

Executive Summary

The United States is facing a growing education crisis marked by stagnant student performance and teacher shortages. Innovative staffing models, such as teacher leadership and distributed leadership, are showing promise in improving student outcomes and retaining highly qualified educators. These projects involve collaboration between teachers and administrators, creating a more supportive and accountable school environment. Local examples from states like North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Illinois demonstrate the effectiveness of strategic school staffing and leadership programs in driving academic success.

To support these efforts, the federal government should prioritize funding for programs such as the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSL), and the Education and Innovation Research Program (EIR), and support the passage of legislation like the Teachers LEAD Act. By supporting such initiatives and expanding research on effective teacher leadership models, the federal government can empower states and districts to scale up successful practices and foster an education system that meets the needs of all students.

Purpose

Across the nation, families are concerned their children are not receiving the engaging, high-quality instruction necessary to meet literacy and math benchmarks, and ultimately achieve their educational and career goals. A primary reason for these challenges is the outdated 19th-century design of the teaching role, which offers insufficient on-the-job support, and little recognition or reward for teaching excellence. As a result, many schools struggle to retain current teachers and find well-qualified and skilled new teachers to replace them.

Students and families deserve an education that supports the fundamentals of learning and encourages growth and success. Teacher leadership and teaming models—where responsibilities are distributed among teams of administrators and teachers—show promising results in disrupting the status quo and ensuring students are put first. Distributed leadership allows educators at every level to promote accountability and drive results. Derived from the best business practices, these models call for principals to build a strong talent pool,

incentivize the most effective educators with stipends or bonuses, and provide opportunities for career advancement through demonstrated results. Students, in turn, are taught by teams of highly skilled teachers who create an environment of learning focused on achieving outstanding academic results, student needs, the needs of their parents, and the needs of the community.

The undersigned organizations have identified a series of critical investments for the 119th Congress and the Trump Administration to support state and local projects that leverage teacher leadership and innovative staffing models to drive student outcomes. By reimagining the way students experience education, these state projects offer the potential for boosting academic success and preparing students to thrive in a competitive global economy. Through investments in states, districts, and charter schools, the federal government can support and enhance community-driven innovations through data reporting, accountability, and research, and create the conditions for parents and localities to choose effective practices. Communities need to feel that the federal government is supporting these initiatives and in doing so, supporting student achievement.

Innovations within Teacher Collaboration, Leadership, and Instruction

School staffing initiatives across the country have the potential to show that students thrive in flexible learning environments that foster critical thinking and excellence. Exemplary teacher leadership programs are key components of these initiatives, significantly impacting both student achievement and overall school success. A Wallace Foundation study across 43 school districts in nine states found that in distributed leadership models—where principals and teachers share leadership—teachers' working relationships were stronger and student achievement was higher. The study found no examples of schools improving student achievement without talented leadership.¹ Similarly, a study utilizing survey data from 23 states from 1.3 million teachers and principals in over 30,000 public schools showed a statistically significant correlation between teacher leadership and student achievement in math and literacy.²

¹ Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning. The Wallace Foundation. Available at: <https://wallacefoundation.org/report/learning-leadership-investigating-links-improved-student-learning-investigating-links>.

² Ingersoll, Richard M., Patrick Dougherty, and Philip Sirinides. n.d. School Leadership Counts. Available at: <https://repository.upenn.edu>.



Local Highlight: North Carolina

Effective partnerships between states, localities, and the federal government have been shown to enable school districts to innovate their school staffing structures. Over the past decade, North Carolina has used a combination of federal and state funds to help implement innovative teacher programs, such as the Advancing Teaching Roles (ATR) and Reimagining Teaching Talent (RTT) initiatives, to recruit and retain excellent teachers while improving student achievement. In 2016, the Republican-led North Carolina legislature codified the establishment of teacher compensation models and advanced teaching roles under the North Carolina State Board of Education. These initiatives, funded by both federal and state dollars, are showing promising long-term results, with ATR schools more likely to meet or exceed expected student growth compared to similar schools not involved in strategic staffing models.

North Carolina districts have also demonstrated the value of federal Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program grants in transforming the teaching role in their schools. Superintendents have applied and been granted funds from the FY23, FY22, and FY20 grant rounds. By investing in these strategic staffing models through this program, the federal government has supported the work that states are leading to improve education.

In the FY24 appropriations package, however, two-thirds of TSL funding was cut. The grant was reduced from \$173 million in FY23 and FY22 to \$60 million in FY24. In 2024, 20 superintendents in North Carolina sent a letter to Congressional Appropriators, urging continued investment in the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program to maintain these successful initiatives.

