



NEOED

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PURPOSE

2026 EDUCATION HIRING REPORT

A woman with curly hair and glasses is looking down at a tablet she is holding. The background is a blurred office setting.

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Hiring in public education is rebounding with promise. After years of hiring struggles brought on by the pandemic, institutions are seeing more purpose-driven candidates who are excited to build meaningful careers in education and public service.

While the education sector continues to face challenges, NEOED's latest data reveals encouraging shifts with the **potential to spark long-term workforce stability**. This analysis of thousands of higher education and K-12 institutions is drawn from real data from January to November 2025, supplemented by research on job seeker sentiment.

With **51% of higher ed candidates exploring new opportunities** and economic uncertainty driving candidates to pursue stability over flashy perks, institutions are attracting candidates intent on working in education careers that reflect their values.

Educational institutions can seize this moment of renewed interest by ensuring hiring processes are **fast, clear, and candidate-focused**. Discover the five standout trends shaping education hiring in 2026 and what actions institutions can take to level up their recruitment strategy this year.

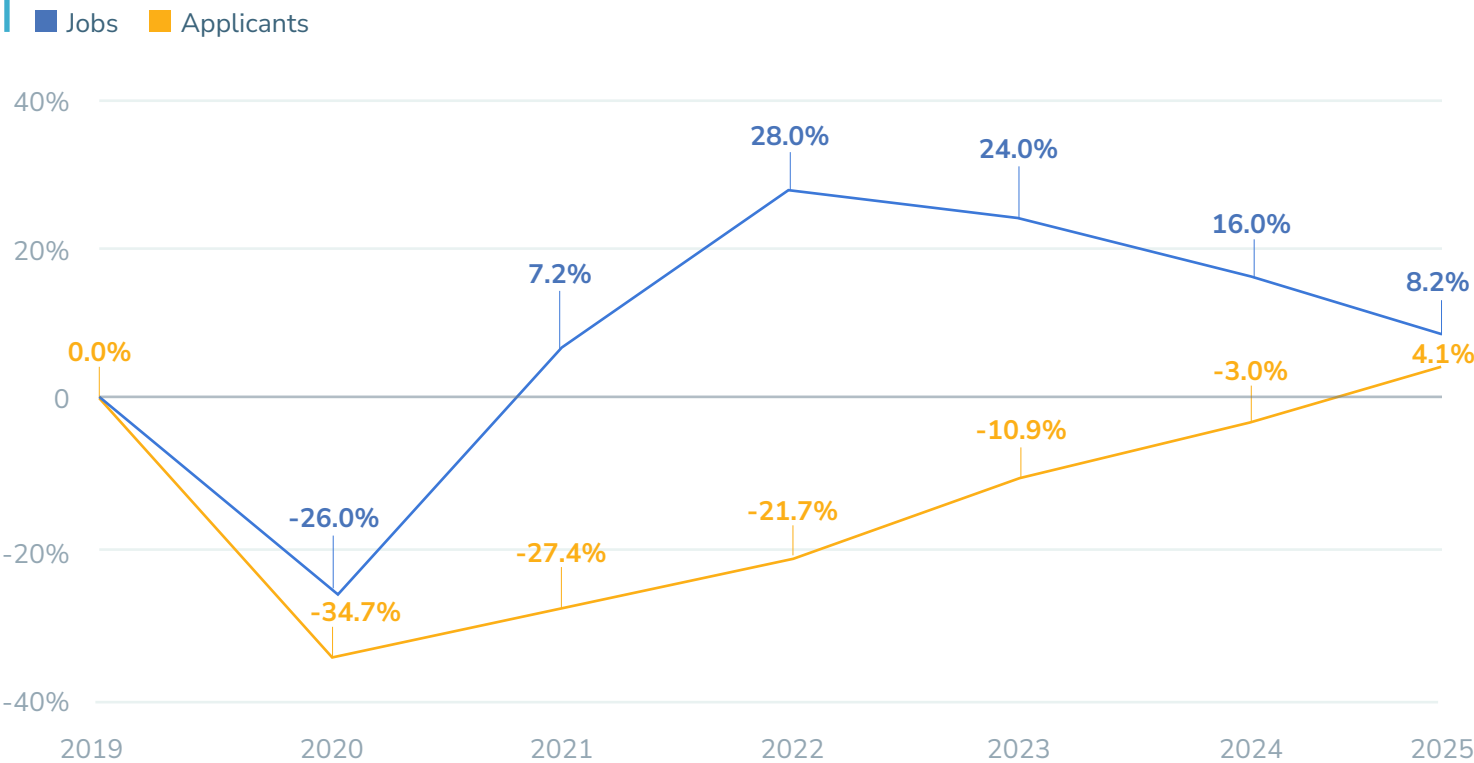
TREND 1:

DEMAND IS SHIFTING THE ADVANTAGE

Applications are rebounding – and competition for open roles is rising – as more job seekers prioritize stable, mission-driven careers in education.

The public education market is showing promising signs of stabilization. NEOED’s data shows **overall applications to education jobs grew slightly (0.5%)** from 2024 to 2025, while the number of **job postings decreased 11.3% on average**.

