



DEVELOPING A MODERN TEACHER WORKFORCE

FEDERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND SUPPORTING
FUTURE-FOCUSED, COMPETENCY-BASED
EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Introduction

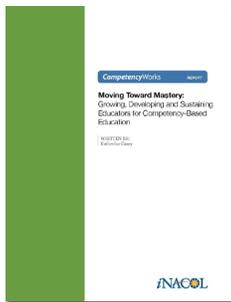
Taking action to realize a vision for a new teaching profession should be a priority for any leader invested in improving K-12 public education. Federal policymakers can enact enabling policies to encourage and support dramatically redesigning teacher preparation, learning, and advancement in alignment with 21st-century student learning and workforce needs. Federal policymakers can activate a common 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 support to be successful in student-centered, competency-based, and diverse learning environments. This brief will:

- ▶ Articulate a future vision for the teaching profession;
- ▶ Frame the role federal policymakers can play in advancing toward this vision; and
- ▶ Describe three federal policy priorities that can help transform teaching:
 - Diversifying pathways into the teaching profession;
 - Catalyzing innovation to redesign teacher preparation; and
 - Developing meaningful systems of assessments and evaluation.

Background



In late 2018, iNACOL published a report called [Moving Toward Mastery: Growing, Developing, and Sustaining Educators for Competency-Based Education](#).¹ 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. The report's vision centers around three core concepts: teaching as equity-oriented, learning-centered, and lifelong. Specifically:



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 where they are with timely, differentiated supports... For students and educators alike, teaching and learning are grounded in meaningful demonstrations of learning rather than seat time."



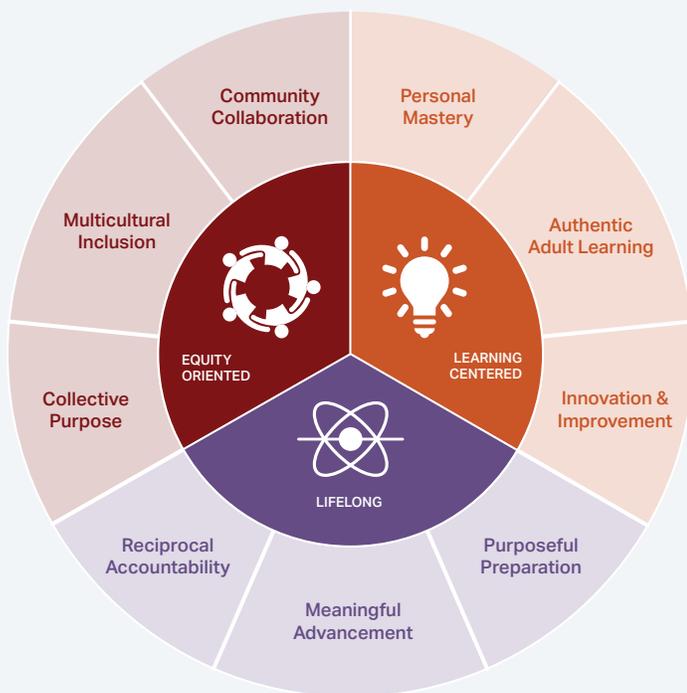
LIFELONG

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 reevaluating, 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."

Moving toward this vision should be a vital priority for any leader invested in improving K-12 public education. 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.² And yet, the urgency for change is not simply because the nation needs more talented teachers in our classrooms. The nation also 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 prepare students for an increasingly complex workforce—one that relies almost universally on some form of postsecondary education,³ 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 making the transition toward a system of education that focuses not only on basic literacy and numeracy, but also on complex outcomes like systems thinking, applied problem-solving, social and collaborative skills, and civic and social awareness.⁴ **Preparing students to achieve more complex outcomes requires developing teachers with more complex skillsets.**



CHANGE STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMING TEACHING

Moving toward this future state will require aligning expectations for teacher knowledge and skill to 21st-century student outcomes; increasing and aligning systems of support at all levels to help teachers meet these new standards; and 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 leaders chart this transformation process. Executing these strategies will take shared vision and coordinated action by leaders at all levels, from the classroom to Congress.

