The last several years have been particularly challenging for public school teachers and support staff. Stagnant wages, COVID-19 disruptions, inadequate funding, book bans, court decisions limiting the teaching of literature and history, and politicized attacks on both the profession and vulnerable students have taken a severe toll on educators, students, and families.

Educators across the country are leaving the profession, a profound loss not only for the teachers who love teaching and for their students but also for the nation’s communities. School districts nationwide—in urban, suburban and rural areas—are grappling with teacher shortages that began long before the pandemic and that continue, in many places, to worsen (Jones, 2023).

Lack of Affordable Housing Is Exacerbating the Shortage of Public Educators Across the Country, Particularly in the Suburbs

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This issue is being faced across the country, but suburban counties are facing unique, changing dynamics. From 2010 to 2021, housing starts in the suburbs did not keep up with demand. In 2021, 36.2% of all suburban counties experienced underproduction. And while housing production increased 56.9% in the suburbs in the aftermath of the pandemic, there was a 104.8% increase in suburban household formation.

In places without affordable housing in the vicinity of schools, it feels like a Sisyphean task to recruit and retain educators. Teachers want to be part of the community where they teach, to arrive earlier in the morning and leave later in the afternoon, to meet with students and parents, and to support afterschool activities. They want to participate in community activities during the weekend and feel fully integrated into the neighborhood. That’s not possible if they can’t find housing nearby.

Communities, municipalities, unions, and school districts are working toward creative solutions to recruit and retain teachers in their areas. Extremely expensive San Francisco recently agreed to build two reasonably priced housing developments for educators—apartments for rent and condominiums for purchase. Shirley Chisholm Village, also in the Bay Area, is an affordable housing project aimed at providing housing for educators.
“...the average teacher can afford only 12% of the homes for sale within commuting distance of the school where they work, compared with 30% in 2019.” (Katz & Bokhari, 2023)