Local Highlight: Pennsylvania

In 2017, Teach Plus began a partnership with the School District of Philadelphia to support five elementary schools in developing teacher-led professional learning communities. Over three years, Teach Plus Leadership Coaches supported 40 grade-level teacher leaders and 17 administrators in shifting the performance of their schools. The group of five schools in the District of Philadelphia Public Schools who adopted the Teach Plus T3 teacher leadership program, on several key early literacy metrics for grades K-3, outpaced both the School District of Philadelphia overall as well as a group of control schools



with similar size, student demographics, and baseline academic performance³. These teacher leadership programs included the practice of examining student data and providing regular professional development that prepared teacher leaders to diagnose barriers to student success.

Attracting High-Quality Teachers Drives Student Performance

Across the country, students are in classrooms with uncertified, undertrained teachers or long-term substitutes because their school district or charter network is unable to find more qualified candidates. Many schools start the school year with open teaching vacancies and struggle to fill them for months, causing serious disruptions to student learning. Innovative school staffing models could create better pathways into the teaching profession and ensure students are receiving an education from a highly qualified, prepared education team dedicated to furthering their success.

Local Highlight: Texas

In 2019, the Ector County Independent School District (ECISD) in Texas faced the challenge of filling over 350 teacher vacancies. However, after adopting a strategic staffing approach that formed teams of teachers, paraprofessionals, and teacher residents led by a "multi-classroom leader" in 13 schools, ECISD was able to reduce its teacher vacancies by 90 percent.

Leveraging its District of Innovation (DOI) status, ECISD was able to exempt certain state requirements, such as class size restrictions, allowing the district to shift its focus from traditional annual hiring to a more proactive strategy centered on talent acquisition and development. This innovative approach not only filled vacancies with high-quality educators but also ensured students were not left behind by creating a more collaborative and effective instructional environment.

Now, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is hoping to replicate the success of ECISD. In 2022, TEA began a paid teacher residency program that is supported through strategic school staffing initiatives. At its core, incoming teachers are being trained like doctors using strategic staffing models to drive residency

³Andrew Knips, Laura Boyce, & Richard Feistman., *The Levers of Teacher Leadership: Growing Student Achievement, Improving Schools*, (Philadelphia: Teach Plus).



programs.⁴ The Texas Strategic Staffing (TSS) is a two-year process in which a district and Education Preparation Program (EPP) commit to designing and implementing a paid teacher residency program that is sustainably funded by reallocating district resources to compensate teacher residents who take on additional instructional responsibilities in the district while completing a year-long teacher residency program.

Retaining High-Quality Teachers Demonstrates Effective Student Outcomes

Teachers who are already in the classroom and steward high student outcomes deserve to be rewarded for their work, and those who are recognized and rewarded for their work are more likely to stay in the profession, while those who aren't are more likely to leave.⁵ Strong teachers have the potential to improve the school environment and student outcomes beyond their own classrooms when they are given the time and responsibility to support the development of other educators. Strategic staffing models offer principals the flexibility to provide stipends and bonuses to demonstrably talented educators to retain and build a strong talent pool.

Local Highlight: Louisiana

In 2010, DeSoto Parish Schools in Louisiana received grant funding through the federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) to strengthen its systems for increasing educator effectiveness and retention, including the introduction of teacher leadership roles and a shared leadership model. At the time, the district ranked 45th in overall student performance across the state. DeSoto partnered with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) to build a multilayered system of support, and opportunities for performance-based compensation, to increase the percentage of effective educators and

⁴Tawnell Richman, "Texas to Give Extra Credit to Teachers Who Train Like Doctors in Residency Programs," The Dallas Morning News, April 17, 2024, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2024/04/17/texas-to-give-extra-credit-to-teachers-who-train-like-doctors-in-residency-programs/>.

⁵TNTP, The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America's Urban Schools (July 30, 2012), accessed January 9, 2025, <https://tntp.org/publication/the-irreplaceables-understanding-the-real-retention-crisis/>.



improve student achievement.⁶ As a result of this work, the district now ranks second in the state overall and first in terms of graduation rate.

Teacher leaders, working with school leaders, are the foundation for this system of support. Teacher leaders help teachers analyze data throughout the school year and adjust instructional strategies as needed. Teachers receive regular feedback when administrators and teacher leaders visit classrooms to observe instruction. DeSoto adopted an evidence-based rubric to define what high-quality instruction looks and sounds like in classrooms, providing greater consistency in coaching and professional learning. The substantial level of teacher support helps the district recruit, develop, and retain effective teachers.