Figure 1.1
Change in Education Job Postings & Applications, 2019 - 2025
Source: NEOED



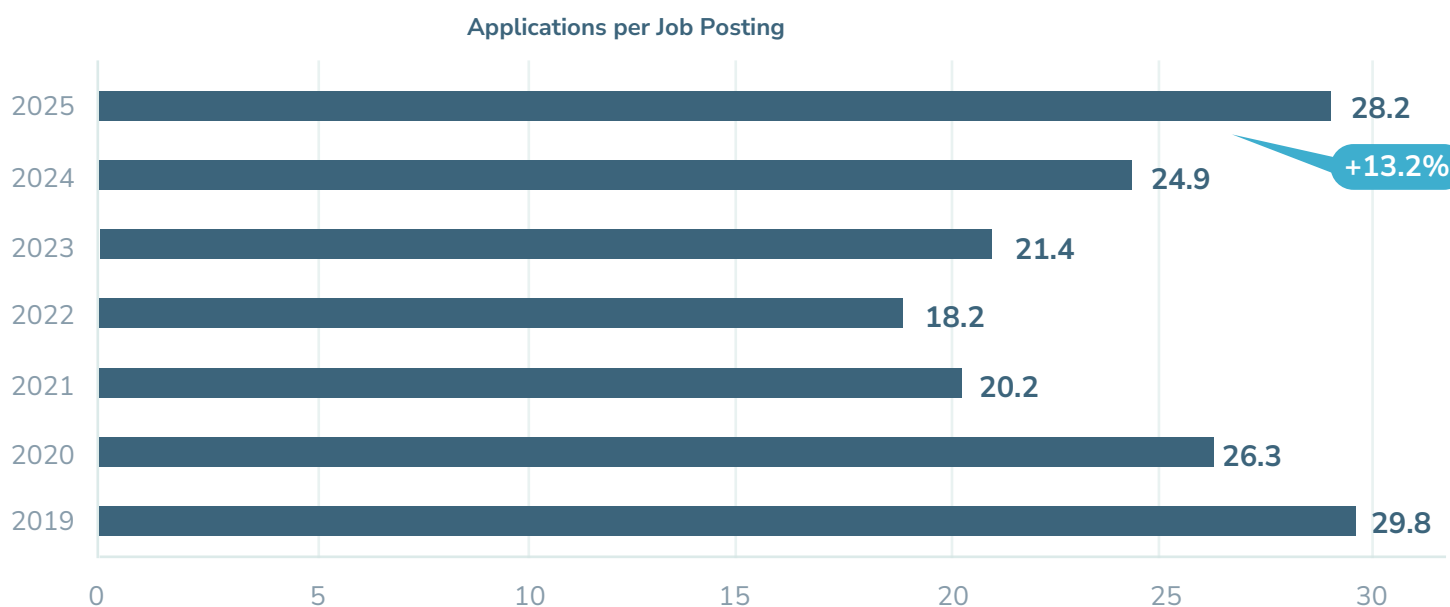
2025 the education sector **averaged around 28.2 applications per job** – landing just below the 2019 average of 29.8 applications per job. This indicates that job seeker interest in education roles is returning to the baseline levels seen before the pandemic.

Perhaps most telling, the number of **applications submitted per job posting increased 13.2% from 2024 to 2025** – meaning more applicants are competing for fewer jobs. If this trend of declining supply and increasing demand continues, institutions will have more candidates to choose from and, ultimately, **gain more leverage in the hiring process**.

Figure 1.2

Average Number of Applications Per Education Job from 2019–2025

Source: NEOED



Why It Matters

Budget flattening and higher teacher retention could be driving institutions to post fewer open jobs. **RAND's State of the American Teacher Survey** found only 16% of teachers intended to leave their jobs in 2025 – down from 22% in 2024.

At the same time, applicant interest is rising in certain higher education roles, especially technology and operations. Recent layoffs in the federal government and in the private sector may be prompting job seekers to **prioritize roles with more stability and longevity in an uncertain labor market**.

Although institutions face funding uncertainties, this moment invites a unique opportunity to hire more strategically. With fewer open jobs to manage and an influx of high-intent applicants to choose from, HR leaders and hiring teams should focus on **making hiring faster, clearer, and more candidate-friendly**. Improving these processes can provide additional leverage over other employers at a unique time when more candidates are searching for work. This increases institutions' chances of securing the best candidates before they accept offers elsewhere.

Actions Institutions Can Take

1

Automate screening and hiring committee processes.

Speed matters when competing for qualified talent and filling critical roles – streamlining screening and decision-making pays off. The International Journal of Global Business and Competitiveness found that using an automated screening framework reduced manual short-listing effort by 80% in a high-volume recruitment environment.

2

Include hiring timelines in job posts.

Include detailed, self-qualifying information in every job posting. When ads spell out specifics – especially flexibility and career-growth opportunities – applications jump. A 2024 randomized field experiment at a large European tech firm found that highlighting flexibility increased entry-level applications by 44%, and emphasizing career advancement raised them by 35%. Use that space to list hiring timelines (“interviews by March 15”), long-term benefits, role outcomes, and growth pathways so candidates can quickly self-screen and opt in.

3

Shorten the length of job applications.

When an application process is overly complicated or cumbersome, 60% of job seekers will drop off due to frustration. Simplify the application process by gathering only the information needed upfront and obtain the rest in later stages. This will encourage more candidates to apply.



TREND 2:

BRAND TRUST IS A TALENT MAGNET

Job seekers are actively searching for purpose-filled careers. Now’s the time to attract qualified, diverse candidates interested in the education sector’s mission.

Finding and retaining qualified candidates has been a persistent challenge in education, but NEOED’s data indicates that this is shifting for the better going into 2026. Notable indicators of this improvement are application conversion rates and eligibility rates, which steadily increased through the 2025 data analyzed in this report.

