

Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond

Priority 9: Prepare Educators for Reinventing Schools

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Across the United States, state education agencies and school districts face daunting challenges and difficult decisions for restarting schools as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. As state and district leaders prepare for what schooling will look like in 2020 and beyond, there is an opportunity to identify evidence-based policies and practices that will enable them to seize this moment to rethink school in ways that can transform learning opportunities for students and teachers alike.

Our current system took shape almost exactly a century ago, when school designs and funding were established to implement mass education on an assembly-line model organized to prepare students for their “places in life”—judgments that were enacted within contexts of deep-seated racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural prejudices. In a historical moment when we have more knowledge about [human development and learning](#), when society and the economy demand a more [challenging set of skills](#), and when—at least in our rhetoric—there is a greater [social commitment to equitable education](#), it is time to use the huge disruptions caused by this pandemic to reinvent our systems of education. The question is: How can we harness these understandings as we necessarily redesign school? How can we transform what has not been working for children and for our society into a future that carries us forward into a more equitable future?

This section is part of a larger report, *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond*, that focuses on how policymakers as well as educators can support equitable, effective teaching and learning regardless of the medium through which that takes place. The full report provides an overarching framework to inform the restart of schools while also providing a long-term vision that can guide leaders toward new and enduring ways to address educational quality and inequity. It illustrates how policymakers and educators can:

1. Close the digital divide
2. Strengthen distance and blended learning
3. Assess what students need
4. Ensure supports for social and emotional learning
5. Redesign schools for stronger relationships
6. Emphasize authentic, culturally responsive learning
7. Provide expanded learning time
8. Establish community schools and wraparound supports
9. Prepare educators for reinventing schools
10. Leverage more adequate and equitable school funding

This section provides research, state and local examples, and policy recommendations for how policymakers and education leaders can prepare educators for reinventing schools. For the full report, go to <http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/restarting-reinventing-school-covid>.

Priority 9: Prepare Educators for Reinventing Schools

Everything we have described here requires knowledgeable, skilled, dedicated educators; there is no other way to get the kind of teaching we need. Meanwhile, for these educators, the expectations are higher than they have ever been before.

What Educators Need

Even before the onset of COVID-19, an emerging consensus in the science of learning and development highlighted the need to provide all students with access to deeper learning experiences in ways that promote greater equity. This raised the bar for educators, and for educator preparation.¹ Now, even greater efforts are called for in [meeting the social and emotional needs of children](#) and implementing trauma- and healing-informed practice, all while making up for learning loss through unpredictable combinations of distance learning, blended learning, and in-classroom learning.

This unbelievably complex scenario would challenge even the most well-prepared, stable, and experienced teacher workforce. Unfortunately, most states do not have such a teacher workforce in place. [Education spending still has not recovered from the Great Recession](#), when layoff and salary cuts shrank the number of teachers, discouraged aspiring educators from entering the classroom, and [reduced preparation program enrollment and capacity](#).

This attenuated pipeline into teaching, combined with inadequate salaries and poor working conditions, has led to substantial shortages. As a result, more than 100,000 U.S. teaching positions were left vacant or were filled by underprepared teachers in 2018–19. Moreover, these shortages, concentrated in the STEM fields, special education, and English learner development, have been most severe in communities serving students of color and those from low-income families. Under-resourced, high-poverty schools have too often been staffed by a highly transient group of inexperienced and untrained teachers.²

COVID-19 and ensuing state cuts to higher education will [make it even harder](#) for students from low-income families to access higher education, including high-quality teacher preparation programs. Already, the pandemic has had a [disproportionate impact](#) on the higher education plans of people of color, with half of Latino/a students and about 40% of African American and Asian American students canceling or otherwise changing their plans, including delaying enrollment, reducing courses, or switching institutions. This raises concerns for efforts to increase the [diversity](#) of the teacher workforce, which will be difficult to accomplish without additional higher education and college affordability investments. As teachers of color have been found to boost achievement and attainment for students of color,³ this is particularly problematic.

