

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH EDUCATOR SHORTAGES?

INTRODUCTION

School is in session! As millions of students return to classrooms for the 2022-23 school year, much thought and attention has been given to the educator shortage. AASA's educator shortage survey reflects real-time nationwide feedback from those doing the hiring and aimed to look at the vacancy rates of both instructional and non-instructional positions. In addition, the survey provides context of these reported vacancy rates compared to the previous school year.



The COVID pandemic did not create the educator shortage. Our nation's schools had been dealing with an increasingly intense teacher shortage prior to the 2019-20 school year.

In 2019, the Economic Policy Institute released its [*The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market*](#) series. Its inaugural issue, by Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss, reported, "The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought. When indicators of teacher quality (certification, relevant training, experience, etc.) are taken into account, the shortage is even more acute than currently estimated with high-poverty schools suffering the most from the shortage of credentialed teachers."

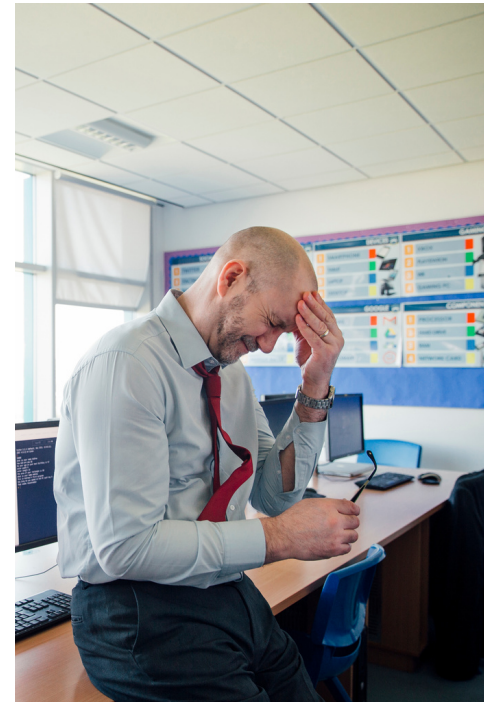
At the time of the report's release, the authors—months before the COVID pandemic exacerbated the educator shortage—warned that there was no sign that the large shortage of educators will go away, especially in high-poverty schools. It is a complex problem with multiple factors driving educators away from the field, including relatively low pay, poor working environments, uneven or absent opportunities for professional growth, and the weak prestige of teaching.

The COVID pandemic did, however, magnify the teacher shortage, amplify the inequities of vacancies, and force the nation to really look at what we expect of educators in the context of the important work they do, their roles in educating students and what it might actually mean to purposefully, equitably and sustainably address educator shortages.

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This survey is not designed to analyze the WHY of the vacancies, or to make policy recommendations on how to address and resolve the vacancies. It is, however, intended to provide feedback and perspective of school superintendents across the country and their responses to critical questions, such as:

- What percentage of your district's instructional positions for the 2022-23 school year remain unfilled?
- What percentage of your district's non-instructional positions for the 2022-23 school year remain unfilled?
- How would you describe the total share of vacancies (overall) for 2022-23 to the start of the 2021-22 school year?
- What are the factors contributing to your district's 2022-23 educator shortages?



The data from the survey doesn't tell us anything new: The educator shortage is real, it is persistent and it is widespread. Equally as important, results from the survey affirm what we had been anecdotally hearing from our members: While the educator shortage is real, and problematic, the vacancy rates, in general, are not representative of a major exodus from the teaching and educator profession.

