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Lindsay Sandoval, Communications Specialist, Colorado Department of Higher Education
Office: 303-974-2486, lindsay.sandoval@dhe.state.co.us

State plan outlines recommendations for recruiting, retaining educators to address teacher shortage

DENVER – Dec. 1, 2017: To address the statewide teacher shortage, the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), in partnership with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), outlined recommendations for recruiting and retaining more teachers [in a strategic plan](#) and [complementary report](#) submitted to the Colorado state legislature today.

Titled “Colorado’s Teacher Shortages: Attracting and Retaining Excellent Educators,” [the strategic plan](#) focuses on four key goals: improving educator retention, increasing teacher compensation and benefits, attracting talent to high-need areas and producing more graduates from educator preparation programs. State officials also recommend enhancing the perception of teaching through a statewide marketing campaign and consideration of more career exploration opportunities for high school students interested in education.

As directed by [House Bill 17-1003](#), CDHE and CDE developed the plan to help curb the state’s educator shortage, which is nearing a crisis in many Colorado districts. The bill was authored by Rep. Barbara McLachlan (D-Durango) and Sen. Don Coram (R- Montrose) and signed by Gov. John Hickenlooper in May.

The strategic action plan was informed by the accompanying report “Teacher Shortages Across the Nation and Colorado: Similar Issues, Varying Magnitudes,” which looks at national and state trends. Although the educator shortage has affected all areas of the state, Colorado’s 147 rural and small rural districts have felt it most acutely, and some schools have struggled to fill key positions for years, according to the report.

Colorado sees about 5,000 educator openings each year, but the supply has not kept pace with demand: Enrollment in and completion of educator preparation programs have declined by 24 and 17 percent respectively since 2010, and nearly a third of Colorado educators will be eligible for retirement over the next several years. Compounding these trends, Colorado loses approximately 16 percent of new classroom teachers within the first five years of teaching, the report says.

“We know that educators make all other professions possible, and attracting top talent to our school districts, especially in rural areas, is a must,” said Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, executive director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education. “We look forward to engaging in policy conversations to advance solutions that will support our teachers, students, and communities.”

To inform the recommendations, state officials hosted 13 town hall meetings with more than 400 participants and administered an online survey that drew nearly 6,500 responses. State officials also met with about 100 participants involved with different education groups.

Many of the recommendations would require community and education partnerships, such as expanding “grow your own” educator or teacher residency programs, while some could be implemented on a state level. Noting the large number of districts that offer average salaries below the cost of living, state officials suggested

exploring minimum salaries at or above their cost of living and establishing incentives for educators who teach in hard-to-staff districts and content areas, including STEM and special education.

“We’re already seeing creative community solutions in supporting educators, and we’ll continue to rely on these partnerships as we look to implement high-impact recommendations,” said Dr. Katy Anthes, Colorado’s education commissioner. “Now that we’ve collected all of this valuable feedback from communities around the state, I look forward to continuing the discussion with our legislature, state board, districts, and educator preparation programs.”

Reed and Anthes will share the action plan at the upcoming Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC) [Superintendent Forum](#) on Thursday, Dec. 7. The Colorado Senate and House Education Committees will review the plan this winter, and CDE and CDHE will provide ongoing planning and support.

[Read the full report](#) and a summary of the [strategic action plan](#).

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