

New Hampshire is losing its teachers. Here is what that actually looks like.

By Timothy O'Neil

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New Hampshire has a teacher shortage. That is not a controversial statement. It is a documented, worsening reality that state officials, school boards and education advocates have been sounding alarms about for years.

What gets discussed less often is what that shortage actually looks like on the ground, inside specific schools and specific classrooms, and what drives teachers out of the profession or out of the state entirely.

I am a business teacher at a small rural school in New Hampshire. My wife is a science teacher at the same school. We came here deliberately, drawn by the size of the district and the genuine belief that a small community school was a place where dedicated educators could build something meaningful and lasting. We invested in this community. We grew our curriculum. We connected with students and families.

We have both received strong performance evaluations. We have both been told our contracts will not be renewed.

I am not writing this to relitigate our specific circumstances. I am writing because what happened to us reflects a set of structural failures that are driving teachers away from New Hampshire schools every year, and those failures deserve a public conversation.

The first failure is the absence of accountability for administrative conduct. Teachers in small districts are acutely vulnerable to administrators who make verbal commitments and then reverse them, who change teaching assignments at the last minute without consultation, and who respond to good-faith concerns with dismissiveness or retaliation. The collective bargaining process provides some protection, but it is slow, expensive and leaves teachers in a deeply precarious position while disputes are unresolved. When both members of a teaching household are non-renewed while a formal grievance remains active, despite positive evaluations, the message sent to every other teacher in the building is unmistakable.

The second failure is the vetting and accountability of school administrators. Small districts in particular often lack the resources or the institutional will to rigorously examine a principal candidate's prior record before making a hire. When prior records include documented patterns of conduct that resulted in formal civil rights proceedings, that information should be part of the public conversation about who is leading our schools. Students and families deserve to know it. Teachers deserve to know it.

The third failure is what we do, as a state, to teachers who speak up. The educators most likely to advocate for students, to push back on poor administrative decisions, and to file formal complaints when something is wrong are also the educators most exposed to retaliation. If New Hampshire is serious about retaining talented teachers, the state needs meaningful protections for those who raise concerns through appropriate channels, and meaningful consequences for administrators who respond to those concerns with adverse employment actions.

My wife and I chose New Hampshire because we believed in what small-town public education could be. That belief has not changed. What has changed is our understanding of how fragile that vision is when the people in positions of authority are not held to the same standards of professionalism and accountability they demand from everyone else.

New Hampshire cannot afford to keep losing the teachers it has. It especially cannot afford to lose them to the kind of institutional dysfunction that is entirely within our power to fix.

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