

# PATHWAYS THAT DELIVER:

## Action Guide for **FEDERAL** Policy Leaders

**B**uilding affordable, high-quality pathways into teaching is vital and underleveraged. Teacher preparation is the starting point – the place where aspiring teachers develop the foundational knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to succeed and stay in the profession. But right now, many federal and state policies are plagued by outdated assumptions, inconsistent standards, and misaligned incentives. Efforts to strengthen pathways into teaching remain fragmented, with siloed advocacy campaigns working on a narrow slice of the problem without considering a more holistic view of the entire system. DFI offers tangible actions that federal and philanthropic leaders can take right now to rectify these challenges and create the conditions necessary for high-quality, sustainable pathways into teaching.

### How to use:

Recommended policy actions are structured around our [full framework](#), this action guide is structured around strategic questions leaders can use to evaluate current practices and **five policy levers** that can strengthen pathways into teaching:



**Standards &  
Licensure**



**Program  
Approval &  
Renewal**



**Data &  
Accountability**

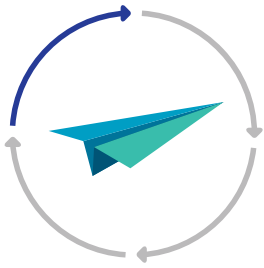


**Funding**



**Convening  
Power**

Where needed, additional details clarify how each action can be implemented. These levers and actions are not mutually exclusive and successful reform efforts will likely use multiple levers to create lasting change.



## INSTRUCTIONALLY-FOCUSED

**Prepare aspiring teachers to understand how students learn and the instructional-moves they can take to activate learning**

- 1. Do current policies and funding incentives for teacher preparation reflect what we know from the science of learning about how students acquire knowledge and skills?**

### POLICY ACTIONS

#### for Aligning Instruction to Learning Science



**Require pre-service and in-service teachers to receive training on learning science and how to translate it into teaching practice.**

- ☐ Fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Personnel Preparation Part D to provide support and training for educators teaching students with disabilities.
- ☐ Fully fund ESEA's Title III to strengthen educator preparation for serving English learners.
- ☐ Streamline and improve longstanding, bipartisan discretionary grant programs such as Teacher Quality Partnerships (TQP), Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED), or the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSL) to align to current national priorities, including incorporating technology into teacher training, accelerating student learning, and aligning instruction to learning science.



**Establish expert advisory groups to help translate the latest research on learning and instruction into actionable improvements in policy and practice.**

- ☐ Establish a national commission that seeks to articulate the national imperative, summarize the existing research base, and offer recommendations for supporting all students to achieve grade-level proficiency in core academic subjects and reach their full potential, with particular emphasis on addressing the needs of multilingual learners and students with learning disabilities.

**Convene cross-sector policy, education, workforce, technological, and research leaders to explore whether and how technological advancements, especially artificial intelligence, can be responsibly and effectively deployed to ensure teacher training is aligned to evidence-based practices.**

- ☐ Incentivize the creation of inter-state collaboratives to reform licensure assessments and explore how emergent technologies like AI may reshape the teaching profession, with a focus on identifying the critical human dimensions of teaching and aligning preparation programs to emphasize these core functions.

## 2. How are policies bolstering EPPs and PK-12 schools to partner to ensure instructional coherence from pre-service preparation through classroom practice and ongoing professional development?

### POLICY ACTIONS to Strengthening EPP and PK-12 Partnerships to Build Instructional Coherence



Establish [formal MOUs](#) between EPPs, PK-12 schools, community colleges, and other community organizations (e.g., tutoring providers) to promote instructional coherence across all partners.

- ☐ MOUs should specify:
  - Shared definitions of high-quality instruction and evidence-based practices that will be used consistently across all settings
  - Roles, responsibilities, and accountability measures for each partner
  - Consistent feedback and evaluation processes for candidates
  - Joint professional learning for faculty, mentors, and partner staff
  - Data sharing and progress monitoring agreements



Fund EPP-PK-12 partnerships to collaborate on shared instructional priorities (e.g., HQIM, literacy, math).

