

One of the most impactful issues within Education is not just teacher shortages or teacher pay, but rather how society views the teaching profession as a whole. Teaching is frequently described as a “rewarding profession”, but rarely described as “prestigious”. Careers in STEM, medicine, business, and law are often described as ambitious and high status, whereas teaching is often viewed as a less-lucrative backup plan. This dangerous narrative is detrimental not only to the teaching profession but to future generations of students. In a nation already faced with a vast teacher shortage, with 411,500 positions left unfilled or filled by teachers who are not fully certified (Learning Policy Institute, 2025), narratives like this contribute directly to teacher burnout and high teacher turnover rates.

From the outside, many do not fully grasp the true power of teachers. Teachers are the backbone of every profession. Doctors go to medical *SCHOOL*, Lawyers go to law *SCHOOL*, and Engineers go to engineering *SCHOOL*. Each of these professions begins with a teacher. Without teachers, society would cease to function. Progress, innovation, and leadership would not be possible without someone first teaching the next generation the skills they need to thrive in a rapidly evolving world. Teaching is not simply a career; it is the foundation of every career.

Despite this, however, the public narrative and media primarily focus on what teachers lack: low pay, long hours, stress, etc. While these challenges are real, they are experienced by other professions that are described as prestigious, and should not define the profession as a whole. Doctors work long, grueling hours during their residencies, businesspeople often work 60+ hour workweeks, lawyers work arduous cases for hours on end, often for low pay early in their careers. Yet these professions are not defined by their less desirable qualities. When teaching is portrayed as exhausting and underappreciated, students who may have become incredible educators are driven away to other professions. This contributes to our mass teacher shortage, leaving existing teachers with large class sizes and heavier workloads, which in turn increases burnout and increases early retirements or teachers quitting the profession entirely.

If teaching were viewed and portrayed as a prestigious profession, akin to STEM careers, we could reverse this narrative. Prestige attracts talent. When a career is respected, more people want to enter it, and people already in the profession feel valued. Raising the prestige of teaching would encourage students who are strong leaders, problem solvers, communicators, to view teaching as a first career choice rather than a backup plan. It would also boost morale and increase long-term career satisfaction.

Additionally, commanding a greater respect for the teaching profession opens doors for better policies surrounding the profession as a whole. Professions that are respected are better paid and offered better benefit packages and working conditions. When teachers are finally given credit as experts, rather than babysitters, it becomes easier to fight for competitive pay akin to STEM jobs, better working conditions, and more trust in their professional expertise. Prestige is not simply symbolic; it directly affects funding, policy, and public support.

Many current teachers already know that teaching is a deeply rewarding profession. While teaching is indeed *Hard-Work*, it is also *Heart-Work* as the impact a good teacher can make on a student's life is immense. Teachers build relationships, foster confidence, and shape lives as few careers can. In fact, teachers can save a life just as well as a doctor can. The problem is that those outside of the profession don't often see that impact. Society must begin telling a different story about teachers. To do that, we must start with how we talk about teachers in our daily lives, in the media, and on the local, state, and national stages.

By restoring the prestige of teaching, we can attract new teachers, retain and motivate current teachers, and continue growing trust in the education system amongst students, parents, the public, and teachers themselves. When teaching is viewed as powerful and honorable, more people will be willing to pursue their passion for teaching. And when teachers are respected, students, teachers, and parents all benefit, communities and schools grow stronger, and we begin preparing the next generation of leaders for our future.

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