



Attracting Tomorrow's Teachers

Strategies for Increasing Enrollment in
Teacher Education Programs

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The most important element to ensuring every student has access to truly transformational learning experiences is the quality of their teacher. This starts with attracting the best and brightest preservice teacher candidates. Unfortunately, at a time when we need more teachers than ever before, fewer and fewer individuals are choosing to go into the teaching profession.

According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), enrollment in teacher prep programs began to lag around 2010 and has been decreasing ever since. This decline is contributing to a historic number of teacher vacancies in K-12 schools. For the 2024-25 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 21% of teaching positions in the U.S. were unfilled, and an estimated 86% of school districts nationwide indicated they were struggling to fill open positions. But the problem is even deeper than those numbers suggest, since a substantial number of teacher positions are currently filled by individuals who are not fully certified for their assignments. The Learning Policy Institute and K12 Digest place this figure between 270,000 and 400,000 positions.

Despite this tremendous need, schools of education have been slow to adopt recruitment strategies that are standard practice in other areas of study. The need for educator preparation programs to optimize their recruitment and retention strategies has never been more urgent.

Fortunately, the characteristics of the teaching profession align with the ideals many students prioritize when considering their future career options, including financial security, flexibility and a sense of purpose.

This guide outlines a variety of practical strategies and tips schools of education can use to more effectively recruit and retain future teachers who are seeking meaningful, collaborative careers that will make an impact. It's no longer feasible for schools of education to operate with an "if we build it they will come" philosophy. In today's competitive landscape, it's essential for teacher preparation programs to develop a finely tuned recruitment and retention strategy.

The education schools highlighted in this guide are all bucking the trend of decreasing enrollment by paying careful attention to recruitment strategies for new teacher candidates.

Effective Recruitment Strategies

This guide addresses four categories of strategies for recruiting and retaining teacher candidates: improving communications; reaching nontraditional students; engaging with secondary students; and proactively addressing financial barriers.

1

Improving Communications

Framing communications about the teaching profession to focus on the rewarding aspects of the job, opportunities for growth and the vital impact teachers have on society can counter misconceptions about education careers. To update and expand communications efforts, EPPs can:

● Reinvent recruitment messaging

Use compelling language that points to the inspiring and impactful elements of a teaching career. Leverage university public information offices (if available) or professional communications consultants to carefully craft messaging that appeals to specific audiences. [This video](#) from George Mason University is a strong example of this tack. Have students be the primary messengers for your program whenever possible. For additional inspiration, check out Australia's [Be That Teacher](#) campaign.

● Leverage social media for engagement

Social media can be a powerful vehicle for highlighting the human stories and experiences of current students and alumni from your program. Use social media to spotlight the individuals who make your program great. Tell day-in-the-life stories, share behind-the-scenes content and post stories about the positive impact your alumni are having. For inspiration, check out [TEACH.org's posts](#) on tips for becoming a teacher; or [Better Make Room](#), which creates content to help teens plan their next steps after high school.

● Refute misconceptions about the field

Rumblings about low salaries and the length of time it takes to earn a teaching credential can discourage potential teacher candidates. Proactively combat these notions in materials designed specifically for prospective students. Show total compensation (salary, benefits, summer opportunities, etc.), career stability and growth opportunities. In some states, starting salaries for teachers have become more competitive than potential students may be aware. Show how graduation time can be accelerated through programs like dual enrollment or prior learning credits.

● Increase awareness of early job offers

Include hiring statistics prominently on websites, social media and other recruitment materials. Other colleges – particularly schools of business – are

Old Dominion University's (ODU) College of Education has crafted a marketing campaign showcasing how rewarding a career in education can be. Using the messaging, "In a world where you can be anything, be a teacher!" the campaign emphasizes the role of teaching in transforming lives and communities. It also highlights the value of lifelong learning, future professional growth opportunities available to teachers, and the work-life flexibility that summers can provide.

The university's Teaching and Learning Department leverages social media to share student success stories that help promote the profession. It also meets with students in undergraduate math and science classes to encourage them to consider teaching as a career.