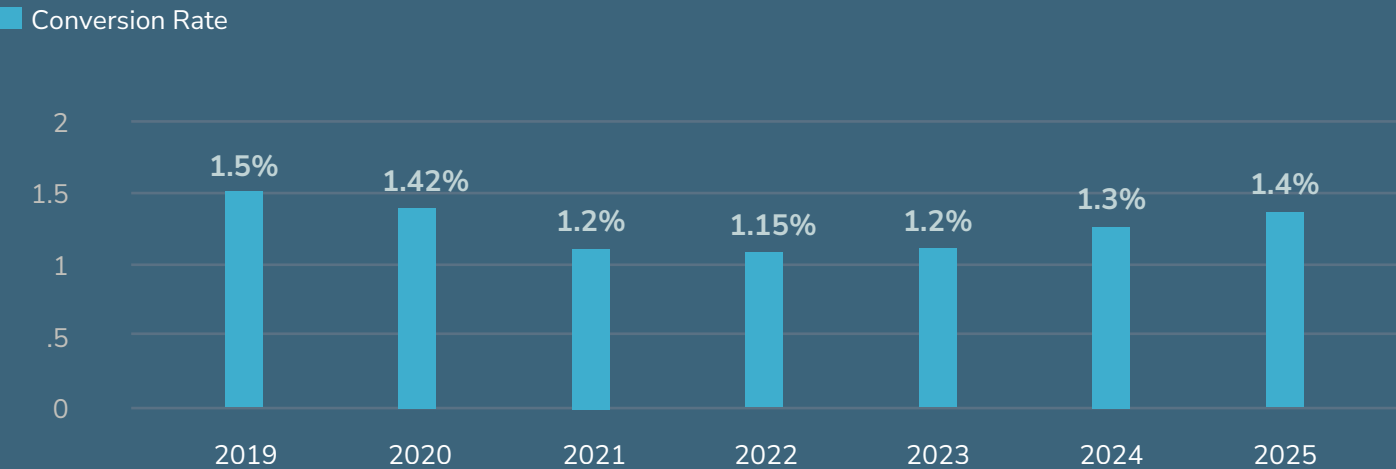
The conversion rate of job views to applications jumped 12% from 2024 to 2025*, meaning more people who view education job postings are actually applying. This signals that **top talent is showing more interest in the education sector** when, previously, these candidates sought flashier roles like those offered in the private sector.

*Conversion rate: Number of job posting views compared to the number of applications submitted.

However, along with this surge, **eligibility rates of applicants declined about 6.8%**. Although a decline in quality can come with a rise in quantity, recruiters and hiring managers don’t want a false sense of security when large candidate pools only deliver a few qualified applicants. As a result, there is a growing need for **more targeted efforts and tools to help to pre-qualify candidates** before they apply to open roles in the education sector.

Overall, this trend supports the narrative that declining supply is driving increased demand for education jobs. It also hints at job seekers’ growing interest in purpose-filled careers, even among more experienced candidates. For HR leaders, the goal is seizing this momentum by **showcasing how the organization aligns with their interests** while the employer’s market favors public service institutions.

Figure 2.1
Average Application Conversion Rate* from 2019–2025
Source: NEOED



Why It Matters

Job seekers are applying more strategically in 2026 by putting more emphasis on roles with **purpose, stability, and growth pathways**. In a difficult economy, candidates are attracted to the promise of a lasting career rooted in positive impact, the opportunity to build a life for themselves, and a path towards long-term success. This suggests candidates are open to roles that are both challenging and motivational.

A 2025 [LinkedIn survey](#) shows **candidates are prioritizing company values, mission, and culture** in their job search more than in years past. This is especially true for Gen Z workers, who prefer roles with a **sense of purpose** over flashy salaries and perks.

The shift reflects broader **post-pandemic changes in workforce expectations**. Today's applicants are seeking company cultures that value employee well-being and celebrate individual contributions to the greater community.

Careers in education may be challenging, but **the right candidates are driven by making a difference**. Now's the time to capture these committed job seekers by meeting their expectations during the application process.

Actions Institutions Can Take

1 Lead with mission and purpose in job descriptions.

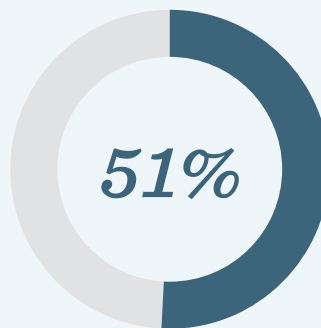
Rather than just listing requirements, open with the difference the role will make, alongside job security, long-term benefits, and compensation. For example, a [2024 recruitment-marketing survey](#) found that organizations which emphasized **purpose and mission** in their employer-branding messages reported **3-times higher candidate quality** (i.e., stronger fit) compared to those focused only on listing tasks and pay.

2 Strengthen employer branding across every candidate touchpoint.

Strengthen employer branding across every candidate touchpoint. Keep the **story and tone consistent** – from postings and careers sites to emails and interviews – so candidates aren't left guessing.

Data shows the cost of inconsistency:

51% of candidates have abandoned a hiring process due to **poor communication/miscommunication**, directly undermining brand perception and pipeline quality. Consistent, timely updates also lift candidate sentiment across the journey, reinforcing the institution's brand each time they interact.



51% of candidates have **abandoned a hiring process** due to poor communication/miscommunication

Source: Criteria Corp, 2024

3

Give applicants priority deadlines to channel intent.

Give applicants priority deadlines to channel intent. Keep the focus on **clarity of instruction**: spell out exactly what to do and show simple status cues (e.g., “apply by March 15 for guaranteed review,” display vacancy age/competition). In large field experiments,

adding clear information (showing prior applicant counts) **raised applications to less-competitive postings by 3.8%** (range 0.9–6.4%), while **removing vacancy-age info cut applications by 1.8%** – evidence that straightforward cues nudge follow-through.

4

Use job distribution platforms that leverage data to target industry-aligned candidates.

Broad job posting can increase volume without improving quality. Using data-driven job distribution platforms not only helps education employers reach mission-aligned candidates – it also provides confidence that job postings, especially paid ads, will have a **higher chance of successfully delivering a great hire**. By using performance and audience data to place roles in the most relevant channels, institutions can **improve applicant fit, reduce screening burden, and reinforce brand trust** early in the hiring process – ensuring growing applicant

pools translate into more eligible candidates, not just more applications.

