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Leading NYS education groups call for renewed focus on student teaching programs amid teacher shortage

ALBANY, N.Y. December 4, 2020 — With New York continuing to face a teacher shortage, four leading education groups today highlighted the pressing need to build up the teacher preparation pipeline to prepare the next generation of educators to join the workforce in the coming years. Specifically, the organizations noted the need for high-quality student teacher placements in local school districts statewide, even with the coronavirus pandemic forcing many schools to continue with remote education or limited in-person instruction.

At issue is an emerging lack of opportunities for student teachers to be paired up with veteran educators in some areas this fall and how that trend would affect springtime student teacher placements. The Interim Commissioner of the State Education Department and Board of Regents [also have sounded the alarm](#) on the serious shortage of student teacher placements.

These placements are a mandatory part of students earning their state teacher certifications and essential for students to learn in real-time how to not just instruct their students, but how to tend to their social-emotional needs as well. In its reopening school guidance, SED strongly urges teachers and districts to continue to welcome student teachers into schools and classroom, whether in-person or remote. SED leaders noted that aside from gaining important clinical experience, student teachers can provide crucial classroom support during these challenging times.

We are hearing reports of some school districts deciding not to take any student teachers. While we understand why districts and teachers might be reluctant to take on a student apprentice during a school year like this, we need to get the word out that student teaching is an essential part of preparing the next generation of educators. We're encouraging educators to consider taking on these critical mentorship roles and help address the teacher shortage.

Among the recommendations the organizations made to policymakers is to support the expansion of partnerships among school districts, colleges/universities and community partners, such as residency, immersion and grow-your-own programs. Despite fiscal problems at the federal, state and local levels, finding new ways to encourage districts to engage in student teaching programs that benefit districts, education students and K-12 students alike is essential.

Enrollment in New York's teacher education programs has declined by roughly 50 percent since 2009. At the same time, the state Teacher Retirement System projects that one-third of the state's teachers could retire in the next five years. SUNY projects that New York will need 180,000 teachers in the next decade.

There also is a pressing need to diversify the teaching workforce. While 43 percent of students statewide are Hispanic/Latinx or African-American, just 16 percent of the teachers are. The state Board of Regents released data in 2019 showing that more than 200 school districts statewide do not employ any teachers of color.