



PEAK EDUCATION  
REACH HIGHER

## PATHWAYS TO POSSIBILITY

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*Building a Sustainable Pipeline for Educators  
in the Pikes Peak Region*

DECEMBER 2024

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# Project Overview & Purpose

The Pikes Peak Region is facing a significant challenge in addressing the growing teacher shortage, which has far-reaching implications for the quality of education and the future of our communities. This project aims to thoroughly examine the educational pathways available in the region, focusing on teacher recruitment, retention, and training. This report is designed to provide evidence-backed policy recommendations that will increase the number of students entering and completing these pathways and ensure that educators are supported with living wages and thriving careers.

To this end, we have undertaken a comprehensive approach that includes an inventory of existing educational programs, an exploration of innovative practices in higher education, and an in-depth analysis of alternative licensure pathways (ALPs). Additionally, we have engaged a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including current and retired teachers, professors of education, policy experts and advocates, students, parents, and community leaders to generate a set of community-informed recommendations.

This report is designed to serve as a resource for policymakers, educational institutions, and community leaders who are committed to strengthening the educational ecosystem in the Pikes Peak Region. By proactively addressing the region's teacher shortage, we aim to foster a more robust and diverse teaching workforce that is well-equipped to meet the needs of all students.



**This project aims to thoroughly examine the educational pathways available in the region, focusing on teacher recruitment, retention, and training.**

# Introduction

## OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current educational landscape within the Pikes Peak Region, with a specific focus on teacher recruitment, retention, and training pathways. In response to the ongoing teacher shortage, this report seeks to identify evidence-based policy recommendations that will enhance educational pathways, support the completion of these pathways, and ensure that educators are adequately compensated and supported throughout their careers. The ultimate goal is to foster a more diverse, well-prepared, and resilient teaching workforce that reflects the needs of the students and communities they serve.

## METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a multi-faceted approach combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. We conducted an extensive inventory of existing educational programs, alternative licensure pathways (ALPs), and innovative practices within the Pikes Peak Region and nationally. In addition, we held interviews and roundtable conversations with over 50 individual stakeholders, including students, educators, school leaders, college professors, community members, and policy experts, to gather insights and perspectives on the challenges and opportunities within the current system. Actionable policy recommendations were formulated by analyzing key themes and insights resulting from the inventory development and stakeholder interviews.

## REPORT STRUCTURE & CONTENTS

The report is organized into several key sections to ensure a logical flow of information and ease of understanding:

1. **Program Inventory:** This section presents a detailed inventory of existing educational programs within the Pikes Peak Region, highlighting their key features, strengths, and areas for improvement.
2. **Innovation in Higher Education:** We explore both local and national examples of innovation in teacher recruitment and training, providing best practices and spotlighting successful models in higher education.
3. **Asset Map of Alternative Licensure Pathways (ALPs):** This section provides a comprehensive overview of the various ALPs available, including their key elements, funding mechanisms, and examples of innovative practices.
4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Here, we outline the purpose and approach of our stakeholder engagement activities and summarize the key findings that informed our policy recommendations.
5. **Policy Recommendations:** Based on the evidence gathered, we provide actionable recommendations to increase the number of students entering and completing educational pathways, with an emphasis on diversity, equity, and ensuring educators' well-being.
6. **Conclusion:** The report concludes with recommended next steps and acknowledgments, providing a clear path forward for stakeholders and policymakers.

# Program Inventory: Existing Educational Programs in the Pikes Peak Region

*This inventory is the summative result of a regional landscape analysis. For additional and most up-to-date details, please visit the programs' site directly.*

## TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS

### University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) - College of Education

**UCCS offers several traditional education programs at the bachelor's and master's degree levels.**

- The [bachelor's degrees](#) offered include Inclusive Early Childhood Education, Inclusive Early Childhood Leadership, and Inclusive Elementary Education. Students can then be connected to concurrent certification programs that provide initial licensure in elementary or secondary education.
- The school's [graduate degrees](#) include Master's programs such as Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, Leadership, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), which are designed to further advance the skills of aspiring and current educators in the region. The school also offers several additional graduate-level licensure programs.

The College of Education provides a comprehensive curriculum that combines theoretical knowledge with practical teaching experience through student teaching placements in local schools. The many options available allow for individuals with different education experiences to access a teaching pathway.

### Colorado College - Education Department

**Colorado College offers two teacher pathway opportunities.**

- The [Undergraduate Education Degree and Licensure Program](#) which includes an option to add an additional "9th semester" focused on licensure at a greatly reduced cost.
- The [Masters Level Teacher Preparation Program](#) leads to Colorado teaching licensure for both elementary and secondary education. The program leverages a "5th-year" model, allowing undergraduates to continue for an additional year to complete practicum experiences begun during their undergraduate career while completing student teaching, an internship, and a master's research project. This pathway allows students to gain a bachelor's and master's degree in just 5 years.

The college emphasizes a liberal arts approach, providing a broad-based education while also offering specialized training in teaching methods and classroom management. Students gain hands-on experience through student teaching placements in local schools, supported by faculty mentorship and supervision.

