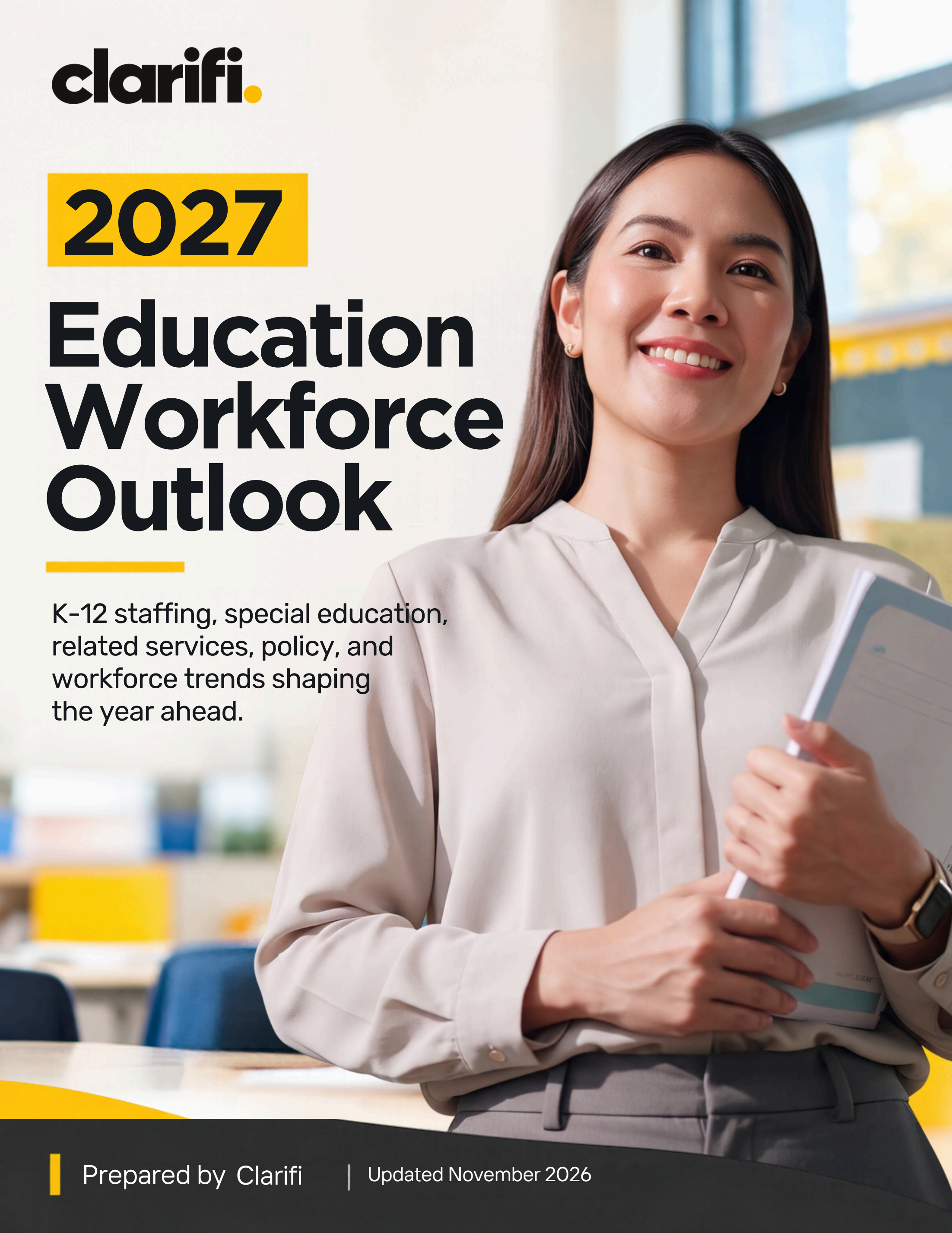
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2027 Education Workforce Outlook

K-12 staffing, special education, related services, policy, and workforce trends shaping the year ahead.



Prepared by Clarifi

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Executive Summary

Education workforce pressure remains concentrated in hard-to-fill and specialized roles, while districts continue to face recruiting, retention, and staffing challenges heading into 2027.

The 2027 Education Workforce Outlook examines the state of the education workforce, the forces shaping it, and what leaders can do to build a stronger, more sustainable talent pipeline. Drawing on labor market data, workforce trends, and national research, this report highlights emerging risks, bright spots, and actionable strategies for the year ahead.

