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Invest in Educators Series

SREB

Principal Induction Policies in the U.S.

Introduction

Strong organizations exist because of strong leaders. This is a universal truth across industries, sectors and organizational structures. To reach goals, realize greater outcomes and build sustainability, teams must be led by visionary leaders equipped with the skills necessary to support and engage their teams and drive all partners to success. This is true in schools as much as it is in business or government. Leadership is a skill that can be taught. Investing in school leader growth is imperative for positive student outcomes.

This policy report examines current state requirements for principal induction across the nation, spotlights states and programs with exemplary components and impact, and summarizes the research on principal induction. It also highlights several policy recommendations for high-quality school leader induction. It is a complementary pairing to SREB's 2025 report Teacher Induction Policies.

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What is strong principal induction?

SREB defines school leader induction as a strategic and extensive support system designed to help new assistant principals and principals transition into their new roles and develop their capacity as highly effective school-based leaders who foster a positive and productive learning environment. Successful leader induction is designed to help leaders create positive school cultures, develop the skills to provide meaningful support to teachers and understand the basis of distributive leadership — which will lead to stronger teacher instruction, improved teacher retention and ultimately higher student outcomes.

Principal induction is a core component of a strong system of support for new or aspiring educators that can benefit every school district in America. Induction initiatives for school leaders, teachers and staff can help set a trajectory of success for the individuals and the schools in which they serve. Systems leaders do not need to feel pressure to focus on student learning or adult learning, as the two are not mutually exclusive, and in fact they fuel each other. Similarly, systems should not focus exclusively on teacher induction or leader induction and can instead build a system of induction for all novice-filled positions.

Across the nation, educators are clearly asking for support. Their difficult jobs are becoming even more complex with new challenges this decade. With numerous state and district examples of impactful school leader and teacher induction, all states can turn to building this culture of support in education by starting with their fresh recruits.

Based on a broad review of available research and SREB's decades of experience supporting leaders across multiple states, SREB's School Leader Induction Framework highlights four key components of high-quality principal induction:

1. Tiered support system for school leaders
2. Professional learning for leader growth and development
3. Instructional leadership support for positive teacher and student outcomes
4. Operational leadership support for schoolwide safety and success

Why should we invest in support for new principals?

In an era of challenges for recruiting and retaining talent in the educator workforce, induction and mentoring can turn the tide.

Data trends: Not only have teacher vacancies and turnover risen over the last decade; so too has principal turnover. The pattern is closely tied to broader disruptions in the profession: as schools navigated the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, principal attrition spiked sharply, and the schools least equipped to absorb that loss were hit hardest.

The scale of the problem is well documented. According to RAND Corporation's American School District Panel research, national principal turnover held around 6% before the pandemic, then spiked to a high of 16% heading into the 2022-2023 school year — more than double the pre-pandemic baseline. The research also found the burden fell unevenly: during the peak turnover years, principal attrition reached 21% to 23% in high-poverty and rural districts, far outpacing the national average. Turnover rates have since receded, falling to roughly 8% as of the 2024 and 2025 school years, but RAND's own researchers caution that this remains above pre-pandemic levels. SREB's state-level data collection efforts corroborate a similar pattern of only partial recovery. In short: the crisis has eased, but it has not resolved, and the districts serving the students who most need stable, skilled leadership are still the ones most at risk of losing it.

Impact highlight: Leading a school has always demanded balancing instructional leadership with the operational, political, and emotional weight of running a building and managing staff. However, new principals face this transition with comparatively little formal preparation for what the job requires day to day, often stepping in with strong instructional backgrounds but limited experience simultaneously managing staff, budgets, and community relationships. Without deliberate, sustained support in those first years, even enthusiastic, well-prepared new leaders are at a meaningfully higher risk of burning out, underperforming, or leaving the role altogether. With every principal that exits the profession, there is a cost that extends well beyond the front office.

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The research is equally clear that this problem is addressable, with clear data to show that quality induction and mentoring measurably improve outcomes. Several studies, such as the multi-district RAND and Wallace Foundation in 2019, Steinberg and Yang's 2022 study in Pennsylvania, the Learning Policy Institute's synthesis in 2023 reinforce the same conclusion:

High-quality leadership training is consistently associated with improved teacher retention and student achievement, though access to that training varies significantly by state policy.