The Role for Federal Policy

What is the role for federal policy in moving toward a new vision for a future-ready teacher workforce? Federal policymakers can enact enabling policies that encourage and support states to dramatically redesign teacher preparation, learning, and advancement in alignment with 21st-century student learning and workforce needs. Specifically, federal leaders and policymakers can play key roles in:

- ▶ Creating equitable structures for access and opportunity in the teaching profession;
- ▶ Incentivizing and supporting innovation in higher education; and
- ▶ Promoting quality, accountability, and improvement.

The policy priorities laid out in this brief do not necessarily need to be enacted in full or at once. However, federal policymakers should aim to support policies that drive toward a common vision of **preparing a diverse and sustainable education workforce for 21st-century learning and teaching**. This includes communicating clear priorities to states; providing aligned incentives, supports, and funding; and addressing any barriers from outdated or competing policies that exist in federal statutes and laws today.

For more information on the top federal policy issues in K-12 education systems and recommendations to address them, see the [INACOL 2019 Federal Policy Priorities](#) issue brief.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES



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

1. Increase Affordability and Institute Incentives to Expand and Diversify the Teacher Workforce
2. Support Innovation in Teacher Education to Enable 21st-Century Learning
3. Help States Build Balanced Systems of Assessments to Support 21st-Century Learning

These recommendations describe what federal policymakers can do to enable and enact the vision described in the report, [*Moving Toward Mastery: Growing, Developing, and Sustaining Educators for Competency-Based Education*](#).

Federal Policy Priorities and Actions

Increase Affordability and Institute Incentives to Expand and Diversify the Teacher Workforce

- ▶ Increase access and affordability.
- ▶ Support quality preparation pathways.

Support Innovation in Teacher Education to Enable 21st-Century Learning

- ▶ Launch a pilot program in the re-authorization of the Higher Education Act.
- ▶ Build on the lessons learned in the Experimental Sites Initiative to stimulate and study innovation.

Help States Build Balanced Systems of Assessments to Support 21st-Century Learning

- ▶ Remove barriers within the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA).

RECOMMENDATION #1: INCREASE, IMPROVE, AND DIVERSIFY PATHWAYS INTO TEACHING

Many states are facing teacher shortages.⁵ These shortages present a global challenge for K-12 education and a particular challenge for modernizing the teaching profession. **Teacher shortages inhibit states and districts from building and sustaining a teaching workforce with the diverse and complex skills necessary for 21st-century learning and teaching.**

Stop-gap solutions, such as filling shortages with temporary or uncertified teachers, relying on online or distance courses, decreasing the rigor of preparation programs, or narrowing to a single “best” pathway into teaching are, alone, inadequate to address persistent shortages.⁶ Addressing the shortages is not just about having enough people in the profession; it is about designing sustainable systems to identify, recruit, and retain the right people in the profession. *Moving Toward Mastery* suggests that “systems leaders should focus on developing multiple high-quality, rigorous and equitable pathways into education. Pathways should align with educational and community priorities, use an equity lens and relate coherently to subsequent stages of an educator’s career: induction, development and support” (Casey, 2018, p. 53).

POLICY ACTIONS

Increase Access and Affordability to Diversify Educator Talent Pools.

Identifying, recruiting, and retaining the right people for teaching will require expanding the pool of candidates who are interested, eligible, and able to enter the profession. This does not mean lowering standards for entry into teaching.⁷ It means creating new entry points and pathways for future teachers and making teacher preparation more affordable.

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.⁸ The costs of teacher preparation tuition and loan repayment can act as barriers to entry for all prospective teachers, and particularly those who have shared life experiences with students of color, students in poverty, and students whose families have immigrated to the United States. Policies that increase access and affordability may therefore be necessary and effective toward achieving the goal of diversifying the teacher workforce.