The Bottom Line

Educator demand remains high in 2027, with ongoing shortages, rising turnover risk, and growing need for innovative talent and retention strategies.

Key Takeaways

Persistent Talent Gaps

Shortages remain concentrated in special education, related services, and selected general education subject areas.

Rising Turnover Risk

Workforce stability depends not only on filling vacancies, but also on improving working conditions, support, and employee experience.

Hiring Strategy Is Changing

Districts are increasingly balancing direct hiring with contract, temporary, hybrid, and virtual staffing options.



The State of the Education Workforce

A closer look at today's workforce landscape and what it means for 2027.



3 Key Realities

- Demand for qualified educators remains high.
- Retention continues to be a challenge.
- Disticts are seeking more flexible, reliable staffing solutions.

50%

of public-school leaders reported feeling their school was understaffed as of October 2024.

35%

of public schools reported having at least one teaching vacancy as of October 2024.

64%

of public schools reported that a lack of qualified candidates was a challenge when filling teaching vacancies.



What's Driving the Shift?

Staffing Demand

Continued needs in special education, related services, and hard-to fill roles.

Workforce Expectations

Greater flexibility, work-life balance, and competitive compensation are shaping career decisions.

Operational Pressures

Disticts need faster, more efficient ways to fill critical roles.

Innovative Solutions

Staffing partners, talent pipelines, and targeted retention strategies are becoming essential.

Key Workforce Trends

The education workforce continues to evolve, with five key trends shaping staffing, hiring, and workforce planning in 2027.

Ongoing Talent Demand

Districts are likely to continue navigating teacher and specialist shortages, particularly in special education and related services.

Greater Flexibility

Flexible staffing models, including contract, virtual, and blended support, are likely to remain important tools for addressing critical staffing needs.

Technology & AI Integration

AI and digital tools will streamline hiring, onboarding, and workforce planning across districts.

Focus on Employee Well-Being

Support, workload, professional growth, and employee well-being will remain important retention considerations.

Skills & Role Evolution

Districts increasingly value educators and related service providers who can adapt to evolving student, program, and service needs.

Strategic Opportunities for Districts & Education Leaders

Practical steps to strengthen your workforce, improve stability, and meet evolving student needs in 2027 and beyond.

Strengthen Your Talent Pipeline.

Start early, build ongoing candidate engagement, and maintain a qualified pool for hard-to fill and specialized roles.

Prioritize Retention.

Invest in support, professional development, and recognition to keep your high-performing staff engaged and committed.

Use Flexible Staffing Solutions.

Leverage contract, temporary, or interim staffing to quickly address vacancies, manage staff leaves, and maintain continuity of services.

Make Data-Informed Decisions.

Use workforce insights, labor trends, and internal data to guide staffing, budgeting, and long-term planning.

Partner with an Education Staffing Specialist.

Evaluate external staffing partnerships when internal recruiting capacity, timing, or access to specialized talent is limited.

Federal Education Policy Outlook

Federal funding, oversight, and policy priorities could reshape how districts plan for staffing and student services in 2027.

What Changed

The Administration's FY2027 education budget request proposes consolidating several K–12 grant programs into a larger state formula intended to give states greater flexibility over how certain federal education funds are used.

Title I remains separately funded in the FY2027 request, with approximately $18.4 billion requested for Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies.

Overall, the proposal seeks to reduce the federal role in education while giving states more flexibility to determine how funds are used to meet local needs.

Budget requests are proposals; Congress determines final appropriations.

What Schools Should Watch

Federal Funding Structure
Proposed consolidation of many K-12 programs into a larger state formula approach.

IDEA Funding
The IDEA Full Funding Act remains a proposal that would increase federal special education funding over time.

Teacher Workforce
Persistent shortages and turnover keep recruitment and retention policy on the agenda.

State vs. Federal Role
States could receive greater discretion over certain federal education funds if the proposed program consolidations are enacted.

What This Could Mean for Districts in 2027

- Plan for funding uncertainty.
- Watch state-level implementation closely.
- Distinguish enacted law from proposals before changing staffing plans.

Policy Breakdown

Key federal proposals and policy developments that could affect K-12 staffing, funding, and student services in 2027.

Policy / Proposal	Current Status	Why It Matters for Schools
K-12 Funding Consolidation	Proposed (FY2027 Budget)	Would consolidate several federal programs into a larger, state-based formula, giving states more flexibility in how funds are used for staffing and student supports.
IDEA Full Funding Act	Reintroduced (In Committee)	Seeks to increase federal special education funding and move closer to full funding, which could support expanded services and additional staff in districts.
Teacher Workforce Stabilization	Under Consideration	Includes measures to address teacher shortages, improve retention, and support recruitment, including potential grant programs and incentives.
Mental Health Services for Students Act of 2025 — H.R. 5557	Introduced	Would revise and extend federal support for school-based comprehensive mental health programs for children and students.

