Condition of Education
IN THE COMMONWEALTH

RENNIECENTER
EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY

Investing in Educators

How Massachusetts Can Support Teachers Through the Pandemic and Beyond

WINTER 2022

Introduction

Overview

Teaching has always been a demanding endeavor. However, beginning in the spring of 2020, as schools and staff raced to figure out how to update lessons for delivery via Zoom, coordinate break and recess times to avoid logistical nightmares, deliver meals to students and families, and keep teachers connected to their students and each other, the field's resilience has reached a breaking point. With teachers delivering content to kids on screens—or six feet away and masked—while dealing with the impact of an ever-changing pandemic on their personal lives, it is no surprise that the past two school years have ended with utter exhaustion.

So far, the 2021–22 school year is no different: "This year is so much harder than last year. We thought it would be easier and it isn't." This speaker (a member of the Condition of Education Teacher Advisory Committee), like other educators across the state, has ridden a roller coaster of pandemic-related closures, priority shifts, instructional upheavals, and bleak warnings about the future of education. In spite of the odds, the education workforce, from early educators to K–12 teachers to college and university professors, has gone above and beyond to support the Commonwealth's students during this turbulent time.

In this year's report on the Condition of Education in the Commonwealth (COE), the Rennie Center seeks to highlight how educators can be empowered to effectively meet the academic and social-emotional needs of their students in 2022 and beyond. We relay findings from research on immediate supports to address student needs in the wake of COVID-19, ongoing supports that facilitate continuous learning and growth, and, finally, strategies for preparing prospective teachers to address the long-term effects of the pandemic. Too often, even pre-COVID, educators have been relied upon to drive improvements in the education system by taking on new responsibilities and adjusting their practice with little input, agency, or support. In this report, we aim to shift that narrative, looking not at what teachers can or should do but at how investing in educators can lead to better, more sustainable practices, now and in the future.

THE PROJECT

The Condition of Education in the Commonwealth project is one way the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy fulfills its mission of producing non-partisan, high-quality, independent research that promotes improvement in public education for all Massachusetts children.

PROJECT COMPONENTS

Action Guide: This guide examines evidence-based practices, identifies local exemplars, and offers research-informed recommendations for statewide actions that have the potential to address gaps and contribute to broad improvement in student outcomes. The report looks at the progress made and the challenges that remain, focusing on areas where new approaches could help foster the immediate success of all the Commonwealth's learners. As the Rennie Center has continued to shift our mindset from promoting strategies for navigating an inherently inequitable system to dismantling and transforming that system itself, we ground ourselves in the examples of local communities taking action. The report offers strategies that can be applied within schools, care centers, and other communities across Massachusetts, thereby grounding the research in real-world examples of success.

Advisory Committee: Our Condition of Education Advisory Committee includes more than 40 leaders from across the Massachusetts education system who meet with us each year to guide our research and recommend programs and practices worth highlighting. This year, we also worked with a group of 12 current and former Massachusetts teachers as part of a new Teacher Advisory Committee. We greatly benefited from their wisdom and guidance about the challenges of teaching amid the pandemic and ways to bolster teacher support over the long term.

Data Dashboard: This tool provides an in-depth look at education performance indicators. By analyzing a set of 16 statewide and local data points, the resource details Massachusetts' educational performance over the past year in the areas of access, inputs, engagement, and outcomes. Through purposeful examination, the Data Dashboard seeks to emphasize our commitment to reporting disaggregated data and uncovering inequities across the Commonwealth. This review of data and ongoing tracking helps to inform the areas of need discussed in the Action Guide.

Federal and State Policy Snapshot

Over the past three years, several state and federal laws have led to significant new investments in education. Although they direct resources broadly rather than concentrating on funding for workforce supports, these laws have undoubtedly impacted the working conditions of educators statewide. The summaries below highlight some of the provisions of recent funding legislation and describe a few pending state bills that have the potential to affect staff at all levels of the education system.

- **2019**: The **Student Opportunity Act** (SOA) promised $1.5 billion in new state education funding over seven years. It directed a significant share of this investment to Gateway Cities and other districts serving high-need student populations by adjusting the state's funding formula to offer higher incremental spending on students with disabilities, English Learners, and low-income students. Along with these major changes, it also included a few provisions directed at addressing the needs of educators and school staff: for instance, it raised per-pupil funding for guidance and psychological services by 60% in the elementary grades, recognizing the importance of expanding non-academic supports. Currently, districts are in the process of revising and resubmitting three-year plans to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) outlining how they will use their SOA funds to address "disparities in achievement among student subgroups" through specific, evidence-based interventions—which may include efforts to diversify the workforce, implement high-quality curriculum, and expand common planning time.

- **2020/2021**: In response to the pandemic, the federal government passed a series of major pieces of legislation between March 2020 and March 2021 to inject new revenue into struggling state and local systems. Each one offered hundreds of millions of dollars to support all levels of the Massachusetts education system—for instance, the last and largest stimulus package, the **American Rescue Plan**, included more than $510 million for early education and care, $1.83 billion for K-12 education, and $826 million for higher education in the Commonwealth. These funding streams have their own unique requirements and methods of distribution (e.g., half of the higher education funds must be given out as grants to students), but together they represent an unprecedented federal investment in programs, schools, and institutions of higher education—and the people who staff them.

SELECTED PENDING BILLS

- **Early education and care:** Under the so-called Common Start legislation (H.605), Massachusetts would commit to the gradual implementation of a universal system of early education and care for children from birth through age 5, with state funding going directly to education and care providers. Families' spending on early education and care would be capped at 7% of their income, while lower-income families would pay nothing to access these services. Among the bill's provisions is a requirement for the Department of Early Education and Care to develop a methodology that accounts for the full cost of high-quality early education, including "[p]rofessional development and instructional coaching for staff." By broadening access to early education and care services, the bill would also (by necessity) expand the early education and care workforce, incentivizing providers to use effective strategies—and offer competitive salaries—in order to recruit and retain staff.

- **K–12 education:** The Educator Diversity Act (H.682/S.366) includes provisions requiring each district to appoint a diversity officer or team, establish an educator diversity council, and set a policy and goals regarding the recruitment, retention, and selection of diverse candidates for staff roles. It also directs DESE to develop an alternative educator licensure process that looks at factors such as licensure in other states and whether candidates have assembled a satisfactory portfolio of work samples, and it mandates state-level reporting on educator diversity data along with corresponding statewide goals.

- **Higher education:** Recent state legislation has focused on making public higher education more affordable to students across the Commonwealth—including prospective teachers, who might otherwise be deterred from pursuing a degree in education through a traditional degree-granting institution. For example, the CHERISH Act (H.1325/S.824) would freeze the cost of student tuition and fees in public institutions through FY26 and define a minimum annual state appropriation for higher education. Another proposed piece of legislation (H.1339/S.829) would "guarantee free public higher education as a right for all residents."

Responding to the Current Moment

Since March 2020, the education system has been assailed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the sheer volume of hidden and neglected student, family, and community needs that were unearthed. Educators have had to shift between remote, hybrid, and in-person teaching and attend to students' varying academic and developmental needs, while recognizing and responding to heightened physical and mental health challenges. Leading students through uncertain times has created unprecedented levels of isolation, stress, and burnout. For instance, in a 2021 study from the RAND Corporation, one in four K–12 teachers nationwide reported that they were considering leaving their job by the end of the 2020-2021 academic year (prior to the pandemic, this number was one in six).[1]

At this moment in time, it is critical to help teachers navigate these challenges not by putting more on their plates, but by bolstering structures designed to assist them. Adult care and supports are essential to any COVID recovery plan, both to survive the current moment and to set a path for building a more equitable and effective system moving forward. Strategies to support educators now can also address needs that were present before the pandemic and help teachers strengthen their craft for the future. In particular, in this report, we focus on three critical areas that can provide immediate as well as ongoing and foundational support: trauma sensitivity, cultural responsiveness, and innovation.

Each of these areas—trauma sensitivity, cultural responsiveness, and innovation—is key to building educators' capacity to serve as leaders in recovering from COVID and beyond. Trauma-sensitive practices are more important than ever before now that students, teachers, and staff have experienced increased feelings of danger, grief, and loss during the pandemic.[6] A number of students will also have encountered widespread suffering in their community, including joblessness, housing instability, illness, and economic insecurity. Additionally, the past few years have ushered in new calls for racial justice that have permeated communities and reverberated inside schools. The need to incorporate authentic, culturally responsive learning experiences for students—while reflecting on one's own backgrounds, beliefs, and behaviors—has been heightened by this important public dialogue on identity and race. Finally, teachers who spent more than a year scrambling to translate lesson plans and learning materials into virtual or

Defining Key Terms

Trauma Sensitivity: Driven by a need to support all students, many educators have adopted a trauma-sensitive lens. This includes learning about the impact and signs of trauma, working to develop trusting relationships with students, and creating safe classroom environments to support students exposed to trauma. These practices produce positive results, improving the emotional wellbeing of children. "A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a school-wide basis is at the center of its educational mission…The term 'trauma-sensitive' helps emphasize that educators are not expected to take on the role of therapists [and] while behavioral health services will be an important part of the effort, helping traumatized children learn at school requires…a school-wide culture that helps children feel safe and supported in all parts of the school."[2]

Cultural Responsiveness: In this report, we follow the definition of culturally responsive teaching laid out by Gloria Ladson-Billings, and subsequently expanded upon by other scholars: "Culturally responsive teaching is a theoretical framework that supports classroom instruction based on students' cultural background and experiences."[3] It consists of meaningful instructional strategies and curricula that make significant connections between students' home and school lives.[4] Overall, culturally responsive teaching brings students' lived experiences into the classroom through an asset-based lens in order to create rigorous, student-centered instruction.