- ☐ Create discretionary grant priorities that specifically name partnerships between EPPs and PK-12 schools around a shared instructional project.

Require and fund ongoing professional development on how to access and deploy HQIM for teacher-educators.

- ☐ Clarify language in discretionary grant priorities and Title programs to allow funds to be used to support professional development for teacher educators.



Publish, either publicly or sent directly to EPPs, a list of HQIM and PK-12 screeners (e.g., literacy screeners) adopted by PK-12 schools and provide open access for all EPPs to the most widely used HQIM.

- ☐ Commission a national landscape report on adoption processes by SEAs, and federally-recommended HQIM and PK-12 screeners based on evidence.

Convene PK-12 schools, EPPs, and technical assistance providers to build a shared understanding of instructional priorities defined in policy, to align on evolving roles and competencies required of educators, and to build cultures and systems of continuous learning and improvement.

- ☐ Reestablish the [Teach to Lead](#) initiative to provide a framework for teams to collaboratively address problems of practice in instructional skill development.

### 3. To what extent do current policies and practices demonstrate a commitment to building and using research and evidence to shape teacher development and instructional improvement?

## POLICY ACTIONS for Cultivating Continuous Learning & Improvement



**Streamline and improve access for teacher-educators and researchers to relevant data systems (e.g., [SLDS](#)) to better align workforce supply and demand, evaluate shifts in instructional outcomes for teachers, understand clinical placement, hiring, and retention trends.**

- ☐ Establish inter-agency partnerships between federal agencies to integrate data on teacher workforce pipelines with broader labor market information, including career transitions into and out of teaching, regional workforce needs, and economic factors influencing teacher supply and demand.



**Prioritize education research and development, specifically related to learning science, instructional practices, clinical experiences, and EPP practices that improve candidate retention and completion.**

- ☐ Prioritize research into the application of cognitive science-informed teacher practices, especially in content areas (e.g., math) without a strong evidence base or consensus from researchers.
- ☐ Fund the [creation of a national center](#) focused on R&D and innovation in education, similar to the [DARPA model](#).
- ☐ Reauthorize the [Education Sciences Reform Act \(ESRA\)](#), which establishes the Institute of Educational Sciences, prioritizes rigorous research, supports evidence-based policy and practice, and funds research grants and programs.

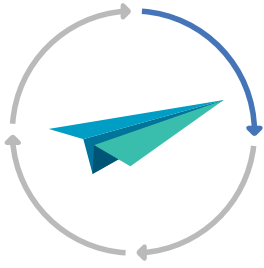


**Create positions and offices in relevant agencies responsible for learning science priorities.**

- ☐ Establish a Chief Learning Science Advisor who is responsible for ensuring instructional initiatives led by the relevant agencies (e.g. ED) are firmly grounded in learning science principles.

**Establish incentives for teacher-educators, teacher-candidates, and teachers to build their awareness and usage of vetted resources, including resources from approved technical assistance providers and resources that qualify for placement in specific knowledge centers such as the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) and Institute of Education Sciences (IES).**

- ☐ Ensure that all instructional initiatives and funding opportunities align to evidenced-based practices (e.g., literacy, mathematics).
- ☐ Ensure communications materials, guidance, and funding opportunities amplify and link to federal research initiatives and bodies such as [What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\)](#) and the [Institute of education Sciences \(IES\)](#).
- ☐ Launch regional collaboratives designed to amplify, disseminate and integrate resources from federal research initiatives and bodies such as the [What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\)](#) and the [Institute of education Sciences \(IES\)](#) into state and local efforts to improve teaching and learning.