What Happens Next

- Final congressional action on the FY2027 budget is expected in the coming months.
- Changes to state funding formulas and implementation timelines will follow if approved.
- Additional workforce or student support policies may be introduced in the next legislative session.

Teacher Supply

The K-12 teacher workforce remains under pressure, with demand continuing to outpace supply in key areas heading into 2027.

Current National Teacher Shortage Snapshot

425,412 — Teaching positions were either unfilled or filled by teachers who were not fully certified for their assignments.

387,843 — Teachers were estimated to be working without full certification for their assignments.

37,569 — Teacher positions were reported unfilled across 29 states plus the District of Columbia that published vacancy data.

About 1 in 8 — Teaching positions nationally were either vacant or filled by someone without full certification.

Minimum estimate based on the latest available state-reported data; vacancy and certification reporting varies by state.

Highest-Need Areas for Teachers

Special Education	Science	Mathematics	Language Arts
45 states	41 states	40 states	38 states

General Education Workforce Snapshot

General education staffing pressure varies by subject and geography, with science, mathematics, and language arts among the most widespread shortage areas.



Current National Data (2024–25)

88% of general elementary teaching vacancies were filled with fully certified teachers before the start of the 2024–25 school year.

41 states reported science teacher shortages.

40 states reported mathematics teacher shortages.

38 states reported language arts teacher shortages.

Special Education Workforce Snapshot

Special education continues to be one of the most in-demand and hardest-to-staff areas in education.

The latest national data from the 2024–25 school year highlights the ongoing staffing pressures districts across the country are facing.

72% of public schools with special education vacancies reported difficulty filling them with a fully certified teacher.

34% of public schools reported being understaffed in special education positions.

45 states reported special education as a teacher shortage area.

77% of special education teaching vacancies were filled with fully certified teachers before the start of the 2024–25 school year.

Takeaway

Special education remains one of the most persistent and widespread staffing pressure points for districts.

These 2024–25 results reinforce the continued need for proactive recruitment, retention, and flexible staffing strategies to keep special education programs fully supported in the year ahead.

Related Services Worforce

Demand for school-based related service providers remains strong, with continued projected growth across key clinical roles through 2035.



Speech-Language Pathologists

+17%

Projected employment growth from 2025 to 2035.



Occupational Therapists

+15%

Projected employment growth from 2025 to 2035.



School Psychologists

+1%

Projected employment growth from 2025 to 2035.



Why This Matters for Schools

- Demand for specialized services remains important for student access and compliance.
- Districts may face competition with healthcare and private-sector employers for licensed clinicians.
- Workforce planning should consider direct-hire, contract, and flexible service models.

Workforce Stability & Retention

Current staffing pressure is reflected in understaffing, vacancies, and continued recruiting difficulty across U.S. public schools.

AT A GLANCE

50% **Understaffed**

of public-school leaders reported feeling their school was understaffed as of October 2024.

35%

of public schools had one or more teaching vacancies as of October 2024.

31%

of public schools reported losing teaching positions compared with 2023–24.

79%

of teaching vacancies were filled with fully certified teachers before classes resumed, entering 2024–25.

KEY HIRING CHALLENGES (2024–25)

64% reported a lack of qualified candidates.

62% reported too few applicants.

What Districts Can Control

- Strengthen working conditions and leadership support.
- Build candidate pipelines before vacancies open.
- Use flexible staffing models to protect continuity while permanent hiring continues.

Source: *NCES School Pulse Panel, August and October 2024 collections for the 2024–25 school year.*

Candidate Experience and Hiring Speed

A fast, clear, and candidate-friendly hiring process helps schools attract and secure qualified talent in a competitive market.

65%

K–12 recruiters say staff referrals are their most effective source of top teachers.

Education Week Research Center, 2026

70%

K–12 recruiters say they fill teaching openings within two months.

Education Week Research Center, 2026

71%

U.S. job seekers expect an application to take less than 30 minutes.

Employ Job Seeker Nation Report, 2025

THE HIRING JOURNEY



Apply

Keep applications simple and mobile-friendly.

Communicate

Acknowledge applications quickly and set clear next steps.

Interview

Offer flexible scheduling and share what to expect.

Decide

Move quickly with a clear offer and onboarding timeline.



