A photograph of a grand, ornate legislative chamber, likely the U.S. Capitol, showing rows of wooden desks and a large mural on the wall.

# MODERNIZING THE TEACHING WORKFORCE FOR LEARNER-CENTERED, COMPETENCY-BASED, EQUITY-ORIENTED EDUCATION

STATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

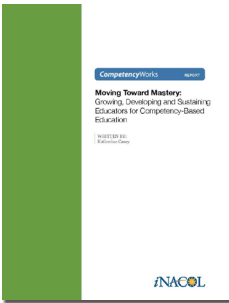
## Introduction

Taking action to realize a new vision for a modernized teaching profession should be a priority for any leader invested in improving K-12 public education. State policymakers can enact enabling policies to encourage and support redesigning teacher preparation, learning, and advancement in alignment with 21st-century student learning and workforce needs. They can also activate a shared vision of preparing a diverse and sustainable education workforce—moving toward competency-based education systems—designed for each and every learner to thrive in the future.

## Issue

Transforming K-12 education systems to meet the new economic, civic, and cultural demands of our global society requires a modern teacher workforce. Specifically, it requires a teacher workforce with the knowledge, skills, and systems of supports to be successful in student-centered, competency-based, and diverse learning environments. This brief will:

- ▶ Articulate a future-ready vision for the teaching profession;
- ▶ Frame the role state policymakers can play in advancing toward this vision; and
- ▶ Describe state policy priorities that can modernize teaching:
  - Convening a state task force to craft a unifying vision and roadmap;
  - Increasing diversity of the educator workforce;
  - Preparing teachers for learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented education;
  - Redesigning teacher licensure and credentialing; and
  - Building balanced systems of assessments that enable learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented teaching



## Background

In late 2018, iNACOL published a report called [Moving Toward Mastery: Growing, Developing, and Sustaining Educators for Competency-Based Education](#). The report describes what it could look like to align teaching with the opportunities and demands of a 21st-century competency-based education system, reimagining multiple aspects of the teaching profession from pre-service training through retirement. Specifically, the report provides a vision for the future state of the teaching profession centered around three core concepts: equity-oriented, learning-centered, and lifelong.

## A FUTURE STATE VISION FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION



### **EQUITY-ORIENTED**

The teaching profession is designed at all levels to ensure that all students succeed and opportunity gaps close.

“Educators create multicultural and inclusive learning environments and are members of multicultural and inclusive professional communities. They investigate and address their biases and work in partnership with the community to disrupt systemic inequity. Competency-based education... can be a powerful strategy for equity when it allows educators, leaders, and communities to collaborate and provide learners with the right supports at the right time, foster learner voice and deepen learning and create systems of transparency and continuous improvement needed to work toward success for all.”



### **LEARNING-CENTERED**

The teaching profession is designed at all levels to ensure that teachers continually improve in their practice.

“Development is a process, not a destination. Learning spans the course of a lifetime, and professional development spans the course of an educator’s career as they try, test, and extend new practices that help them improve student learning and advance equity. Like learners, educators pursue learning progressions along competency-based pathways and are met with timely, differentiated supports. For students and educators alike, teaching and learning are grounded in meaningful demonstrations of learning rather than seat time.”



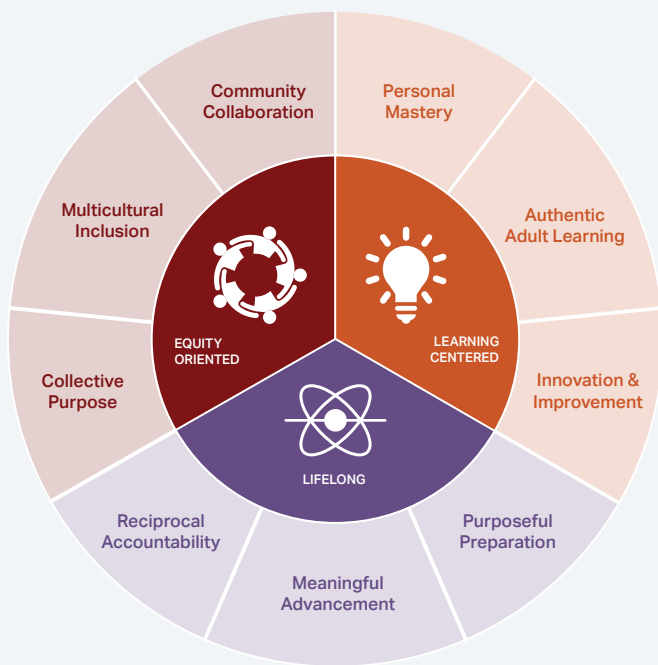
### **LIFELONG**

The teaching profession is designed at all levels to ensure that teachers are supported, respected, and sustained over the course of their careers.

