THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

December 16, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

As schools work hard to provide safe, in-person learning and address the social, emotional, mental health, and academic impact of COVID-19, we have heard directly from chief State school officers, superintendents, educators, and families about the harmful impacts of shortages of educators and other school staff. These impacts include difficulty providing student transportation, interrupted access to meals and critical services such as mental health services, larger class sizes, a greater number of students being taught by substitute teachers and teachers who are not certified in the area assigned to teach, and, in the most extreme cases, disruptive school closures.[1] Preexisting teacher shortages in critical areas such as special education; bilingual education; science, technology, engineering, and math; and career and technical education have been further exacerbated by COVID-19—directly impeding student access to educational opportunity. According to a recent Ed Week Research Center survey,[2] one in four district leaders and principals are reporting severe staffing shortages; and according to a recent survey conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 68 percent of principals surveyed are concerned about teacher shortages and report it has been more difficult to hire qualified teachers since COVID-19.[3] History has shown that shortages disproportionately impact students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and often rural communities.[4]

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) is committed to supporting districts and schools across this country in addressing teacher and staff shortages, minimizing disruption to in-person learning, and meeting student needs. That is why we are urging you to use resources from the $122 billion made available through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) (Pub. L. 117-2) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund and a portion of the $350 billion made available through the ARP's Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to ensure that students have access to the teachers and other critical staff they

[1] St. George, D., and Strauss, V. "The Principal is Cleaning the Bathroom: Schools Reel with Staff Shortages." The Washington Post, 5 Dec. 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/school-staff-shortages-bus/2021/12/03/05b88a0e-4cab-11ec-a1b9-9f12bd39487a_story.html.
[2] Lieberman, M. "How Bad Are School Staffing Shortages? What We Learned by Asking Administrators." Education Week, 22 Oct. 2021, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/how-bad-are-school-staffing-shortages-what-we-learned-by-asking-administrators/2021/10.
[3] "NASSP Survey Signals a Looming Mass Exodus of Principals from Schools." National Association of Secondary School Principals, 8 December 2021, https://www.nassp.org/news/nassp-survey-signals-a-looming-mass-exodus-of-principals-from-schools/.
[4] Goldhaber, D. & Gratz, T. (2021). School District Staffing Challenges in a Rapidly Recovering Economy. CEDR Flash Brief No. 11082021-1. University of Washington, Seattle, WA.; Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute; and Cardichon, J., Darling-Hammond, L., Yang, M., Scott, C., Shields, P. M., & Burns, D. (2020). Inequitable opportunity to learn: Student access to certified and experienced teachers. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

need to support their success during this critical period. This includes moving quickly to implement short-term strategies while also considering longer-term investments.

Let us be clear: ARP provides vital resources to hire additional educators and school staff and to improve compensation to recruit and retain educators and school staff. School districts should act with urgency to keep schools open for in-person learning and ensure they do not waste this opportunity to make critical investments.

To this end, this letter describes (1) evidence-based and promising short- and long-term strategies for addressing teacher and staff shortages that can be funded through ARP ESSER and (2) examples of how ARP and previous relief funds are already being used to attract and retain teachers and staff. These strategies can help to fill currently open positions and add and fill new roles, such as providing one-time initial hiring incentives, or short-term investments in additional staff to support students and educators and increased needs. The current needs of our students, families, and educators call on us to act and use the Federal resources made available to respond to this crisis. We must do everything we can right now to support our students during this critical year by addressing the impact of the last few years on their social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs.

Strategies for Hiring and Retaining Qualified and Effective Educators

1. Increase Educator and Staff Compensation[5]

The most common reason educators have cited for leaving school employment in the last year is stress, followed by insufficient pay.[6] Many school leaders are increasing wages by offering hiring and retention bonuses, working towards permanent salary increases, or providing premium pay that help educators receive the compensation they deserve and keep them in the profession, and we encourage others to continue to work towards increasing compensation. Hiring and retention bonuses may provide additional relief from some of the stresses caused by COVID-19. While some districts have expressed concern about investing in increasing compensation with short-term recovery funds, our nation's children need support now, and many states and districts are already choosing to use ARP ESSER funds to address immediate shortage needs. For example, West Contra Costa County Unified School District is providing $6,000 signing bonuses for teachers.[7] Districts in Oklahoma, North Carolina, New Jersey, and elsewhere are offering a range of cash incentives for new teachers, particularly in struggling and underserved schools.[8]

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[5] Ulrich Boser and Chelsea Straus, "Mid- and Late-Career Teachers Struggle with Paltry Incomes" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k12/reports/2014/07/23/94168/mid-and-late-career-teachers-struggle-with-paltry-incomes/; and Linda Darling-Hammond, Roberta Furger, Patrick M. Shields, and Leib Sutcher, Addressing California's Emerging Teacher Shortage: An Analysis of Sources and Solutions (Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute, 2016).