Now, [with one out of five teachers saying they are unlikely to return](#) if schools open physically in the fall, we face the prospect of a new wave of resignations and retirements,⁴ which, combined with potential staff cuts to meet budget shortfalls, and piled on top of preexisting workforce challenges, may create the counterintuitive outcome of [simultaneous shortages and layoffs](#) in the educator workforce. It is critically important that current educators be well-supported in meeting the challenges that they face and that well-trained educators be recruited into the profession.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

While the immediate needs of communities will create major pressures on budgets, it is important for policymakers to recognize how critically important it is to recruit, develop, and retain a strong educator workforce, so that other aspirations for education for our children can be realized. The incentives needed to accomplish this reside at the federal, state, and local levels.

Invest in high-quality educator preparation, especially for high-need communities where shortages continue to be problematic.

Strong educator preparation, which increases teacher efficacy and retention,⁵ is needed now more than ever. While many of the demands being placed on teachers and school leaders are new, the ingredients of high-quality educator preparation programs are not: They are built around a coherent vision and well-defined standards and include the modeling of research-based, effective practices in courses that are integrated with strong clinical experiences and performance assessments.⁶ A policy agenda that supports such preparation incentivizes programs to provide it and aspiring teachers to pursue it.

High-quality programs begin with **strong, research-aligned standards** for teaching and school leadership, long recognized as a foundation of high-achieving education systems⁷ and as a key feature for influencing preparation program quality and supporting student learning. Policymakers can update and strengthen these standards to reflect the needs of today's students—including new knowledge about social, emotional, and cognitive development; culturally responsive pedagogies; and trauma-informed practices—and then ensure that these standards are reflected in licensure requirements, performance assessments for teacher and administrator candidates, and performance-based accreditation for programs.⁸ California provides an example here, having strengthened standards to address teacher and administrator knowledge and skills that are ever-more important today⁹ and developed teacher and administrator performance assessments to evaluate these skills.¹⁰ The state also incorporated performance-based aspects, such as candidate assessment and survey results, into its [new accreditation system](#).

Incentives for individuals to enter teaching should address [cost as a key barrier to quality preparation](#), particularly for candidates of color and those from low-income backgrounds, as this is a problem that will likely grow with the economic effects of COVID-19. [Service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs](#) can help candidates meet those costs and have been shown to aid in teacher recruitment and retention for high-need locations and subject areas (such as special education, bilingual education, math, and science) and especially for candidates of color.¹¹ This should be a major agenda at the federal level, where support for training needed medical personnel has long been a key factor in addressing shortages of physicians in key fields and communities.

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Policymakers can also support high-retention pathways such as [teacher and leader residencies](#), which not only address the cost issue through financial support for candidates but also show promise in producing effective educators who work in high-need subject areas and schools and who stay in the profession at higher rates.¹² By ensuring these candidates get a top-flight preparation at little or no cost through strong programs that arrange for excellent clinical preparation under the wing of expert educators in high-need communities, these programs improve the quality of teaching and school leadership for students furthest from opportunity. California, Delaware, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Texas are among the states that have aimed to address existing shortages by adopting such models.¹³ Federal funding for these programs as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Higher Education Act (HEA) should be expanded to support state efforts.

In considering how to meet unprecedented needs in changing times, state and local leaders should also seek ways to leverage innovation that is currently underway in educator preparation. They could support communities already seeking localized solutions to existing shortages through **Grow-Your-Own (GYO) programs**, which recruit teacher candidates from local communities, including paraprofessionals, who are more likely to reflect local diversity and to continue teaching in their communities over the long term.¹⁴ To ameliorate its shortages, Tennessee is using CARES Act funding to expand GYO programs that train teachers for special education or English learner development along with an additional credential, such as elementary education. The funds will allow candidates to engage in paid paraprofessional roles during their preparation and experience strong clinical training alongside their credential coursework.

Transform educator learning opportunities to match current needs

The new skills needed by teachers and school leaders are many. It will be critically important for both incoming and current educators to learn how to engage productively in distance learning as well as blended and hybrid learning models. Educators also need to be increasingly knowledgeable about how to engender authentic learning supported by formative assessments, enable social and emotional learning, and engage in trauma-informed and healing-informed practice.

