Strengthening Pathways of Professional Learning and Growth for Teachers and Principals
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In order to ensure that profession-ready teachers and principals advance from novices to accomplished professionals, strong professional learning and growth systems must be in place to provide comprehensive support and tailored learning opportunities for each stage of the career. As with other professions that provide scaffolded support and strong mentoring, this professional learning and growth system should foster a supportive school environment and be built on the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that characterize a teacher’s and principal’s practice at each stage of his or her career.

The responsibility of having a strong professional learning and growth system is made more critical given that current social, economic, and political realities require educators to accomplish greater academic goals with shrinking resources, analyze and use complex data, incorporate rapidly changing technology into instruction and learning, and prepare young people with higher-order thinking skills appropriate to a global society. In addition, the changing demographics of students means that educators must also be increasingly equipped with the skills and knowledge to work with diverse learners, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Research makes it clear that teachers, together with principals, are the most important school-based influences on student learning.1 Given the critical role that teachers and principals have in preparing every student regardless of income, race, disability, culture, English language status, or zip code to meet the demands of school, society, and the global economy, we must do a better job of systematically developing and sustaining a high-quality, professional educator workforce. Such a system will require a comprehensive vision, stakeholder and parent engagement, capacity building and resources for educators, and a commitment to collaboration.

While the specifics differ for teachers and principals, the Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that states and districts provide comprehensive and complementary professional learning and growth systems for teachers and principals that include:

**Professional Learning and Growth Systems for Teachers**

- Induction programs with comprehensive mentoring;
- Ongoing professional learning focused on capacity building and collaboration;
- Evaluation that provides feedback for professional growth;
- Supported pathways for career progressions including board certification and leadership opportunities;
- Appropriate measures to provide information about how professional learning is impacting student outcomes, school climate, and family engagement; and
- Strengthening cultural and linguistic competence and responsiveness.

Educators, like all professionals, learn throughout their careers, and the types of learning and support needed differ depending on the stage of their career they are in, their own individual professional goals and challenges, and their local context and priorities. Learning and growth for teachers therefore must be supported as linked systems in which induction, professional learning, evaluation, and career pathways are connected and interdependent.

**Establish or Strengthen Induction Programs for Beginning Teachers**

Comprehensive mentoring and induction programs are critical for reducing teacher turnover and strengthening new teacher effectiveness.2 Well-trained and supported mentors are an especially important aspect of comprehensive induction programs. According to a May 2015 Institute for Education Sciences (IES) report, beginning teachers with mentors stay in the profession longer than teachers without mentors.3 Effective induction programs should include the following elements:4

1. A focus on building the skills and knowledge of individual educators as well as the collective capacity of the educator workforce;
2. Systematic processes for providing feedback designed to guide teachers’ growth;
3. Rigorous and diverse mentor selection, with a preference toward teachers with demonstrated excellence in teaching and facilitating the professional learning of colleagues, and mentors matched by grade level and subject area;
4. High-quality training and ongoing support for mentors;
5. Common planning time or regularly scheduled collaboration for mentor and mentee; and
6. Resources such as research-based teaching standards and teacher portfolio processes to guide educator learning.

Ensure Professional Learning is Collaborative, Continuous, and Teacher-Led

The Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that states and school districts provide teachers with the time and support they need for ongoing, team-based, job-embedded professional learning.5 Building the knowledge and skills of educators, as well as professional development that strengthens teachers’ cultural competencies, can result in improved efficacy for all teachers, and is especially critical for teachers negotiating changing student demographics, standards, assessments, or technologies. Technology can increasingly enable ongoing relevant professional learning with tools that can provide supports ranging from just-in-time resources to online communities for discussing ongoing practice issues.6 OECD studies show that countries that intentionally focus on supporting and providing protected time for teacher collaboration achieve more skillful teaching and stronger student achievement.7 Yet international comparisons reveal that while U.S. teachers work more hours per week than their global counterparts, U.S. teachers have much less time in their schedules for planning, collaboration, and professional learning. In fact, research from the National Center for Literacy Education shows that the percentage of teachers with protected time for collaboration actually declined significantly between 2009 and 2012.8 Research finds that the most effective collaboration is based on ongoing shared inquiry, is grounded in evidence of classroom practice, and is measured against a clear, shared definition of success such as the standards for professional development developed by the organization Learning Forward.9

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Support Evaluation Systems that Foster Growth and Development.

The Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that teacher evaluation systems be part of a larger professional learning and growth system that supports teachers in moving from the novice to accomplished level and is used for the purpose of fostering feedback and reflective practice. States should improve their evaluation systems with collaboration from all stakeholders, teachers, paraprofessionals, and organizations that represent these professionals. Collaboration with peers can be an integral component of a shared accountability system. Yet international comparisons show that U.S. teachers receive less of the type of feedback that research shows is most useful for improving practice: feedback from peers. Evaluation components should be open to opportunities for development that leads to improved student learning and teaching skills. In rare cases, teachers not able to meet agreed-upon professional growth targets should be counseled out of the profession.

Provide a Pathway and Support for Career Progressions.

Teaching is a continuously developing and evolving profession, as new standards, resources, and technologies create new opportunities for developing practice and new roles within the career. Career ladder opportunities should support the development of specific skills, team leaders, and facilitators, and other leadership roles (detailed in Coalition’s Leadership document). A variety of roles within the career ladder opportunities will also allow the instructional expertise of accomplished teachers to lead professional learning for their peers and to strengthen the support new teachers receive so they can develop into accomplished practitioners.

