

Reimagining the Teaching Role

How Strategic Staffing can Attract and Retain Effective Teachers

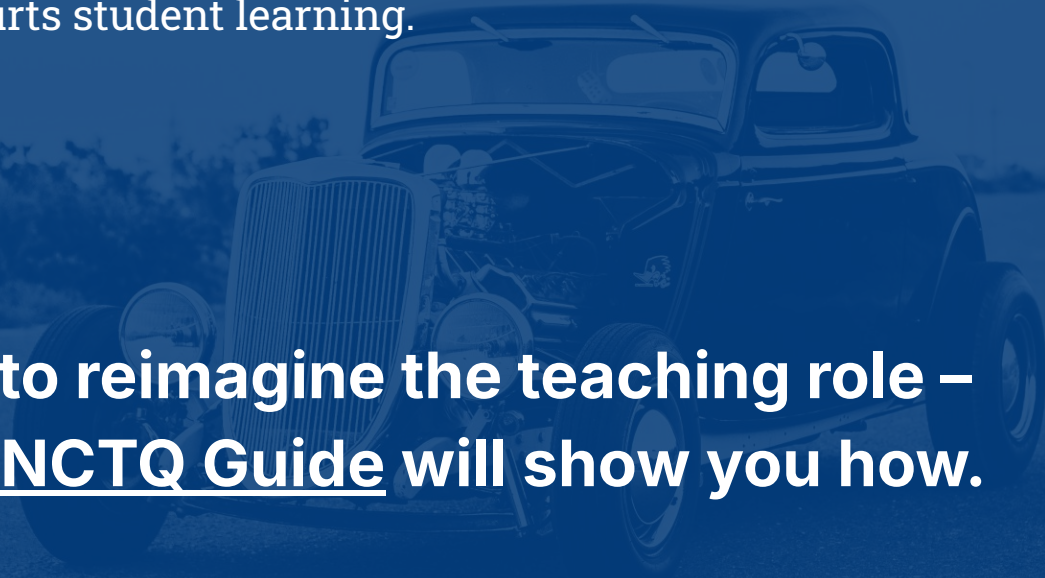
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National Council
on Teacher Quality

The Ford Model T represented breakthrough technology more than 100 years ago—but it wouldn't serve us well today. Similarly, our traditional classroom model from the same era isn't working, making it difficult for schools to find and keep great teachers, which ultimately hurts student learning.

**It's time to reimagine the teaching role –
and this NCTQ Guide will show you how.**



Why does reimagining teaching matter?



Students need a well-prepared, diverse teacher workforce, yet shortages persist in some schools and subjects.

In the 2022–2023 school year, just over 40% of schools in low-income areas and those with mostly students of color were fully staffed.¹



Job dissatisfaction is the leading cause of teacher turnover.²

Only 26% of teachers agree that the teaching profession is dynamic, meaning that it has role flexibility and opportunities for growth and leadership.³



Shorter teaching careers have created a less experienced workforce.

In 1988, teachers most commonly had 15 years of experience. As of 2016, teachers most commonly have only 1-3 years of experience.⁴



Teachers seek a more innovative, collaborative profession.

63% of teachers want more time to collaborate with other teachers, and over 80% are open to co-teaching or team-teaching models.⁵



**Most importantly,
redesigning teaching
can improve student
outcomes.**

Early evaluations show that redesigning teaching roles can help solve one of the biggest staffing challenges, attracting and retaining great teachers – and in one model, even equated to an extra half year of learning for students.

What does it mean to “reimagine the teaching role?”

Often used interchangeably with terms like “strategic staffing” or “strategic school staffing,” reimagining the teaching role involves disrupting traditional approaches to teaching in favor of innovative solutions like teacher teams to manage the instruction of larger classrooms, flexible scheduling, and new roles for teachers that allow them to advance in their careers while staying in the classroom, making the profession more sustainable—and ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

Examples of Strategic Staffing in Action



Classrooms of 50 - 150 students led by 4 - 5 educators.



