

Pandemic-Level Teacher Appreciation

Teacher Appreciation Week is traditionally an opportunity for all of us to recognize the contributions of the profession that makes all other professions possible: teachers. Yet too often, the words of gratitude offered in this week are not matched by the types of meaningful job rewards and supports that teachers say they value most. Following the most challenging year of most teachers' lifetimes, let's make this the year we genuinely engage in Teacher Appreciation Week, with commitments to invest in attracting, preparing, and retaining teachers with comprehensive supports that include competitive salaries.

Teachers continue to be critical leaders in navigating the coronavirus pandemic. Teachers have managed to navigate completely upturned schedules and systems to reach kids remotely, in person, and in hybrid settings. They have collaborated with one another to ensure that students were fed, had access to technology, and regularly saw a friendly face on a screen. Many teachers went above and beyond to care for their students, colleagues, and communities. Now, more than ever, it is clear that teachers are a critical cornerstone of our society.

Teachers improve student lives in myriad ways. They improve students' test scores, attendance and behavior, graduation rates, future earnings, and other important life outcomes. Yet, states across the country have been plagued by a chronic shortage of teachers, and with the advent of the pandemic, shortages likely have been exacerbated. Early retirement in some states has increased dramatically, and enrollment in teacher preparation programs has declined. Although the full impact of the pandemic on educator shortages is not yet known, it is likely that the impact of these shortages will continue to disproportionately impact students in poverty, English learners, students with disabilities, and students of color—all of whom are less likely to be taught by effective, experienced, and qualified teachers.

Our future success lies in the hands of teachers: the reversal of student learning loss, the remedies to student anxiety and mental stress, and the closing of opportunity and achievement gaps. During this year's Teacher Appreciation Week, let's operate with pandemic-level appreciation. Please join us in thinking critically about your role in building a more stable and diverse educator workforce.

- Education leaders: Invest Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds to stabilize and diversify the educator workforce by creating incentives and programs throughout the talent development pipeline.
- Stay informed and talk with policymakers. More than 30 states have pending legislation focused on teachers.
- Welcome teachers to join task forces, speak at meetings, and provide thought partnerships when critical education policy decisions are deliberated.
- Empower teachers to consider leadership opportunities, such as those supported through National Board Certification, Teach Plus, or other teachers' associations.

Let's recognize and invest in teachers as if our future depends on it—because it does.

For all you do to make teachers feel appreciated this week and all weeks, **THANK YOU!**