### Pikes Peak State College (formerly Pikes Peak Community College) - Education Program

Pikes Peak State College offers two [Associate of Arts degrees](#) focusing on Elementary and Secondary Education. The degrees are designed to transfer seamlessly to four-year institutions where students can complete their Bachelor's degrees and teacher licensure. The program provides foundational courses in education theory and practice and opportunities for classroom observation and participation in local schools. This program is an entry point for students in the Pikes Peak Region who are starting their journey toward a teaching career.

## ALTERNATIVE LICENSURE PROGRAMS

### Pikes Peak BOCES Two-Year Alternative Licensure Program

In partnership with the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS), [this program](#) allows individuals who have already completed a bachelor's degree to earn a Colorado Initial Teacher License while working full-time as a teacher.

The program spans 24 months, during which participants attend seminars and complete various projects designed to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful educators. The program includes mentorship from experienced educators and hands-on teaching experience in the classroom.

This program provides an “earn while you learn” pathway to education that increases access to the profession for individuals with a bachelor’s degree at all stages of life.

### University of Colorado Colorado Springs Alternative Licensure Program

[This program](#) provides a quick on-ramp to a teaching pathway for professionals with a bachelor’s degree and content knowledge in one of the following areas:

English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, World Languages, and Computer Science

The program includes 10 courses. Six courses must be completed before applying for any teaching roles. The employer provides documentation to the program and the license is provided if all 10 courses are completed within the required time. This program offers an opportunity for a fast-paced career transition and opportunities for professionals to earn while learning after the initial six courses are completed.

### Teach for America Colorado - Pikes Peak Region

[Teach for America \(TFA\)](#) places recent college graduates and professionals in high-need schools across the Pikes Peak Region, including Colorado Springs. Corps members commit to teaching for at least two years, receiving intensive training and ongoing support to help address educational inequities and teacher shortages.

TFA provides another pathway to education that includes an opportunity to learn while gaining licensure and work experience.

### ASPIRE to Teach - University of Colorado Denver

[The ASPIRE to Teach program](#) at the University of Colorado Denver is an alternative, one-year, licensure program designed for individuals who have a bachelor’s degree and want to become licensed teachers in Colorado. This program offers a flexible, online learning environment combined with hands-on classroom experience, allowing participants to earn their teaching license while working as full-time teachers.

ASPIRE to Teach is tailored to meet the needs of career changers and those who require an alternative pathway to licensure. The program provides extensive support through mentorship, professional development, and personalized coaching, ensuring that participants are well-prepared to succeed in the classroom. It is a valuable option for those in the Pikes Peak Region looking to enter the teaching profession through a non-traditional route.

With a focus to work as a teacher while enrolled in the licensure program, participants can earn a salary while completing their education requirements. Participants can enroll if they have a full or part-time position, which allows for additional flexibility and opportunities to get started in the profession.

## OTHER PATHWAYS PROGRAMS (NON-LICENSURE)

### Teacher Recruitment Education and Preparation (TREP)

[The Teacher Recruitment Education and Preparation \(TREP\)](#) program is designed to help qualified students in an educator career pathway earn college credits while still in high school, with the opportunity to continue their education tuition-free for up to two years after graduation. This Colorado-based concurrent enrollment program, aims to expand the pool of trained educators by creating a seamless pathway from secondary to post-secondary education, making it more accessible and affordable for future teachers in the Pikes Peak Region.

TREP is available to all students immediately following their 4th year of high school who have taken at least one course in the state’s [education career pathway](#) and are in good educational standing, meeting the other related eligibility requirements. Although eligibility requirements leave the opportunity open, the program is focused on recruiting students from underrepresented backgrounds, helping to diversify the teaching workforce and address shortages in high-need areas.

# Innovation in Teacher Training and Licensure

The programs highlighted below are examples of models that organizations are using to increase access to the education field for all populations. Visit the sites directly for more and the most up-to-date information. The “Key Features” outlined in this section represent one or more of the distinguishing characteristics of each program that could be impactful for other initiatives or programs to learn from or build upon.

## ALTERNATIVE LICENSURE PATHWAYS - INNOVATION AT SCALE

Alternative Licensure Pathways (ALPs) are an innovative solution to increasing teacher pathways and addressing teacher shortages. These programs are being developed nationally, allowing learners with bachelor’s degrees in fields other than education to transition into teaching careers more quickly than traditional pathways.

ALPs are an example of how programs can streamline access to the teaching profession for a specific population. In this case, those with a bachelor’s degree and who are looking to make a career change. ALPs increase the capacity to educate and license future teachers, expanding the number of programs available to those that meet the minimum requirements. ALPs are designed to meet the needs of a professional adult who needs flexibility and earning opportunities while becoming a teacher.

### Key Features:

ALPs have addressed population-specific needs through:

- **Expedited and flexible timelines.** ALPs provide a niche opportunity for individuals with degrees to gain certificates in a shorter timeline. Many ALPs offer flexibility in how and when learners complete their certification process. This supports professionals in learning while earning for their family in a related or unrelated job.
- **Decreased cost.** The shorter timeline and reliance on an existing bachelor’s degree keep ALPs at a low cost.