To accomplish this learning, we will need even more effective ways of **developing and sharing expertise across the profession**. Innovative teacher and leader preparation programs, such as those that are part of the [Educator Preparation Laboratory](#) (EdPrepLab) network—which is focused on supporting deeper learning and equity—are developing means to share their practices with each other and with other programs in the field through affiliation groups, site visits, webinars, a practice-based website, and partnerships with other organizations that reach the field. EdPrepLab members are also sharing strategies for [responding to the challenges of COVID-19](#), demonstrating how institutions can support each other in learning to meet emerging needs.

Similarly, educators in the field need means to learn from one another so that innovative practices developed in one school or classroom can travel to others. As districts figure out how to structure intense, effective professional learning and recognize those educators who can lead the way for others, [micro-credentialing](#) may become increasingly important. Micro-credentials recognize specific areas of skills teachers have acquired based on demonstrated performance, rather than seat time. These may range from areas such as distance learning or competencies in designing performance-based assessments to skills for supporting social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practice to more general skills of mentoring.

Some states are developing systems of micro-credentialing for both pre- and in-service educators. [Digital Promise](#) offers a wide range of micro-credentials for teachers and school leaders, including a number that are focused on concerns that are prominent as a result of the pandemic, such as securing digital access for students and working effectively with parents during distance learning. Districts may want to use micro-credentialing as a means to identify mentors and professional development leaders so that they can more quickly develop the expertise of colleagues in particular areas.

Support mentoring and new teacher roles

With the probability that teachers in the 2020–21 school year will face a mix of online, hybrid, and in-person instruction, and with some teachers unable to staff in-person classrooms for health reasons while schools adjust to social distancing arrangements, policymakers and school leaders will need to consider new teaching roles and arrangements. These new roles could apply to novice and experienced teachers as well as student-teachers and could be built around both the challenges and the emerging opportunities presented by COVID-19.

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For example, some veteran teachers who might be considering retirement due to health concerns associated with in-person teaching could, with strong professional development, support online instruction for the students who will not be able to return to school due to school designs or their own health considerations. These veteran teachers may also be able to provide mentoring and support for colleagues, including new teachers.¹⁵ New teachers whose student-teaching was altered by COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 may need additional support as they begin their careers, but they may also bring new perspectives and practices informed by their experiences, including an awareness of the equity issues raised by the pandemic.¹⁶ Student-teachers may be able to take on new roles, functioning as assets to districts by working with small groups of students through remote settings, bringing knowledge of technology to bear in supporting virtual instruction, and making unique contributions even as they themselves are learning.¹⁷

The most expert teachers can support other teachers in a variety of ways. [Long Beach Unified School District](#) in California capitalized on the opportunities provided by distance learning to enable students and teachers from across the district to tune in to the lessons offered by expert teachers so that they could learn both the content and the teaching strategies these teachers used.¹⁸ In some cases, as many as 2,000 students and dozens of teachers tuned in to watch lessons taught by teachers famous for their abilities to teach particular content or in particular ways. Some of these teachers will be livestreamed and video recorded during the coming school year as part of demonstration classes used both for professional development and student learning.

New models of professional expertise sharing, such as the [Instructional Leadership Corps](#) (ILC) in California, can be adapted to these needs as well. The ILC was created by the California Teachers Association, the National Board Resource Center at Stanford University, and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education to enable accomplished teachers to support professional

development for implementing new state standards in their home districts. This network of just over 250 teachers and administrators has served over 100,000 educators in more than half of the state's districts since 2014, [offering job-embedded learning to rave reviews from colleagues](#) and adapting their supports to contemporary needs.

Create collaboration time

Factory model school designs have meant that U.S. educators have had much more time during which they are responsible for students and much less time for collaboration than their counterparts in other countries. The [international TALIS surveys](#) found that U.S. middle school teachers teach more students on average and are responsible for student instruction about 8 hours more per week (40% more on average) than their peers internationally—ranking first in the world for instructional hours and near the bottom of all countries for planning and collaboration time. Thus, it is not surprising that U.S. teachers were less likely than the TALIS average teacher to report that they ever observe other teachers' classes and provide feedback, ever teach as a team, or ever take part in collaborative professional learning. Yet collaboration time is ranked by teachers as among the most important variables for their learning and retention in the profession, and research finds that those who work in collegial work settings grow more rapidly in effectiveness.¹⁹

In many districts this has changed overnight with distance learning, with more teaming and collaboration time organized among teachers than ever before. And many states and districts are thinking very differently about the use of time for the return in the fall. The notion of a 4-day teaching week, with a fifth day for collaborative planning among teachers, is widespread among the proposals for the coming year. As we consider innovative teaching and learning schedules, securing that time for U.S. teachers—the 8 hours on average that their international colleagues experience—should become part of the new normal.