Taken together, the research makes a direct case for investment in principal induction, not as soft or supplemental assistance, but rather a systemic lever with demonstrated effects on the teachers that principals lead and the students in their schools, landing hardest where the need is greatest.

Support is key for all educators, no matter their role or experience level. As lifelong learners, most educators want to grow their agency, self-efficacy, knowledge, skills and abilities to improve student outcomes. A strong system of support that helps teachers and educational leaders alike includes:

- A cultural foundation of support
- Quality instructional and operational leadership
- Induction and mentoring
- Coaching, differentiated learning, professional development, learning communities and support networks
- Incentives that reward success and foster retention and advancement

Principal Induction Policy Scan

Across the U.S., states differ in how they require or encourage structured support for new principals. This 50-state scan examines state policies governing novice teacher induction, including whether it is mandatory or suggested. It also explores specific policy components, such as mentorship, professional development, observation, and compensation for mentors.

In each of the following tables, SREB states are noted in bold.

Principal Induction Requirements by State

Induction Policy Status	# of States	States
Induction initiative AND mentoring required by state law	5	**DE**, **KY**, NJ, NM (limited), OH (limited)
Induction required by state law	13	CO, IA, **KY**, MA, **MD**, NJ, NM (limited), PA, **SC**, **TX**, UT, WA, WY
Induction encouraged by state law	1	**WV**
Mentorship required by state law but not full induction	12	**AL**, IL, KS, ME, MI, MO, ND, NY (limited), OR, VT, **VA**, **WV**
No statutory language requiring principal induction *or* mentoring	24	AK, **AR**, AZ, CA, CT, DC, **FL**, **GA**, HI, ID, IN, **LA**, MN, **MS**, MT, **NC**, NE, NH, NV, **OK**, SD, RI, **TN**, WI

Of the 50 states:

- Only three states (Delaware, Kentucky and New Jersey) require induction programming and mentoring for all new principals.
- Ohio and New Mexico require induction and mentoring for alternatively or provisionally licensed principals only.
- Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania require more than one year of induction components for new principals.
- West Virginia requires mentoring and encourages it to be a part of an induction program in state law.
- Five states without formal induction requirements (California, Hawaii, South Dakota, Virginia and Wisconsin) provide a statewide voluntary school leadership academy or program for new principals.
- States vary in their induction and mentoring requirements greatly, with some requiring specific elements and principal mentor qualifications and standards, while others loosely define requirements.

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State Induction, Mentoring, Professional Development Policies

Policy Detail	# of States	States
Induction required for at least 1 year	9	IA, **KY**, **MD**, MA, NM, OH, **SC**, **TX**, WA
Induction required for 2+ years	3	**DE**, NJ, PA
Induction required but timeline unspecified	2	CO, UT
Mentorship required for at least 1 year	11	**AL**, IL, KS, **KY**, ME, MI, NY, NM, OH, **VA**, WA
Mentorship required for 2+ years	4	**DE**, NJ, ND, VT
Mentorship time requirement unspecified or mentoring encouraged but not required	8	CA, HI IN, MO, **MS**, OR, PA, **WV**
Professional development coursework or credit-hour requirements for new principals	5	**DE**, **KY**, ND, OH, PA
General professional development requirement for new principals	7	CA, CO, IA, **MD**, MA, NM, UT

State Principal Supervisor Policies

Policy Detail	# of States	States
Principal supervisor/mentor qualifications listed in state law	9	DE, KY, NJ, NY, OR, OH, SC, TX, WA
Principal supervisor/mentor training for professional development required	13	**AL**, CO, **DE**, **GA**, IL, KS, **KY**, NJ, OH, OR, **SC**, **TX**, WA
Principal supervisor/mentoring professional development encouraged	3	AZ, CA, **WV**
Principal supervisor/mentor observations required	17	CO, **DE**, HI, KS, **LA**, IL, IN, ME, **MD**, MA, NV, NM, NY, **SC**, **TX**, UT, **WV**
Principal supervisor/mentor observations required but only when supervising first year principals	4	**KY**, MI, **NC**, OH
Principal supervisor/mentor observations encouraged for all principals	10	CA, HI, MI, MO, NJ, NM, ND, **NC**, OH, **VA**