Learners can participate in ALPs that are delivered in varying ways, such as:

- **Online Programs:** Online coursework provides extensive flexibility for distance learning and those working while learning. These programs often include elements of practical experience in the classroom to attain licensure.
- **Residency Programs:** Residency programs are centered around work-based learning with the oversight of mentors. These programs combine coursework with classroom experience.

Different organizations or entities can host or manage an ALP.

- **University-Based Programs:** These ALPs are offered by colleges and may lead to a master’s degree and certification. Example: [UCCS Alternative Licensure Program](#)
- **State-Approved Alternative Programs:** Many states have their own alternative certification programs designed to meet local needs. Example: [Colorado’s Alternative Teacher Pathway](#)
- **National Programs:** Some organizations work nationally to provide and promote ALPs in multiple states. Example: [Teach for America](#)

ALPs create a streamlined on-ramp to an education career that attracts individuals from various professional backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, supporting diversity in the profession. Where many education programs focus on recruiting and training high-school students in concurrent enrollment or high-school graduates, ALPs are tailored to meet the needs of professionals or college graduates. ALP programs are an important component of the many on-ramps to the education pathway.



## TEACHER APPRENTICESHIP DEGREES- INNOVATION AT SCALE

Teacher Apprenticeship Degrees (TADs) are a more recent innovative solution to the teacher shortage. A 2024 Bellwether report, "[Best of Both Worlds, Teacher Apprenticeship Degrees](#)," provides an in-depth look at these degrees and how they blend the benefits of formal education and on-the-job training. These programs build on traditional registered apprenticeship models to provide an on-ramp to the education field that allows all participants to earn while learning, with or without a prior post-secondary education.

### Key Features:

[The Bellwether report](#) outlines 7 elements of a TAD program, summarized below. For more detailed information, please review the report directly.

1. **Work-based learning.** Like traditional registered apprenticeship programs, TADs ensure that graduates have hands-on experience. Apprentices typically begin working at a school as paraprofessionals or in other student-facing roles that do not require a degree. They are matched with a mentor they can observe and learn from throughout their experience. As they continue through their program, apprentices will take on more and more responsibilities, eventually teaching in the classroom under the supervision of their mentor.
2. **Apprentice Coaching.** In addition to the apprentice's mentor, TADs include access to navigators or other program facilitators who provide guidance and support throughout the program.
3. **Rigorous, Accessible, and Flexible Academic Preparation.** TAD programs provide a curriculum that can be navigated seamlessly while working as an apprentice, often with remote and in-person options.
4. **Earn and learn.** TAD programs allow students to pursue a degree while earning a salary.
5. **Affordability.** Like traditional apprenticeship programs, TADs provide a low to no-cost pathway to a degree.
6. **Placement and fit.** TADs often result in placement into full-time employment and support in navigating a best-fit district for their apprentices.
7. **Portable bachelor's degree and teaching certificate.** TAD programs offer a bachelor's degree and certification. Although, like all education programs, certifications are often state-specific, the bachelor's degree component supports apprentices seeking certification in other states.

Where ALPs provide an innovative on-ramp to education for career changers and those with an existing bachelor's degree, TADs are accessible to learners without a post-secondary degree.

## LOCAL INNOVATION IN ACTION

### Colorado Mountain College (CMC) Teacher Apprenticeship

[CMC](#) recently launched its registered apprenticeship program, offering an earn-while-you-learn pathway to a bachelor's degree in education. The program was developed in collaboration with apprenticeship-focused partners, [CareerWise](#) and the National Center for the Apprenticeship Degree (NCAD) at [Reach University](#). In a [CareerWise Colorado post](#), CMC's Director of Teacher Education, Liz Qualman Ed.D., describes the program, "Individuals can work while studying and be in the classroom getting hands-on experience. The Teacher Degree Apprenticeship will require more collaboration with our K-12 partners, which will be great because both the college and the employer will be responsible for training educators together," said Qualman. "The apprentice will get more experience in the K-12 system, which will prepare them better to take over their classrooms when they graduate from the program. They can graduate with little to no debt."

**Key Feature:** CMC's apprenticeship program presents an opportunity for other colleges to leverage or use as a model for new programming. The apprenticeship program removes many barriers to a teaching profession, providing opportunities for students to access low-cost but quality education that results in degrees while earning money and gaining work experience in the education field.

## P-TEACH Pathways to Teaching; St. Vrain Valley Schools

St. Vrain Valley School District has developed a robust grow-your-own model to address teacher shortages. Through a partnership with UC Denver, P-TEACH provides pathway opportunities for three key populations:

1. P-TEACH Pathway for High School Students - Students can complete up to 49 college credits towards their bachelor's degree in teaching at no cost.
2. P-TEACH Registered Apprenticeship - In their first and second year after high school, students can participate in the P-TEACH apprenticeship, which leverages T-REP to provide 2 years of tuition at no cost to the student if they meet all T-REP requirements. Students attend college and work in the district as part of the earn-and-learn program. Students can participate full-time or part-time.
3. P-TEACH Professional - Anyone working in the district who is interested in being a teacher can take up to 49 credits towards their bachelor's in education at no cost to the student.

