

**TEACHSTRONG POLICY PROPOSAL: PRINCIPLE 9**

# **CREATE CAREER PATHWAYS**

Create career pathways that give teachers opportunities to lead and grow professionally

**#TEACHSTRONG**

# THE NINE TEACHSTRONG PRINCIPLES

## PRINCIPLE 1

**IDENTIFY AND RECRUIT MORE TEACHER CANDIDATES**

## PRINCIPLE 2

**REIMAGINE TEACHER PREPARATION**

## PRINCIPLE 3

**RAISE THE BAR FOR LICENSURE**

## PRINCIPLE 4

**INCREASE COMPENSATION**

## PRINCIPLE 5

**PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR NEW TEACHERS**

## PRINCIPLE 6

**ENSURE TENURE IS A MEANINGFUL SIGNAL  
OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT**

## PRINCIPLE 7

**PROVIDE TEACHERS WITH MORE TIME, TOOLS,  
AND SUPPORT**

## PRINCIPLE 8

**DESIGN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO BETTER  
ADDRESS STUDENT AND TEACHER NEEDS**

## PRINCIPLE 9

**CREATE CAREER  
PATHWAYS**

# THE TEACHSTRONG THEORY OF CHANGE

The TeachStrong coalition has adopted nine principles we believe must be put in practice in order to modernize and elevate the teaching profession. This policy proposal from the TeachStrong coalition explains how we can create career pathways that give teachers opportunities to lead and grow professionally. This proposal builds out Principle Nine, the last of the nine TeachStrong principles. Although this proposal addresses just one principle, the nine principles affect and build upon one another and must be aligned to achieve systemic changes to the teaching profession.

Thoughtful changes across the teaching career continuum are necessary to improve teaching and learning for all students—especially students of color and those from low-income families. While higher expectations for students and schools have heightened the demands placed on teachers, the systems that are designed to support teachers have not kept pace. These gaps are especially apparent in high-need schools.

This campaign seeks to promote changes that span a teacher’s career, starting with recruitment and preparation and continuing on through compensation and career pathways, paying particular attention to the importance of the professional context in which teachers work. The TeachStrong coalition believes that all aspects of the teaching profession must be addressed in a systemic way; only then can we create a self-reinforcing cycle through which the status of the profession is raised along with the quality of teaching and learning in our nation’s classrooms.

We need a comprehensive approach to addressing the teacher pipeline because we have seen that piecemeal policy changes do not work. In the past, there have been attempts to address singular aspects of the teacher pipeline, and while these efforts may have made significant changes to one area, the system as a whole remained largely unchanged. For example, if we were to focus solely on preparation programs, it might give beginning teachers a stronger start. But student learning will not significantly improve if teacher training and development are ineffective or if teachers do not have opportunities to lead. In combination, however, changes in these areas could have powerful, lasting effects. Moreover, if we are to ensure that great teaching consistently reaches all students, we must explicitly address inequities in access to our strongest educators for low-income students and students of color.

No one simple policy fix will be enough to move the system as a whole. Many of the institutions responsible for educating, training, and setting policy for teachers operate in isolated silos that are sometimes disconnected from teachers themselves. The work is not easy: Policymakers must strive for a comprehensive system while factoring in other realities, such as existing political landscapes and the unique situations and contexts of individual states. However, as demonstrated by the consensus achieved by the diverse TeachStrong coalition around these nine principles, success is possible.

To achieve the kinds of dramatic changes we need for student achievement—and for those changes to be sustainable for teachers, students, and taxpayers alike—we need dramatic changes to all aspects of the systems designed to support teachers.

## TEACHSTRONG POLICY PROPOSAL: PRINCIPLE 9

Create career pathways that give teachers opportunities to lead and grow professionally

*“[In] powerful, successful schools ... the people who are seen as most credible with the greatest expertise about teaching and learning are the teachers themselves.”*

– **CARL GLICKMAN**, President of the Institute for Schools, Education, and Democracy<sup>1</sup>

### PROBLEMS WITH CURRENT TEACHER CAREER PATHWAYS

Teachers today have few meaningful opportunities to assume leadership roles while remaining in the classroom. In many places, teaching is still an “unstaged occupation,” or one in which professionals rarely have the chance to take on expanded responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> Too often, a teacher’s career path includes only limited opportunities for growth into leadership roles that allow them to advance along a career pathway.<sup>3</sup>

Instead, most teachers only have the chance to expand their leadership responsibilities by assuming an administrative position, which requires them to leave the classroom entirely.<sup>4</sup> Even if teachers do not want to leave the classroom, pursuing a role in administration may be their only way to achieve increases in pay, responsibility, and autonomy.<sup>5</sup> Although some school districts implement career pathways, diverse leadership roles for teachers are few and far between.

