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2027 Education Workforce Trends & Insights

A forward-looking report on the K-12 talent market, Special Education staffing, and school-based workforce planning.



Prepared by Clarifi

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– 2027 MARKET OUTLOOK

2027

Education Workforce Trends & Insights

Data. Trends. Opportunities. A stronger education workforce.

EVIDENCE-LED WORKFORCE INTELLIGENCE

Built for what comes next.

A forward-looking national report on K-12 hiring, shortages, retention, school-based clinicians, staffing strategy, and the workforce signals leaders should watch entering 2027.

Prepared by clarifi. | October 2026

Evidence first. Outlook second.

This report separates observed data from Clarifi's forward-looking interpretation. National statistics are drawn from public, reputable research organizations and government sources. When the report discusses 2027 expectations, those statements are labeled as outlook or implications rather than measured facts.

CURRENT MARKET DATA	OBSERVED TREND	2027 OUTLOOK
Published statistics from sources such as NCES, BLS, Learning Policy Institute, RAND, ASA, and SIA.	A pattern supported by more than one data point or a documented change over time.	Clarifi's interpretation of how current conditions may shape school hiring and workforce strategy in 2027.

RESEARCH STANDARD

No invented Clarifi statistics

Clarifi does not present proprietary survey data in this edition. Every external number is sourced, and forecasts are identified as forecasts.

Primary research base

Learning Policy Institute (teacher shortages); National Center for Education Statistics School Pulse Panel; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2025-35 projections; RAND State of the American Teacher; American Staffing Association; Staffing Industry Analysts public forecast materials and summaries.

Five signals shaping 2027.

1 IN 8

At least 425,412 teaching positions were unfilled or staffed by teachers not fully certified in LPI's 2026 national scan.

72%

Of public schools with a special education vacancy reported difficulty filling it with a fully certified teacher in NCES data.

53 HOURS

Teachers in RAND's 2024 survey reported working 53 hours per week on average, versus 44 for comparable working adults.

17%

Projected employment growth for speech-language pathologists from 2025-35, according to BLS.

+3.3%

U.S. staffing revenue grew year over year in Q2 2026, according to ASA, ending a multi-year run of year-over-year declines.

2027

SIA's September 2026 public forecast points to another year of overall U.S. staffing market growth in 2027.