In 2016, DeSoto earned its first “A” rating from the state. In 2024, the district maintained this “A” rating, an honor held by only eleven districts in the state. DeSoto first achieved a graduation rate above 90% with the 2013-14 cohort and has maintained this rate for the past 10 years. The district is one of only two districts in Louisiana to sustain a graduation rate of 90% or higher for that length of time.

DeSoto's transformation demonstrates the power of high-quality teaching practices and how a commitment to excellent teaching, with support from teacher leaders, can overcome barriers and help all students succeed.

Local Highlight: Illinois

John F. Eberhart Elementary School, a Title I school located in Chicago Lawn, is on a faster path to academic recovery than neighboring schools because of its strategic staffing model. Students have shown remarkable academic growth since implementing a Teach Plus-supported teacher leadership program in 2021. The K-8 students showed twice as much growth in math proficiency as similar control schools during the most recent data gathering post-pandemic. While student academic achievement decreased during the pandemic and slowed the progress of the teacher leadership teams, the

⁶ DeSoto implemented the TAP System model, a study of the model can be found here: Cohodes, S., Eren, O., & Ozturk, O. (2023, May). The Long Run Effects of a Comprehensive Teacher Performance Pay Program on Student Outcomes (Working Paper No. 31056). National Bureau of Economic Research. (p. 4). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w31056>



Eberhart administration has reported that they have the necessary support in place to combat the student achievement gap as opposed to their colleagues in neighboring schools. Due to this work and the structures she has created to build distributive leadership, the principal, Nneka Gunn, was recently recognized and asked to lead a session at the School Leadership Institute for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) administrators.

Local Highlight: Colorado

In 2007, Denver Public Schools (DPS), Colorado's largest district, launched a comprehensive effort to transform public education. Over the next decade, DPS implemented a system-wide reform focused on family choice, educator empowerment, and accountability for student outcomes.

Teacher leadership has become one of those reform efforts that has the potential to help schools ensure academic success while also retaining quality teachers. The Teacher Leaders program at DPS allows educators to take on leadership roles within their schools while remaining in the classroom. Teacher leaders receive additional compensation, varying by role. These leadership models are central to the district's ongoing reform, which has seen significant growth since its launch. Professional learning for teacher leaders helps them develop the foundational leadership competencies essential to their roles.

These efforts have helped cultivate a culture of success, and accountability and may be the reason why teachers are encouraged to stay in the classroom.

Recommendations

By leveraging congressional and executive support, state projects can be scaled up to ensure that effective and quality educators are in the classroom with the resources they need to promote high student achievement. These levers are essential tools to support the long-term success of our nation's students and teachers.

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the efforts of states in improving student learning by attracting and retaining a talented educator workforce, Congress should:

- + Reintroduce and support the **passage** of existing legislation, such as:



- + [**The Strengthening the Educator Workforce Data Act**](#) directs the Department of Education to collect and centralize educator data to help policymakers and stakeholders produce data-informed policies to address nationwide teacher shortages and strengthen the educator workforce to serve our nation's students better;
 - + [**The Teachers Leading, Educating, Advancing, and Designing \(LEAD\) Act**](#) establishes a competitive grant program at the Department of Education to provide professional leadership opportunities for educators. Local education agencies, educational service agencies, and Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools would be eligible to apply to the grant program to create teacher leadership programs tailored to their local needs.
 - + [**The Retaining Educators Takes Added Investment Now \(RETAIN\) Act**](#) creates a fully refundable tax credit for teachers, paraprofessionals, school-based mental health providers, and school leaders in Title I schools. Educators, program providers, and program directors in early childhood education programs would also be eligible for the tax credit; and
- + Support investments in key grant programs during the FY26 Appropriations Cycle, such as:
- + [**The Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program \(TSL\)**](#) provides states and districts funding to support teacher recruitment and retention in high-need schools. We support prioritizing funds for paid teacher leadership roles that allow teachers to lead and support student success;
 - + [**The Education and Innovation Research Program \(EIR\)**](#) supports competitive grants for researching, creating, developing, implementing, replicating, and scaling up evidence-based effective programs that will support student achievement in high-need schools, including teacher leadership. It also rigorously evaluates the impact of their funded projects on addressing persistent educational challenges at scale;
 - + [**The Teacher Quality Partnership Program \(TQP\)**](#) fosters collaboration between high-need local educational agencies (LEAs), high-need schools, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and various entities, including state officials, educational organizations, businesses, and alternative teacher certification programs;
 - + [**The Supporting Effective Educator Development Program \(SEED\)**](#) increases the number of highly effective educators by supporting




the implementation of evidence-based practices that prepare, develop, or enhance the skills of educators; and

