Global Solutions for Local Classrooms: Combating the U.S. Teacher Shortage with International Talent

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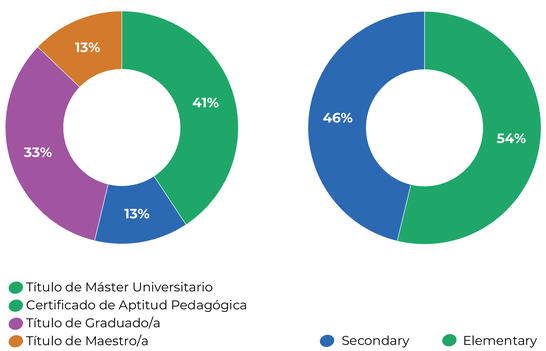
Background

In 2025, the number of K-12 teaching positions in the United States either vacant or filled by teachers inadequately certified increased to an estimated 411,549, or approximately one in every eight positions, across 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia, with the greatest percentage in special education, language arts, and vocational and technical education.[1] Collectively, all 48 states reported a shortage in math, science, or special education.[2] These alarming figures reveal persistent and systemic deficiencies in the U.S. education system, specifically in teacher training, standards, and recruitment.

The data suggest an urgent need for a strategy to address the two root causes of the teacher shortage crisis: teacher attrition, with 7 to 8 percent of teachers leaving their positions annually,[3] and declining interest in the teaching profession. The recruitment and integration of qualified teachers educated outside the U.S. present a unique opportunity to harness international talent to address these issues.

For over 20 years, WES has had a partnership with the Spanish Ministry of Education's Visiting Teachers Program,[4] issuing credential evaluations for thousands of licensed teachers who want teaching experience in the U.S., providing elementary and secondary schools across the country with much-needed global talent. This model is an example of how the U.S. can successfully leverage internationally qualified professionals to help address a national issue.

Credentials evaluated and qualifying levels



Teacher Training and Professional Pathways

Elementary education

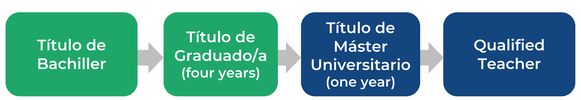
Prior to the educational reforms carried out as part of the Bologna Process and Spain's incorporation into the European Higher Education Area, teaching at the elementary level required the *Título de Maestro/a,* a three-year undergraduate degree requiring the *Título de Bachiller* for entry.[5] Under the current structure, elementary schoolteachers must hold a *Título de Graduado/a en Maestro/a,* a four-year program comparable to a bachelor's degree in elementary education in the U.S.

Students take general education and disciplinary didactic courses and complete both an internship and a final degree project.[6] Students can specialize in curricular areas such as English language, speech and hearing, and special education.[7] In total, 415 evaluations were completed for Spanish visiting teachers in 2025, with 46 percent holding one or more credentials in elementary education, representing all available specializations.

Secondary education

Teaching at the secondary level in Spain requires an advanced degree. Prior to 2009, those without a qualifying four- to five-year integrated bachelor's and master's degree were required to obtain the *Certificado de Aptitud Pedagógica (CAP),* a one-year program consisting of a minimum of 300 hours of theory and practice.[8] Following the implementation of the Bologna structure, the credential required is the *Título de Máster Universitario,* a one-year master's degree consisting of 60 ECTS credits, or 1500 total academic hours.[9]

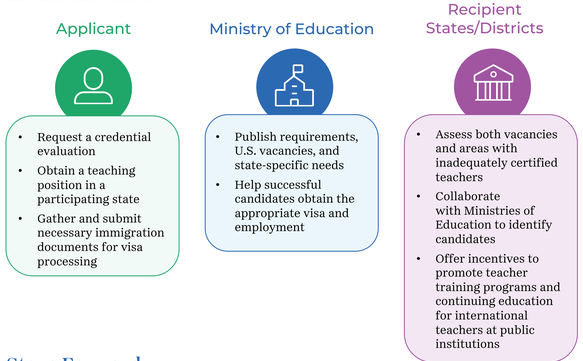
Like U.S. master's degree programs in secondary education, the curriculum includes courses in educational processes, adolescent development, teaching-learning methods, and major-specific didactic courses and offers a wide range of specializations, from business and economics to educational guidance and counseling.[10] Common specializations reported by visiting teachers from Spain include mathematics, physics, and chemistry, and the Spanish language. In 2025, 54 percent of visiting teachers from Spain submitted at least one credential in secondary education.



Keys to Success

Successful partnerships require extensive planning and cooperation between all parties involved, in this case, the recipient states through the Exchange Visitor Program,[11] the Spanish Ministry of Education, and the teachers themselves. Participation in the program is contingent on the timely and successful completion of the required processes and procedures outlined in the program guide,[12] including requesting a credential evaluation report, processing a J-1 visa, and obtaining employment and certifications.

The receiving states communicate their vacancies, preferred areas of specialization, and selection processes.[13] The Ministry publishes this information, along with application requirements, the number of positions available by state, and a general guide that is updated yearly.[14] Each party illustrated below plays an important role in ensuring successful collaboration in the recruitment and integration of international teachers.



Steps Forward

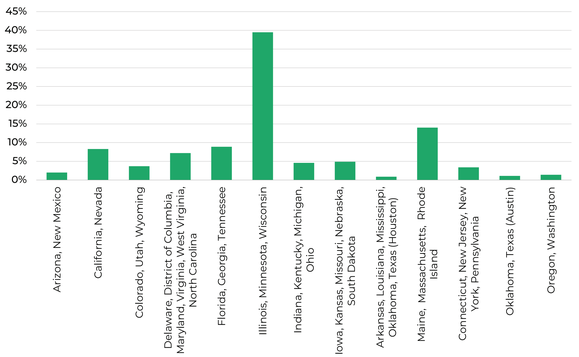
The above model is a data-driven method of addressing the two main causes of the teacher shortage: declining interest in the profession and teacher attrition. While states could do more to attract teachers, resources are often limited, complicating efforts to extend incentives or increase salaries, especially in rural and low-income areas.[15] Internationally educated teachers who wish to participate in these programs are highly motivated.

To leverage international talent to reduce teacher attrition, educational authorities should focus on further integrating successful international teachers into the workforce through simplified employment processes and the promotion of graduate study and continuing education at U.S. institutions, contributing to positive outcomes for the teachers, students, and the U.S. education system as a whole.

Visiting Teachers Program 2021-2025

2,247 evaluations completed
43 receiving states across the country
80% of applicants hold multiple credentials

Receiving states by region (2025/26)



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