Education organizations using NEOED Insight can take advantage of an integration with JobTarget, a paid job advertising tool that **gives users the ability to advertise on 25,000 popular and industry-specific job boards**. The platform also leverages job-specific data and candidate insights to optimize where your job ads are shared, automate posting to save time, and get the most value out of your budget allocation.



[Learn how the City of Portland uses NEOGOV Insight's integration with JobTarget to tailor job ads for 29 bureaus with less work and more success.](#)



TREND 3: TARGET INVESTMENT WHERE IT MATTERS MOST

More job seekers are applying to top roles – yet interest in critical support roles remains low. Without a strategic approach, this growing gap risks impact on operations.

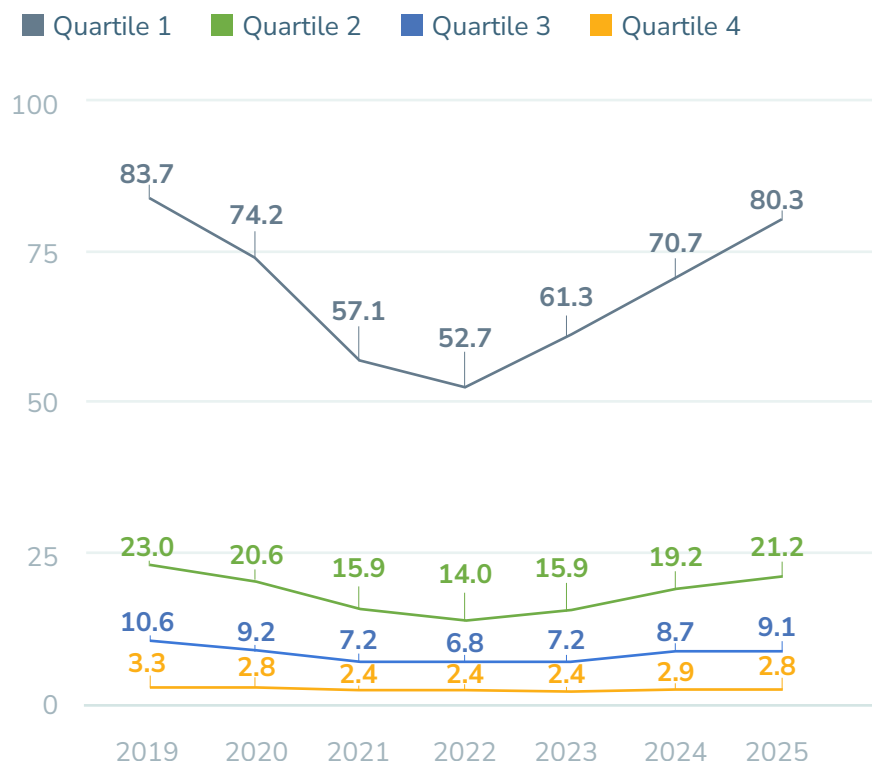
Continuing trends from years past, fewer job seekers are applying to lower-wage jobs in education. **Applications to bottom quartile positions in higher education are down 2.2% YOY and 18.7% since 2019.** Interest in support roles in K-12, like transportation, custodial, and paraprofessional positions, also remains low.

Filling these jobs is time and resource intensive. High turnover and low pay make critical support roles less appealing to job seekers, but with strategic marketing, HR teams can attract candidates who are interested in purpose-filled and growth-oriented careers.

Figure 3.1

Average Education Applications Per Job Quartile, 2019 - 2025

Source: NEOED



Why It Matters

Candidates are drawn to prestige and growth roles but often **skip over low-wage, inflexible jobs**. These positions are essential to support teachers and keep institutions running, but are sadly undervalued – by institutions and candidates alike.

An EdWeek teacher poll found that hiring more staff, specifically paraprofessionals, to support teachers and students is **most likely to improve teacher morale**. Job seekers, especially those with less experience, may not be aware of the positive impact these supportive roles have on teachers, students, and educational outcomes.

Supportive positions often serve as entry points for new graduates, career-switchers, and candidates with non-traditional experience who want to grow and develop into new fields of work. With more and more job seekers **motivated by job security and opportunities to learn new skills over pay**, institutions are well-positioned to meet their needs going into 2026 by tactfully recruiting for low-interest support roles.



Actions Institutions Can Take

1 Emphasize the value of support roles in job descriptions.

Support roles are critical to operations and student outcomes. **Share real stories that demonstrate the impact of each role** and the institution's commitment to supporting and valuing their contributions.

For example, research shows that when paraprofessionals are trained and supported to provide extra reading help, students make meaningful improvements in their reading skills. This is especially true for students with disabilities and those who are at risk of falling behind, demonstrating that paraprofessionals play a critical role in improving student learning outcomes.

2 Leverage recruitment marketing to generate a continuous candidate pipeline.

Build targeted campaigns that spotlight role specifics and what sets the institution apart to measurably move the needle. A randomized field study in the Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization found that optimizing job-ad content increased applications by ~7%, showing how **precise messaging reliably grows the applicant pool for high-turnover and hard-to-fill roles**. Considering trend #1, the education sector is better positioned now than ever to attract candidates who are seeking long-term, stable employment.



Learn how Fresno Pacific University transformed its brand messaging with
Attract to save \$5,000+ per year and recruit more mission-aligned candidates.

3 Create and advertise distinct career pathways for bottom quartile roles.

Create and advertise distinct career pathways for bottom-quartile roles. When entry-level or support positions are framed as the **first step on a clear advancement track**, they attract stronger candidates and improve retention.

Recent peer-reviewed research on career-pathway programs found participants experienced **12–34% higher long-term earnings**, demonstrating that visible growth opportunities meaningfully boost motivation and outcomes. Highlighting this potential – by showing where the role can lead and what skills it builds – signals that even lower-interest positions are genuine **career starters, not endpoints**.



