

WINTER 2025

DATA STORIES:

TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
IN MASSACHUSETTS



INTRODUCTION

Condition of Education in the Commonwealth 2025

The latest entry in our Data Stories series explores the critical issues of teacher recruitment and retention in Massachusetts. As this year's Condition of Education action guide outlines, rethinking the teaching profession has never been more urgent—longstanding challenges in education are leading to unprecedented rates of burnout, job dissatisfaction, fewer people entering the profession, and many leaving it altogether. By analyzing statewide data, this story uncovers trends in the teacher pipeline, highlighting why systemic changes are necessary to strengthen and sustain the teaching profession.



Why is teacher recruitment and retention important and what are the current trends?

Across the US, a declining number of candidates are joining the teaching profession while fewer teachers stay in the classroom, leading to national concerns about teacher shortages and the state of the teacher pipeline. [The National Council on Teacher Quality](#) found that “enrollment in teacher preparation programs stands at 70% of what it was 10 years earlier,” with program completers declining by 25% from 2010 to 2020. This data represents an increasingly prevalent hesitancy to become a teacher. The [2024 PDK poll](#) reported that 60% of Americans wouldn’t want their children to become teachers. Commonly reported reasons for the decline in teaching candidates include notoriously [low pay](#), increased [politicization](#), overwhelming [workloads](#), [lack of professional respect](#), and [fear of budget-driven teacher layoffs](#).

At the other end of the teacher pipeline, more teachers are leaving the classroom, reducing teacher retention rates and contributing to the growing teacher shortage. A [National Education Association poll](#) in 2022 found that 55% of teachers are thinking of leaving the profession earlier than expected. [Commonly reported reasons](#) for quitting include low pay, inadequate preparation or support, and challenging work conditions. High teacher turnover has prompted many states to [adopt policies](#) permitting novice or unqualified individuals to teach, potentially [undermining student achievement](#) and further [diminishing teacher retention](#).

Teacher retention plays a critical role in shaping student success, reducing financial strain on schools, and ensuring equitable access to quality education. [Research](#) shows that higher teacher turnover harms student performance, with one study revealing lower math and English language arts (ELA) scores in grade levels experiencing frequent teacher changes. These effects are particularly pronounced in schools serving more Black students and low-performing students. Additionally, replacing a teacher can cost over [\\$20,000](#) per educator, contributing to an estimated national expenditure of \$8 billion annually. Finally, schools serving low-income students and students of color have [disproportionately high rates of teacher turnover](#), leading to staffing shortages and the increased likelihood of unqualified or inexperienced teachers being assigned to classrooms. For example, districts serving high enrollments of students of color are [four times more likely to employ uncertified teachers](#). By addressing the root causes of teacher turnover, schools can enhance teacher quality and retention, particularly in underserved districts, promoting more equitable educational opportunities.

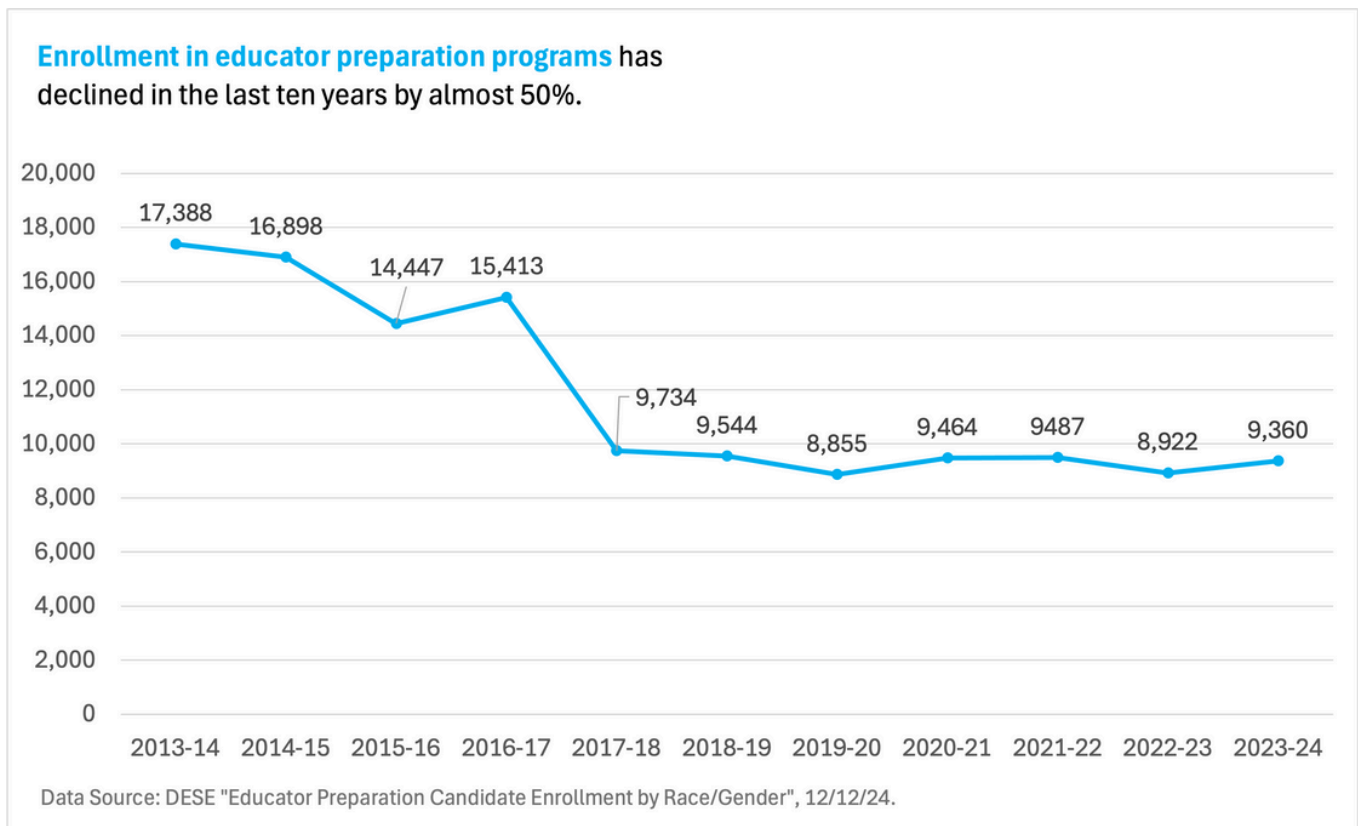
Given the national challenges in teacher recruitment and retention, this report explores teacher pipeline data from Massachusetts and proposes policy solutions to address local needs.