Graduates of ODU's [Teacher in Residence program](#) assist with recruiting by speaking to ODU students who have not yet selected a major to get them excited about careers in teaching. According to Maggie Barber, ODU associate dean, these student ambassadors are some of the most compelling proposers of the program because of how well they relate to the undergraduate students.

known for touting the number of students that receive job offers *before* they even graduate. Colleges of education should actively encourage schools to make offers to their candidates before they have graduated and share those cases as a recruiting tool for potential teacher candidates.

2

Reaching Nontraditional Students

Connecting with career changers, paraprofessionals already in schools, adult learners and students from a wide range of backgrounds can help broaden the range of candidates for your program. In addition, these students often bring unique skill sets and knowledge that make them high-potential teaching prospects. Use these strategies to connect with nontraditional students:

- **Offer flexible schedules and formats**

Providing evening, weekend and hybrid courses will benefit those who work full-time, have family care responsibilities or are changing careers. Structure programs to accommodate working professionals with families, and highlight the flexibility of your program in your messaging. Providing online options will help you reach aspiring teachers in remote areas or who have scheduling constraints that don't permit attending in-person courses.

- **Recruit paraprofessionals**

Develop communications strategies to reach paraprofessionals who are already working in schools. Create competency-based programs that enable paraprofessionals to earn credits for their work. Work with their current district or school to develop tuition reimbursements or other financial incentives to support these educators during their participation in your program. Consider practicum placements in schools where paraprofessionals may already be employed.

- **Simplify your application process**

Meticulously test your application forms and process with potential applicants to identify areas of friction. Simplify the application process as much as possible; define acronyms; provide clear guidance on required documents or provide a guide to the process; ensure the user experience is reliable on mobile browsers;



Sample ad messaging from the [TEACH.org](#) campaign to attract new teachers.

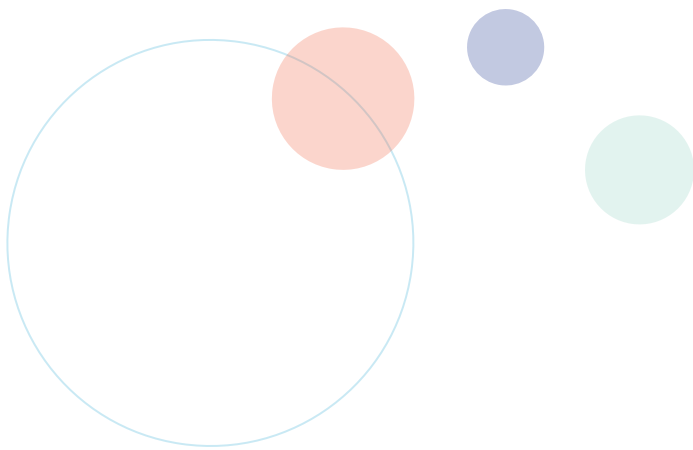
use welcoming rather than bureaucratic language; and offer flexible deadlines for students who may be facing additional challenges.

- **Identify barriers prospective teachers may face and provide supports**

Nontraditional candidates face many barriers to deciding to teach and enrolling in an educator preparation program. Provide teacher candidates with information about programs such as [TEACH.org](https://teach.org) that may be able to provide additional support for them.

- **Offer licensure test prep resources**

Preparing for licensure exams can be an extra hurdle for nontraditional teaching candidates, particularly for those who are working as they complete their education. In addition to test prep materials and practice tests, provide office hours or special tutoring access to help candidates feel confident before taking exams.



3

Engaging with Secondary Students

Waiting until secondary students reach university campuses is far too late to begin the recruitment process. Beginning outreach to middle and high school students around teaching as a profession can spark interest and inspire them to pursue a career in education. These strategies can help teacher preparation programs reach secondary students early – as they are beginning to make college and career decisions:

- **Begin building relationships early**

Find ways to begin engaging with high school students as early as possible. Host open house events to support and recognize high school students who are interested in teaching. Work with local schools to start a group that supports students who are interested in becoming teachers, such as [Educators Rising](https://educatorsrising.org).

- **Build relationships with secondary school educators**

Ask teachers, principals and counselors to proactively identify outstanding potential teacher candidates in their schools and talk with them about a career in education, rather than waiting for students to express interest first. Provide talking points or guides to help support counselors and career center leaders in having conversations with students around considering teaching as a profession. Create partnerships with Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers to ensure your program is promoted to students participating in these programs. Develop online modules for CTE course students (see [Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow](https://virginiateachersfortomorrow.org), for example).