Innovation: According to the U.S. Department of Education, "Innovation is driven by a commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. Innovation is based on curiosity, the willingness to take risks, and experimenting to test assumptions. Innovation is based on questioning and challenging the status quo. It is also based on recognizing opportunity and taking advantage of it."[5] In this report, we think of innovation as the ways in which we work to fundamentally rethink students' learning experience and break out of generational habits on how to deliver content. In this report, innovation encompasses individualization, deeper learning, and the use of technology and online tools not to replace, but to strengthen, instructional practices.

hybrid formats now face new demands for innovative approaches to instruction, as they work to address students' unfinished learning and accelerate their understanding of key concepts.

At the same time, while the pandemic exposed (and exacerbated) many challenges within the education system, some of the most pressing needs it uncovered have been known for many years. For instance, research has long pointed to the significant impact that students' social-emotional wellbeing and mental health can have on their academic outcomes. Attending to the effects of trauma is particularly critical now that all students are experiencing the ongoing collective trauma of a global pandemic—and, for too many students, individual traumatic experiences such as the loss of a loved one—but many of the core strategies that educators can use to address trauma are well-established in practice. Well before the movements for racial justice that burst forth amid the pandemic, spurred on by incidents of racially motivated violence as well as the clear public health (and other) disparities between predominantly White communities and communities of color, scholars and educators recognized the value of curriculum that speaks to, values, and uplifts each student's lived experiences. And while there is more variation now than ever before in the foundational skills that students possess—and an even greater need for differentiating content—teachers have long been responsible for working with students at widely varying levels. Using innovative strategies to adapt and individualize instruction has taken on renewed urgency during the pandemic, but it is not a novel approach.

The way forward, through the pandemic and beyond, requires trauma-sensitive practices that address the increasing level of non-academic barriers students are facing, culturally responsive practices that build supportive and inclusive classrooms, and innovative practices that make sure students' unfinished (and future) learning is addressed in creative, engaging ways. Each approach represents a major undertaking and requires commitment, alignment, and collaboration among programs, schools, and community partners.

In order to deliver these practices, there is a clear need for a mindset shift away from "Teachers should do," and toward "How can the system support teachers to do." Rather than placing demands on educators, we should be asking: What can we do right now to support the workforce? How can we provide ongoing assistance so we can continue to recover while not losing sight of larger systemic improvements? How do we build a foundation so this work continues over the long term? In order to facilitate this asset-based approach, the following sections examine the highest-leverage strategies for advancing trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative practices across three phases:

IMMEDIATE SUPPORT

What supports do educators need to be trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and/or innovative in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

ONGOING SUPPORT

How can specialized training or professional learning help teachers improve their knowledge, skill, and effectiveness moving forward?

BUILDING A PIPELINE

How can teacher preparation programs create an environment that engages candidates in these skills for effective future instruction?

Within each of these phases, the report examines relevant data and research to explore how our education system can invest in critical educator supports that lead to effective practice. It then shares several examples of current programs in order to demonstrate one or more key strategies in action. Finally, the report highlights opportunities for districts and the state to consider new ways of incorporating supports for educators across multiple contexts to effectively meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students in 2022 and beyond.

IMMEDIATE SUPPORTS

For the education system as a whole to be successful, teachers need to be successful, and right now teachers have made it clear they need more support. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators are being pulled in many directions, struggling to navigate conflicting messages about making up for lost learning time, taking care of kids' ever-growing non-academic needs, and returning to "normal" as quickly as possible. Teachers need working conditions that support them in navigating these tumultuous times. This can be done by fostering a culture of support and maintaining focus on a core set of strategies for responding to the current crisis: prioritize and strengthen trauma-sensitive approaches to learning that acknowledge and attend to the turmoil experienced by all students; continue to cultivate schools and classrooms that are welcoming, inclusive, and culturally responsive where all students feel a sense of belonging and purpose; and remain flexible and willing to pursue innovative solutions to unexpected challenges.

What Can Immediate Support Look Like?

Especially in the current moment, promoting learning environments that address educators' need for immediate support not only serves to improve students' educational experiences, but also to improve the work experiences, wellness, and performance of staff. By making school culture more responsive to teachers' day-to-day challenges, teachers are more likely to remain in the profession and maintain a higher commitment to teaching.[7]

Right now, providing continuous, in-service support for educators may sound overwhelming, or like one more thing for schools and educators to do. However, as this report details, such supports are necessary and achievable—effective strategies are already being pursued in learning settings across the Commonwealth. Education leaders can consider several strategies for providing immediate support to teachers, including making space for purposeful collaboration and amplifying just-in-time tools and resources.

> "I've become a lot more flexible because of remote learning. You had to roll with the punches and realize you had to allow students to engage and show ways they could get their work done."
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> TEACHER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

Building on What Worked

Among the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted for educators, there have also been lessons learned that can form a part of effective educational practice moving forward. By building on what has worked over the past few years, strategies that respond to educators' immediate needs won't seem like new undertakings, and they may take root more quickly. Empowering educators to reflect on their recent successes can activate some of the energy needed to process the traumatic, challenging experiences from over the past two years and identify ways to move forward. One approach is for schools to facilitate the *Amplify, Hospice, Create* protocol, where educators identify "what has gone well and is worth growing (amplify), what could be safely let go of because no one was asking to return to it (hospice), and what new structures, processes, and ideas could be developed that would extend and sustain [what worked] (create)."[8] Recognizing prominent themes from this reflection and following through on each gives teachers more voice in their working environment while ensuring recovery strategies focus on what they need, what can be integrated into their ongoing responsibilities, and what yields benefits.

For instance, in some cases, providing teachers with greater agency and the space to be creative led to feelings of empowerment that prevented burnout. As one member of our Teacher Advisory Committee shared, "Typically, veteran teachers are trusted to be creative and have autonomy designing their lessons and curriculum. Within the pandemic, schools had to give space to [all] teachers to make decisions, without strict judgment, on how to create a new classroom environment. This empowerment gave us more ownership to get through remote learning." Leadership that welcomed innovative approaches to remote or hybrid

instruction offered opportunities for teachers to rethink how to scope and sequence learning, while continuing to meet academic standards. It became possible for students to demonstrate competency in diversified ways (recording a video response vs. writing a paragraph) and have more voice and choice in the classroom. Supportive schools and districts listened to teachers, halting or adapting instructional efforts that were ineffective or unworkable.

Schools that promoted consistent communication between teachers and families also reported positive developments, especially in the area of relationship-building. By facilitating outreach and two-way communication (including through new technologies such as virtual meetings and app-based translation tools), schools helped educators develop a deeper understanding of the struggles many families were facing throughout the pandemic and a clearer picture of students' home lives, cultures, and behaviors. Such connections are critical for raising awareness about the need for—and application of—culturally responsive practices in Massachusetts, where a predominantly White teaching force frequently assumes responsibility for the growth and wellbeing of large numbers of students of color. Remote and hybrid learning brought teachers directly into students' homes, resulting in opportunities for building a more culturally sensitive knowledge base and assisting "teachers in reducing conventional cultural deficit thinking along with improving their cultural competence to effectively work with students from minority groups."[9]

Teachers have also reported successes from collaborating with colleagues on lessons that prioritize critical learning goals. By working together, teachers have increased their knowledge base and toolkit, been able to divide and conquer lesson plans, and, critically, maintained connections with peers who helped them roll with the punches. As discussed further in the *Ongoing Supports* section, setting aside collaboration time reduces isolation among teachers and promotes school community.

Make Space to Address Teacher Needs

Workplace expectations, union contracts, and day-to-day schedules can determine how much time is available to teachers for addressing their own wellbeing, working with other educators through common planning time, or participating in new initiatives. For the early childhood workforce, this time may be very limited, as it is rare for there to be "policies providing for payment for planning time, staff meetings, and professional development."[10] In the long term, appropriate levels of paid planning time and dedicated spaces for learning and sharing are necessary for educators to engage in thoughtful planning on trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative practices. Unfortunately, we recognize that many education providers and schools are currently facing staffing shortages that impede their ability to devote time to educator supports. Therefore, in the section below, we highlight a few key strategies where immediate action is both warranted and possible—making space for adult mental health and wellbeing, promoting teacher collaboration, and providing instructional coaching—while acknowledging that the introduction of any new practice or program is a challenge. Later sections of the report consider strategies to pursue when more time and resources are available.

> "We knew we were going to be home and wanted to use it as an opportunity to review what we usually teach. If we usually teach these 20 things, how can we narrow them down to the 8 highest-priority items that can be translated to remote learning? Having a clear sense of what was and wasn't required from our school leadership was key."
>
> TEACHER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our educators means offering grace when they need it most, particularly given the important role they play in students' lives. Says ChildTrauma Academy Founder Bruce Perry, "A dysregulated adult can never regulate a dysregulated child."[11] Said differently, if a teacher is unable to manage their sadness, anger, or frustration, potentially due to trauma or stress, they will have difficulty responding to student behavior in supportive and constructive ways. Especially

now, it is important for school and district leaders to provide educators with resources that contribute to their own self-care. The type of resources provided—and the way that they are shared—should be informed by educators' perspectives in order to ensure that these are seen as true benefits rather than additional work responsibilities. For instance, scheduling meetings after school to promote self-care is likely to lead to resentment at the loss of personal time rather than gratitude.

That said, giving adults additional tools and opportunities to recognize, name, and regulate their emotions will benefit students too. One strategy, described in more detail below, is connecting with other teachers. Schools with positive staff culture produce better results for students. Feeling affirmed by those experiencing a similar situation, and sharing strategies for common challenges, can help lessen feelings of burnout.[12] Intentional staff-to-staff activities, like vulnerable dialogue, constructivist listening, and paired mentors, provide staff opportunities to reflect on their own social, emotional, and cultural competencies and practice self-care. With the field of education pushing forward social-emotional learning, we must ensure that educators are recipients of those supports as well.

