

SEIZING OPPORTUNITY AT THE TOP II

STATE POLICIES TO REACH EVERY STUDENT WITH EXCELLENT TEACHING POLICYMAKERS' CHECKLIST

BY PUBLIC IMPACT

What can policymakers do to ensure that every student has consistent access to excellent teaching? In this checklist, Public Impact details the policies that states and districts need.

Research continues to confirm that without excellent teaching consistently, most students who start behind stay behind, and too few on-track and advanced students leap ahead. Even hardworking, solid teachers who achieve the expected one year of learning progress each year leave achievement gaps intact. Schools that consistently provide all students with excellent teachers—those in today's top 20 to 25 percent who achieve well over one year of learning progress—can close most gaps fast. But most schools provide students with teaching at this level in only one of four classrooms.

Rigorous recruitment, development, and retention, plus necessary dismissals will improve teaching. Nations making education surges have limited who can teach to their top high school or college students who also exhibit other qualities needed for great teaching. U.S. states should follow their lead. But this alone would not be adequate in our economy, absent paid career advancement that both makes the teaching profession attractive to more top candidates and allows rapid on-the-job development for all.

Yet most teachers today work alone. Excellent teachers rarely have authority, time, or sustainably higher pay to lead while teaching. Solid teachers are on their own, with few chances to learn on the job from excellent peers.

To ensure that every student has access to excellent teaching consistently, states and districts must also help excellent teachers extend their reach to far more students, primarily by leading teaching teams, and earn far more, within budget. "Reach extension" also creates new roles and in-school time for all teachers to learn on the job from the best, contribute to excellence immediately, improve, and pursue career advancement. Altogether, this creates an "Opportunity Culture" for students and teachers.

In the years since this brief was first published, research showed large student learning gains for Opportunity Culture teams led by excellent teachers.¹ View details on new roles and career paths [here](#).

What Policy Leaders Can Do

This checklist provides policies that state leaders can use to enable an Opportunity Culture statewide, in six categories—first by **committing to reach every student with excellent teaching** consistently:

- * Making the Opportunity Culture Commitment
- * Identifying and Developing Teaching Excellence
- * Flexibility to Staff Schools
- * Flexibility for Instructional Delivery
- * Accountability and Feedback for Results
- * Rewarding and Retaining Excellent Teachers

Policies are marked either as **🕒 urgent**, because they are urgently needed to support pilot districts or schools, or **⊕ optimal**, to support successful scale-up across a state. States should allow waivers for pilots when lasting policy change cannot be made fast enough. **Far**

more students can experience the consistently excellent teaching needed to close achievement gaps and leap ahead to advanced work.

The full report, *Seizing Opportunity at the Top II: State Policies to Reach Every Student with Excellent Teaching*, provides more detail.

This updates our earlier working paper *Seizing Opportunity at the Top*, based on experience collaborating with several districts and hundreds of teachers and administrators, and analysis of their states' policies. Getting these policies right is especially important to the outstanding and committed teachers in schools implementing Opportunity Culture models, and to the students they serve.

This checklist is written for an audience already familiar with the five Opportunity Culture Principles and related terms. See [OpportunityCulture.org](#) for details on **career paths** and **higher pay** while letting teachers reach more students with excellence and increasing time for planning, collaboration, and on-the-job learning.

OPPORTUNITY CULTURE PRINCIPLES

Teams of teachers and school leaders must choose and tailor models to:

1. Reach more students with excellent teachers and their teams
2. Pay teachers more for extending their reach
3. Fund pay within regular budgets
4. Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development
5. Match authority and accountability to each person's responsibilities

At-A-Glance: Urgent and Optimal State Policies for an Opportunity Culture

The table below lists state policies that are **urgent** for Opportunity Culture pilot and expansion efforts, and policies that **optimize** Opportunity Culture implementation over time. The “**Urgent Policies**” column lists the policy needs that are critical for pilot schools to design and implement Opportunity Culture models, and these should receive immediate attention from policy leaders. The “**Optimal Policies**” column lists policies that will increase the effectiveness and prevalence of Opportunity Culture models and make the best use of state funds. These should receive attention in any state ready to scale up an Opportunity Culture within and across multiple districts.