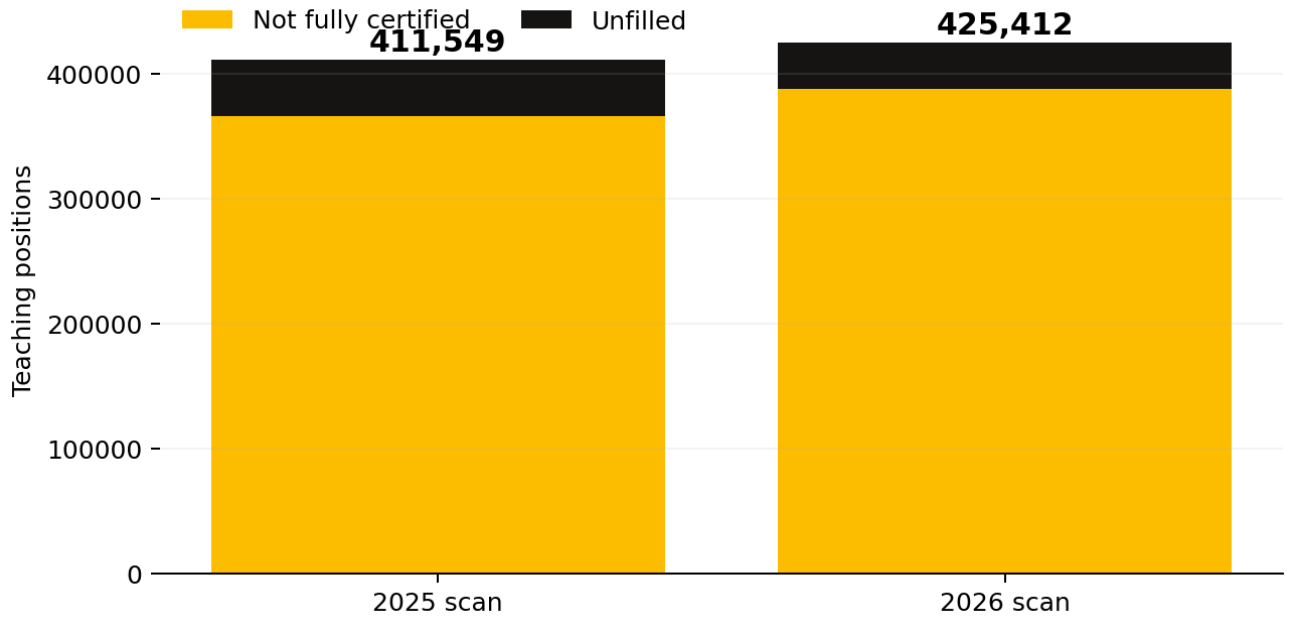
Clarifi 2027 outlook

Schools are likely to enter 2027 with a dual challenge: persistent hard-to-fill education roles and tighter pressure to hire efficiently. The winning strategy will be less about simply generating more applicants and more about reducing friction, widening sourcing reach, accelerating credential verification, and protecting retention once talent is hired.

Source: LPI 2026; NCES School Pulse Panel; RAND 2024 State of the American Teacher; BLS 2025-35 projections; ASA Q2 2026; SIA September 2026 forecast.

The shortage problem is not resolving evenly.

Learning Policy Institute's 2026 national scan estimated 387,843 teachers were working without full certification for their assignments and 37,569 positions were unfilled among reporting states. Combined, that is at least 425,412 positions - roughly 1 in 8 teaching positions nationally. LPI also reported this was the third consecutive year of increases in its shortage estimate.



2027 IMPLICATION

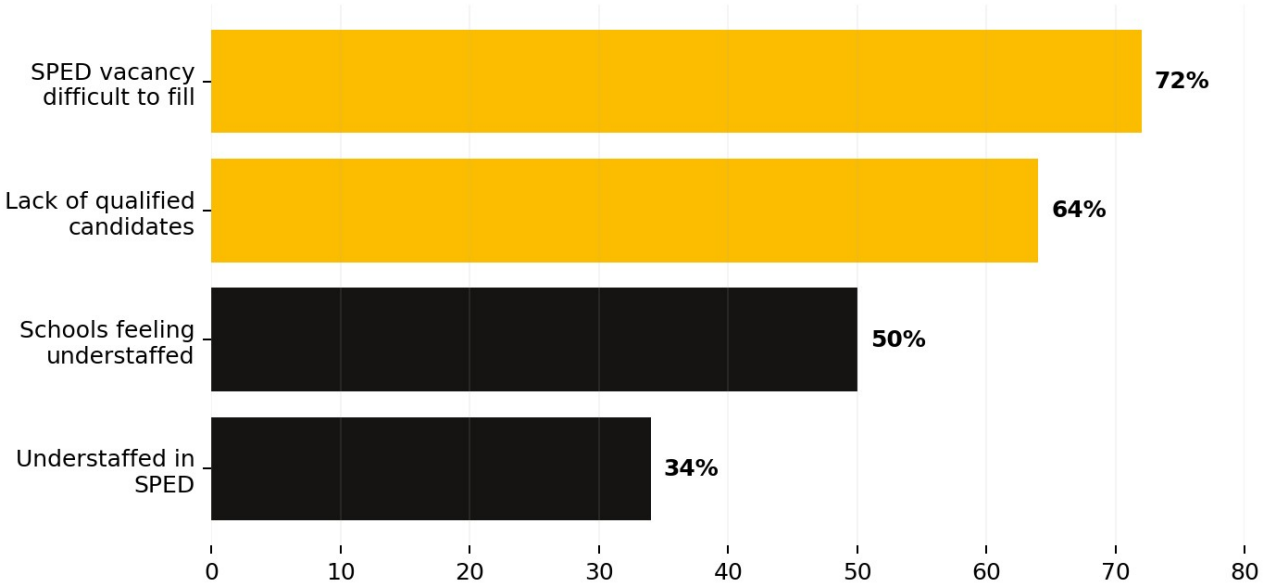
Shortage is a quality-and-access issue, not only a vacancy count.

When districts cannot hire fully certified educators, they may rely on substitutes, out-of-field assignments, larger classes, canceled courses, or added workload for existing staff. Recruiting speed matters, but qualification and fit remain central.

Source: Learning Policy Institute, An Overview of Teacher Shortages: 2026 and State Teacher Shortages 2026 Update.

Special education remains the pressure point.

