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A Vision for a Reimagined Teaching Job



EDUCATION RESOURCE STRATEGIES



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We can lift students and educators by making teaching a more dynamic, rewarding, collaborative, and sustainable profession.

The crisis of the teaching job

The pandemic exposed and exacerbated deep structural challenges in our public education system, raising basic questions about how we organize the core work of students and educators.

Over the past several decades, American workplaces have become more collaborative, team-oriented, technology-infused, and flexible. But teaching remains the same one-size-fits-all job it has been for generations—despite vastly increased expectations for teachers, who must support all students, many with deepened needs, in reaching rising standards.

Today, most classrooms still feature one teacher leading instruction for twenty to thirty students. Teachers work largely alone, without time during the day for reflection, collaboration, and getting to know their students as individuals. Professional development opportunities are sporadic and often disconnected from day-to-day teaching and learning. Teacher pay is stagnant, increasingly uncompetitive with comparable professions, and not aligned to the level of expertise and responsibility that many teachers take on.ⁱ And in most districts, teachers have few opportunities to advance, lead, and earn more unless they step away from the very thing that drew them into the profession in the first place: the opportunity to work directly with students.

Most importantly, the antiquated construction of the teaching job is bad for students. Persistent turnover—especially in schools serving large populations of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds—limits students' access to consistently excellent teaching: the #1 school-based factor leading to positive academic outcomes and social-emotional development. Students deserve a high-quality education—and teachers deserve a profession that provides them with the time, supports, and compensation to meet their students' needs and meet their own professional goals.

As the COVID pandemic has led many Americans to reevaluate the status quo and expand their sense of possibility about new ways to organize work, it's time to reimagine the fundamentals of the teaching job. Over the past fifty years, more than half of new investment in public education has gone toward increasing the number of staff in schools,ⁱⁱ while the basics of how we organize resources in service of educating students remain the same. Despite the efforts of school, district, and state leaders, even the most promising innovations have had only a peripheral impact on the day-to-day work of teachers and students.

Reimagining the teaching job demands that leaders at all levels reconsider the ways in which we organize people, time, and money in schools and school systems in pursuit of a bold, new vision that has the potential to elevate both the teaching profession and outcomes for all students.



A new vision for the teaching job

What *should* the teaching job look like instead? Teaching should be a dynamic, rewarding, collaborative, and sustainable profession with a diverse teaching force that enables all educators to have the greatest positive impact on student learning and well-being.¹

The teaching job should be:

Dynamic: Role flexibility, less time on non-instructional duties, and more opportunities for instructional leadership

Rewarding: Highly competitive compensation that increases based on teachers' contribution and impact

Collaborative: Emphasis on teaching teams supported by instructional experts, with opportunities to shape the direction of their school community

Sustainable: Workload and schedule that enable teachers to focus on teaching, with more support and lighter workloads for incoming teachers

Diverse: Accessible on-ramps to teaching for high potential candidates of all backgrounds, with school cultures and professional support that help retain teachers of color

Restructuring the teaching job to meet this vision would fundamentally change the experience of teaching from a one-size-fits-all role to working in expert-led teams of educators who share the work of planning, teaching, and supporting their students.

