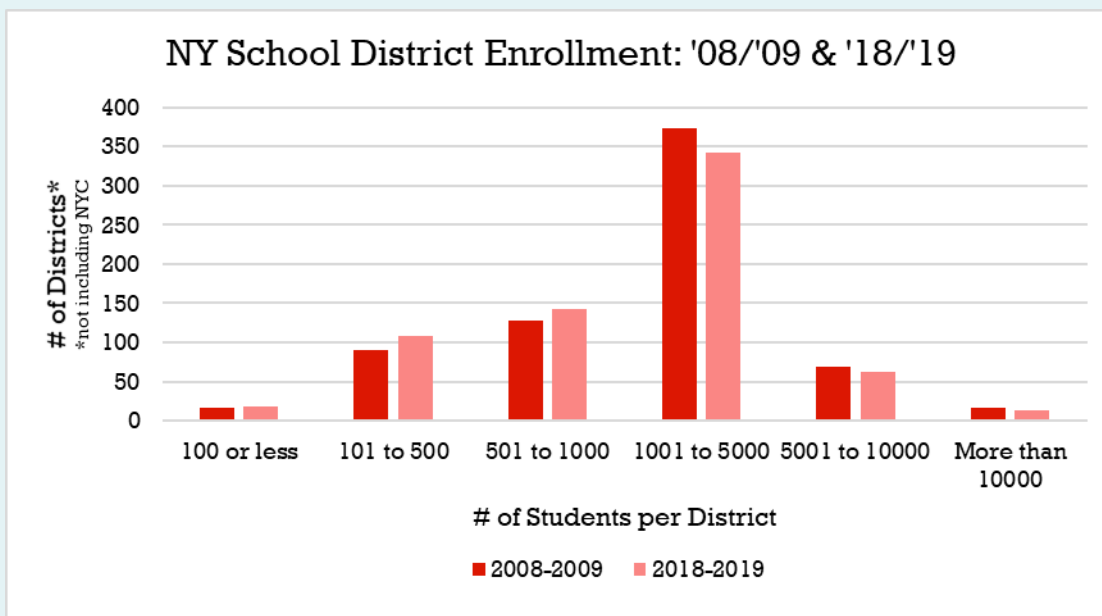


#Rural Reality-NY #1

This is the first in a series of 12 weekly postings to help inform discussion and analysis of issues facing New York State's small and rural schools. Each figure, table or map alone signals a particular characteristic, but together they will paint a complicated portrait of the state of NY's rural school districts in 2019. We present these without judgement.

Here we see an increase in the number of NY's smallest school districts. We now have 19 districts with fewer than 100 students k-12, and 108 districts between 100 and 500. Hence, the number of districts with fewer than 500 students has increased from 107 to 127 over the last decade. Likewise, the number of districts with fewer than 1000 students has increased from 235 to 270.

NY School District Enrollment: '08/'09 to '18/'19		
# of Students per District	# of Districts*	
	2008-2009	2018-2019
100 or less	17	19
101 to 500	90	108
501 to 1000	128	143
1001 to 5000	373	342
5001 to 10000	69	63
More than 10000	17	13
*Not including NYC		



NREAC—MEDICAID IN SCHOOLS

As part of our effort to expand the reach of RSA on behalf of New York State's rural school districts, your Rural

WHO WOULD SEEK MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT IF THE ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS WERE SUBSTANTIALLY DECREASED?



44% of rural districts



37% of suburban districts



40% of urban districts

Schools Association helps lead the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition. NREAC recently held its national Advocacy Day and RSA took the opportunity to meet with our United States Senatorial education staff, as well as members of the New York Congressional Delegation having committee ties to public education. We have included our one page fact sheet highlighting federal issues of importance to our rural school districts. Below you'll also find our NREAC material on Medicaid claiming for services in schools. This is an important source of revenue for districts and vital to providing our increasingly impoverished student population with the programs and services needed to succeed. Your RSA Board of Directors recently designated Seneca Falls and RSA Board Member Heather Zellers as RSA's Federal Issues Liaison. Heather has already done great work on federal advocacy, creating the one page fact sheet and meeting with federal representatives.