**Key Features:** There are many key features to the P-TEACH programs that make them accessible to each of the populations served.

- P-TEACH Counselor(s) support students in navigating their education journey. Even after the initial 49 credits, the counselor helps students leverage other funding streams, such as PEL grants, to ensure the remainder of their education is provided at a low cost.
- P-TEACH has created a culture at the district that ensures staff treat their peers and students as their colleagues or future colleagues. The education profession is celebrated, and there is a culture of support and encouragement.
- P-TEACH is housed in St. Vrain's Innovation Center. The courses provided can be taken in person at the innovation center, and the district has busses connecting each school to the innovation center to ensure transportation is not a barrier to participation.
- P-TEACH courses are provided during the day to ensure classes work for both student and professional learners who are working in the district during the day.

These are just some of the foundational characteristics of the P-TEACH program. The staff at the P-TEACH program are actively pursuing opportunities to share their "grow-your-own" model and lessons learned. They encourage other districts to connect with them to learn more.

## D11 Future Educator Pathway

[The D11 Future Educator Pathway](#) is another example of how a district can increase access to education careers by leveraging existing resources. The pathway is a concurrent enrollment program for high school students that connects directly to TREP opportunities, which leads to two free years of college. The program includes two optional paths: the Teacher Cadet Pathway, which focuses on an introduction to K-12 education, and the Early Childhood Education pathway.

**Key Feature:** District 11 took an existing program (TREP) and identified a way to make it more relatable to their community. The D11 Future Educator Pathway leverages TREP as a foundational resource while building upon it to create district-specific messaging and courses. This effort to increase awareness and streamline access to an educator pathway could be replicated by other districts leveraging TREP or other relevant resources.

## Sachs Foundation Partnership with Colorado College

[The Sachs Foundation Partnership program](#) is funded by a Sachs Foundation grant to support Black students at Colorado College who are interested in pursuing a career in education. The funds from this program support summer fellowships, academic year internships, and scholarships, including two Master of Arts in Teaching scholarships annually for five years. The summer fellowships are open to current freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors who identify as Black and are interested in education. Students participating receive \$5,000 at the beginning of the summer and are assigned relevant work roles. Internship opportunities provide students \$1,000 a semester as they complete 5-10 hours of work to improve educational equity and access for K-12 students. The program also provides two full scholarships to students who have completed their bachelor's degree and identify as black.

**Key Feature:** This is an example of a program that directly supports recruiting underrepresented populations. Other funders could consider learning from the Sachs Foundation model to increase access to the teaching profession.

## Teach Colorado

[Teach Colorado](#) aims to simplify each learner's "path to the classroom" by providing a one-stop-shop platform that outlines how students and job seekers can begin their journey on an education pathway, and providing incentives like scholarships and application fee reimbursement.

**Key Feature:** This is a statewide resource that can be used to support recruitment and is relevant to learners and job seekers at all levels of education and experience considering an education pathway. The "one-stop shop" model supports accessibility to the education profession by ensuring learners can find all the information they need in one place as they consider if an education pathway is right for them.

## NATIONAL INNOVATION IN ACTION

### Reach University

[Reach University's NCAD Initiative](#). Reach University hosts the National Center for the Apprenticeship Degree (NCAD), which is focused on scaling apprenticeship degree opportunities within existing institutions of higher education. Their model addresses issues with program affordability and the need for learners to earn while learning on site at the workplace. This opportunity builds additional opportunities into the career pathways, providing employer-led solutions to growing their incumbent talent as they continue to retain them in their current roles. Often, these opportunities are leveraged by staff members in supporting roles such as paraprofessionals. There are two ways Reach and NCAD are helping communities in scaling education apprenticeships.

1. Institutions (higher education or employers) can partner with and learn from the NCAD resources to launch their own apprenticeship degree program, leveraging local programs that are open to adapting programming to meet the needs of an apprenticeship model. NCAD is working with Careerwise Colorado and Colorado Mountain College to build upon this approach.
2. School Districts or schools can also leverage a partnership directly with Reach to provide degree-bearing, on-the-job training and career pathway development opportunities for their existing staff who are not licensed to teach. In short, Reach becomes the provider of related instruction for apprenticeship programs to convert them to a degree-bearing pathway, allowing them to qualify for teacher licensure processes. Some Colorado charter schools are working with Reach as a direct service provider of related postsecondary education for their staff who seek to complete a degree-conferring apprenticeship.

**Key Feature:** NCAD provides an access point to apprenticeship resources and programming in communities nationwide. The apprenticeship model is different than an alternative licensure program in that it provides both a degree and certification, with no cost to the learner, while the learner is being paid to work at a school. Learn more about the apprenticeship model in this report's Teacher Apprenticeship Degrees - Innovation at Scale section.

## Teachers of Tomorrow

[Teachers of Tomorrow](#) is an alternative teaching certification program accredited by AAQEP. This program provides a low-cost, highly accessible educational pathway to teaching. The program streamlined certification requirements to create a robust and impactful curriculum that supports certification in nine states. In addition to providing what the program describes as rigorous course work, it matches its learners with its partner districts.