Transformative SEL (TSEL) has emerged as a form of SEL aimed at building relationships in order to "critically examine root causes of inequity, and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, community, and societal wellbeing."[13] TSEL emphasizes the development of identity, agency, and belonging while integrating issues of race, class, and culture.[14] Over time, integrating TSEL-based strategies can help build a more trusting and collaborative staff culture that engages staff in vulnerable dialogue, offers opportunities to build empathy, and affirms educator identities. Once this degree of trust is in place, one way to build meaningful reflections into the school day is to conduct a Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol (CRIOP), which helps educators self-reflect on their culturally responsive practice by recognizing strengths and opportunity areas in six holistic dimensions.[15] A more immediate option is to embed SEL Signature Practices—Welcoming Inclusion Activities, Engaging Strategies, and Optimistic Closure—throughout faculty meetings and group conversations. Relatively short activities such as open-ended welcoming check-ins, Think-Ink-Pair-Share engagements, and reflection prompts at the ends of meetings can help maintain "a solid foundation of safety, consistency and joy in adult learning environments."[16]

Collaborative, Collegial Planning & Coaching Time

With appropriate supports, all teachers have the ability to strengthen their instructional practice to be more rigorous, trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative. But everyday logistics frequently get in the way of implementation. Class sizes, schedules, and the structure of the day can prevent teachers from participating in common planning time or engaging in meaningful collaboration. Often, lesson planning and classroom preparation takes place alone before or after school hours, at home, or on weekends. This approach further burdens teachers, while reducing opportunities to work together. Educators can easily get caught up in their own good intentions, wanting to do their best for their students, and with limited or no in-school support this process can lead to exhaustion.

Building Trusting Relationships: Amherst-Pelham Regional Middle School

Diego Sharon, former Dean of Students and now Principal of Amherst-Pelham Regional Middle School, came into his current role in the midst of school closures and the COVID-19 pandemic. He has recognized the elevated levels of trauma and the social, emotional, and financial instability that not only students but also his staff are facing. "It's never been more important to be present and focus on relationships," says Sharon. As Dean of Students, he developed trusting and supportive relationships with educators, making his transition to Principal and the process of navigating remote and hybrid learning a collaborative process with educators to meet their needs.

To support educators during this time, Sharon emphasizes "individualized care and a clear, articulated vision on goals for students," as well as "communication and follow through." His approach to support-ing educators includes being available to them at all times, for professional as well as personal reasons, including through one-on-one check-ins. His voice is a consistent support, reminding them to engage in self-care and asking about their families at home as well as their students in the classroom. Sharon finds that show-ing care to educators has a direct effect on the care shown to and felt by students.

Teachers benefit from common planning time and coaching experiences built into the school day. This time can allow for content experts, mental health staff, veteran and novice teachers, school leaders, specialists, and coaches to work together to build a comprehensive approach to academic and non-academic practices. A good place to start is by leveraging existing structures (e.g., grade-level teams, student support teams) and meetings. When educators do find time to meet, they can also utilize established techniques for promoting strong collaboration. The National Center for Learning Disabilities identifies preparedness, active listening, summarizing, questioning, delivering, integrating, and empathizing as the skills that teachers need to use to maximize collaborative time.[17] Identifying a facilitator to help teams develop these skills as they conduct meetings can model and reinforce their importance. Another high-leverage space for collaboration and learning is professional learning groups (PLGs), which are discussed in detail in the *Ongoing Supports* section of this report; these can be used to meet the immediate needs of teachers as well. Schools should aim to integrate opportunities for shared work and in-school coaching, even though a comprehensive approach to supporting collaboration may need to wait until staffing challenges begin to subside.

SPOTLIGHT ON
Revere Colleague to Colleague

Revere Public Schools, located in the Greater Boston area, is home to approximately 7,000 students, among whom 59.5% are Hispanic, 67.1% are English Learners (ELs), and 70.7% are low-income.[18] The district has been identified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as having "a long track record of teacher voice, empowerment, and peer support."[19] Part of that track record includes the Revere Educators Leadership Board (RELB), a shared leadership mechanism composed of central office staff and teacher representatives organized into six councils.

Part of the role of the RELB is to build teamwork and pilot new initiatives to improve teaching and learning. A joint proposal by the professional development and career ladder councils established the Revere Colleague to Colleague (C2C) program, a peer-to-peer teacher consultant initiative, in the 2017-18 school year. Growing from Revere's long-established relationship of trust among colleagues and with the administration, the C2C program provides teachers with the space and expertise to tackle immediate, and longer-term, needs.

C2C job-embedded supports are designed to give teachers agency to identify areas for growth based on their current needs, along with access to immediate resources and feedback on their practice. The program is voluntary and ensures participating teachers are committed to improvement through prolonged and sustained engagement. At the onset of the C2C program, four teachers served as full-time consultants to 10 participating teachers on several high-priority topics: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), English Learner instruction, competency-based learning, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The program added three consulting teachers (CTs) in the topics of deeper learning, mindfulness, and restorative practices this school year. CTs take on this full-time role for a two-year cycle and are promised their original classrooms back when they are done.

Pairs of CTs and participating teachers meet one to two times a week on a question of practice, and CTs spend time in participating teachers' classrooms to observe their implementation of practices related to the topic area of choice. In response to COVID, consulting teachers were also able to provide differentiated levels of support, from a listening ear to a co-lesson planner.

Through this program, good teachers are supported to be great teachers. They report increased wellbeing and feelings of support, and they remain in their positions at a higher rate. Consulting teachers bring out the strengths of participating teachers and

celebrate their skills, as each teacher, whether a CT or a participant, is regarded as having knowledge and expertise to share. The C2C program allows teachers to go deep into areas in which they want more experience, such as embedding trauma-sensitive models through mindfulness and restorative practice. All schools and districts can learn from this model and seek to embed elements of peer learning and sharing in the short term—for instance, by allowing educators to identify their own learning priorities, establishing a norm of learning from each other, and building in opportunities for peer sharing and discussion.

Offer Just-in-Time Tools and Resources

When challenges (or curiosities) arise, educators frequently turn to online resources to provide immediate support. It is often difficult to sort through tools and resources to determine credibility. A 2019 study from the Fordham Institute found that 64% of all materials shared on Teachers Pay Teachers, ReadWriteThink, and Share My Lesson (the three most popular supplemental websites) are not high-quality enough to be worth using.[20] However, providing educators with evidence-based materials for just-in-time learning is important. Education stakeholders, like research organizations, nonprofits, and foundations, can work to provide the field with high-quality, evidence-based resources to "keep up with innovations in curricula, pedagogy and the development of digital resources."[21] Meanwhile, school and district leaders, instructional coaches, and other content experts can identify and share reputable resource banks for exploration.

Going Deeper: Resources

TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

- The Rennie Center's Back-to-School Blueprints on *Helping Students Heal from Trauma, Rebuilding Community,* and *Reengaging Students* are part of an interactive series of research-based, online action guides featuring practices that not only address the pressing issues facing our students right now, but also can become building blocks for a more supportive, equitable, and high-performing system.[22]

- The Center on Child Wellbeing & Trauma offers a toolkit for early childhood educators to use for their own professional development on trauma and racial trauma, as well as other general resources for becoming trauma-informed and responsive.[23]

- The School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System provides access to a range of self-assessments on building school mental health systems and supporting trauma-responsive schools. By creating a free account, users can access a library of screening and assessment tools and many other resources.[24]

- The five modules available as part of Support for Teachers Affected by Trauma can help educators recognize and address the effects of secondary trauma—that is, trauma triggered by working with others (such as students) who have experienced traumatic events.[25]

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE

- The MIT Teaching Systems Lab has open learning courses on Becoming a More Equitable Educator, as well as other topics like Launching More Innovation in Schools.[26]

- Highlander Institute's Culturally Responsive & Sustaining Pedagogy Framework details the "what," "why," and "how" of each element of the Framework, with specific examples of teacher practices on topics such as "develop sociocultural awareness" and "examine and address power and privilege as they show up in the classroom."[27]

INNOVATIVE

- Dr. Torrey Trust's graduate students at UMass Amherst compiled a website on Online Tools for Teaching and Learning that educators can access to understand specific digital learning tools.[28]

- Digital Promise is a nonprofit organization authorized by Congress that works to spur innovation in education and provide more accessible learning experiences to all children. To achieve their vision, they run networks, including the League of Innovative Schools and the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools, to provide connectivity and access to students across the country. As a result of these engagements, Digital Promise has published a suite of learning tools that guide educators to design innovative learning experiences.[29]

ONGOING SUPPORTS

To be an excellent teacher is to be a lifelong learner. As researchers found when investigating lessons learned from National Teachers of the Year, "Outstanding teachers refuse to remain stagnant. With each new day, they learn more from the people—students, families, colleagues—who surround them and commit to adapting their practice and developing the traits that lead to success in the classroom."[30] Receiving support through professional learning and other growth opportunities can help teachers recognize the gaps in their practice and continue to find alternative methods for delivering content to their students. Yet as teachers continue to face the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, professional learning experiences may be pushed aside because of limited time or to avoid exacerbating the sense of exhaustion felt across the profession. Without opportunities to explore gap areas in educators' practice, the greatest challenges facing students, teachers, and families may not be adequately addressed. In particular, "[w]ith the advent of the pandemic, even greater efforts are called for in meeting the social-emotional needs of children and implementing trauma- and healing-informed practice, all while making up for learning loss and preparing for the coming unpredictable combinations of distance learning, blended learning, and in-classroom learning."[31] If educators are not given adequate time and space to engage in meaningful professional learning and receive ongoing support, burnout and attrition may increase. As this section will detail, continuous support should be developed in conversation with teachers in order to tailor an experience that meets the needs they see in their classrooms as well as their own social-emotional and learning needs.

