Concept Proposal: Kern County *Educator Housing Pilot Program

Purpose

Explore a pilot program that reduces housing costs for educators as a workforce recruitment and retention strategy rather than a replacement for competitive salaries. Success of the program can result in expansion of the program for essential workers across other industries.

Problem Statement

Teacher recruitment and retention remain persistent challenges. While salary increases are valuable, they require ongoing budget commitments. Housing assistance targets one of the largest household expenses and may improve recruitment and retention at a lower cost.

Pilot Objectives

- Increase recruitment of qualified educators.
- Improve retention, particularly during the first five years.
- Reduce vacancies in high-need subject areas.
- Strengthen educational continuity for students.

Why Kern County

Kern County combines urban and rural school districts, has recurring staffing challenges in several credential areas, and has housing costs where a modest subsidy could have a meaningful impact. It provides an excellent environment to evaluate whether housing assistance produces measurable workforce improvements.

Illustrative Pilot Design

Duration: 5 years
Participants: 100–250 teachers
Priority: Early-career teachers, Special Education, STEM, bilingual educators, and teachers relocating from outside the county.
Benefit: Monthly rental assistance (illustratively $500–$750) with annual employment verification.

Potential Partners

- Kern County school districts
- County government
- California state education and housing agencies
- Local housing authorities
- Private apartment developers and property managers
- Philanthropic and community foundations

Evaluation Metrics

- Teacher recruitment rates
- Three-year retention rates
- Vacancy reductions
- Teacher satisfaction
- Cost per retained teacher
- Student and school stability indicators

Funding Possibilities

- State appropriations
- Housing or workforce development grants
- Local matching funds
- Public-private partnerships
- Philanthropic support

Discussion Points for Local Leaders

1. Is housing one of the largest barriers to recruiting educators locally?
2. Which districts would be ideal pilot participants?
3. What existing housing or workforce programs could be leveraged?
4. What funding sources are most realistic?
5. Which state partners would need to be involved?

Next Steps

Conduct a needs assessment, gather recruitment and vacancy data, estimate program costs, identify funding sources, and prepare a formal policy proposal with budget projections and implementation timeline.

Executive Summary

This proposal recommends exploring a Kern County Educator Housing Pilot Program to determine whether targeted rental assistance can improve teacher recruitment and retention. The concept treats housing assistance as a workforce investment that complements, rather than replaces, competitive educator compensation. A successful pilot could provide evidence for expansion at the county or state level.

Additional Questions to Ask Friends & Colleagues

"Is teacher recruitment a priority you're hearing about?"
"If housing assistance existed, what would be the biggest obstacle to implementing it?"
"Who would have to champion something like this?"
"Has anything similar ever been proposed here?"
"If you had to pilot this on a small scale, what would it look like?"