“Educators are supported and trusted as respected members of a respected profession. They are meaningfully and adequately prepared for the roles they will take on, they have opportunity to grow and specialize in their careers, and they are evaluated in ways that support improvement and promote advancement. Making teaching a lifelong profession means re-evaluating, reimagining, and realigning every phase of a career in education from preparation through retirement. And, it means challenging core assumptions that have been used to structure the teaching profession in its current state.”

Policymakers have long known that teachers play pivotal roles in driving student achievement. In fact, teachers can have two to three times the impact on student outcomes as any other school-related factor.<sup>1</sup> And yet, the urgency for change is not just that the nation needs more talented teachers in our classrooms. The nation needs teachers with different capabilities than those that were required for the profession when it was conceived and designed in the industrial age.

States, districts, and schools across the country are seeking to better prepare students for an increasingly complex workforce — one that relies almost universally on some form of postsecondary education,<sup>2</sup> requires continuous learning and innovation to keep pace with changing industries and demands workers who can find solutions to systemic global problems. Many are, therefore, transitioning toward a system of education that focuses not only on basic literacy and numeracy, but also on more complex outcomes like systems thinking, applied problem-solving, social and collaborative skills, and civic and social awareness.<sup>3</sup> **Preparing students to achieve new outcomes requires developing teachers with new skill sets.**



## CHANGE STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMING TEACHING

Moving toward this future state will require aligning expectations for teacher knowledge and skill to 21st-century student outcomes, as well as increasing and aligning systems of supports at all levels to help teachers meet these new standards. Furthermore, it requires connecting separate silos — higher education; K-12 and federal, state, and local governance — to create a continuum of supports from pre-service training through retirement.

*Moving Toward Mastery* articulates 15 change strategies to help education leaders chart this transformation process. Executing these strategies will take shared vision and coordinated action by leaders at all levels, from the classroom to state capitals and governors' offices to Congress. Yet, state policymakers are best positioned to bring all parties together to begin the necessary steps to align systems across their states.

## The Role for State Policy

State policymakers can play an important role in modernizing educator development systems, including shaping preparation pathways and approaches and licensure and credentialing requirements. Systems of assessments, learning, and supports that are fit for purpose will create more conducive conditions for teaching in student-centered learning environments.

At the state level, teaching is touched by interrelated policies, regulations, and practices overseen by multiple entities: policymakers, state departments of education, higher education and boards of regents, professional standards and certification boards, local superintendents, labor leaders, and others. **The most effective and sustainable pathways to a future-ready teacher workforce require approaches that recognize these interdependencies, fostering collaboration and phasing implementation.** While state policymakers alone cannot drive all changes necessary to shift the conditions for teaching and learning, they can play important roles initiating and coordinating collaborative approaches and enacting targeted policies.

State policymakers are encouraged to approach changes related to the teaching profession as part of a coherent policymaking approach. For ideas about the relationships between policy related to teaching and other related policy areas, please see the [iNACOL 2019 State Policy Priorities](#)<sup>4</sup> and [Current to Future State: Issues and Action Steps for State Policy to Support Personalized, Competency-Based Learning](#).<sup>5</sup>

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES



This brief identifies five policy priorities and articulates specific policy strategies and actions for each:

1. Convene a state task force to craft a unifying vision and roadmap.
2. Increase the diversity of the educator workforce.
3. Prepare teachers for learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented education.
4. Redesign teacher licensure and credentialing.
5. Build balanced systems of assessments that enable learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented teaching.

These priorities and recommendations describe what state policymakers can do to enable and enact the future state vision described in *Moving Toward Mastery: Growing, Developing, and Sustaining Educators for Competency-Based Education*.

## State Policy Priorities and Actions

**Convene a state task force to craft a unifying vision and roadmap.**

- Convene a statewide task force on modernizing teaching.

**Increase the diversity of the educator workforce.**

- Increase access and affordability for teacher preparation pathways.
- Prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in the educator-leader workforce.

**Prepare teachers for learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented education.**

- Incentivize innovation in higher education.
- Leverage pilot learnings to shift policy and practice.

