TACKLING GAPS IN ACCESS TO STRONG TEACHERS:

What State Leaders Can Do

TO THE POINT:

- Research shows that low-income students and students of color are less likely to have access to strong, consistent teaching than their White and higher-income peers.

- Although district and school leaders make many of the decisions about recruiting, hiring, assigning, and supporting teachers, state education officials also have a critical role to play in addressing disparities in teaching quality.

- Unfortunately, when called upon to propose how they would address these inequities, most state officials only described broad efforts to raise overall teaching quality.

This report highlights five ways state education leaders can prompt and support districts in addressing inequities in assignment to strong teachers.

By Rachel Metz and Allison Rose Socol

When Karen Spaulding, a middle school principal in Milton, Massachusetts, looked at her district's data, she noticed an alarming pattern: Schools that had the highest percentages of low-income students also had the most students who had been taught by novice teachers. Those data have changed the district's conversation around equity and equitable access to strong teaching.

"We're thinking about the experiences that students had before they came to school, but also the experiences they have within the district. What was the actual experience, with what kind of teacher, and what can that tell us about what kinds of things we might want to put in place?" Spaulding said. "Having all that information makes it even more pressing and compelling to ensure that the way teachers are teamed together and the support structures in place are providing some additional rich support for those students. It forces us — or motivates us, rather — to think richly about what that whole notion of equitable access really means."

The troubling patterns in Spaulding's district are far too common. Yes, there are strong teachers serving low-income students and students of color. But there is an indisputable, widespread pattern of low-income students and students of color not having the same access to strong, consistent teaching as their wealthier, White peers.[1]

In fact, of the many inequities in our education system, gaps in access to strong teaching have proven to be among the most stubborn. Spaulding's district is fairly unique in its willingness to confront these patterns head on. By and large, our education system has allowed these disparities to persist for so long that many educators and education leaders may not even see them anymore, much less understand their harmful impact. Even those who see the issue and understand the damage it does may feel that the problem is so intractable — and potentially politically fraught — that it just isn't worth taking on.

State leaders, in particular, may ask themselves why they should tackle this inequity when there are so many others for which progress feels so much easier. And since many of the decisions about recruiting, hiring, assigning, and — perhaps most importantly — creating conditions for retaining teachers are made by district and school leaders, state leaders may ask what role state departments of education have in addressing these disparities.[2]

On the question of *why*, research is quite clear: Because strong teaching is the most important in-school factor for student success. Having a strong teacher can accelerate student learning, while having a weak teacher can do the opposite. Moreover, both research and the lived experiences of children show that strong teachers affect much more than student achievement. They can cultivate a love of learning, motivate children to come to class and stay in school, support them in going to college, and help them develop as active members of our communities and democracy.[3]

The question of *what* state departments of education should do is more complex. Yes, district and school leaders make most of the relevant decisions. But state education officials make many decisions and take many actions that set the context in which districts and schools operate.

In this report, we draw on promising practices of state education leaders to highlight some of the ways that their decisions and actions can incentivize leaders in districts — both traditional and charter — to remedy inequities in assignment to strong teachers and how state and district leaders can collaborate in doing so.

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Lessons from states and districts that have engaged in this work show that if there's going to be any traction in overturning inequities in access to strong teaching, state leaders must:

1 Make the invisible far more visible (including both patterns of inequity and their impact on children).

2 Set clear improvement expectations for leaders at all levels and make meeting those expectations matter.

3 Target resources to the districts and schools struggling most with this issue.

4 Develop networks of district leaders to problem-solve together.

5 Break down silos between work to increase access to strong teaching and school improvement work.

Sadly, when the federal government recently called upon states to propose how they would address inequities in assignment to strong teachers, most proposed none of these things. Most of the "teacher equity plans" states submitted in 2015, in fact, had little to do with equity.[4] Although most agency leaders presented data on persistent gaps in assignment to strong teachers, few set forth efforts to address these disparities. Instead, most provided only descriptions of generic efforts to raise overall teaching quality. Far too often, state education agencies' plans talked about improving teacher preparation or induction, for example, but failed to target efforts to the highest need districts and schools. And many of the plans that states submitted this past spring under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — which requires states to ensure that low-income students and students of color are not disproportionately taught by inexperienced, out-of-field, or ineffective teachers — replicate these shortcomings.

