

# Why Teach? Challenges, Rewards, and Future Considerations for the Profession

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## Abstract

*Teaching is a challenging yet rewarding career. To better support teacher candidates in our educator preparation program and prepare them for their future teaching careers, this study examined the perspectives of 133 experienced teachers collected through individual interviews with teacher candidates. Results revealed the challenges and rewards of teaching within three major themes: 1) Challenges and unrealistic teacher demands, 2) bonding with students, and 3) collaboration and team spirit in planning. This study presents a comprehensive picture of the reality of teaching and offers recommendations for policy changes to better support and recruit teachers to the profession.*

Keywords: challenges, rewards, teaching profession, educator preparation, teacher candidates

While a career in teaching notoriously has its challenges, it also can provide meaningful rewards, such as the opportunity to “significantly change students’ lives” and to contribute positively to society (Marion University, 2022, p. 1). During the pandemic, the educational environment shifted for millions of students, educators, and families, and it could be argued that the public became more keenly aware of how difficult the profession can be, as well as the demands that teachers face daily (Hargreaves, 2021; US Government Accountability Office, 2002). Simultaneously, the public learned of its dependence on our teachers and the importance of their expertise and skill, perhaps for the very first time (Hargreaves, 2021). Public understanding of democracy’s dependence upon an educated citizenry highlights the need for meaningful discussions concerning attracting highly educated and fully qualified people to the field.

Because statistics show there is a teacher shortage and that many educators continue to leave the field in the first five years (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2018; National Education Association [NEA], 2009; Sutchter et al., 2016), the first step to recruitment and retention of highly skilled educators is understanding what current teachers perceive to be the challenges and rewards of their chosen career. It is equally important that teacher candidates (TCs), who are just beginning their undergraduate education courses, realize what the profession entails before they enter the field. To address these two areas, an assignment to interview classroom teachers by TCs was included in an initial education course at a rural university in East Texas. TCs interviewed an in-service classroom teacher of their choosing who taught children from birth through age 12. Survey questions attempted to examine teacher perceptions regarding the challenges and rewards of their jobs, their educational background and professional development requirements in

the field, and their approach to lesson planning. This assignment also gave TCs an authentic “peek” into the career they were pursuing.

## Literature Review

### Teacher Challenges

There is a growing need for fully certified teachers, yet attrition appears to be a driving force in our current teacher shortage (Geiger et al., 2018). The recent pandemic appears to have exacerbated this national trend (McMurdock, 2022). Although difficult to measure with specificity (Saenz-Armstrong, 2022), it seems clear teachers are leaving the profession in concerning numbers (Edsall, 2022; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Geiger et al., 2018; Nguyen, Lam, & Bruno, 2022). According to a study at Brown University, “the current state of the teaching profession is at or near its lowest levels in 50 years” due to a sustained drop that began in 2010 (Kraft & Lyon, 2022, p. 1). Many variables contribute to this trend, including poor working conditions, unrealistic expectations or responsibilities, and low pay (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Kraft & Lyon, 2022).

Stress and burnout have long been cited as problems within the field, and teachers continue to point to stress as a large factor in why they leave the profession (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Brunsting et al., 2014). Stress can be the result of a lack of support, large class sizes, administrative issues, and poor working conditions, which can include elements such as limited respect and collaboration (Banerjee et al., 2017; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Brunsting et al., 2014; French, 1993; Grissom, 2011; Kraft & Lyon, 2022; Moriarty et al., 2001). All this stress, which leads to burnout, negatively impacts student learning (Herman et al., 2018; Najarro, 2022). This becomes problematic for teachers who care very much about their students’ learning.

“Beginning teachers, regardless of their race, have among the highest rates of turnover of any group of teachers” (Ingersoll et al., 2018, p. 22), with 44% of teachers leaving within the first five years. It is possible that these beginning teachers have unrealistic expectations about what actually takes place in the classroom each day and may not be fully aware of the myriad responsibilities that come with the job. What is certain is that teachers are

expected to plan effective lessons, meet accountability goals, complete mounds of paperwork, and possibly more difficult, as our study revealed, differentiate learning for the various needs of each individual student in their care (Dixon et al., 2014). All these responsibilities can make teaching an occupation with a heavier workload than many other professions, especially given the low pay (Hooftman et al., 2015; NEA, 2023). As one 8<sup>th</sup>-grade Science teacher stated, “This is a noble profession, but we’re under-appreciated and underpaid. You deal with that on a daily basis, and it’s a hard pill to swallow” (NEA, 2023, p. 3). Yet, as this study seems to have confirmed, many persist as there are other rewards that appear to draw them to or keep them in the field. Teachers do care about their students and want to make a difference in their lives.