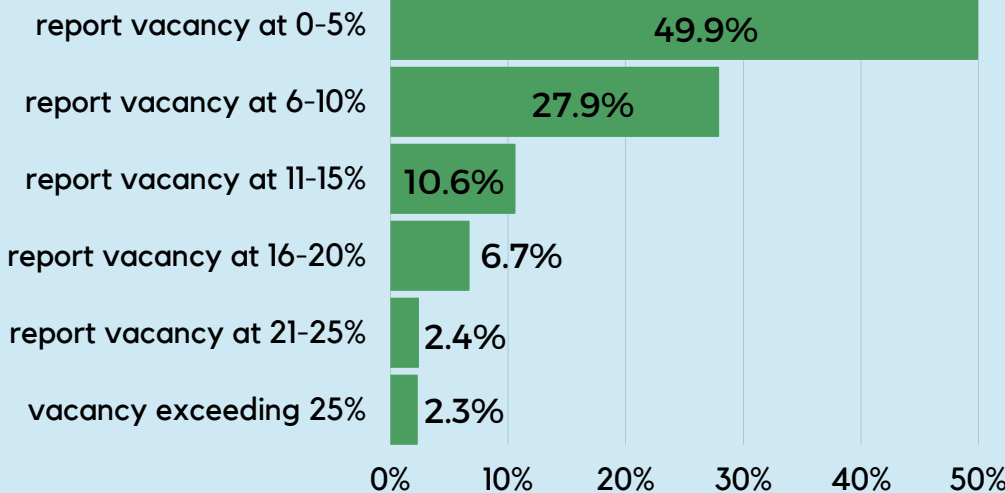
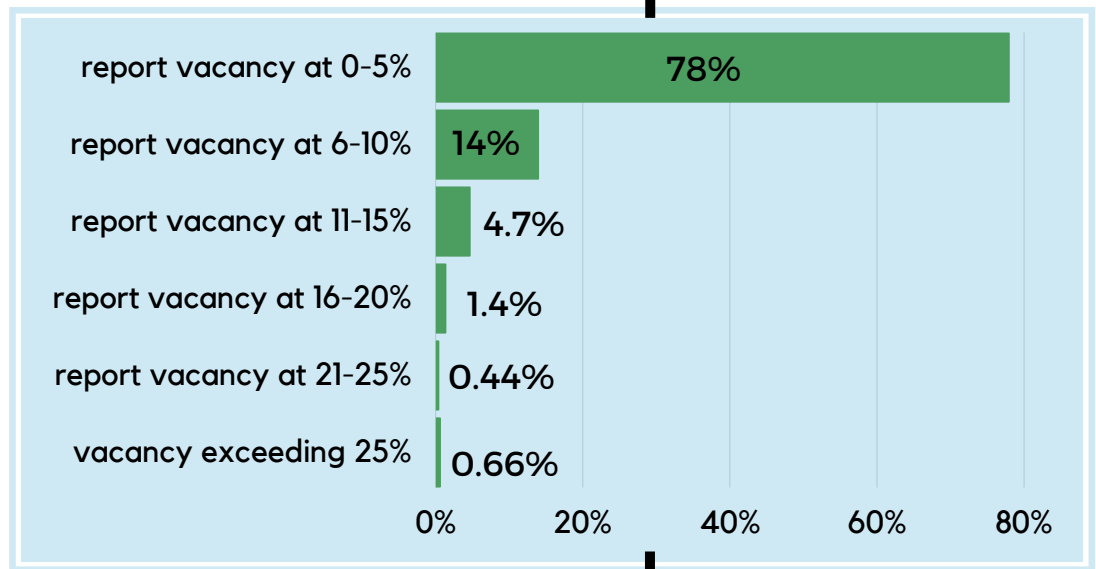
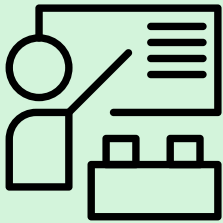
We asked about the percentage of vacancies rather than the total count of vacancies because rates and denominators matter. Had we relied on the straight count of vacancies, the increase from year to year—as has been documented and reported—is much higher, in large part likely due to the infusion of federal dollars stemming from American Rescue Plan and the ongoing work of schools in their efforts to support student learning recovery and provide trauma and mental health supports.

Earlier in the pandemic, as we built the [National COVID-19 School Response Dashboard](#), the first nationwide database that systematically maps schools' responses to the pandemic across the United States, we focused on rates because, simply stated, 'denominators matter'. That is a truth that matters here, too. The overall count of vacancies would indeed have been much more jarring if taken at face value. That significant uptick, however, in the context of a denominator that reflects that schools were also hiring more instructional and non-instructional staff shows that while there is an increase in the rate of vacancies, it is much smaller than the reported count.