[6] Diliberti, Melissa Kay, et al. "Stress Topped The Reasons Why Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19." RAND Corporation, 22 Feb. 2021, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1121-2.html.

[7] Klapper, Rebecca. "To Fill Teaching Vacancies, Some Districts Offer Thousands in Signing Bonuses." Newsweek, Newsweek, 22 Sept. 2021, https://www.newsweek.com/fill-teaching-vacancies-some-districts-offer-thousands-signing-bonuses-1631724.

[8] Gecker, Jocelyn. "Covid-19 Creates Dire US Shortage of Teachers, School Staff." *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 23 Sept. 2021, https://apnews.com/article/business-science-health-education-california-b6c495eab9a2a8f1a3ca068582c9d3c7.

Indiana plans to launch a program to provide more than $2.5 million in ARP ESSER funds and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B funds to support licensure in high-need areas, and the Indianapolis Public Schools plans to provide a three percent pay raise.[9]

Flexibilities can also be used by states and districts to bring retired educators back into the school for the next year or two. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has issued FAQs clarifying that, in some instances, retirees can return to work and still receive their pensions.[10] As an added incentive to retain current staff eligible for retirement, employees can in some cases begin receiving pension payments while still working. And where it is not currently allowed, pension plans can be amended to permit these benefits. For example, Kentucky passed legislation to temporarily allow retired teachers to be rehired and keep their pensions to help with teacher shortages, and increased ten-fold the percentage of retired teachers who can be rehired by a district.[11] In addition to retired educators, mobilizing retired social workers and psychologists can help meet our schools' needs to provide additional social, emotional, and mental health support to students as they recover from the impact of the pandemic on their well-being.

States and districts are also providing additional compensation to address staff shortages in critical areas in addition to teacher shortages. For example, the Jordan School District in Utah has raised the bus driver starting pay to more than $21 per hour and will pay for the required training and commercial driver's license fees.[12] Waco Independent School District in Texas will give custodians and cafeteria workers up to $1,000 in bonuses.[13] Custodians and cafeteria workers will also receive retention bonuses based on years served with the district. North Carolina is using federal COVID-19 recovery funds to help local school nutrition operations across the state recruit and retain needed staff.[14] Additional examples of state and local efforts to address teacher and staff shortages are included in the joint two-part ED and Treasury Webinar: "Using American Rescue Plan Funds and Other Federal Supports to Address State and Local Teacher Labor Shortages"[15] and "Using American Rescue Plan Funds and Other Federal Supports to Address State and Local Staff Labor Shortages."[16]

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[9] Indiana ARP ESSER State Plan Highlights. https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/08/Indiana-ARP-ESSER-State-Plan-Highlights-v2-081121.pdf.

[10] "Coronavirus-Related Relief for Retirement Plans and IRAs Questions and Answers." Internal Revenue Service. Accessed December 2, 2021. https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/coronavirus-related-relief-for-retirement-plans-and-iras-questions-and-answers.

[11] WDRB.com "Kentucky's retired teachers can be rehired and keep their pensions to help with teacher shortage", 15 Sept. 2021, https://www.wdrb.com/news/kentuckys-retired-teachers-can-be-rehired-and-keep-their-pensions-to-help-with-teacher-shortage/article_71957ad0-1681-11ec-8bc3-6b6924dcf3b5.html.

[12] Vaughen, Kelly. "Staffing Shortages Impacts Schools across Utah, Big Need for Bus Drivers in Most Districts." *KUTV*, KUTV, 20 Aug. 2021, https://kutv.com/news/local/staffing-shortages-impacts-schools-across-utah-big-need-for-bus-drivers-in-most-districts.

[13] Hoover, Carl. "Waco ISD Teachers to Get Bonuses up to $10k; Custodians, Cafeteria Workers to Get up to $1K." *WacoTrib.com*, 17 July 2021, https://wacotrib.com/news/local/education/waco-isd-teachers-to-get-bonuses-up-to-10k-custodians-cafeteria-workers-to-get-up/article_ce11760e-e65e-11eb-8e2a-030f026747c9.html.