DATA ANALYSIS: RECRUITMENT

What does the data say about teacher recruitment in Massachusetts?

Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has decreased over the past decade.

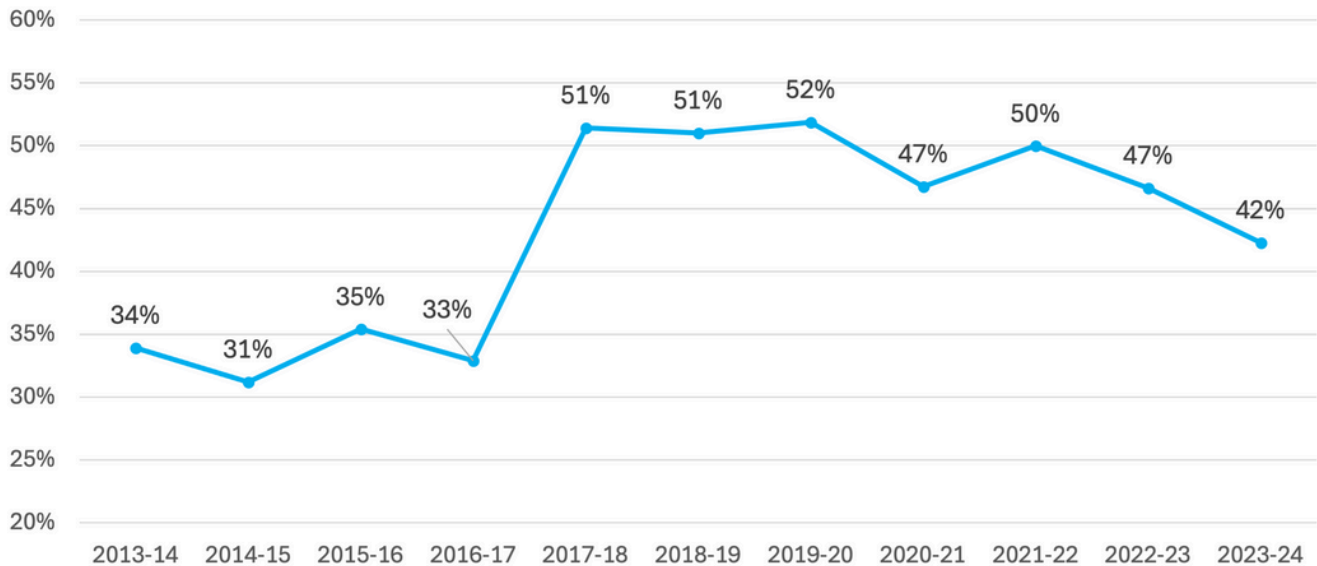
Since 2013, enrollment in teacher preparation programs has dropped by nearly 50%, likely contributing to teacher shortages. Enrollment decreased sharply from 2013-14 to 2017-18 and has since remained relatively constant at around 9,000 enrollees each year. Given that enrollment and completion of an educator preparation program is the most common pathway to becoming a teacher in Massachusetts, declining enrollment highlights a critical issue in the teacher pipeline and its impact on teacher recruitment.



Completion of educator preparation programs remains low, with an average completion rate of 43% over the last decade.

Following an increase from 2016-17 to 2017-18, the preparation program completion rate has gradually declined, dropping from 51% in 2017-18 to 42% in 2023-24. According to [DESE](#), enrollees are considered program completers once they fulfill all preparation program requirements, including coursework and practicum experiences, but excluding passing licensure exams or receiving licensure endorsement. Given that over half of those enrolled in preparation programs don't complete them, it's important to explore the factors hindering program completion and identify policies that could better support candidate success.

The **completion rate** for educator preparation program candidates has varied from 31% to 52% over the past decade.

