

## ***Shaping Our Future: A Response to the National Teacher Shortage***

By Amber Podlucky

Most of us can remember teachers who impacted our life. They made us think, broadened our horizons, and gave us confidence. They inspired us with the latest science discoveries or innovative research. What the world had to offer or what we could accomplish seemed endless.

Today, the nation is experiencing a teacher shortage larger than ever. School districts across America are having difficulty filling classrooms with highly qualified teachers, particularly in high-need subject areas such as math and science, and in rural areas. Teachers' contributions to society may be great, but many are still underpaid, overwhelmed by the large class sizes, and end up leaving the profession.

Due to an increasingly scarce pool of qualified new teachers, school districts are sometimes forced to reduce their hiring standards. Some districts, using temporary or emergency licenses, place teachers in content areas where they don't have the necessary credentials, often in high-needs subject areas. Lacking the proper credentials, teachers are often faced with the challenge of connecting students to content through real world experiences or events without the appropriate background

Western Governors University is addressing the growing need for highly-qualified teachers through online, competency-based degree and licensure programs. With their unique model, they are able to license teachers in virtually every state. WGU continues to be the only online university that is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Some colleges and universities are offering scholarships to encourage students to become licensed in hard to fill subjects. [Western Governors University](#) is offering scholarships made available through a \$3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Valued up to a maximum of \$7,500, the [WGU Scholarships for Rural Mathematics and Science Educators](#) are designed for individuals currently teaching or desiring to teach mathematics or science in one of America's rural school districts.

Select states also have programs in place that will reduce a student's loan amount for each year they teach in a high-need area. Each year completed will reduce their loan balance by a set dollar amount.

The teacher shortage won't go away early, but innovators such as WGU are now addressing the challenge.