State Induction Compensation Requirements

States	Requirements
AL	The School Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act provides annual stipends for principals and assistant principals who satisfactorily complete the program requirements of the Alabama Principal Leadership Development System.
DE	Administrator mentors are required to complete the mentoring and coaching program in addition to providing evidence of using Department-provided resources to mentor new administrators to the Department yearly in order to receive an additional responsibility salary supplement.
KY	The Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) reimburses a principal mentor's mileage expenses, and, contingent on funding, provides up to $1,400 to each principal mentor as compensation for out-of-school time spent with the mentee. Kentucky also separately pays $300 to each "administrator educator" committee member from the partnering university, contingent on funding.
NJ	New Jersey Leaders to Leaders (NJL2L) program requires mentors to be paid directly by the resident (not the district). Recent NJ Principal and Supervisors Association guidance cited $1,600 for year 1 and $1,200 for year 2. In addition, an NJL2L administrative or registration fee is also required, paid to the NJPSA and Foundation for Educational Administration ($1,100 effective for registrations starting July 1, 2026, up from the previous $950 rate). While residents are initially responsible for submitting these payments directly to their mentors and the NJPSA/FEA, many individual school districts choose to reimburse these costs or cover them in accordance with local district policies and collective bargaining contracts.
SC	Mentor pay or stipends are not mandated but the state reimburses mentor travel expenses "in accordance with the established State Department of Education fiscal policies."
WA	Statewide pay proposal for $3,000 stipends for principal mentors was not approved, but districts are encouraged to fund. However, mentors receive 10 clock hours per educator mentored, up to 30 hours total. Clock hours are equivalent to continuing education credits, required for licensure renewal every 5 years.
WV	State guidance encourages increased compensation for additional mentorship duties, at the discretion of each district.

State Spotlights

Policy Spotlights: New Jersey and Kentucky



New Jersey stands out as the only state in this scan with robust requirements across every dimension of principal induction and mentoring policy. Its regulatory framework combines:

1. **Universal scope —** the requirement applies to every incoming principal, not just those entering through a narrow licensure pathway, as is the case in Ohio, North Dakota, and New Mexico's provisional tracks.
2. **Defined duration —** a full two-year term or defined principal residency period.

3. **A quantified performance structure —** three formal reviews per year, a summative evaluation, and a mentoring plan that formally replaces the standard professional development plan.
4. **Mandated mentor training —** mentors must complete a state-approved training program, rather than qualifying experience alone, as in Ohio and North Dakota.
5. **Codified mentor qualifications —** a minimum of three years' experience as an "effective" or "highly effective" principal, with an explicit requirement of independence from the candidate's supervisory chain.
6. **Mandated compensation —** a structured stipend, though notably routed through the resident principal rather than the district.

Kentucky's Principal Internship Program (KPIP) is a close second, and in some respects exceeds New Jersey's rigor: its committee-based structure requires a minimum of three observations per committee member and a formal portfolio system, more prescriptive than anything in New Jersey's regulation. However, KPIP's limitations relative to New Jersey are twofold: It lacks an explicit mentor-training mandate, and its structure (three sequences over roughly one school year but could extend into a second) is less of a multi-year commitment than New Jersey's two-year residency.

For states designing or revising induction policy, the strongest model may not come from a single state but from combining proven components: New Jersey's mentor-training and supervisory-independence requirements, Kentucky's quantified observation minimums and committee/portfolio structure, and Delaware's explicit year-by-year hour requirements (12 hours of professional learning in year one, 20 hours of coaching in year two). Delaware deserves recognition as one of the few states requiring mentors to complete a state-run training program — a standard it shares with New Jersey but applies universally to all new administrators rather than principals alone.

Program Spotlight: California



The California Administrator Induction Program is the strongest program-level model nationally, distinguished by something no other program in this scan can offer: documented outcome data, not just a description of program structure.

Data from program participants finds that:

- Over 90% rated the program effective or very effective.
- "At least 85%" reported feeling well-prepared in standards-aligned leadership practices across every state-aligned leadership skill.
- Frequency of contact predicted perceived effectiveness. Specifically, principals receiving weekly field support were twice as likely to rate their induction as "very effective" compared to those receiving monthly support.

