



The Multifaceted Crisis in U.S. Education

And a Path Forward



I. Abstract

The U.S. education system seems to currently be facing a complex and self-reinforcing crisis. This document examines four interconnected issues: **a severe teacher shortage, a growing student mental health crisis, the challenges of integrating new technology, and persistent funding instability.** These challenges are not isolated but rather form a destructive cycle: teacher burnout is exacerbated by underfunding and by a surge in student mental health needs, while unstable policy and a digital divide create new inequities. And the proper response to that might actually be a three-pronged solution, centered on robust investment and policy reform, comprehensive professional development and support, and a commitment to more rounded student care. By addressing these challenges together, we should be able to work toward a more resilient, equitable and effective educational system that supports both students and educators.

II. An Examination of the Teacher Shortage and Retention Crisis

The nationwide teacher shortage is a critical threat to educational quality. A mid-2025 analysis found that at least 411,549 teaching positions were either vacant or filled by teachers who were not fully certified for their role, across 48 states and the District of Columbia [1]. This represents approximately 1 in 8 of all teaching positions nationwide. The issue is not just a lack of new recruits. At least, not with enrollment in teacher preparation programs dropping by approximately 100,000 candidates between 2012–13 and 2014–15, but also with high attrition [2].

In fact, less than one-fifth of teachers who leave the profession are retiring; the majority are leaving for other careers, seeking higher salaries, or due to dissatisfaction. The most severe and persistent shortages are in special education (45 states), science (41 states), and math (40 states), which have had consistent shortages since at least the 1990s [3].

While educators cannot solve these systemic problems alone, they can adopt strategies to manage their workload and combat burnout.

Practical Actions for Educators

To deal with teacher shortage and retention, we have shortlisted a few considerations that we believe would yield some really practical long term improvements. And some of them might start showing results much sooner than most of us would think:

- **Set Clear Boundaries:** It is critical to separate work from personal life. Educators would be wise to designate a specific time each day to stop working and stick to it, avoiding bringing work home if at all possible. This intentional break allows for personal time to recharge, which is important in dealing with burnout, PTSD and the resulting attrition rates.
- **Prioritize Ruthlessly:** Not all tasks have the same impact. Before taking on a new task or project, educators could evaluate each one, by questioning its purpose and its impact on student outcomes. Learning to say "no" to non-essential duties that will only add to their stress, and do not have a significant positive effect on students, is equally important in dealing with burnout and dissatisfaction.
- **Use Data to One's Advantage:** Educators can use student data from low-stakes quizzes and observations, to quickly identify where students are struggling. This helps to adjust teaching methods on the fly and prevents the need for extensive, time-consuming summative assessments and reteaching. It has the potential to save significant administrative time.





III. Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis

The mental health of students is a profound and worsening crisis. And there are plenty of reasons why that is happening. From the fast-paced lifestyle to the competitive nature of nearly every community students participate in, to the extended lockdown periods during the CoVid pandemic, and so much more. And with educators suffering from burnout at such high rates, students are often struggling to find some valuable help in dealing with whatever troubles them.

So, nearly 60% of students report experiencing daily stress, often about school-related issues, and data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that 40% of high school students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Additionally, a Pew Research Center study found that 68% of teens feel a great deal of pressure to get good grades [4]. This academic and social pressure, often amplified by digital technology, is contributing to alarming rates of anxiety and depression among young people. According to a report from research.com, about 3 in 10 teenagers (ages 13-17) confirmed that anxiety and depression were common in their schools [5].

Despite this growing need, the national average student-to-counselor ratio for the 2023-2024 school year was 376:1 [6], which is significantly higher than the recommended 250:1 ratio from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). While educators are not mental health professionals, they are on the front lines of this crisis and can create a more supportive classroom environment.

Practical Actions for Educators

To help students ease out of that situation, we have shortlisted a few considerations that could prove catalytic for teachers in their efforts to foster a supportive environment for all parties. Students get a helping hand with their struggles, and educators get to improve the classroom environment, avoiding burnout in the process.

- **Prioritize Relationships:** Educators can benefit from building strong, positive relationships with students. A trusting relationship can make a student feel safe enough to confide in them. Small, one-on-one check-ins can make a significant difference.
- **Integrate Mindfulness:** The introduction of short, simple mindfulness practices into the daily routine could also help. Just a few minutes of deep breathing or quiet reflection can help students manage stress and regulate their emotions.
- **Partner with Professionals:** Establishing a clear protocol for referring students to the school counselor or other mental health professionals is key to being able to help students in the best possible way available. To do that, educators can work with administrators to understand the available resources and the best way to get students the help they need.

IV. The Evolving Role of Technology in the Classroom

Technology is rapidly transforming the classroom, with the global AI in the education market valued at approximately \$6.90 billion in 2025; and projected to reach \$41.01 billion by 2030 [7]. While this presents exciting opportunities, it also exposes deep-seated inequities and a critical need for teacher training. For example, a significant portion of students still lack adequate access to technology at home, with only 89% of American Indian/Alaska Native children and 96% of Black children having access to the internet, compared to 97% or higher for White and Asian children [8]. This digital divide exacerbates existing achievement gaps. Furthermore, while the use of generative AI tools among undergraduate students jumped to 88%, a survey found that only 36% of students had received formal training in AI skills from their institution [7], highlighting a clear need for increased digital literacy instruction.

Given these challenges, educators should approach technology not as a panacea, but as a tool to support their teaching goals, also mitigating the student idling effect that seems to go hand-in-hand with the onset of AI-generated essays and assignments.