NREAC Medicaid in Schools Proposal

For over thirty years, Medicaid has helped cover the costs for certain medically necessary services provided in school-based settings to children eligible for special education services. Medicaid can also reimburse school districts for health and mental health services delivered in schools to students and for providing other screening, diagnosis and treatment

services like vision and hearing screenings, and diabetes and asthma management.

As districts are faced with more children with critical health and mental health care needs and increasing demands for school personnel to provide those services, NREAC has sought a solution that will enable more small and rural districts to participate in the Medicaid program.

In December 2018, we participated in a survey of over 750 school leaders in 41 states about their participation in the school-based Medicaid program and found the complex administrative and paperwork requirements necessary to obtain Medicaid reimbursement significantly hindered school district participation in the program.

Our report outlines how Congress and the Administration must work together to provide States with the flexibility to reduce the administrative burdens that unfairly diminish the amount of reimbursement school districts receive, or worse, create insurmountable barriers that freeze out small and rural schools from even attempting to receive reimbursement school district participation in the program.

WHO WOULD BE MORE WILLING TO ADMINISTER A SCHOOL-BASED MEDICAID PROGRAM IF THE PAPERWORK REQUIREMENTS WERE REDUCED?



Districts with less than 1,000 students



Districts with 1,001-2,500



Districts with 2,501-5,000



Districts with 5,000-10,000

Eighty-four percent of the school districts we surveyed that do not seek Medicaid reimbursement are rural and among rural districts that do not seek Medicaid reimbursement, more than half, 55%, are districts whose enrollment is less than 1,000 students.



Of rural districts with enrollments less than 3,000 students, 22% of them do not seek Medicaid reimbursement.

More than 20% of rural school districts did not claim Medicaid reimbursement despite having more than 50% of their students eligible for free or reduced lunches, compared with only 3.5% of urban school districts not claiming Medicaid reimbursement with similar levels of poverty.



Thirty-seven percent of rural districts indicated that the costs of complying with the paperwork and administrative requirements of the program were why they did not attempt to bill Medicaid.

A quarter of rural districts indicated they no longer participate in the program because they lost money due to the cost of complying with the paperwork and administrative requirements.





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Rural Schools Association Federal Priorities

Maximize Investments in Public Education

RSA opposes any legislation that diverts public funds from UPK–12 education through voucher programs and incentivized federal tax credits for donations to private, religious or home school education. Limited federal resources should maximize investments in public education, where choice and innovation already exist. RSA requests that any school that receives public funds, whether through direct funding, tax credits or vouchers, should be held to the same accountability and reporting standards under ESSA.

Improving School Infrastructure, Safety and Educational Technology

RSA would support the establishment of a capital funding program that could provide low interest loans, grants and federally backed bonding capacity that would allow school districts to make much needed infrastructure improvements that include school safety and digital connectivity.

We support federal efforts to help rural districts address the widening gap that exists for communities and their students by investing in expanding connectivity and bandwidth. This includes maintaining E-rate, as an element of the Universal Service Fund, and preserving Net Neutrality.

Preserving Net Neutrality

RSA believes that the House and Senate should overturn the FCC's vote to abandon current regulatory practices with a Congressional Resolution of Disapproval. Congress needs to ensure all students have equal access to online content regardless of where they are living or learning. With internet service providers charging educational companies providing online content more to deliver services, the costs will be passed on to school districts. Many rural schools will be unable to absorb increased costs, which will widen the achievement gap between rural schools and districts with superior access.

Higher Education Act and Investments in Career and Technical Education

The re-authorization of the HEA should include increased access to high-quality teacher and leader training programs and extend federal support for recruiting well-prepared educators for rural areas affected by teacher shortages. This includes protecting and increasing Title II and Title IV investments. RSA supports the Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals (PREP) Act to address teacher and principal shortages in rural communities. Rural communities find it difficult to recruit and retain teachers and school personnel. RSA supports efforts at the federal level to provide loan forgiveness programs that target rural communities.