### Rewards of Teaching

Teaching can be highly satisfying despite the concerning challenges that have been mentioned. Teachers may be drawn into the field for various reasons, all of which can be altruistic, intrinsic, or extrinsic (Bastik, 2000; Dunder, 2014). Reasons include the ability to contribute to society, the opportunity to make a positive impact on student lives, to build relationships, teach students a new concept or skill, teach a particular subject in which one has an interest, engage in collaborative teamwork, and the opportunity for continuous personal growth and development (Dunder, 2014; Santucci & Will, 2022; Sinclair, 2008; Younger et al., 2004). Many teachers have an admirable ambition to “significantly change students’ lives” and to positively contribute to society (Marion University, 2022, p. 1). However, according to C. Kirabo Jackson, a professor at Northwestern University, many gifts from teachers fail to be recognized as they are not easily measured or noticed (as cited in Terada, 2019). Regardless, as Jackson suggests, teachers are elated when they can make even small incremental changes in a student’s life, such as improving the ability to self-regulate and adapt; this can have a powerful impact on the student’s learning resulting in higher grades, the ability to graduate, and, ultimately, move on to more positive outcomes in the future (as cited in Terada, 2019). All these things help the students and our society move forward, which can be so rewarding for the teacher.

Teachers may also find joy in building relationships with students and their families and in watching their

students grow and learn new skills and concepts over many years. Teacher Timothy Hilton stated, “Building relationships with students is by far the most important thing a teacher can do. Without a solid foundation and relationships built on trust and respect, no quality learning will happen” (as cited in Ferlazzo, 2018, p. 2). Huberman (1993) found that teachers gained pleasure or satisfaction from having contact with and teaching students, facilitating and promoting student learning, and sharing their passion for a particular subject with others. Repeatedly, the literature documents that teachers view working with children, watching them learn, and nurturing their growth as positive aspects of their job (Cockburn, 2000; Cohn, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Perrachione et al., 2008).

Finally, engaging in collaborative teamwork and continually growing and learning with others in the field can also be a perceived benefit of teaching. Again, numerous researchers have found that teachers appeared to have greater job satisfaction when they were able to collaborate and work with others (Cockburn, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Klecker & Loadman, 1999), where they were able to hone their own professional practices in alignment with others continually (Meek, 1998).

Continual learning can be achieved in many ways, including professional development. Professional development can help teachers become more proficient in many areas and can equip them to handle changes in the fields or keep up to date on new subject-related or classroom-related strategies. Although continual learning can be related to job satisfaction, when it comes to professional development, it should be thoughtfully considered so that it has relevance and value to teachers and is not just one more required thing that has been added to their already busy plate (Matherson & Windle, 2017). Equally, time becomes an issue if too many workshops are planned after a long day at work.

## Research Purpose

Given the current issues with recruiting and retaining highly trained teachers and the need to better prepare teacher candidates for their future careers in education, the current study explored what is happening in today’s classrooms by interviewing 133 experienced in-service teachers’ perspectives on being a teacher. Specifically, we investigated the challenges they experience as a teacher,

their favorite aspects of being a teacher, their educational preparation and professional growth, and their approach to lesson planning.

## Methods

This is an exploratory study that is qualitative in research design. Preliminary data were collected by the teacher candidates through individual interviews with actual, in-service classroom teachers who were working with children from birth to age 12. This was a required teacher education prep course assignment for TC seeking early childhood – 6<sup>th</sup>-grade teacher certification (EC-6). The teacher candidates were expected to interview anyone of their choosing, with the requirement that the in-service teacher was currently teaching and serving students birth-age 12 or EC-6<sup>th</sup> grade. This assignment occurred early in the teacher education program.