## PRACTICE-BASED

**Equip aspiring teachers with knowledge and skills that prepare them for the realities of the classroom**

- 1. Do clinical experience requirements ensure practice opportunities are intentionally woven throughout a teacher-candidate's experience and increase in complexity over time?**

### POLICY ACTIONS

#### for Aligning Coursework, Feedback and Practice



**Incentivize EPPs and PK-12 schools to reconfigure their respective schedules to accommodate and align clinical practice with core instructional duties.**

- ☐ Reauthorize the Higher Education Act and create incentives for EPPs to redesign coursework and clinical experiences to align with PK-12 academic calendars and daily schedules.
- ☐ Re-launch the [Experimental Sites Initiative](#) through which colleges and universities could pay students for off-campus roles, increase the number of hours, increase the federal share of wages, and could be applied to student teaching and clinical rotations.
- ☐ Amend Federal Work Study (HEA, Title IV(C), Sec. 443 – §1087–53(d)) in the following ways:
  - Codify and standardize waivers for institutions of higher education to allow for Federal Work-Study dollars to compensate students for student teaching/clinical experiences as well as other field experience requirements (e.g. tutoring).
  - Expand current use of tutors from reading in grades PK-6 to include tutors in grades PK-12 in all academic subject areas.
  - Prioritize FWS funding for programs that place tutors in “high-needs schools.”
  - Increase the Community Service Requirement to at least 25% and increase the required number of tutors within the Community Service Requirement.



**Develop systems for understanding the impact of aspiring and early-career teachers on PK-12 student learning (e.g., student outcomes after being tutored by a teacher-candidate fulfilling field experience requirements).**

- ☐ Establish and amend federal grants to incentivize state-EPP partnerships for building data infrastructure that [links](#) teacher candidates' clinical experiences to student outcomes.
- ☐ Develop IES research priorities focused on the relationship between preparation [program features](#) and candidate impact on student learning.
- ☐ Support technical assistance and model data-sharing agreements to help states ethically and effectively connect SLDS, EPP, and K-12 student data systems.



**Align funding incentives for EPPs and PK–12 partners to prioritize practice-based preparation models.**

- ☐ Amend Federal Work Study (HEA, Title IV(C), Sec. 443 – §1087–53(d)) by codifying waivers to the part-time employment requirement under 34 CFR 675, enabling institutions to compensate students for full-time employment (e.g. paraprofessional) opportunities related to the student’s academic program (e.g., relevant apprenticeships, clinical rotations, or student teaching).

## 2. Are policies and funding structures enabling or limiting extended, high-quality practice opportunities for aspiring teachers?

### POLICY ACTIONS

#### for Reducing the Cost of Clinically-Rich Pathways



**Create new workforce credentials that give aspiring teachers access to industry benefits while they complete preparation programs.**

- ☐ Create an RFP for an interstate micro-credentialing system that validates teacher candidates’ competencies, and is aligned to evidence-based practices (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse, Regional Educational Laboratories, evidence-based instructional materials), with the goal of creating portable and stackable credentials that are recognized across state lines.



**Streamline funding to directly compensate teacher-candidates for their clinical experiences and reduce administrative barriers for schools and EPPs.**

- ☐ Streamlining and increase funding I into programs that can be utilized to support practice-based teacher education, such as:
  - Federal Work Study (FWS)
  - School Improvement Grants (SIG)
  - Title I, II, and IV of ESEA
  - IDEA
  - AmeriCorps Segal Educational Service Awards, esp. for individuals who commit to working in certain K-12 education settings.
- ☐ Release guidance on how education, community service, and workforce funding can be used to support clinical practice experiences.

### 3. Do policies support aspiring teachers to receive timely, actionable, and aligned feedback across practice opportunities?

## POLICY ACTIONS

### for Formalizing High-Quality Feedback, Mentoring, and Induction



**Incentivize a formal induction period whereby novice teachers are guaranteed ongoing support and training from their EPP and LEA and are paired with a high-quality mentor.**

- ☐ Define, create and/or prioritize evidence-based mentoring and induction programs within existing federal grants. These grant programs should require:
  - Mentor teacher qualifications
  - Time for collaboration
  - Alignment to evidence-based practices
  - Opportunities for new teachers to observe mentors
  - Interdisciplinary collaboration
  - Induction support for no less than first two years of teaching

**Require planning time for PK-12 and EPP faculty and staff to build shared language and visions for instructional priorities and create feedback loops for aspiring teachers.**

- ☐ Provide guidance for how ESEA Title funds can be leveraged to support mentorship and induction activities.



