

# re:VISION

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

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*talented, well-trained, and committed workforce is the life-blood of any enterprise. Ask any successful business or military leader. The most successful companies spend considerable time, energy, and resources to identify, recruit, and hire the best and brightest; then they work at keeping them through optimal working conditions, incentives, and pay.*

The military invests mightily in developing and honing the skills of its members; it pays for additional education and it invests in talent. The security of our country depends on it.

Education leaders are no different than their counterparts in industry and the military. Their most valuable assets are in human resources, which comprise upwards of 80 percent of most district and school budgets.<sup>1</sup> **Classroom teachers, now established by extensive research as the most important school-based factor affecting student achievement, and school principals, who affect the learning of every student in their schools, are the two most valuable assets.**<sup>2</sup> But, too many school districts are hampered by less than adequate means of accomplishing what their for-profit colleagues can do: identify, recruit, and retain the most highly talented people to fill those roles. They also lack the means to compensate adequately and support sufficiently their current teachers and leaders.

### EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS SERIES: SNAPSHOT

This is the **overview** of a special series on improving the effectiveness of the nation's teachers and leaders. The briefs in the series are:

- Teacher Evaluation
- Teacher Compensation
- Teacher Preparation
- School Leadership

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Created by The University of North Carolina Board of Governors in 2001 to honor and continue the legacy of former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt, The Hunt Institute collaborates with policymakers to secure America's future through quality education. Working at the intersection of policy and politics, The Hunt Institute connects leaders with the best strategies for developing and implementing policies and programs to improve public education. To that end, The Institute convenes governors, policymakers, and legislators, as well as business, education, and civic leaders across the nation to provide them with the best information to make informed policy decisions.

Among international competitors, the U.S. is an economic leader but trails in many aspects of teacher preparation, investment, and continuous improvement. **To change this situation requires a multi-part and comprehensive strategy.** The good news is that examples of encouraging reforms exist in many places, and strong evidence shows that these reforms are lifting student achievement.

This overview, part of a *re:VISION* special series on *teacher effectiveness*,

is intended to provide state-level policymakers with a digest of existing research and current state efforts around teacher preparation, evaluation, compensation, and school leadership. Policymakers should consider each area of reform in context of the others. If they are addressed in isolation, old problems in some areas will hinder progress in another. For instance, effective compensation reforms require an evaluation system that is capable of producing accurate

results that distinguish between good, average, and poor teachers.

Each of the briefs in this series will provide a deeper exploration of the challenges states are facing in the area of educator effectiveness reform and offer considerations for policymakers. This issue provides a brief summary of the issues examined in the accompanying four briefs on teacher preparation, evaluation, compensation, and school leadership.

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## TEACHER PREPARATION

Retiring teachers, a growing student population, and high attrition among teachers in the first five years of their careers means that first-year teachers are now the largest cohort each year.<sup>3</sup> Improving teacher preparation so that teachers are ready to teach from day one is therefore essential to any comprehensive effort to improve teacher quality.

Research suggests that improving teacher preparation requires that programs:

- *Recruit the best students.* The more selective a program, the more likely it will graduate teachers who raise student achievement.<sup>4</sup>
- *Ensure that candidates have deep knowledge of the content they will teach.* Teachers who have greater subject content knowledge raise student achievement more in those subjects, especially in math.<sup>5</sup>
- *Ensure that candidates have sufficient clinical practice.* Extended student-teaching experiences, supported by trained mentors, result in graduates that raise student achievement more than those who do not receive the same high-quality, classroom-based experiences.<sup>6</sup>
- *Toughening program approval standards.* The new *Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)* standards require programs to be more stringent in selecting candidates and produce graduates with deep content knowledge in their chosen subject fields who demonstrate that they can teach to college and career ready standards.

Most states have only just begun addressing teacher preparation, but many are focusing on three policy levers identified by the *Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)*:<sup>7</sup>

- *Making initial licensure performance-based.* This approach can include adopting multi-tier performance-based licensure systems that differentiate between levels of teaching expertise. The recently developed *ed-TPA* is a performance-based assessment that can be used to assess a candidate's initial readiness for the classroom and probationary licensure.
- *Collecting data on the performance of graduates and using that data to assess programs.* A lack of data on the performance of preparation program graduates has hindered reform in the past. Linking K-12 longitudinal data systems to higher education data can inform progress.

For more on what the research says about effective teacher preparation and the reforms states are currently considering, see **Getting Teachers Learner-Ready: Reforming Teacher Preparation**.

## TEACHER EVALUATION

The difference between having an effective teacher or a non-effective teacher can be equivalent to almost a full year or more of student learning.<sup>8</sup> The ability to identify effective teachers is the basis for assessing the distribution of good teachers among schools and districts, crafting evidence-based plans to improve the supply of effective teachers where they are needed, and making resource and human capital decisions to develop the existing teacher workforce.

Evaluation systems that distinguish between the best, worst, and average performers are critical. Fortunately, teacher evaluation systems are improving rapidly. Until recently, teachers were evaluated infrequently, and the data generated was not useful. Now, most states require frequent evaluations with student achievement growth playing a major role. The most common measures used by states fall into three categories:

- *Measures of student achievement.* Most states now require that districts use student achievement measures as one component of teacher evaluations. These include test-based measures of student achievement growth, as well as learning goals set by teachers and principals and other reviews of student work.