	! Urgent Policies	+ Optimal Policies
Making the Opportunity Culture Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Commit to reaching at least 75% of students in core subjects in 75% of schools with high-growth, multi-classroom leaders leading small teams. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide districts with matching funds to cover temporary transition costs to reach this goal. <input type="checkbox"/> Commit to reaching at least 75% of schools with high-growth multi-school leaders leading small teams of schools. 	<p><i>Instead of the “urgent” items, make this commitment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Commit to reaching all students in core subjects, and more, in all schools with high-growth, multi-classroom leaders leading small teams. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide districts with matching funds, or full or sliding scale funding for lower-resource districts, to cover temporary transition costs to reach this goal. <input type="checkbox"/> Commit to reaching all schools with high-growth multi-school leaders leading small teams of schools.
Identifying and Developing Teaching Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All teachers receive an annual evaluation that includes student growth, or a proxy measure, and includes multiple measures correlated with student learning. <input type="checkbox"/> States can identify approximately the top quartile of teachers. <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluations match the responsibilities of each teacher, including the outcomes of students and subjects for which each teacher is responsible. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide districts with funds to design full-year teacher residencies for aspiring teachers and principals, to be supervised by multi-classroom or multi-school leaders as appropriate. ² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers’ evaluations include behavioral competencies that correlate with student learning outcomes in tested subjects. <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluations include a “reach measure” of the number of students for whom each teacher is formally accountable compared with a standard, one-teacher-one-classroom teaching role. <input type="checkbox"/> State evaluations help teachers improve and advance as professionals in common Opportunity Culture career paths. <input type="checkbox"/> Require paid residencies for <i>all</i> aspiring teachers and principals, supervised by multi-classroom or multi-school leaders as appropriate.
Flexibility to Staff Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> State funding is fungible across budget categories, allowing districts and schools to trade or combine positions, technology, and other funds at the budgeted level as needed to pay for and support advanced roles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent out-of-state teachers are automatically eligible to teach. <input type="checkbox"/> Budget transfer administration costs and time are eliminated by funding schools in lump sums, based on the weighted costs of educating students with differing characteristics in each school.
Flexibility for Instructional Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> When a highly effective teacher is willingly accountable for each student’s learning, restrictions are waived or eliminated to prevent extended-reach teaching models from being hampered by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • class-size limits • “seat time” and “line of sight” requirements that limit where or with whom a student learns. <input type="checkbox"/> Districts can reallocate categorical funds to implement blended and online learning, if a multi-classroom leader is accountable for each student’s learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> State data systems provide sufficient detail on student learning progress to enable personalized instructional levels and interventions during the year. <input type="checkbox"/> State procurement policies are streamlined to help districts implement blended and online learning. <input type="checkbox"/> State supports temporary transition costs to provide universal wireless broadband access.
Accountability and Feedback for Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> State uses a student growth model, or proxy measures, for subjects in which teachers will extend their reach. <input type="checkbox"/> Formal accountability tracked by the state matches the students and subjects for which each teacher, team teacher, and team leader is responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The state formally tracks and reports behavioral competency ratings and other soft measures that correlate with success in new teaching roles. <input type="checkbox"/> The state tracks and reports the percentage of students in each core subject and grade, overall and by student subgroup, with excellent teachers accountable for student learning.
Rewarding and Retaining Excellent Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Statewide salary scales allow districts and schools to create new roles and pay excellent and effective teachers more for reaching more students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> State funding allocation helps districts reward excellent teachers for taking hard-to-staff positions, such as STEM teaching in any school or positions in high-poverty schools, in addition to extending their reach. <input type="checkbox"/> State salary scales include default career paths and criteria that districts may adopt to pay more for roles that extend teachers’ reach, directly and by leading peers. <input type="checkbox"/> Consistently excellent teachers earn “elite tenure,” including protection during layoffs and the ability to help choose peers.

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1. Hansen, M., & Backes, B. (2018, January 25). New teaching model yields learning improvement for students in math [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/01/25/new-teaching-model-yields-learning-improvement-for-students-in-math/>

2. Public Impact plans to publish more to guide state leaders in supporting the development of educator residencies in Opportunity Culture schools.