Too few schools and districts provide teachers with opportunities to take on other types of leadership roles without leaving the classroom, and current compensation systems do not always reward teachers based on the leadership roles or extra responsibilities that they do assume.<sup>6</sup> Many school districts offer salary increases for teachers based exclusively on years of teaching experience and additional credits of education or graduate degrees.<sup>7</sup> This sort of lack of career advancement can drive many young teachers out of the profession. In fact, Millennial teachers, or those born between 1977 and 1995, are often frustrated at the static path of a teacher’s career and leave the profession at higher rates than older teachers.<sup>8</sup> Career pathways and opportunities for advancement are critical components of any profession that seeks highly qualified, diverse job candidates.

*“I love my school and love my district, but finishing my twentieth year teaching has left me wondering if there are other opportunities for me to utilize my skills and experience beyond the classroom without leaving the classroom completely.”*

**– HEIDI WELCH, 2013 New Hampshire Teacher of the Year,  
Music Educator, and TeachStrong ambassador<sup>9</sup>**

## **COMPONENTS OF CAREER PATHWAYS FOR TEACHERS**

Despite variations in their skills, interests, and success as educators, schools and districts too often provide teachers with the same limited set of responsibilities. Through career pathways, however, teachers can earn roles as classroom and school leaders as they demonstrate their capacities for those positions. Leadership roles can also give teachers opportunities to mentor new teachers and peers; provide support to school-level administrators; and craft professional learning systems and curricula that are appropriate for their school and district communities.<sup>10</sup>

Career pathways for teachers may look different depending on school district contexts, but the roles for teachers along any given pathway often reflect teachers' time spent in the profession, individual strengths, interests, and specific leadership responsibilities. In some cases, teachers can create their own pathways, depending on their unique interests and classroom contexts. Career pathways are also often shaped by various school and district needs.

Teachers who advance along a career pathway can assume a variety of roles. These roles may include, for example: team leader, who takes responsibility for team and student growth; reach teacher, who takes responsibility for larger-than-average student loads with the help of paraprofessionals; master educator, who develops and leads professional development and learning; peer evaluator, an accomplished educator who coaches other teachers, assesses teachers' effectiveness, and helps his or her colleagues improve their skills; and demonstration teacher, who models excellent teaching for teachers in training.<sup>11</sup> According to the Aspen Institute and Leading Educators—a nonprofit organization that partners with schools and districts to promote teacher leadership—teacher leaders can model best practices, observe and coach other teachers, lead teacher teams, and participate in the selection and induction of new teachers.<sup>12</sup>

Career pathways can also provide teachers with meaningful growth opportunities, especially when teachers who have demonstrated a readiness to lead earn their leadership positions after undergoing a rigorous application and selection process. The roles and responsibilities required of teachers traversing career pathways should also hold meaning and provide value to the school community, including other teachers.

Additionally, teachers who assume additional responsibilities should also receive the time, tools, and support—including professional learning opportunities—to help them thrive in their new roles. Schools and districts, possibly in partnership with teacher preparation programs and nonprofit organizations, can support teacher leaders as they develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that will help them achieve success in new leadership positions. In other words, career

pathways for teachers should be connected to and aligned with all of the various systems and supports designed to help teachers thrive.

Ultimately, high-performing educators should have meaningful opportunities to share their expertise with their peers in ways that are built into teaching career continuums. Career pathways can provide the best teachers with opportunities to mentor their colleagues, give instructional support, craft specialized professional learning, and possibly earn more credentials for their additional skills. States and school districts can leverage career pathways by allowing teachers to learn from one another and to play a meaningful role in decisions that affect their classrooms.