Highly effective teachers coaching and co-teaching alongside other educators.



Teacher residents taking on additional duties or leading instruction under the supervision of a cooperating teacher.



Highly effective teachers earn more for taking on additional responsibilities and more students.

Reimagining teaching has the potential to address several challenges faced by students and teachers.

Benefits to students

- Responds to the needs of all learners, especially students farthest from opportunity.
- Creates conditions for teachers to be the most effective in classrooms.
- Centers student outcomes by ensuring students receive robust learning experiences and exceptional instruction.

Benefits to teachers

- Ensures more time for collaboration and professional development.
- Offers opportunities for increased compensation.
- Fosters better career pathways for teachers.
- Implements strong accountability and instructional teams.⁵

The Role of State Policy

A National Landscape Scan

State policy can help or hinder a district's ability to reimagine the teaching role.

- **Few states** explicitly focus on reimagining the teaching role as a strategy, despite its powerful potential to attract and retain talented teachers.
- **Less than half of states (23)** allow for “innovation zones” where districts can apply for waivers from existing policy to implement strategic staffing models.
- **Only 14 states** offer grants that could be used by districts to innovate with strategic staffing models.
- **Just 8 states** provide some type of supplemental pay for teacher leadership roles beyond mentoring novice or aspiring teachers.



The data tells us that teachers crave better support at all levels of their career, as well as meaningful opportunities to advance their careers without leaving the classroom for administrative roles. Transforming the way we recruit, retain, support, and compensate teachers will keep great teachers in the classroom, generate interest in the profession, and increase every student's access to a high-quality education."

— Catherine Truitt, North Carolina
Superintendent of Public Instruction

To determine whether states are adequately supporting districts to reimagine the teaching role, NCTQ examined five state policy areas.

1. **Compensation Structures:** Differentiated pay structures for various types of teacher leader roles.
2. **Extended Teacher Reach:** Policies that relate to class size, student-teacher ratios and if there were any state restrictions on the use of teacher's time.
3. **Team Structures:** Opportunity for shared accountability, teachers as observers, etc. as well as whether there were barriers in identifying a "teacher of record" in the state data system.
4. **Staffing Structures to Cultivate Pipelines:** State requirements for residents, paraprofessionals, etc. as well as any restrictions for paraprofessionals and new teachers.
5. **Funding:** State role in direct or indirect funding opportunities to reimagine the teaching role as well as waivers.

Within the five policy areas, NCTQ uncovered four aspects of state policy that could be a barrier to implementing strategic staffing models.

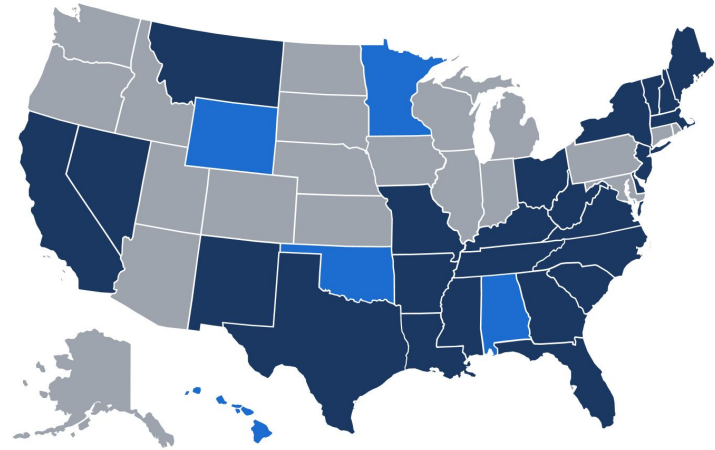
1. Class size
2. Teachers as observers
3. Team outcomes
4. Restrictions on the use of support staff and time

Class Size

The state allows a district to request a waiver for class size or student-teacher ratio policies

5 States

do not allow districts to request a waiver for class size or student-teacher ratio law policies.