That last finding carries a direct design implication for states building or refining their own programs. Consistency of contact with a coach or mentor appears to matter as much as total program hours. Structurally, California's program is also well-built, with a two-year, job-embedded model requiring a minimum of 40 coaching hours and 20 professional development hours per year, with competency assessments tied to state leadership standards. This places it on par with New Jersey's regulatory rigor, while adding something New Jersey's framework does not yet provide publicly: direct participant feedback confirming the program works as intended.

Research Spotlight: Pennsylvania

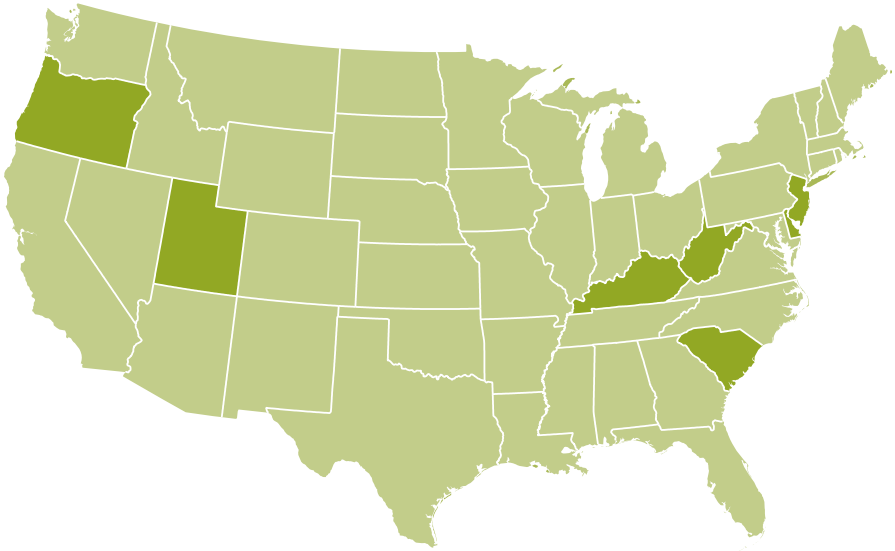


Steinberg and Yang's 2022 study of Pennsylvania's Inspired Leadership induction program is the strongest research this scan identified. It is the only study with a genuinely causal design: a difference-in-differences analysis of statewide student, teacher, and principal panel data, rather than a survey or descriptive account. Its findings speak directly to the question every state policymaker should be asking:

- Induction completion was linked to increased student math achievement, driven by improved teacher effectiveness — equivalent to roughly one to two additional weeks of learning.
- These effects were concentrated in the most economically disadvantaged and urban schools, a meaningful equity finding.
- Impact was strongest when principals completed induction within their first two years in the role.
- Teacher turnover declined in the years following induction completion.

No other state-specific induction program in this scan has been evaluated with this level of methodological rigor. California's participant data offers strong evidence of perceived program quality; Pennsylvania's research offers something rarer — externally measured, causal evidence of what quality induction does for teachers and students once principals return to their buildings.

State Funding Models Spotlights: A State Spectrum



State approaches to funding principal induction and mentoring range from fully state-absorbed costs to costs shifted onto the incoming principal — with significant implications for whether a well-designed program is accessible to every new leader.

Fully state funded: The **Pennsylvania** Inspired Leadership Program represents the strongest funding model. Its induction support and required courses are fully funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and free to participants, removing cost as a barrier entirely. **Kentucky** similarly commits real, itemized state dollars — the Education Professional Standards Board reimburses mentor mileage and provides up to $1,400 per principal mentor for out-of-school time, plus $300 to university-based program partners — turning a general mandate into a funded budget line rather than an unfunded expectation placed on districts.

State-funded infrastructure, discretionary compensation: A middle tier of states fund the systems that support induction — training programs and state-level coordination — while leaving individual mentor compensation to local discretion. **Delaware** requires the state to build and administer mentor training, absorbing that infrastructure cost centrally even though it doesn't specify mentor pay. **South Carolina** mandates a travel stipend for mentors but leaves further compensation to the district. **West Virginia** funds general induction infrastructure through its *Public School Support Plan* while leaving individual mentor pay to local discretion.