The HEA reauthorization process will provide Congress a critically important opportunity to fully invest in America's workforce by ensuring affordable and accessible postsecondary opportunities for every learner. HEA funding at the secondary and postsecondary level will directly affect the business community where finding skilled workers in growing fields like healthcare and advanced manufacturing is difficult. RSA supports allowing rural communities to research and design programs for teacher and principal preparation that is driven by local ESSA frameworks. Districts could create alternate certification programs determined by workforce needs. Flexible, local control in making these decisions not only impacts the educational outcomes of a community but its ability to retain a vibrant workforce.

Medicaid

Medicaid funding ensures that school districts have the resources to support all students in achieving success. Rural districts rely on Medicaid reimbursements to pay for nurses, therapists, and personnel that provide IDEA services to students with disabilities. The federal focus on mental health and safety in schools must recognize that Medicaid is a critical piece in providing health and related services to students in poverty. RSA opposes restructuring Medicaid reimbursements to enact per-capita caps or block grants that no longer reimburse school districts for the services they provide to students. This reduction in funding would hurt the most vulnerable students and hinder improvements that support the overall well-being of children and a safe and secure school environment.



A SURPRISING NUMBER OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE SWITCHED TO A FOUR-DAY WEEK

A Louisiana district is the latest to implement a four-day school week, but the effect on student performance is still unclear

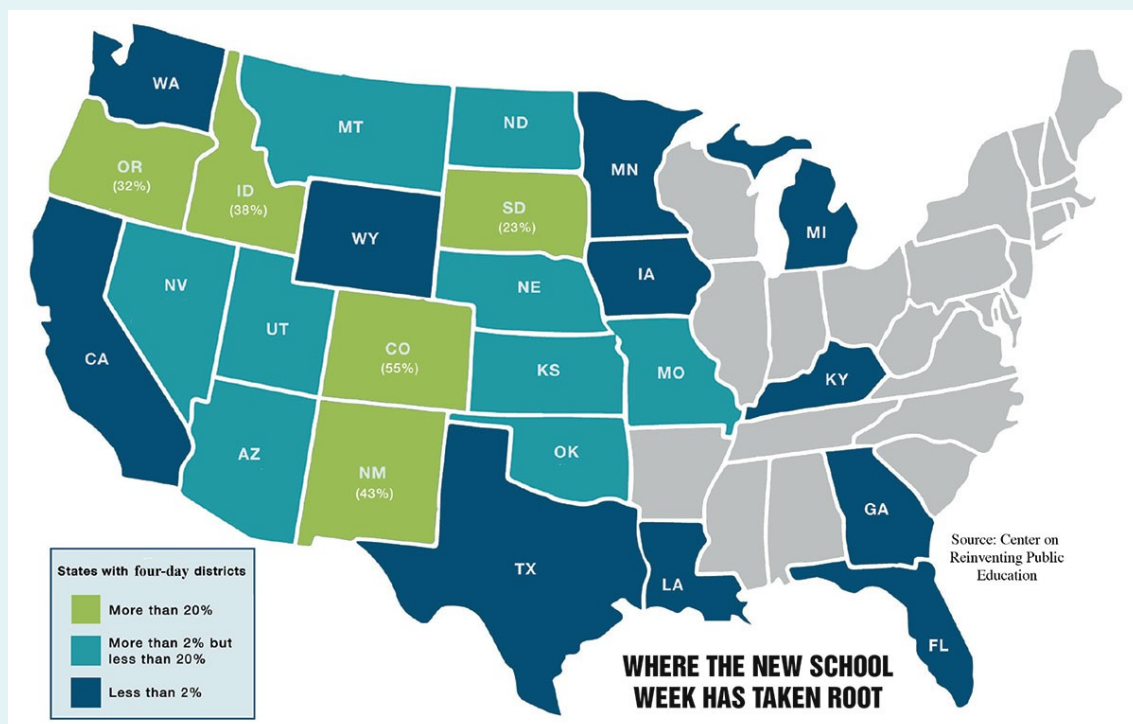
Hundreds of school districts across the country are cutting classes.

