

PATHWAYS THAT DELIVER

An Action Guide for Tennessee Leaders

Deans for
Impact 

Building strong, affordable pathways into teaching is vital to a strong teacher workforce and improved student outcomes. Grounded in the Tennessee Ed Prep Impact Coalition's vision for future teachers in the Volunteer State, this guide offers concrete actions state and philanthropic leaders can take now to build high-quality, affordable teacher pathways.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Make mentoring and induction a core experience for all new teachers.** Mentorship and induction improve instruction, raise student achievement, and reduce attrition. Since repealing its mentoring requirement in 2016, Tennessee has seen a 16% decline in mentorship, leaving first-year teachers less supported than peers in neighboring states. To ensure all new teachers receive essential early-career support, Tennessee should:
 - Develop comprehensive, evidence-based mentoring and induction standards.
 - Incentivize local education agencies (LEAs) and EPPs to co-design induction programs. For example, allocate \$2,000 per new teacher for an EPP-based instructional coach during their first three years.
 - Amend licensure rules to:
 - Grant Professional Development Points for mentoring through induction programs equal to those earned in clinical programs.
 - Require new teachers to complete or participate in an induction or mentoring program for professional certification.
 - Create a mentor teacher endorsement aligned to evidence-based standards and incentivize participation (e.g., through a Lead Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program).
 - Establish a state-funded mentoring and induction grant program for LEAs that:
 - Partners with EPPs to support novice teachers.
 - Provides at least three years of formal mentoring.
 - Allocates release time for mentor-mentee meetings.
 - Compensates mentors with stipends and advancement opportunities.
 - Ensures mentor selection and training align with criteria such as effectiveness, experience, and grade/content match.
- 2 Make the case for why teacher preparation matters.** In recent years, Tennessee has seen rising numbers of emergency-certified and undercertified teachers used to fill vacancies. To underscore the importance of strong preparation, state leaders should:
 - Collect data on emergency-certified teachers, linking student outcomes and evaluations to compare fully certified and uncertified teachers.
 - Adopt a statewide resolution affirming the value of aspiring teachers and EPPs, calling for stronger EPP-PK-12 partnerships to align workforce needs.
 - Fund the Aspiring Educator Award annually to provide scholarships or incentives (e.g., loan forgiveness or reduced licensure fees) for at least one finalist from each State Board district.
- 3 Streamline existing education, workforce, and service funding by reducing red tape.** Federal and state funds should be flexible enough to address local needs while maintaining safeguards to achieve results. Yet programs aimed at strengthening the teacher workforce often include restrictions that limit communities' ability to use investments for meaningful, local change. To ensure funding reaches the students and areas most in need, Tennessee should:
 - Automatically apply Future Teacher Scholarship Program funds to all aspiring teachers during their student teaching year.
 - Issue guidance for EPPs about how they can braid and blend federal, state, local, and philanthropic funds to mobilize aspiring teachers as tutors and build high-quality RTAPs.

4

Ensure clinical experiences are structured and scaffolded. Tennessee was an early leader in using high-dosage tutoring to support students, investing in the [Accelerating Literacy and Learning \(TN-ALL\) Corps](#) and creating a [tutoring promotion pathway](#). State leaders should expand this success by mobilizing the 8,000+ teacher-candidates enrolled in educator-preparation programs (EPPs). Specifically, Tennessee should:

- Incentivize aspiring teachers to serve as high-impact tutors by amending early field experience requirements to allow:
 - Experiences in instructional settings beyond PK–12 schools, including virtual ones.
 - A defined minimum duration for early field experiences (around 50 hours).
 - High-impact tutoring completed before EPP enrollment, as defined by the state, to count toward required hours.
 - Align training (e.g., [TN ALL Corps Training](#)) with licensure requirements by crosswalking related trainings and exams to reduce redundancies.

5

Expand access to extended, high-quality practice. Tennessee's progress on clinical practice is undermined by the Clinical Practice Certificate, which allows pre-service teachers to serve as teachers of record, a practice which [evidence](#) shows harms retention and student outcomes and is rarely seen in other professions like nursing, law, or engineering. To ensure all teachers are prepared to teach when they become the teacher of record, Tennessee should:

- Replace or revise the Clinical Practice Certificate with an "[Associate Teacher License](#)," similar to [Louisiana](#) and [New York](#), ensuring pre-service teachers are not teachers of record and are paired with a mentor.
- Create an enhanced professional license for candidates completing a Tennessee EPP with a year-long residency, similar to [Texas](#).
- Provide a [financial incentive](#) for under/uncertified teachers to earn full certification.

6

Strengthen partnerships between EPPs and PK-12 schools. Tennessee leads nationally in promoting high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), yet many EPPs lack access to local districts' HQIM due to complex contracting. To fully realize the state's HQIM strategy, leaders should:

- Include EPP faculty in [state-sponsored HQIM professional development](#) alongside PK-12 educators and administrators, and update trainings based on current research (e.g., fidelity vs. integrity in HQIM use).
- Expand EPP access to HQIM by securing demo licenses from curriculum providers and granting open access to at least two [top-rated](#) HQIM resources, similar to the state's open-access approach during pandemic.
- Use existing research on HQIM adoption to correlate specific curricula with student achievement.
- Revise state policy to require LEAs to share HQIM with EPPs that place teacher-candidates in their districts and to subsidize related partnership agreements.

7

Expand existing homebuyer assistance programs to include teachers. Cities like [Memphis](#) offer homebuyer assistance for [police](#) and [firefighters](#), and states such as Mississippi extend similar programs to teachers, especially in shortage areas, helping address affordability and retention while honoring teachers' public service. To promote homeownership among educators, Tennessee leaders should:

- Support homebuyer assistance programs for teachers by:
 - Expand eligibility to teachers through the TN Housing Development Agency's [Homeownership for Heroes](#) program, offering a 0.5% mortgage rate reduction.
 - Including teachers in existing public servant programs for first responders.
 - Invest in [district-led](#) homeownership programs tied to service commitments.

About Deans for Impact (DFI)

DFI is a national nonprofit committed to ensuring that every child is taught by well-prepared teachers. This resource was developed in partnership with its **Tennessee Ed Prep Impact Coalition**, which consists of leaders from Belmont University, Carson-Newman University, East Tennessee State University, Freed-Hardeman University, Lipscomb University, Maryville College, Nashville Teacher Residency, Tennessee Tech University, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, programs that collectively prepare nearly 50% of the state's future teachers. For more information and a comprehensive set of policy recommendations, download [Pathways that Deliver](#), DFI's full policy framework.