Professional Learning and Growth Systems for Principals

Effective school principals influence student achievement by supporting and developing effective teachers, managing curriculum in ways that promote student learning, and creating a productive school culture that builds collaboration and organizational processes. Therefore, the systems that support principals’ growth and development need to be comprehensive, aligned, and supported by policies and resources.

Establish or Strengthen Mentoring and Induction Programs for Principals.

The Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that states and districts establish a strong mentoring and induction program for principals during their residency program and through the first three years of a principal’s career. Programs should be integrated into the professional development continuum, based on high standards and expectations for performance, and be supported by strong commitments and clearly defined roles for stakeholders. Further, they should be based on evidence of what works, including capacity building favoring the transference of knowledge through mentor coaching relationships; tight matches between the expertise, needs, leadership style, and school experience of coaches and protégés; and sufficient training and resources for coaches. Innovative programs for mentoring principals include university-district partnerships that incorporate clinical internships with strong mentoring relationships, collaborations with school districts for high quality placements, and cohort groups engaged in studying a more coherent and more relevant curriculum.

Support Ongoing Professional Learning and Capacity Building.

Principals and assistant principals must be afforded professional development opportunities that support their role as instructional leaders so that they have the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to mentor and coach teachers to build their capacity to improve, as well as training on the evaluation system and rubric they will use. Collaborative, experienced-based professional learning, such as cohort groups, site visits with other principals, and professional learning communities, provide effective training and support.

Ensure Principal Evaluation Systems Build Capacity.

Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that state or district principal evaluation systems be created in collaboration with principals and teachers throughout the individual principal’s experience and grade-level responsibilities, and be tied to professional growth plans. The principal’s capacity to address essential issues related to curriculum and instruction, and support and improve the instructional practice of their schools, is strongly dependent upon effective teamwork. Organizing the school leadership team around the 6 domains of professional leadership prioritizes the impact of the individual principal’s leadership style, and school experience of coaches and protégés. An ideal evaluation system would give equal consideration to the six domains of professional leadership prioritized by the research and weight them appropriately with regard to the immediate needs of the school, the context of the learning community, and the level of authority of an individual principal.

Strengthen Principals’ Skills and Capacity in Cultivating Effective Teams

The Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that state or district principal evaluation systems include comprehensive support structures and resources for professional development, reflective practice, induction support for early-career principals, personalized professional growth plans, and advanced certification/recognition for accomplished practice. An ideal evaluation system would give equal consideration to the six domains of professional leadership prioritized by the research and weight them appropriately with regard to the immediate needs of the school, the context of the learning community, and the level of authority of an individual principal.


17 A number of tools for districts and principals interested in building professional learning teams and promoting trust within schools can be found here.
Participating Organizations

National Organizations

- Alliance for Excellent Education
- Alliance for Multilingual Multicultural Education
- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- American Association of People with Disabilities
- American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- American Council on Rural Special Education
- American Federation of Teachers
- The ARC
- ASPIRA Association
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities
- Autism National Committee
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network
- Center for Teaching Quality
- Citizen Action of New York
- Citizens for Effective Schools
- Coalition for Community Schools
- Communities for Excellent Public Schools
- Council for Exceptional Children
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
- Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund Inc.
- Easter Seals
- Education Law Center
- Educators Rising
- FairTest, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
- First Focus Campaign for Children
- Gamaliel Foundation
- Helen Keller National Center
- Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
- Latino Elected and Appointed Officials
- Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Leadership for the Common Good
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- Learning Disabilities Association of America
- Movement Strategy Center
- NAACP
- NAAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
- National Alliance for Black School Educators
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of School Psychologists
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- National Center for Learning Disabilities
- National Center on Deaf-Blindness
- National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future
- National Council for Educating Black Children
- National Council of Teachers of English
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
- National Disability Rights Network
- National Down Syndrome Congress
- National Down Syndrome Society
- National Education Association
- National Indian Education Association
- National Latino Education Research & Policy Project
- National Network of State Teachers of the Year
- National Opportunity to Learn Campaign
- National Urban League
- New Teacher Center
- Opportunity Action
- Phi Delta Kappa International
- Parents Across America
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills
- Progressive States Action
- Public Advocacy for Kids
- Public Advocates Inc.
- Rural School and Community Trust
- School Social Work Association of America
- South East Asia Resource Action Center
- TASH - Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities
- Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
- TESOL International Association
- United Cerebral Palsy
- United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries
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State and Local Organizations

- Abbott Leadership Institute, Newark, New Jersey
- Action Now, Illinois
- Action Now, North Carolina
- ACTION United
- Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)
- Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)

Arkansas Community Organizations
- Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network
- Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Chicago
- California Association for Bilingual Education
- California Latino School Boards Association
- Californians for Justice
- Californians Together
- Campaign for Quality Education
- Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning Coalition for Educational Justice
- Citizen Action of New York
- Delawareans for Social and Economic Justice
- Educate Our State
- Education Voters Pennsylvania
- Grow Your Own Illinois
- Inner City Struggle
- Justice Matters
- Legal Advocates for Children and Youth
- Montgomery County Education Forum
- Parent-U-Turn
- Parents for Unity
- RYSE Center
- San Francisco Teacher Residency
- Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education
- Young Voices Providence, Rhode Island
- Youth On Board, Somerville, Massachusetts
- Youth Together

About the Coalition for Teaching Quality

The Coalition for Teaching Quality represents a broad cross-section of more than 100 local, state, and national organizations representing civil rights, disability, parent, student, community, and education groups. Formed in reaction to a provision of federal law that allowed teachers in training to be identified as “highly qualified” and concentrated in low-income, high-need schools with diverse learners, this group has developed a new, comprehensive framework for teaching quality that will allow the nation to put a fully prepared and effective educator in every classroom.