To diversify and create more equitable pre-service pathways, federal policymakers should consider strategies that address college affordability, persistence, and completion in federal student aid policies. Education advocacy groups have proposed a variety of ideas to achieve this goal. These include:

- ▶ Considering reforms to federal student aid to increase access to competitive financial aid, loans, and loan forgiveness programs for the highest-need students;
- ▶ Enabling competency-based models in higher education by ensuring that eligibility for loans is not tied to units of time (e.g., credits completed or seat time hours), but rather to outcomes (e.g., program completion, performance assessment, or demonstration of competency against program and state standards);⁹ and
- ▶ Expanding pathways to new potential teachers by offering loans or loan forgiveness to mid-career professionals, veterans, or other prospective teachers, modeling or extending successful efforts like the GI Bill and Military College Loan Repayment Program. In addition to increasing accessibility and affordability, such incentives could contribute to future-ready workforces by integrating professionals with the skills and experience to support community-based, work-based, and applied forms of learning that prepare students to thrive in college and career.

Support Quality Preparation Pathways.

States are best positioned to meet teacher workforce needs when they have multiple high-quality pathways into the profession. Research does not show any one pathway, whether traditional or alternative, to be consistently best at preparing effective teachers.¹⁰ Research shows that program quality matters; factors like rigorous coursework, pre-service teaching experience with a master teacher, and support during induction have an impact on teacher quality and retention.¹¹ Federal policymakers can aid the development of quality pathways by supporting strong institutions of higher education (IHE) and program accreditation processes. The federal role in program accreditation is largely limited to oversight of accreditation systems: federal government influences accreditation by determining the criteria and process by which accrediting agencies are recognized and by maintaining public record of accredited IHEs and programs.¹² The federal government can support the development of quality pathways into teaching by using rigorous criteria to recognize accrediting agencies. Possible criteria include requiring accrediting agencies to review outcome data in addition to input data, and/or encouraging them to prioritize evidence-based practices like pre-service teaching.

RECOMMENDATION #2: REDESIGN EDUCATOR PREPARATION TO SUPPORT INNOVATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION TO ENABLE 21ST- CENTURY LEARNING

Transforming the teaching profession requires transforming all stages of a teacher’s professional pathway, starting with preparation. *Moving Toward Mastery* offers this vision: “In a lifelong profession, incoming educators are purposefully and rigorously prepared for the roles and responsibilities they will assume in the field. Preparation programs build capacity in the competencies required for teaching and leading, engage future teachers in learning experiences that model the learning theories and models they will be asked to lead with students and offer learning pathways that are accessible to a diverse student body. Preparation is responsive to dynamic and evolving needs in the teaching profession. Programs are attuned to developments in learning and teaching driven by changes in the global population and economy, as well as those that are driven by changes and developments in local school systems. They evolve and adapt to ensure their graduates have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be qualified and relevant practitioners who can respond to the learners, families and professional expectations they will encounter in the field. Preparation is key, but preparation programs are just the first step in an educator’s ongoing development. Induction, professional learning and ongoing certification continuously improve educators’ practice and support their advancement” (Casey, 2018, p. 51-52).

Federal policy can help to advance innovations in teacher education, including but not limited to pre-service preparation, by incentivizing and supporting innovation in higher education and supporting cooperative local approaches to redesigning preparation, induction, and ongoing support.

POLICY ACTIONS

Launch a Pilot Program in the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act to Encourage the Development of Innovative, Fully Competency-Based and Personalized Teacher and Leader Preparation Programs.

Preparing teachers to lead in 21st-century learning environments will require significant changes in pre-service preparation, certification, and ongoing professional development. There is an opportunity in the Higher Education Act to launch a teacher preparation innovation pilot. A pilot would serve to catalyze, support, study, and spread effective new approaches to developing teachers with the skills needed to teach and lead in student-centered, personalized, competency-based environments. Although an innovation pilot should be broad enough to unleash discovery, it should also articulate parameters encouraging innovations that align with purpose, outcomes, and learning approaches of learner-centered, competency-based education. These might include:

- ▶ Prioritizing innovations that **build teacher knowledge and skill in areas that align to student-centered learning and 21st-century student outcomes**. These could include: student-centered learning and teaching; instructional design; special education and language acquisition; assessment literacy; culturally competent teaching; improvement and innovation practice; and specializations like science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) and others;
- ▶ Prioritizing innovations that integrate **adult learning modalities aligned to research and the learning sciences**. These might include personalized learning, clinical practice, problem- and project-based learning, mentorship and induction supports, and performance assessment. and math (STEAM) and others;
- ▶ Prioritizing innovations that **diversify professional pathways**. These might include: offering continuing learning and education, offering specialized credentials, working with local education agencies to develop systems of micro-credentials, and developing advanced certificates and degrees to develop school and systems leaders for student-centered, personalized, competency-based education.