[14] "$10 Million in Additional Support Approved for NC School Nutrition Programs." *North Carolina Department of Public Instruction*, 2 Sept. 2021, https://www.dpi.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2021/09/02/10-million-additional-support-approved-nc-school-nutrition-programs.

[15] Part 1: Using ARP Funds and Other Federal Supports to Address State and Local Teacher Shortages. YouTube. U.S. Department of Education, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF3ZXjfdumc.

[16] Part 2: Using ARP Funds and Other Federal Supports to Address State and Local Teacher Shortages. YouTube. U.S. Department of Education, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBr6hIrJ4cw.

2. Build and Maintain a Cadre of High-Quality Substitute Teachers

States and districts can use ARP funds to recruit and train high-quality substitute teachers.[17] To create some stability and certainty, substitute teachers could be assigned to a school for an entire school year. This strategy would help substitute teachers be more prepared to step into the classroom and support continuity for students when educators need to take time off. These substitute teachers can also co-lead small group learning and provide support during release time for educators to allow for teacher professional development. For example, a school district in San Diego, California,[18] signed an agreement with the union to create a "Resident Visiting Teacher" position at every school providing standby substitute teachers. Another example is the Colorado Substitute Stipend[19] program, which was instituted to encourage qualified individuals to apply for a substitute teaching certificate, offering a $300 bonus for obtaining a license, undergoing training, and working a minimum of one day. The California Department of Education also increased its hourly rates for the school year and introduced a new level of licensed substitute teachers.

3. Support Educator and Staff Well-Being, Including Improved Working Conditions

Now, more than ever, supporting educator well-being is critical for retaining our current educators and staff. As previously mentioned, stress is the most common reason educators have cited for leaving school employment in the last year, followed by insufficient pay.[20] As educators continue working during a global health crisis, educator well-being and support continue to be essential to school and district success.

Surveys show educator well-being is tied to feeling supported, valued, and heard by school and district leaders, as well as peers.[21] Many educators may also be struggling as they watch the students they serve and care deeply about going through challenging experiences. ED's COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs[22] includes detailed strategies and practices for stabilizing and supporting the educator workforce and their well-being. Key strategies include:

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[17] See Liu, Jing. "American Faces a Substitute Teacher Shortage- and Disadvantaged Schools are Hit the Hardest." Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/10/21/america-faces-a-substitute-teacher-shortage-and-disadvantaged-schools-are-hit-hardest/ ; NEA, "Substitute Teachers." https://www.nea.org/substitute-teachers. Heubeck, E. "This District Built a Better, More Reliable Supply of Substitute Teachers. Here's How." https://www.edweek.org/leadership/this-district-built-a-better-more-reliable-supply-of-substitute-teachers-heres-how/2021/09.

[18] Nakano, Rina. "San Diego County School Districts Face Serious Substitute Teacher Shortage." KGTV. KGTV, October 5, 2021. https://www.10news.com/news/local-news/san-diego-news/san-diego-county-school-districts-face-serious-substitute-teacher-shortage.

[19] Mullen Special, David, and O'Dell Isaac. "Colorado School Districts Battling Diminished Substitute Teacher Numbers." Colorado Springs Gazette, October 11, 2021. https://gazette.com/cheyenneedition/colorado-school-districts-battling-diminished-substitute-teacher-numbers/article_fb2a3468-261a-11ec-ae95-6797d5664caf.html.

[20] Diliberti, Melissa Kay, et al. "Stress Topped The Reasons Why Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19." RAND Corporation, 22 Feb. 2021, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1121-2.html.

[21] "The Causes of Teacher Burnout and Attrition." Digital Commons@CSP, 12 July 2019, https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=teacher-education_masters.

[22] U.S. Department of Education. "ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2," U.S. Department of Education, August 2021. https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-2.pdf.

- **Building intentional systems that support educator and staff well-being**. Efforts to prioritize communication and collaboration between staff and leadership nurture, and model, a sense of connectedness that is crucial to supporting educators and keeping them in the profession.[23] Efforts can include:
    - Developing school leader-to-educator support systems. For example, leaders can build in time for recurring debrief sessions with all staff members and, when necessary, hold debrief sessions after stressful days.
    - Establishing peer-to-peer support systems. For example, school leaders can prioritize educator mentoring programs to prevent burnout.
    - Reducing educator workloads. For example, school leaders can schedule staff planning time into work hours.
    - Communicating established district and school mental health supports (e.g., who to contact and what supports are available).
    - Supporting educators in recharging, including providing designated space, while ensuring students have continuous access to in-person learning. School leaders may consider providing peer-to-peer support networks and other strategies for supporting adult well-being.
    - Providing paid-time for educators and staff to get vaccinated if states or school districts are not providing on-site vaccination opportunities, and sick leave to recover from any side effects that keep them from working.

