

# Leadership Preparation Programs and Teacher Shortages: Are Leaders Prepared to Address School Discipline, Trauma and Stress Related Issues?

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## Abstract

This paper examines several factors affecting teacher shortages across the United States. These factors reference school discipline, teacher trauma and teacher stress. According to several studies, teachers cite these factors as the reasons why they left, or are considering leaving the teaching profession. When examining Educational Leadership (Principal Preparation) programs, very few programs contain coursework related to school-wide discipline, teacher trauma and teacher stress. This short report paper examines the alignment between Educational Leadership preparation programs and the teacher shortage crisis. Recommendations for further research and changes to Educational Leadership Programs of study to better address the profession's current needs are proposed.

## Keywords

Teacher Shortage, Principal Preparation, School Discipline, Trauma and Stress

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## 1. Background on Teacher Shortage

Teachers play a crucial role in students' learning. Classrooms must be adequately staffed with highly qualified educators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Current news and policy reports indicate teacher shortages in many areas of the nation (e.g. Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association, 2023; Hall, 2021; Illinois State Board of Education, 2021; Learning Policy Institute, 2016). One trend affecting the shortage is decreased enrollment in teacher prep-

aration programs (Will, 2022). Other concerns include teachers' experiences with high stress, being overworked (Retta, 2021), a lack of competitive salaries, and administrators ignoring problems (Retta, 2022). The concept of "high stress" is personal and is often self-defined. What represents high stress for one individual may not be high stress for another. The effects of stress are measurable and can cause physical damage. "If schools want to retain more of their teaching staff, the biggest factor isn't necessarily salary, but rather administrative support, a study led by a Kansas State University professor found" (Garcia, 2020).

Teacher shortages are especially alarming in subject areas, such as Mathematics, Science and Special Education. A greater impact is seen in hard-to-staff schools (Aragon, 2016; Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). Teacher shortages often harm students and schools because many positions are left vacant or filled with less competent or uncertified individuals. According to Castro et al. (2018), schools with persistent teacher shortages are likely to experience lower levels of achievement among students and less favorable overall student outcomes. This can have a long-term impact on the educational careers and economic potential of students. Furthermore, these schools are likely to invest more time and resources in replacing their temporary hires because underqualified and underprepared teachers are more likely to leave the profession (Nguyen et al., 2020).

In response to shortages, states and districts have issued emergency and probationary certificates, hired teachers uncertified to teach in their subject area, canceled courses, employed substitute teachers to fill teaching positions, and left essential roles open throughout the school year (Aragon, 2016; Castro et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Additionally, some states have significantly lowered certification and substitute teacher qualification standards, asked retired teachers to return to the classroom, used administrators for teaching duties, requested parental assistance, and even used the National Guard in the classroom due to the growing staffing issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (Jung, 2020; Examiner, 2022; Newark Board of Education, 2022). Little research has been conducted on the impact of school leadership preparation on the interplay of school discipline, teacher trauma and teacher stress.

## 2. Where are the Teacher Shortages?

According to university.com, the "Top Ten States with the Worst Teacher Shortages" include:

- 1) California;
- 2) Nevada;
- 3) Washington;
- 4) Arizona;
- 5) Hawaii;
- 6) Indiana;
- 7) District of Columbia (Washington DC);
- 8) Virginia;

- 9) Montana; and
- 10) Nebraska (Harris, 2023).

**Table 1** provides data on the largest public university in each state with the largest teacher shortage. Data related to course offerings (school discipline, trauma and stress) for education leaders (School Principals) is also provided. Preliminary data suggest that educational leaders are not receiving coursework related to school discipline, trauma or stress. The American Psychological Association (APA) is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States, with more than 146,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students as its members. The APA defines trauma and stress as:

**Trauma** is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea (American Psychological Association, 2021; Croft et al., 2019).

**Stress** is a normal reaction to everyday pressures, but can become unhealthy when it upsets your day-to-day functioning. Stress involves changes affecting nearly every system of the body, influencing how people feel and behave (American Psychological Association, 2023; Embse et al., 2019).

**School discipline** refers to the rules and strategies applied in school to manage student behavior and practices used to encourage self-discipline (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2011).

**Table 1.** Largest public university by state-discipline, trauma and stress course offerings.

		Largest Public University with Total Enrollment	Program	Offers School Discipline Coursework	Offers Trauma Coursework	Offers Stress Coursework
1	California	University of the People (off-campus) 56,292	Master of Education in Advanced Teaching (University of the People, n.d.)	No School Discipline—Classroom Mgmt EDUC 5240 Creating Positive Classroom Environments	No	No
2	Nevada	University of Nevada-Las Vegas 30,679	Master of Education—Educational Policy and Leadership (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2016)	No	No	No
3	Washington	University of Washington-Seattle Campus 52,434	Leadership for Learning Program (UW College of Education, n.d.)	No	No	No

## Continued

4	Arizona	Grand Canyon University 103,072	Master's in Education Leadership (MEd Degree) (GCU, n.d.)	Yes Creating and sustaining positive school cultures	No	No
5	Hawaii	University of Hawaii at Manoa 19,098	Aloha 'Āina Education and Leadership (College of Education, 2022)	No	No	No
6	Indiana	Purdue University-Main Campus 50,344	Educational Leadership and Policy Studies—Building Level Admin. License (Purdue University College of Education, n.d.)	No	No	No
7	District of Columbia (Washington DC)	George Washington University 26,457	Master's in Educational Leadership and Administration (The Graduate School of Education and Human Development, n.d.)	No	No	No
8	Virginia	Liberty University 94,709	Master's in Education Administration and Supervision (Team, n.d.)	No	No	No
9	Montana	Montana State University 16,788	Masters in Principal Preparation (Montana State University, n.d.)	No	No	No
10	Nebraska	University of Nebraska-Lincoln 24,431	Educational Administration—P-12 School Leadership (College of Education and Human Sciences, n.d.)	Yes EDAD 852: School Culture and Behavior	No	No

Note: The 50 Largest US Colleges and Universities (n.d.).

### 3. Additional Research

Per the authors' conclusion, additional research is needed to fully examine the depth of the misalignment between teacher support/needs and the level of preparation/capacity that educational leaders have. The Leadership Preparation research may include:

- School Discipline and Leadership Preparation;
- Social Emotional Learning, Impact of Poverty—homelessness, drug use..., Building Positive School Cultures, Understanding Social factors affecting the school community and Leadership Preparation;
- Teacher Trauma (Identifying and Mitigating the Effects of Primary and Secondary Trauma) and Leadership Preparation; and
- Teacher Stress (Identifying and Mitigating the Effects of Stress) and Leadership Preparation.
- ...

### 4. Conclusion/Recommendations

With the alarming number of individuals leaving the teaching profession and the lack of individuals entering the profession, practitioners, researchers and policymakers must examine the factors that are exacerbating the problem. Research suggests that school discipline, trauma and stress are leading factors. Educational leaders are responsible for increasing student achievement, providing a safe and supportive learning environment and a host of other charges. Embedded within this is the need to support teachers academically, mentally and professionally to address the challenges associated with our contemporary educational systems.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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