Moving Toward Mastery defines the importance of aligning teacher preparation programs with global and local workforce needs. Programs should be “attuned to developments in learning and teaching driven by changes in the global population and economy, as well as those that are driven by changes and developments in local school systems” (Casey, 2018, pp. 51–52). Doing so requires collaboration across systems that are frequently siloed: higher education, K-12 education, civic leadership, technical support providers, and others. Federal policymakers can encourage and support cooperative approaches to meeting local workforce needs by offering grant funding for state, intra-state, and inter-state regional efforts. This could be achieved by restoring the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Grant Program or offering a similar incentive. Funding should continue to focus on inter-agency collaboration and equity-related outcomes, like addressing hard to fill positions. Funding

can focus on innovations related to teacher knowledge and skill, adult learning pedagogy, and diverse professional pathways as described earlier.

Build on the Lessons Learned in the Experimental Sites Initiative to Stimulate and Study Innovation.

Institutional eligibility criteria for their students to access federal financial aid can impede IHEs and programs from innovating when credit completion is narrowly defined by seat time. This can present a barrier to participation in high-quality competency-based or distance-learning programs.¹³ Federal policymakers can consider strategies that give IHEs and programs the leeway to innovate—to align teacher preparation with personalized and competency-based practice, support continuing professional learning, open pathways for new candidates, and expand upon promising new practices in teacher education. Allowing eligibility for federal financial aid to be outcomes-based is an important first step. One idea comes from KnowledgeWorks, which published recommendations for advancing personalized learning through the HEA; these are highlighted in the text box below.

Considerations for Federal Financial Aid

Adapted from Advancing Personalized Learning through the Higher Education Act (KnowledgeWorks, 2017):

“Postsecondary education programs that organize instruction around mastery of core competencies offer students many benefits, including greater transparency of learning outcomes and increased personalization that responds to student needs. But despite these benefits, competency-based programs face barriers conforming their programs to meet traditional credit-hour based requirements for accessing federal financial aid. HEA should address these barriers by creating a demonstration program to explore strategies for modernizing Title IV eligibility for competency-based postsecondary programs.

This demonstration should offer selected postsecondary institutions federal flexibility balanced with appropriate guardrails:

- **Flexibility from requirements that competency-based programs at postsecondary institutions demonstrate credit hour or clock hour equivalencies and from methods of disbursing student financial aid to carry out competency-based education programs.**
- **Flexibility from definitions that attempt to restrict a timeframe for learning including the terms academic year, full-time student, term (including standard term, non-term, and non-standard term) and flexibility to redefine the terms satisfactory academic progress, educational activity, and payment period to align to competency-based programs.**
- **Flexibility from time-based operational requirements such as documenting attendance, weekly academic activity, or demonstrating minimum weeks of instructional time. This flexibility could support experiential, performance-based opportunities that are integrated into an instructional program.”**

Through the Experimental Sites Initiative (ESI) included in the current HEA law, the federal government is exploring specific innovations in higher education program design by issuing waivers for federal financial aid requirements by waiving specific statutory or regulatory requirements at participating postsecondary institutions.¹⁴ Current approaches under the ESI include competency-based education, dual-enrollment, and enrollment in programs that partner with non-traditional providers to provide more than 50 percent of students’ learning.¹⁵ While the initiative holds potential for incubating, studying, and sharing promising new practices, many stakeholders argue that it is not fully realizing its potential.¹⁶ Congress and the U.S. Department of Education could reinvigorate and revamp the ESI as a lever for innovation by expanding the approved areas of experimentation to include new future-oriented areas (e.g., use of performance assessment, micro-credentialing, and residency programs), increasing emphasis on studying outcomes in innovation sites, and sharing effective practices.