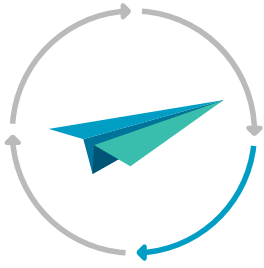
**Compensate and recognize mentors of aspiring and novice teachers.**

- ☐ Authorize grants and programs that seek to scale and sustain mentoring and induction programs, especially those that compensate mentors.



**Host state or regional convenings to align state, PK-12, and EPP instructional priorities.**

- ☐ Host regional convenings that are grounded in a national commission's (see *Instructionally Focused, Recommendation 1, Convening Power*) research and recommendations to help state teams develop coherent approaches to instructional improvement across PK-12 and teacher preparation systems.



## ACCESSIBLE

**Lower financial and structural barriers so more aspiring teachers can enter and complete quality preparation**

### 1. Who is currently entering teacher preparation in your state, and who is being left out?

## POLICY ACTIONS

### to Better Align Teacher Preparation with Workforce Needs



**Define** consistent and specific categories and characteristics for pathways into teaching. The current standard for classifying programs as “traditional” or “alternative,” even if distinguished by whether it’s run by an IHE, is opaque and hides important variation between program types.

- ☐ Update authorizing statutes, especially ESEA and HEA, to reflect more precise program definitions that capture meaningful variation in program structure, clinical experience requirements, and support models.
- ☐ Revise competitive grant priorities to align with refined definitions to ensure federal investments target specific program features rather than outdated categorical labels.



**Hold all programs, regardless of pathway type, to the same set of high-quality standards.**

**Publish** standardized information about the quality of EPPs for accountability and improvement purposes.

- ☐ Streamline and improve current reporting requirements outlined in Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) to focus on outcomes, remove requirements oriented around simple assurances, and reduce redundant requirements across HEA; Title II (IPRC); IPEDS; state program approval; and regional, specialized, and national accreditation, including:
  - Program type definitions that are more representative than “traditional” and “alternative” (e.g., “traditional- residency” or “non-IHE alternative - Grow Your Own”).
  - Enrollment and completion rates, disaggregated by average time to complete.
  - Total costs to complete and all available financial assistance, including opportunities to be paid for instructional services provided during preparation.
  - First-attempt success rates on certification exams, the share of test takers who take a test once and don’t retake, and rates of three or more attempts.
  - Matriculation into teaching rates.
  - 1-, 3-, and 5-year retention rates of program graduates working as in-service teachers.





- 1-, 3-, and 5-year retention rates of program graduates working in school-based roles, including leadership positions.
  - Teachers' impact on students, including but not limited to learning outcomes, growth measures, school climate, suspension rates.
  - Ability to meet workforce needs determined by the share of statewide high-need content areas and grade-levels compared to the current pipeline of candidates enrolled in the EPP.
  - Whether a candidate is the teacher of record prior to completing the program.
- ☐ Require states to report on state-level EPP approval and renewal requirements that seek to promote instructionally-focused pathways, practice-based, and instructionally-focused pathways.



**Expand dedicated funding to EPPs that are working to address specific workforce needs and demonstrate strong completion rates (e.g., funding for dual credit and CTE courses that result in course credit with EPP partners and funding for RTAPs).**

- ☐ Maintain and expand funding for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program and other programs such as:
- Section 323 of HEA
  - Title III-A SIP: grants for PBIs to establish/enhance an EPP
  - Title III-B: Strengthening HBCUs program
  - Title III-F: competitive PBI grants
  - Title V-A: grants for HSIs to establish or enhance EPPs
- ☐ Expand eligibility to federal teacher-preparation grant programs beyond IHEs to include non-profit organizations (e.g. residency programs) and PK-12 schools serving as educator-preparation providers who are working to address specific workforce challenges.