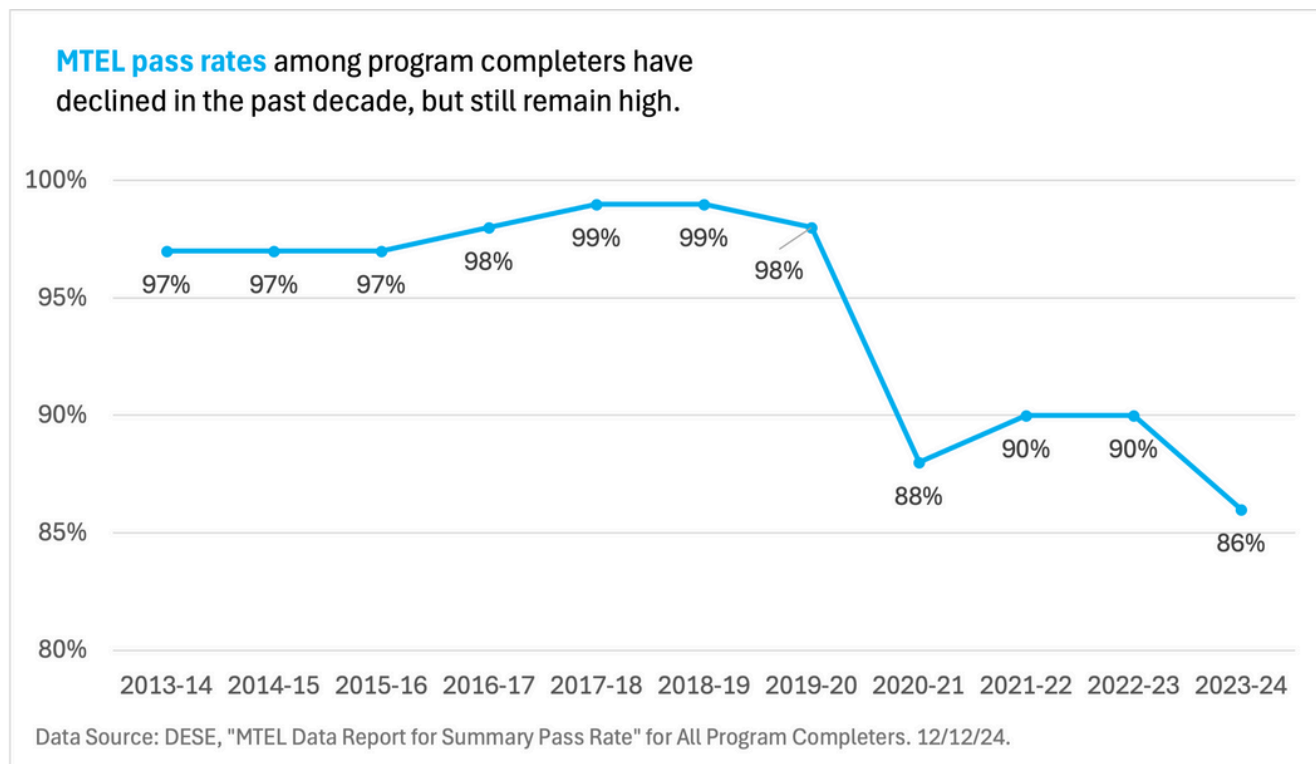


Data Source: DESE "Ed Prep Program Completers" for initial licenses for all program completers, 12/12/24.

MTEL pass rates have decreased in the past decade but still remain relatively high.

The Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) have historically been a key requirement for obtaining a teaching certificate. While the passage of the [Educator Diversity Act in late 2024](#) introduces an alternative certification pathway that will allow some candidates to bypass the MTEL or other standardized tests, many candidates will still need to pass the MTEL to become licensed educators.

Data from recent years shows that MTEL pass rates have decreased compared to the past decade. In the 2017-18 and 2018-19 academic years, pass rates were as high as 99%, but they have since declined to 86% in 2023-24. These trends suggest that while the Educator Diversity Act eliminates the MTEL requirement for some candidates, passing the test may still be a barrier to entering the teaching profession for others. As alternative pathways and changing requirements become more common, pathways must remain rigorous to ensure that teachers entering the profession are highly qualified and well-prepared to meet the needs of students.



