Washington's Health Workforce SENTINEL NETWORK

Findings Brief: *K–12 Schools*

Spring 2025

This brief highlights workforce needs reported by Washington's **K–12 schools** to the Health Workforce Sentinel Network in **May/June 2025.** These facilities have contributed workforce insights since 2016, across 17 reporting periods. More findings are available at wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings. Respondents range from school district administrators to school nurses.

K – 12 Schools

Top occupations with exceptionally long vacancies*

Rank	Spring 2019	Spring 2022	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025
1	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse
2	Licensed practical nurse School psychologist	Licensed practical nurse	School psychologist	Mental health counselor Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse Speech language therapist
3	Dental hygienist Nurse practitioner Speech language therapist	Occupational therapist School psychologist	Mental health counselor	School psychologist Speech language therapist	Administrator/Director Athletic Trainer
4	No additional occupations reported	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Speech language therapist	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency

← Most cited

*Fall 2019 to Fall 2021, Fall 2022, and Spring 2023 findings not shown due to low response numbers. Occupations cited by the same number of responses share the same rank number.

Reasons for Exceptionally Long Vacancies

Respondents cited salary, wage, and benefits issues and not enough qualified applicants (particularly for registered nurses) as some of the main reasons for exceptionally long vacancies across occupations. Examples of responses below:

- *[Registered nurse] Full time, 1:1 medically fragile student RN position in self-contained classroom has been open all year. have used multiple agency nurses that have ended up not staying. Also have part time openings for 2 students in general education that have tracheostomies/vents that we [can't] find someone wanting few hours.*
- *[Licensed practical nurse] Looking for 1:1 care provider- limited pool of nurses in the area with vent/trach experience or willing to learn. Pay is always a discussion point.*
- *[Speech language therapist] It is a 0.6 [FTE position] possibly also [due to] not a lot of SLPs [in our area].*
- *[Multiple occupations] Pay, workload, difficulty filling the position with qualified staff.*

Reasons for Retention/Turnover Problems

Respondents highlighted workload and patient acuity issues and salary, wage, and benefits issues as the top reasons for retention/turnover problems. Examples include:

- *[Registered nurse] One out on sick leave and then chose to resign. So, even though the position was only vacant for 4 months, the services had a much longer interruption.*
- *[Registered nurse] Cutting hours at [our district], poor administration support.*
- *[Registered nurse] Several school districts have had a change in staff every year I have worked here (6 years).*
- *[Multiple occupations] Pay, workload, difficulty filling the position with qualified staff.*

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

Currently, what are your organization's top workforce issues?
Recruiting new workers and filling vacancies were cited by many K-12 schools as top workforce issues. Examples of responses include:

- *"Some areas are very remote and rural making it difficult to fill positions."*
- *"Location - eastern central Washington has a provider shortage- nurses with experience (including subs and contracted nursing) are either in Spokane or on the West Side."*
- *"Doesn't pay as well as hospital/clinic nursing safety in self-contained classrooms."*

In the past year, has your organization supported "grow-your-own" programs (i.e., apprenticeships, residencies or on-the-job training opportunities) to train workers for specific roles?

Most respondents did not have "grow-your-own" programs for healthcare personnel. Those that did have "grow-your-own" programs said:

- *"We are training on the job for a specific role. We partnered with an educational institution out of [state]."*
- *"Nurse mentorship. CMS/CHS nurse mentored this RN in CES school nurse role."*

To what extent have the following affected your ability to recruit and retain your workforce in the past year?
Childcare availability remains a top issue for employers, impacting their recruitment and retention efforts.

Childcare availability

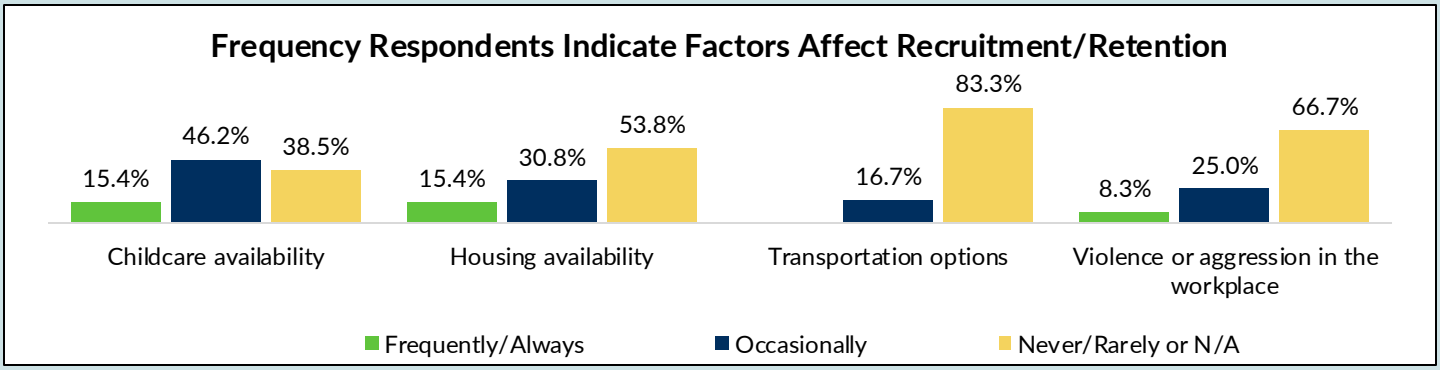
- *"Childcare is limited in our rural community and expensive when available."*
- *"It's expensive, so some people can't increase hours because the childcare is too pricey."*