Practical Actions for Educators

More knowledge typically translates to less fear. Less fear typically translates to a facilitated teaching process. This can also mean significantly less emotional distress for both educators and students. And if technology can offer that, we can all benefit from it. That's why we've shortlisted a few considerations in relation to the latest technological advances available:

- **Start Small and Be Intentional:** As counter-intuitive as it might seem, it doesn't really help to try to use every new app and platform. Instead, educators can select one or two tools that directly support their learning objectives. Students will appreciate the simplicity.
- **Use AI for Efficiency:** Educators can leverage AI to handle time-consuming tasks like creating quizzes, generating lesson plans, or summarizing long articles. This will allow them to reclaim valuable time for one-on-one student interaction and creative lesson design.
- **Teach Digital Literacy:** We believe that the most important skill we can teach students in a tech-driven world is not how to use a specific app, but how to be a responsible digital citizen. Educators can teach them how to evaluate online sources, recognize AI-generated content, and understand the importance of data privacy.





V. Examining Funding and Policy Instability

Education funding remains a persistent and divisive issue. The reliance on local property taxes creates vast disparities, which directly impacts student outcomes and perpetuates systemic inequities. A report by The Education Trust found that school districts with the highest concentrations of Black and Latino students receive substantially less funding (as much as \$2,700 per student) compared to districts with the fewest students of color [9]. This can amount to a funding gap of \$13.5 million for a 5,000-student district. This underfunding is directly linked to lower student achievement in schools with large populations of low-income students [10]. Furthermore, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has highlighted challenges in federal education programs, noting that agencies and schools often face difficulties with inconsistent policy implementation and a lack of long-term funding commitments [11].

While educators may not be able to influence national policy directly, they can advocate for change and work to build resilience within their own communities.

Practical Actions for Educators

Advocating for change and working to build resilience have their own challenges. Oftentimes it's important to be able to present evidence of problems and evidence of work. Technology can also help with that. For example, AI can help summarize student progress and behaviors, indicating patterns. An educator would have to put in extreme effort before they could identify issues and patterns like that for each student. A digital workflow can help significantly lower administrative costs and minimize errors, while offering a more direct and complete image for each student, in real time. For example, weighted grades can be calculated instantly with each change in a student's academic results. But all of that requires funding. That's why we've put together a shortlist of practical considerations to help with just that:

- **Advocate for Your School:** Educators can actually get involved in local and state-level policy discussions. One might join teacher unions or professional organizations that lobby for more equitable funding and stable educational policies. And that would potentially offer opportunities to present clear evidence of why and how proper funding and its resulting actions would help the community in the long term.
- **Seek Community Partnerships:** This is a less direct approach but educators can look for local businesses, non-profits, or community groups that can provide resources or funding for their classroom. A strong community network can help offset budget shortfalls and provide students with valuable opportunities they might otherwise miss out on. This type of outreach may offer temporary or permanent solutions to specific parts of the budget plan.

- **Use Data to Tell a Story:** If educators can collect and share data on how funding shortages are impacting students, there could be more people in that chain that would be willing to listen. Using specific examples, such as a lack of mental health resources or outdated technology, can help illustrate the need for change. This approach personalizes the issue and makes a more compelling case for action. In other words, it helps busy people better understand the problem, faster.

So are these four issues actually interconnected?

Interconnected, indeed!

With proper funding, technology and infrastructure is available to more educators and more students towards eradicating inequities, administrative tasks can be automated and minimized, errors reduced to the absolute minimum, double copies and constant cross-reference eliminated, and workload burnout virtually averted. If educators can save time to do their actual jobs, stress levels drop back down to normal and, with the vicious cycle broken, students can eventually get the help they need, to learn and become productive members of their communities.



Did you find this guide helpful?

Share it with someone else!



Citations:

1. Tan, T. S., Comai, S., & Patrick, S. K. (2025). *State teacher shortages 2025 update: "Teaching positions left vacant or filled by teachers without full certification"*. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved on August 26, 2025 from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/state-teacher-shortages-vacancy-resource-tool-2025>
2. Learning Policy Institute. (2025). *"An Overview of Teacher Shortages: 2025"*. Retrieved on August 26, 2025 from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/overview-teacher-shortages-2025-factsheet>
3. U.S. Department of Education. (2024-2025). *"Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing"*. Retrieved on August 26, 2025 from <https://www.ncsl.org/education/teacher-shortage-areas-by-state>
4. Pew Research Center, February 2019, *"Most U.S. Teens See Anxiety and Depression as a Major Problem Among Their Peers"*. Retrieved on August 26, 2025 from <https://www.nabp.org/pew-research-center-report-most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/>
5. Research.com. (2025). *"50 Current Student Stress Statistics: 2025 Data, Analysis & Predictions"*. Retrieved on August 26, 2025 from <https://research.com/education/student-stress-statistics>
6. American School Counselor Association (ASCA). *"School Counselor Roles & Ratios"*. Retrieved on August 26, 2025 from <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/about-school-counseling/school-counselor-roles-ratios>
7. Mordor Intelligence. *"AI in Education Market Size, Trends & Growth"*. Retrieved on August 27, 2025 from <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/ai-in-education-market>
8. National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *"Children's Internet Access at Home. Condition of Education"*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved on August 28, 2025 from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cch/home-internet-access>
9. The Education Trust. *"School Districts That Serve Students of Color Receive Significantly Less Funding"*. Retrieved on August 28, 2025 from <https://edtrust.org/press-room/school-districts-that-serve-students-of-color-receive-significantly-less-funding/>
10. Education Law Center. *"The Color of Opportunity"*. Retrieved on August 28, 2025 from <https://edlawcenter.org/research/the-color-of-opportunity/>
11. U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). *"GAO reports on education funding and policy"*. Retrieved on August 28, 2025 from <https://www.gao.gov/topics/education>