



How Could States and Districts Improve Teacher Working Conditions?

Examples of Initiatives From Around the South

Why Do Teachers Leave the Profession?

On average each year, 8% of teachers leave the profession. Some leave for personal reasons — career switching, relocation, retirement — but others leave because of poor working conditions. State and district leaders could redesign workforce policies and school-based strategies to improve working conditions.

According to the Learning Policy Institute, teachers often cite job-specific factors like poor leadership, insufficient professional learning support and insufficient or unpleasant engagement with parents and community partners. General dissatisfaction with aspects of the teaching profession — low pay, lack of advancement opportunities, and testing and accountability demands — also accelerates attrition rates.

This briefing describes three areas for policymakers to prioritize when considering how to improve teacher working conditions.

Three Focus Areas		
School and District Efforts	Teacher Feedback and Support	Ensure that induction, mentoring and professional learning programs support professional growth of all teachers and instructional support staff.
	School Leadership and Climate	Strengthen relationships between teachers and school leaders, teachers and students, and school employees and the community. Address issues that contribute to cultural challenges, such as poor school improvement planning, ineffective administrative leadership and instructional support, and lax student discipline.
State and District Efforts	Human Resources	Reform certification, compensation and school staffing strategies to make the profession more attractive to prospective teachers.

Teacher Feedback and Support

Improving Early-Career Induction and Mentoring

The Delaware Department of Education requires early-career educators to complete the [Comprehensive Induction Program](#). The four-year program requires districts to deliver induction curricula that are responsive to individual teacher's needs. The program provides structured guidance on the specific tasks and professional learning activities that participants should complete during each school year.

[Maryland Senate Bill 493](#) (2016) created an induction pilot. Participating districts would allow first-year teachers to spend at least 20% more time during the week receiving mentoring, peer observation and planning assistance.

The South Carolina Department of Education requires districts to assign mentors to all novice teachers. Districts submit plans that describe how they will select mentors, provide at least three types of professional learning, and assess the effectiveness of induction programs. These [requirements](#) do not guarantee effective mentor selection or growth, but they do set expectations for system monitoring and define roles for district and school leaders.

Increasing Opportunities To Engage in Professional Learning

[Arkansas House Bill 1646](#) (2017) allows educators to obtain credit for required professional development through a micro-credentialing process approved by the state education agency. The state board of education is considering [proposed state regulations](#) that would provide more detailed guidance on how educators could receive credit for competency-based learning.

[Kentucky Senate Bill 73](#) (2018) establishes a pilot program for performance-based professional learning projects. Two or more teachers would design an instructional practice or strategy project to address classroom challenges.

Induction and Professional Learning Resources

- Mentoring New Teachers: A Fresh Look (SREB) [\[Link\]](#)
- Adult Professional Culture (Research for Better Teaching) [\[Link\]](#)
- Effective Teacher Professional Development (Learning Policy Institute) [\[Link\]](#)

School Leadership and Climate

Strengthening School Leadership

The Maryland State Department of Education has provided professional learning to assistant principals and teacher leaders for several years through their Promising Principals Academy. The yearlong cohort program provides training to professionals interested in becoming principals. The Oklahoma State Department of Education developed training for aspiring principals after meeting with their Maryland colleagues.

The Arkansas Department of Education developed a regional professional learning initiative called the Arkansas Leadership Quest in 2016. Education service cooperatives nominate lead principals, who deliver customized professional development in consultation with support coaches. The state created online micro-credentials aligned with the program so that administrators can receive competency-based credit for their work.

[Florida House Bill 287](#) (2016) created the Principal Autonomy Pilot Program to provide highly effective principals in three districts with increased instructional and operational autonomy to turn around low-performing schools. Pilot schools received turnaround training, and participating school leaders received a salary supplement.

[West Virginia House Bill 4006](#) (2018) requires preparation programs to provide coursework on instructional leadership to aspiring school administrators and authorizes county boards to establish systems of support and supervision for beginning principals.