## **HOW CAREER PATHWAYS CAN MODERNIZE AND ELEVATE THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

Research shows that career pathways can improve teacher evaluation procedures and improve student achievement.<sup>13</sup> For example, research from the Emerging Leaders Program—a job-embedded teacher leadership development program—shows that with high-quality training, teacher leaders can quickly improve achievement among students in high-need school districts in places such as New York City, the District of Columbia, and Shelby County, Tennessee.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, student achievement growth in schools implementing Teach Plus' T3 Initiative—a teacher-designed turnaround model that trains and supports teacher leaders to improve school outcomes and transform schools—is consistently more than double that of area district and charter schools.<sup>15</sup>

What's more, states and school districts can use career pathway models to recruit and retain exceptional teachers and teaching candidates. Young teachers today say that they are less motivated than previous generations by a career in which their work responsibilities do not change over the course of their employment.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, young teachers want to receive frequent feedback on their teaching, and they want to be rewarded for proving their ability to help students learn.<sup>17</sup> Career pathways can provide young teachers with the feedback and mentorship that they report are lacking.<sup>18</sup> Additional pathways can provide opportunities for these teachers to grow and excel, which is critical in order to increase student achievement and retain great teachers.

Indeed, many teachers have the potential to lead, and many seek more formalized opportunities to do so.<sup>19</sup> While young teachers cite feedback as a critical component of their professional success, teachers of all ages prefer tiered leadership opportunities to standard administrative positions. In a 2012 study, only 16 percent of teachers were interested in becoming a principal, but twice as many teachers were at least somewhat interested in a teacher leadership role.<sup>20</sup> Midcareer teachers, high school teachers, and teachers in low-income community schools were especially interested in "hybrid teaching roles," which provide teachers with leadership opportunities while keeping them in the classroom part time.<sup>21</sup>

Hybrid teaching roles and other leadership positions often include additional compensation and can improve retention by providing career advancement opportunities still connected to the classroom. Given that the average American has 11 jobs over the course of his or her life,<sup>22</sup> it is no surprise that teachers do not want to remain in the same exact role for the entirety of their professional lives—nor should we expect them to do so.

Additionally, school districts that implement career pathways can create alternative pay structures that reward teachers for assuming leadership roles and supporting the growth of other teachers. In order to attract top-tier candidates into the profession and retain excellent teachers already in the classroom, career pathways should be aligned to compensation systems that are similarly differentiated by teachers' roles and responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> Career pathways, especially when paired with innovative compensation structures, can appeal to prospective, new, and mid-career teachers alike.<sup>24</sup> Not only are young people interested in assuming varied job responsibilities, but they also want compensation structures that reflect increased responsibilities.<sup>25</sup> As in other professions, compensation should reward leadership and success in addition to educational expertise and experience in the classroom.

*“I have been looking for alternatives to my current role for the past four years because I’m weary. I’m weary of doing the good work it takes to be a highly effective teacher and leading professional development every time it’s offered but receiving none. I want to grow professionally and invest in other new professionals, but I am not given the time or resources to do it.”*

**– SHANNON WHITE, High School Teacher and TeachStrong ambassador, Indianapolis, Indiana<sup>26</sup>**

The successful implementation of career pathways may also lead to improved professional development that better addresses student and teacher needs, especially when this professional learning is led by teachers. Currently, professional learning most often comes in the form of one-size-fits-all workshops, which do not always improve student achievement.<sup>27</sup> School districts can improve their current systems of professional learning by having teacher leaders design and facilitate professional development specifically tailored to the needs of their colleagues.

What’s more, schools and districts can maximize the time and resources dedicated to professional learning by allowing their teacher leaders to develop many of their schools’ professional development plans rather than relying on external consultants to deliver training, who may not understand unique district, school, and teacher needs. Similarly, if accomplished teachers have the opportunities to choose the roles and functions that most interest them along individualized career pathways, professional learning can become increasingly tailored to those roles and therefore more productive for those teachers.

School districts can use career pathways to help address unique student and teacher needs. For example, while some schools may need additional data coaches, others may need curriculum design leaders. Teacher leaders can fill those roles through career pathways implemented at the school or district level. Career pathways can also provide a mechanism through which classroom teachers can increase their involvement in decision-making and play an important role in supporting school leaders with some of the responsibilities that are typically left to administrators and district offices. Teachers who have advanced to the position of curriculum teacher leader, for example, can advise administrators on

curriculum and assessment design. Teachers in a peer evaluator role can take part in the hiring and observation of other teachers.<sup>28</sup>

Teacher leadership is also critical for creating a professional culture in a school or district. By leveraging the expertise of accomplished teachers, a school or district can improve collaboration and provide a common language for teachers and administrators to share professional expertise and discuss student and school goals. Teacher leaders can also fill critical gaps in the leadership pipeline by creating stability when schools demand a source of prepared leaders.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, career pathways can support strengthened licensure systems. In states in which teachers must renew their licenses, relicensure requirements can align with career pathways to ensure a streamlined process through which accomplished teachers continue in their roles.