Housing availability

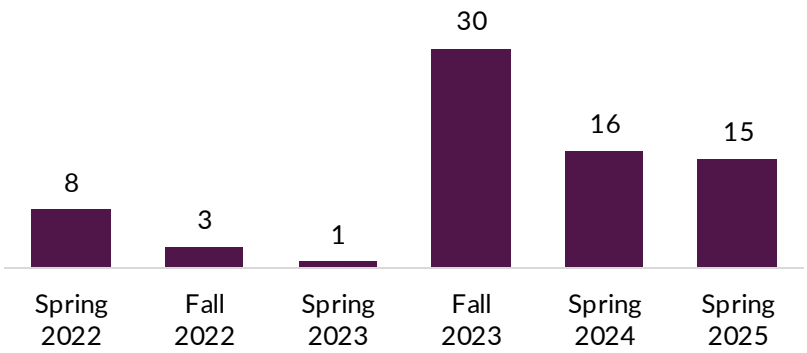
- *"Affordable housing leads to long commutes."*
- *"There is a major affordable housing shortage and because we are an island, there is a very physical radius of what is a tolerable commute for most people. It is too expensive to live where we work."*

Transportation options

- *"If you live outside of [our town] then you may have to drive 20 plus miles to work, and if you do not have a reliable vehicle that may make the commute hard on the employee."*
- *"Long commutes and sitting in traffic doesn't bring anyone joy."*

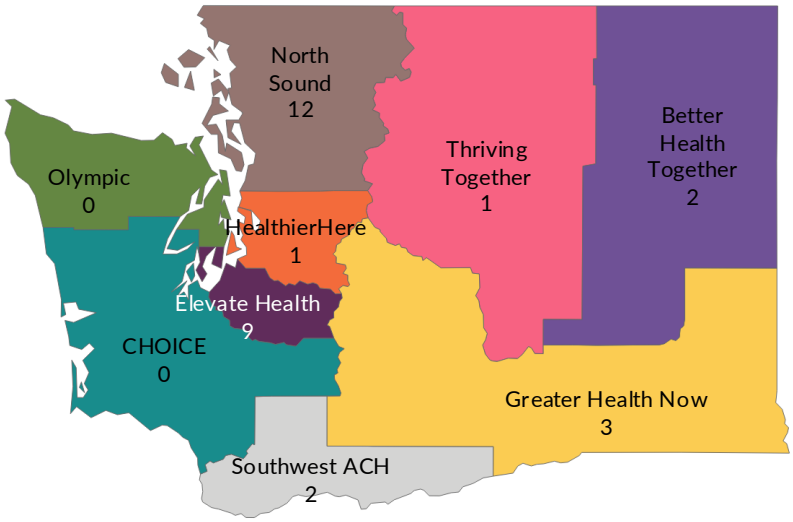


Number of Responses from K-12 Schools in WA by Data Collection Date



*Findings prior to Spring 2022 not shown due to space constraints.

Number of Responding K-12 Schools by Accountable Community of Health (ACH), Spring 2025



Note: Each facility may serve clients/patients in more than one county, which is why map totals may exceed total unique responses.

About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners and educators to identify and respond to changing demand for healthcare workers, with a focus is on identifying newly emerging skills and roles required by employers. The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington's Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington's Workforce Board and the University of Washington's Center for Health Workforce Studies. Funding to initiate the Sentinel Network came from the Healthier Washington initiative, with ongoing support from the Washington State Legislature.

Why become a Sentinel? ***As a Sentinel, you can*****:**
--Communicate your organization's workforce needs to inform policy and planning responses.
--Have access to current and actionable information about emerging healthcare workforce needs.
--Compare your organization's experience and emerging workforce demand trends with similar employer groups.

To view an interactive summary of findings and to provide information from your organization:
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