As one example, in Iowa, the Johnston Community School District has released a [draft proposal](#) with Fridays reserved not only for deep cleaning but also for a full day of professional learning (see Figure 9.1). Wednesdays can serve a similar purpose if a day is needed for cleaning between two groups of students within the same week. These modified schedules present an unprecedented opportunity for educators' professional development and to enhance their ability to collaborate and deliver hybrid instruction. With a day every week designed for planning and collaboration, this change may quadruple the amount of time teachers previously had, when many districts offered professional learning only during monthly meetings on early-dismissal half-days.

Figure 9.1 Example A/B Schedule

A/B Week Rotations of Groups of Students

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	Group A (On-Site)	Group A (On-Site)	Group A (On-Site)	Group A (On-Site)	School Cleaning/ Teacher Planning/Office Hours/Professional Learning
	Group B (Remote)	Group B (Remote)	Group B (Remote)	Group B (Remote)	
Week 2	Group B (On-Site)	Group B (On-Site)	Group B (On-Site)	Group B (On-Site)	
	Group A (Remote)	Group A (Remote)	Group A (Remote)	Group A (Remote)	

Source: Johnston Community School District. (2020). [Return to Learn: Hybrid Learning Model](#) (Draft).

Take the long view

Policymakers can also use this time to plan ahead to ensure that, as resources come back into the system, they are spent to leverage greater teaching expertise. States (and countries) that have made substantial gains and closed achievement gaps have made systemic investments in educator quality.²⁰ There is no reason why preparation to make such investments cannot begin now, informed by the changing needs of today’s students and schools.

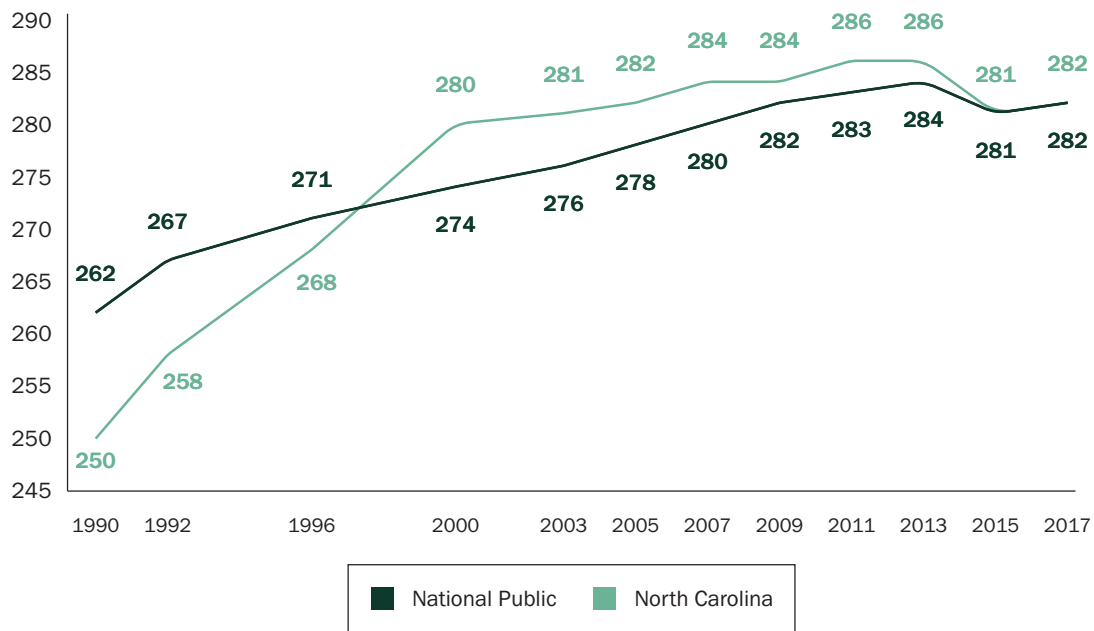
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California, which has transformed its system of educator certification and preparation program accreditation over the past decade, began this work at a low point in funding and capacity caused by the Great Recession of 2007–08. The state’s education budget **dropped 14%** from 2007–08 to 2010–11, and the teacher **workforce declined by almost 10%** by 2012. At the same time, the state’s Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) began looking ahead, launching a new **strategic plan** in December 2014 and collaborating with the California Department of Education and State Board of Education to produce a report, **Greatness by Design**, which laid out cross-agency priorities for improving the state’s educator quality system. For the remainder of the decade, the state has built upon this foundation, transforming state standards and expectations, implementing them through performance-based assessment and accreditation, and monitoring progress through new data systems and dashboards. As the state invested more money more equitably in its education system and moved to incorporate emphasis on deeper learning within a whole child framework, the transformations in preparation supported **strong gains in achievement and attainment for students**.