Tucked into a few state plans, though, we found examples of promising, equity-focused initiatives that could inform the work of other states. We draw on these in this report.

In the coming months, as state leaders work to implement ESSA, they have an opportunity to correct course, moving beyond generic improvement strategies to include strong, equity-focused action. We hope they will do exactly that.

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS REPORT

This report does not provide an exhaustive survey of every state policy aimed at ensuring high-quality teaching — nor does it highlight all of the key state responsibilities in this area. Rather, this report focuses specifically on the state role in drawing attention to, and motivating district leaders to act on, inequities in assignment to strong teachers. As such, the report does not address many key state functions in improving teaching quality, such as regulating teacher preparation standards and licensure.

What's more, this report focuses specifically on the role of state education agencies, not state legislatures. Therefore, it does not address funding formula decisions and other key legislative actions.

Lastly, it's important to note that many of the examples cited in this report relate to new and evolving work, so there are not yet data to show whether the policies or programs are effective. In the coming months and years, it'll be important to monitor these initiatives to see whether they are having the intended impact. States have an important role to play not only in efforts to address inequitable access to strong teaching but also in evaluating the effectiveness of those interventions.

1 MAKE THE INVISIBLE FAR MORE VISIBLE *(INCLUDING BOTH PATTERNS OF INEQUITY AND THEIR IMPACT ON CHILDREN)*

The first step to fixing a problem is recognizing that it exists. As the keepers of state data systems, leaders in state departments of education are uniquely positioned to provide district and school leaders — and the public — with transparent information on patterns in assignment to strong teachers, potential causes of these patterns, and their impact on children. In their teacher equity plans, most state education officials highlighted statewide gaps in assignment to strong teachers, and in some cases, to strong school leaders. For example, officials in New York reported that teachers in the highest poverty schools are over four times as likely as teachers in the lowest poverty schools to be in their first year.[5] These statewide analyses are a good start, but they do not do enough to provide state or district leaders with actionable information.

To support districts where low-income students or students of color are less likely than their higher income or White peers to be assigned to strong teachers, state officials must be able to identify those districts and dig deeper to understand:

- Which districts have the highest percentages of inexperienced, out-of-field, or ineffective teachers?

- Which districts have large within-district disparities in assignment to experienced, in-field, or effective teachers?

- Are disparities driven by differences in teacher quality *between* schools, by the results of student-teacher assignment patterns *within* schools, or both?

- Are certain groups of students (e.g., low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, or English learners) less likely to be assigned to strong teachers?

Answering these questions requires diving into district-, school-, and even student-level data to understand which students are assigned to which teachers. It's not enough, in other words, to know that 10 percent of teachers in a district's highest poverty schools are brand-new. District and school leaders also need to know that low-income students within a school are five times as likely to be assigned to a brand-new teacher as their more privileged peers in that same school. Currently, however, many states report teacher assignment data at the school or even district level but not within schools.[6] State leaders have an important role to play in developing robust systems that examine data at this more granular level, such as the examples below.

MASSACHUSETTS TAKES A DEEP LOOK AT TEACHER ASSIGNMENT DATA

Massachusetts education officials have perhaps done the most among state education leaders to provide schools and districts with critical data on students' access to strong teaching. State leaders are leveraging student-level data to create the Student Learning Experience Report, which gives school and district leaders a real sense of the impact on students when they are inequitably assigned to strong teachers. The report, which becomes available in fall 2017 to school- and district-level administrators, shows the characteristics of teachers that taught *each student* over a number of years.

State, district, and school leaders can use the Student Learning Experience Report to look at data:
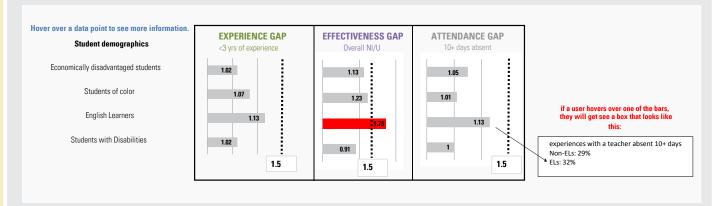
- At multiple levels – state, district, school, and for an individual student; and

- Overall or for certain groups of students – including low-income students, students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and students who are behind academically.