Special education continues to stand out across multiple national data sets. LPI reported special education as the most commonly reported shortage area across states in 2024-25, while NCES found schools with special education vacancies were especially likely to struggle to fill them with fully certified teachers.



45 STATES

LPI reported special education shortages in 45 states for 2024-25.

37,100

BLS projects about 37,100 special education teacher openings per year from 2025-35, largely from replacement needs.

34%

NCES reported 34% of public schools felt understaffed in special education positions in October 2024.

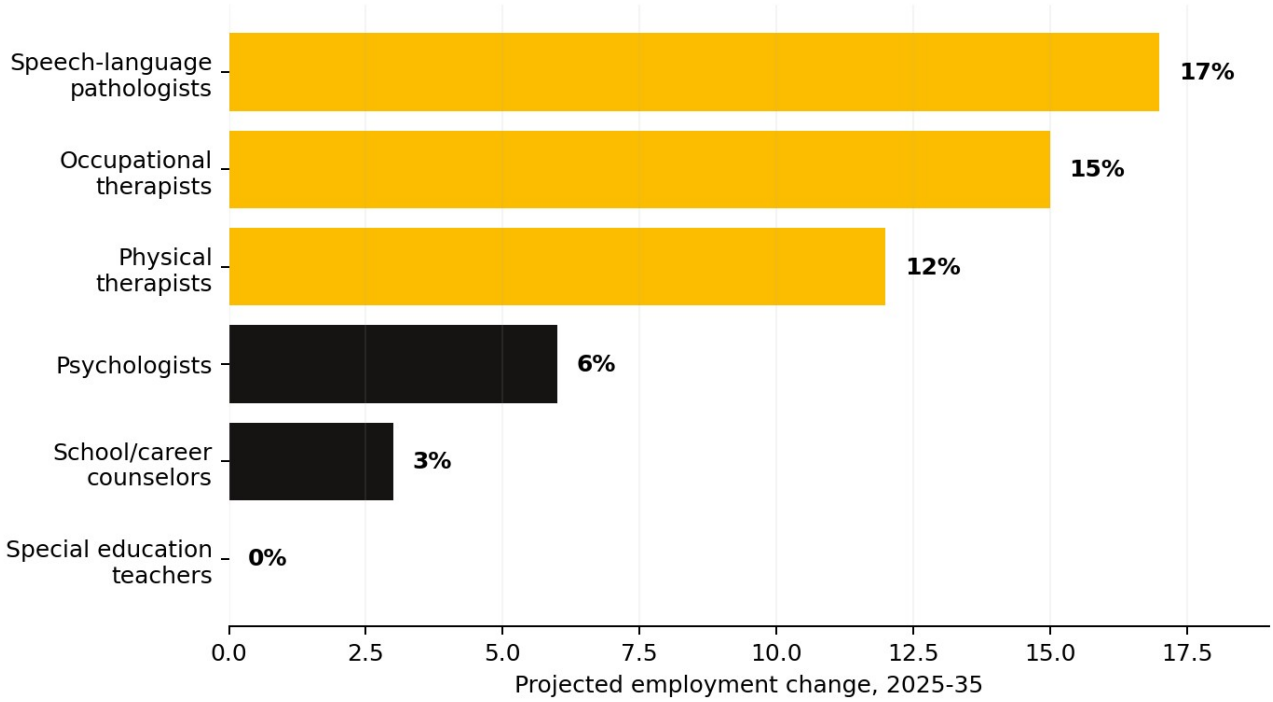
2027 outlook

Districts should expect competition for special education talent to remain structurally high. Faster credential review, licensure support, realistic caseload discussions, and earlier pipeline building can become meaningful differentiators before the 2027-28 school year.

Source: LPI 2026; NCES School Pulse Panel 2024-25; BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, Special Education Teachers, 2025-35 projections.

Clinician demand adds another layer of competition.

Schools recruit in many of the same licensed labor markets as hospitals, clinics, private practices, and other employers. For several school-based disciplines, BLS projects faster-than-average national employment growth through 2035.



SLPs

17% projected growth; about 12,500 openings annually.

OTs

15% projected growth; about 10,000 openings annually.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

BLS projects about 3,400 school psychologist openings annually, even with modest net employment growth.