> "Something I've noticed as a response to the pandemic that really doesn't work is that we've shifted to watching 3-hour-long videos for professional development and workshops. This means moving away from interacting with people...and it's ultimately not helpful and not conducive to growth."
>
> TEACHER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

Creating experiences that engage educators in critical thinking around their practice—particularly how they can become more trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative in response to student (and their own) needs—is of great importance in response to the pandemic. Rather than one-off lectures, these experiences must be continuous, since "meaningful professional learning (PL) is not a product, but is a process comprised of multiple opportunities for educators to learn and practice skills that advance their expertise."[32]

What Can Ongoing Support Look Like?

In this report, ongoing supports are framed as learning touchpoints that help educators understand, strengthen, and implement practices over time. Rather than immediate supports, which serve to triage urgent issues that come up, ongoing supports are grounded in continuous improvement and provide a path for additive learning experiences over the course of an educator's career. Although many of the strategies included in the *Immediate Supports* section could be adapted into ongoing professional learning, this section details supports for educators that are applicable both in this current moment and in the years to come, having already been successful in Massachusetts school contexts. These strategies include promoting teacher voice, convening professional learning groups, and establishing a comprehensive ecosystem of support.

Promoting Teacher Voice

Often, implementation of new school initiatives happens top-down. Central office staff or school administrators frequently identify new programs or models by examining evidence such as test scores and other student outcomes, outside research, and anecdotes from other sites that have used the same approach, but they do not always involve educators in the decision-making process. Carrying out new initiatives can mean additional work on teachers' plates, upping their stress levels and frustrations. This is as true for professional learning initiatives as for any other new bodies of work. But there is a better way to support ongoing educator learning. Instead of delivering content based on what administrators, school committees, and other leaders *think* teachers require, turning the tables so teachers are able to identify possible professional growth and learning areas can ensure that developmental materials are relevant for their needs. In short, empowering educators to be effective problem solvers increases their ability to more quickly and accurately identify problems, unearths a greater quantity of potential solutions, provides assurances that these solutions are well-suited to specific contexts, and ensures sustainability through increased buy-in and planning among staff.

BPS Telescope Network: The Telescope Network is a bottom-up approach for supporting teachers as leaders in their own right. Based in the Office of Teacher Leadership and Development in Boston Public Schools, and run in collaboration with the Boston Teachers Union, the Telescope Network creates opportunities for educators to collaborate across the district, share challenges and promising practices, and learn from one another. Educator voice comes first in the Network: teachers are asked what they want and need to learn so that program staff can provide professional development and learning site experiences to magnify those practices.

In learning sites, teachers come together to work on a problem of practice. A host teacher welcomes 12-15 guest educators into their classroom during the school day for developmental, non-evaluative observations. The host teacher, also referred to as a "humble expert," receives a stipend for their time, while the guest teachers are eligible to receive professional development points or Academic Ladder Credits. During the lesson, guest educators spend time interacting with students and asking them questions about their work. After the lesson, teachers come together and talk about the problem of practice and what they observed in the classroom. Virtual coaching and follow-up conversations occur after the visit to continue teachers' learning.

Prior to the pandemic, the Telescope Network would begin in October or November and provide substitute coverage in order for guest teachers to observe other classrooms. With continued difficulty in finding substitute teachers, on top of a continuously precarious pandemic, this program has been on hold for the school year. It has remained a consistent challenge to take teachers out of classrooms, and the Telescope staff is working to adapt this experience to a virtual, time-limited world.

Teacher Leadership Fund Grants: The Teacher Leadership Fund is the product of a Boston Teachers Union contract provision that sets aside $300,000 to empower educator-led innovation. Teachers write proposals to identify an authentic classroom, school, or district challenge and how they plan to solve it. They can identify many different approaches to solving their problem: leading professional development sessions; creating materials or resources for students, colleagues, or families; participating in trainings and earning endorsements through specific learning programs; attending conferences; and more. When promising solutions are discovered, staff facilitate opportunities for fund recipients to come together to celebrate, iterate on, and disseminate their learning. The Teacher Leadership Fund Grants empower educators to be the drivers of their own professional learning and reflect the nuances that come from their lived realities.

Especially with the complexity of supporting students and families throughout and beyond the pandemic, listening to educators about what they need to thrive in their work can inform learning content that leads to professional growth. Furthermore, since effective practices for educating students also apply to teachers who are learning about their craft, differentiation and individualized content are useful strategies for helping all educators reap the benefits of professional learning.

A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

"My district is asking me to do too much. We have a head of instruction asking us to fill out week-by-week what we are teaching. And we are doing that instead of what we want to be doing. We've been trying for years to go through a cultural proficiency protocol looking at what we teach, but the district is giving us other things to do. Districts are the ones that put the time towards what they value."

"One of the things that staff have pushed for is an equity learning team and we were able to start this at our school. We are working across disciplines and job titles in teams of 6–7 to do deep dive work around our own understanding of equity so that we are better able to talk about it, articulate how we understand it, and teach better."

TEACHER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Convening Professional Learning Groups

Given that teachers often have non-stop schedules and few opportunities to pause and reflect, building in time for comprehensive professional learning experiences can be difficult. Especially now, with some districts putting a pause on any professional development to alleviate teachers' workloads, districts and schools need to formulate creative solutions to encourage teachers' growth in the skills that are particularly necessary to address students' current needs. Rather than encouraging sit-and-get PD on a handful of days during the school year, one effective strategy that embeds continuous learning into the school day is professional learning groups (also referred to as communities of practice or professional learning communities).

Professional learning groups (PLGs) differ from typical staff meetings or grade-level meetings in a few ways: 1) trained, supportive facilitators leading structured activities; 2) a horizontal structure for sharing power (everyone is regarded on an equal footing); and 3) the opportunity to dive deep into specific topics, including trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative practices. PLGs meet regularly for an extended period of time, ideally 1-2 hours during the school day. For schools with existing blocks of planning time, applying that time towards PLGs is an effective way to allow for uninterrupted collaboration. For schools without that option, it may be a significant challenge to carve it out, especially when staffing shortages limit flexibility. If time doesn't already exist for collaboration within the school day, it is important for school and system leaders to 1) gain a sense of how teachers are currently spending their time, including how they are planning and collaborating, 2) design schedules that maximize uninterrupted collaboration time, and 3) ensure alignment with union and logistical considerations.

Education Resource Strategies proposes a few options for expanding collaborative planning time, including stacking two blocks of planning time together; reducing planning time on a few days to increase on another day; reorganizing time that teachers have at the beginning and end of the day into more team planning time; and creating larger specials classes (art, music, etc.) so that fewer specials classes can cover more teachers' time.[33] The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Center for Collaborative Education also offer some ideas for increasing time for collaboration, such as releasing students early one day each week and using teacher assistants or college and university students to free teachers for collaborative work.[34]

When given the time to collaborate, teachers and their classrooms can both benefit. But in order for PLGs to work, administrators need to recognize the importance of investing in learning time for teachers, especially for new concepts and initiatives. This means acknowledging a learning curve. Change is hard, mistakes will happen, and adjustments will need to be made. PLGs offer a

superb place for strengthening and planning practices before their implementation, as well as a safe space for reflecting on initial outcomes, troubleshooting unexpected challenges, and making improvements.

Great Schools Partnership

The Great Schools Partnership (GSP) is a nonprofit organization focused on equity-grounded school improvement. In 2021, GSP coaches worked with 70+ districts located in 12 states, including Massachusetts. Within their work, GSP aims to redesign structures to improve instruction, assessment, curriculum, and student voice, choice, and agency so that all students are ready for college, career, and citizenship. Overall, GSP helps schools and districts prepare to be responsive to students whose diversity is increasing at a far greater rate than the adults supporting them. Professional learning groups are a foundational piece of GSP's model for working with schools.

Many of GSP's coaching contracts across the country involve establishing PLGs, with GSP providing initial training and ongoing support for the teachers who serve as facilitators of these groups. Facilitators are educators from the schools and districts who receive training and support throughout the year. Their role is to create and sustain a supportive space conducive to collaboration and to design and facilitate meetings using protocols that will help address the common goals group members have identified. In this way, facilitators work to ensure the group's time together is meaningful and promote the use of common language during PLGs, including a shared understanding, commitment, and set of norms around high-quality teaching and learning. With the help of effective facilitation, and by giving teachers uninterrupted time together, PLGs aim to build a sustainable structure marked by vulnerability and mutual respect.[35]

> "We believe very strongly that the cornerstone of building sustainability of efforts happening in schools is around professional learning groups (PLCs, CoPs). That is essentially making sure that teachers have at least one block of 75-90 minutes of uninterrupted collaboration time every month to talk about and share teaching and learning."
>
> MARK KOSTIN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR AT GREAT SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP

Many of the design considerations and practices embedded in effective PLGs were featured in GSP's work with Springfield Public Schools in Springfield, Massachusetts.[36] In SPS, a majority (68.3%) of students are Hispanic, while the administration is majority White (56.6%) and Hispanic (24%).[37] When Springfield sought to develop a Portrait of a Graduate outlining what students should know and be able to do by the time they finish high school, GSP designed and helped facilitate an inclusive and engaging process that sought the voices of the greater community to collectively identify and codify the skills and attributes for a Springfield graduate. Within this work, GSP used professional learning groups and other similar structures to meet with the district's project leads; support facilitation of meetings with community members, students, families, and educators; and analyze data. By ensuring educator voice, drawing on and including the experiences of the local community, and collaborating with students and families, the result of the work was a more culturally relevant collective vision of the skills and attributes Springfield students need to thrive in college and career.
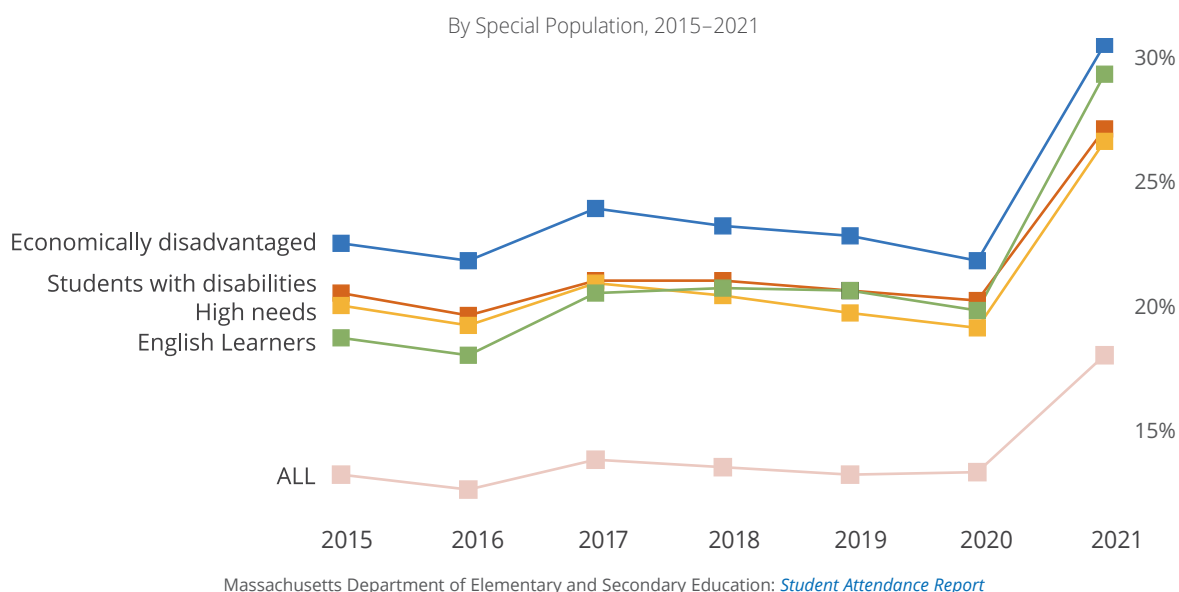
Establishing a Comprehensive Ecosystem of Support

In education, it truly does take a village to support a child. A single educator or care provider can't do everything, nor should they have to. Therefore, one strategy to provide ongoing support for educators is to connect them with others who can help address students' needs. Professional learning should include building awareness of (and making connections to) networks of other adults with specific expertise in providing essential services to children and youth. Over time, and through strong relationships between staff members, these networks of adults can become comprehensive ecosystems of support, where staff inside schools

are familiar with services in the community that can meet the academic and non-academic needs of students and families. This exposure to outside services can also support educators to create safe and equitable learning spaces, while helping them focus on their core role within the classroom.

For example, this means that when an educator is tending to a student with mental health challenges, they can not only learn how to grow their own trauma-sensitive practices, but also consult with mental health experts from their school and community, connect the student and family with an in-house social worker or counselor, or elevate the issue within a school-based system of support with links to external mental health providers, based on the student's specific situation. Mental health is not the only area where wraparound supports have taken on increased importance during the pandemic. Recent data on chronic absenteeism also demonstrates the need to coordinate services inside and outside the school building. In 2021, students were facing remote learning, unreliable technology and internet connections, job and child care responsibilities, and other barriers to attending school regularly. The chronic absenteeism rate spiked for all students, from 13% to 17.7%. Within this spike, almost 1 in 3 English Learners were chronically absent in 2021. This increase can have negative impacts on a student's academic, social-emotional, and developmental outcomes. Schools and community-based organizations can work together to identify the specific challenges that keep students from consistent school attendance and provide support to address these needs.

FIGURE 1. CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE
By Special Population, 2015–2021

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: *Student Attendance Report*

In order to leverage community connections, care providers and schools should assess any gap areas in their expertise and ability to serve their students' needs in-house. Appointing a staff member to a dedicated community liaison or wraparound support role can alleviate added responsibilities for educators. Wraparound support specialists can build relationships with point people in community organizations and provide quick-touch resources for educators to share with families in need. By broadening the group of individuals responsible for student care, children's holistic needs can be more effectively met during and beyond the pandemic—without adding to teachers' workloads. The following are various examples of ecosystems of support, starting with a focus on a community-level ecosystem and then widening the lens to look at cross-district and even national initiatives.

The Systemic Student Support Academy (S3A), an initiative co-led by the Rennie Center and Boston College's Center for Optimized Student Support, demonstrates one approach to in-school system-building. S3A works with schools and districts to create a system of integrated student support to address students' holistic needs and interests—a network of care and resources that range from tutoring, extracurriculars, and physical and mental healthcare to food banks and employment assistance. Over the period of three years, educators and school leaders participating in S3A learn about students' holistic needs and the related school- or community-based resources available to them, evaluate a pilot group of students, and scale the process school-wide.

Digital Promise, a nonprofit seeking to spur educational innovation, has also taken steps to build school- and community-wide ecosystems of support. Digital Promise has partnered with Verizon to create **Verizon Innovative Learning Schools,** providing schools within 92 districts (including Boston, Fall River, Lawrence, Holyoke, New Bedford, and Worcester) with 1:1 devices, reliable internet access, full-time coaching and professional development, increased community-school STEM partnerships, and long-term progress monitoring on new ways of teaching. By utilizing the expertise and resources of Verizon, Digital Promise is able to expand equitable access to technology and connectivity for students and educators.

Partnering with outside groups and corporations to ensure reliable internet access is particularly imperative in Massachusetts as educators seek to incorporate innovative uses of technology that require high-speed internet connections. Although the Federal Communications Commission recommends a speed of 1 Mbps (megabyte per second) for each student, only 56% of MA school districts meet that goal. Some large districts fall well below the benchmark—Lowell Public Schools, for instance, has one of the slowest bandwidths per student, at just 20 kbps (0.02 Mbps). According to a 2020 Teach Plus Massachusetts survey of Massachusetts teachers, lack of access to appropriate technology devices and reliable-high speed internet were major barriers to their teaching during remote learning, but lagging school district internet speeds mean that being back in person is no guarantee of strong connectivity.[38]

FIGURE 2. MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL DISTRICT INTERNET SPEEDS

Percent of School Districts >= 1 Mbps/student, 2017–2021
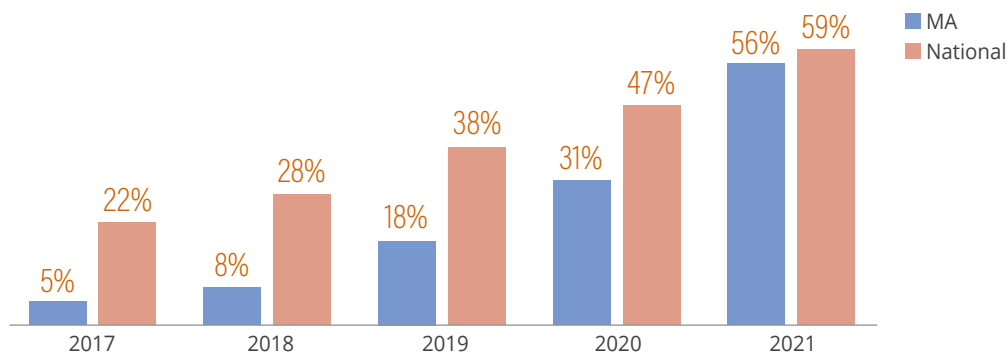
Looking beyond individual schools and districts, ecosystems like the Five District Partnership (5DP)—a joint educational effort between the districts of Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Revere, and Winthrop—connect educators across communities for ongoing professional learning and support. After noticing high rates of student mobility within and among the five districts, the partnership was established in 2012 to collaborate on high-quality instructional resources, professional growth and development for teachers, educator relationships, and efficiency and fiscal prudence. By bringing teachers together for curriculum alignment, professional development, and conversation, the 5DP opens up avenues for teachers to connect and feel refreshed, supported, and able to share ideas. This forum for continued engagement is particularly important for teachers serving the districts' students of color, immigrant students, and multilingual students, because research shows that "if in-service teachers cannot receive ongoing support for their professional development, they are more likely to fall back on traditional approaches that may not be well-suited for their students and families of various backgrounds."[39] Within the 5DP, teachers are treated as experts and have opportunities during educator showcases and professional development days to present to their colleagues. In doing so, teachers share content expertise and participants learn from peers about relevant topics (such as the focus of this year's professional development day, Equity for All).

Connecting Teachers and Students Across Communities: Campus Without Walls

Campus Without Walls (CWW) is an initiative designed to close long-standing gaps in educational equity by leveraging the power of communities and technology to break down barriers that segregate students and limit resources. Supported by Open Opportunity—Massachusetts, a cross-sector coalition (co-chaired by the Rennie Center) of more than 40 organizations representing education, health care, housing, and workforce development, CWW connects classrooms, educators, and students to each other and a broader education ecosystem, increasing access to opportunity and offering a new vision for more equitable schooling.

The CWW model is centered on three key steps. First, CWW recruits Lead Teachers who excel in their field, are committed to rigor and culturally responsive instruction, and are willing to engage in a more liberated approach to instruction. Second, CWW supports these Lead Teachers in adapting or creating exciting, credit-bearing units within their curriculums that may be shared virtually. (The CWW course catalog may be viewed at www.openopportunityma.org/campuswithoutwalls.) Third, Lead Teachers are matched to partnering schools and classes through a learning management system, enabling students to enroll in more diverse and advanced coursework outside their home school. The power of the CWW model is that it builds on community strengths and the talent of the existing teaching force while expanding learning opportunities for students by connecting these communities and teachers to one another.