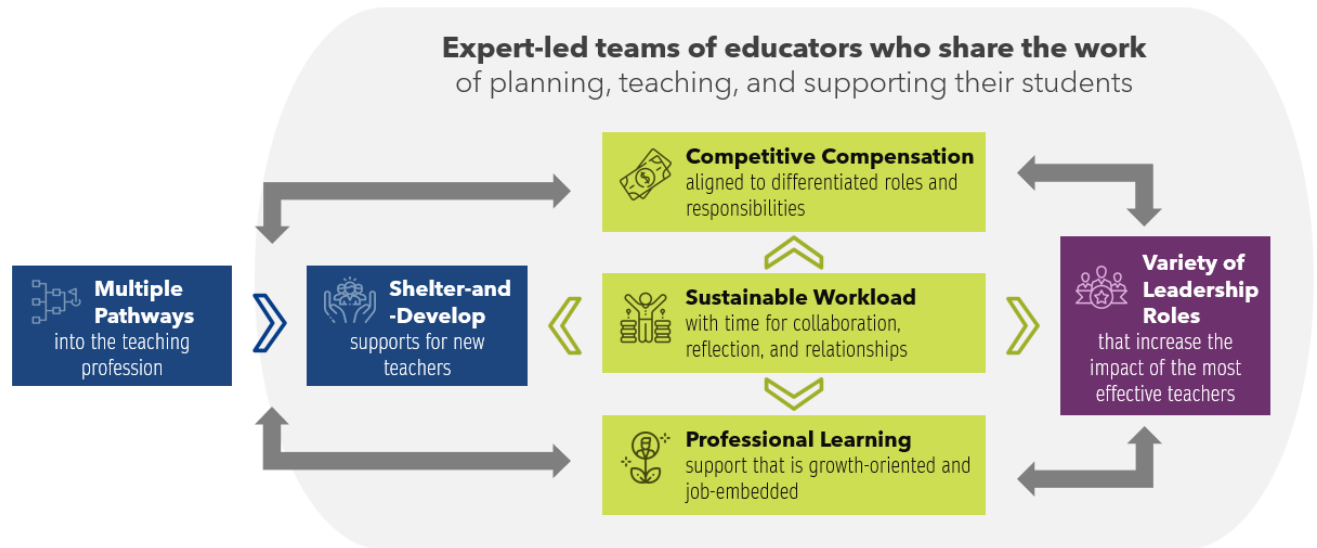
These shifts are not cosmetic or fleeting. They imply deep reflection and a willingness to create inspiring new models that build on what works and, over time, radically improve the day-to-day experience of educators and their students. The work will be challenging—but the magnitude of change that is required is possible.

¹ Thanks to our partners at Leading Educators, Public Impact, Teach Plus, and the Mary Lou Fulton Teacher's College at Arizona State University for developing this approach with us.



What this looks like in practice

The teaching experience would look different over the course of a teacher’s career. Incoming teachers would benefit from **multiple pathways** into the profession and **shelter-and-develop** supports that smooth their transition. The most effective experienced teachers would be able to take on a mix of **leadership roles** that enable them to increase and extend their impact. All teachers would earn **competitive compensation** aligned to their differentiated roles and responsibilities. Importantly, teachers’ day-to-day experience would look significantly different with **sustainable workloads**; time for **team collaboration**, reflection, and relationships; and **professional learning** support that is growth-oriented and job-embedded.



There are **four key areas of impact** to drive this necessary change: **Leveraging Teams**, **Expanding On-Ramps**, **Improving the Core Job**, and **Deepening Impact**. [See [Figure 1](#).]

Leveraging teams: Expert-led teams of educators who share the work

Transforming teaching from an isolated job to a team-based enterprise has the potential to make teaching more manageable with greater student impact. A team-based approach lowers the burden for each individual teacher, while students benefit from the shared expertise of a diverse group of educators.

“I feel isolated in my classroom.”
- Elementary School Teacher

Rather than fitting each educator into a one-size-fits all role, teaching teams would be created to deliberately include a variety of educator roles that leverage each person's skills and experiences. Educators on each team would share the daily work of planning, teaching, reviewing student work, adjusting instruction, and providing individualized supports that address the unique needs of each student. Each team would have access to deep instructional expertise and share responsibility for the students they serve.



Expanding on-ramps: Multiple pathways into the teaching profession and shelter-and-develop supports for new teachers

Today, there is essentially a single, main point of entry into the teaching profession: traditional teacher prep models at institutes of higher education (IHE). These models often come with high costs and limited flexibility, which has deterred talented potential teachers—particularly people of color and people from low-income backgrounds—from entering the profession.