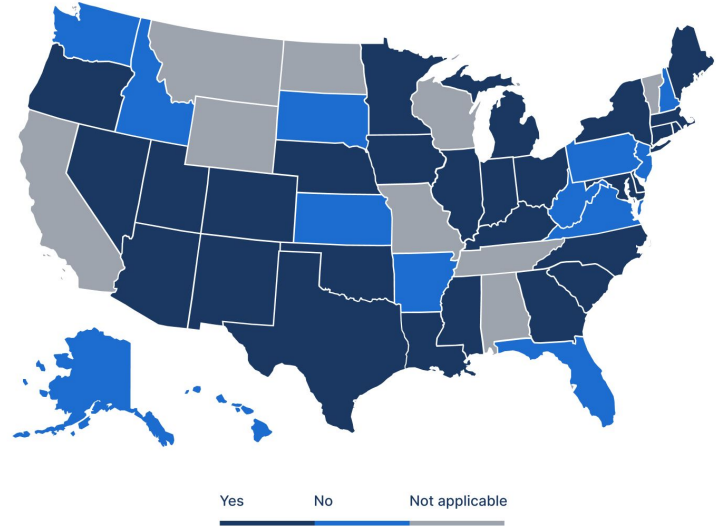


Yes No Not applicable

While well-intended, class size and/or student-teacher ratio laws can be overly restrictive, potentially making it challenging for multiple adults to be in the same classroom supporting students, or prohibiting highly effective teachers from taking on additional students for extra pay.

Teachers as Observers

The state permits teachers to formally observe other teachers



13 States

do not permit teachers to formally observe other teachers.

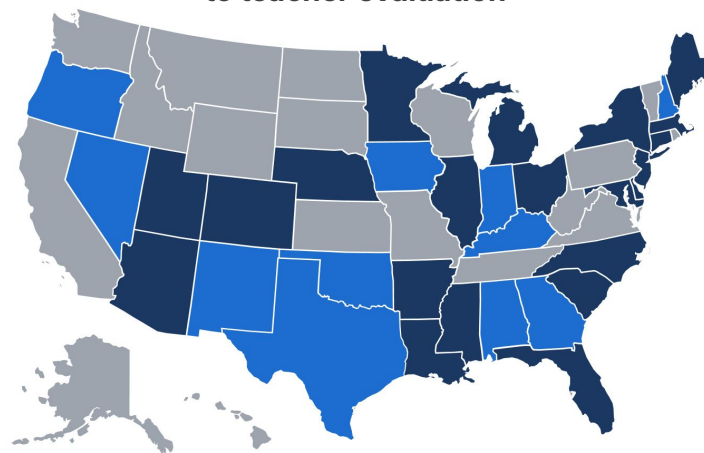
Creating meaningful growth and teacher leadership opportunities requires flexibility for teachers to serve as team leaders, with the ability to observe and lead others. When policy restricts teachers' ability to be observe others, it limits career pathways for teachers.

Team Outcomes

The state permits districts to attribute team outcomes to teacher evaluation

11 States

do not allow districts to attribute team outcomes to teacher evaluations.