TREND 4:

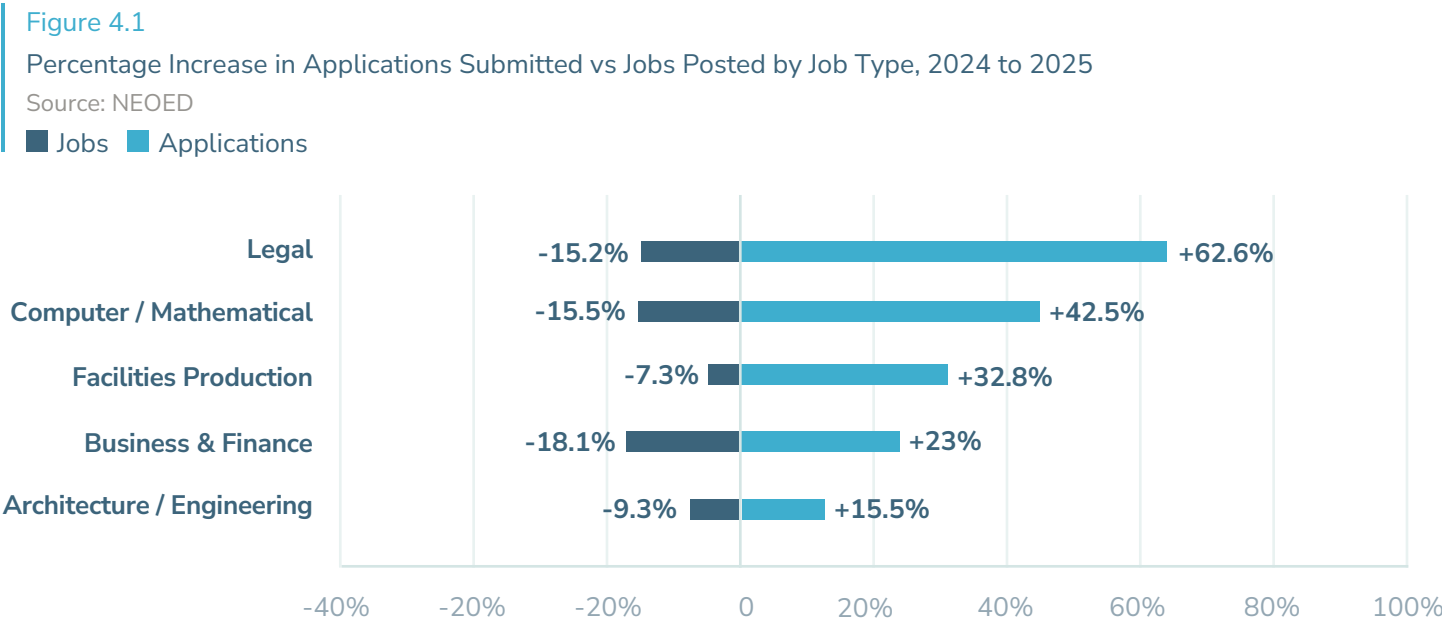
TECH & TECHNICAL OPERATIONS ARE THE NEXT TALENT FRONTIER

Institutions are posting fewer jobs in tech, legal and business functions, but applicant interest in these areas has skyrocketed – creating high competition and strategic opportunities.

Federal workforce reductions and economic instability are driving applicants toward stable career paths in education. NEOED’s 2025 data shows education employers are posting fewer professional and technical jobs, yet applicant demand for these roles is rising sharply.

Applications per job posting rose **42.5% for computer and mathematical positions** and **15.9% in architecture and engineering** year-over-year. Yet **job postings in these disciplines plummeted 15.5% and 9.3%, respectively**. Over the next ten years, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that both **computer and information technology** jobs and **architecture and engineering** jobs will grow significantly faster than other occupations.

Beyond traditional tech roles, applicant interest is rising even faster in other professional functions essential to education operations. For **legal occupations, applications per job increased by 62.6%** from 2024 to 2025, while jobs posted declined by 15.2%. **Business and financial roles also saw 23% more applications**, despite the number of **job postings falling by 18.1%**.



Together, these shifts signal that candidates with technical, analytical, legal, and financial expertise are increasingly viewing education as a reliable alternative to private-sector roles. Due to **continuous advancements in technology like artificial intelligence**, job seekers in these fields are likely being drawn to roles that provide opportunities for skill development. But as demand outpaces supply, candidates are becoming more **open-minded to lower-paying positions that advance their career goals while offering job stability** in an unpredictable economy.



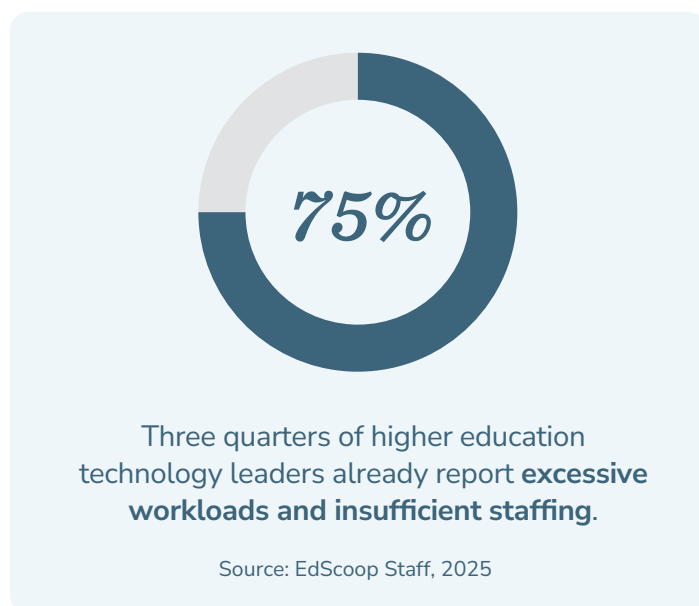
Why It Matters

The importance of skilled technical professionals outside the classroom is rising. Education institutions are operating in an environment of **increasing technological complexity, regulatory oversight, and public accountability** – often with limited budgets and lean staffing models. As digital systems expand and compliance requirements intensify, technical and professional teams are being asked to do more with fewer resources.