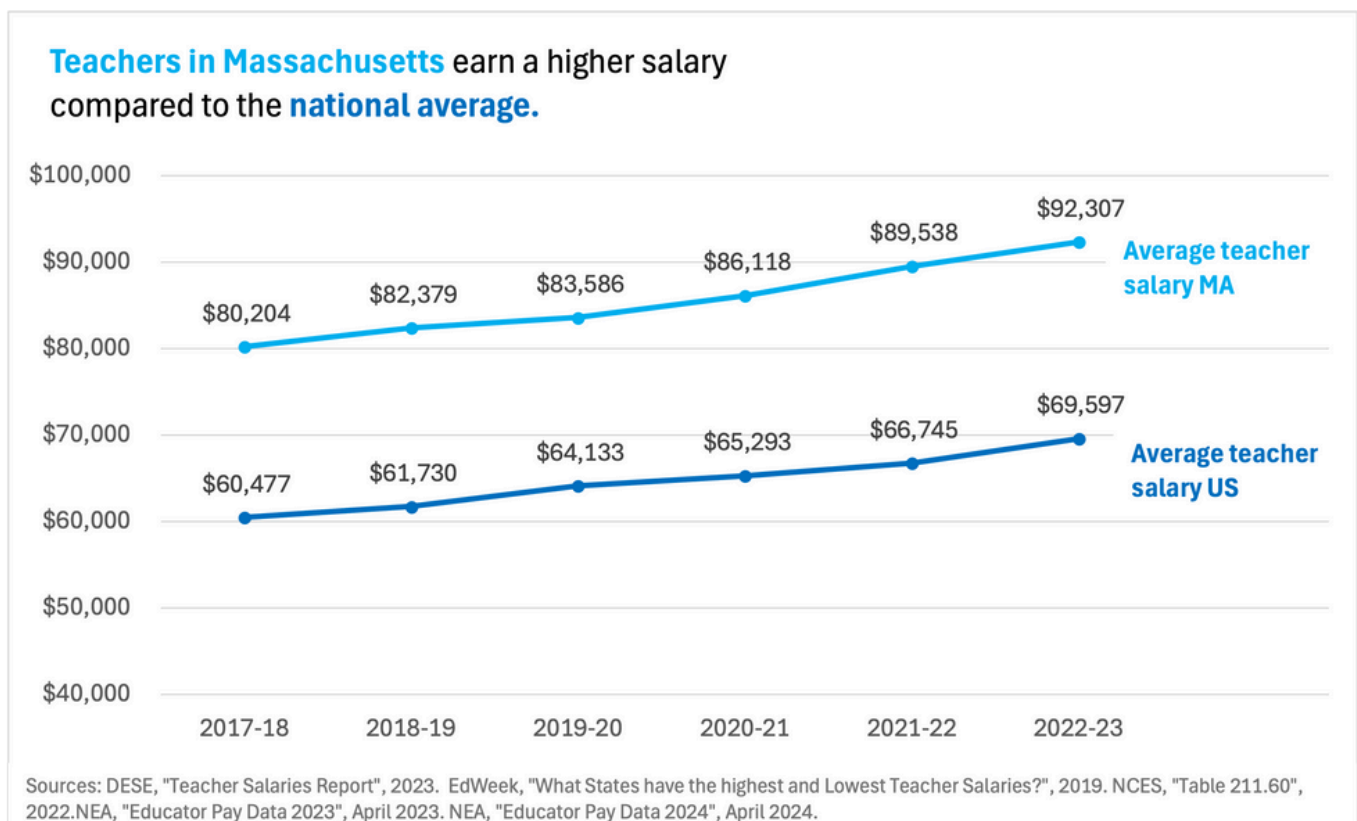
DATA ANALYSIS: RECRUITMENT

Can increasing pay help recruit teachers?

Given that pay is often cited as a leading reason why prospective teachers don't join the profession, increasing teacher pay has become a national topic of conversation. Massachusetts offers some of the highest average teacher salaries compared to other states, but is it enough to help recruit teachers?

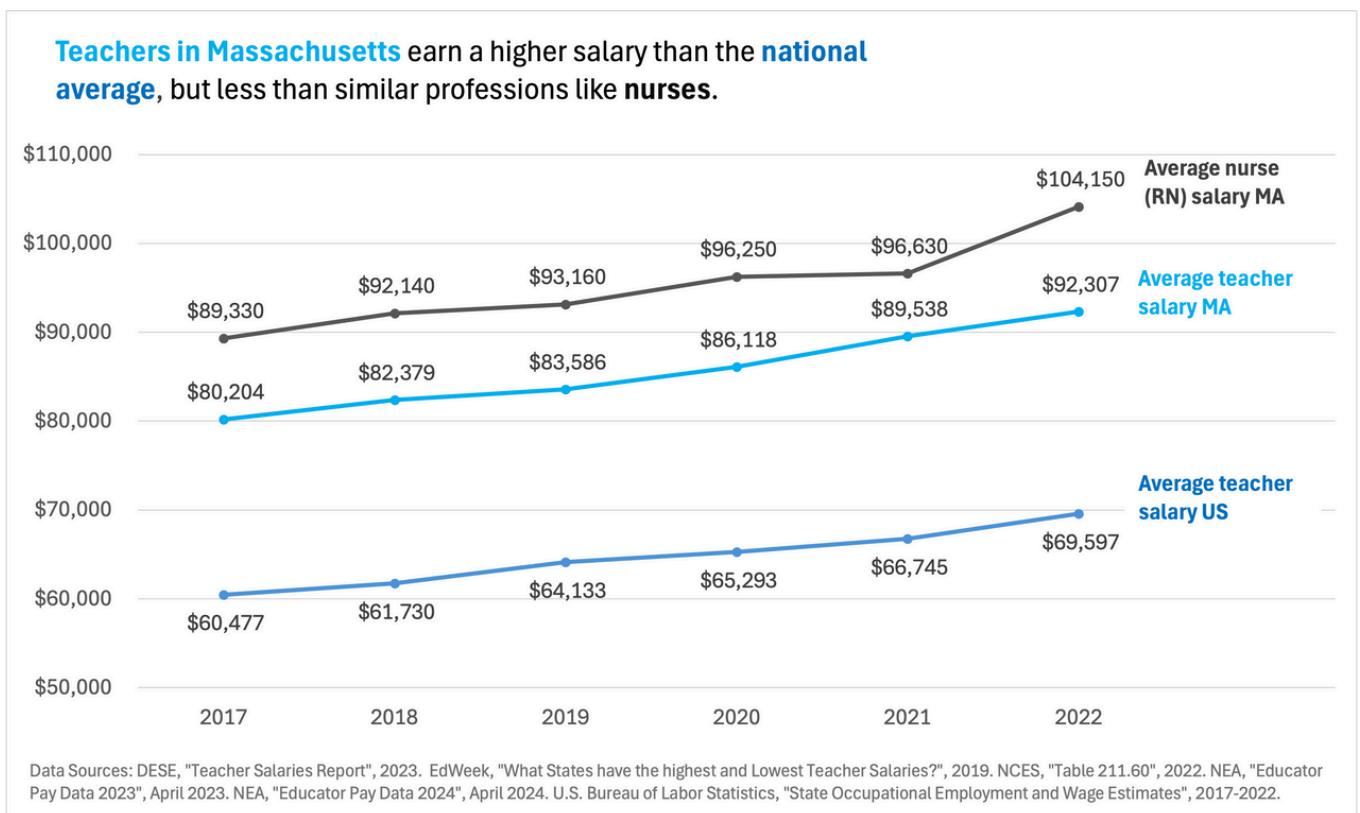
On average, teachers in Massachusetts earn a higher salary than the national average, but the rising cost of living outpaces earnings.