Data sources include 133 in-service teachers’ responses to the interview questions. Of the participants, 47 teachers were interviewed before the COVID pandemic, and 86 teachers were interviewed during and after the pandemic. The teachers interviewed were mostly female. Most of these teachers ( $n=121$ , or 91%) had earned a bachelor’s degree, passed the required certification tests, and were certified to teach in the field. Among these 121 teachers, 17 of them were alternatively certified, and 14 had obtained their master’s degrees. Eight teachers had either a high school diploma, associate degree, or child development associate (CDA) credential. Four teachers did not specify their educational requirements. The grade levels the participants were teaching ranged from Pre-kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. However, it is important to note that, upon analysis, it was found that three teacher candidates interviewed educators beyond this age range; one educator who was teaching 7<sup>th</sup> grade, one in middle school, and one in high school. Although years of teaching experience were not requested as one of the interview questions, some of the teachers indicated that they had more than 30 years of teaching experience.

There were six open-ended interview questions that were given to the 133 in-service teachers by the teacher candidates. The interviews could take place in person, by Zoom, or by telephone. The interviews were approximately 10-15 minutes in length and targeted questions about perceived challenges and rewards of teaching, educational

obtainment, professional development participation, lesson planning, and where they found ideas for their lessons and teaching. Responses were recorded in written format and then submitted to the course online platform.

Data were analyzed using open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to reveal major themes represented in the data. Researchers individually coded the data and looked for patterns within the data sets. During the initial stages of data coding, interrater reliability was calculated by randomly selecting 25% of the data and assigning it to researchers to code separately. The interrater reliability showed high agreement among researchers with an alpha of .85. Researchers continued to code the rest of the data. During the coding process, researchers met, compared, and then discussed the similarities and differences among the codes for further analysis. After the completion of data coding, the researchers discussed the categories that emerged during the analysis based on their frequencies and combined similar categories to develop the final themes.

### **Preliminary Findings**

#### **Challenges and Unrealistic Teacher Demands**

As identified in our study, the teachers interviewed faced many challenges during their daily teaching. The most frequently mentioned challenges were Meeting the needs of individual students, behavior management and guidance, and the countless expected professional development hours.

Meeting individual student needs, in terms of differentiating instruction and managing social and emotional needs, was listed as the greatest challenge for most teachers. During the interview conversations, teachers often provided similar responses, such as challenges with “meeting each child's individual learning needs to get them to where they need to be. There will always be kids ahead and kids behind. It can be a struggle to find a way to make sure each is getting the attention they need.” Also mentioned often during interview conversations were concerns such as “making accommodations for multiple different students while being expected to uphold the school's policy and standards.” These teachers were trying to provide quality education to ensure the success of every

student in their classroom but struggled to meet their diverse needs in academic and social-emotional growth.

Behavior management and guidance were other areas of difficulty that surfaced as a theme among these teachers. One teacher said the most challenging thing was “dealing with challenging behaviors. Most of the stories behind the behaviors are heartbreaking. As a teacher, sometimes I worry more about how the child is doing outside of school than I do inside of school. This year has been challenging because a lot of the students have so much going on, and it is hard for them to focus on school and make it a priority.” One teacher also expressed her challenge with “trying to navigate through the many behaviors that young preschool children present.”

Teachers indicated that teaching was not their only job description; in addition to their daily teaching responsibilities, the core task of teachers required them to take care of multiple state and district mandates, such as professional development training after school and on weekends and changing requirements to make additional curricular modifications, etc. One teacher summarized this reality:

“I am not only a teacher at school. I wish that I could only teach at school and go home and forget, but instead, I teach 24/7. The work is never-ending... Also, you are never just a teacher because you are serving in so many ways. There is a lot of paperwork involved, not only in school but in the district as well. So, you are not just a teacher. You just try to do your best in everything and to the best of your abilities.”

As a result, some teachers were challenged by the difficulty of “finding time in the day to fit everything in (during) the time we have the students.”

Professional development (PD) can be a great learning opportunity for teachers to keep up with changes in curriculum and updates in teacher knowledge and pedagogy. Participant responses to the question about their PD training varied from subject-related training (i.e., literacy, Neuhaus/Dyslexia, math, technology, science, social studies, and music) to pedagogy-or other-related workshops and training (i.e., curriculum, assessment, cooperative learning, professional learning communities

(PLCs), learning disabilities, gifted and talented, classroom management, self-care, child abuse, mental health, and CPR.) However, from what we've discovered from these teachers, it seems like they participated in so many professional development classes, seminars, and workshops that it could be overwhelming. One teacher reflected, "Oh wow! A TON! There's no way I can list everything because I can't even remember them all. I can't even remember the names of them." Another teacher mentioned much professional development training and explained that "we are required to take PD over the summer and have a half day every nine weeks for professional development." In addition to these, there were also PDs provided by independent school districts or school or care centers as required training or for updates.