**Redesign teacher licensure and credentialing.**

- Define competency-based pathways for teacher learning, development, and advancement.

**Build balanced systems of assessments that enable learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented teaching.**

- Create balanced systems of assessments.
- Build capacity for assessment literacy.

# RECOMMENDATION #1: CONVENE A STATE TASK FORCE TO CRAFT A UNIFYING VISION AND ROADMAP

*“State leaders, in cooperation with higher education and districts, set vision, direction and outcomes that guide the development of new teacher pathways, the redesign of certification and credentialing and the balance of responsibility across levels of the larger system.” (Casey, 2018, p.67)*

**P**olicymakers play pivotal roles in convening, coordinating, and supporting planning and implementation efforts. While change itself must engage and empower local leaders, educators, and communities, it often takes state leadership to initiate and coordinate change processes. This is particularly true in the context of transforming teaching systems, as they are shaped by multiple influencers — state policy and state departments of education, local education agencies, labor unions, higher education, local governments, communities, and more – and thus required coordinated, collaborative approaches.

State leaders are encouraged to prioritize inclusivity and intersectionality in their approaches by including stakeholders at all levels, proactively engaging voices that are not often engaged in decision-making processes and taking a systems approach that focuses on the relationships between policies, regulations, and practice across multiple sectors.

## POLICY ACTIONS

### Convene a Statewide Task Force on Modernizing Teaching.

Comprehensive change starts with a unifying vision. State policymakers can support a coordinated change effort by convening a statewide task force to articulate a common vision for future-ready teaching, in direct relationship to the state vision for 21st-century learning and learner outcomes. Key components of a statewide vision might include:

- A graduate profile — an articulation of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for student success in college, career, and civic life beyond secondary school;
- A teacher profile that describes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to support student attainment of the graduate profile;
- Standards for professional practice — including licensure and certification requirements that reflect the teacher profile;
- Quality criteria for teacher preparation programs — in alignment with standards for professional practice and best practice in adult learning; and
- An articulation of statewide teacher workforce needs (e.g., specializations, content areas, and diversity).

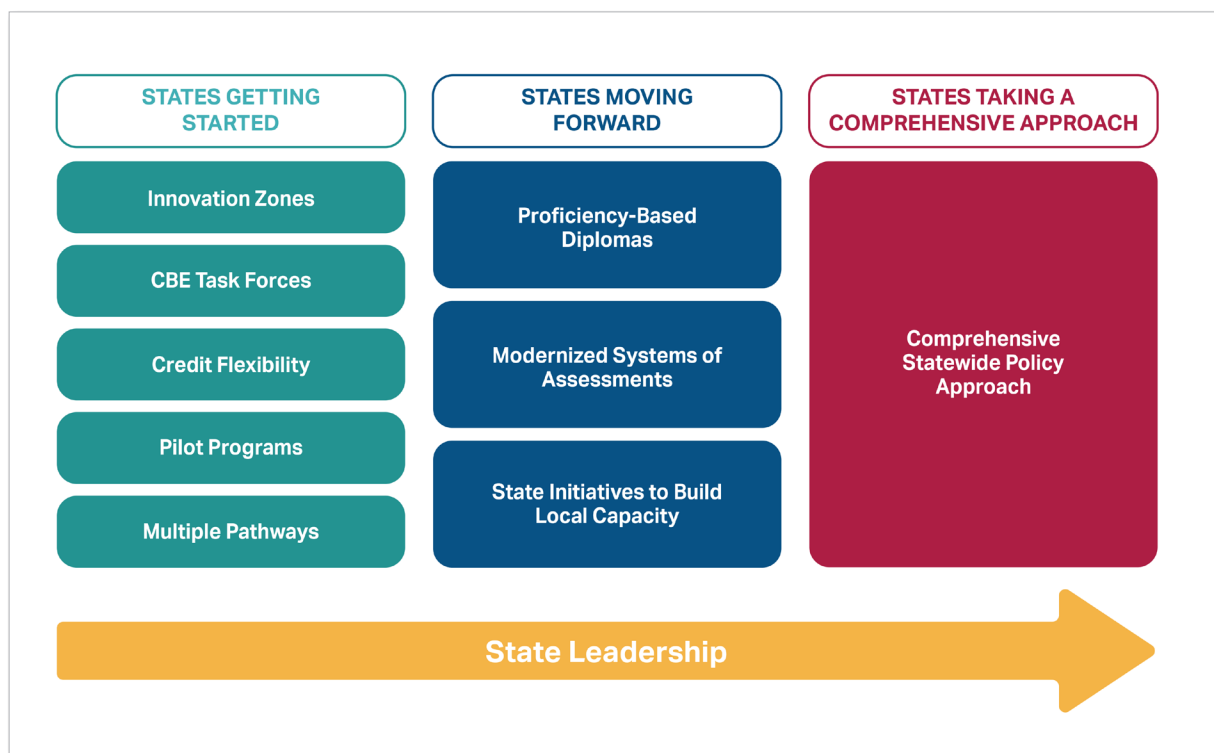
Having identified a future state vision for professional practice, state leaders can audit their current policy and practice landscape relative to this vision. This process will identify areas of alignment and potential barriers within state policy, teacher preparation programs, professional boards, statewide data systems, and other areas of policy and practice that shape teaching. When the current-to-future state relationship is clear, leaders can create a roadmap for change.

