

Executive View

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Reimagining the Profession How New Jersey Can Attract and Empower the Next Generation of Educators

New Jersey's public schools have long been recognized among the strongest in the nation. Yet we now face a critical challenge that strikes at the heart of our mission: a diminishing pipeline of teacher candidates and mounting obstacles to retaining the educators we have. As documented extensively in the [NJASA Educator Recruitment and Retention Committee Report](#) and reinforced by the association's [Learning Without Limits](#), the conditions prompting this crisis are not short-term disturbances—they are structural shifts, shaped by changing workforce expectations, economic pressures, and longstanding policy constraints.

For years, the traditional strategies we relied upon—job fairs, university partnerships, and retirement-cycle hiring—were enough to sustain a healthy teacher workforce. That era is over. The answer is not in the box of past practice. It requires new thinking, new pathways, and a renewed commitment to elevating the profession.

The Problem: New Jersey's Teacher Workforce Is Under Strain

New Jersey colleges and universities are producing far fewer teacher candidates than a decade ago, even as student needs grow more complex. Districts report shortages across nearly every content area, with acute challenges in mathematics, world languages, special education, bilingual education, and STEM fields.

Several forces drive this decline:

- Changing generational perceptions of work.
Today's emerging workforce seeks flexibility, autonomy, professional growth, and roles that evolve over time. Many do not perceive teaching—at least in its traditional structure—as aligning with those values.
- Barriers to entering the profession

The financial burden of college tuition, the cost of certification exams, and the requirement for full-time unpaid student teaching deter many promising candidates, especially from underrepresented or lower-income backgrounds.

- Workload and burnout.

Teachers cite rising responsibilities, compliance demands, and the pressure of high-stakes accountability systems as major factors in job dissatisfaction and early-career exit.

- A competitive labor market.

Private-sector careers often offer higher starting salaries, remote work options, and more flexible career pathways — advantages that pull away potential educators.

These challenges call for systemic solutions. If we continue to recruit teachers the same way we always have, we will continue to get the same insufficient results.

Out-of-the-Box Solutions for Attracting and Retaining Teachers

1. Create Multiple, Flexible Pathways Into the Profession

The state must embrace models that reduce barriers and welcome diverse, talented individuals into education. This includes:

- Expanding grow-your-own pathways for paraprofessionals, instructional aides, and local community members.
- Supporting apprenticeship-based teacher preparation where candidates earn income while training.
- Building on-ramps for career-changers, including professionals in STEM, world languages, and specialized fields.
- Offering credentialing structures that allow candidates to progress at varied paces with strong mentoring supports.

These approaches broaden entry, increase diversity, and provide New Jersey districts with more sustainable local talent pipelines.

2. Redesign the Teaching Role for the Modern Workforce

New Jersey must rethink what it means to be a teacher in the 21st century. This includes:

- Offering flexible scheduling or job-sharing where possible.
- Expanding roles that blend teaching with instructional coaching, curriculum development, or digital innovation.
- Creating clear, compelling career ladders so educators can advance without leaving the classroom.
- Modernizing workplace structures to emphasize collaboration, creativity, and autonomy.

To the next generation, teaching must not appear static—it must be communicated as a dynamic, intellectually rich profession.

3. Strengthen Retention Through Support, Culture, and Professional Respect

Recruitment alone will not solve the shortage. We must retain the educators we have through:

- Robust mentoring and induction programs that extend beyond the first year.
- Streamlined administrative expectations to reduce noninstructional burdens.
- Healthy, supportive school cultures where teacher voice is central to decision-making.
- State and district policies that protect time for planning, collaboration, and professional learning.
- Compensation and benefits structures that remain competitive with similar professions.

Retention is not a matter of incentives alone—it is a matter of professional respect and working conditions.

4. Reimagine Messaging About the Profession

New Jersey must update how we speak about teaching. Recruitment should emphasize:

- The powerful impact teachers have on students, families, and communities.
- Opportunities for creativity, leadership, and innovation.
- The stability and purpose inherent in public education.
- Stories that reflect the fullness of modern classrooms and the joy of teaching.

Today's candidates want careers that matter. Teaching must be presented as one of the most meaningful choices available.

Rethinking Student Assessment: Another Box That Needs Opening

Just as we must rethink recruitment and retention, we must also reconsider how we assess student learning. Traditional systems—summative tests, periodic benchmarks, and compliance-driven models—often provide limited value to teachers during the school year.

They offer accountability, but they do not always offer insight.

What New Jersey teachers need is a balanced system that:

- Emphasizes ongoing formative assessment throughout the year.
- Uses data dashboards that integrate academic, behavioral, and engagement indicators.
- Encourages project based performance assessments that show what students can create and apply.
- Treats assessments as tools for learning, not merely tools for reporting.
- Builds professional trust by recognizing context and growth rather than relying solely on high-stakes outcomes.

A modern accountability system approved by state and federal government must support teachers, not overwhelm them. When assessment becomes a partner in instruction rather than a compliance requirement, teachers feel more effective—and more likely to remain in the profession.

Why Recruitment and Assessment Must Be Connected

Too often, conversations about the teacher shortage and assessment reform happen separately. In reality, they are deeply linked. A profession defined by creativity, flexibility, support, and professional respect will attract a new generation of educators. An assessment system that provides actionable guidance—not punitive consequences—will help keep them. Both require opening the box and reimagining our approach.

Conclusion: New Jersey Can Lead by Thinking Differently

The challenges before us are significant, but they also present an opportunity. New Jersey has the talent, the commitment, and the collective will to reshape the future of the teaching profession.

The answer is NOT in the box of past practice. It is in new pathways, new structures, new assessments, and a renewed vision for what it means to teach and learn in our state.

By embracing innovation, reducing barriers, empowering our educators, and modernizing accountability, we can build the workforce our students deserve—and sustain the excellence for which New Jersey is known.