In spring 2021, CWW launched a pilot in Boston Public Schools (BPS) that included 16 schools, 13 community-based organizations, and two universities serving approximately 600 students in grades 6–12. Pre- and post-survey results for the pilot showed positive results among students: a seven percentage point increase in students reporting their classes were relevant to the daily lives; a six percentage point increase in students reporting their classes were focused on topics they want to learn about; and an eight percentage point increase in students reporting they were making progress toward their high school diploma. Perhaps most notably, survey results showed a more than twenty percentage point increase in students reporting they received strong support from their school for remote learning during the COVID pandemic. In future years, CWW aspires to spread to other communities across Massachusetts and across the nation, building a vibrant professional learning community where teachers can receive ongoing peer support and students can benefit from a more expansive learning ecosystem.
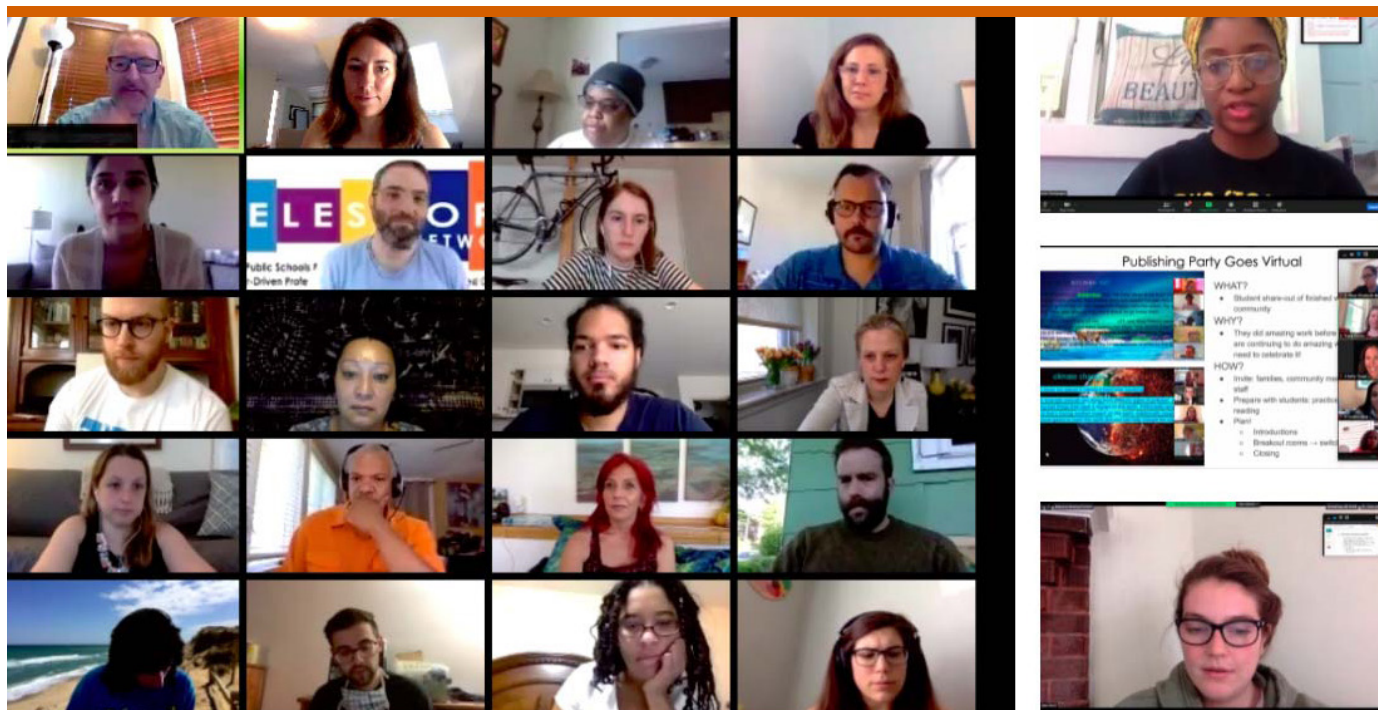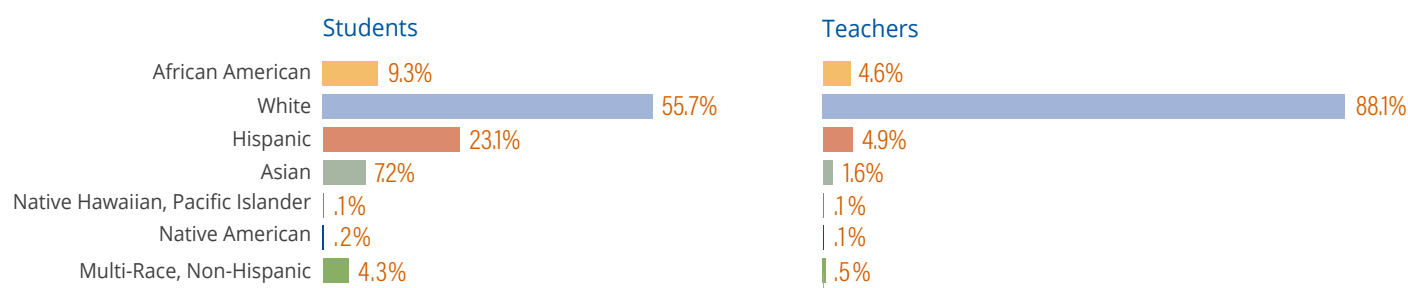
BUILDING A PIPELINE

While it is critical to support current educators to meet students' pressing academic and social-emotional needs, focusing only on existing teachers is insufficient. New teachers entering the field must likewise be prepared to adopt trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative approaches in order to maximize their students' potential. As the changes that we now see in the education space become new norms, teacher preparation programs must adapt to ensure aspiring educators enter changing classroom environments empowered, emboldened, and able to be effective.

Evidence indicates that the traditional teaching pipeline—entering college or university to earn a bachelor's and/or master's degree and taking the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) and other relevant tests—does not offer equitable opportunities for all candidates. For example, the financial and personal costs of obtaining higher degrees and taking teaching licensure tests (possibly more than once) disproportionately affect people of color, potentially dissuading them from entering the field and undermining workforce diversity. In fact, a survey on the financial burden of teacher preparation found that "[e]ducation majors from diverse backgrounds are more likely to come from families with less than half of the $90,000 income average for families of education majors who are white. These realities are often buried when considering implications for aspiring teachers, a group that is still predominantly white and female."[40] In addition to the financial burden placed on teacher candidates, the requirement that prospective educators pass the MTEL Communication and Literacy Skills exam in order to attain a teaching license can also present a barrier to entry for candidates of color: MTEL data reveals that 80.3% of White test takers pass this exam compared to 46.1% of Black test takers, 58.4% of Hispanic test takers, and 63.7% of Asian/Pacific Islander test takers.[41]

Collectively, these and other factors have resulted in a disproportionately White teaching force. In fact, in SY21-22, 81% of all teachers identified as White, while only 55.7% of Massachusetts students identify in the same way. According to the data in Figure 3, Hispanic/Latinx-identifying students face the highest differential between themselves and their teachers (-18.2%).

FIGURE 3. STUDENT-TEACHER RACE/ETHNICITY DIFFERENTIAL
By Race/Ethnicity—SY21-22

	Students	Teachers
African American	9.3%	4.6%
White	55.7%	88.1%
Hispanic	23.1%	4.9%
Asian	7.2%	1.6%
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	.1%	.1%
Native American	.2%	.1%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	4.3%	.5%

The Education Trust: *Is Your State Prioritizing Teacher Diversity & Equity*

A key question to ask about any approach to educator preparation is whether it attracts a strong pool of candidates and equips them with the full range of tools and skills needed to support students across multiple developmental domains. Undoubtedly, the expectations we place upon teachers are growing. Teachers are facing new challenges that require them to be adept at navigating new technologies, learning environments, and instructional approaches, while cultivating an understanding of students' own lived experiences, to be effective in the classroom. With the expansion of what it means to be an educator also comes the need to expand how potential candidates are viewed and assessed, which includes recognizing strengths, assets, and perspectives they may bring to the classroom in addition to their content knowledge. It is important to ask questions such as, "What is the teacher bringing to the classroom? What is this teacher interested in? What do they uniquely possess and care about that will make them an even stronger teacher?" At a time where diversifying the educator workforce is more important than ever, the teacher pipeline needs to provide multiple entry points and pathways forward to meet aspiring educators of all backgrounds where they are and help them develop the skill sets to become effective, trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative teachers.

Alternative Pathways to Teaching

From 1999 until 2009, the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers (MINT) provided an alternative certification path for college graduates and career-changing professionals, serving and training more than 600 educators during its ten-year operation. In 2009, the MINT program ended, as the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education developed a state-approved and district-based series of alternative pathways and programs to enter the teaching profession.

The **Provisional Teaching License** method begins with obtaining a bachelor's degree in any course of study. Following this, prospective educators must pass the MTEL exam appropriate to the grade and content level they wish to teach. With these two qualifications, aspiring teachers may begin teaching right away as teachers of record with a preliminary license. The license is valid for up to five years while the teacher completes an educator preparation program and any additional licensure requirements.

An **Initial Teaching License** is available to candidates who have passed the MTEL, earned a bachelor's degree, and completed an approved educator preparation program. Approved programs include Alternative/Practice-Based Licensure Programs, several of which combine a yearlong residency in a school with a master's-level education program (the Sposato Graduate School of Education, described below, is one example of this model).

Finally, those who aim to teach in technical subjects can explore alternative pathways to the classroom with the **Preliminary Vocational Technical Teacher License.** Similar to the Provisional Teaching License, prospective educators must have an appropriate educational credential (high school diploma or equivalent, associate degree, or bachelor's degree, depending on their field), along with professional experience. They must also achieve passing scores on the applicable vocational subject matter test and either the Vocational Technical Literacy Skills Test or the Communication and Literacy Skills Test.

The program exemplars and models explored in this section build on these options, broadening the focus from the technical requirements of licensure to examine how to make pathways into the teaching profession more accessible for aspiring educators, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups.

What Can a Pipeline of Support Look Like?

To build an educator pipeline that offers multiple routes into teaching, there must be a deep investment in homegrown talent, a real connection to and grounding in the community, and space for individualized coaching practices. Reevaluating the teacher preparation process and developing exploratory ways to support all kinds of aspiring educators will, in turn, support students of all kinds.