Louisiana’s Avoyelles Parish recently announced that it’s moving to a four-day school week next year, joining the approximately 560 school districts in 25 states that have already embraced three-day weekends year-round.

“We have to think outside of the box when it comes to stuff like this,” Avoyelles Parish School Board member Rickey Adams [told central Louisiana NBC/CBS affiliate KALB](#) on Wednesday, a day after the board voted 7-2 in favor of the shorter school week for its 5,300 students in the rural 10-school district.

The move is expected to cut costs, as Avoyelles Parish superintendent Blaine Dauzat told [Yahoo News](#) that, “We are dead last in the state in teachers’ salaries,” as well as help hire and retain teachers who would still be paid five-day salaries while working for four days, albeit by extending the length they teach during the days that they’re on.

[Four-day weeks aren’t new](#) — they’ve tended to cycle during times of financial crises, such as the 1930s and most recently during the Great Recession, when struggling Western states like Idaho, Missouri, South Dakota and Montana saw more schools drop either Mondays or Fridays to save transportation and utility costs one day per week. Today [more than half of Colorado’s school districts](#) (98 out of 178) have switched to a four-day week, as have about 40% of New Mexico’s districts. Schools in Florida (2012), Iowa (2013) and Texas (2016) have shortened their school weeks in the past few years, as well.



Most districts run Monday through Thursday, although a few have gone the Tuesday through Friday route, and the remaining school days are extended about an hour or an hour and a half longer to deliver the same amount of instructional time over fewer days, [as required by state law](#).

But while the shorter workweek may sound great on paper — especially for teachers, many of whom would like to enjoy the popular shortened workweek perk [enjoyed by employees at Shake Shack and a growing roster of companies](#) — many parents and educators are concerned about what the long-term effect of a shorter week will have on their kids' education.

For one thing, academic outcomes have been mixed. While [one Colorado study](#) saw some higher math scores after students switched to four days, [another found no significant difference](#). [An unpublished Oregon study](#) found a temporary decline in academic performance among minority, low-income and special needs students, in particular.

Worse, [another recent study in Colorado](#) estimated that shifting to a four-day schedule increased juvenile arrests for property crime (particularly larceny) by 73%.

Critics also note that losing a day of school is especially hard on lower-income parents and dual-income households who have to scramble to find affordable child care an extra day each week now that their kids don't have class. Also, many low-income students depend on public schools for breakfast and lunch, so they would also lose a couple of essential meals.

Paul T. Hill, a research professor at the University of Washington Bothell who founded the Center on Reinventing Public Education, has written several articles questioning the impact that four-day school weeks have on students.

“You can see where children of fairly privileged families said, ‘Oh here’s my chance to take my kid to the college-prep course or on a tour or to get involved in an enrichment project of some kind.’ The kids could come out fine from that,” he said in [a 2017 interview](#). “But what we’re concerned about are two sets of kids. One, little kids who were, because of the way four-day weeks were structured, going to school a lot longer days; it wasn’t clear to anybody that they were able to handle that. Secondly, the kids of poorer families or families who weren’t two-earner families where the kids might be at loose ends on the fifth day.”

But on the plus side, some schools have reported lower absentee rates from students and staff by switching to the shorter week. And some parents and teachers have said they enjoy the improved work-life balance of having an extra weekday to run errands or work on lesson plans. Third grade teacher Michelle Lopez, from Jal, New Mexico, told the [United Federation of Teachers](#) that, “We [now] have extended blocks of time during the week for reading and math interventions for students who need help. A lot of us come in on Fridays anyway for lesson plans and other paperwork.”