On average, Massachusetts teachers are paid \$20,000 more than teachers nationally, a difference that has remained relatively constant over the past six years. However, Massachusetts has the third highest cost of living in the US, making it one of the most expensive places to live—and work. While teachers in Massachusetts may earn more than their peers nationally, the state's elevated cost of living outpaces earnings, leaving many struggling to make ends meet.



Though they earn more than the national average, teachers in Massachusetts earn less than those in similar professions.

In Massachusetts, registered nurses (RNs) have similar education, testing, and training requirements as teachers, yet nurses working here earned nearly \$12,000 more on average than teachers in 2022. The pay penalty between teachers and other white-collar workers in Massachusetts is 20%, compared to 17% nationally. In other words, teachers make 20% less than similar professions, suggesting why many individuals choose not to join the teaching profession and many educators are leaving the profession. That said, teachers in Massachusetts do still make more than some other comparable professions—social workers, for instance, earned almost \$30,000 less than teachers in 2022 despite the need for similar credentials.

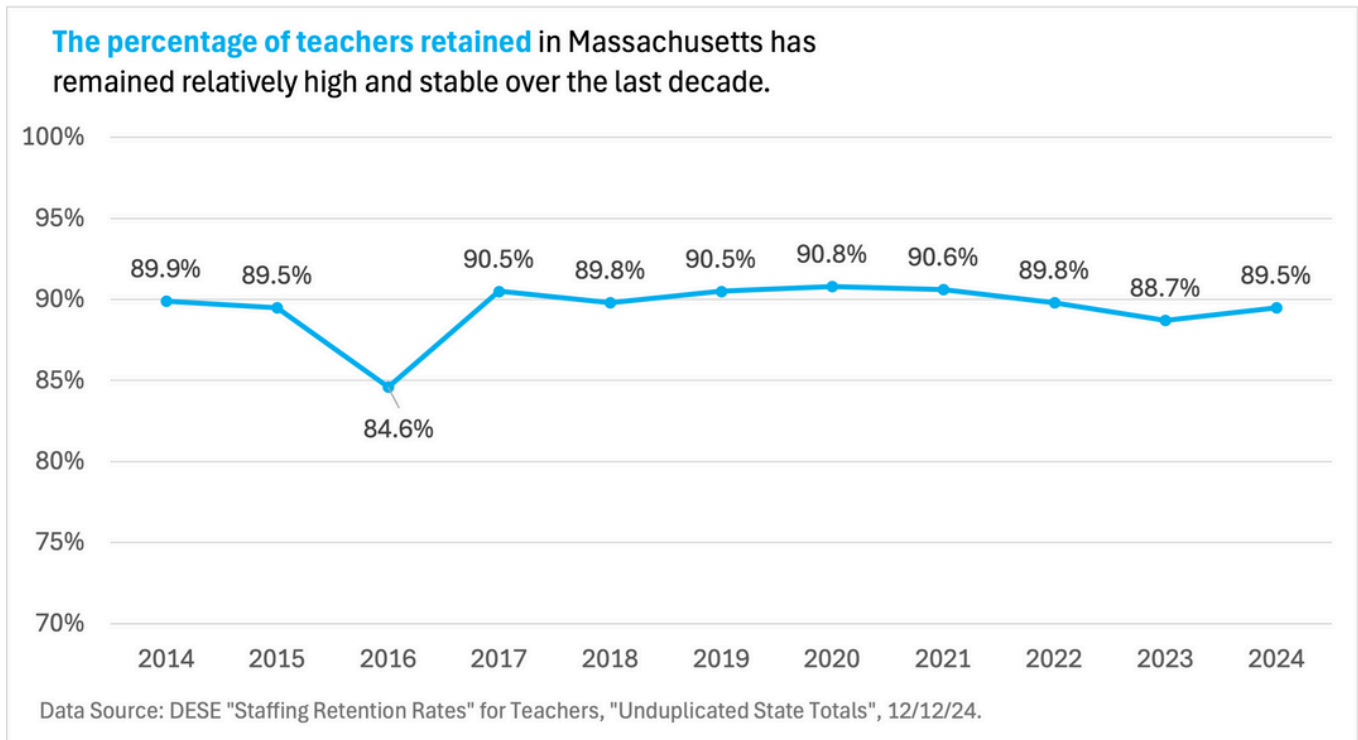


DATA ANALYSIS: RETENTION

What does the data say about teacher retention in Massachusetts?

