



# Education Workforce Housing in California

## MYTHS and FACTS

**MYTH:** *Supplying housing is not part of the mission of school districts or county offices of education, collectively known as local educational agencies (LEAs).*

**FACT:** Multiple surveys and studies have shown that many teachers and other LEA staff leave their employers — or the education sector altogether — because they simply cannot afford to live near where they work. This leads to high turnover for beginning teachers especially, which causes disruption to the schools and students where they work. Research shows that retaining qualified teachers and staff has a positive impact on student outcomes, so the housing crisis makes workforce housing a clear part of LEAs' educational mission.

According to estimates from the report [Education Workforce Housing in California: Developing the 21st Century Campus](#), California LEAs own 150,000 acres of land — approximately 75,000 of which could be used for purposes including developing education workforce housing. By building housing on this land, LEAs can offer housing at reasonable rents to their employees. This reduces staff turnover, makes it easier to recruit new educators and allows educators to live in the same communities as their students — all factors that contribute to student success.

**MYTH:** *Given all that they must manage, LEAs cannot successfully take on the work of building housing for staff.*

**FACT:** Six school districts in California have [already built successful housing developments for their staff](#), providing a template for other LEAs to follow. These districts offer clear lessons on how to plan for, develop and manage education workforce housing without detracting from their core mission of preparing students for success in the world.

The experiences of these LEAs show that the bulk of the work is in the early stages of planning education workforce housing. The LEA's primary job is to keep their communities informed and hire good consultants, including development advisors, architects and property managers. Once a development is approved, the LEA should play a very minor role. Specifically, LEAs do not directly take on the technical work of development and construction, nor should they engage directly in property management.

**MYTH:** *A better solution to the housing affordability crisis would be to pay teachers and staff more.*

**FACT:** CSBA agrees that teachers and staff should earn more, and continually advocates for this. Educator pay largely depends on the state budget, which LEAs do not control, while benefits like housing offer much more LEA flexibility and can provide employees with the financial relief they need.

Further, no matter how much more educators are paid, the high cost of housing is still going to be a challenge in most of California. Education workforce housing is a non-taxable benefit that saves employees substantial money every month.

**MYTH:** *Education workforce housing looks institutional, carries stigma and lowers property values.*

**FACT:** All of the education workforce housing developments built in California to date are indistinguishable from new market-rate units. [Studies](#) even show that workforce housing can increase property values.

[This slide deck features photos](#) of all the completed developments across the state and can be downloaded and shared to build community support.

**MYTH:** *No one wants to live with their colleagues.*

**FACT:** This kind of housing option isn't right for everyone, and many staff members will choose not to apply. However, all of the developments built so far have waiting lists, which indicates that this type of residence is in high demand among educators and other school employees. LEAs survey their staff to learn what they want in a housing development, and good design ensures that every unit has privacy and that shared spaces are available where residents can choose to join neighbors when they desire.

Anecdotally, educators living in workforce housing say they are pleasantly surprised at how much they enjoy living with other education professionals. They reference the sense of community and safety that stems from living with others working in education and even the ability to collaborate with those who work at different school sites.

**MYTH:** *There's no evidence that building education workforce housing improves staff retention and recruitment.*

**FACT:** Thanks to funding from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, CSBA and its partners are conducting research to evaluate how workforce housing affects teacher and staff retention and recruitment. Those findings will be published in a report that is anticipated to be released in early 2025.

Districts that have built education workforce housing report that it has significantly improved staff retention. For example, Jefferson Union High School District in Daly City began both the 2022–23 and 2023–24 academic years fully staffed for the first time in at least a decade after its complex opened for residents in early 2022.

**MYTH:** *Education workforce housing unfairly benefits those who get to live in the developments.*

**FACT:** LEAs can allow all their employees to apply to live in newly-built workforce housing developments. Units are allocated by income or lottery, depending on local eligibility priorities.

Educators who aren't interested in workforce housing still benefit, as LEA-built homes can reduce staff turnover and create a sense of community pride. This means less of a need to continually orient new staff to schools and help them adjust to each site's culture and procedures. Fewer vacancies also helps mitigate the need to fill in for empty roles in addition to everyday duties.

**MYTH:** *Building education workforce housing takes money away from the classroom and employee compensation.*

**FACT:** CSBA does not advise LEAs to use general fund dollars to pay for education workforce housing. Most LEAs only use money earmarked for facilities to pay for the planning and construction of these developments. Additionally, housing helps relieve general fund pressure in both the near and long-term by creating a stable workforce, thereby lowering the cost of hiring and onboarding.

**MYTH:** *Our district is underfunded, so there is no way we can assemble the resources needed to build workforce housing for our employees.*

**FACT:** All you need to get started is collective will. Boards can pass resolutions, communities can meet to support their educators, educators can get together to outline their needs, staff can suggest the best sites. It's true that after your LEA gets started, you will have to find resources to pay for feasibility studies. But these studies can be broken into steps that don't require a large capital outlay, and there are many regional philanthropies and financial institutions interested in supporting workforce housing projects.

**MYTH:** *Our community is wary of affordable housing and any development that will increase density, traffic or parking problems.*

**FACT:** Education housing is **workforce** housing. Most communities want their teachers and school staff living nearby. And when housing is close to jobs, traffic and parking issues decrease. Change in a neighborhood is always concerning to the people who live there, so ongoing community engagement is key to a successful education workforce housing development.

Learn more about education workforce housing at [csba.org/workforcehousing](https://www.csba.org/workforcehousing).