The COVID pandemic seemed to make all the prior challenges mentioned even worse. In addition, it seemed to bring on a few new challenges. As indicated by one teacher, "There are constant needs for the students, classroom, other teachers, administration, parents, and much more. There is limited planning time in the day, and trying to keep work at work is not possible many times." During the pandemic, teachers were facing additional challenges, such as closing the achievement gap as this teacher describes:

"The most challenging thing I do as a teacher this year is what we call 'closing the gap.' The students that I teach are in first grade. Most of the students were online for almost a year during their Pre-k and Kinder years of school. For a few, this is their first experience in a classroom setting. The gaps are huge!"

### **Building Relationships with Students**

Given the abovementioned challenges, people may wonder who would want to be a teacher. However, one theme that emerged from the conversations with these in-service classroom teachers is that teaching is rewarding; one rewarding part is the close relationship between teachers and students. Teachers interviewed were very passionate about their job, and so many of them identified that the most rewarding aspect of being a teacher was bonding with students; they love their students and the reciprocal nature of interacting and bonding with them. Nurturing students seemed to provide teachers with a sense

that they were doing important work. For example, one 1<sup>st</sup>-grade teacher indicated her favorite aspect of teaching was "the relationships I have been able to build with kids. I want all of my kids to feel valued and loved and know that I care about them." Another teacher echoed this idea and stated that it was "100% relationship building. I have so much love to give, and so do the kids. Being able to truly love the kids and have a real bond with them is the best part of working with kids. A kid's love is unconditional, and that's amazing."

One teacher shared her favorite aspect of teaching very sentimentally by saying:

"From past experiences, I have noticed that building a relationship with my students comes down to discipline and creating a fun and safe environment for them. I think it is so important to have personal and genuine relationships with each of the kids in my classroom. Learning one fun fact about them and remembering it throughout the year made them feel special. I kept notes about each student. I want to provide a place where they all feel loved. I also loved coming up with different math games and activities. That was definitely my favorite subject to teach them, and watching their skills develop was amazing. I always cry on the last day of school because I love all of my students so much, every one of them."

Another teacher also emphasized that building relationships was the key to success in teaching. She indicated that

"My favorite part of teaching is building relationships with my kids and teaching life lessons throughout the school day. Of course, I love teaching my students the first-grade content; however, student-teacher relationships are the key to success in a classroom. It also helps to teach simple/common life lessons each day. For example, my first graders have learned so much about sharing, using manners, how to calm down/reset appropriately, how to ask for help, how to apologize, kid problem vs. adult problem, problem-solving, etc."

Given this type of strong relationship as a foundation, most teachers showed confidence and felt successful in teaching young children, and they felt knowledgeable and skillful in the subjects they were teaching. Many mentioned with pride the growth they would see in only a year. As indicated in the conversations, one teacher stated: “I enjoy watching students make progress and gaining independence in different areas.” Another teacher echoed: “I love building a relationship with each of my students and watching them learn and grow. I feel so blessed to be able to watch each of my students grow into amazing people.”

### **Collaboration and Team Spirit in Planning**

Another rewarding part of teaching had to do with collaboration or a “team spirit.” Teachers enjoyed team planning and supported each other to ensure the district curriculum and state standards were followed. Teachers met and discussed various ideas and supplemental resources to improve the effectiveness of individual and weekly lessons.

One teacher noted:

“I plan lessons collaboratively with my grade level team, as well as the special education teacher we share students with. We meet at least once a week, as well as times after school to plan for the upcoming week. We print materials, search out new, engaging activities, look over assessment results to place students into intervention groups and plan out scope and sequences for curricular areas. It is absolutely essential to be a team player and share/try out ideas as well as reflect together on what worked/didn’t work with students.” Another teacher echoed the same appreciation for teamwork and collaboration. One teacher spoke to the necessity of being a “team player.” She stated the following:

Having a strong team makes planning easy. We plan and strategize as a team...the more, the merrier. We like to sit and look at the big picture. What do we need to teach, and what's the best way to teach it so that ALL our kids are learning? How can we differentiate our lessons and activities, so we are reaching all our students?