**Key Feature:** The Teachers of Tomorrow program provides a holistic approach as it recruits, trains, and connects its learners to teaching opportunities. The region's education programs could consider this job-matching model. Partnerships with regional districts could provide more opportunities for post-secondary education programs to both recruit new students, and place or connect its graduates with job opportunities. These activities could positively impact program outcomes.

## Teach Western Mass

[Teach Western Mass](#) is a resource for early-career educators in Western Massachusetts. Its program, [The Residency](#), is "a comprehensive, state-approved Educator Preparation Program that focuses on licensing and retaining a workforce of teachers who are reflective of student identities and life experiences." Their credentialing program was designed to meet the needs of its community members to create equitable access to education for BIPOC and antiracist teachers. The program leverages a residency model as learners develop their teaching skills in the classroom with guidance and training over 18 months. The program has a strong emphasis on community building which is supported by its cohort model.

**Key Feature:** The Residency program leverages ongoing connections to create a supportive community for its alumni. This focus on community building and long-term connection, especially within its smaller learning cohorts, could be duplicated in the region's programs to support long-term commitment to the teaching profession.

## Grow Your Own Teachers

[Grow Your Own Teachers \(GYO\)](#) is an Illinois-based program that focuses on developing a racially diverse pipeline of teachers. The program provides financial and academic assistance, social-emotional support, and culturally sustaining instructional strategies to support participants in getting their licenses. Currently, two key programs are running through GYO.

1. The Forgivable Loan Program provides loans to racially diverse and community-connected individuals enrolling in and persisting through an initial teacher licensure program.
2. The Diverse Male Teacher Initiative is a scholarship program focused on increasing the number of men of color entering the teaching profession across Illinois. The initiative serves men actively enrolling in or already enrolled in community colleges, providing funds to take prerequisite courses required for licensure.

**Key Feature:** This program is a model for removing barriers to the education profession for underrepresented populations through financial support and connection. As similar programs or initiatives consider opportunities to increase equity, having a clear population of focus or scope could increase impact.

## Dallas College Residency Program

[The Dallas College Residency Program](#) is an undergraduate program that prepares future educators using a teacher residency model. As the program's site describes, "the model [is] "based on exploration, hands-on experiences, and inquiry-based practices." The program is tailored to meet the state's standards. The residency program is tracked by leveraging skill benchmarks and performance tasks relevant to each course.

**Key Feature:** This program provides an example of how a college can leverage aspects of alternative licensure programs. The residency program is an example of how a college embeds hands-on learning as a more intensive, experiential learning component of its program's curriculum that could decrease the amount of classroom learning required.

## PROMISING PRACTICES IN TEACHER PATHWAYS INNOVATION

A review of the programs discussed in this report shows how innovation can impact the region's teacher talent pipeline. The Pikes Peak Region can continue to build and learn from the characteristics of these programs which promote access and engagement.

### Streamlined Access

A focus on equitable access can ensure teacher pathway programs are relevant and marketed to all populations.

- **Accessible Information:** Access can be as simple as providing a one-stop location for candidates to find all of the required information and opportunities that can help them on their journey to an education career such as the way Teach Colorado has managed to streamline state-level information.
- **Early Engagement:** Access can also look like engaging with learners and job seekers early and often. Ensure that students know the programs available to them so that they can become teachers through opportunities like concurrent enrollment. The D11 Future Educator Pathway and St. Vrain's P-TEACH programs provide examples of how naming and marketing an existing program, such as TREP, can create more accessibility.
- **Targeted Recruitment:** Equitable access requires identifying opportunities that promote the inclusion of specific populations. Using data and community voice to identify gaps in diverse representation can inform targeted recruitment techniques such as the Sachs Foundation Partnership focused on recruiting and supporting Black students interested in education careers.
- **Financial Support and Incentives:** Many programs offer financial incentives to attract and retain potential educators. Removing or addressing the cost of education is another way to increase access to the profession. Programs like Teach for America provide access to the education profession while ensuring a return on investment by asking participants to commit to at least two years of teaching. The Grow Your Own Teachers program in Illinois provides forgivable loans to support diverse candidates seeking licensure. Programs like Colorado College have found opportunities to promote their traditional education programs while increasing access through opportunities like their "9th Semester" option, which connects students to licensure while enrolled with the college at a significantly reduced cost.
- **Sustained Engagement:** Many of the programs highlighted in this report offer some type of mentorship or community engagement element. As we found from stakeholder engagement efforts in the region, long-term connections and support between a community or cohort of learners or education professionals could impact the long-term outcomes of these programs. Teach Western Mass - The Residency program strongly emphasizes being a part of a cohort and engaging with alumni of the program. These elements could support a feeling of connection and commitment for its graduates.

# Stakeholder Engagement

## PURPOSE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Our team undertook a comprehensive stakeholder engagement effort to collect ground-level insights from a diverse array of perspectives within the Pikes Peak Region. Engaging key local and regional voices allowed us to better understand the factors influencing teacher recruitment, retention, and satisfaction. Our goal was to identify specific challenges, barriers, and opportunities related to the teaching profession, with a particular focus on addressing the region's teacher shortage and creating pathways that are accessible, sustainable, and attractive to a broad spectrum of potential educators.