Aspiring educators should have multiple, varied entry points to the profession. This would tap into the wealth of existing talent (paraprofessionals and other school staff, parents, part-time professionals, high school students, etc.) to participate in the crucial work of educating our students. Having a variety of high-quality educator preparation models that increase financial and professional development supports for aspiring teachers can help diversify and increase quality among the pool of new teachers. It's important that preparation programs build in opportunities for hands-on teaching experience with significant expert support, such as through teaching residencies. Research shows that well-designed and well-implemented teacher residency models can positively impact teacher retentionⁱⁱⁱ and student outcomes, as well as increase racial diversity of the teaching workforce.^{iv}

“My workload is a huge challenge and there’s a never-ending to-do list. I never really feel successful.”

- Elementary School Teacher

This gradual on-ramp to teaching should continue in a teacher’s first year through shelter-and-develop models that reduce workloads and provide opportunities to learn and practice with expert support. Reduced workloads can mean fewer students, fewer hours teaching, or fewer non-instructional responsibilities.

This both makes the job more manageable *and* provides additional time for rookie teachers to learn their craft by observing expert teachers, participating in collaborative planning, practicing skills, being observed, and receiving actionable, non-evaluative feedback. With a strategic approach to teacher recruitment, placement, and development, students taught by rookie teachers could gain an average of 3.5 to 4.2 additional months of learning each school year.^v

Visit ERS’ [Growing Great Teachers Toolkit](#) to learn more about new teacher support, including Louisiana’s pilot program for school systems to provide new teachers with mentors as part of shelter-and-develop opportunities. Check out [Next Education Workforce](#) at Arizona State University’s Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College to learn more about pathways into teaching to develop a workforce with a wider array of educational skills and areas of expertise.



Improving the core job: Sustainable workloads, professional learning support, and competitive compensation

Compensation is important, but compensation alone will not make the job better for teachers. Workdays and student loads must allow time for reflection, collaboration, and student connections.

First, we must rethink the idea that each teacher must “do it all.” A team-oriented model can make it possible for teachers to share the load, support their collective and individual professional development, and bring more resources to bear to address students’ learning needs. The workload for every teacher also does not need to look the same. For example, leaders could strategically reduce teaching loads and utilization (percent of day teaching) in priority grades and subjects. Teams can distribute the work of lesson planning, grading, and course correction for students who would benefit from more support. Leaders can also narrow teachers’ workloads by limiting non-student-facing responsibilities that divert attention from the work with greatest student impact.

“The single most important challenge is that teachers are not given the time to do their jobs well.”

- Middle School Teacher

High-quality, sustained, content-specific professional development can significantly improve teaching and learning^{vi} and is a strong predictor of teacher satisfaction and teacher retention.^{vii} A “connected professional learning” approach involves tight connections between rigorous, comprehensive curricula and assessments; content-focused, expert-led collaboration; and frequent, growth-oriented feedback. Teachers should have the opportunity to collaborate in shared-content teams, led by content experts, for at least 90 minutes per week. Teachers should also have biweekly observation periods and receive targeted, actionable feedback and coaching as part of this time.

Finally, we must address outdated and rigid compensation systems that unintentionally make it difficult to innovate in ways that could benefit teachers and students. As a baseline, teacher compensation should be competitive with surrounding districts and with comparable professions.

Rather than dedicate as much as 10% of a district’s investment in teacher compensation to pay for education credits or advanced degrees^{viii}—despite evidence showing that obtaining additional degrees is not highly correlated with improving student performance^{ix}—we should shift to more dynamic compensation models that reward contribution. These systems could include salary curves that accelerate pay at points where teacher turnover is highest and vary compensation for educators with differentiated roles; significant increases in pay for effective educators to take on instructional leadership roles; and/or financial incentives for effective teachers to work in priority schools, subjects, and grade levels.

Visit ERS’ [Connected Professional Learning Toolkit](#) to learn more about how to accelerate teacher effectiveness and student growth through supports for teaching, including DC Public Schools’ professional development model, Learning Together to Advance our Practice (LEAP). Check out [Leading Educators](#) to learn more about supporting teachers through weekly professional learning and collaboration time, unpacking of curriculum, frequent coaching, and progress monitoring.