This will mean:

- Identifying major change phases;
- Creating plans for coordinating changes in different sectors; and
- Creating a sustainable platform for ongoing collaboration between leaders in K-12, higher education, labor, policy, and other areas.

Ideally, a roadmap will clarify the roles for state policymakers in different phases of change. Early on, the policy changes necessary may be those that allow adequate flexibility for innovation and learning. Later, policy change may be necessary to redesign systems of licensure, accreditation, assessment, and evaluation. A roadmap can be useful in illuminating different roles for policy and policymakers at different stages in coordination with leaders from other sectors. iNACOL's report, *Current to Future State: Issues and Action Steps for State Policy to Support Personalized, Competency-Based Learning*, offers a continuum of entry points for state policy at different stages of development (shown in Figure 1) and may be useful to state leaders looking to define possible policy actions and priorities.

**Figure 1:** A continuum of entry points for state policy at different stages of development



## Lessons from the Field

Virginia hosted a series of statewide meetings that began with defining a “Profile of a Virginia Teacher” — what teachers needed to know and be able to do – to align with Profile of a Virginia Graduate. This clarity allowed them to audit and eventually align multiple areas of existing practice, including standards for professional practice, higher education programs, licensure requirements, and others. The following is an excerpt from Virginia’s case study in *Moving Toward Mastery* (p. 57).

Several years into a statewide transformation, the Commonwealth of Virginia is taking compelling new strides to increase educator and leader capacity for personalized, deeper learning models. In 2016 the state passed House Bill 895 and Senate Bill 336, which led to the development of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate. The “Profile” updates Virginia’s statewide graduation requirements, opening the way for competency-based and personalized learning. These shifts accelerated previous innovation efforts, including high school program innovation and performance-based assessments. Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national leader in student-centered learning, is providing Virginia leaders with ongoing support as they implement these initiatives. Stephanie Krauss, Director of Special Projects at JFF, describes early stages of the work this way, “All the changes were happening, but there was an opportunity to have them be better aligned and mutually advancing. We have had the privilege of partnering with the state as they look to link the various pieces together comprehensively.” This birds-eye view led state leaders to an important realization:

*“We were talking about what students needed, and we realized that it would be unfair to retool graduation requirements and hold teachers and principals accountable, without providing them with additional support and training. State leaders are starting to think differently about pre-service preparation and in-service supports, accreditation and professional standards.”*

**Stephanie Krauss**, Jobs for the Future

## RECOMMENDATION #2: INCREASE THE DIVERSITY OF THE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

*“There is ample evidence that students of color benefit from learning with educators who reflect their personal and cultural identities. While the families who attend America’s public schools are increasingly non-white, the vast majority of educators remain white. This gap is an ethical issue and a practical one; we believe that learners of color deserve the opportunity to learn with and from educators of color, and we know that they will do better in school and in life when they do. Competency-based systems can deepen equity-focused practice by placing priority on hiring, supporting and retaining educators who reflect and relate to the students they teach and creating inclusive professional cultures for all educators and staff.”*

(Casey, 2018, p. 25-26)

A teaching workforce that reflects the diversity and life experiences of today’s communities and schools is an important part of closing achievement and opportunity gaps and ensuring all students are prepared to succeed in postsecondary education and beyond.<sup>6</sup> The evidence is strong. Learners experience fewer disciplinary incidents with educators of the same racial identity.<sup>7,8</sup> Educators of color are shown to form strong and trusting relationships with students of color,<sup>9</sup> which contributes to deeper learning. And, educators of color often serve as advocates for students and families of color, helping them navigate and succeed in public education systems.<sup>10</sup> Diverse leadership teams in educational institutions increase equity and lead to better decisions.<sup>11</sup> Education organizations that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as mutually reinforcing practices and a belief that DEI will lead to improvements across many domains within the organization, are more likely to foster changes that achieve more diverse applicant pools and staff.

