

# Arizona breaks ground on tiny homes for teachers amid worsening educator shortage



By [Gabe Cohen](#), CNN

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See how this state is attracting teachers

**PhoenixCNN** —

Desperate to find educators amid a [nationwide shortage](#), an Arizona school district is breaking ground on an unusual recruitment tool: tiny homes for teachers.

Chino Valley Unified School District is using federal money to build 10 studio units, each 400 square feet, on a vacant lot behind an elementary school, where teachers will pay roughly \$550 per month – well below the market rate for rent. The homes, expected to be finished by early fall, are designed to be transitional housing and a way to lure educators to their schools over other districts across the country.

“Districts are fighting over applicants, and we sometimes don’t get any, and we have to do with people that are not fully certified,” Chino Valley Superintendent John Scholl told CNN. “We’re hoping that these 10 units will help attract and retain teachers that we normally wouldn’t get.”



Superintendent John Scholl says the district hopes the units will attract and retain teachers.

CNN

Teacher advocates see the employment crunch as a symptom of other industry problems – from [low salaries](#), [decreasing morale](#) to [waning professional respect](#) – that should be addressed instead. And they worry about potential conflicts if a teacher's boss is also their landlord. But with housing affordability nevertheless a key hurdle, officials in Arizona and California have taken to building their own homes for teachers, with similar proposals also proffered by districts in [Nevada](#) and [Hawaii](#).



Teachers are leaving, forcing this school to cancel classes. Lowering professional qualifications does not fix shortage, educators say

Jason White, a 50-year-old high school English teacher currently living with his parents outside Phoenix, heard about Chino Valley's project and applied for a teaching role. Without an extra benefit like affordable housing, he says he'd struggle to make ends meet on a teacher's salary. "I've turned down two jobs already because I did my research and I knew I couldn't afford to live there," White said. "I'm sort of at a crossroads, I guess. I want to try at least one more year. But if the situation doesn't work out, then I'll probably end up moving on and moving out of education."



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CNN

## Where the money's coming from

Across Arizona, an estimated 2,890 teacher positions remained unfilled as of January, which is 25% of the vacancies from the start of this school year

Chino Valley, roughly two hours north of Phoenix, is one of at least eight Arizona school districts creating teacher housing, also known as a "teacherage," as part of a \$3 million pilot program in North Central Arizona using funds from the [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund](#) and the [American Rescue Plan Act](#), according to Yavapai County School Superintendent Tim Carter. The Biden administration announced the allocation of more than \$122 billion for schools from those pandemic relief plans in March 2021.

Each district could receive up to \$500,000 in matching funds to support teacher housing projects as part of the program in North Central Arizona.



US public schools get a D+ for poor conditions, and experts say problems are getting worse. Here's what kids are facing

Sedona-Oak Creek Unified School District is planning to convert a vacant school building into 11 apartments for teachers and their families. The early plans are for studios and one- to two-bedroom homes, with rent calculated based on the household income of the teacher's family. In Prescott, a fenced-off lot behind Taylor Hicks Elementary School will soon house six modular homes: four for teachers, one for a police officer and one for a firefighter. Each home will be roughly 843 square feet and have two bedrooms.

"Most of the teacherages we're familiar with are in very rural parts of Arizona, where there simply is not housing available," Prescott Unified Assistant Superintendent Clark Tenney said. "That's not the case in Prescott. There are lots of homes, but with our median home price being over \$600,000, that prices teachers completely out of the market."

### **'Treating a symptom and not the illness'**

Teacher housing projects are popping up in other parts of the US, especially in areas with skyrocketing housing costs. Last year, Gov. Gavin Newsom [signed](#) a bill to make it easier for California school districts to build teacher housing.



A view of a new housing complex for Jefferson Union High School District teachers and education staff in Daly City, California.

Godofredo A. Vásquez/AP

In the Bay Area, Jefferson Union High School District [opened](#) a 122-unit apartment complex for school staff last Spring. It's nearly full, the district says, and helped them start the school year with a full staff of classroom teachers for the first time in recent history.

Teacherage proposals have also come from districts in [Nevada](#), [Hawaii](#) and several other parts of [California](#).



From an old convent to rooms for rent, schools are desperate to find affordable housing for struggling staff

But some public education advocates are skeptical of these teacher housing projects.

“Our concern would be that a professional educator would not only work for the district, but the district would also be their landlord,” said Marisol Garcia, president of the Arizona Education Association. “If there’s a leaky sink or the air conditioning isn’t working, you have to go to your boss to ask them to fix that.”

Garcia argues these projects are a bandage on a broken system, missing the root of the problems driving teachers away.

“We’re treating a symptom and not the illness,” she said. “We don’t have enough educators who want to enter the profession, who want to stay in the profession, because we’re not able to pay them what they deserve to be paid, and more importantly, we have taken steps away from respecting the profession.”



Crises converge on American education

A new [report](#) from the National Education Association found that despite some pandemic pay raises, the national average public school teacher salary rose just 2% in the 2021-2022 school year and another 2.6% in 2022-2023, failing to keep up with inflation.

Another [analysis of data from eight states](#) found more teachers than usual quit the classroom after last school year, backing up concerns repeatedly raised by teachers and advocates across the country. Meanwhile, students are still recovering from steep [learning loss](#) from the pandemic.



Meagan Brown says she is leaving the profession after 12 years of teaching.  
CNN

Meagan Brown, a special education teacher in Tucson, is leaving her special education classroom next month after 12 years of teaching.

“It shouldn’t have to be about vow of poverty to be a teacher, and that’s what it feels like,” Brown said.

She and her husband, a firefighter, are living with her parents, struggling to save money to buy a home and start a family. She says she earns roughly \$46,000 per year, and her husband makes a little more than \$50,000.

“We can’t both be in helping professions, so I decided to leave,” she said. “I’m a really proud public school teacher, and it’s hard. It’s hard to know that I can’t do it anymore. Because I really feel like all kids deserve the best education they can receive.”

White, who’s still in the running for the job in Chino Valley agrees. “I think it’s a very difficult time to be a teacher. And it’s really a bit sad, because it’s such an important job... Teachers need some type of support that hasn’t been offered up until this point...And I hope that more districts would see that and maybe follow their lead.”