Recognizing Teacher Leaders and Providing Them with Professional Learning

The Louisiana Department of Education has encouraged district and school administrators to identify teacher leaders. Over 7,000 teacher leaders participated in the most recent Teacher Leader Summit. The department has selected Teacher Leader Advisors through a competitive application process. The advisors develop instructional and assessment resources, review state department materials and facilitate professional learning sessions.

School Administrator and Teacher Leader Resources

- Arkansas Leadership Quest (Arkansas Department of Education) [\[Link\]](#)
- Can Good Principals Keep Teachers in Disadvantaged Schools? (Grissom, 2011) [\[Link\]](#)
- Feedback on Teaching: A Fresh Look (SREB) [\[Link\]](#)
- Maryland Promising Principals Academy (Maryland State Department of Education) [\[Link\]](#)

Human Resources

Tiered Certification

Policymakers in Arkansas, Georgia and Oklahoma have developed tiered certification systems. These systems allow educators to demonstrate instructional effectiveness and their willingness to assume leadership roles.

[Arkansas House Bill 1425](#) (2017) authorized the state board of education to create a tiered licensure system by January 2019. The act authorized the creation of advanced licensure types and the differentiation of salary for educators holding advanced licensure.

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission developed a [four-tier licensure system in 2014](#).

[Oklahoma Senate Bill 980](#) (2018) created a framework for a tiered licensure system, delineated requirements for mentor and lead teacher certificates, and provided salary supplements for advanced certificates.

Career Lattices & Advanced Teacher Roles

[North Carolina House Bill 1030](#) (2016, pp. 18-20) created a three-year pilot program to develop advanced teaching roles that link teacher performance and professional competence to salary increases. The general assembly appropriated \$9.8 million to fund successful district proposals.

[Oklahoma House Bill 3114](#) (2016) allowed districts to implement a career path and compensation framework. The act specified the five career rungs and the requirements to advance up the ladder. The act requires coaching and professional development for novice and career teachers.

Teacher Leadership and Advanced Roles Resources

- Systemic Approach to Elevating Teacher Leadership (Learning Forward) [\[Link\]](#)
- Teacher Leadership and Licensure Advancement (Education Commission of the States) [\[Link\]](#)
- Teacher Leadership Competencies (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards) [\[Link\]](#)

Three Considerations for States

1. Review How To Keep Talented Educators in the Classroom

State legislators, state agencies and numerous advocacy organizations have sounded the alarm about the rate of teacher turnover in the region. While improving school climate could decrease teacher attrition, state legislators might also consider strategies that encourage highly effective educators to stay in the classroom. In some cases, these strategies would discourage exit from the profession; in other instances, strategies might give educators a compelling alternative to “graduating into administration.”

The statewide strategies above — tiered certification and advanced teaching roles — signal to educators that state policymakers recognize teaching as a professional endeavor in which teachers might progress, specialize and grow. While some states that adopted these models have attached salary considerations to attainment of advanced licensure or employment in advanced teaching roles, another key outcome is recognition of instructional effectiveness. It is important that policymakers understand that the state sets the stage for incentivizing these roles, with a responsibility to standardize incentives so as not to exacerbate equity issues across districts with different budgets.

2. Investigate How To Support Educator-Driven Professional Learning

Most educators want professional learning activities to be relevant and targeted. Giving educators the flexibility to design and execute their own professional learning is one way to distribute leadership and decision-making throughout a school building. And finding ways to measure and verify teacher mastery could help school administrators identify which educators are prepared for advanced roles.

3. Explore How To Assess Adult Professional Culture in the School Building

Several states have found ways to assess school climate and teacher working conditions. Through its Every Student Succeeds Act plan, South Carolina measures student engagement with surveys in grades three through 12. Similar surveys of adults, including teachers, administrators, parents and the community, could pinpoint areas of strength and areas for growth. Schoolwide examination of the survey results and collaborative planning could also improve relationships between educators and the broader community.

Collecting and Reporting School Climate Data

- Measuring School Climate (National School Climate Center) [\[Link\]](#)
- North Carolina Working Conditions Survey [\[Link\]](#)
- Student Surveys: A Fresh Look (SREB) [\[Link\]](#)
- Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey (New Teacher Center) [\[Link\]](#)