### POLICY ACTIONS

#### **Increase Access and Affordability for Teacher and Leader Preparation Pathways.**

Many factors contribute to the disproportionate whiteness of our nation’s teaching force, not all of which have easy policy solutions. Nonetheless, state leaders can support progress by reducing specific barriers to diversity and representation in both traditional and non-traditional teacher and leader preparation pathways. For example, the costs of tuition and loan repayment can act as barriers for accessing high-quality teacher and leader preparation pathways. Specific actions policymakers can take toward achieving the goal of diversifying the teacher workforce include:

- ▶ Establishing policies that increase access and affordability to higher education,
- ▶ Addressing access and affordability for graduate educational teaching and leadership programs, and
- ▶ Engaging with stakeholders of both traditional and non-traditional teacher and leader preparation programs to identify and address other systemic barriers to access and affordability.

#### **Prioritize Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Educator-Leader Workforce.**

Diversification of the educator-leader workforce will have the greatest impact when it goes hand-in-hand with equity and inclusion. According to Padamsee and Crowe, “Diversity, equity, and inclusion are strongly tied to staff retention, particularly for people of color” (2017, p. 4). Educators become more effective with practice, making retention of a diverse workforce that reflects the students it serves a critical goal for state policymakers. Regardless of their ethnic or racial background, staff members “who experience their organizations as diverse, equitable, and inclusive report that they are more likely to remain with the organization three years into the future” (p. 5). Furthermore, DEI-committed organizations require a culture of organizational transparency and accountability, which leads to better decision-making and results for students.

Although state policymakers do not directly influence districts’ and teacher preparation programs’ human capital strategies, they can encourage and support a focus on DEI through some of the following actions:

## POLICY ACTIONS

- Use the “bully pulpit” to communicate the importance of DEI practices in the educator-leader workforce for student achievement.
- Support the use of specific practices that advance DEI, such as by prioritizing state funding and through technical assistance on district DEI initiatives.
- Engage stakeholders to examine any gaps in educator workforce data that impede progress toward DEI (e.g., transparency on staff turnover by race/ethnicity and pay equity by race/ethnicity).<sup>12</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION #3: PREPARE TEACHERS FOR LEARNER-CENTERED, COMPETENCY-BASED, EQUITY-ORIENTED EDUCATION

*“Preparation programs can be a significant lever for scale and quality in competency-based education if they reimagine ‘preparation’ to align with the broader set of competencies needed to support student learning and increase equity. Doing so will require reimagining what is taught, how it is taught, and to whom it is accessible.” (Casey, 2018, p. 54)*

**C**reating a future-ready teaching workforce requires preparing teachers for learner-centered and competency-based education systems, which entails different knowledge, skills, and dispositions than teaching in traditional classrooms. While changes to teacher preparation are predominantly overseen by institutions of higher education (IHE) and boards of regents, they can be influenced by state policymakers. State policymakers can also influence change in higher education with legislation that creates room for and spurs innovation.

## POLICY ACTIONS

### Incentivize Innovation in Higher Education.

Preparing teachers to lead in learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented environments will require significant changes in pre-service preparation and ongoing professional development. States can help mobilize these changes by catalyzing innovation in higher education. Specifically, state leaders can spur progress by taking actions like funding innovation pilots and regional partnerships between institutes of higher education and local K-12 education agencies. While parameters around innovation should be broad enough to unleash discovery, they should also encourage innovations which align with states’ newly defined expectations for teacher success, quality criteria for teacher preparation, and the purpose, outcomes, and learning approaches of learner-centered, competency-based education. Innovations include:

- Prioritizing educator development approaches that **build teacher knowledge and skill in areas which align to learner-centered learning and expanded student outcomes** like assessment literacy and culturally competent practice, which are two particularly vital competencies;
- Prioritizing innovations that integrate **adult learning modalities aligned to research and the learning sciences** like clinical practice, problem-based and project-based learning, mentorship and induction supports, and performance assessment;
- Prioritizing innovations that **diversify professional pathways** like micro-credentials and advanced certificates and degrees to develop school and systems leaders for learner-centered, personalized, competency-based education; and
- Prioritizing innovations that help **modernize professional learning and development**. Contrary to the common assumption that higher education’s role ends with pre-service training, higher education can play a role in helping districts and schools to modernize professional development: integrating research on cognitive science; reflecting principles of learner-centered, competency-based, and equity-oriented learning; and focusing on developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to teach in these environments.