By engaging directly with those impacted by or connected to education in the region—current and former teachers, school leaders, policy experts, students, parents, and civic leaders—we sought to generate evidence-based recommendations that would resonate across the education ecosystem and reflect the real needs and aspirations of the community.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Our approach to stakeholder engagement was designed to ensure thorough representation and input from various groups. We conducted interviews and focus groups to collect informed perspectives on the teaching profession and teacher preparation pathways. The focus groups allowed us to explore nuanced topics in a group setting, facilitating conversation and idea-sharing among individuals with similar backgrounds or interests. One-on-one interviews provided a deeper, more individualized view of personal experiences, challenges, and ideas. In total, we connected directly with over 50 individual stakeholders.

In addition to stakeholder interviews and focus groups, we distributed a Student Perspective Survey to high school and college students in the region to understand their perceptions of the teaching profession and identify factors that could make the career path more appealing. The survey responses complement the qualitative data from our interviews and focus groups, providing a broad, data-driven overview of student attitudes and aspirations related to teaching.

This combination of qualitative and quantitative stakeholder engagement methods ensured a comprehensive and balanced foundation for our findings and recommendations.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

### Key Insights and Trends

- **Mentorship and Coaching:** Across stakeholder groups, mentorship emerged as a critical factor for teacher retention and the successful transition of new teachers into the classroom. Teachers who received ongoing support reported higher job satisfaction and resilience against burnout.
- **Positive Perceptions with Practical Concerns:** While many stakeholders view teaching as a noble profession, practical concerns—such as financial instability, excessive workloads, and limited support—dominate decision-making and discourage new candidates.

*“I love the idea of teaching—it’s meaningful work that shapes lives—but when I see how much teachers are paid and the hours they put in, I can’t justify it as a career choice.”*

- **Early and Sustained Pathways:** Stakeholders emphasized the importance of early exposure to teaching pathways, particularly at the high school level, coupled with financial and career pathway guidance support to maintain interest and engagement.
- **Desire for Diversity:** Multiple groups highlighted the need for a teaching workforce that reflects the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the student population, emphasizing the importance of targeted recruitment and support for underrepresented candidates.

## Enabling Conditions to Address the Teacher Shortage

- **Competitive Compensation:** Nearly all stakeholder groups identified increased salaries and benefits as a foundational necessity for attracting and retaining teachers.
- **Streamlined Certification Processes:** Simplified, consistent licensure requirements and alternative pathways, such as “earn while you learn” programs, were seen as critical enablers, particularly for mid-career changers and rural candidates.

*“I had to jump through so many hoops to get certified when I moved here. If the process was easier, I might still be in the classroom.”*

- **Workplace Advocacy:** School leaders emphasized the importance of advocating for teachers by ensuring manageable workloads, adequate preparation time, and supportive administrative practices.

*“Having a mentor made all the difference. My mentor helped me navigate the challenges of those first years and reminded me why I chose this profession in the first place.”*

## Increasing Access and Candidate Diversity

- **Targeted Recruitment:** Stakeholders suggested programs such as “Grow Your Own” initiatives and partnerships with minority-serving institutions to attract candidates from underrepresented backgrounds.
- **Financial Incentives:** Scholarships, stipends, and forgivable loans were identified as key mechanisms to reduce the financial burden of pursuing a teaching career.
- **Culturally Responsive Training:** Training programs that incorporate cultural competence and address the specific needs of diverse communities were widely endorsed.

## Barriers to Entry

- **Financial Constraints:** High tuition costs, lack of stipends during student teaching, and the absence of living wages were cited as significant obstacles to entering the profession.
- **Perceptions of Low Value:** The societal undervaluing of teaching and concerns about job-related stress and limited career growth opportunities discourage many from pursuing the field.
- **Logistical Hurdles:** Inconsistent licensure requirements across states and limited availability of alternative certification programs in rural areas further restrict access.

## Enhancing the Appeal of the Teaching Profession

- **Public Campaigns:** Stakeholders proposed launching campaigns to celebrate and elevate the status of teachers, emphasizing their societal impact and professional contributions.
- **Professional Growth Opportunities:** Offering clear career advancement pathways, such as leadership roles and specialized certifications, could enhance the appeal of teaching as a long-term career.

*“There’s no real ladder in teaching. You’re either in the classroom, or you leave to become an administrator. We need more ways to grow while staying connected to students.”*

- **Work-Life Balance:** Policies and cultural shifts that prioritize teacher well-being, such as reduced administrative burdens and dedicated mental health support, were seen as vital to making the profession more attractive.
- **Importance of Residency and Clinical Practice:** Stakeholders emphasized that extended clinical experiences, such as year-long residencies, are essential for preparing new teachers. Shorter field experiences leave candidates underprepared and lead to high attrition rates.

## Student Perspective Survey

With the help of regional teachers and school leaders, as well as district leaders and departmental leadership at local colleges, our survey was distributed to hundreds and high school and college students across the Pikes Peak Region. We received 225 total responses, which can be viewed [here](#).