Other efforts, undertaken earlier, show similar results. For example, during the 1980s and 1990s, in response to desegregation litigation, Connecticut launched ambitious efforts to equalize educational opportunity while improving teaching. Its Education Enhancement Act coupled major increases in teacher salaries with higher standards for teacher education and licensing. Funds were allocated based on district need and the number of fully certified teachers, creating incentives for districts to recruit those who met the new certification standards and for individuals to meet those standards. With these incentives, plus service scholarships to underwrite preparation for high-need candidates, the state eliminated emergency credentials and attracted high-ability teacher candidates. Connecticut also invested deeply in training for principals and ongoing professional development for teachers, while it enacted new standards and performance-based assessments for students, focused on higher-order thinking skills. By 1998 Connecticut 4th-graders ranked first in the nation in reading and mathematics, and its 8th-graders topped the rankings in writing and science on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, despite increasing numbers of students from low-income families, students of color, and new immigrant students in its public schools during the decade. The achievement gap between White students and students of color decreased, and Connecticut's Black and Hispanic students substantially outperformed their counterparts nationally.

Similarly, during the 1980s and 1990s, North Carolina made substantial investments in its teaching force—increasing standards for entering teaching and school administration, requiring improvements in educator preparation, boosting salaries, and investing in high-quality mentoring and professional development. Importantly, the state invested in greater expertise throughout teachers' careers, authorizing a noted service scholarship program—the North Carolina Teaching Fellows—to recruit talented individuals and prepare them well for teaching while also enacting a 12% salary increase for teachers who achieved National Board Certification, an accomplishment that has been associated with greater teacher effectiveness. It also substantially upgraded principal training, including support for intensive internships, another move associated with greater effectiveness. During the 1990s, North Carolina posted the largest student achievement gains of any state in mathematics (see Figure 9.2) and realized substantial progress in reading. It was also the most successful state in the nation in narrowing the achievement gap between White students and students of color.

Figure 9.2
North Carolina Achievement Trends (NAEP 8th-Grade Mathematics Scores)



Source: Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). *Investing for student success: Lessons from state school finance reforms*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Based on data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). (n.d.). [Data tools: State profiles](#).

These efforts show that purposeful action to support teaching can make a major difference in the long-term learning opportunities of children.

Resources

- [EdPrepLab](#) (EdPrepLab Network). This network of leading-edge teacher and leader preparation programs supports research, policy, and practice aimed at helping practitioners use the science of learning and development to support equitable deeper learning. EdPrepLab offers a practice-based website that provides teaching resources and policy exemplars that enable improvements in educator preparation policy and practice, including strategies for [responding to the challenges of COVID-19](#).
- [Effective Teacher Professional Development](#) (Learning Policy Institute). This brief and report summarize seven widely shared features of effective teacher professional development (based on a review of methodologically rigorous studies) and can be used to guide professional development design and investments.
- [Micro-Credentials and COVID-19](#) (Digital Promise). This curated library of micro-credentials that can be earned outside of the classroom and without students can be used to help educators continue their professional learning during social distancing and beyond.

Endnotes

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