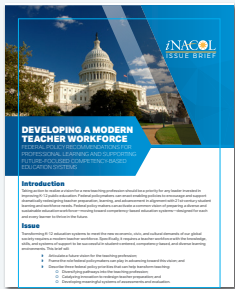


## POLICY ACTIONS

### Leverage Pilot Learnings to Shift Policy and Practice.

Learnings from innovation pilots are most useful when they are studied, shared, and leveraged over time, with the dual goals of spreading effective practice and shifting state policy to support effective practice. State legislative and administrative leaders can dedicate resources, including people, data systems, and funding for research activities and capacity-building, to enable this learning. Investments in learning and research increase returns on investment in innovation, ensuring that dollars spent on pilots can be leveraged for coordinated statewide improvement. Specific actions and activities might include:

- ▶ Funding the state's education agency to form a team focused on facilitating networked learning, capacity-building, and continuous improvement in innovation pilot sites;
- ▶ Establishing data systems adequate to study and compare the impacts of higher education innovations over time; and
- ▶ Identifying opportunities to enact policies that remove barriers to effective practice and/or enable effective practice more broadly.



For more information on federal policy recommendations, see the issue brief: [\*Developing a Modern Teacher Workforce: Federal Policy Recommendations for Professional Learning and Supporting Future-Focused, Competency-Based Education Systems.\*](#)

## RECOMMENDATION #4: REDESIGN TEACHER LICENSURE AND CREDENTIALING

*“At the state level, leaders can craft policy that aligns educator [licensure and] credentials with expectations for student outcomes and professional practice in competency-based systems. Ideally, this means aligning credentials with educator competency frameworks, creating specialized credentials that reflect the specific knowledge and skills needed for specialized roles educators can play in competency-based systems, working with higher education leaders to ensure preparation programs are developing these knowledge and skills.” (Casey, 2018, p. 60)*

**T**eacher licensure and credentialing requirements drive multiple parts of professional learning systems: what teacher preparation programs teach, how they are organized, how teachers engage in ongoing learning and development, and how they advance and specialize in their careers. Leaders can help prepare and develop teachers to succeed in learner-centered, competency-based environments by:

- ▶ Aligning licensure and credentialing requirements to the educator knowledge and skills required for learner-centered, competency-based education, such as assessment literacy, instructional design, and personalization; and
- ▶ Aligning licensure and credentialing processes to learner-centered, competency-based approaches such as using performance assessment and advancing based on demonstrated mastery.

The role for policymakers in this work will vary by state. In most states, teacher licensing and credentialing requirements are governed by a combination of state policy and standards which are determined by professional boards, including professional standards boards, licensure boards, and boards of regents overseeing IHEs. State leaders can determine the exact interplay of policy and professional practice governance that shape licensure and credentialing in their context; in almost all cases, enacting change will require collaboration between legislators, members of professional boards, teachers, and other stakeholder groups.

## POLICY ACTIONS

### Define Competency-Based Pathways for Teacher Learning, Development, and Advancement.

Teachers do not enter the classroom on day one knowing all they need to know; they learn and refine practices over time. Many traditional systems provide teachers with an initial license to enter the classroom and then require basic recertification at set intervals. In contrast, personalized, competency-based systems would aim to establish clear expectations for what teachers need to know and be able to do at different stages of development, including but not limited to initial licensure. Ideally, these expectations would not be time-based but would be based on teachers' demonstration of competency. Such approaches to licensure and certification could help teachers deepen mastery and specialize in areas of interest as they advance. For state policymakers, actions to move toward a professional learning and development approach that is a more competency-based system might include:

Working with professional standards boards to:

- ▶ Align licensure and credentialing requirements to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required in learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented education;
  - Define multitiered licensure frameworks that articulate increasing levels of teacher knowledge and skill;
  - Define what it means to demonstrate competency at all levels; and
  - Provide opportunities for teachers to earn credentials for increasing specialization and demonstrated skill sets, especially in areas that align with visions for student learning (e.g., STEM) and those that align with anticipated workforce demands (e.g., dual-language certification). These can include micro-credentials and other means of recognizing ongoing professional growth.
- ▶ Requiring meaningful demonstrations of competency for teachers to attain licensure and advance along professional pathways. Performance tasks required for licensure at multiple points along pathways could include demonstrations in clinical practice, student teaching, portfolios of evidence, and other evidence of competency.