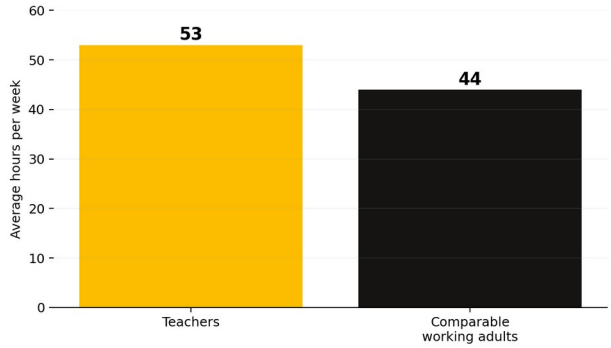
What this means for schools

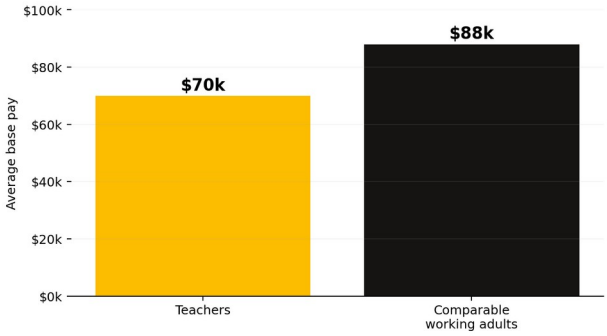
A low-growth occupation can still be difficult to staff when replacement demand, licensure requirements, geographic constraints, and competing employers collide. District workforce planning should therefore track both growth rates and annual openings, not growth alone.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook and 2025-35 Employment Projections.

Recruiting cannot outpace avoidable turnover forever.

RAND's nationally representative 2024 State of the American Teacher survey found teacher well-being remained worse than that of comparable working adults. Teachers reported about twice the rate of frequent job-related stress or burnout, worked longer hours, and earned lower average base pay than comparable adults in the survey.





The retention signal

Managing student behavior, low salaries, and administrative work outside teaching were among the leading sources of stress in RAND's 2024 survey. Compensation matters, but working conditions, workload, administrative support, and role clarity also shape whether educators stay.

2027 IMPLICATION

Retention is a staffing strategy.

Districts that treat onboarding, communication, workload expectations, and supervisor support as workforce infrastructure may reduce the number of vacancies they have to refill.

Source: RAND, Teacher Well-Being and Intentions to Leave in 2024.

The hiring process itself is part of the offer.

NCES reported that a lack of qualified candidates and too few applicants were the most common challenges schools cited when filling teaching vacancies. In a constrained talent market, unnecessary friction can shrink an already limited candidate pool.

SPEED	CLARITY	SUPPORT
Reduce long gaps between application, interview, credential review, and offer.	Be direct about grade level, caseload, setting, schedule, commute, start date, and expectations.	Help candidates understand licensure, documentation, onboarding, and next steps before problems become drop-off points.

CLARIFI 2027 OUTLOOK

Candidate experience becomes operational leverage.

The organizations that communicate quickly and accurately can compete without relying only on higher pay. A smoother process also protects recruiter time and reduces late-stage fallout.

Important distinction

This is a forward-looking operating recommendation based on current shortage and hiring-friction evidence. It is not presented as a measured national preference ranking.

Staffing is moving back toward growth.

The broader U.S. staffing market entered 2026 with signs of stabilization and then returned to year-over-year growth. ASA reported Q2 2026 staffing revenue up 3.3% from Q2 2025 and staffing employment up 0.6%, the first quarter of year-over-year growth in its survey since late 2022.

ASA Q2 2026	SIA 2026 FORECAST	SIA 2027 FORECAST
Revenue +3.3% year over year; staffing employment +0.6%.	SIA's September public forecast projected 2.4% U.S. staffing market growth to $183.1B in 2026.	Public summaries of the September update indicate a further 2.2% growth forecast for 2027, to about $187B.

What this does - and does not - mean for K-12

These are broad staffing-industry figures, not education-staffing market-share statistics. The useful signal is directional: employers facing uncertainty are again using flexible workforce solutions, while buyers remain focused on value, speed, compliance, and measurable service quality.

Source: American Staffing Association Q2 2026 Staffing Employment & Sales Survey; Staffing Industry Analysts, U.S. Staffing Industry Forecast: September 2026 Update. Full SIA report is subscription-based; forecast figures are from public SIA summaries/search excerpts and secondary reporting that attributes them to SIA.

Five developments to track all year.