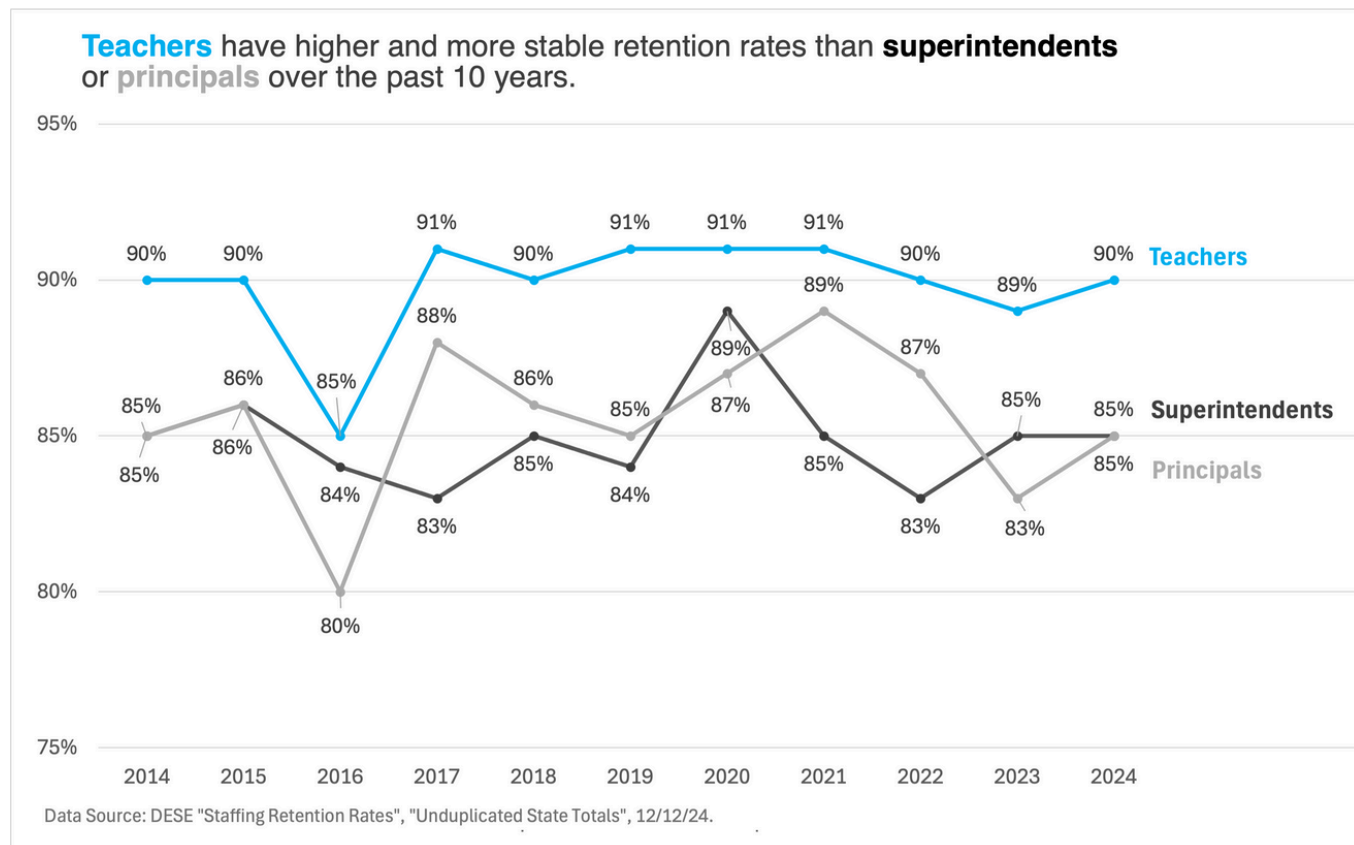
Teacher retention has remained high over the past decade, including during COVID-19.

Massachusetts has maintained a high teacher retention rate—defined as teachers remaining in the same position anywhere in the state from one year to the next—despite experiencing a significant decline in 2016. Interestingly, the highest retention rate was in 2020, the same year as the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among teachers who stayed through the end of school in June 2020, 90.8% remained in their positions at the start of the next school year. Although yearly national data is unavailable, the most recent available figures from 2021-22 show that Massachusetts outperformed the national average, with a retention rate of 90.6% compared to 84% nationwide.



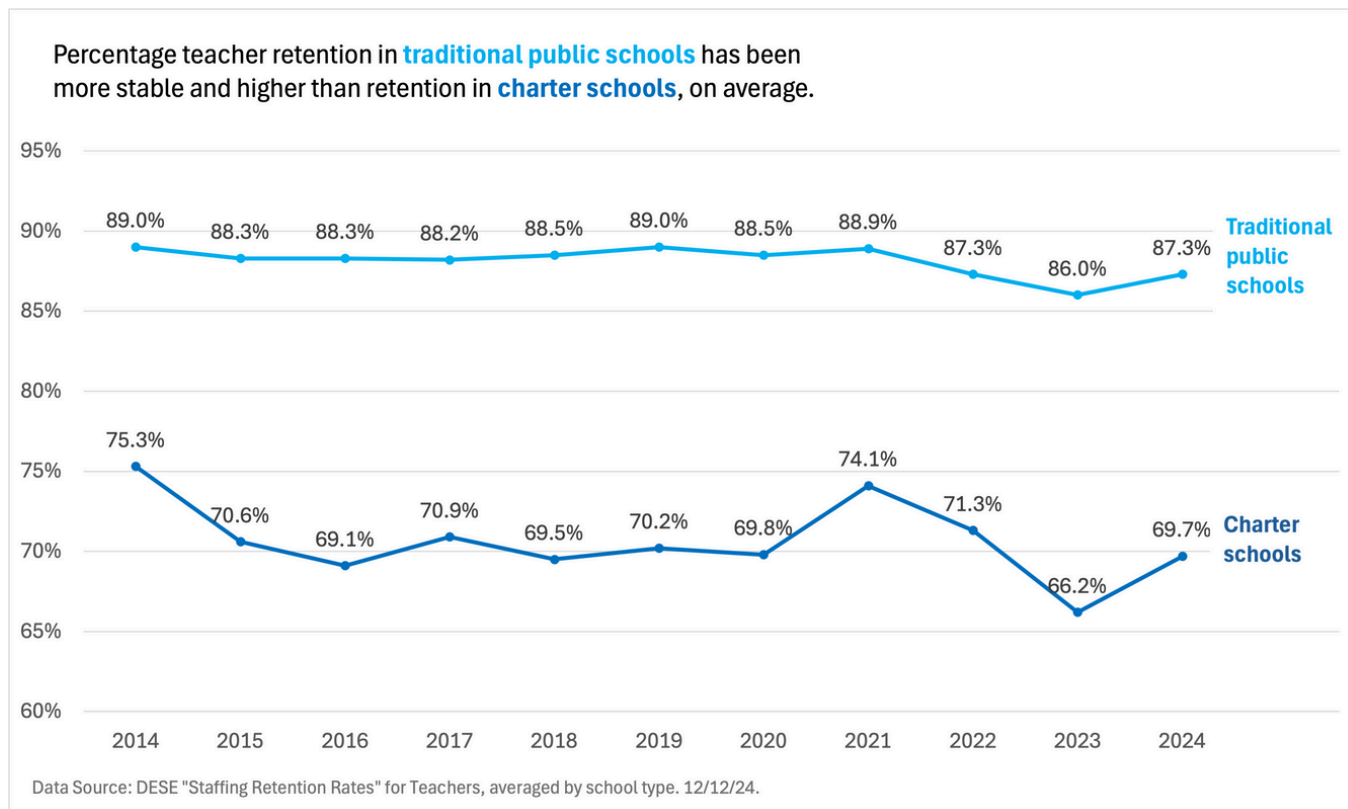
Teachers have higher and more stable retention rates than school principals or superintendents.

