

POLICY ISSUE BRIEF: TEACHER QUALITY AND LEADERSHIP

Issue at a Glance

Research confirms that teachers are the most important school-related factor in student learning—with principals following a close second. Nonetheless, teacher quality varies across the country, and research also shows that students of color and low-income students are less likely to be taught by a highly effective teacher. Each state determines its own requirements for teacher licensure and certification, and many states set a high academic bar for admission into teacher preparation programs through grade point average and/or test requirements. Twenty-seven states require a 10-week minimum of classroom experience for student teachers; 32 states require mentoring for all new teachers; and 16 states require that the mentor teacher has demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom. But as states and districts struggle to find excellent teachers for every classroom, the minimum expectations are being lowered.

Alternative routes to teacher certification first emerged in the 1980s as a way for individuals who already have a bachelor's degree or prior work experience to earn a teaching credential. All 50 states and Washington, DC, now have some form of state-approved alternative routes, and approximately 20% of new teachers are entering the profession through alternative certification programs. While alternative programs tend to recruit more diverse candidates into the teaching profession, they do not have the same requirements for supervised clinical experience as traditional teacher preparation programs.

Districts have always used substitute teachers if a classroom teacher is ill or participating in professional development activities, but many are now relying on them to fill long-term gaps. A recent study found that 8%, or one full year, of a student's K-12 education is taught by substitute teachers, and that number climbs to 13.5% for low-income, disadvantaged, or high-minority schools. The qualifications for substitute teachers differ in each state, but in general they must have at least a bachelor's degree or 60 semester hours from an accredited institution of higher education. While many states do require a teacher's license and background checks, more than 20 states allow individuals who only have a high school degree or GED to substitute teach. An additional concern for school leaders is that in more than 70% of districts across the country, substitute teachers receive no orientation or training.

After filling teaching positions with qualified candidates, school leaders face the challenge of supporting their ongoing development and leadership capabilities in the school. Principals have reported that their jobs have become increasingly demanding and complex, and overwhelming research shows that this stress is leading many to leave the profession. This demonstrates a need for principals to involve teacher leaders by instilling shared responsibility for school culture, policies, and practices. While the formal or informal leadership roles of

teachers may vary in different schools and districts, teacher leadership is broadly defined by the [Teacher Leader Model Standards](#) as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.” Many teachers already assume duties such as mentoring and coaching, serving as curriculum supervisors, leading professional learning communities, and participating in school leadership teams.

But while 84% of teachers say they have no interest in becoming a principal, surveys consistently show that they are interested in taking on additional leadership roles or responsibilities in their school or district. As of 2021, 22 states had teacher leader certification endorsements. Those designations are not solely based on the Teacher Leader Model Standards, however, and differ widely between states. In addition, no state required teachers to have a specific endorsement to serve in a teacher leadership role.

NASSP Position

- NASSP supports the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) which state that effective leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
- As a member of the Coalition for Teaching Quality, NASSP supports its mission to ensure a diverse, talented, and sustainable teaching force that can prepare all students for a variety of postsecondary options and to be contributing citizens in their communities.
- Principals should have specific authority over hiring and other school personnel decisions, budgets, and the implementation of laws and district policies.
- Teacher preparation programs must maintain high standards that ensure all new teachers are qualified to deliver excellent education to all students.
- NASSP has additional policy issue briefs on [Principal and Teacher Shortage](#) and [Teacher Supervision and Evaluation](#) that offer additional recommendations and resources.

Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

- Fully fund Title II, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which provides resources for states and districts to strengthen teacher and principal preparation programs; reform educator certification and licensure requirements; develop career advancement initiatives for teachers; and offer professional learning opportunities for teachers and principals.
- Reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) to 1) ensure that teacher preparation programs include a strong residency program or substantial student teaching experience, ongoing mentoring, and support for new educators and 2) create a Teacher Leader Development Program to provide grants for teacher leaders, including those in high-need schools, to receive professional development, training, and support that ultimately leads to a teacher leader credential.

- Fully fund the Teacher Quality Partnership grant program under Title II of HEA to strengthen and reform educator preparation programs.
- In collaboration with all education stakeholders, develop a teacher evaluation and support system that includes the following components:
 - Feedback and reflective practice.
 - Multiple measures of classroom practice, student learning, and other evidence related to the teacher's contribution to schoolwide improvement.
 - High-quality training, credentialing, and ongoing professional development for principals to fully understand teacher evaluation.
- Provide funding for states and districts to train substitute teachers in classroom management, effective teaching strategies, teacher professionalism, and educational laws and issues. Advocate for reasonable and appropriate funding that will allow schools to offer important student activities and athletics.

Enact legislation to strengthen educator preparation programs, including the creation of residency programs and other induction opportunities for new teachers and principals.