HOW TO FIGHT THE GROWING TEACHER SHORTAGE

By: Tim Hodges

Each summer, Gallup surveys the nation's school superintendents to collect their opinions on a range of topics. One thing we usually ask district leaders to identify is the issues they anticipate will be a challenge for their district in the year ahead. And every year, certain topics rise to the top of the list.

This year's top challenges again included budget shortfalls and issues such as the effects of poverty on student learning and improving the performance of underprepared students. But the No. 1 challenge identified on this year's poll was new, and it debuted at the top of the list. Sixty-one percent of superintendents strongly agreed that "recruiting and retaining talented teachers" would be a challenge for their district.

All of us have heard about the national teacher shortage, and many of us have experienced it in our own districts. Several factors have converged to create the current shortage. In some ways, the issue is as simple as the basic supply-demand curve. For at least a decade, the supply of teachers has been in decline. Fewer teachers are entering teacher preparation programs, with a decline from more than 700,000 enrollments in 2010 to fewer than 500,000 in recent years. While a higher percentage of teachers who enroll in teacher preparation programs complete them, this sharp decline has put a strain on the supply of new teachers entering the market.

Sixty-one percent of superintendents strongly agreed that "recruiting and retaining talented teachers" would be a challenge for their district.

The demand side of the equation isn't helping. Student enrollment in public schools has been increasing steadily. Many states have enacted legislation limiting class size, which exacerbates the need for teachers. Finally, demographic shifts and market pressures have accelerated retirements and given teachers other reasons to [leave the profession](#).

The Best Teachers Care

So, we know that there is a teacher shortage, and we understand why. But how can we recruit and retain talented teachers? To answer that question, take a moment to recall the best teacher you've ever known. It might be a teacher in the school you currently lead or even a teacher with whom you worked in the past. Once you've identified that exemplary teacher, consider what makes that person so special. What one word best describes it?

Nearly every week, I meet with educators, and almost every time I ask them to do this exercise, there's a consistent theme. We don't often think of the best teacher as the one with the most years of experience or the most prestigious degree or certification. We almost always fondly remember their excellence in terms of how they made us feel. The word most often mentioned is that they "care" about us.

This isn't new -- it's been a consistent theme for decades. In the early 1970s, Don Clifton and his team of researchers set out to accomplish a clear mission: "Our greatest contribution is to be sure there is a teacher in every classroom who cares that every student, every day, learns and grows and feels like a real human being." That could be the tagline for most of today's efforts surrounding a positive school culture, approaching the needs of the whole child or addressing students' social-emotional needs. While it is not a new idea, it is time to refocus our efforts on what we've always known to be true.

Tapping Into Talent

Recruiting and selecting talented teachers is a difficult job that requires heroic efforts on the part of principals and other leaders who ultimately make the hiring decisions. It's tempting to focus on the profile of teacher applicants and prioritize teaching experience, advanced degrees and additional certifications. These factors are easy to measure, and although they certainly have some value, we often place more emphasis on them than on the talent of the teacher.

"Our greatest contribution is to be sure there is a teacher in every classroom who cares that every student, every day, learns and grows and feels like a real human being."

Teaching excellence requires a certain level of knowledge and skills, but it starts with whether a teacher has talents similar to those of other great educators. Gallup defines talent as a "naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behavior that can be productively applied." Every person has talent, but different roles require different talents. The best teachers have three key talent dimensions in common:

1. **Achievement drive.** This is the motivation to enable students to succeed in the classroom. Great teachers have an intrinsic motivation that drives them to ensure that their students win.
2. **Classroom structure and planning.** This is the balance of innovation and discipline. Great teachers are thoughtful and creative and establish a sense of order, creating an engaging environment that works for their students.
3. **Student and parent relationships.** Relationships are the key to student success as well as parent engagement. Great teachers know this and possess the talent to build positive relationships throughout their constituency.

These talents don't always come through clearly in a resume, on a transcript or in a letter of recommendation. Structured interview questions can help school leaders identify whether teacher candidates have the potential -- the talent -- to be the teachers our students need for the future.