- **Increasing the availability of qualified adults and personnel to support educators, students, and staff**. For example, districts can partner with institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and businesses to provide additional supports to educators and students through the use of teaching candidates and well-trained volunteers. Districts could hire AmeriCorps members to serve as tutors or mentor students, assist with additional administrative responsibilities brought on by the pandemic, and provide creative enrichment support for students. ED funds can be used to meet AmeriCorps matching requirements to support these efforts.[24] Districts should also hire the staff needed to support increased student mental health needs—providing educators and students with the additional staff they need to succeed. A number of states are already using ARP funds for these purposes. For example, the Oklahoma State Department of Education hired new school counselors, mental health professionals, and recreational therapists.[25] Nevada is reserving $7.5 million of ARP ESSER funds to hire 100 school-based mental health professionals.[26] Minnesota will use ARP ESSER funds to support districts and charter schools in hiring licensed school counselors, school nurses, school social workers, and school psychologists to help provide early responses to support students' social, emotional, and mental health.[27]

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[23] "The Causes of Teacher Burnout and Attrition." Digital Commons@CSP, 12 July 2019, https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=teacher-education_masters.
[24] For additional information, please see https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/Leveraging-National-Service-in-Your-Schools.pdf.
[25] Oklahoma ARP ESSER State Plan Highlights. https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/arp-esser-ok-plan.pdf.
[26] Nevada ARP ESSER State Plan Highlights. https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/arp-esser-nv-plan.pdf.
[27] Minnesota ARP ESSER State Plan Highlights. https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/arp-esser-mn-plan.pdf.

- **Implementing flexible and creative scheduling to support students for full-week in-person learning while providing planning and collaboration time for teachers.** For example, districts could hold entire days focused on a single core academic subject; offer all "special" subjects (e.g., music, art, physical education) on the same day so grade-level teams can plan together; and hold shorter learning cycles, with more frequent breaks, some of which educators can use for planning. Districts should ensure that continuous in-person learning and enrichment opportunities are available for all students, and that days of in-person programming are not reduced.

4. Make Investments in the Educator Pipeline

As states and districts work to stabilize their educator pipeline, a variety of strategies have been identified that can both support the preparation and development of new educators and encourage them to work in high-need schools. Evidence-based approaches to addressing pre-existing and ongoing teacher shortages include:

- Providing loan forgiveness, grants, or service scholarship programs that significantly underwrite the cost of postsecondary education in exchange for a commitment to teach in a high-need field or school for a minimum number (e.g., four) of years (e.g., the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program[28]);[29]

- Developing and implementing high-quality comprehensive teacher residency programs that provide extensive clinical experience, which have been shown to increase teacher retention and effectiveness;[30] and

- Developing and implementing professional development programs and mentoring models, particularly for newer teachers, that emphasize building effective instructional strategies and provide time for ongoing collaboration.[31]

Schools across the country continue to implement these evidence-based and promising strategies in an effort to address these challenges. ED strongly encourages you to use funding under ARP to respond to the urgent needs resulting from the pandemic while beginning to plan for the investments needed to ensure that every student has access to the qualified educators and staff they need.

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[28] "North Carolina Teaching Fellows." *NC Teaching Fellows*, https://myapps.northcarolina.edu/ncteachingfellows/.
[29] Podolsky, A. & Kini, T. (2016). *How Effective Are Loan Forgiveness and Service Scholarships for Recruiting Teachers?* (policy brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
[30] Institute of Education Sciences, "New Findings on the Retention of Novice Teachers From Teaching Residency Programs." August 2015, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20154015/pdf/20154015.pdf; and Papay, J. P., West, M. R., Fullerton, J. B., and Kane, T. J. (2012). Does an urban teacher residency increase student achievement? Early evidence from Boston. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 34(4), 413–434.
[31] Ingersoll, R. M., & Smith, T. M. (2004). Do teacher induction and mentoring matter? NAASP Bulletin, 88(638), 28–40.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership to address teacher and staff shortages and ensuring high-quality, safe, in-person educational experiences for students across this country.

Sincerely,



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