

## SCHOOL SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

# Data-Driven Strategies for Teacher Shortages

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Like many states across the country, Washington state has experienced an acute teacher shortage. In all subjects and all areas of the state, students have lacked access to high-quality and diverse teachers.

The Washington Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) wanted to address the teacher shortage with a clear understanding of the challenge and responsive, data-driven strategies. PESB partnered with Education Northwest, working under the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest contract, to conduct two studies that would give an accurate picture of the state's educator workforce shortages and ideas for responding effectively.

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## Researching teacher certification and pathways

The **first study** focused on limited certificated teachers: those who receive short-term certification to fill an open teaching or substitute position. Working with PESB, we invited all limited certificated teachers in the state to take a survey in 2017. About 68 percent of respondents said they were interested in becoming fully certificated in Washington, yet many cited barriers to full certification. Removing those barriers and clearing the pathway to full certification could increase the teacher workforce in Washington by up to 25 percent in a given year.

Our **second study** focused on improving pathways for teachers of color. We studied six points in Washington's teacher preparation and career pathway, from taking the basic skills test to becoming a certificated employee and being retained as a certificated employee in a Washington K–12 public school. We identified the points at which teacher candidates and teachers were most likely drop out or leave the field—especially candidates and teachers of color. We found that from 2010

to 2016, **only half of those who started to pursue a teaching career went on to be employed as a teacher.** We also found that **teacher testing may be a major financial barrier for many candidates**—particularly candidates of color. For example, Hispanic candidates spent an average of \$166 to pass the basic skills test, in comparison to \$110 for white candidates.

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## **Improving state systems and equity with research and data**

With the evidence from our studies, PESB began to explore responsive policy decisions that would address the teacher shortage and increase teacher diversity by eliminating unnecessary barriers for teachers of color. For example, in 2019 Washington removed its basic skills test score requirement, and in 2021 the state removed the edTPA teacher candidate performance assessment requirement.

In addition, our team coached PESB staff members on how to gather accurate, comprehensive data to determine whether policy changes they make correlate with their desired changes in teacher diversity or certification. By conducting studies and coaching PESB on data practices, we set them on a path toward sustainable, evidence-driven change that will benefit students across the state.