The survey asked students about their perceptions of the teaching profession, the factors that drive their career interests, and how they learn about various career possibilities. Our analysis here will focus on three survey topics: (i) what do students find appealing about the teaching profession? (ii) what do students find unappealing about the teaching profession? (iii) what can be done to enhance the appeal of the teaching profession?

### **What do students find appealing about the teaching pathway?**

Student survey responses revealed a range of themes that align with both the emotional and practical dimensions of teaching.

- **Overwhelming Positivity Around Impact and Connection:** The majority of respondents focused on the relational and impactful aspects of teaching, emphasizing mentorship, the opportunity to shape young minds, and inspiring the next generation.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Lifelong Learning:** Teaching was often seen as a way to engage deeply with personal passions while encouraging curiosity and critical thinking in students.

*“I’m drawn to the connection with students that organically happens as a mentor passes down their knowledge and skills.”*

- **Balancing Mission and Practicality:** While respondents generally spoke of teaching as a noble and meaningful profession, some also cited practical benefits such as breaks, work schedules, and professional stability as appealing factors.

### **What do students find least appealing about the teaching profession?**

Student survey responses revealed several key themes that highlight both systemic and practical challenges within the teaching profession.

- **Low Pay and Financial Insecurity:** The overwhelming majority of respondents cited low salaries as a significant deterrent, especially given the workload and education required to enter the field.
- **Student Behavior and Classroom Management:** Concerns about managing disruptive or disrespectful students emerged as a major challenge for many respondents.
- **Workload, Stress, and Burnout:** Heavy workloads, unpaid hours, and stress were repeatedly mentioned as unsustainable aspects of the profession.

*“The intense stress that comes with constant grading and working outside of school hours. Long hours and little pay.”*

- **Systemic Issues and Safety Concerns:** Respondents expressed frustration with inadequate institutional support, administrative burdens, and concerns about school safety.



**How can Colorado make teaching a more attractive career choice for our state's high school and college students?**

Student responses revealed clear themes focused on improving the financial, structural, and cultural conditions of teaching. These responses highlight both systemic issues and actionable opportunities.

- **Competitive Pay and Financial Incentives**

By far the most frequently cited factor, students emphasized the need for higher salaries, financial security, and tangible benefits to make teaching a sustainable and competitive career choice. Many suggested offering stipends for student teaching, scholarships for education pathways, and loan forgiveness programs.

- **Workload and Structural Supports**

Respondents noted the need for better work-life balance, reduced workloads, and stronger administrative support. Smaller class sizes, additional support staff, and streamlined pathways to licensure were seen as ways to ease teacher stress and burnout.

- **Classroom Safety and School Environment**

Concerns around school safety—namely gun violence—appeared prominently, as did the need for supportive, well-funded school environments. Respondents stressed the importance of ensuring teachers feel safe and valued.

*“As dark as it sounds, we need bulletproof doors, windows, and more security.”*

- **Positive Messaging and Recruitment**

Students encouraged better promotion of teaching as a rewarding and impactful profession. Suggestions included showcasing teachers who love their jobs, emphasizing professional growth opportunities, and challenging misconceptions about the role.

*“Highlight the skills teaching provides, like curriculum building and conflict management.”*

- **Pathway Flexibility and Support**

Respondents advocated for clearer and more flexible pathways into teaching, including subsidized education costs, opportunities to shadow teachers, and streamlined licensure processes.

# Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations provide possible next steps and priorities the region could move forward to impact the educator workforce. The recommendations were informed by the elements of this report in addition to informal interviews held with state and national policy and subject matter experts.

In addition to the recommendations listed below, the Pikes Peak Region should leverage any activities resulting from the Colorado Department of Education's most recent [Strategic Action Plan](#). One of the wildly important goals (WIG) included in the plan is "strengthening the educator workforce." This WIG includes potential action items such as providing more support to districts and BOSES related to these efforts.

## 1. COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

- **Increase Teacher Salaries:** Ensure that teacher salaries are competitive with other professions requiring similar levels of education. This increase should include structured pay raises to account for experience, advanced degrees, and certifications.
- **Student Loan Forgiveness and Housing Support:** Implement or expand loan forgiveness and housing assistance programs specifically for teachers in high-need and rural areas. These policies would help reduce the financial burden on teachers, making the profession more attractive.
- **Retirement and Health Benefits:** Advocate for enhanced health care and retirement benefits for teachers. Comprehensive benefits are critical in ensuring teaching is a sustainable, long-term career choice.