## Lessons from the Field

Many states have already enacted two- to three-tier licensure systems already, while others still rely on one tier. Information about states' licensure systems can be found at the website of the [National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification](#). For most states, there remains opportunity to design systems of licensure that support ongoing learning, development, and advancement. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) offers a summary of effective policies titled [Tiered Licensure: Connecting Educator Effectiveness Policies](#).<sup>13</sup> Examples of recommended practices and state examples include the following:

- ▶ Include performance measures as requirements for licensure in addition to inputs (professional development hours, years in the profession, or degrees). Wisconsin requires teachers to submit a portfolio and videos of their teaching, which are reviewed by a three-member team prior to advancement. More information can be found [here](#).
- ▶ Create multi-tiered systems that include multiple pathways for advancement. Ohio has a four-tier licensure system that promotes advancement from a Resident Educator to a Lead Professional Educator. Advanced licenses require performance demonstrations. More information can be found [here](#).

# RECOMMENDATION #5: BUILD BALANCED SYSTEMS OF ASSESSMENTS THAT ENABLE LEARNER-CENTERED, COMPETENCY-BASED, EQUITY-ORIENTED TEACHING

*"A competency-based system uses assessment as and for learning. Assessment is part of a student's learning cycle, and it supports more effective learning and teaching: by providing educators and learners with data to adjust instruction and supports. Becoming a learning-centered profession requires meaningful systems of assessments and evaluation for learners and educators alike, 2018." (Casey, p. 43)*

**B**alanced systems of assessments promote deeper learning and improved outcomes. One way they can do this is by supporting good teaching; balanced systems of assessment provide teachers and students with timely and transparent data about where students are in their learning, allowing teachers to meet students where they are and support students' ongoing development. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows states flexibility to design systems of assessments that could better support students' learning while also meeting requirements to report on achievement outcomes.

## Defining Balanced Systems of Assessments

According to Chattergoon & Marion (2016),<sup>14</sup> balanced systems of assessments meet the following criteria:

- ▶ Coherent systems: "The assessments in a system must be compatible with the models of how students learn content and skills over time" and "curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be aligned to ensure that the entire system is working toward a common set of learning goals;"
- ▶ A well-articulated theory of action that articulates how each part of the system relates to the others. In other words, what purpose does the system as a whole serve, what different needs does it meet for different stakeholders, and how does it meet them? "A set of assessments, even if they cohere, will not fulfill the intended purposes if the information never reaches the intended user;" and
- ▶ Assessment efficiency means that systems are providing stakeholders with the full range of information that it is intended to provide. "For example, if a state wants to give educators information to help them adjust instruction, its assessments must be tied to the curriculum that is being used. These assessments should in turn yield timely, detailed information about the knowledge and skills being assessed at the local level."

## POLICY ACTIONS

### Create Balanced Systems of Assessments.

State legislators can leverage new federal flexibilities within ESSA to design balanced systems of assessment that support learner-centered, competency-based education. Working in partnership with assessment experts, legislators can explore and implement assessment practices that include multiple measures, balance performance and growth, measure student learning at levels below and above grade level to better meet students where they are, and permit the usage of multiple assessments over time to create a summative determination of student mastery. Under ESSA, the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) opens up an opportunity for states to design balanced systems of assessments that—when aligned to standards, curriculum and commensurate investment in educator capacity and assessment literacy—promote deeper learning and help schools focus on developing expanded sets of 21st-century outcomes. While IADA is not the only pathway for states to redesign assessments, it is one avenue for states wishing to pilot new approaches.

## POLICY ACTIONS

### Build Capacity for Assessment Literacy.

Balanced systems of assessments are tools. Like any tool, assessments are powerful when people and institutions have the capacity to use them effectively. Assessment literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and systems associated with designing, selecting, interpreting, and using high-quality assessments to improve student learning. In the context of student-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented learning, this means ensuring that assessment literacy is prioritized in teacher and leader preparation programs, requirements for licensure, and ongoing credentialing. It also means ensuring that there are adequate state, district, and school-level systems in place to ensure the effective design, calibration, and refinement of high-quality assessments. Such systems are required to ensure reliability and consistency.