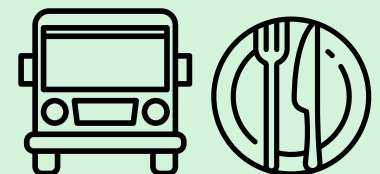
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FINDINGS

INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF VACANCIES



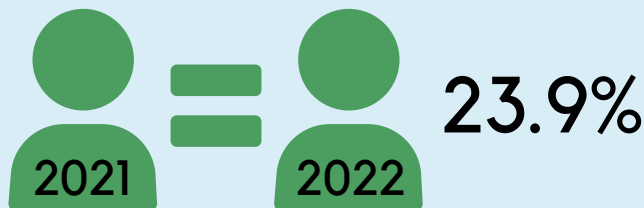
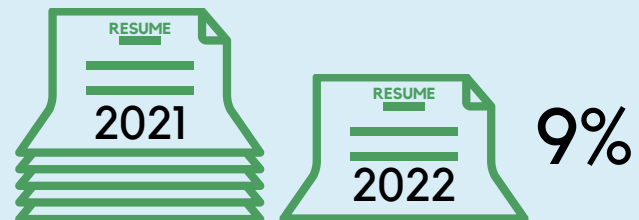
NON-INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF VACANCIES



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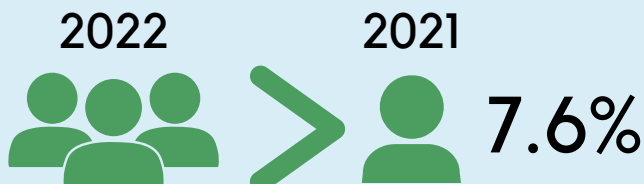
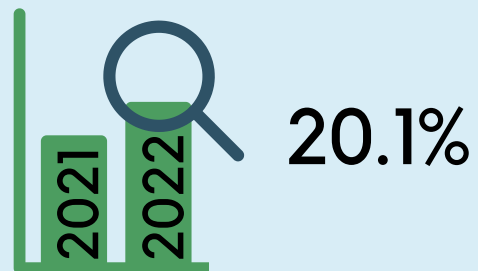
When asked to describe the total share of overall vacancies for 2022-23 compared to the start of the 2021-22 school year:

9% responded "Lower. We had more vacancies in 2021-22."



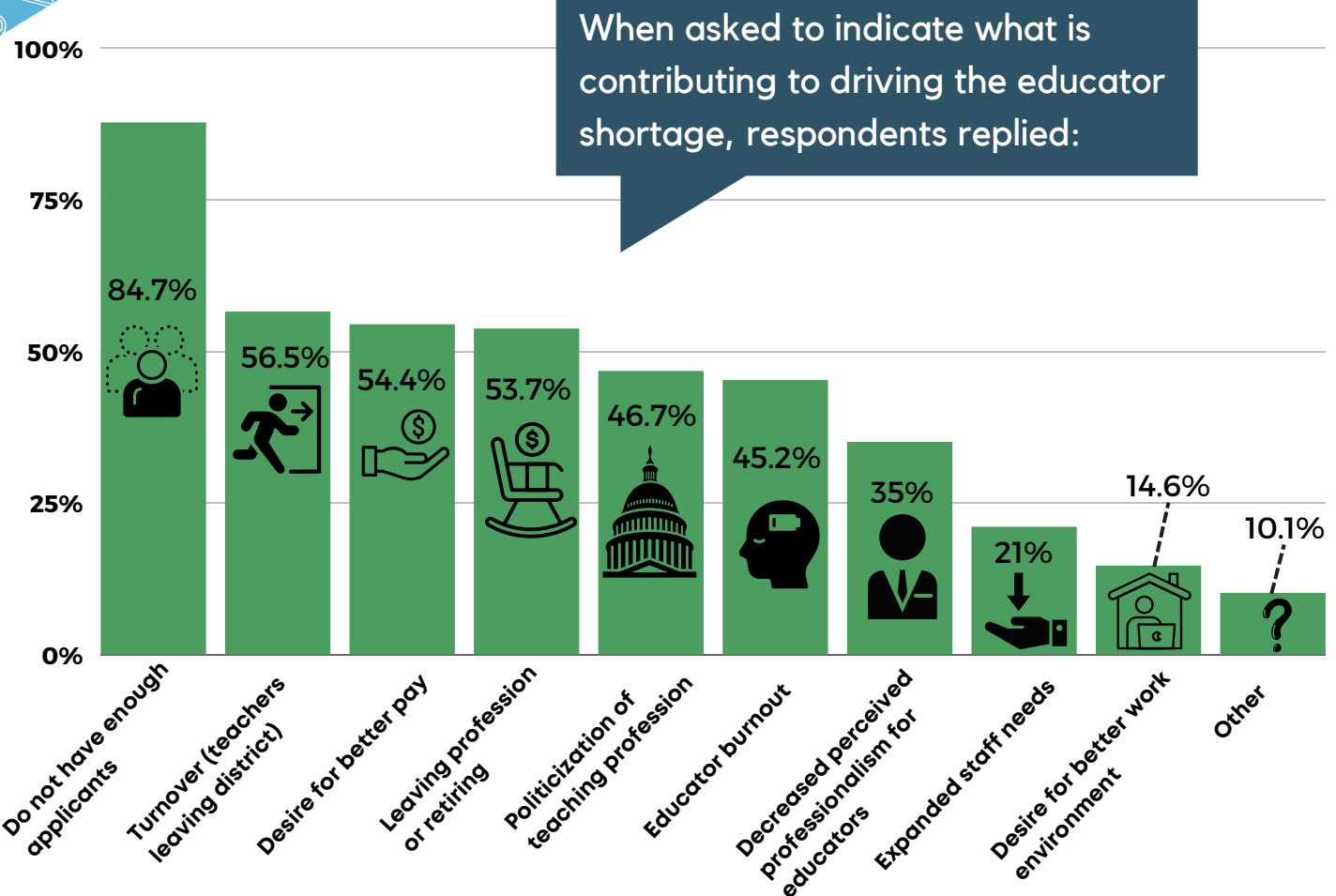
23.9% reported "unchanged/comparable."