At the same time, applicant demand for education technology, legal, and business roles is rising faster than job supply, driving higher competition per opening. This imbalance places sustained pressure on existing staff. National research shows that **three quarters of higher education technology leaders already report excessive workloads and insufficient staffing**, a combination that **raises the risk of burnout, disengagement, and turnover**.

These challenges are compounded by compensation constraints. Education employers often cannot match private-sector salaries for highly skilled technical and professional talent. Without intentional workforce planning, institutions **risk losing critical expertise at a time when operational resilience matters most**.

The cost of inaction is not just slower hiring – it's also increased strain on existing teams, delayed initiatives,



and greater exposure to operational and compliance risk. Institutions that proactively prioritize these roles, redesign work to be sustainable, and invest in smarter hiring and retention strategies can **stabilize capacity and protect long-term performance before pressures become unmanageable**.

With more focus on optimizing workload management and establishing smooth and efficient hiring processes, education employers can set themselves up for success with technical talent in 2026.

Actions Institutions Can Take

1 Streamline hiring to match the pace of the market.

In fast-moving fields, a slow hiring process means losing top candidates to faster-moving employers. Recent peer-reviewed research in the *Future Business Journal* (2025) found that **shorter time-to-hire and time-to-fill cycles significantly improve candidate experience and application completion rates**, while lengthy processes erode employer perception.

Furthermore, in high-demand technical and professional roles, prolonged vacancies increase pressure on already overstretched teams. Slow hiring processes don't just delay fills and erode perception – they **contribute to burnout, disengagement, and attrition among existing staff** who must absorb additional responsibilities.

Shortening time-to-hire through skills-based screenings, leveraging quick online forms at job fairs, simplified approvals, or time-bound hiring sprints helps institutions **stabilize capacity more quickly**. Faster hiring cycles improve candidate experience, but in education, they also serve a second purpose: **protecting internal teams from prolonged overload**.

2 Leverage automation to quickly identify and engage eligible candidates.

Automation should be viewed as a **workforce-protection strategy**, not just a recruitment efficiency tool. In understaffed environments, automated screening, candidate communication, and talent pooling reduce administrative burden and allow limited staff to focus on higher-value, mission-critical work.

Not to mention, the right tools can accelerate hiring from weeks to days. Recent research shows that organizations using AI-sourcing and automated communication **reduce time-to-hire by up to 30%** while improving candidate engagement. Tools like **NEOED's candidate relationship management solution, Attract**, help institutions by automatically surfacing qualified job seekers and delivering personalized, timely outreach about open roles. This allows education employers to maintain engagement with qualified candidates while reducing manual follow-up – relieving pressure on HR and technical leaders who are already stretched thin.



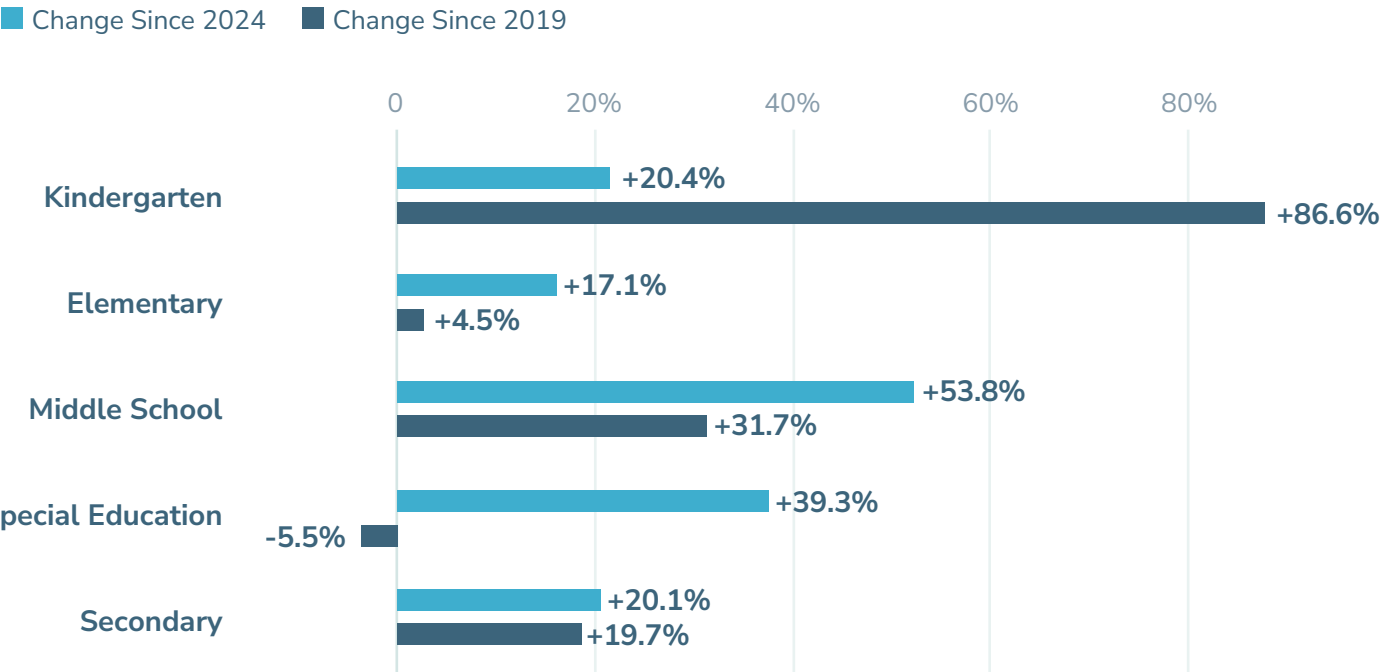
TREND 5:

TEACHING INTEREST IS RETURNING

Teaching roles are rebounding across grade levels and some postsecondary disciplines, but other areas still struggle to attract talent. Supporting specialty teachers is key for workforce stability.