Those data can be powerful for understanding students' varied learning experiences. For example:

- A district leader trying to understand why the district is underperforming for students with disabilities could use the tool to compare how often those students — across the district and at each school — have access to experienced and highly-rated teachers; or

- A school leader trying to understand why a group of students is struggling in math could use the tool to see how often each of those students has had a math teacher who is a novice, chronically absent, lower-rated, or a long-term substitute over the past few years.

After all, it's one thing to know that one-third of the teachers in a school are in their first year; it's another altogether to know that a student who's struggling had novice teachers for the last three years in a row (whether in the same district or another).

Massachusetts provides each district with a summary report, which might look something like this:

Hover over a data point to see more information.

Student demographics

	EXPERIENCE GAP <3 yrs of experience	EFFECTIVENESS GAP Overall NI/U	ATTENDANCE GAP 10+ days absent
Economically disadvantaged students	1.02	1.13	1.05
Students of color	1.07	1.23	1.01
English Learners	1.13	1.73	1.13
Students with Disabilities	1.02	0.91	1
	1.5	1.5	1.5

if a user hovers over one of the bars, they will get see a box that looks like this:

experiences with a teacher absent 10+ days
Non-ELs: 29%
ELs: 32%

As shown in the chart above, English learners were 73 percent more likely than their native English-speaking peers to have been taught by teachers rated "needs improvement" or "unsatisfactory" over the past three years.

Massachusetts officials have partnered thoughtfully with leaders in the pilot districts, eliciting feedback from district officials and modifying the system to better address their needs. Through this partnership, they have made it clear that their priority is helping local leaders address issues like those above.

OTHER STATES TAKING A DEEPER LOOK AT TEACHER ASSIGNMENT DATA

Washington officials conducted a district-by-district analysis to identify where low-income students were especially likely to be assigned to out-of-field, inexperienced, or unqualified teachers. These data, which are publicly available, would allow state education leaders or community members to see, for example, that in a small suburban district in Tacoma, 82 percent of students from low-income families are in schools with a high percentage of inexperienced teachers; whereas, statewide, only 24 percent of low-income students are in such schools.

Tennessee officials, meanwhile, wanted to understand how much of the gap in assignment to highly effective teachers within districts was the result of differences between schools and how much was the result of differences between classrooms within schools. The state's analysis highlighted that gaps in assignment to highly effective teachers are the result of both the assignment of teachers to schools and the assignment of teachers within schools. For example, consider two districts where the state found that low-income students were about 10 percent less likely to be assigned a highly rated teacher. Tennessee's deeper, student-level analysis showed that in one district, this inequity was primarily the result of which teachers were assigned to which schools, i.e., there were fewer highly rated teachers in high-poverty schools. In the other, the problem was mostly one of assignment *within* schools, meaning low-income students were less likely to be assigned to highly rated teachers than their wealthier peers in the same school building.

State officials should also examine additional indicators (beyond those required in federal law) that can provide insight into the potential causes of these disparities. For example:

- Do districts and schools with the highest percentages of inexperienced, out-of-field, or ineffective teachers also have particularly high rates of teacher turnover?

- What do the data say about school climate and working conditions?

- What do the data say about the consistency and quality of school and district leadership?

- Are these districts and schools in "teacher deserts," with few nearby teacher preparation programs?

Indiana officials, for example, found that teachers rated "effective" and "highly effective" are twice as likely to leave the state's highest poverty schools than its lowest poverty schools. (Massachusetts officials found that high-poverty schools were over twice as likely as lower poverty schools [19 percent vs. 9 percent] to have a first-year principal.)