Measuring Teacher Value

Evidence illustrates the value of teacher talent. Recent Gallup research says that teachers with top-quartile talent were 2.8 times more likely to be engaged than teachers who scored in the bottom half of the applicant pool. Teachers who scored in the top quartile on a pre-employment talent assessment were 2.5 times more likely to be recognized as top performers by their principals. Finally, teachers who scored in the top half of the assessment were 1.65 times more likely to receive a "highly effective" value-added model rating than teachers who scored in the bottom half. Simply put, talented teachers are more engaged, more likely to be evaluated favorably, and more likely to have students who grow and achieve academically.

We offer six strategies to address the teacher shortage:

1. **Study your district's hiring processes and successes.** What are your best sources of great candidates? What is the return on investment (ROI) from each of your recruiting strategies?
2. **Start early and grow your own.** Recent research suggests that as many as 60% of today's classroom teachers are employed in a school within 20 miles of the high school from which they graduated. So while recruiting teacher applicants nationally can have value, the majority of your efforts should be focused locally, planting a seed with current students who might grow into top applicants in the future.
3. **Prioritize natural teaching talent.** Review your hiring processes and ensure that each of the criteria you use to make a selection links to the future performance of the teacher. If you look only at advanced degrees, experience and certifications, it might be time to focus more intently on measures that matter.
4. **Hire for the district as well as the school.** Most districts value the opinion of the local principal, as they should. The principal-teacher relationship is a key factor in teacher retention, but principals and teachers aren't likely to work together at the same schools throughout their careers. Create consistency in hiring across the district to ensure that teachers can be successful with or without the principal who initially hired them.
5. **Create a great place to work.** Employee engagement is a leading predictor of teacher retention. Measuring and creating a culture of employee engagement helps ensure that your best teachers don't leave and create another vacancy to fill.
6. **Develop the strengths of each educator throughout their career.** A recent Gallup study found that career advancement was the most common job-related reason that caused teachers to voluntarily leave the classroom. That doesn't necessarily mean they wanted to be promoted out of the role, but rather to advance within it. Great schools create classroom heroes in ways that improve teacher retention.

The national teacher shortage is a major challenge, but it doesn't have to define us. Principals who put these strategies to work will be well-positioned to recruit and retain the talented teachers who ensure our students succeed.

From: Gallup.com



U.S. Department of Education Delivers on Key School Safety Report Recommendation

Resource Guide will Help School Leaders and Teachers Foster Positive Learning Environments

WASHINGTON— Acting on the recommendations of the Federal Commission on School Safety, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos today announced the release of the *Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources*. This guide, produced jointly by the Department’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, provides best practices and includes resources school leaders and teachers can utilize as they work to achieve a positive school climate, lower disciplinary issues and enhance school safety.

“We know that fostering a positive school climate is critical to the well-being, safety and long-term success of all students,” said Secretary DeVos. “In the absence of a safe and positive learning environment, a student may feel disconnected, disregard consequences, and engage in bullying or other destructive behaviors. As teachers and school leaders assess the unique needs of their school communities, we hope this guide helps them make the decisions that are right for their students and also provides parents and guardians with effective tools to support teachers in making those decisions.”

The Q&A document, which is available on the Department of Education’s website, provides parents and educators with useful decision-making frameworks and implementation tools, as well as best practices that school leaders can consider as they work to foster positive and inclusive learning environments. Examples from schools across the country are included to illustrate the various interventions communities are employing to enhance student behavior and achievement. With recent research highlighting the importance of evaluating school climate through a range of indicators, the guide provides diagnostic tools so educators can collect and utilize data to drive their climate improvement strategy.

Additionally, the *Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources* provides information to teachers and school leaders on how they can receive support from the Department’s two technical assistance centers dedicated to promoting safe and supportive schools, including the National Center of Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>), and the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (www.pbis.org). The guide includes an appendix of additional resources spanning the work of government agencies and private organizations, equipping parents and educators to create positive learning environments for all students.

To view the *Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources*, click [here](#).