- *Measures of classroom performance via observation.* Nearly every state requires that districts use classroom observation data when evaluating teachers. Ensuring that the results reliably correlate with student achievement requires conducting multiple observations—preferably by more than one rater—substantive training for observers, and regular calibration checks to ensure that observers are rating teachers accurately.
- *Measures of teaching effectiveness via student surveys.* About half of the states allow districts to use student surveys to collect feedback on teacher performance. Valid instruments, such as the *Tripod* survey, generate data that correlate with student achievement growth.<sup>9</sup>

Teaching is complex work, and research has shown that using these measures in combination better predicts student performance.<sup>10</sup> Combining measures from the three categories can ensure that evaluation results avoid instances where teachers are rated “highly effective” one year but “ineffective” the next without any apparent change in their teaching.<sup>11</sup>

For a deeper look teacher evaluation, along with considerations for policymakers, see **Evaluating Teachers: Opportunities and Best Practices**.

## TEACHER COMPENSATION

High-performing organizations routinely use compensation to reward increases in employee performance and responsibility. By contrast, today's K-12 salary schedules reward years of experience and degrees. Facing an accountability environment that demands significant student growth each year, most districts have no mechanism to reward their top-performing teachers. The default *step-and-lane* compensation system also provides little or no incentive to teach in low-performing schools, or for top STEM college graduates to enter teaching.

In response, state and district leaders have experimented with three broad forms of incentive pay for teachers:

- *Pay-for-performance*: The default method for pay-for-performance has been the use of bonuses on top of step-and-lane determined salaries for teachers who improve student performance.

- *Strategic staffing*: A second strategy used by districts to improve teaching is to use bonuses and other incentives to attract teachers into hard-to-staff schools or to teach in shortage subject areas. At least a third of teachers now teach in districts that use these market-driven incentives.<sup>12</sup>

- *Pay for extra duties*: Some districts are exploring how to provide teachers with additional pay for taking on increased workloads and/or serving as teacher-leaders.

As states and districts confront compensation, they must deal with a limited research base around what works. Little or no evidence supports the idea that using small teacher bonuses improves teaching or schools. To be truly effective, compensation reform must be part of a comprehensive approach to improve teaching. There is some encouraging evidence that when a comprehensive approach occurs, student achievement does improve.<sup>13</sup>

*For a deeper look at what the research shows about the effectiveness of each type of compensation, along with considerations for policymakers, see **Paying for Improvement: Teacher Compensation Reform**.*

## SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Effective principals provide a significant boost to the learning of every student in their schools.<sup>14</sup> They do so by setting a vision for what the school could be, cultivating a positive working environment, developing leadership and greater responsibility among teachers and staff, focusing on improving instruction, and effectively managing operations.<sup>15</sup> There are no documented instances of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership.<sup>16</sup>

Improving school leadership is a critical piece of the teacher effectiveness puzzle. Good school leaders cultivate school environments that enable both teachers and students to improve. There are several avenues states can consider to improve their leadership pools, including:

- *Improving principal preparation.* Developing effective leadership skills is challenging. To date, traditional principal preparation programs in universities and four-year colleges have a mixed record in producing a leadership workforce that can inspire, organize, and develop schools where students learn more than expected. Reforms to encourage innovation in principal preparation are promising. Many alternative preparation programs are establishing a track record of highly effective graduates.
- *Strengthening principal evaluation.* When done well, evaluations based on performance provide data that can connect leaders to targeted development, inform licensure decisions, and hold them accountable for school progress and student achievement. Evidence-based measures in evaluation systems have been lacking. However, the recently developed *VAL-ED*, an evaluation instrument focused on the principal's core responsibility to improve instruction, is a promising exception.
- *Reforming licensure.* Licensure is predominantly based on inputs such as holding an advanced degree or completing a minimum number of hours of professional development. Moving to a performance- and competency-based licensure system would ensure that principals and principal candidates have demonstrated the skills needed to do the job effectively.

*For further exploration of the evolving role of today's school leaders and the policy levers available to spur reform, see **Building Leadership in Schools**.*

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## BIG PICTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Improving the effectiveness of our educator workforce will require time and thought. Each piece—preparation, evaluation, compensation, and leadership—intersects with the others at multiple points. **Developing a comprehensive strategy that encompasses all four areas is critical to long-term success, and ultimately, improving student achievement.**

In addition to ensuring that reform is comprehensive, there are several broad considerations that cut across all four areas:

- *Make high-quality data a priority.* A lack of good data will hinder reform. High-quality teacher and principal evaluation data that differentiates between good, average, and poor performance informs many key aspects of educator effectiveness, including teacher accountability and development, teacher preparation program accountability, new forms of compensation, performance-based licensure, and new teacher-leader roles. In all but a handful of states, the “bricks and mortar” for functioning data systems are in place. The challenge now is training educators to use the data.
- *Ensure teacher buy-in.* The most successful reforms are done with teachers, not to teachers. Providing opportunities for teacher input has enabled reforms to be implemented smoothly, completely, and in good faith. Particularly regarding contentious areas like compensation and evaluation, seeking—and using—feedback from those in the field helps to build buy-in and support for policy changes.
- *Provide adequate and stable funding.* Funding uncertainty undermines reform. For instance, there have been numerous grant-funded and time-limited pay-for-performance schemes that have failed to produce improvements in student achievement, and their short life cycles are one reason. Teachers do not expect such reforms will last, diminishing the relevance of the initiatives. Mentoring and coaching programs critical for developing inexperienced teachers are often cut when state and district budgets tighten, creating predictable negative effects on the quality of instruction from these teachers. If reform is to be permanent and not a passing phase, adequate funding needs to be a priority.

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**PART TWO | EVALUATING TEACHERS: OPPORTUNITIES AND BEST PRACTICES**

**PART THREE | PAYING FOR IMPROVEMENT: TEACHER COMPENSATION REFORM**

**PART FOUR | GETTING TEACHERS LEARNER-READY: REFORMING TEACHER PREPARATION**

**PART FIVE | BUILDING LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS**

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