## 2. Are policies making high-quality pathways more affordable and supportive?

### POLICY ACTIONS for Affordable and Supportive



**Streamline and make requirements for scholarships, loan forgiveness, and other financial assistance programs more transparent.**

- ☐ **Publicly report** on the TEACH Grant's grant-to-loan conversion rate and implement accountability measures for institutions with high rates of conversion.

**Collect data that allows researchers to understand trade-offs in cost and quality.**

- ☐ For example, how do teacher outcomes differ for those prepared via fully online vs. hybrid models?
- ☐ Correlate student outcomes with the types of preparation routes teachers completed (e.g., **student earnings**).



**Invest in and/or expand evidence-based alternative funding models that reduce upfront costs for aspiring teachers.**

- ☐ Create a grant program incentivizing partnerships to train teachers through RTAPs and teacher residencies modeled after the [Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program](#).
- ☐ Create weighted funding formulas for workforce training grants, including SAEF grants and WIOA awards, that prioritize industries with national or generalized shortages of skilled workers, including teaching.
- ☐ Leverage [Community Funding Projects](#) to invest in practice-based pathways such as RTAPs, residencies, and GYO.
- ☐ Update funding guidance for RTAPs to “[increase collaboration across workforce and education systems](#),” at the local level, and reduce the paperwork and data collection burden for RTAPs.

**Establish and fund scholarship, grant, and loan forgiveness programs to increase the number of teachers from underrepresented backgrounds in the teacher workforce, as well as improve attainment rates and forgiveness amounts for public service loan forgiveness.**

- ☐ Reform TEACH grants to raise the maximum amount, allow them to cover full cost of attendance, and eliminate conversion into loans for non-completers (e.g., [Diversify Act](#)).
- ☐ Improve communication processes to increase understanding of TEACH grant expectations to eligible teachers, especially regarding [what counts as qualified service](#).
- ☐ Improve access to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program for teachers by enhancing communication about eligibility requirements, streamlining the certification process, and providing technical assistance to ensure teachers can successfully navigate the program and avoid common pitfalls that lead to disqualification.

**Subsidize or remove fees (e.g., the cost of licensure assessments and background checks) for entry into the profession.**

- ☐ [Allow/clarify use of WIOA funding](#) for eligible candidates to receive grants that cover some or all of the costs associated with preparation, credentialing, and licensure exams.

**Subsidize transportation, housing, and childcare for pre- and in-service teachers enrolled in high-quality pathways.**

- ☐ Authorize childcare, healthcare, and retirement tax incentives for aspiring and current teachers.

**Designate teaching and educator preparation as a “workforce development priority,” allowing students to access WIOA and Perkins V funding.**

- ☐ Designate teaching and educator preparation as a “workforce development priority,” allowing teacher candidates to access WIOA and Perkins V funding.
- ☐ Continue to release and communicate [guidance](#) about how Perkins funds can be used to address educator shortages.
- ☐ Establish reciprocal eligibility between Pell Grants and WIOA funding so that students who qualify for Pell Grant eligibility are automatically eligible for WIOA workforce development funding for teacher preparation programs, and vice versa.
- ☐ Provide guidance and incentives for states to align dual enrollment pathways and credential requirements to ensure students participating in programs like P-TECH can access necessary financial aid to complete industry-recognized credentials and degrees, particularly by ensuring that credit hour caps for state financial aid programs account for dual enrollment credits earned toward teaching credentials.



**Improve structures and quality of guidance provided to PK-12 schools and EPPs on shifts in funding opportunities and policy that intend to make teaching more affordable and supportive.**

- ☐ Amplify state examples of useful and impactful [guidance](#) on braiding and blending federal and state funding to support educator preparation.