Grant-based and opt-in: States like **Utah** (and formerly **Oregon**) fund induction through competitive or opt-in grants rather than guaranteed appropriations. This model can produce strong programs where adopted. Oregon's statutory design, for instance, explicitly provided for mentor compensation and release time, but it is inherently less durable than a standing appropriation. Oregon's mentoring program sunset in 2019 when state funding lapsed, even though the authorizing statute remains on the books. This is a cautionary example for states considering grant-based funding. A strong statute does not guarantee a persistently funded program, and states should weigh recurring appropriations over discretionary or grant-cycle funding if program continuity is a policy goal.

Cost shifted to the individual: At the far end of the spectrum, **New Jersey** — otherwise one of the strongest states for policy design — funds its mentoring program by requiring novice principals to pay their mentors directly (currently $1,600 in year one and $1,200 in year two, plus a $1,100 program registration fee). District reimbursement of these costs is not guaranteed; it depends on local policy or collective bargaining agreements. This structure illustrates an important distinction for states to consider, as strong program design does not itself ensure open access. A new principal in a district without a reimbursement policy bears a real financial cost simply to become certified, which may particularly disadvantage candidates in lower-resourced districts — the same districts research suggests are least likely to have robust principal pipeline infrastructure in the first place.

Policy Recommendations

To provide schools with stronger, more prepared school leaders, states should consider investing in principal induction and mentoring. The following recommendations can help states create or strengthen their own school leader induction policies and support:

1. Require state-supported leader induction for all new school principals and consider including aspiring principal support as well.

The job of leading a school is high stakes, intense and complex. No matter how high quality a principal preparation program is, or how many years of planning and practice as an aspiring leader, new principals need a lot of support to succeed in their first few years in the position. States can provide robust and impactful support by requiring two or more years of quality principal induction and mentoring.

Similar support could also be provided to aspiring school principals, building the pipeline of high-quality leaders even further. Assistant principal and teacher leader access to leader induction and mentoring is a sustainability strategy to link together teacher and principal induction, creating a true system of support and long-term success.

From the policy scan, research and SREB's own School Leader Induction Framework, we've surfaced several key aspects to include in such a policy:

- Quality principal mentor policies that help guide mentor eligibility and training, mentor matching and mentor guidance and requirements.
- A network for new principals and their mentors to access shared learning and engage with a community of practice.
- Robust professional learning for instructional leadership, operational leadership and organizational and school climate building.
- State guidance and support for district leaders to build and improve their principal induction support, led by a trusted entity of experts such as a state education agency, a university or a partnership collaborative.
- Funding support for induction programming as well as mentor support.

2. Invest in new principal support.

The strongest funding model pairs a mandated system of induction with a recurring, non-discretionary appropriation that covers both induction infrastructure and mentor compensation. This ensures the mandate doesn't become an unfunded burden on districts or principals. Funding support should be durable, and it should be set up in a way that allows for proper distribution across districts to support the number of new principals hired. Pennsylvania and Kentucky come closest to this pairing (see state spotlights above).

3. Research and evaluate induction.

Future research is needed to conduct a formal cost-benefit analysis of principal induction (as exists for teacher induction although more is needed there as well). More impact studies can help bolster the reasoning for and impact of school leader induction and mentoring programs. A cost-benefit analysis would be most helpful in arming states with the necessary information for needed support and potential return on investment of quality programs.

Virginia Senator Tim Kaine, joined by Connecticut Representative Jahana Hayes, introduced the Better Education Through Mentoring Act in June 2026, a bill that would create a federal grant program to fund teacher and school leader induction programs in K-12 schools. The bill responds to a well-documented pattern: teachers with the least experience leave at the highest rates, a trend Kaine says will worsen as a wave of retirements hits amid existing shortages nationwide, and which disrupts student learning, school stability, and the collegial knowledge schools depend on. Citing research on comprehensive two-year mentoring programs and studies of the particular challenges facing rural schools — including limited access to mentors and professional isolation — the bill would fund the pairing of new teachers with experienced mentors and expand both teacher and school leader induction programs, framing the effort as both an effectiveness measure and a retention strategy. Kaine noted the proposal would need congressional funding to offset the cost of mentors' time, though no dollar figure was specified.

What's the return on investing in principal induction?