In addition, state leaders should take a closer look at the race/ethnicity of their teachers. Research shows that teacher diversity is important for students, particularly students of color, and that teachers of color often face different on-the-job challenges than their White peers.[7] Therefore, all analyses should be disaggregated by teacher race/ethnicity to understand whether personnel policies and working conditions might be undermining teacher diversity. For example, overall school climate survey results may provide some insight into working conditions, but they may not accurately portray the experiences of Black and Latino teachers. And while average turnover rates provide the percentage of teachers leaving a school or district each year, they can hide far higher levels of churn among teachers of color.[8]

Finally, definitions are important — they can either hide or reveal problems. State officials should ensure that each measure of teacher quality (certification, experience, and effectiveness) is defined in a way that provides different and meaningful information. "Effective," for example, should not be defined the same way as "certified," and whenever possible should take into account the teacher's impact on student learning. Moreover, definitions should allow for differentiation between teachers and schools. If teachers with emergency credentials to teach out-of-field are considered certified, for example, 99 percent of students may have teachers who meet that definition, when — in reality — some students are disproportionately assigned to teachers who have not demonstrated that they are fully prepared to teach in their subject area.

2 SET CLEAR IMPROVEMENT EXPECTATIONS FOR LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS AND MAKE MEETING THOSE EXPECTATIONS MATTER

While highlighting disparities is important, transparency in and of itself is not always sufficient to motivate action. State leaders must go a step further and set clear expectations for eliminating inequities in assignment to strong teachers, both for their states and for their district leaders. And they must make those expectations matter.

Setting expectations for equitably assigning strong teachers to all students

When asked in their teacher equity plans how they would monitor progress, most state education officials chose to simply list the steps they would take to address teacher-related issues. Setting expectations for equitable access to strong teaching must go beyond that.

Expectations must include:

● Clear numeric goals for reducing inequities;

● Timelines for reaching them; and

● Intermediate targets that allow the state to monitor progress and correct course as necessary.

State officials should work with district leaders to set district-level goals — and timelines for meeting them — that are aligned with the goals for the state.

Goals must also be ambitious — designed with the intention of closing, not just narrowing, gaps. For example, Colorado officials submitted a draft ESSA plan that calls for cutting the identified gaps in assignment to strong teaching in half by the 2020-2021 school year, with the ultimate goal of eliminating gaps by the 2025-2026 school year.[9]

Of course, the state as a whole will only make progress when its districts and schools make progress. State officials should work with district leaders to set district-level goals — and timelines for meeting them — that are aligned with the goals for the state. (See our "Achieving Equitable Access to Strong Teachers" report for guidance on leading this process in districts.[10])

In many districts, where there are disparities in assignment to strong teachers, that may mean setting goals for closing those gaps. In other districts, where leaders struggle to recruit, develop, and retain strong teachers, that may mean setting goals for increasing the percentage of strong teachers districtwide. And in some districts, leaders will have to do both. In all cases, state officials should clearly communicate the goals so district and school leaders know what the expectations are and by when they are expected to reach them.

Making those expectations matter

State and district goals are important, but unless meeting those expectations matters, they will be nothing more than lip service to equity. State education agency leaders must make these expectations meaningful to their own staff, their district leaders, and their school leaders.

Making expectations matter to state officials

Parents already know that teachers matter, and many parents in historically underserved groups see that their kids are being shortchanged. Black and Latino parents overwhelmingly cite good teachers as the most important characteristic of a great school, and many say that lower teaching quality is one of the top reasons why Black and Latino students don't receive as good an education as White students.[11]

State officials can validate and respond to parents' and other stakeholders' awareness of inequities in schools by encouraging them to hold the state accountable for advancing equitable access to strong teaching. That starts with clearly communicating the state goals — including to underserved families and communities — then continues with regular meetings to report progress toward reaching those goals. In their teacher equity plans, a number of state officials committed to future stakeholder meetings on a specific timeline. Reporting on progress toward specific, numeric targets at such meetings could jump-start more meaningful stakeholder engagement and give more weight to the stated goal of eliminating disparities.

Making expectations matter to district leaders

There are several ways that state officials can make progress on teacher equity important to district leaders. For example, they could:

- *Revise application requirements and monitoring processes for Title II funds (federal funds for improving teaching quality, especially in low-income communities)* to push district leaders to prioritize reducing inequities in access to strong teaching.

