

NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON
**Teaching and
America's
Future**

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Nation's Schools Facing Largest Teacher Retirement Wave in History; Every State Affected, But 18 States & DC Are Beyond the Tipping Point, Report Reveals

U.S. Will Not Be Able to Recruit Enough New Teachers to Fill Classrooms; Nation Must Change Staffing Models and Encourage Teacher Retirees to Return in New Roles

WASHINGTON – April 7, 2009 – The nation stands to lose half of its teachers to retirement over the next decade, but states and districts have an opportunity to avert the crisis, according to report released today by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF).

The report – *Learning Teams: Creating What's Next* – finds that over 50 percent of the nation's teachers and principals are Baby Boomers. During the next four years our nation's schools could lose a third of their most accomplished educators to retirement. The wave of departures will peak during the 2010-11 school year, when over one hundred thousand veteran teachers could leave. In less than a decade, more than half of today's teachers – 1.72 million – could be gone.

The situation is hitting home in 18 states (CT, ID, IL, IN, IA, ME, MA, MT, NH, NJ, NM, ND, OR, RI, VT, WA, WV, and WY) and the District of Columbia, where more than half of public school teachers are age 50 or older. The average teacher retirement age is currently 59. (*See attached 50-state table on the percentage of public school teachers age 50 or older.*) The situation is most severe in West Virginia, where more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the teaching force is 50 or older.

"First time teachers have been leaving the classroom in record numbers," said Tom Carroll, NCTAF president and author of the report. "And now we are about to be hit by a massive wave of retirements. We need to face facts and recognize that the supply of teachers is collapsing at both ends."

The report also includes results of a new national NCTAF survey of teachers and principals, which finds that while some educators are delaying their retirement plans because of the economic downturn, many are not and might stay or return to teaching only if the traditional staffing model is changed. The report urges the development and adoption of a new approach to teacher deployment that mobilizes learning teams comprised of new teachers, teacher mentors, and teacher retirees in new roles to better prepare today's students for college, the workforce, and citizenship.

Teacher Supply “Collapsing at Both Ends”

The wave of retirements, the report notes, will be exacerbated by the fact that the percentage of new teachers leaving the profession within five years continues to climb. Since 1994, the number of teachers leaving the classroom each year for reasons other than retirement has doubled.

Today, over a third of the nation’s new teachers leave the profession within five years. In urban school districts, one in five new teachers leave the classroom after just one year, and nearly half leave within five years.

“One teacher will not do,” Carroll said. “The day of a ‘highly qualified teacher’ in every classroom is gone. It is now about mobilizing an army of teachers ready to work in teams. We need to change the staffing model to take advantage of teachers who might stay or return to the classroom if they could work in teams rather than isolation, using the best of their skills and knowledge, as professionals in other fields do.”

Redefining Teaching Careers

According to the survey, almost 60 percent of Boomer teachers said they intend to work after retirement. Over 70 percent of Boomer teachers nearing retirement would be more interested in staying in education if they were able to pursue a “flexible retirement.” This would include assuming positions in “cross-generational learning teams” composed of veterans, beginning teachers, and adjunct experts from other fields. These teams could create powerful new learning opportunities for today’s students.

The survey also reveals that most teachers are interested in encore careers in education, but believe that new approaches to teaching are needed to support them. The survey found that three-quarters of teachers and principals agree that the current “solo teacher” model is outdated, and favor restructuring schools by creating cross-generational learning teams, in which veteran teachers would work with new teachers, providing mentoring, coaching, and instructional assistance that will help to improve student performance and reduce attrition rates for new teachers.

Policy Implications

The report recommends that states and districts assess their own teacher workforce demographics and begin to take action **now** to offset the loss of years of hard-won expertise as Baby Boom teachers retire, including:

- Bringing teacher pay systems into the 21st century to ensure that length of service and years of education are not the only basis for pay increases, that salaries and incentives are competitive in the current job market, and that teachers and principals are rewarded for teamwork that improves school performance and student achievement;
- Reexamining the fiscal consequences of pension provisions that push teachers in their fifties out of the workforce;
- Developing collaborative learning teams composed of veterans and beginners trained to share their expertise and experience with each other across the generations;
- Providing opportunities for veteran teachers to take on flexible new roles as members of strong learning teams; and
- Factoring in how retired educators and Boomers from the wider workforce might make significant contributions in part-time positions.

“These new directions for policy can help the nation rebuild the teacher workforce and prepare for the demographic tsunami that is coming,” says NCTAF co-chair Richard W. Riley, a former U.S. Secretary of Education. “We need to let our teachers and students know that we will not let them down as they work to keep us competitive in a global economy. We need to mobilize an army of educators and community resources, led by learning teams, whose core mission is creating a 21st century education system that can give us a competitive edge for years to come,”

“We have less than a decade to transform our schools into 21st century learning organizations that function as teams,” Carroll said. “This is an ambitious goal, but we have met challenges of this magnitude before. If the nation’s leaders make strategic use of stimulus funding and the Obama Administration’s new ‘Race to the Top’ grants, this could be the decade in which we reinvent American education. Just as NASA’s teams built the space program during the 1960s, learning teams could build a 21st century education system,” he added.

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The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization based in Washington, DC. NCTAF is dedicated to providing every child with competent, caring, qualified teaching in schools organized for success. With a network of 27 partner states and links to professional educational organizations across the nation, NCTAF provides leadership on innovation and improvement in teaching and learning in America’s schools. For more information, visit NCTAF’s website: www.nctaf.org.

Percentage of Public School Teachers Age 50 or Older 2008-09*

State	Percentage 50 and Older
Alabama	42.63
Alaska	46.12
Arizona	45.97
Arkansas	41.22
California	47.15
Colorado	43.18
Connecticut	53.32
Delaware	43.58
District of Columbia	51.23
Florida	49.35
Georgia	43.24
Hawaii	45.53
Idaho	50.86
Illinois	50.68
Indiana	53.82
Iowa	50.84
Kansas	47.93
Kentucky	40.03
Louisiana	45.89
Maine	55.82
Maryland	47.46
Massachusetts	53.27
Michigan	48.13
Minnesota	45.61
Mississippi	46.73
Missouri	43.10
Montana	54.73
Nebraska	44.35
Nevada	41.46
New Hampshire	53.02
New Jersey	52.96
New Mexico	53.89
New York	41.37
North Carolina	42.50
North Dakota	53.74
Ohio	46.28
Oklahoma	46.40
Oregon	52.73
Pennsylvania	48.82
Rhode Island	50.12
South Carolina	44.96
South Dakota	46.05

Tennessee	46.82
Texas	42.57
Utah	48.57
Vermont	55.22
Virginia	46.61
Washington	50.89
West Virginia	67.64
Wisconsin	41.45
Wyoming	52.77

**NCTAF estimate based on actual data for 2003-04*

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Schools and Staffing Survey; NCTAF analysis