

— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

The ongoing teacher shortage is back in headlines as students return to school, but the shortage itself isn't news — not really. Nationwide, teachers have been in short supply since [at least 2015](#); in [some states](#), the shrinking candidate pool has been an issue for decades. But the problem is growing. During the pandemic, teachers [left the profession](#) in droves, and the churn hasn't slowed in the ensuing years. On average, educators are exiting the classroom [at higher rates](#), and the talent pool [is not large enough](#) to replace them.

The growing shortage stems from chronic problems like [low pay and long hours](#), with an assist from newer culture-war issues like books, race, gender and “parental rights.” State legislatures considered [nearly 400](#) “education intimidation” bills from January 2021 through June 2023, most of them designed to police curricula or classroom discussions. Teachers have been bullied for [displaying pride flags](#), acknowledging [students' gender identities](#) and teaching factual history lessons. Little wonder, then, that so many are eager to leave.

The Big Takeaway

Not every departure is voluntary. In Nebraska, a high school English teacher was asked to resign after helping her students compose a letter asking administrators to honor Martin Luther King Jr. Day, [the Nebraska Examiner reported](#).



*Nikki Menard, a teacher with 25 years of experience, was forced to resign for, you know, teaching.
(Photo by Zach Wendling/Nebraska Examiner)*

The exercise wasn't planned. Nikki Menard, an honors English teacher at Crete High School, had planned to teach her junior class to use primary resources during a lesson that focused on [a 1779 letter](#) penned by Alexander Hamilton urging Congress to allow slaves to become soldiers. But the subject matter, discussed on MLK Day, prompted one student to wonder why the school didn't celebrate the state and federal holiday.

If you want change, Menard replied, you should ask for it. As a group, the class decided to [write a letter](#) to the Board of Education and the school's superintendent, proposing various ways the district might honor King. Menard created the document and advised students on sentence structure and tone, but did not offer input on the content. No one objected to the project, she said, though some students wavered once the letter was completed and ready to be sent.

Principal Cory Bohling reacted positively to the letter, telling a student it was "very well written" and that he'd be happy to help submit it to administrators. But by the next morning, he'd changed his tune. Some students, he said, had told their parents that Menard implied district officials were "racist." Menard denied the allegations. Three days later, Bohling asked for her resignation, citing

the alleged comments and a handful of other policy violations.



No caption necessary.

(Photo by Getty Images)

Menard, the school's only Native American instructor, refused. Officials scheduled a Feb. 22 hearing to allow the six-member school board to settle the matter, but Menard relented days before the proceedings. The district bought out her contract.

Citing personnel laws, Bohling declined to comment on the matter. Menard, he added, would have had a chance to give her side of events at the public meeting. But Menard said she has nothing to defend. She was, she said, simply doing her job.

"This is my livelihood. This is my career. I didn't do anything wrong," she said. "I think I was empowering students to express their civic duty."



*A (or F?) for effort.
(Photo by Getty Images)*

Public school officials in North Carolina are struggling to comply with [a sweeping education overhaul](#) that restricts lessons about gender identity and sexuality and requires teachers to out transgender children to their parents. Schools have until Friday to enact the required policy revisions, which administrators said was proving difficult amid a shortage of teachers and bus drivers, [NC Newsline reported](#).

“We’re not talking about how we might be able to provide additional resources to hire teachers, to incentivize hiring teachers, to get more math teachers,” Chatham County Schools Superintendent Anthony Jackson told the school board on Monday. “[This law] is what our instructional people have had to spend their time on — not getting our new teachers prepared to teach mathematics, not getting our new teachers prepared to plan good lessons.”

Theoretically, the requirements aren’t complicated. A lot of the stipulations in the bill, like allowing parents to opt their children out of certain lessons, already exist in current district policy, officials said. But they’ve had to comb through those statutes to confirm “what we already have in place and what’s actually new in the law,” said Amanda Moran, the county’s assistant

superintendent.