- + **The Native American Teacher Retention Initiative (NATRI)** addresses the shortage of Native American educators and expands their impact on Native American students' education. This initiative, included under the Demonstration Grants for Indian Children and Youth, supports teacher leadership models to increase the retention of effective, experienced Native American teachers and support student success.
- + Support the *Education Innovation and Research (EIR)* program by including information on evidence-based reading instruction;
- + Support research that helps illuminate the impact of strategic school staffing and what is required to successfully implement different models by establishing a set-aside within the *Education Innovation and Research (EIR)* program to support research and implementation of strategic school staffing models;
- + Support report language during the FY26 Appropriations Cycle to improve the efficacy and effectiveness of key grant programs, such as:
 - + Report language expanding the Department of Education's flexibility to use the *Teacher and School Leader Incentive (TSL) Program* grant in effective ways to increase teacher retention, including an absolute priority for teacher leadership models; and
 - + Report language expanding research on the impact of strategic school staffing and what is required to successfully implement effective models.
- + Support the *Education and Innovation Research Program (EIR)* program to prioritize research on effective teacher leadership and distributed leadership models in schools, particularly exploring how implementing science of reading projects can inform and enhance these strategies; and
- + Support nationwide research to help understand the impact of strategic school staffing and what is required to successfully implement different models.

EXECUTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the efforts of states in improving student learning by attracting and retaining a talented educator workforce, the President and the Secretary of Education should:



- + Support the reintroduction and **passage** of:
 - + [**The Strengthening the Educator Workforce Data Act;**](#)
 - + [**The Teachers Leading, Educating, Advancing, and Designing \(LEAD\) Act;**](#) and
 - + [**The Retaining Educators Takes Added Investment Now \(RETAIN\) Act;**](#)
 - + Highlight key initiatives in the presidential budget, including:
 - + [**The Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program \(TSL\);**](#)
 - + [**The Education and Innovation Research Program \(EIR\);**](#)
 - + [**The Teacher Quality Partnership Program \(TQP\);**](#)
 - + [**The Supporting Effective Educator Development Program \(SEED\);**](#)
and
 - + [**The Native American Teacher Retention Initiative \(NATRI\).**](#)
 - + Revise questions on Department of Education grant applications to provide more flexibility for innovation with appropriated grants, while ensuring guardrails for quality by:
 - + Promoting efficient action based on best practices from states, districts, and schools nationwide, ensuring LEAs and SEAs are given guidance and can implement strategies before applications are released;
 - + Setting measures for accountability; and
 - + Proposing what the outcome of each of those programs should be if they operated with full efficiency and faithfulness to the intention of the program.
 - + Support the *Education and Innovation Research Program (EIR)* to prioritize research on effective teacher leadership and distributed leadership models in schools, particularly exploring how implementing Science of Reading projects can inform and enhance these strategies;
 - + Support nationwide research to help understand the impact of strategic school staffing efforts and what is required to successfully implement effective models by establishing a set aside within the *Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program* to support research and implementation of strategic school staffing models;
 - + Support and promote passage of report language during the FY26 Appropriations Cycle to improve the efficacy and effectiveness of key grant programs, such as:
 - + Report language expanding the Department of Education's flexibility to use the *Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program*
- 

(TSL) grant in effective ways to increase teacher retention, including an absolute priority for teacher leadership models;

- + Report language expanding research on the impact of strategic school staffing and what is required to successfully implement effective models.

By leveraging congressional and executive support, state projects can be scaled up to ensure that effective and quality educators are in the classroom with the resources they need to promote high student achievement. These levers are essential tools to support the long-term success of our nation's students and teachers.

Conclusion

The challenges facing America's education system require immediate action. The current state of student performance, teacher shortages, and inadequate support for educators demands a response that prioritizes long-term, sustainable solutions. Teacher leadership models and innovative staffing approaches have demonstrated their potential to improve student outcomes, enhance teacher retention, and strengthen the overall educational experience for students and communities alike.

The legislative and executive recommendations outline concrete steps that Congress and the Administration can take to support and scale successful local initiatives. By advancing policies such as the *Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSL)*, the *Educator Workforce Data Act*, and the *Teachers LEAD (Leading, Educating, Advancing, and Designing) Act*, the federal government can provide states and districts with the tools necessary to pilot staffing strategies and to better address the needs of students and educators. Additionally, investing in research and data collection will allow for a more informed understanding of the impact these models have on student achievement and the conditions needed for their successful implementation.

The federal government has a critical role to play in supporting efforts that strengthen the educator workforce, improve student outcomes, and ensure that all students, regardless of background, are prepared to thrive in an increasingly complex and competitive world. We urge the 119th Congress and the Trump Administration to consider these recommendations carefully and act on behalf of students and parents.



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