Yes No Issue not addressed

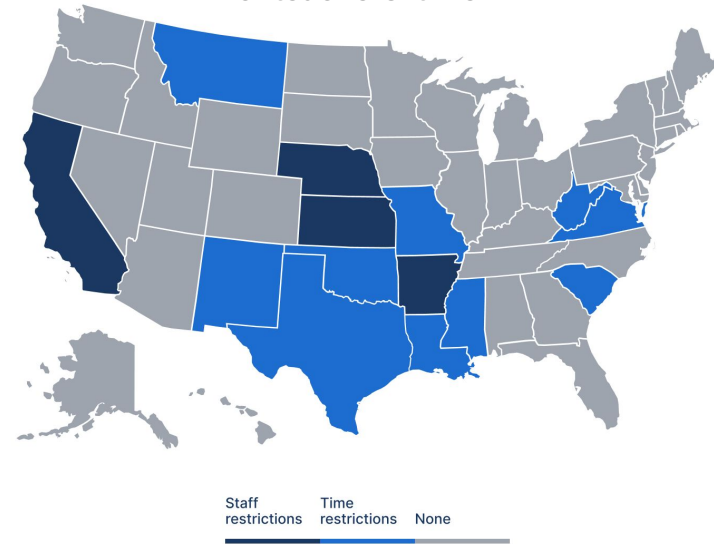
In many strategic staffing models, state policy may need to be flexible to allow districts to create team-based accountability structures, where teachers are held accountable for team outcomes.

Restrictions on the Use of Support Staff or Teacher Time

14 States

have policies that restrict the usage of support staff or teachers' time, which may restrict new models or collaboration.

The state has restrictions on the use of support staff or teachers' time



Restrictions on the use of paraprofessionals, residents, or other support staff can limit how schools build models using all the adults in the building and impact their ability to collaborate with one another to implement team-based instructional approaches.

Beyond state policy, stakeholders across the education sector play an important role in expanding access to innovative staffing models.

NCTQ examined four key stakeholder groups and how each play a part in reimagining the teaching role, offering recommendations for each and models of those who are doing it well.

State Leaders



District Leaders



**Ed Prep
Leaders**



Advocates



State Leaders

What can STATE LEADERS do to support districts innovating with strategic staffing models?

✓ Provide funds to seed innovation and evaluate results.

- Offer grant opportunities to financially support districts that want to explore strategic staffing models, particularly to cover technical assistance costs and/or supplemental funding for teacher leader roles.

✓ Allow flexibility—with accountability for results.

- Create programs where districts apply for waivers from state policy to innovate with strategic staffing models.
- Districts applying for waivers should be required to submit a detailed plan with measurable outcomes.
- Set clear standards for how districts use staffing flexibility to improve student achievement and teacher retention.
- Revoke flexibilities for districts that fail to advance student learning or improve teacher retention.

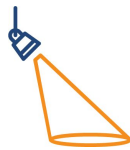
✓ Leverage district networks to support implementation.

- Provide opportunities and supports for districts willing to step outside the status quo and collaborate with each other.
- Ensure networks are used to share key learnings, best practices, and provide opportunities for districts to observe and learn from one another.

What can STATE LEADERS do to support districts innovating with strategic staffing models?

- ✓ **Require and fund research and evaluation to study the outcomes of strategic staffing models.**
 - Require program evaluations for any grant opportunities offered to districts.
- ✓ **Incorporate high-quality pipelines into strategic staffing models.**
 - Align strategic staffing initiatives to existing programs for aspiring teachers, including teacher residency programs, registered apprenticeship models, and “grow your own” programs.
- ✓ **Provide data on teacher performance and guidance on selection.**
 - Ensure district leaders have the necessary data to identify teachers who consistently achieve extraordinary student results.
 - Provide guidance on how to select teachers who have strong student outcomes and strong potential to coach other teachers.
- ✓ **Connect the dots among multiple initiatives.**
 - Couple strategic staffing with other state academic initiatives, such as efforts to implement high-quality instructional materials, improve reading instruction, or developing teacher pipelines.

STATE SPOTLIGHT



North Carolina

North Carolina's Advanced Teaching Roles program seeks to expand the reach of excellent teachers by empowering principals with the flexibility to adjust class sizes, develop multi-classroom leaders, and modify classroom structures to effectively meet student needs.

Teachers who take on more responsibility are rewarded with higher pay. The program is designed to be budget neutral, with the state offering a competitive grant process to support districts with the design and implementation of the program.

[Explore other state spotlights.](#)

District Leaders

What can DISTRICT LEADERS do to support innovation with strategic staffing models?