What Candidates Notice

- Clear job information and realistic expectations.
- Prompt follow-up and status updates.
- Flexible, simple scheduling and application steps.

Source: Education Week Research Center, 2026; Employ Job Seeker Nation Report, 2025.

Flexible Workforce Models

A strategic approach to staffing that gives schools the flexibility to fill gaps, manage changes, and maintain continuity for students.

The Models

Direct Hire

Add long-term team members who build consistency, culture, and continuity for students.

Contract / Temporary

Quickly fill vacancies, cover leaves, and respond to unexpected staffing changes.

Hybrid Workforce Model

A strategic mix of direct hires and contract staff to keep the right balance of stability and flexibility throughout the school year.

When to Use Each

- Ongoing or core staffing needs
- Hard-to-fill or high-priority roles
- Long-term program consistency

- Urgent, short-term needs
- School leave coverage (e.g., FMLA, medical, maternity)
- Specialized roles such as special education and related services

- Disticts that need consistent coverage
- Fluctuating or seasonally changing needs
- A mix of long-term stability and short-term flexibility



The Bottom Line

The right staffing model depends on your district's goals, timing, and workforce needs. A flexible approach helps you stay staffed, reduce disruption, and keep students supported.

Role-By- Role Outlook: Where Demand Is Headed In 2027

A look at key education roles, expected demand, and what districts may experience in the year ahead.

Role	Demand Outlook	Key Takeaway
Special Education Teachers	Very High	Continued strong demand, especially in high-need areas and specialized programs.
Speech-Language Pathologists	High	Ongoing shortages and increased need for early intervention and multilingual support.
School Psychologists	High	Growing demand for mental health services, behavioral support, and student well-being initiatives.
School Social Workers	High	Increased need for student and family support, crisis response, and community resource connections.
Occupational / Physical Therapists	Moderate – High	Steady demand, with higher needs in early childhood, special education, and related services.
General Education Teachers	Moderate	More stability than other roles, with pockets of higher demand in core subjects and hard-to-staff schools.

Closing Perspective

The 2027 education workforce will not be defined by one shortage, one policy change, or one hiring challenge. It will be defined by how well districts respond to several pressures happening at time same time.

Across this outlook, a consistent picture emerges; demand remains strongest in specialized roles, especially special education and related services; workforce stability continues to depend on retention as much as recruitment; and hiring processes must become faster, more flexible, and more intentional as districts compete for a limited pool of qualified professionals.

At the same time, workforce planning is becoming more complex. Federal and state policy decisions may influence funding and program priorities, while technology, candidate expectations, and changing staffing models continue to reshape how schools attract and deploy talent. Districts can no longer treat staffing as a series of isolated vacancies. The stronger approach is to view workforce planning as an ongoing operational strategy.

What the Data Suggests

The most successful districts in 2027 are likely to be those that:

Plan earlier.
Anticipate hard-to-fill roles before vacancies become urgent and maintain active talent pipelines throughout the year.

Protect retention.
Recruitment alone cannot solve workforce instability, Workload, support, personal development, leadership, and employee experience all influence whether strong educators stay.

Use flexibility strategically.
Direct hire, contract, temporary, hybrid, and virtual models each solve different workforce problems. The goal is not to favor one model, but to use the right model at the right time.

Move faster when qualified talent is available.
Lengthy hiring processes can put districts at a disadvantage. Candidate communication, streamline decisions, and an easier application experience increasingly matter.

Stay informed without overreacting.
Policy proposals, funding changes, and workforce projections should inform planning, but districts should distinguish between proposed changes and enacted requirements before making major staffing decisions.

Districts that understand where demand is increasing, know which roles require earlier intervention, strengthen the experience of the people they are already, and build flexible options before they are needed will be better positioned to maintain continuity for students.

The workforce challenges outlined in this report are significant, but they are not all outside a district's control. Preparation, speed, retention, flexibility, and informed decision-making are areas where education leaders can act now.

Sources & Methodology

How this outlook was developed and the key sources that informed the insights for 2027.



Sources

Federal & State Education Reports

National and state-level data on staffing, funding, and education policy.

Workforce & Labor Market Data

Education workforce trends, role demand, and employment projections.

Industry Research & Publications

Insights from education, special education, and healthcare workforce studies.

Clarifi Market Insights

Trends and observations from school district needs, client conversations, and workforce activity nationwide.

Methodology

This outlook combines publicly available data, industry research, and Clarifi's market insights to identify key trends, workforce needs, and considerations for the education sector in 2027.

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