



Educator Workforce '23 Reflections and '24 Trends

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I'm writing this short recap of 2023 later than I would prefer. However, the extra time has allowed me the opportunity to reflect on the past year and to tease out a few nuanced observations that will carry into the new year. While overall, changes in the educator workforce were less pronounced last year, there were several important shifts that foreshadow changes in the future.

Throughout 2023, educator shortages remained at the forefront of policy discussions and interventions in the educator workforce. We saw a continued push to reduce both real and perceived barriers that hinder educators from entering the profession. Additionally, we saw sustained efforts by stakeholders to provide additional scaffolds and supports as educators navigated through the various stages of the educator pipeline.

As I spoke to educators, clients, and other educational stakeholders, the need for comprehensive data and meaningful insights was a familiar topic. In 2022, during the peak of regulatory responses to the educator shortages, several pockets of comprehensive data emerged, which offered valuable insights that contextualized shortages—this data helped us to understand that in many cases shortages were largely limited to specific regions and subject areas. A reality that was sometimes lost in translation as interventions and solutions were put into place.

In 2023, this data provided additional insight that further contextualized the educator workforce issues that we are currently facing. Specifically, the U.S. student population is undergoing a significant shift.

Many students have left the public education system to attend ever-increasing alternatives. In response, some states have made the decision to close schools, while others have closed open educator job requisitions.

Overall, despite shortages remaining the most salient issue in the educator workforce, 2023 showed early signs of a potential change in this trend. As we transition into 2024, we should continue to analyze data and keep a close eye on both educator and student populations. This year should provide critical visibility, offering insights into where the workforce is headed over the next 3-5 years.

While educator shortages are critical enough to warrant a sustained and focused discussion, this brief reflection will highlight other insights from 2023 and provide a view of emerging trends for 2024.

2023 Reflections and Highlights

1. Literacy. While states contemplated and implemented changes to relax educator certification requirements, they simultaneously increased rigor and accountability for the science of reading. The heightened focus on early literacy signals an important shift, placing an emphasis to ensure that our students are equipped with critical foundational skills that they need to learn and grow. This is a trend that will continue into 2024, influencing the next item on this list.
2. Numeracy. Literacy efforts have reignited discussion about the development of foundational skills in early learners across the U.S. Although still in its early stages, indicators suggest that numeracy initiatives are poised to follow a path similar to literacy initiatives over the next decade. As educators research and define the evidence-based practices that will serve as the basis of the numeracy canon, states will be paying close attention to match their policy responses to the ever-changing environment.
3. Flexibility. Last year, I highlighted flexibility as a key trend for 2023. It was indeed a major trend, as many states looked to implement multiple measures approaches into their licensure systems and measurement tools. Alternative ways of knowing and doing are getting increasing attention in the educator workforce space, with critical attention being paid to flexible pathways that do not reduce rigor and quality.

2024 Trends

Entering 2023, the pace of change was rapid. At the time, it was clear that 2023 would be a banner year for changes in the educator workforce, and indeed it was. In 2024, the overall pace is likely to slow as stakeholders look to analyze the data from changes that have been implemented over the last 3-5 years.

Last year I wrote, "As perceived barriers to becoming an educator continue to loosen across states (to varying degrees), the question becomes how the education community will ensure that students receive quality learning experiences."

This statement appears more relevant than ever in 2024, evidenced by the continual and rapid expansion of literacy and, to a lesser extent, numeracy initiatives.

I'd like to quickly highlight a few key points:

Preparation

Educator preparation will be a key trend for 2024 and beyond. The impact of pandemic-induced learning loss, coupled with the compounding effects of systemic workforce issues over the last 5 years will put student learning front and center. Our educator workforce must not only be present in classrooms but must also be adequately prepared.

At Evaluation Systems we have spent considerable time focused on this trend and have worked to enhance support for educators across every service that we provide. We are committed to these efforts not only to assist with educator pipeline issues, but also because of its crucial impact on student learning.

Integration of Assessment, Teaching, and Learning

In the same way that student learning has been integrated with periodic and insightful assessment, educator learning will follow a similar path. Specifically, embedding accountability measures, such as licensure assessments, into educator learning promises to provide additional flexibility while increasing efficacy.

This is a trend that promises to develop slowly but has the potential to provide a new paradigm. It is after all the integration of teaching, assessment, and learning that is the hallmark of great educators. It seems fitting that we should begin that integration as it relates to their development much earlier in their growth process.

References

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