✓ Examine your data to determine your “why.”

- Identify the purpose and goals that a new strategic staffing model would seek to address.

✓ Start with a coalition of willing leaders.

- Establish a “coalition of the willing” of early adopters and make implementation a collaborative process.
- Do not force significant change upon leaders and teachers who are not yet ready to engage in this work.

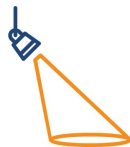
✓ Give school leaders funding flexibility.

- Provide school leaders with the flexibility to think creatively about how best to use positions to meet student needs.

What can DISTRICT LEADERS do to support innovation with strategic staffing models?

- ✓ **Seek additional start-up funds from the state, federal government, or philanthropy to help get started.**
 - Identify and secure grant funding to support schools with costs associated with design, transformation, and implementation.
 - Leverage funds to support training and coaching for teacher leaders.
- ✓ **Choose a partner to help implement innovative staffing models.**
 - Select an external partner to provide support, technical assistance, and coaching support on the redesign of school staffing models.
- ✓ **Include a research component to study the outcomes of strategic staffing models.**
 - Couple transformation and implementation with robust program evaluation to better understand the impact of new staffing models student learning, teacher satisfaction, teacher retention, and more.

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT



Ector County Independent School District

In 2019, Ector County Independent School District (ECISD) struggled to fill over 350 teacher vacancies districtwide. Since implementing a strategic staffing model in 13 schools, the district has reduced their teaching vacancies by **90%**. Leveraging Texas' District of Innovation status, which allows them to waive portions of state policy like class size restrictions, the district has been able to focus its human capital pipeline away from an annual hiring and firing to one centered on talent acquisition and development.

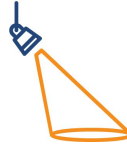
[Explore other district spotlights.](#)

Educator Preparation Program Leaders

What can EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM LEADERS do to support strategic staffing models?

- ✓ **Collaborate with district partners to assess critical teacher shortage and certification needs and align efforts to fill positions.**
 - Leverage strategies like conducting in-depth needs assessments of district staffing needs to ensure candidates are receiving the necessary clinical practice experiences to fill critical gaps.
- ✓ **Seek district partners to support innovative staffing models that utilize student teachers, residents, or apprentices to deliver instructional support.**
- ✓ **Gather feedback from district partners to strengthen the clinical practice experience for aspiring teachers**
 - Gather data through structured interviews, surveys, and student/teacher outcomes to continuously reevaluate whether clinical practice experiences are still aligned to student and district needs.
- ✓ **Provide aspiring teachers with opportunities to learn about and participate in different innovative teaming structures.**

EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



Arizona State University

Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College has taken a hands-on approach to reimagining what the teaching role can look like. Through its Next Education Workforce model, the university supports district leaders and teachers with transforming their schools from the traditional "one teacher: one classroom" model to large, flexible, team-based teaching structures. Their approach centers on improving the daily working environment of educators.

[Explore other educator preparation program spotlights.](#)

Advocates

What can **ADVOCATES AND NON-PROFITS** do to support innovation with strategic staffing models?

✓ **Evaluate your position as an advocacy organization and determine your value add to support strategic staffing models. Opportunities could include:**

- Analyze existing district data to identify student and teacher outcome goals for the model.
- Set measures of success for the model and track implementation results.
- Build networks of districts interested in the work:
 - Sponsor site visits to districts implementing new staffing models.
 - Meet with districts already doing the work to capture their story and publish it.
- Sponsor or share research to add to the research base.
- Help districts identify funding opportunities to support this work or directly provide funds to districts themselves.
- Promote legislation that offers the necessary flexibility to support strategic staffing models.

✓ **Provide technical support to districts engaging in this work.**

- Ensure districts have the technical support necessary to properly implement strategic models, particularly after first-party providers are no longer actively engaged.