Helping Those Already Committed to Schools Earn Degrees

College Unbound

College Unbound's Transformative Education Pathway program helps paraprofessionals and teaching assistants who are already working in local schools become certified teachers. A majority of participants earn a bachelor's degree in two years.

Students who enroll in the program – most of whom have some college under their belts – move through classes in small cohorts with built-in supports. Classes run on eight or 16-week cycles, synchronously or asynchronously, and every class begins with a one-on-one meeting between a student and professor.

College Unbound (CU) costs about \$11,000 per year, with most students qualifying for Pell Grants. A majority of the students graduate debt free because school districts help cover the gap between grants and tuition.

Currently, over 150 students participate in the CU program each year through cohorts in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Washington state and South Carolina.

"College Unbound is built around the idea that we're always learning. Traditional higher ed says learning only counts if it's happening in a class," explains College Unbound President Adam Bush. "We're focused on assisting those who are already working in schools to complete their bachelor's degrees and move onto their master's and teacher certification programs ASAP. They get credit for the work they're doing to guide and build learning teams in the schools where they're already committed, where they already care about that community of learners."



Arlington Schools hosts their 2025 Future Teacher Signing Day.

● Provide opportunities to work in the field

High school students share that the opportunity to participate in apprenticeships or internships solidifies their decision to pursue teaching. Collaborate with school districts to provide students with opportunities to work in PK-12 classrooms as teaching assistants. [Arlington Public Schools](#) in Virginia requires students participating in their education pathway courses to complete at least 40 field hours in a classroom observing their host teacher, instructing small groups and delivering full-class lessons. Students who choose a career in education after completing their coursework and internships are celebrated at an annual “[future teacher signing day](#).”

● Offer dual enrollment courses

Partner with local school districts to offer dual enrollment college courses related to education that are open to secondary students. Dual enrollment courses allow students to earn high school and college credits simultaneously. These courses are a great way to help students get a taste of teaching as a profession and start building toward a degree in education before they graduate from high school.

The Center for Black Educator Development’s [Teaching Academy](#) partners with [Temple University](#) and [Community College of Philadelphia](#) to provide high school students participating in their education pathway program with college credits. These students graduate high school with college credits that put them ahead in their journey to become educators. Students are also eligible for the [Future Teachers of Excellence Fellowship](#) where they receive additional academic, financial and social support.

Leaving students on their own to figure out how to finance their teacher education experience is a guaranteed way to push talented future teachers to other majors. Use these strategies to proactively address financial barriers:

● Curate applicable apprenticeship and grant programs

Identify and share funding opportunities that your prospective students might qualify for. Tools such as the U.S. Department of Labor’s [apprenticeship.gov](#) website can help you get started. Many state governments offer similar programs. For example, [Teach California](#) maintains a list of scholarships and grants for teacher candidates, including grants specifically for [qualified school employees to pursue teaching credentials](#).

● Develop scholarship programs for current students

Work with your campus career development professionals to create scholarships to support students in your programs. Tap into alumni networks to support future teachers. Help students who are already enrolled in college complete their studies with support from scholarships. Even if sufficient funding isn’t available to defray tuition, using funds to allow your school to waive application fees or other ancillary costs can still be impactful.

● Advocate for recruitment funding with state and national associations

Collaborate with teacher preparation programs and school systems in your state to advocate for state agencies (including the Department of Education and Department of Labor) to create new programs to provide financial support for teacher candidates. AACTE hosts advocacy days and provides [advocacy resources](#) to help you get started.





Easy On-Ramps for High School Students

Utah Valley University

For the past three years, Utah Valley University's School of Education has been working with high schools in the area to introduce students to its teacher preparation program earlier and proactively invite them into the teaching profession. The outreach starts with bringing area high school students to the college campus to tour the education school and to meet with preservice teachers, faculty and university leaders.

"They visit our Creative Learning Studio and work with robots, so we show what we do and what future teachers learn at our school," explains James Jacob, dean of UVU's School of Education. They hold prize drawings for the prospective students to keep it fun.