## 2. STREAMLINED CERTIFICATION AND LICENSING PROCESSES

- **Simplify State Licensure and Reciprocity:** Implement policies that streamline licensure requirements, especially for teachers moving from other states. Developing uniform standards for certification could help retain teachers who relocate.
- **Identify Flexibility in Existing College Programming:** Identify opportunities for existing college programs to adjust course requirements, building from apprenticeship and alternative program model's rigorous work-based learning component. This model has been shown by these innovative programs to decrease costs.
- **Alternative Licensure Pathways & Teacher Apprenticeship Degrees:** Expand and promote alternative licensure pathways, such as career-switcher programs and in-service training for paraprofessionals. By making certification more accessible to diverse candidates and mid-career professionals, policymakers can help widen the pool of potential teachers.
- **Statewide "Grow Your Own" Programs:** Encourage local communities and school districts to adopt "Grow Your Own" programs that support students, paraprofessionals, and community members in pursuing a teaching credential, with targeted financial and academic support.
- **Entrepreneurial Partners:** Districts and education communities can learn from St. Vrain Valley School District's partnership with UC Denver to develop relationships with existing education institutions. By establishing an ongoing and robust collaboration, the school district and college worked together to determine cost-sharing and funding opportunities to make sure all three of the P-TEACH programs could be delivered to students at a low to no cost.
- **System and Scale:** The team at St. Vrain Valley School District stressed the importance of their innovation center and the staff and capacity that exists to identify opportunities their district can leverage. It is important to have a system in place that allows all schools within the district to connect to initiatives easily and to have staff capacity available to take action and think innovatively. Districts should consider if they have the right systems and staff roles in place to make change happen and leverage opportunities that arise to support teacher shortages.

### 3. RECRUITMENT, SUPPORT, AND RETENTION INITIATIVES

- **Strategic Recruitment:** Review regionally specific industry trends to identify jobs with low employment rates or talent-saturated industries that likely result in under-employed or unemployed professionals. These populations could benefit from leveraging alternative licensure and apprenticeship programs. Consider how to leverage other aspects of the region's population, such as developing or promoting existing teacher pathways for military spouses and veterans. Strategic recruitment within existing education talent pools could include programs or messaging that markets a pathway from entry-level roles, such as paraprofessionals and bus drivers, to a teaching profession. This type of messaging could also positively impact recruitment for those entry-level roles.
- **State-Funded Mentorship Programs:** Establish a state-funded mentorship program for new teachers, pairing them with experienced mentors. Structured mentoring could reduce burnout and attrition in the first few years, which is when teachers are most likely to leave.
- **Professional Development Stipends and Incentives:** Offer annual stipends or grants for professional development, particularly in high-need areas like special education and STEM. This would give teachers the resources to improve their skills and remain current in their fields. Consider how stipends or other incentives could lengthen terms with teacher programs that are already providing positive outcomes. For example, incentivizing a 3rd year for Teach for America participants in the region.
- **Mental Health and Wellness Programs:** Provide funding for schools to offer mental health resources and wellness programs specifically for teachers. Including regular access to mental health professionals, peer support groups, and burnout prevention workshops could address the high levels of stress in the profession.
- **Human Resources (HR) Assistance:** Create a role within the district or across districts that focus on providing technical assistance for HR teams. HR professionals need access to training and resources that allow them to leverage new apprenticeship and ALP models.

### 4. ENHANCING RESPECT AND APPEAL OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION

- **Public Awareness Campaign:** Launch a public campaign to highlight the value of teachers and the rewards of the profession. By shifting public perception, policymakers can help make teaching a respected and desirable career choice. The Pikes Peak Region could consider opportunities to address this campaign as a collaborative effort across all districts in the region. Aligned messaging and visuals could have a great impact across the region. In addition to the region's districts, local chambers and other workforce and education-centered programs could likely support or champion this campaign.
- **Teach Next Generation Scholarships:** Offer scholarships and stipends for high school students who commit to pursuing education degrees, particularly in high-need subjects or in rural areas. This would engage young people early and emphasize teaching as a prestigious career path.

### 5. ADDRESSING RURAL EDUCATION NEEDS

- **Rural Hardship Stipends:** Provide additional stipends for teachers who work in rural or remote schools to address geographic and resource-related challenges.
- **Community-Based Teacher Housing:** Allocate funds to develop affordable housing for teachers in rural areas. This can help attract and retain teachers who may otherwise be deterred by limited housing options.
- **Remote Teaching Resources:** Invest in technology and infrastructure to support hybrid or virtual teaching models for rural schools, allowing them to access a broader pool of specialized educators and resources.

## 6. CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND DIVERSE TEACHER RECRUITMENT

- **Inclusive Recruitment and Support Programs:** Fund programs specifically designed to recruit and support teachers from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. This could include scholarships, paid internships, and recruitment partnerships with HBCUs, HSIs, and other minority-serving institutions.
- **Cultural Competency Training:** Make cultural competency training a standard part of professional development and certification requirements. This helps ensure that all teachers are well-prepared to serve diverse student populations.
- **Disability and Neurodiversity Accessibility:** Provide support to make teacher preparation pathways accessible for disabled and neurodivergent candidates, creating a more inclusive and representative teaching workforce.

## Conclusion

This report underscores the urgent need and opportunities to address the teacher shortage in the Pikes Peak Region through innovative policies, systemic support, and collaborative action. Our findings reveal that competitive compensation, streamlined certification pathways, robust mentorship programs, and intentional recruitment of diverse candidates are critical to attracting and retaining teachers. Nonprofits, school systems, and policymakers must work together to implement these solutions, ensuring they are tailored to the unique challenges of local communities. Ultimately, solving the teacher shortage requires viewing education as a public good and investing in the profession as a cornerstone of community and economic vitality. With sustained focus and partnership, the Region can build a thriving, equitable teaching workforce that meets the needs of every student.

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