✓ **Advocate directly with policymakers.**

- Share or sponsor research, data, case studies, and other resources to develop solutions alongside decision-makers.


✓ **Forge and sustain partnerships among stakeholders to drive progress.**

- Bridge the gap between schools, districts, educator preparation programs, and the state agency by fostering and maintaining continuous collaboration - even when leadership changes.

Companion Resources

State-Specific Profiles

Customized summaries for each state, highlighting their current policies and recommendations for improvement



Reimagining the Teaching Role

How Pennsylvania's state policy can help or hinder the implementation of strategic staffing models

Our classrooms haven't kept pace with innovation. The Ford Model 7 represented breakthrough technology in its day—more than 100 years ago—but it wouldn't serve us well today. Likewise, our traditional classroom model from the same era doesn't work well for far too many students and teachers. In fact, as a result of this outdated model, it is more difficult for schools to find and keep great teachers, which ultimately hurts student learning.

NCTQ's latest report, *Reimagining the Teaching Role*, highlights innovative approaches some states are taking to give school districts more autonomy and flexibility in designing and organizing their workforce. These restructuring efforts are often referred to as "strategic staffing models."

Unfortunately, few states seem to promote strategic staffing models, despite promising early results. Studies show these models not only boost teacher retention but, in one model, can lead to an extra half year of learning for students.¹

What does it mean to reimagine the teaching role?

Often used interchangeably with terms like "strategic staffing" or "strategic school staffing," reimagining the teaching role involves disrupting traditional approaches to teaching in favor of innovative solutions like creating teacher teams to manage the instruction of larger classrooms, flexible scheduling, and developing new roles for teachers that allow them to advance in their careers while staying in the classroom, making the profession more sustainable - ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

The stakes for students and teachers in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania needs to attract and retain great teachers for great results for kids. Right now only 24% of Pennsylvania's fourth grade students read proficiently, and that number falls precipitously for Pennsylvania's underserved population. So how can Pennsylvania design roles that attract and retain the best teachers and improve results for students?

Only 25% of teachers in the northeast region of the country agree that the teaching profession is dynamic, meaning it has role flexibility with opportunities for growth and leadership.²

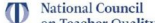
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Recommended Teacher Contract Language

Model language for incorporating policies into teacher contracts that will support reimagined teaching roles



Reimagining the Teaching Role: Model Teacher Contract Language

September 2024

Introduction

Across the country, districts are focused on attracting and retaining an effective and diverse teacher workforce to meet student needs. Districts recognize that, in many cases, the traditional one-teacher, one-classroom model is not meeting student or teacher needs. It's time to reimagine the teaching role and redesign staffing structures to be more attractive and sustainable for teachers and support better student outcomes. Strategic staffing models build out formal teacher leadership roles, create structures for working in teams led by teacher leaders with shared responsibility for student learning, and position all the adults in a school to maximize their service to students and their work with each other.

Models and Approaches

Popular Strategic Staffing Models & Approaches

There are many approaches to reimagining the teaching role. Most are designed to be malleable to a school's unique student and staffing needs. Here are several effective models where the primary focus is developing new types of teaching teams designed to better meet students' learning needs:

- **Opportunity Culture** - Developed by Public Impact, this model leverages teacher teams to reach more students by positioning excellent teachers to lead teams of teachers.
- **Next Education Workforce** - Arizona State University's flexible, school-specific model positions a "core team" of educators who provide instruction to and share responsibility for a large, 50-150 student roster. An "extended team" can then be leveraged to provide additional support to teachers while working across teams or schools.
- **US PREP** - The University of School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP) Strategic Staffing model aims to combat district staffing challenges by working directly with educator preparation programs to fund teacher resident stipends to address candidates' financial needs and strategically place student teachers to address schools' instructional needs.
- **Education Resource Strategies (ERS)** - ERS helps educational leaders rethink their resources, organizational structures, and practices so that all students can learn and thrive.

ENDNOTES

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