UVU also created "Teaching as a Profession," a dual enrollment course for high school students who are considering a career in teaching. This allows students to start earning college credit toward a teaching degree before they graduate from high school.

"We're trying to build a pathway for them to take these classes and connect with them early, and many choose to enroll in our program early," Jacob says. These activities have led to an increase in students taking the introduction to education course at UVU.



Supporting Students from High School to Teacher Certification

Monroe University

Monroe University in New York partners with Yonkers Public Schools to encourage students to explore teaching as a viable career path, while earning high school and college credits.

Working with [My Brother's Keeper Yonkers](#) (and soon My Sister's Keeper) the university's CAEP-accredited undergraduate program offers hands-on training designed to support students from high school to their graduation as certified teachers. Participating students attend a kickoff event featuring a panel of current educators who share their experiences in the field. They are also invited to visit the Monroe University campus to meet with faculty and explore teaching as a career.

During the teacher preparation program, students take interactive courses modeled on the pedagogical skills they'll use in their own classrooms and work in the field. Those who receive grants to the preparation network can receive free tuition, as well as other benefits like coverage for certification exam and fingerprinting fees, access to additional workshops and a dedicated faculty mentor.

The program offers a supportive cohort model that helps students transition smoothly from high school to higher education. With certification test prep embedded into the courses, students emerge prepared for employment.

"By creating early opportunities for our students to explore careers in teaching – especially in communities that need representation the most – we're helping build a pipeline of educators who reflect the strength and diversity of our schools," said Yonkers Public Schools Superintendent Aníbal Soler Jr. "This partnership reflects the goals of our Yonkers 2030 Strategic Plan by preparing students not only for college and career success, but also for leadership roles that strengthen our community for years to come."





UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND

Building Financial Advising into Recruitment

University of Maryland

When the College of Education at the University of Maryland (UMD) began searching for ways to help more prospective and admitted students accept enrollment offers, one hurdle became clear: The financial burden of attending college. And it wasn't just about the money; students and families also lacked knowledge about financial planning and where to get reliable information. The solution was to make financial advising part of the recruitment process.

"We understood that there were resources available, but students often needed help navigating the various scholarships and funding sources," explained Monica Simonsen, Ph.D., director of teacher education for the College of Education at the University of Maryland. "Now we treat it as part of the recruitment process because we know it's a big part of the decision process. It's a high-touch effort, and it has become part of our job."

Beginning with the 2024-25 recruitment cycle, prospective students received emails about funding resources like scholarships that cover tuition, room and board for students in teacher licensure programs; need- and merit-based scholarships from the university; and other state and federal funding options. Staff also walk prospective students through the specific process for applying to university, college and department scholarships.

Students receive similar financial support emails after they are accepted for admittance. Within a week of being notified of acceptance, they're invited to scholarship and funding information webinars.

"Anytime we're in touch with students and families, we discuss money," Simonsen said. This includes during in-person and virtual information sessions, campus tours and admitted student days. "We establish that we're here to walk alongside them to make the program accessible. It's high-touch, wraparound support."

The university also adjusted the timing of the donor-funded scholarships it awards, so admitted students know how much money they'll be receiving as early as possible – and the timing now syncs with when students are making their final decisions. Funding for first-generation college students and students who want to teach in critical shortage areas is also identified early.

Preliminary numbers show increases in both undergraduate and graduate new student cohorts. UMD is continuing to refine its process and is exploring strategies for providing financial advising to support retention.



OLD DOMINION
UNIVERSITY

Removing Financial Barriers Through Residencies & Apprenticeships

Old Dominion University

Teacher candidates at Old Dominion University's College of Education can choose from two teacher preparation pathways developed to remove financial barriers to entering the profession.

Through grant-funded teacher residencies and apprenticeships, the university is providing extra support to students, particularly those from first-generation college or underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds, to complete their programs and earn their teaching licenses.

The teacher residency program covers licensure test preparation and registration costs, plus 12 credits of paid tuition and a \$10,000 stipend to cover financial costs during an unpaid student teaching semester.

The registered apprenticeship program covers all costs for paraprofessionals pursuing a bachelor's degree in elementary or special education with licensure. The grant also allows apprentices to complete their field experiences as paid employees of their school district.