Deepening impact: A mix of leadership roles that increase the impact of the most effective educators

Strong, experienced teachers shouldn't have to find roles that take them farther away from direct work with students in order to increase their own learning, earning, and impact. Meaningful, instructionally focused leadership roles can extend the reach of highly effective teachers to more students while increasing team satisfaction, sense of empowerment, and retention. Strategic teacher leader roles, such as content-specific team leads, hybrid teacher/coach roles, multi-classroom leadership roles, or participation in school-wide instructional leadership teams, also require shifts in schedules. This enables teacher leaders to have time to take on the responsibilities of observing and coaching teachers and leading collaborative planning time; meaningful additional compensation; and support from administrators or coaches in their new roles.

"There's a lack of leadership opportunities outside of leaving the classroom. I don't feel like there's a professional trajectory for me."

- High school teacher

Explore [Public Impact's Opportunity Culture](#) to learn about how they help pre-K-12 districts and schools extend the reach of excellent teachers, principals, and their teams to more students, for more pay, within recurring school budgets. Check out [Teach Plus](#), who empowers teachers to lead both within their schools (e.g., shaping professional learning) and outside their schools (e.g., advocating with state policymakers).

How we get there

In order for our country to transform outcomes for all students, especially students of color and students growing up in low-income communities, we must realize a bold new vision for the teaching job. One-school-at-a-time reform or improvements that focus on just one aspect of the teacher experience can foster incremental progress but ultimately leave the fundamental structure of the teaching job unchanged. We need to make holistic changes to the teaching job at a [systemic level](#) in order to sustain these changes in ways that benefit educators and students.

Supporting all students to achieve their goals requires a teaching job that is dynamic, rewarding, collaborative, and sustainable. It's not an easy task—but it is possible. It will require broad buy-in, a restructuring of long-term costs, and a strategy for continuous improvement to make this vision a reality. Leaders can start by centering the teacher and student experience, building from a deep understanding of their needs and ideas and partnering with them to drive change. By adopting a "[Do Now, Build Toward](#)" approach, leaders can address both school- and system-level structures and practices through [doable starting points](#)—and take meaningful steps in service of a truly reimagined teaching job.



Figure 1. Shifts in the teacher experience.

		From	To
Leveraging Teams	Expert-led teams of educators who share the work	A one-size-fits all teaching role and isolating job in which each teacher works alone and owns the full burden of planning and leading instruction	A team-based, expert-led structure in which educators share the work of planning and of educating and supporting students
Expanding On-Ramps	Multiple pathways into the teaching profession	Limited pathways into teaching with high costs, little flexibility, and few opportunities for meaningful practice	Plentiful, varied, and easily accessible on-ramps to teaching that enable recruitment and development of high potential candidates of all backgrounds and experiences and that build in opportunities for hands-on teaching experience with significant expert support
	Shelter-and-develop supports for new teachers	Heavy teaching loads for new teachers, largely independent planning time disconnected from curricular content, and infrequent observation with limited feedback	Reduced workloads (“shelter”) and opportunities to learn and practice (“development”) for new teachers, gradually ramping up to full teaching responsibilities
Improving the Core Job	Competitive compensation aligned to differentiated roles and responsibilities	Uncompetitive compensation and rigid salary structures not aligned with educators’ responsibility or impact	Highly competitive compensation that is differentiated by role and that grows based on contribution and role
	Sustainable workload with time for team collaboration, reflection, and relationships	Back-to-back teaching days with limited breaks, short planning periods without deep peer collaboration, and few opportunities to build authentic relationships with individual students	Workdays and student loads that allow time for reflection, collaboration, and student connections
	Professional learning support that is growth-oriented and job-embedded	Curricula that lack rigor and alignment across grade levels, team planning time that is disconnected from curriculum, and coaching that is limited to occasional visits and formal annual observations	A cohesive professional learning strategy that includes rigorous, comprehensive curricula and assessments; content-focused, expert-led collaboration; and frequent, growth-oriented feedback
Deepening Impact	A mix of leadership roles that increase the impact of the most effective educators	Limited student-facing career options for strong, experienced teachers, with leadership roles that provide little additional pay, time, or instructional impact	Meaningful leadership opportunities for effective, experienced teachers to grow in their careers, extend their impact, and increase their compensation



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