- *Use financial incentives to motivate district leaders to take action to eliminate disparities in assignment to strong teachers.* As we discuss in the following section, state leaders could provide competitive grants to districts most committed to taking action on this issue. And they could make progress toward district goals for eliminating disparities a condition for eligibility for any competitive dollars.

MONITORING HOW FUNDS ARE USED TO ADVANCE TEACHER EQUITY

States have a real opportunity to use Title II funds to advance teacher equity. But right now, too few state leaders even know how districts are using the dollars they receive. Although tracking how districts are using their Title II funding for teacher equity initiatives isn't sufficient to spur action, it's an important first step. **Maryland** officials, for example, wrote in their teacher equity plan that they intend to monitor whether district leaders used some of their Title II funds to increase effective teaching in high-need schools.

- *Continue to monitor and hold districts accountable for making progress toward their local goals.* One powerful way to do this is to incorporate progress toward eliminating disparities in assignment to strong teachers into the state's broader district accountability system. In other words, make the rating from the state (and, perhaps, the level of support/intervention a district receives) partially depend on whether the district is on track to meet goals for reducing inequities in assignment to strong teachers. Where a state has no formal district accountability system, state leaders could still include progress on teacher equity in the metrics — like progress on student achievement — that they discuss in regular meetings or calls with local superintendents. Doing so could push district leaders to move from "admiring" the data to acting on them.

A NOTE ABOUT TITLE II FUNDING

Congress invested $2.06 billion in Title II in FY 2017 and $2.35 billion in FY 2016 to support districts in improving the quality and effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. The law is explicit that the funds should be used to provide low-income students and students of color greater access to those educators. As of this writing, the Trump administration and U.S. House of Representatives have proposed eliminating all Title II funding from the federal budget. The Education Trust has joined a wide range of education advocates in opposing these damaging proposals and pushing for level funding for Title II, so that state and district leaders have funds they need — including to use in the ways described in this report. We are heartened that the Senate's funding bill maintains Title II funding at its current level, but the fight is far from over — the House and Senate will need to negotiate this difference before a final funding bill is passed.

Making expectations matter to school leaders

In addition to holding themselves and their district leaders responsible for reducing disparities in assignment to strong teachers, state officials should also consider extending that accountability to principals. Research shows that teachers — particularly those in high-need schools — choose whether to stay or go largely based on the strength of the school's principal.[13] If state leaders are serious about addressing gaps in assignment to strong teachers that exist across and within schools, they should make retention of, and equitable assignment to, strong teachers a criterion in principal evaluation.

HOLDING SCHOOL LEADERS RESPONSIBLE FOR RETAINING STRONG TEACHERS

Some state leaders have taken steps toward holding principals responsible for reducing attrition of strong teachers. Policymakers in **Florida**, for example, require district leaders to include recruitment and retention of strong teachers in their principal evaluation systems.[14]

State officials can validate and respond to parents' and other stakeholders' awareness of inequities in schools by encouraging them to hold the state accountable for advancing equitable access to strong teaching.

3

TARGET STATE RESOURCES TO THE DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS STRUGGLING MOST WITH THIS ISSUE

Leaders in state education agencies must set expectations for school districts, but if they really want action on a problem that many think is intractable, they're going to have to provide some real support. Of course, officials at state education agencies are responsible for serving all districts, but they must prioritize support to the districts and schools that need it most.

Unfortunately, most strategies in states' teacher equity plans were directed at raising the overall number and quality of teachers statewide, with no focus on inequities in access to strong teaching. For example, many of the plans mentioned providing professional development on the implementation of new standards. This might raise the quality of instruction for some students, but it won't necessarily prepare teachers to provide differentiated instruction to English learners, students with disabilities, or students who are academically behind.

There are several ways state leaders can target their support to districts and schools that need it most:

- **Target state dollars.** State leaders can give priority to high-need districts — where students are less likely to have access to strong, consistent teaching than students in the state overall — when allocating teacher quality grants. They can also offer competitive grants specifically for support, professional development, and retention programs in high-need districts and schools.