Extending the reach of excellent teachers by allowing them to remain in the classroom and support less skilled teachers can also foster positive school cultures and improve student outcomes.<sup>30</sup> By assuming hybrid teaching roles, teacher leaders can work with other teachers throughout the school, thereby expanding their influence on students and student achievement. By crafting meaningful teacher career pathways, states and school districts can make the teaching profession more attractive to prospective and current teachers seeking a career with room for professional growth. If teachers are able to grow professionally and are compensated for the additional responsibilities that they assume, we can elevate the professional status of teachers as leaders both inside and outside the classroom.

## **HOW TEACHERS ALREADY BENEFIT FROM CAREER PATHWAYS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES**

Although they are not common yet, model career pathways for teachers do exist in some states, districts, and schools. In many of these places, career pathways feature differentiated leadership roles for teachers based on experience, effectiveness, and interests, and include increases in pay for additional responsibilities. Below are some examples of local school systems that have invested in career pathways for their teachers.

### **New York City's Teacher Career Pathways**

In 2012, the New York City Department of Education, or NYCDOE—the largest public school system in the country—and the United Federation of Teachers, or UFT, designed a teacher career ladder to extend educators' skills beyond their individual classrooms and allow teachers to be powerful levers of change in school communities. Supported by the federal Teacher Incentive Fund, New York City piloted and scaled new formal roles, with corresponding pay increases, in the 2014 UFT-DOE contract.<sup>31</sup> There are now three New York City teacher leadership roles: Model Teacher, Master Teacher, and Peer Collaborative Teacher. Today, there are over 1,000 teacher leaders across nearly 400 New York City schools.<sup>32</sup>

New York supports these hybrid roles with time in teacher leaders' schedules, as well as dedicated time for school-embedded coaching. Teacher leaders receive targeted coaching focused on developing, practicing, and mastering the critical skills required in these distinct roles. Participating teacher leaders report growth in their skills as educators.<sup>33</sup> In collaboration with Teaching Matters, a nonprofit dedicated to developing and retaining great teachers, NYCDOE recently

added a competency-based Emerging Teacher Leader Program. The program is a microcredentialing initiative designed to identify and develop the most promising and robust candidates from high-need schools to assume teacher leader roles.<sup>34</sup>

### Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Project Leadership and Investment for Transformation

Launched in 2011, Project Leadership and Investment for Transformation, or L.I.F.T., is a five-year initiative in nine low-performing schools in Charlotte, North Carolina.<sup>35</sup> The project focuses on innovative strategies to provide students with extended learning time and increased access to technology while supporting community engagement and excellent teaching.<sup>36</sup> Project L.I.F.T. worked with Public Impact—a nonprofit organization that works with school districts to create innovative school models—to design hybrid teacher-leader roles that “extend the reach” of high-performing teachers to more students.<sup>37</sup> These “multi-classroom leaders” continue to teach while leading teams of teachers and assuming responsibility for the learning of all students taught by their team.<sup>38</sup> For this advanced role, teachers earn supplements of up to \$23,000 annually, funded sustainably by reallocating funds within current budgets.<sup>39</sup>

### Denver's Differentiated Roles Pilot Program

Denver's teacher leadership program, which the school district hopes to offer to every school by 2018, provides teachers with the opportunity to assume hybrid roles.<sup>40</sup> In the program, teacher leaders spend between one-quarter to a half of their time outside of their classrooms observing and coaching teams of other teachers.<sup>41</sup> Currently, 72 of the district's schools offer a role that includes both teaching and administrative responsibilities.<sup>42</sup> According to Justin Darnell, the senior manager of teacher leadership in the district:

*This is about saying, we need to put the power in the hands of the people who best understand the work, getting teachers back in the position of being true leaders, and allowing the principal the space to be the organizational leader of the school.<sup>43</sup>*

Results from the pilot indicate that teacher leadership systems can expand opportunities for teachers to receive feedback from their peers while also contributing to increased student achievement.<sup>44</sup>

### Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation System

In 2013, the Iowa General Assembly passed legislation to create the Teacher Leadership and Compensation System, a voluntary program for school districts in the state. The TLC System provides funding for districts to create teacher leadership roles and responsibilities aligned to statewide goals and designed to meet each district's unique needs. Depending on the model developed in their district, teachers have the chance to assume one of several possible leadership positions, such as: model teacher, who allows other teachers to observe his or her classroom; lead teacher, who dedicates 50 percent of his or her time to coaching, mentoring, and evaluating other teachers; mentor teacher; instructional coach;

curriculum teacher leader; or professional development teacher leader. Teachers who assume these leadership roles are given a salary supplement—typically ranging from a \$2,000 to a \$12,000 annual pay increase—and extended contract days.<sup>45</sup>