While teacher retention rates have stayed near 90% over the past decade, principal retention rates varied from 80% in 2016 to 89% in 2021. Similarly, retention among superintendents peaked at 89% in 2020 and hit a low of 83% in 2017 and 2022. These differences underscore the importance of implementing targeted policy interventions designed to address the unique retention challenges of each role.



Teacher retention in traditional public schools is more stable and typically higher than retention in charter schools.

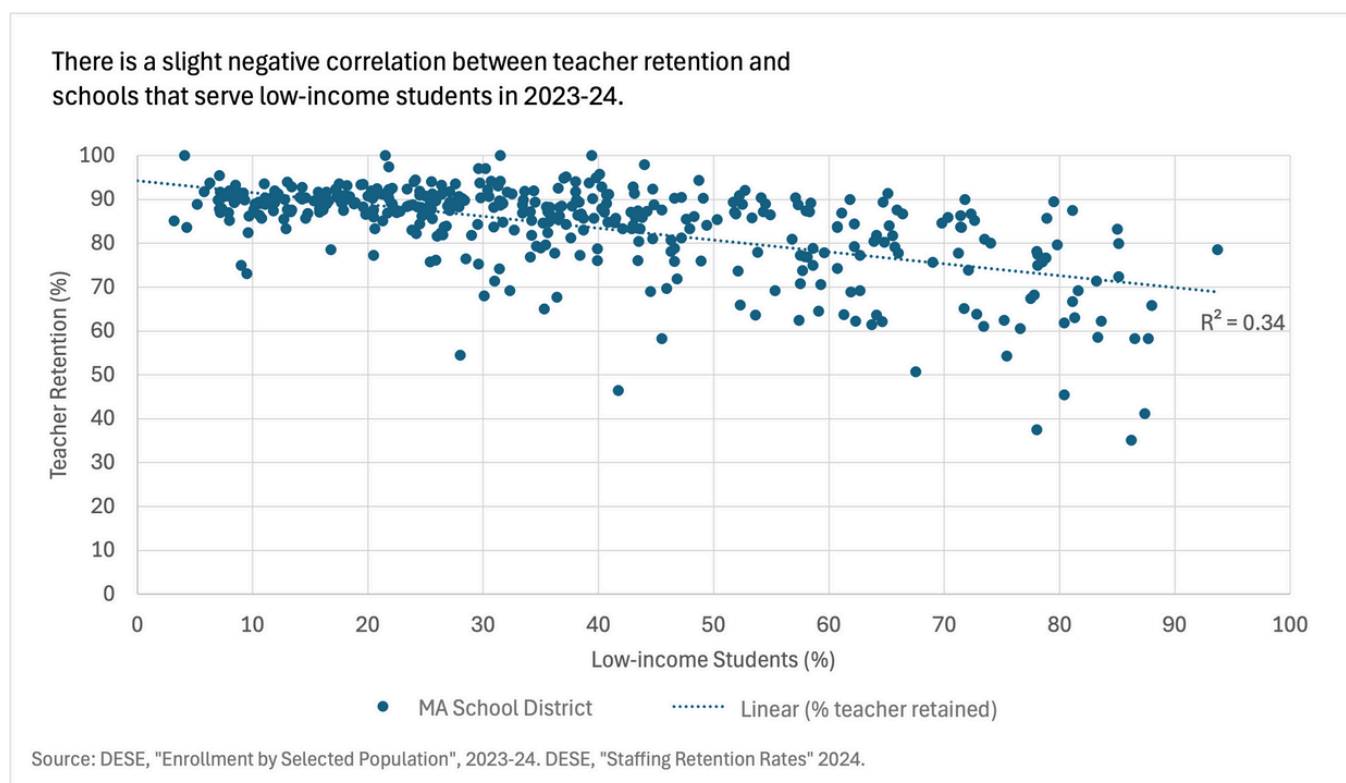
On average, teacher retention in traditional public schools was 17% higher than in charter schools over the last ten years. In 2023, both charter and traditional public schools reported their lowest teacher retention rates, at 66.2% and 86%, respectively. These figures indicate that there may be differing factors that impact teacher retention in charter schools compared to public schools, suggesting the need for tailored policy approaches.