Although not necessarily a perceived reward, many teachers specifically mentioned appreciation for internet sources shared by other teachers to the websites such as

Pinterest, Teachers Pay Teachers, teacher forums, Facebook groups, and other online resources. It might be because they would like to reach out to more teachers outside of their regular team, to enhance their planned lessons. One teacher shared, “Believe it or not, a lot of ideas come from watching TikTok. So many teachers share exciting things on there, and clicking the teacher hashtags can open so many new ideas.” Other teachers also explained that “I use it [Pinterest] to spark my creativity; not necessarily to copy the exact idea but to bring something to mind that matches our theme and monthly curriculum,” or “they [online sources] offer refreshing ideas that I can plug into my lesson plan.”

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to provide teacher candidates with a vision of teaching reality through interviewing experienced in-service classroom teachers. It was also to determine what the teachers perceived to be the challenges and rewards of their jobs, their educational and professional development requirements, and their approach to lesson planning. Our study discovered bitter and sweet teaching journeys among these experienced teachers. The results support the idea that teaching is challenging yet rewarding.

Experienced teachers in this study found meeting the needs of individual students, behavior management and guidance, and countless required professional development hours to be real challenges. It was not surprising that differentiation of learning was found to be the biggest challenge cited by these teachers which supports the work of Dixon et al. (2014). It can be arduous to successfully tailor instruction to meet individual needs, which are affected by factors often beyond the student’s control, such as socioeconomic circumstances, learning disabilities, health concerns, and linguistics (Munger, 2018).

Although the literature does support the idea that many novice teachers struggle with classroom management or guidance (Goodwin, 2012; Greenberg et al., 2014), it was a bit unexpected to find that these largely experienced teachers were struggling with classroom management. It is possible that the changes and learning disruptions that came with the COVID pandemic contributed to the perceived challenge in this area. Regarding professional development, the idea that teachers have the opportunity to continue

learning can be considered positive (Meek, 1998). However, the findings in this study seem more in line with Matherson and Windle (2017); too many professional development courses can prove overwhelming, given time constraints and so many other demands on teachers.

It was encouraging to see the general enthusiasm by teachers toward bonding with students and the positive impact they had on student lives, plus the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers and become part of a “team.” These findings are echoed in the literature (Cockburn, 2000; Cohn, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Ferlazzo, 2018; Marion University, 2022; Santucci & Will, 2022) and are reaffirmed. These teachers cared about students’ academic success, as well as their social-emotional and physical well-being, and they strove to make a difference among their students by using a variety of resources to ensure lessons are fun and meaningful. It appears this contributed to a feeling of “ownership” and reward for effective teaching (Brezicha et al., 2020). According to our study, despite all the challenges, bonding with students surfaced as the most rewarding aspect of being a teacher. It was exciting to learn how much these teachers loved their students, how much they enjoyed building relationships with them, and that they truly enjoyed their time with students each day. It appears that students are the main reason behind the retention of these teachers and, possibly, most teachers in the field. This finding is common in previous studies (Bondy et al., 2012; Cockburn, 2000; Cohn, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Perrachione et al., 2008), where researchers found teachers loved their students and established strong relationships with them. It precisely reflects the caring for students found to be so rewarding in Isenbarger and Zebylas’ work (2006).

Team planning was found to be prevalent and popular with the classroom teachers in this study. Given classroom teachers’ daily challenges, it appears helpful to have others with whom to share frustrations and ideas, seek advice, plan, and lean on for support toward such an important cause. Research also suggests that a good team can add flexibility, creativity and enhance problem-solving capabilities (Essa & Burnham, 2019). It appears this collaborative exchange may provide teachers with a sense of personal contribution and ownership (Brezicha et al., 2020), which may prove quite satisfying during efforts to balance what is required from a district’s adopted

curriculum with what they perceive to be most effective for their unique set of students and the context in which they teach. This personal and positive impact toward the success of their students for whom they genuinely care may be an important link to retaining teachers in the profession.