Education officials said last week they were pressing lawmakers for more time to implement the changes, but a reprieve seems unlikely. Neither legislative chamber had committee meetings scheduled on Wednesday or Thursday, and lawmakers typically do not meet on Fridays.

Whenever they get around to it: [Hit the snooze button: States debate later high school start times](#) ... [Faltering school safety efforts restarted in Colorado with new state office](#) ... [Joint letter asks Florida education head for transparency on universal vouchers](#) ... [Idaho parental panel opposes using grants for private school tuition](#) ... [Families who rely on interpreters find Kansas City area schools can come up short](#) ... [Montana is struggling to retain new teachers; experts cite waning education graduates](#) ... [Las Cruces superintendent said bus delays are top priority](#) ... [Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo got \\$14M for charter school transportation. Why aren't more schools applying for it?](#) ... [Their academic freedom in jeopardy, university faculty in North Carolina, other southern states want out](#) ... [Ohio GOP effort introduced to make all state board of education positions elected and partisan](#) ... [Texas Education Agency delays release of annual school ratings](#) ... [Report: State test, 'unclear' requirements, and costs may be barriers in Virginia teacher pipeline](#) ... [41% of West Virginia special education aides left their jobs for new classroom role created by Legislature](#)



State of Our Democracy

Arkansas Republicans on Tuesday scaled back their plan to demolish the state's public records law, settling on a proposal that would exempt only information related to security services provided to Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders and other state officials, [the Arkansas Advocate reported](#).

That provision is “the most critical and important aspect of FOIA reform,” Sanders said in a statement. “Nobody said changing the status quo would be easy, but this is a great starting place for making our government safer and more effective.”

[The proposed legislation](#) removed a host of changes that critics decried as overly broad, including provisions that would have shielded communication between Huckabee and her cabinet secretaries and any records prepared by attorneys for a host of state officials. Huckabee had praised those measures as wins for government efficiency and the safety of her family, which she said had experienced threats after she accepted a job as Donald Trump's press secretary.

Democrats and transparency advocates said the new bill was a fair compromise, but others said it still placed unnecessary limits on public access to government records.

“Our government needs to be more transparent to our citizens, not less transparent,” said Lorri Justice, a former Republican candidate for the Pulaski County Quorum Court. “We’re the taxpayers, this is our money, and I keep hearing talk about the governor — with all due respect, y’all don’t work for the governor. We elected you to represent us.”

Blinders: [U.S. Senate Judiciary Republicans: Book bans aren’t bans ... Judge: Is the mere potential for hacking enough to ban voting machines?](#) ... [Joe Ganim claims win in Connecticut mayoral race, opponent says election ‘stolen’](#) ... [On the cusp of his 45th birthday, DeSantis plays the age card against Biden, Trump](#) ... [Former Idaho Gov. Butch Otter endorses open primary ballot initiative](#) ... [Beshear far outraises Cameron. But that’s only part of the money story](#) ... [National Democrats promote five legislative races in Mississippi](#) ... [Judge rules against challenge to Missouri Senate district map](#) ... [Trump can run in New Hampshire primary despite Jan. 6 involvement, AG and secretary of state say](#) ... [Elections changes giving North Carolina legislators more power move back to the forefront](#) ... [Dark money group running attack ads in Ohio against Sherrod Brown with almost no public disclosures](#) ... [Some lawmakers want to close Ohio primaries, claiming without evidence voters are gaming the system](#) ... [Tennessee defends GOP measure that protects Confederate monuments](#) ... [Tennessee special session bills expected to revive in 2024](#) ... [Paxton trial updates: Credit union CEO alleges donor benefited from “surprising” AG opinion](#) ... [Wisconsin Assembly Republicans announce plans to introduce Iowa-style redistricting process](#)



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One Last Thing

98 Degrees frontman Nick Lachey [eats potato chips](#) before heading into the recording booth because the oil “lubricates” his throat, and probably also because potato chips taste way better

than cough drops.

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