Quality induction and mentoring for new principals pays off — for the principal, for their teachers, and for students. However, a full, formal cost-benefit analysis (the kind that exists for teacher induction) does not yet exist for principal induction specifically. What we have instead is strong evidence of impact, plus real cost figures, which together paint a convincing picture even without a calculated return on investment figure.

Principals who met with a coach weekly were twice as likely to call their induction "very effective" as those who met monthly.

Benefit to the principal: New principals who go through strong induction report feeling significantly more prepared and effective in their role. A Learning Policy Institute study of California's Administrator Induction Program found that over 90% of participants rated it effective or very effective, and 85% or more said they felt well-prepared in core leadership practices aligned to the state's standards. That same study found that frequency of support mattered as much as total hours — principals who met with a coach weekly were twice as likely to call their induction "very effective" as those who met monthly. In plain terms, consistent, ongoing contact with a mentor makes a bigger difference than an occasional check-in.

Benefit to teachers and staff: This is where the strongest hard evidence exists. Steinberg and Yang's 2022 study of Pennsylvania's Inspired Leadership induction program, published in the *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, used statewide student, teacher, and principal data and a difference-in-differences design to isolate the program's effect. They found that when principals completed induction, the teachers in their schools became measurably more effective — and teacher turnover declined in the years following. In other words, good principal induction doesn't just help the principal; it stabilizes and improves the whole staff around them.



Benefit to students and schools:

Steinberg and Yang's study also found that this improved teacher effectiveness translated into real gains in student math achievement — roughly the equivalent of one to two extra weeks of learning. That may sound modest, but two things make it significant: it is a measured, causal effect rather than a correlation, and the researchers found the benefit was largest in the most economically disadvantaged and urban schools — the schools that often need the most help. Separately, a 2019 RAND Corporation study for the Wallace Foundation, led by Susan Gates and colleagues, examined six major school districts that built comprehensive principal pipelines. That study found schools with a newly placed principal in a pipeline district outperformed comparable schools by more than six percentile points in reading and nearly three percentile points in math after three years, with the largest gains concentrated in the lowest-performing schools.



While there is no specific return-on-investment ratio for principal induction study, the way some studies do for teacher induction, there is real cost data to review. The RAND and Wallace study found that comprehensive principal pipeline support cost districts about $42 per student per year — a modest figure against achievement gains equivalent to multiple percentile points, concentrated in the schools that need it most. This cost amounts to 4.5% of the $920 spent on average per pupil on school administration, according to the latest breakdown from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Based on this report's policy scan, Kentucky's state-funded induction program costs roughly $1,700 in state funds per mentor-intern pair, reimbursed through the Education Professional Standards Board, while Pennsylvania's PIL program is fully funded by the state Department of Education at no direct cost to districts or principals. None of these figures alone constitute a formal cost-benefit analysis, but together they show that the investment required is small relative to the documented gains.

The research doesn't yet give us a single "for every $1 spent, you get $X back" figure for principal induction the way some teacher induction research does. But the causal evidence, primarily from Steinberg and Yang's Pennsylvania study and the RAND and Wallace pipeline study, shows that quality induction improves teacher effectiveness, reduces teacher turnover, and raises student achievement — with the biggest gains landing in the schools that most need them — all at a modest, well-documented cost. The absence of a single ROI statistic is a genuine research gap this report identifies, not evidence that the investment doesn't pay off.



The Case for High-Quality Principal Induction

Principals lead the way for schools. No matter the changing context, there will always be some level of leadership turnover and groups of incoming new principals. To invest in their success is not about allocating dollars and time for one single person's growth, it is pouring layers of investment into a leadership team, an entire school staff and all the students enrolled over years to come. Principal induction sets a tone of support from the leader on down.

Quality induction isn't just a program and a few mentor meetings. It is a system of support provided to leaders, teachers and staff members all throughout a district. It is a package of growth mechanisms and learning that helps create a growth mindset, a supportive culture, and a focus on continuous improvement for adults and children. It is an investment with long-range ripple effects.

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Fully reversing educator and leader workforce staffing issues will require additional systemwide renovations — such as improving the quality of teacher and leader preparation pathways, reforming licensure, and strengthening educator compensation and working conditions. Investing in support for new school leaders and teachers through policy shifts that help districts provide high-quality systems for induction is a good place to start and could significantly improve public school staffing and student outcomes.

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