01 | CERTIFICATION PRESSURE

Watch whether the number of not-fully-certified teachers continues its multi-year rise.

02 | SPED PIPELINES

Track state shortage lists, emergency credentials, vacancy timing, and caseload pressure.

03 | CLINICIAN COMPETITION

Monitor SLP, OT, psychology, and behavioral-health hiring against healthcare and private-practice demand.

04 | DISTRICT BUDGET DISCIPLINE

Hiring decisions may favor flexible capacity, targeted placements, and faster time-to-fill over broad headcount expansion.

05 | RETENTION SIGNALS

Teacher workload, stress, pay adequacy, and leadership support should be treated as early indicators of future vacancies.

06 | STAFFING RECOVERY

A strengthening staffing cycle may increase competition for recruiters, contractors, and specialized talent across sectors.

Clarifi view

The strongest 2027 workforce plans will combine recruiting data with operational signals: vacancy age, credential status, candidate drop-off, interview-to-offer speed, acceptance rate, early attrition, and hard-to-fill role coverage.

Move from vacancy response to workforce planning.

A practical 2027 planning model can be built around five questions. The goal is not to forecast every opening perfectly. It is to know where the district is most exposed before the vacancy becomes urgent.

01

Where is risk concentrated?

Identify roles with recurring vacancies, long time-to-fill, high turnover, or credential scarcity.

02

How early can sourcing begin?

Separate evergreen pipelines from requisition-based recruiting so critical talent is not sourced only after a resignation.

03

What friction can be removed?

Audit application length, scheduling, approvals, background checks, licensure steps, and communication gaps.

04

What can be flexed?

Determine which needs can be addressed through direct hire, contract staffing, temporary coverage, part-time models, or phased start dates.

05

What protects retention?

Track onboarding quality, workload, school-level support, role expectations, and early warning signs during the first 90 days.

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WORKFORCE SCORECARD

Metrics worth bringing into 2027.

Vacancy age

Days each critical position remains open.

Qualified applicants per opening

Separates applicant volume from usable talent.

Interview-to-offer time

Measures decision speed once a candidate is viable.

Offer acceptance rate

Shows whether compensation, role design, or process is losing finalists.

Credential completion time

Tracks licensure and compliance friction.

Early attrition

30-, 60-, and 90-day departures or assignment failures.

Source quality

Which pipelines produce qualified, retained hires.

Hard-to-fill coverage

Percent of priority roles covered by start date.

Use metrics as decisions, not decoration.

A dashboard is useful only when each measure has an owner and a response. For example: if interview-to-offer time exceeds a set threshold, who can remove an approval step? If credential completion stalls, who contacts the candidate and what support is available?

Where Clarifi expects the most pressure.

Role family	2027 pressure	Evidence signal
Special Education Teachers	VERY HIGH	Persistent state shortage reporting, certification pressure, replacement demand, NCES hiring difficulty.
Speech-Language Pathologists	HIGH	Strong national growth projection and competition across schools and healthcare.
School Psychologists	HIGH	Specialized credentialing, geographically uneven supply, and ongoing replacement openings.
Occupational Therapists	HIGH	Fast national growth and cross-sector competition.
Paraprofessionals / Support	MODERATE-HIGH	High-volume school need, wage competition, and retention sensitivity.
General Education Teachers	VARIES	Subject and geography matter; math, science, and some elementary markets remain more constrained.
Behavioral Health / RBT-related	HIGH	Broader behavioral-health demand is growing and youth mental-health needs remain a workforce driver.

Pressure ratings are Clarifi outlook labels, not published government classifications.

The 2027 advantage is preparedness.

The national education workforce picture is not a single shortage story. It is a mix of certification gaps, replacement demand, geographic imbalance, competing labor markets, workload pressure, and school-level operating realities.

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Plan earlier than the vacancy.

Build pipelines for recurring roles, map licensure bottlenecks, shorten decision cycles, and measure the points where qualified candidates are lost.

FOR WORKFORCE PARTNERS

Prove value beyond resumes.

Speed, credential accuracy, candidate experience, communication, and post-placement support should be part of the staffing product - not extras.

Clarifi will continue to update this outlook as new national data are released. This report is designed as a planning resource, not a prediction of any individual district's hiring outcomes.

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Research cut-off: October 7, 2026. Forward-looking interpretations are Clarifi's analysis of the cited evidence and should not be read as guarantees.