- **Target technical assistance.** In addition to distributing grants, many state education agencies deliver direct support (or partner with high-quality outside organizations to provide indirect support) to district leaders on issues, such as effectively teaching new standards, providing meaningful feedback on instructional practice, and gauging teaching conditions. Limited capacity, however, means that state education agencies often cannot offer substantive support everywhere. Faced with the pressure to support as many districts as possible, state education agencies have often chosen to provide one-size-fits-all resources or professional development curricula. Instead of trying to maximize reach, state leaders should prioritize districts that most need support — where low-income students, students of color, English learners, or students with disabilities are less likely to have access to strong teaching — and tailor the assistance they provide to those districts' needs.

- **Target teacher pipeline and preparation efforts.** In response to concerns about shortages, many states are trying to increase the number and improve the preparation of people entering the teaching profession. But too often, these efforts ignore the fact that these shortages are not an across-the-board problem. Rather, most states struggle with shortages in some subject areas, districts, and schools.[15] Targeting recruitment, preparation, and induction efforts to these areas of need is critical. That may mean focusing specifically on increasing the number of educators prepared to teach English learners or students with disabilities. Or it may mean focusing on districts facing teacher shortages and the institutes of higher education serving them.

USING DATA TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS TEACHER SHORTAGES

Recognizing that teacher shortages may be more of an issue in some subject areas and districts than others, **Tennessee** officials broke down their staffing data by subject and district poverty level. They found that while in some content areas districts have more applicants than openings, in others they have shortages — and those shortages are worse in high-poverty districts. The state's data analysis also showed that its new teacher workforce did not match the diversity of the student population; only 14 percent of people who completed educator preparation programs self-identified as people of color in the 2015-16 cohort, compared with 36 percent of Tennessee's student population.

In response, state education leaders are working to improve the partnership between districts and preparation programs, including by encouraging preparation programs to steer candidates to districts with the greatest need. The state's college, career, and technical education team will support districts in developing more "Grow Your Own" programs, prioritizing districts with significant shortages in key academic areas and significant mismatches in teacher and student demographics. And officials plan to invest $100,000 in grants for targeted districts to develop plans to increase diversity of the teaching force.[16]

- In small or isolated, lower capacity districts, state education agency officials could also *provide support directly to teachers and school leaders*. In cases where there simply aren't many district staff, the state may need to perform some traditional district roles, such as providing professional development.

SUPPORTING TEACHERS IN ISOLATED SCHOOLS

Recognizing the importance of support for new teachers and the challenges of providing it for those who teach a less common specialization, state officials in **Maine** piloted an online mentorship program for special education teachers across the state, with a particular focus on three low-income, less-populated counties. Through this initiative, teachers receive mentorship either from faculty at institutes of higher education or teachers currently in the classroom.[17] This program may allow new teachers to learn from others with experience addressing similar instructional challenges, even if there aren't any other teachers with the same focus in their school or district.

4 DEVELOP NETWORKS OF DISTRICT LEADERS TO PROBLEM-SOLVE TOGETHER

Although it is imperative that state officials target their resources, staff at the state education agency aren't the only source of support for districts struggling to give equitable access to strong teaching to all students. Research and experience have shown that practitioners learn best from their peers, especially those with proven track records of success in similar geographic or socioeconomic contexts.[18] State education agency officials have an important role to play in helping district leaders learn from one another. In doing so, they can both acknowledge the hard work of district teams that are ahead of the curve and leverage their valuable expertise.

One way state education agency officials can facilitate such learning is to create and support networks of high-need districts or districts with significant within-district gaps in assignment to strong teachers, including districts making significant progress in addressing disparities.

State education officials can also use data to identify district and school leaders who are recruiting and retaining strong teachers for low-income students and students of color at the highest rates, and share out promising practices.

State education agency officials have an important role to play in helping district leaders learn from one another.