20.1% reported higher (vacancies are 6-10% higher in 2022-23).



7.6% reported vacancy rates that are 11-15% higher.

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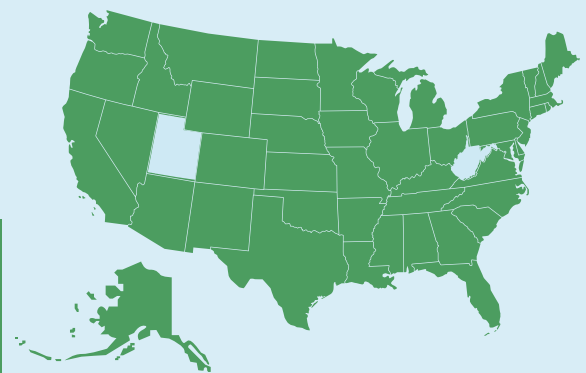


DEMOGRAPHICS

AASA received 910 responses from 47 states (all but Hawaii, Utah and West Virginia).



Two-thirds (62%) of responses were identified as rural, compared to 29.6% suburban and 8.4% urban.



One-third (36.4%) of respondents are in a district enrolling less than 1,000 students, compared to 24.4% enrolling 1,001-2,500; 18.5% enrolling 2,501-5,000; 11% enrolling 5,001-10,000; and 9% enrolling 10,000 or more.

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CONCLUSION

This survey contributes to the current conversation rightly focused on ensuring our nation's public schools have the staff in place to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all of our students, needs that existed before the pandemic and even more so now. School districts continue to grapple with real educator shortages with slightly higher vacancy rates for non-instructional positions, and vacancy rates for the 2022-23 school year that are only slightly higher than the 2021-22 school year.

When we look at the WHY of the vacancies—whether instructional or not—the overwhelming response of “We do not have enough applicants to fill vacant positions,” an overwhelming majority (84.7% of respondents) tell us a lot of what we need to know, and there is already a host of literature, proven practice and room to innovate to get the solutions we need. These options could include working to build the pipeline of educators, ensuring career opportunities to bolster retention and recruitment, being honest about what we require academically of educators and how they are paid in the context of what their equally-educated peers will make, salary-wise, among others.



Moving forward, the simplest conclusion is this: To do better, we have to know better. Data from this survey gives a very real-time, boots-on-the-ground perspective. The information generated in our survey can and should be used in coordination with the broader body of research on ways to address educator shortages and getting very candid and honest about what that will look like, what it will cost, and how we can invest accordingly because we cannot afford to get this wrong.

To borrow a very powerful line from the Committee for Education Funding, “When our students succeed, our nation succeeds” and our nation’s students, schools and future depend on how we respond now.