Job seekers are showing increased enthusiasm about returning to the classroom, especially in K-12 education. Figure 5.1 shows that teaching interest has not only returned but, in several grade levels, surpassed pre-pandemic benchmarks. **Applications per job increased significantly across K-12 roles**, with Special Education applications per job increasing by 39% year-over-year.

Figure 5.1
Teaching Applications Per Job in 2025 Compared to 2024, 2019
Source: NEOED



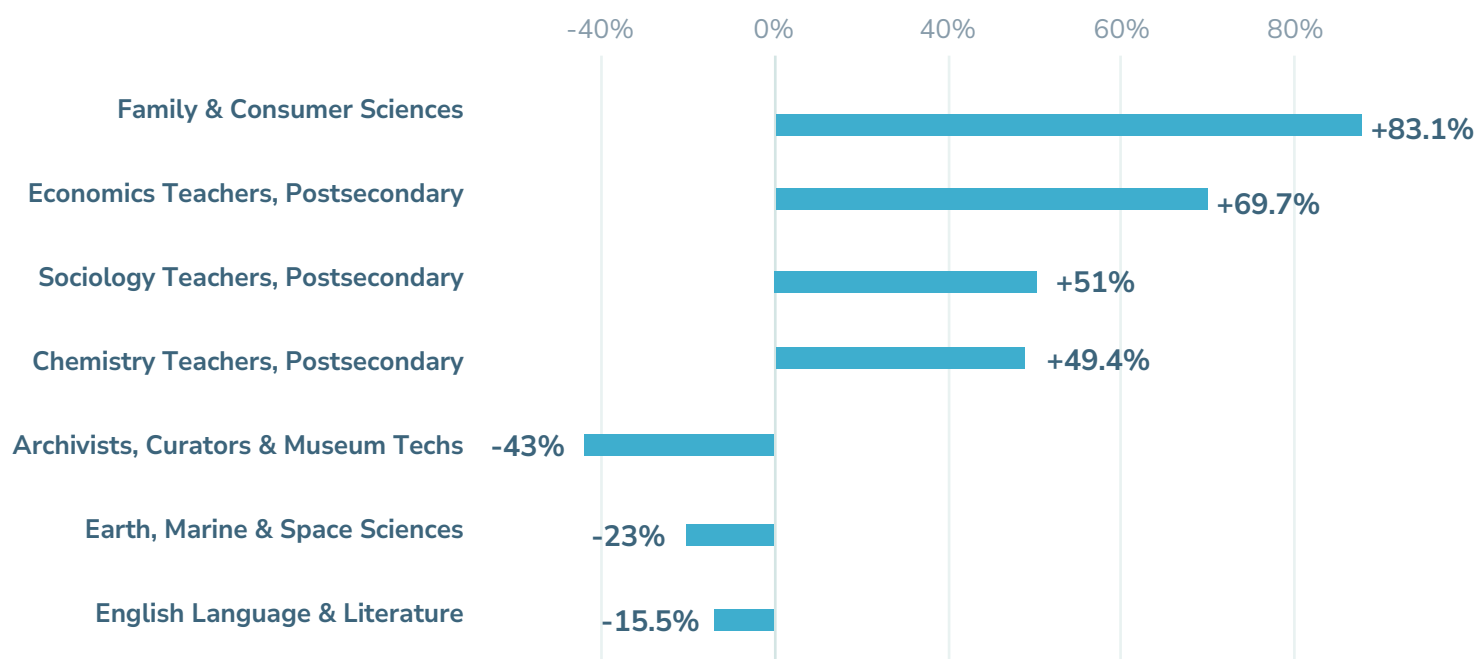
In certain higher education specialties, interest is also on the rise, as shown in Figure 5.2. The **fastest-rising disciplines are tied to policy, social systems, and STEM** – including Family and Consumer Sciences, Economics, Social Work, and Chemistry – which could indicate what to expect in 2026.

Figure 5.2

Higher Ed Specialties: Applications Per Job from 2024 to 2025

Source: NEOED

■ Change Since 2024



Why It Matters

Despite national teacher shortages, the 2025 data presents a hopeful shift toward a more stable teacher workforce. For K–12 institutions, this momentum offers a chance to reduce pressure from vacancies – especially in early and middle grades. A recent [Gallup](#) study found **two-thirds of K-12 teachers feel satisfied with their job**, and [EdWeek Research Center](#) marked the Teacher Morale Index at +18 on a scale of -100 to +100, up from -13 last year.

The rebound in teaching interest reflects a renewed desire among job seekers for **purpose-driven work with long-term impact**. [Researchers at UVA](#) found 58% of preservice teachers are motivated to enter the profession by a desire to help others.

At the same time, the uneven recovery across higher-education disciplines highlights the **need for targeted recruitment strategies**. Institutions that treat all teaching roles the same risk over-investing in high-interest areas while under-supporting specialties that still struggle to attract applicants.

Understanding where interest is accelerating – and where it lags – gives HR leaders a clear path forward to begin implementing **new recruitment tactics that support struggling specialties** and investing in automation to manage this surge of interest.



Actions Institutions Can Take

1 Offer credentialing pathways for Special Education and early grade job postings.

Demonstrate commitment by offering residencies or apprenticeships that let candidates earn credentials while working. Teacher residencies **retain 80–95% of new teachers after three years**, and a **Special Education residency study** found **75% still in-district after six years**. Skills-based hires also post **9% longer tenure**, widening education candidate pools without sacrificing performance.