USING DISTRICT NETWORKS TO FACILITATE LEARNING

State leaders in **Ohio**, alongside the U.S. Department of Education and other education partners, convened an Educator Equity Lab, where nine representative district teams refined their local plans for addressing inequities in access to strong teaching and developed actionable steps to facilitate their successful implementation. "The Equity Lab provided time for our district team to have conversations about specific activities to implement our strategy. It also allowed us to hear what other districts are considering," Sharon McDermott, superintendent of Franklin Local Schools, told Battelle for Kids, a Columbus, Ohio-based nonprofit that works with school systems and communities to improve student achievement in the state.[19] Ohio Department of Education officials hope these local planning documents will serve as exemplars for other district leaders and plan to organize similar meetings in the future, focused specifically on districts in Ohio with the largest gaps in access to strong teaching.[20]

5 BREAK DOWN SILOS BETWEEN WORK TO INCREASE ACCESS TO STRONG TEACHING AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT WORK

Nearly every district serves low-income students, students of color, English learners, or students with disabilities. Ensuring that these children are assigned to strong educators, and that these educators have the support they need to succeed in the classroom, is imperative to virtually every effort to raise student achievement. But too often, state education leaders treat teacher equity work as separate from other improvement efforts. State leaders must work to break down these silos and integrate efforts to eliminate disparities in access to strong teaching with all of the other work to close gaps in opportunity and achievement.

Perhaps the most obvious area for integration is between teacher equity efforts and school improvement. Too often, the lowest performing schools are also the ones where teachers have the fewest resources and least support. Additionally, less equity-oriented school leaders often assign students who need the most support to their least experienced and/or least effective teachers within the school building.[21] These between- and within-school disparities are a key driver of schools' underperformance — both overall, and for particular groups of students.

To break down silos between teacher equity and school improvement work, state education agency officials could:

- Ensure that examining patterns in teacher assignment and retention, and addressing identified inequities, is a key component of any school improvement effort.

- Provide school and district leaders the necessary data to analyze gaps in assignment to strong teachers.

- Make tools available that prompt school and district leaders to address teacher retention and assignment in their needs assessment and improvement planning processes.

- Require that district leaders commit to analyzing data on student assignment and teaching quality and developing strategies to address inequities (both between and within schools), in order to receive federal funding for improvement planning (an allowable use of federal school improvement funds).

MAKING PERSONNEL DECISIONS AN INTEGRAL PART OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

In 2010, Lawrence Public Schools, one of the lowest performing school systems in **Massachusetts**, became the first district to enter state receivership status. Jeffrey C. Riley, whom the late Massachusetts Commissioner Mitchell Chester appointed as receiver, led a number of initiatives to improve student outcomes, including several focused on school leader and teacher quality. He replaced over 50 percent of district principals and increased principal salaries, with the belief that stronger leaders would be better able to attract, develop, and retain strong teachers. He also implemented (as part of the state rollout) a more rigorous teacher evaluation system to give teachers better feedback, focused on filling vacancies with strong teachers, instituted a new salary schedule that rewarded teachers for leadership roles, and paid teachers for additional hours of instruction and planning time. While it's impossible to say which of the many changes had the greatest impact on student outcomes, improvement in the district was striking. In just two years, student proficiency jumped from 28 percent to 41 percent in math, the graduation rate increased by almost 15 points, and the number of the highest rated schools in the district increased from two to six.[22]

OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — which requires state leaders to ensure that low-income students and students of color are not served at disproportionate rates by inexperienced, out-of-field, or ineffective teachers — provides an important opportunity for state leaders to re-focus on this important issue. The law supports many of the strategies described in this report.

- ESSA prioritizes **making the invisible far more visible** by requiring each state and district to publish a report card which, if well-designed, could begin to provide state and local leaders with actionable information to address disparities in access to strong and consistent teaching. The report cards must include information on the professional qualifications of educators, including:

  o the number and percentage of inexperienced teachers, principals, and other school leaders;

  o teachers with emergency credentials; and

  o teachers who are out-of-field.

District and state report cards must include comparisons of high-poverty and low-poverty schools on these metrics.