RECOMMENDATION #3: DEVELOP MEANINGFUL, BALANCED SYSTEMS OF ASSESSMENTS AND EVALUATION TO SUPPORT 21ST-CENTURY LEARNING

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides flexibility for states to redesign systems of assessments to better align to student-centered learning. States are now allowed to use a variety of assessment types, including formative and performance-based assessments, together to create statewide, balanced systems of assessments. “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” (Casey, 2018, p.43).

States can also apply to the U.S. Department of Education for the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority program, which allows states to pilot next-generation systems of assessments in collaboration with a subset of districts prior to scaling statewide. This is progress in the right direction. However, allowing states to redesign assessment does not guarantee that they can, or will. While federal policymakers have taken actions that have potential to help transform teaching and learning, they can do more to enable that transformation by fine-tuning policies and providing additional supports to states.

POLICY ACTIONS

Remove barriers for states to participate in the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA).

The Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) has opened up exciting possibilities for states to design balanced systems of assessments that will promote deeper learning and help schools focus on developing expanded sets of 21st-century outcomes. However, IADA contains limitations that cap its potential and hold states back from learning important lessons about developing, implementing, and scaling high-quality systems of assessments aligned to competency-based learning. Congress should amend Section 1204 of ESSA to remove barriers to state participation in the pilot, with implementation of high-quality performance assessments to support competency-based pathways. Congress should:

- ▶ Lift the cap on the number of states that could apply to participate in the IADA;
- ▶ Include language that allows states planning time prior to starting implementation and to scale up;
- ▶ Allow adequate time for states to scale up new systems of assessments statewide with high quality, by removing or providing greater flexibility in the time to statewide implementation; and,
- ▶ Make funding available for states to develop and improve on innovative systems of assessments.

Considerations for Assessment Literacy

As the federal government supports states to develop innovative systems of assessments to promote deeper learning, it is vital that they consider implications for teachers. Specifically, it is critical that teachers be trained and supported to have “assessment literacy,” the ability to design assessments and use assessment data to inform instruction. As Patrick, Worthen, & Truong (2018) note, “Through cultivating assessment literacy, educators will develop the knowledge and skills to assess student learning, provide meaningful feedback and personalize learning.”¹⁷

Experts on assessment literacy explain further: “Assessment literacy has traditionally evoked measurement principles such as validity and reliability accompanied by complex equations, statistical terms, and images of normal curves, ogives, and error bands. We now conceptualize assessment literacy as the knowledge and skills associated with designing, selecting, interpreting, and using high-quality assessments to improve student learning. Beyond using assessments in their classrooms, assessment literate educators should be equipped to deal with an onslaught of data from large-scale state assessments, interim assessments, local district- or school-wide assessments, and classroom-based assessments.”¹⁸

Conclusion

Transforming the teaching profession to meet the needs of a 21st-century education is a national priority to ensure K-12 education is built so that all students succeed. While states are key drivers in the work of redesigning teacher preparation, credentialing, professional learning and evaluation, federal policymakers can play an important role in creating space and enabling state-led transformation efforts. Federal policymakers can use the levers available to them—funding, eligibility and accreditation criteria; incentives; and support—to enable quality, innovation, and diversity in the teacher workforce. This issue brief is written for policy leaders at the federal level and designed to help address the question, “What can I do to support teachers and improve teaching, and what actions can I take for modernizing teacher and leader preparation needed in the larger picture of systems change?”

Scaling competency-based education systems with consistent quality will require increasing the number of educators who have the knowledge and skill to be competency-based practitioners and simultaneously improving the quality of teaching. Educators and building educator capacity are vital to developing and expanding competency-based education. This issue brief draws from *Moving Toward Mastery: Growing, Developing and Sustaining Educators for Competency-Based Education* and describes the role of federal policy to catalyze change needed to modernize the teaching profession.

Endnotes

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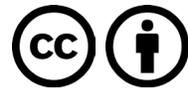
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Suggested Citation

Please refer to this issue brief as Casey, K., & Worthen, M. (2019). *Developing a modern teacher workforce: federal policy recommendations for professional learning and supporting future-focused, competency-based education systems*. Vienna, VA: iNACOL.

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The mission of iNACOL is to drive the transformation of education systems and accelerate the advancement of breakthrough policies and practices to ensure high-quality learning for all.

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