**Fund technical assistance and convenings for EPPs and PK-12 schools to effectively implement shifts in funding and policy, as well as incubate hubs of innovation that can inform future efforts to make pathways more affordable. For example, provide support for districts to reallocate personnel dollars from vacant teaching positions to fund stipends for teacher residents.**

- ☐ Establish regional educator workforce hubs, modeled after but distinct from Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs), to coordinate technical assistance, share implementation lessons, and surface innovative local practices that inform future federal and state investments.

### 3. Do policies support flexible entry points into teaching without compromising quality?

## POLICY ACTIONS

### for Modernize Entry Points Without Lowering Standards



**Reevaluate licensure prerequisites to ensure they measure readiness to teach without creating unnecessary barriers, especially for candidates entering through non-traditional routes.**

- ☐ Incentivize states to leverage available flexibilities (e.g. testing and school calendar requirements) to modernize teacher credentialing processes, especially to account for and generate interest in new roles (e.g. lead teacher, tutor) to staff schools.



**Ensure credit-bearing secondary coursework completed through CTE, dual-enrollment programs, and youth apprenticeship programs can seamlessly transfer to an aspiring teacher's chosen EPP and adequately address competencies EPPs are held accountable for in their approval process.**

- ☐ Update federal definitions in ESEA, ESSA, HEA, WIOA, and Perkins V to require that credit-bearing secondary coursework is part of an intentional, meaningful pathway aligned to postsecondary program requirements, including admission to educator preparation programs.
- ☐ Make competitive and formula federal grants prioritize partnerships between PK-12 districts and EPPs that have established crosswalks between secondary coursework and teacher preparation competencies.
- ☐ Include teacher prep-aligned CTE, dual enrollment, and apprenticeship programs as eligible activities in [College Promise](#) federal-state partnerships.
- ☐ Provide [guidance](#) on how federal programs (e.g. Perkins V and WIOA) can be leveraged to measure and improve transferability of credits into educator preparation.



**Increase flexibility for EPPs, especially those within traditional IHEs, to ensure they can be responsive to changes in workforce needs.**

- ☐ Reauthorize the HEA and outline specific flexibilities for states and IHEs to meet critical workforce needs. For example, federal leaders could reinstate and make permanent [flexibilities in the Federal Work Study program](#) to allow aspiring teachers to be compensated for clinical experiences, including student-teaching.

**Incentivize EPPs to offer flexible, high-quality coursework options (e.g., evening/weekend coursework, coursework that takes place in PK-12 schools) for candidates, especially for those who are currently working in schools or career switchers.**

- ☐ Encourage public-private partnerships to expand access to these flexible coursework models, leveraging district and private sector resources to support candidates while maintaining rigorous program quality.

**Reduce barriers to degree-granting pathways into education, rather than removing degree requirements to address vacancies.**

- ☐ Provide federal guidance, fund research, and support technical assistance to states, districts, and EPPs to address key barriers such as financial constraints, rigid course sequencing, limited online/hybrid options, testing requirements, credit transfer issues, and insufficient academic advising and support.



**Report current and projected supply and demand for aspiring teachers, by specific demographics, geographies, and content areas.**

- ☐ [Require interagency collaboration](#) to support the integration of existing data systems to reduce redundancies, including but not limited to Title II (ED) and RAPIDS (USDOL) reporting systems.

**Establish research and innovation funds designed to support local programs balance quality and access.**

- ☐ Authorize grant programs for states to articulate coherent pathways from high school to certification.



**Use state or regional-level convenings to identify and share promising practices for expanding access while maintaining quality across preparation pathways.**

- ☐ Fund and facilitate these convenings to ensure lessons from successful programs are disseminated nationally and incorporated into federal guidance or technical assistance resources.

**Establish cross-sector task forces that include higher education, K-12, and workforce leaders to address barriers and opportunities in building a more accessible, high-quality teacher pipeline.**

- ☐ Provide federal support for these task forces through seed funding, research synthesis, or coordination with national networks to scale effective practices.