## Lessons from the Field

The Council of Chief State Schools Officers (CCSSO) and Learning Policy Institute (LPI) published a report titled, [Developing and Measuring Higher Order Skills: Models for State Performance Assessment Systems](#).<sup>15</sup> The report describes four assessment models, which can be integrated and combined in numerous ways:

- ▶ "Performance items or tasks as part of traditional 'sit-down' tests.
- ▶ Curriculum-embedded tasks that are implemented in the classroom during the school year, assessing more complex sets of skills. These may be common or locally developed and may stand alone or be combined with test results to produce a summative score.
- ▶ Portfolios or collections of evidence that aggregate multiple tasks to display a broad set of competencies in multiple domains or genres.
- ▶ Comprehensive assessment systems that include traditional sit-down tests, curriculum-embedded tasks, and portfolios and exhibitions leading to a student defense, each serving distinctive complementary purposes." (p. 1)

Examples of states using these assessment models include:

- ▶ New Hampshire's [Performance Assessment of Competency Education](#) (PACE). The program uses a combination of standardized testing with locally developed common performance assessments. Assessments are designed to support deeper learning and to integrate with students' day-to-day learning experiences.
- ▶ Washington state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction-Developed Assessments. [State-developed classroom-based assessments](#) evaluate student demonstration of Essential Academic Learning Requirements in social studies, the arts, and health/fitness. These assessments include performance-based assessments.

## Conclusion

Modernizing teaching to meet the needs of learning environments that give every student the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college, career, civic life, and beyond, should be a national priority. We envision a future state where teaching is learner-centered, competency-based, equity-oriented in every sense, from preparation to professional learning through advancement and leadership. State policy can move us toward this vision by creating a roadmap for change, diversifying the workforce, redesigning teacher preparation and licensure, and leveraging assessment for learning. State policymakers can use the levers available to them *and* collaborate with teachers and leaders across systems to enable quality, innovation, and diversity in the teacher workforce.

## Endnotes

1. *Teachers matter: Understanding teachers' impact on student achievement.* (2012). Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate\\_pubs/CP693z1-2012-09.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP693z1-2012-09.html).
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## About the Authors

**Katherine Casey** is Founder and Principal of Katherine Casey Consulting, an independent organization focused on innovation, personalized and competency-based school design, and research and development. Katherine was a founding Director of the Imaginarium Innovation Lab in Denver Public Schools, supporting a portfolio of almost 30 schools across Denver and spearheading the Lab's research and development activity. Katherine was a founding design team member at the Denver School of Innovation and Sustainable Design, Denver's first competency-based high school. Prior to her time in Denver, Katherine worked in leadership development, philanthropy, public affairs and higher education. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Stanford University and her Doctorate in Education Leadership from Harvard University. Her dissertation, titled "Innovation and Inclusion by Design; Re-imagining Learning, Remembering Brown," explored the intersection of school design and integration in Denver.

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**Maria Worthen** is Vice President for Federal and State Policy at iNACOL. Prior to joining iNACOL, Maria served as Education Policy Advisor to the Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa. She also worked at the US Department of Education, serving as Congressional Liaison in the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs, Program Officer in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Presidential Management Fellow in the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools.

Earlier in her career, Maria was a pre-school teacher and a social worker, practicing with at-risk children and youth in a variety of settings. An Iowa native, she holds a B.A. in Government and Italian Language and Literature from Smith College and a Masters in Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis.

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**Natalie Truong** is Policy Director at iNACOL. Prior to joining iNACOL, Natalie was a Policy Analyst in the Education Division of the National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices. Natalie began her career as an English teacher in Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland.

## Contact

For more information or technical assistance, contact the staff at iNACOL Center for Policy Advocacy:

Susan Patrick, CEO, iNACOL and Co-Founder, *CompetencyWorks*  
[spatrick@inacol.org](mailto:spatrick@inacol.org)

Maria Worthen, Vice President for Federal and State Policy, iNACOL  
[mworthen@inacol.org](mailto:mworthen@inacol.org)

Natalie Truong, Policy Director, iNACOL  
[ntruong@inacol.org](mailto:ntruong@inacol.org)

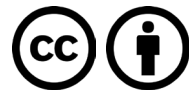
Alexis Chambers, Policy Associate, iNACOL  
[achambers@inacol.org](mailto:achambers@inacol.org)

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**ADDRESS**

1934 Old Gallows Road, Suite 350  
Vienna, VA 22182

888.95.NACOL (888.956.2265)  
**ph.** 703.752.6216 / **fx.** 703.752.6201  
[info@inacol.org](mailto:info@inacol.org)