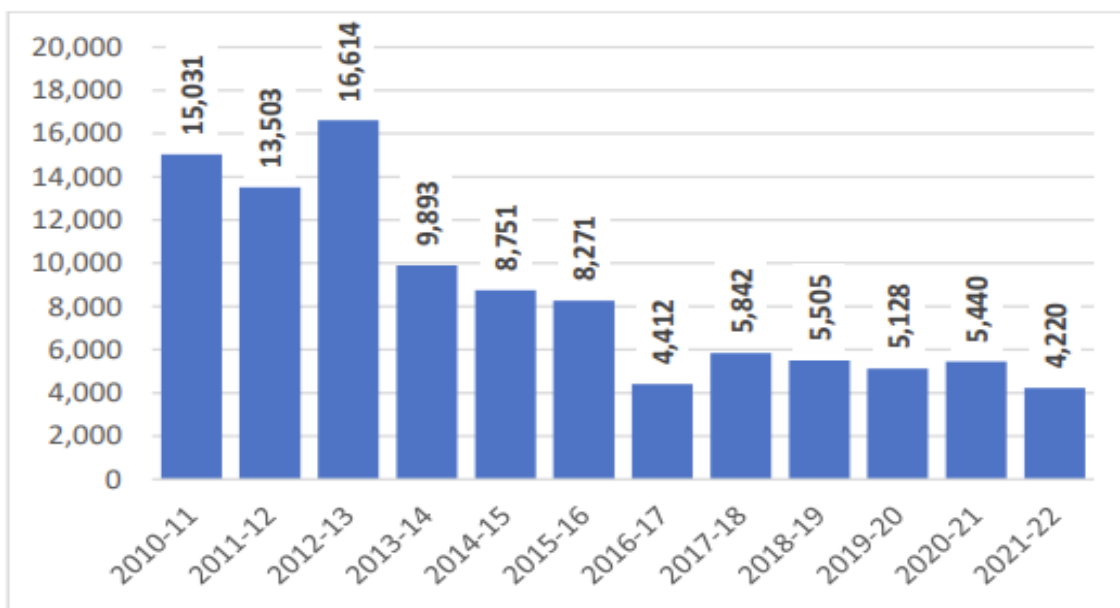




## PARSS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

### *Teacher Staffing Shortage Subject of Education Committee Hearings*

On April 13, the House Education Committee held a hearing on the teacher shortage, mirroring a Senate Education Committee public hearing held on March 13. In a nutshell here is a look at the numbers from the [Penn State Report-- Pennsylvania Teacher Staffing Challenges](#)—issued last fall showing the number of initial teacher certificates issued for in-state graduates of PA teacher preparation programs (2011-12 through 2021-22)



Data source: Author's analysis of PDE Act 82 Report data

The report revealed these findings:

- Pennsylvania is facing a severe teacher staffing challenge, although the severity varies by school subject area, region of the state, and school characteristics.

- There are now more Pennsylvania teachers on emergency permits than newly certified teachers from Pennsylvania teacher preparation programs.
- There are teacher preparation program “deserts” in Pennsylvania that exacerbate the challenges faced by rural schools.

Some of the solutions being discussed include paying student teachers, raising the minimum teacher salary, scholarships for students in education programs, and improving recruitment and retention models. To read a great review of the House hearing [click this link](#).

What else is on the agenda in Harrisburg? Winter is over, temperatures are warmer and that usually signals a move towards increased legislative activity and intensified state budget discussions in Harrisburg. During this year’s budget hearings, the budget tenor struck a more positive chord and less of the rancor and bitter budget bickering of previous years.

Some of Governor Josh Shapiro’s proposals in his March budget address have received some Republican receptivity, but on key issues like a minimum wage increase and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative the sides are far apart. The Governor has been across the state stumping for his \$2,500 state income tax credit incentive for hiring new teachers, nurses, and police officers. The proposal has also met with Republican resistance.

The elephant in the room remains efforts to address the Commonwealth Court decision on education funding. The Governor did not directly address restructuring state support to education but did provide a billion dollars in new funding to schools. Some have suggested the proposal does not go far enough to meet the court’s ruling. Others, notably Senate Majority Leader Ryan Aument (R-Lancaster) say that public education is an “antiquated system built over a century ago with goals that are no longer relevant in today’s globally competitive, knowledge-based job market, which we know is prone to rapid change and disruption.”

So far this session, there has been limited action on education bills. The Senate Education Committee has moved four bills out of committee, two of which have passed the Senate. [Senate Bill 84](#) amends the School Code to allow freedom of religious expression. The current language in the law restricts wearing of religious garb, insignias, and other religious expressions by teachers. The language was ruled as an unconstitutional restriction of First Amendment rights in federal court. Senate Bill 84 passed the Senate unanimously in January.

Another education bill also passed the Senate unanimously in January. [Senate Bill 114](#) provides for training high school students in firefighting and emergency service by community college and state universities to address the shortage of volunteers. The Senate Education Committee has also overwhelmingly approved Senate Bill 297 which provides for serving of whole milk in schools and [Senate Bill 232](#) which established a parental notification requirement and Lyme Disease awareness when students are treated in school for a tick infestation. Both bills are pending full Senate action.

The Senate panel also held a public hearing last month on school fund balances. Auditor General Tim DeFoor again reiterated his claim that school districts were manipulating Act 1 by using exceptions in order to raise property taxes and avoiding referendum approval. PASBO testimony at the hearing showed that only seven school districts used Act 1 exceptions in the 2021-fiscal year, down from a high of 228 in the 2011-12 fiscal year.

Over in the House, the Education Committee got off to a slower start than its Senate counterpart as a result of the beginning of session chaos on control of the House. The House Education Committee did meet in April reporting out four bills for consideration by the full House. [House Bill 148](#), establishing an Eating Disorders Taskforce in the PA Department of Education and providing for parental information on eating disorders was approved by 17-4 vote on April 13. The committee also unanimously approved [House Bill 301](#) which removes archaic and derogatory terms in the School Code such as “retarded” and “crippled” among others.

[House Bill 663](#) would allow a student that is subject to a residency challenge to remain in his or her district until the residency dispute has been resolved. The bill was approved on a vote of 16-4. The final legislation approved on April 13 was [House Bill 668](#). The bill would allow students raised by family members other than their parents—“kinship kids”—to be eligible for the same college tuition waivers as students in foster care can obtain. The vote to approve the bill was 17-3.