The COVID pandemic only added more twists with the changes in teaching needs, health requirements, and the states’ changing demands. All these concerns appear to lead to teacher burnout, which has been frequently reported in the literature (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Harmsen et al., 2018; Herman et al., 2018; Kyriacou et al., 2001; McCallum, 2021; Najarro, 2022; Prelltensky et al., 2016). Teacher shortages were quite common during a portion of our study. One teacher explained, “Like most places, we were short-staffed or constantly losing teachers because once a new hire sees how hard our jobs are and how much they are getting paid, they quickly find out they are not cut out for early childcare and since we have never stopped working during this pandemic, at times I feel burnt out.” It is important to address and support the well-being of teachers, which can directly lead to the quality of education students receive (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). This is crucial for the success of both teachers and students in the field of early childhood and elementary education.

### **Future Considerations and Policy Recommendations**

As our study indicates, teaching is a profession that draws and retains those who care to make a difference, often at a personal cost (Santucci & Will, 2022; Toropova et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). When that cost becomes too great, multiple stages of burnout can emerge. We are already seeing the first where caregivers and teachers become exhausted. This is followed by becoming cynical, and finally, effectiveness with students can suffer (Howell, 2021). While many of the teachers in our study quickly identified frustration with the demands of the profession as their primary challenge, they still indicated they cared very much about the children they served.

Fortunately, things can be done to support teachers in the field, including providing group support and resources to manage workloads better. Creating a positive work environment that values and recognizes the important work of teachers is also vital. Paying teachers more, providing financial support for advanced degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), offering more “family-friendly” hours,

reducing class sizes, and including affinity groups may help improve the profession. Education is known for low pensions (Jones, 2022) and struggles to keep up even with the poorest salaries across the nation (National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2022). Advocates, at every level, will be needed to improve the profession if we all are to benefit.

We often hear that teaching is a “family-friendly” profession, yet many teachers are parents and could use those morning hours to take care of their own before heading off to support the children of others. Equally, being home when their own children arrive from school at the end of the day could also be seen as an appreciated job perk for the profession. Utilizing teacher candidates during those hours before and after classroom instruction could provide teachers with the luxury of starting their long and difficult day at 9 a.m. instead of 8 a.m. It would get them home in time for their children to arrive by 3:30 p.m. with a few hours to plan for the next day’s lessons. Utilizing teacher candidates as aides would also give these support teachers much-needed practice working with a range of students before they take on total responsibility for a classroom of their own.

The inclusion of a 4-day work week, which is already becoming popular (Timsit, 2023), could provide some relief in terms of the benefit of more family and planning time for these busy teachers, but, according to the American Federation of Teachers’ CEO, Randi Weingarten, that would still not solve the teacher shortage (Wilkins, 2023). Smaller class sizes could support teachers in their noble attempt to give students with so many individual needs more time and attention to differentiate their learning. Finally, the inclusion of affinity groups could be helpful. Affinity groups can be defined as “a group of faculty and staff linked by a common purpose, ideology, or interest” (University of Pittsburgh, n.d., p. 1). For teachers, this could take many forms. For example, it could be a group of teachers who are all interested in self-care in the workplace and who share resources, professional development, or other things related to that area.

Simple improvements like these and others could show our teachers we appreciate what they do and reward them with benefits that draw and help keep quality teachers in the profession. As our current Secretary of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona, so eloquently stated (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 1):

*“Teachers are the backbone of our democracy – fostering curiosity and creativity, building skillful individuals, and strengthening informed citizens. A great teacher in every classroom is one of the most important resources we can provide students. This is not possible without a commitment to recruiting, developing, and retaining highly qualified teachers.”*

He sensed the urgency and emphasized that *“It’s not only our responsibility, but our commitment ... to encourage, invest in, and lift up teachers across America. The future of our country and our children’s futures depends on it”*.

## Conclusion

The current study is important for improving teaching and elevating teachers on many fronts. By listening to experienced classroom teachers, teacher candidates learned about many aspects of teaching that inspired them. They also became better informed about the reality of the challenges this profession demands of its teachers and the daily frustration classroom teachers feel. The perspectives shared by these experienced teachers can provide policymakers and teacher preparation institutions with valuable leads toward advancing the profession in both attracting teachers to the field and improving teacher effectiveness and retention in the classroom. This study sheds light on the urgency of much-needed changes to retain quality teachers as well as to recruit new teachers, not only for dealing with current teacher shortages but also to provide recommendations for uplifting and supporting teachers toward a more long-term perspective leading to a lengthy and rewarding career.

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