Workforce data showing that tens of thousands of adults in Georgia had started college but not completed their degrees led Valdosta State University to launch its Online College for Career Advancement initiative in 2022. The goal: Create an online experience that would encourage past college attendees to wrap up their degrees.

The fully online college operates continuously and offers eight majors, including elementary education. The college's eight-week asynchronous courses are designed for adult online learners and feature an all-inclusive pricing model of \$299 per credit hour, with no additional fees or costs. The pricing covers all fees for tests students must complete toward teacher certification. Online students earn the same degree as those attending in-person – a bachelor's in elementary education.

Valdosta also helps arrange student teaching positions for enrollees when needed, but because nearly half of online attendees are currently working in schools as paraprofessionals, they often work in their own classrooms.

In its first year, the online teacher preparation program had 25 students; today enrollment has reached over 600 students, said David Slykhuis, dean of the Dewar College of Education and Human Services at Valdosta State University. The program's growth has been highly organic – mostly due to word of mouth.

Slykhuis says online students appreciate the convenience and affordability of the program, and that faculty work hard to make online students feel they are part of the university.

"We work with them on a personal level to find practicum and student teaching placements if needed. They really like the personal touch and the fact that we're not a traditional online university," he says. "They have a sense that their faculty and advisers will stick with them throughout the program."

What's Next?

With the recruitment strategies shared here in mind, take an inventory of the efforts you already have underway and determine which strategies to focus on next. There's no need to tackle every strategy, but it is important to get moving!

Meet with faculty from the other colleges on your campus to find out what strategies they're using to recruit students – and what's working and what's not.

Additionally, identify which strategies from this guide would be most impactful if implemented in collaboration with other schools of education in your state, with the goal of creating an "all boats rise" scenario.

While recruitment is one aspect of the teacher shortage, we recognize that other challenges, like teacher retention, must also be addressed. The [EPP Alliance for Innovation](#) in Teacher Education can support colleges of education in taking intentional steps to attract students, as well as a forum for solution sharing.



About the EPP Innovation Alliance

More than 140 educator preparation programs have joined the EPP Alliance for Innovation in Teacher Education to transform teacher education. They collectively reach 75K+ new teacher candidates annually. As part of the alliance, EPP leaders are driving system change by pledging to:

- Modernize curriculum so candidates get hands-on experience in designing learning that infuses technology.
- Build faculty competencies in digital learning and model effective practices.
- Develop the essential skills the next generation of educators need to successfully adapt and thrive in classrooms as digital learning evolves.
- Strengthen collaborative working relationships with districts.

The EPP Innovation Alliance is a collaboration between ISTE+ASCD and the [American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education \(AACTE\)](#), the [Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation \(AAQEP\)](#), the [Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation \(CAEP\)](#), [Educational Testing Service \(ETS\)](#) and the [Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education \(SITE\)](#).

[Learn more](#) and [sign the pledge](#). Plus, download ISTE's free [Transforming Teacher Education report](#).

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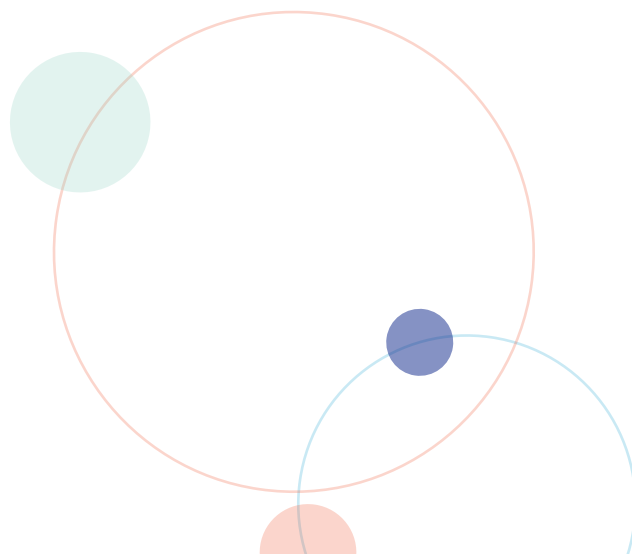
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