Recommendations for State Policymakers

- Revise teacher certification and licensure requirements so that teacher preparation programs only accept and graduate individuals who demonstrate the capacity to be high-caliber teachers through a teacher performance assessment. Avoid establishing a hierarchy of student activities that leads to funding competition.
- Require all new teachers to be "profession-ready" when they become the teacher of record in a school. At a minimum, they should:
 - Hold a bachelor's degree and demonstrate in-depth content knowledge in their area of licensure.
 - Fulfill the requirements of a state-approved preparation program, which includes clinical experiences that use models of accomplished practice by instructors with K-12 experience, as well as promote cultural responsiveness and the ability of teachers to address the individual learning needs and backgrounds of all students.
 - Complete a comprehensive residency program in which a teacher preparation program and a local school district partner to engage teacher residents in a series of school-based experiences and teaching enrichment opportunities under the guidance of accomplished educators.
 - Demonstrate proficiency through a valid and reliable classroom-based performance assessment.
- Incentivize teacher preparation programs to partner with districts and schools to develop a pipeline of profession-ready teachers; provide aspiring teachers with induction or residency opportunities; and include coursework that will prepare candidates to teach students with disabilities and English language learners and incorporate literacy instruction into their content areas.
- Ensure that alternative routes to teacher certification are equal in rigor and quality to traditional preparation programs, including significant coursework in effective teaching pedagogy and the multiple subjects a teacher will be licensed to teach.

- Set a high bar for entry into the profession by requiring rigorous qualifications for career and technical education (CTE) teachers but also offer some flexibility in providing alternate routes into the teaching profession.
- Ensure that CTE teacher candidates have additional training and support in instructional practices, classroom management, and the use of data and assessments to ensure they are effective in the classroom.
- Create tiered licensure and certification systems that recognize participation in ongoing, high-quality professional learning opportunities; attainment of national board certification; and taking on teacher leadership roles within the school or district.
- In collaboration with all stakeholders, develop professional learning and growth systems for teachers that:
 - Include content focus
 - Incorporate active learning utilizing adult learning theory
 - Support collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts
 - Use models and modeling of effective practices
 - Provide coaching and expert support
 - Offer opportunities for feedback and redirection
 - Sustain duration
- Offer incentives for high school graduates to return as teachers after receiving the appropriate credentials and preparation.
- Adopt or adapt the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and the Teacher Leader Model Standards and revise educator certification and licensure, evaluation systems, and professional learning opportunities to align with those standards.
- Redesign educator preparation programs to support principals in developing a school culture based on collaboration and shared leadership and differentiate between the skills and training needed for principals versus those for teacher leaders.
- Provide incentives for school districts to develop teacher leader initiatives and to provide compensation for teacher leaders who take on additional roles and responsibilities within their schools.

Recommendations for District Policymakers

- Develop partnerships with teacher preparation programs and offer streamlined induction opportunities for student teachers to work in your schools.
- Compensate teachers for relevant prior work experience to help encourage career switchers from science, math, and CTE fields to enter the teaching profession.
- Provide consistent funding for schools to hire assistant principals and other school administrators who directly evaluate and support teachers in the classroom.
- Ensure flexible scheduling and additional compensation for teacher leaders to serve as mentors who work side by side with new teachers.
- Offer annual professional learning opportunities for school leaders on best practices for coaching and mentoring to help teachers improve their instruction.

- Develop a systemic approach to establishing pathways for career advancement and a comprehensive plan for its implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. The plan should include the following components:
 - Engagement of all stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students, and parents.
 - Articulation of district and schoolwide goals and flexibility to ensure that teacher leader roles and responsibilities meet the needs of individual schools.
 - Model job descriptions aligned to teacher leader standards and competencies.
 - Clear and transparent selection criteria for principals to conduct a fair selection process.
 - Guidance and appropriate autonomy for school leaders and leadership teams to create schedules that provide common planning time and networking opportunities for teacher leaders to collaborate with their peers.
 - Professional learning opportunities to help build the capacity of teachers to take on new leadership roles, including training on topics related to instructional leadership and adult/team management.
 - Evaluation of teacher leaders based on performance criteria aligned to their leadership role and responsibilities.
 - Long-term and sustainable funding.
 - Recognition of teacher leaders for their contributions to the school and district.
- Negotiate with teacher union leaders, if applicable, to ensure teacher leadership roles are included in employment contracts or agreements, and provide significant and sustainable compensation for teachers to serve in leadership roles in their schools, (i.e., release time, stipends, authority, etc.).
- Offer teacher leaders and principals opportunities to assume meaningful roles in shaping district policies and practice.

Recommendations for School Leaders

- Develop a school culture that provides meaningful decision-making roles for teachers of all experience levels and committed to a shared vision and mission focused on student success.
- Absent a district structure for teacher leadership, work collaboratively with teachers to conduct a school-needs assessment to identify opportunities for leveraging teacher leadership to advance school improvement goals and priorities; identify multiple and varied formal or informal leadership opportunities; and provide flexible scheduling and additional compensation that would allow teachers to take on increased responsibility for professional learning, curriculum, or school improvement activities. Leadership opportunities could include serving as mentors, instructional coaches, or master teachers.
- Create teacher leadership pipelines for effective teachers and build the leadership capacity of teachers through efforts that are job-embedded, individualized for their needs, and appropriate for adult learners.
- Foster opportunities for collaboration to improve student achievement such as teacher teams; regularly scheduled common planning; and structures for teachers to engage in peer observations, collective reflection, or learning, so they can give each other constructive, actionable feedback.