### The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's System for Teacher and Student Advancement Program

The TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement is implemented in school districts across the country, affecting approximately 15,000 teachers and 200,000 students.<sup>46</sup> With support from the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, school districts create multiple career paths for teachers, including career, mentor, and master teacher.<sup>47</sup> Teacher leaders participate in school leadership teams with administrators, provide colleagues with regular professional learning opportunities and individualized coaching, observe and provide feedback for instructional improvement, and are compensated for these additional responsibilities.<sup>48</sup> Trained teacher leaders in schools using the TAP System have demonstrated an ability to evaluate classroom instruction with accuracy and consistency, and their observations are closely aligned to student learning gains in classrooms.<sup>49</sup> According to Lori Johnson, a participating TAP master teacher in Phoenix, "It was the best decision I ever made professionally. It's the best teaching I've ever done and the best mentoring I've ever done."<sup>50</sup>

### California's Instructional Leadership Corps

California recently initiated the Instructional Leadership Corps, or ILC, a new network of accomplished teachers, administrators, and higher education professionals dedicated to supporting professional learning around college- and career-ready standards in schools across the state. Nearly 200 teachers, most of whom possess National Board Certification, take what they learn back to their own districts to support their colleagues in implementing the new California Standards for English Language Arts/English Language Development and Mathematics and the Next Generation Science Standards.<sup>51</sup> Each ILC member receives a \$2,000 stipend upon fulfillment of commitments.<sup>52</sup> This model of teacher-led professional development leverages the expertise of exemplary teachers by training them to share best practices, which are immediately relevant and responsive to state and local needs. The ILC has served over 15,000 educators since its launch in 2014.<sup>53</sup>

### Teacher Leadership Initiative

The Teacher Leadership Initiative, or TLI, is a partnership between the Center for Teaching Quality, the National Education Association, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to recruit, prepare, and support the next generation of teachers to lead the profession.<sup>54</sup> Through the initiative, participants engage with an interactive curriculum designed and facilitated by expert teachers. In 2013, 150 teachers from Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Mississippi participated in the program. Another 300 teachers joined the TLI in 2014.<sup>55</sup> All participating teachers learn skills associated with three kinds of leadership: instructional leadership, or how teacher leaders can improve the systems that support teachers and students within schools and districts; policy leadership, or how teacher leaders can influence policymakers at local, state, and national levels; and association leadership, or how teacher leaders can advance the goals of their local and national unions.<sup>56</sup> When they return to their districts, these teacher leaders work to address leadership challenges that they identified through their training. Through portfolio-based projects called "Capstones," these teacher leaders address student-learning challenges in their schools, districts, associations, or states.<sup>57</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

States and school districts should create career pathways and additional leadership opportunities for teachers that include distinct roles with commensurate pay.

States and districts should identify innovative leadership opportunities for teachers that allow them to remain in the classroom. The Every Student Succeeds Act allows states and districts to use Title II funds to provide leadership opportunities to excellent teachers and school leaders.<sup>58</sup> States and school districts should overhaul the current conception of the teaching profession and use new roles to transform the way schools operate. Career paths should enable teachers to earn substantially more within existing budgets and to expand their effect on peers and students.

Schools and districts should leverage teacher expertise to determine the most appropriate teacher-leader positions within individual school and district contexts.

Schools and districts can garner valuable input from accomplished teachers when creating teacher career pathways. Teachers can provide essential insight when determining which leadership roles will best serve unique school and district environments, and they can support school leaders who seek to cultivate school cultures grounded in professional growth and student learning.

Schools and districts should build the capacity of teacher leaders to ensure they have the expertise to transfer professional knowledge and skills to other teachers.

Schools and districts that choose to create career pathways should also develop training for prospective teacher leaders with the input of their most expert teachers. Schools and districts that choose to create career pathways should also develop support models for prospective and selected teacher leaders, as well as school leaders. These models should be focused, competency-based, and equip teachers with the specific tools necessary to effectively lead other adults. Additionally, schools and districts should ensure that teachers have the time, tools, and support to meaningfully engage in their leadership positions—and that their colleagues have time to participate in professional learning—when they are not leading classrooms of their own.

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