Rethinking Teacher Preparation

A differentiated and equitable pipeline is necessary to fuel a workforce where all educators are trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative academic instructors. Achieving this goal means promoting teacher preparation models that recruit and support candidates who might otherwise struggle to enter the profession, while advancing a comprehensive program of study that develops the skill sets needed to find success in rapidly changing classroom environments.

Learn and Earn Practicum

In traditional educator preparation programs, candidates pay tuition to their institution for the time spent working in a student teaching placement. A learn and earn practicum flips the script on this model, and helps offset the cost of higher education, by compensating teacher candidates for time they spend in classrooms while earning a degree. One example is the Sposato Graduate School of Education (profiled below), which provides a paid, in-classroom residency for aspiring educators working toward their teaching license. By compensating students for this time, learn and earn models "combine career-oriented academic curriculum, relevant work experience, and student financial assistance" to "allow students who might not be able

> "How are we representing and looking for all voices, not just loud, common, or assumed voices?"
>
> TEACHER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

to study without financial assistance to remain in school."[42] The benefit of learn and earn programs is that they provide flexibility for students to acquire new knowledge and progress in their careers while continuing to earn a living. They also help candidates develop essential workplace and classroom skills that can be difficult to learn without direct experience. For employers looking to hire educators, learn and earn programs allow them to secure qualified candidates through "effective screening, selection, and recruitment techniques."[43]

Early College High School Models (ECHS)

Entering the teaching profession is not exclusive to college students—high school students can also start on that path while in their own classrooms. The early college high school model (ECHS) can and should be leveraged to tap into a potential future workforce. In this model, students engage in coursework that positions them to gain high school and college credit (and perhaps even an associate degree) simultaneously, coupled with career exposure that supports their journey to becoming an educator. In the long run, this will "build the pipeline of qualified teachers to fill local vacancies in a way that also reflects the school's student population."[44] ECHS can find and foster homegrown talent, creating pathways that encourage successful students to return and teach in their own communities and former schools.

Connecting with the Community

There is a unique value to creating teacher preparation experiences that are rooted in the community, particularly given the difficulty of cultivating a homegrown teaching force. Districts face challenges in developing a "pipeline of students [who] will go back to the community to become teachers," which can be solved in part with the Grow-Your-Own (GYO) model for teacher preparation.[45] The GYO teacher preparation model dates back to the 1970s, emerging out of community organizing efforts to address educational equity in public schools in the United States.[46] These programs identify community members with an interest in teaching and provide them with coursework, experience, licensure options, and other resources so that they can become teachers within their own communities and share their lived experiences with the students they aspire to teach. Some GYO

programs enable the participation of low-income community members of color through financial support for childcare, transportation, tutoring, and loan forgiveness, while simultaneously providing trainings and educational support.

Whether through partnerships with local colleges and universities or at the district/school level itself, administrators can develop pipelines for aspiring educators to study and gain experience in the classroom by way of internships or residencies. By encouraging participants to return to or remain in the community where they grew up, these programs can expand the number of teachers who bring an understanding of students' home lives and cultures— and who can bond with their students over shared identities and experiences. As described below, Lawrence CommunityWorks uses practices from this model as part of the Lawrence Working Families Initiative, supporting community members to pursue a paraprofessional or educator license and providing resources to complete the steps it takes to get there.

SPOTLIGHT ON
Lawrence CommunityWorks

Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW) is a nonprofit community development organization working alongside residents and other stakeholders to revitalize and transform the city of Lawrence. LCW's core work lies in community organizing and social change, which guides all its program development. Among its robust array of adult learning programs (financial education, housing counseling and education, English classes, etc.), is a workforce development program, which integrates organizing work, coaching, and financial education to create pathways to good work opportunities in schools and neighborhoods.

The Lawrence Working Families Initiative's Educator Training program is in its fourth year, recruiting parents and other community members into a learn-and-earn program focused on preparing paraprofessionals. Participants take a year-long class with high-level ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) instruction to pass the ParaPro (paraprofessional) exam, take a college course through Northern Essex Community College, and participate in a paid internship in the district. From there, program participants can start careers as paraprofessionals or take steps to pursue teacher licensure. Participants come from various parts of the teacher pipeline—for instance, some have their associate degree, some have not yet taken the MTEL exam, and some have education and credentialing from their country of origin.

LCW also provides a three-month, intensive MTEL bootcamp to help paraprofessionals pass the literacy component of the MTEL and become teachers of record. Participants receive wraparound services, tutoring, and guidance counseling, as well as financial support to cover testing costs. A small group of Latinx principals serve as mentors. Of the 19 participants who completed the program, 3 have passed the MTEL and are working as teachers, 10 are in the process of taking steps towards the exam, and 6 require additional support. Another cohort of 16 new members is set to launch in January.
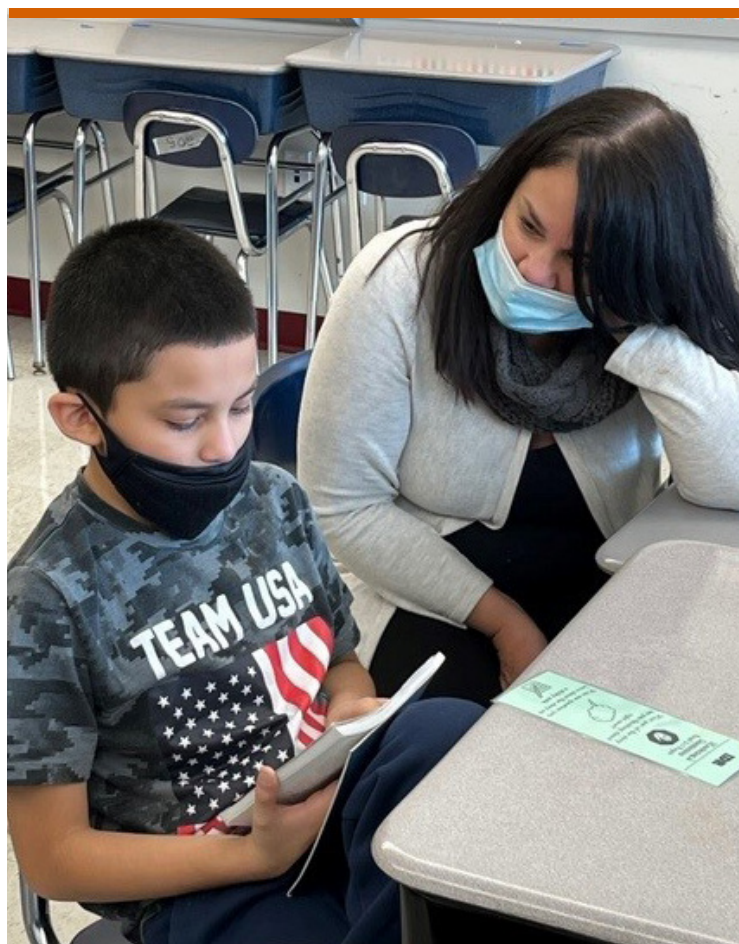
As LCW Deputy Director Jessica Andors puts it, the success of the Lawrence Working Families Initiative raises systemic questions regarding teacher preparation: "How are we recruiting, training, and preparing folks to be educators? Is there a value placed on the cultural lens?" Multiple factors led LCW to get more deeply involved in the city's schools and build stronger connections between the community and its classrooms—perhaps most importantly, hearing from parents about their desire to be more active in their students' education. LCW also aimed to increase the diversity of its teaching force and improve families' financial stability. While 93% of Lawrence Public Schools students are Latinx, 72% of the teaching force is White. And as Andors explained, there is a direct correlation between financially stable families, who are able to provide foundational and well-rounded supports like food, shelter, security, healthcare, and extracurricular support, and positive student outcomes.

Diversified Coaching Strategies

Receiving regular feedback and guidance on practice—whether from experts in the field, mentors, or peers—is critical to fostering ongoing improvement in both prospective and current educators. Skilled coaches can offer aspiring educators guidance and feedback customized to their strengths and needs and grounded in real work environments, helping to ease transitions, facilitate the implementation of new curricula and learning strategies, and strengthen classroom practice. Ideally, a personalized approach for supporting teacher candidates would include coaching strategies tailored to both the work needs and lived experiences of educators.

> "What supported me in my journey to pursuing teaching was building collegial relationships, experiencing mentorship, getting help with classroom management and planning, and being in the same community I did my student teaching in when I finally moved into the classroom."
>
> TEACHER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

Peer-to-peer learning models can also offer useful insights for aspiring educators, such as through communities of practice where educators who share similar training, working conditions, and backgrounds come together to discuss instructional successes and challenges. In pre-service programs, communities of practice can provide "meaningful opportunities to develop students' understanding of content."[47] They also allow "students to reflect and participate actively in the construction of their own understanding…whether related to particular subject matter or to student teaching experiences," thereby building their confidence to work with students.[48]

Preparing Teachers through Mentorship and Movement: Project Coach

Project Coach, an out-of-school-time program that serves the community of Springfield, Massachusetts, is designed to prepare aspiring educators to enter the field while improving academic and social-emotional outcomes for local children and young adults. The program is run by Smith College in partnership with Springfield Public Schools and Baystate Health. Project Coach works to develop a culturally responsive educator workforce through a cross-age community of practice composed of Springfield high school students, college students, graduate students, Springfield Public Schools teachers, Smith College faculty and staff, and practitioners from Baystate Health. The members of the Project Coach community of practice work together to learn and leverage lessons from sports, coaching, and mentoring in order to advance individual and community change.