Note that this graph shows average retention rates within individual charter and traditional public schools aggregated to produce state totals. In contrast, the earlier state retention graph uses unduplicated state totals that account for teachers moving among schools to avoid misrepresenting teachers who moved job locations but remained in Massachusetts.

There is a slight negative correlation between teacher retention and schools that serve low-income students.

As the proportion of low-income students increases, teacher retention slightly decreases. However, there isn't a strong relationship between the two, as shown by a low R-squared value, meaning that only 34% of the variation in teacher retention can be explained by the proportion of low-income students. This suggests that other factors also play a significant role in influencing retention. The finding indicates that initiatives aiming to retain teachers in schools serving predominantly low-income students may be somewhat effective, but they won't address the full picture of teacher retention.



CURRENT POLICIES

What policies currently exist to improve teacher recruitment and retention?

Recruitment and retention have been a focal point of both national and state conversation in the past decade, especially post-COVID. Massachusetts offers the following types of programs and policies aimed at improving teacher recruitment and retention.

Recruitment:

- **Alternative certification pathways:**

- Massachusetts recently joined a growing number of states that offer alternative pathways to teacher certification in an effort to recruit educators from diverse backgrounds. The passage of the Educator Diversity Act in December 2024 aimed to expand alternative paths to certification to attract a more diverse teaching workforce and address recruitment challenges. This legislation eases certification requirements for some candidates and districts, including testing requirements such as the MTEL. Additionally, in 2023, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education allowed teachers to obtain a provisional license in a new field to help fill teacher vacancies in English as a second language and special education roles.

- **Financial incentives:**

- Massachusetts teachers can earn signing bonuses, grants and scholarships, and student loan forgiveness, all of which aim to attract more individuals to the profession.

- **Teacher residency programs:**

- Residency programs available in a handful of districts and schools provide new teachers with hands-on classroom experience alongside a mentor teacher (usually for a full school year) while completing coursework. Some programs, like the Framingham Teacher Residency, offer enhanced levels of support: participants can receive living stipends, full-tuition scholarships, educational awards, and mentorship in exchange for a commitment to teach in the district after graduation.

Retention:

- **Support for new teachers:**

- DESE offers induction and mentoring programs for new teachers, including funding for districts to pay mentor stipends, provide materials, and hire consultants to develop and/or implement the program.

- **Professional Development:**

- The Career Advancement Program Tuition Waiver offers teachers who have been in the classroom for three years a tuition-free graduate course for each year of service. The initiative is aimed at the first three years in education as a key timeframe for teacher retention.

- **Support for educators of color:**

- DESE-sponsored programs such as Influence 100, the Aspiring Principals Fellowship, and the Teacher Diversification Guidebook aim to recruit and support educators of color.

NEXT STEPS

How can Massachusetts improve teacher recruitment and retention?

Expand teacher residency programs to improve enrollment in educator preparation programs.

Data demonstrates that enrollment in teacher preparation programs has declined by half over the past decade, hurting the teacher pipeline. Massachusetts offers over 70 approved teacher preparation programs including various teacher residency programs, but this variety may result in inconsistent support and education for candidates. Expanding teacher residency programs, which emphasize hands-on learning, mentorship, and structured support, could enhance enrollment and completion while attracting more individuals to the teaching profession. Recent data shows that enrollment in residency programs is growing, particularly among candidates of color, suggesting that these programs not only address enrollment challenges but also contribute to greater teacher diversity.

Focus on retention in charter schools.

The data indicates that teacher retention is the lowest in charter schools, with traditional public schools experiencing significantly higher retention rates over the past ten years. More research is needed to understand the mechanisms that help retain teachers in traditional public schools compared to charter schools. Depending on the findings, potential policy interventions could focus on offering additional opportunities for mentorship and professional development and sharing effective retention strategies between traditional public and charter schools.

Seek to understand why educator preparation program completion is declining in order to develop interventions that retain candidates.

Educator preparation program completion rates have been declining since 2019-20, indicating a need to better understand what is preventing enrollees from completing the program. More research is needed on the factors that may influence candidates to leave programs prior to completion. Understanding the reasons will help leaders develop policies that boost the completion rate, strengthening the teacher workforce. For instance, policies such as financial support for candidates, increased access to flexible preparation programs, and enhanced mentorship and advising may help improve completion rates.

Along with the areas described above where additional research would help shape policy solutions, the following data are needed to better understand and address challenges with teacher recruitment and retention:

- How does retention change by experience and demographics?
- Which districts have the highest number of vacancies?
- How does teacher turnover impact districts serving high-need and/or low-income students?

Looking Ahead:

The data supports the urgent need to rethink and reimagine the teaching profession. Declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs and stagnant retention rates in Massachusetts point to future challenges with the teacher pipeline. As outlined in this year's Condition of Education Action Guide, addressing these issues requires innovation—rethinking how teachers spend their time, leveraging technology to enhance learning, and redefining the role of education in a rapidly changing world. By elevating these conversations and changes, we can better support educators and the communities they serve, ensuring a more sustainable future for the teaching profession.

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