2 Prioritize high-resource recruitment activities for declining specialties.

Reserve job fairs and paid advertising for hard-to-fill roles. In K-12, **time-to-fill averages 51 days** (over a week slower than other sectors) as reported by **iCIMS**, so focus time and budget spend where timelines lag.

For high-interest roles, streamline processes with automation and shorter applications. **Withe.co** found that applications that took over 15 minutes to **complete saw only 3.6% application rates**, while applications that took **5 minutes or less earned ~12% application rates**. Simplifying the application process makes it easy for institutions to move faster and capture qualified candidates.

3 Offer multi-school “float” roles.

For educators, float roles provide **flexibility and variety** – allowing them to work across multiple schools, gain broader experience, and avoid burnout tied to a single assignment.

For districts, permanent float pools improve coverage and efficiency: **Kelly Education** found that systems using this model report **~83% fill rates** through the school year, and platforms show **nearly double the fill rate for last-minute requests** compared to traditional substitutes. With **30 million absences annually**, floating roles keep instruction consistent while offering teachers a dynamic, growth-oriented path.



FROM EFFICIENCY TO STRATEGY IN 2026

Education hiring in 2025 tells a hopeful story driven by a sense of purpose as **more candidates applied to institutions' roles with intention and passion**. With stability returning to the hiring landscape, the talent market is recalibrating in favor of educational institutions at all levels.

In 2026, education leaders should **make bold, targeted moves to improve recruiting outcomes** and build positively upon this momentum. **For Higher Ed**, success can come by strategically leveraging tech and business recruitment while emphasizing mission and values to make specialty faculty roles compelling. For **K-12**, highlighting impact and implementing creative tactics can help build on surging teacher interest while addressing persistent shortages.

Education careers will always inspire those who want to make a difference. By adapting now, HR leaders can turn today's promise into tomorrow's workforce stability.

CITATIONS

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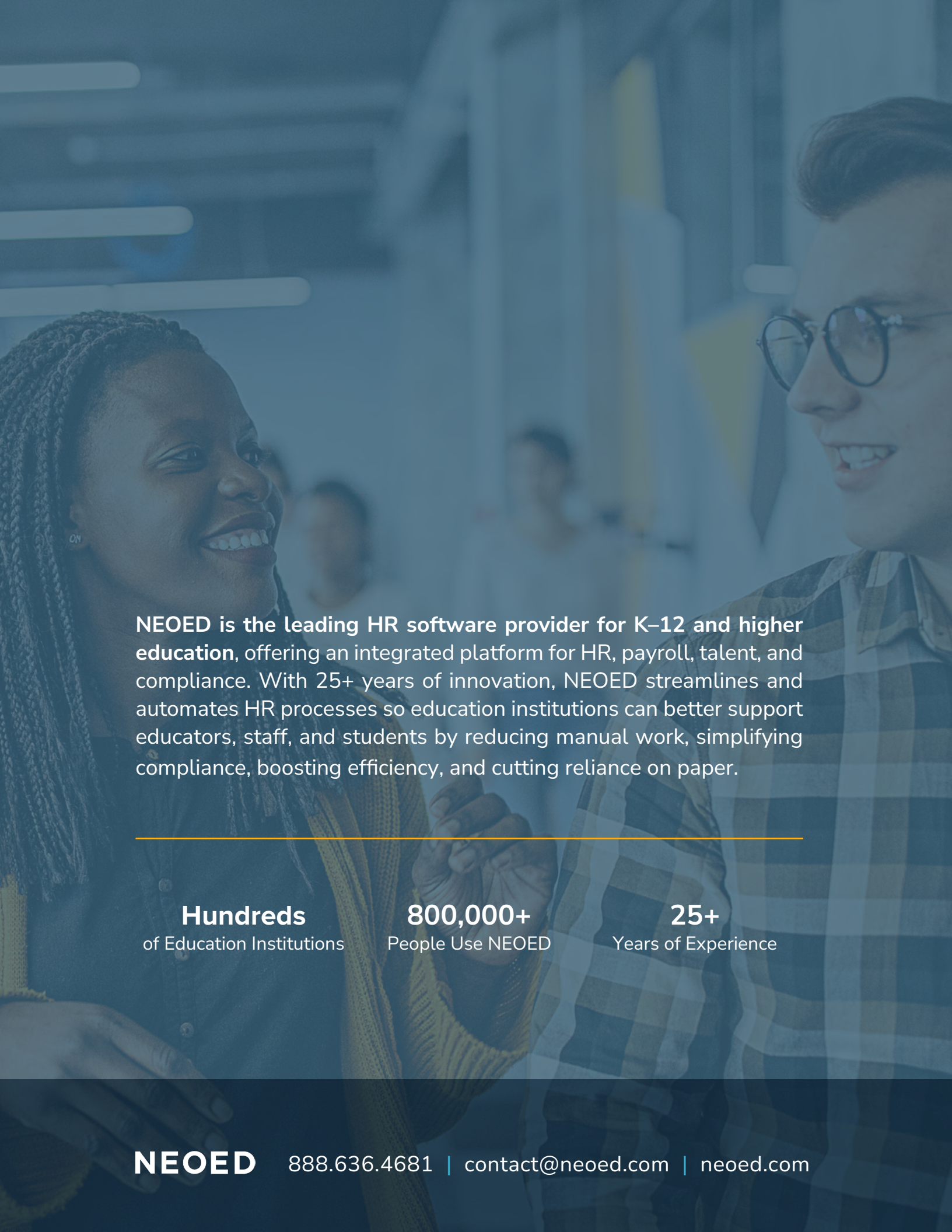
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800,000+
People Use NEOED

25+
Years of Experience

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