Project Coach uses a "cascading mentorship model," where high school students from Springfield Public Schools are tutored and mentored by aspiring teachers from Smith College to become coaches and leaders in the local community.[49] This mentorship contributes to students' academic outcomes, as 100% of high school seniors who participated in the program in 2017 graduated from high school (compared to a 77% overall graduation rate in Springfield).[50] These teens apply the skills they develop in the program by serving as coaches themselves in an afterschool program for elementary students. By participating in sports-based play, elementary students are taught important life skills like teamwork, sportsmanship, and focus.[51]

Both undergraduate and graduate students at Smith College have the opportunity to gain firsthand experience in mentorship and youth development through Project Coach. Undergraduates play a variety of roles, including serving as one-on-one tutors and mentors for Springfield youth, while exploring their interest in a potential teaching career. Graduate students in Education or Exercise and Sport Science are eligible to participate in the Project Coach Graduate Fellowship. These Fellows receive tuition waivers as compensation for their work as coaches and team leaders, while their experience in these roles helps them prepare for a teaching career after graduation.

Learning by Doing: Charles Sposato Graduate School of Education

The Charles Sposato Graduate School of Education is a two-year program for aspiring teachers in the Greater Boston area. This 11-year-old program grew out of Match Charter Public School, and it serves as a way for aspiring teachers to pursue a Master's degree as well as a Massachusetts teaching license. In the fall semester of their first year, program participants work full-time in classrooms around Greater Boston (largely in charter schools), take evening courses, and participate in Saturday training sessions. The Saturday sessions are led by coaches who introduce participants to instructional practices and provide opportunities to workshop them with peers. In the spring, participants take on more responsibility in their host teachers' classrooms and receive constant feedback on their work in the classroom from their coaches. Upon completing the first year and attaining a state teaching license, trainees spend their second year in full-time teaching jobs while continuing to receive coaching from Sposato. They also take a year-long distance-learning course to earn their Master's degree in Effective Teaching. During year one of the program, trainees receive compensation from the schools where they're employed during the day (e.g., as associate teachers), while in the second year of the program, they are paid for their work as lead teachers.

Dean Jalene Tamerat highlights particular shifts brought on by the pandemic, such as supporting trainees to be more sensitive to the traumas and challenges students are facing, while embedding culturally responsive teaching in the coach-resident relationships. While Sposato works primarily with the charter school system, it is building new connections to the traditional public school space by way of a developing partnership with Malden Public Schools. By expanding its program in this way, Sposato aims to address the substantial need to recruit, retain, and train highly effective candidates in the educator workforce.

Policy Recommendations

The 2022 Action Guide shares key considerations for supporting pre-service and in-service teachers to be trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive, and innovative—practices that are of the utmost importance in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its predicted long-lasting impact. While teachers and schools can apply many of these practices within their own settings, district- and state-level actions can also contribute to these efforts and help build a more supportive environment for educators overall. The following recommendations offer starting points for district and state leaders to contribute to the effective work of teachers. Of course, these recommendations are not comprehensive—stakeholders from across the education system should work together to craft strong solutions for supporting teachers in 2022 and beyond, with teachers themselves playing a lead role in both identifying challenges and developing ways to address them.

District-Level Recommendations

1. **Attend to the Whole Child:** Students spend only 20 percent of their waking hours in school, but what happens in the other 80 percent of their time can have a significant impact on students' ability to learn, thrive, and reach their full potential. A whole-child approach recognizes the importance of nurturing the strengths and addressing the needs of each student, both inside and outside of school, and connecting them with necessary school- and community-based resources. While teachers are often best-positioned to recognize and call attention to students' individual needs, they cannot be solely responsible for following through and taking action to address these needs. Rather, they should be able to turn to a system of support designed for this purpose.

   By building time in the school schedule to review the needs of each child—and bringing in staff who can speak about students' progress across multiple domains—an integrated system of support ensures that classroom teachers aren't alone in addressing students' holistic development. Initiatives like the Systemic Student Support (S3) Academy, described above, are designed to help schools and districts establish integrated student support systems that not only identify individual student needs but also build connections with resources in the broader community. These connections are increasingly vital

during the pandemic, as it has become clearer than ever that teachers and schools don't operate alone. The Rennie Center's action guide on Accessing Essential Services offers some useful starting points for moving toward a systematic approach to identifying and addressing students' needs in the time of COVID.[52]

2. **Utilize ESSER funds to remove pandemic-added responsibilities from teachers' plates:** At the current moment, many teachers are taking on more and more responsibilities with no reprieve in sight. These added burdens could include completing COVID-related compliance requirements, filling in for absent staff, attempting different learning acceleration strategies, documenting lesson plans or interventions, providing virtual content for quarantined students, and much more. ESSER funds can be dedicated to recruiting and hiring more teachers, as well as clerical and support staff, in order to provide more coverage, time, and space for educators to engage in collaborative planning (as described above) or to simply reconnect with colleagues and reignite their passion for teaching. Given the challenges of recruiting and hiring new staff, schools and districts can think creatively about how to draw on their communities—including alumni and families—to help provide services during the school day. This could include setting up programs that leverage community volunteers or paraprofessionals (as exemplified by Lawrence CommunityWorks), using funding to pay teachers to serve as full-time coaches (as with the Revere Colleague to Colleague program), or hiring coordinators to manage and lead a school's integrated system of support (described above). Districts can help by offering guidance on the uses of funds, supporting recruitment, and elevating effective practices.

3. **Ensure teacher voice in school and district decision-making processes:** Through surveys, discussion forums, school committee comments, and more, many teachers have shared their frustrations around their lack of involvement in local, state, and federal decisions about how they spend their time, particularly during the pandemic. Based on interviews with 57 teachers from across the country, researchers at the MIT Teaching Systems Lab commented, "One of the unnecessary tragedies of pandemic schooling, repeated in schools across the country over the past year and a half, is that teachers have not been valued as partners in designing our educational response to COVID." Classroom teachers should not be overlooked when crafting solutions and priorities for the education system—the most effective approaches to the pandemic tend to be those that are co-created with educators as equal partners, taking into account their concerns and lived experiences. The Revere Educational Leadership Board (RELB) is one example of a collaborative structure that brings together educators and administrators to make district-wide decisions on topics from recruitment and hiring, to educator growth, to professional culture. Districts looking to take initial steps toward creating a structure like the RELB could work with local educators and union representatives to design opportunities for teachers to offer regular input on decisions.

State-Level Recommendations

1. **Foster innovation and collaboration among districts:** The state can promote strong partnerships among districts to share successes and best practices they have used to support educators. Disseminating these ideas can help schools quickly adapt by offering immediate supports, while also cultivating longer-term initiatives. The state can play a role by providing incentives for districts to participate in networks and coaching opportunities run by outside organizations, or by instituting and managing its own network-based initiatives. For instance, DESE's Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning seeks to assist a cohort of schools with implementing deeper learning that draws from culturally responsive practice. By offering professional development, coaching, guidance, tools, and resources, Kaleidoscope is working to ensure that districts are supported from the initial investigation of deeper learning practices all the way through effective implementation.

2. **Expand equitable pathways to teaching:** Diversifying the teacher workforce in Massachusetts requires policy solutions at all levels. The state can continue to support traditional and alternative educator preparation programs to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers of color by providing additional funding and guidance on strategies for increasing racial diversity. This may include, for instance, encouraging institutions of higher education and alternative programs to offer coursework that recognizes the importance of self-care and helps candidates navigate the professional teaching environment.[54] Other strategies include investigating and expanding alternatives to the MTEL, promoting guidance and standards for Grow-Your-

Own programs and other alternative models, and collecting (and publicly reporting) data on gender and racial diversity among leaders in school districts and educator preparation programs.[55] The state should also examine how pathways into teaching help prospective educators build competencies around embedding trauma-sensitive practices, working with families and diverse communities, and advancing innovative approaches to learning.

3. **Promote teacher voice in decision making at the state level:** The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education convenes Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets four times a year to inform policy and resource development.[56] Meanwhile, the members of the Advisory Council on Early Education and Care, established through the 2008 Early Education and Care Act, include representatives of the early childhood community, parents, and teachers, among other leaders from business, academia, and social service providers.[57] Continuing to reserve spots for practitioners on state-level boards and cabinets—and looking for opportunities to expand their role in decision making—is a way to make more voices heard and create policy solutions that are derived from on-the-ground experiences.

Conclusion

The education system has adapted—though imperfectly—in response to the pandemic, shifting core instruction to remote or hybrid settings (and back again), while responding to the impacts of collective and individual trauma on students and educators alike. In order for teachers to be successful both now and in the future, they need to be supported in developing skills and competencies that respond to critical areas of need, particularly trauma sensitivity, cultural responsiveness, and innovation. These three focus areas are central to the long-term success of all students, especially those who have been historically marginalized. With the use of the strategies described in this report, school, district, and state leaders can begin to support teachers in a way that pushes past "a return to normal" and toward a new vision of schooling. The pandemic will continue to strain the system as we know it, and we must urgently adapt in order to both support teachers in the moment and respond to the need for broader change.

Over the past few years, and for a long time before that, educators have balanced addressing the academic and social-emotional needs of their students with their own (and their families') needs. A key takeaway from our research and conversations with practitioners is that we need to empower teachers with the knowledge, space, and time to implement new practices, connect with colleagues on shared problems of practice, and attend to their own wellbeing. By highlighting programs, schools, and organizations that are doing exciting work to support teachers, we hope to shed light on how the Massachusetts education system can bolster our hardworking educators to effectively meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students in 2022 and beyond. With the pandemic raging on, and the teaching force facing unprecedented levels of burnout, we must focus on aiding educators and prospective educators across multiple contexts—immediately, in an ongoing way, and through our approach to teacher preparation. A core strategy for recovering from the pandemic and pushing the Commonwealth's education system forward is to invest in our teachers. Providing educators with the tools and resources they need to strengthen and evolve their craft will help to alleviate the intensity of the past few years and chart a way forward for the years to come.

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About the Rennie Center

The mission of the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy is to improve public education through well-informed decision making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policy making and practice. As Massachusetts' preeminent voice in public education reform, we create open spaces for educators and policymakers to consider evidence, discuss cutting-edge issues, and develop new approaches to advance student learning and achievement. Through our staunch commitment to independent, non-partisan research and constructive conversations, we work to promote an education system that provides every child with the opportunity to be successful in school and in life.