- ESSA includes extensive stakeholder engagement requirements that state leaders can harness to **communicate expectations for eliminating inequities** in access to strong teaching and **make meeting those expectations matter**. For example, state officials must seek advice from families and community members on how to use Title II funds to improve teaching quality and equitable assignment to strong teachers. District and school leaders must seek community and family input when developing improvement plans for struggling schools. State officials can maximize the impact of this stakeholder engagement by providing data on equitable assignment to strong teachers, information on state and district goals on each measure of teacher quality, and updates on progress toward those goals. Doing so will help parents and advocates in underserved communities see whether their state and district are on track to eliminating disparities — and push for greater progress if they are not.

State leaders could also go a step beyond ESSA requirements and establish accountability systems that hold districts responsible for improving outcomes for all groups of students and providing equitable opportunities to learn — including equitable access to strong teaching.

- ESSA gives state leaders the opportunity to use Title II funding to support the strategies described in this report. ESSA also gives state leaders leverage to **target resources to the districts and schools struggling most with this issue** by requiring district officials to describe in their applications for Title II, Part A funds how they use dollars to prioritize struggling and high-poverty schools.

- Because states have flexibility for how to use the 5 percent state set-aside under Title II, Part A, they could choose to use it to **develop networks of district leaders to problem-solve together** toward equitable access to strong teaching.

- ESSA should be an impetus for state education agency leaders to **break down silos** between offices and integrate efforts to eliminate disparities in access to strong teaching with other work to close gaps in opportunity and achievement. Under ESSA, states must integrate their teacher equity plan into the consolidated Title I plan, offering state leaders a key opportunity to consider the interactions between their teacher equity and school improvement efforts. What's more, the law's requirement that improvement plans for low-performing schools (those identified for comprehensive or additional targeted support and improvement) identify and address resource inequities offers additional opportunities for alignment:

  o State leaders can and should require that these resource inequities include disparities in assignment to strong teachers.

  o These inequities should also be a key part of the state's periodic review of its resource allocations to districts with large numbers of struggling schools.

ESSA provides many potential avenues for state leaders to address disparities in access to strong teaching, but it's up to state leaders to take advantage of these opportunities. States can use the transparency requirements under ESSA to shine a light on inequities in access to strong teaching, for example, or to conceal them. They can push district leaders to use Title II dollars to address these disparities, or allow them to keep using these funds for across-the-board class-size reductions or generic professional development. They can continue to provide funding for initiatives with no knowledge of their impact, or they can invest time and resources into evaluating which interventions are successful. And they can push district leaders to include tough conversations about inequities in teacher assignment in the needs assessment process, or punt those decisions to each locality. In each case, the examples highlighted throughout this report demonstrate that the decisions state officials make matter — and provide ideas for how some state leaders are using their influence to help address disparities in access to strong teaching.

Moreover, while ESSA provides an opportunity to get serious, the goal of teacher equity work shouldn't simply be complying with federal law. It should be doing what's right for kids and communities. State leaders have had the power to support district and school leaders in closing these gaps for a long time. They have had the capability — and the responsibility — for a long time, too. For the sake of the students who have been shortchanged for far too long, state leaders must exercise that power now.

ESSA provides many potential avenues for state leaders to address disparities in access to strong teaching, but it's up to state leaders to take advantage of these opportunities.

ENDNOTES

1. This body of work includes, but is not limited to: Sarah Almy and Melissa Tooley, "Building and Sustaining Talent: Creating Conditions in High-Poverty Schools That Support Effective Teaching and Learning," (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, June 2012), http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Building_and_Sustaining_Talent.pdf; Carrie Hahnel and Orville Jackson, "Learning Denied: The Case for Equitable Access to Effective Teaching in California's Largest School District," (Oakland, CA: The Education Trust–West, January 2012), https://edtrust.org/resource/learning-denied-the-case-for-equitable-access-to-effective-teaching-in-californias-largest-school-district/; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, "Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: Teacher Equity," (March 2014), http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-teacher-equity-snapshot.pdf; Glenda Partee, "Attaining Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers in Public Schools," (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, April 2014), https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/TeacherDistro.pdf; Dan Goldhaber, Lesley Lavery, and Roddy Theobold, "Uneven Playing Field? Assessing the Inequity of Teacher Characteristics and Measured Performance Across Students," The Center for Education Data & Research Working Paper 2014-4, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, April 2014), http://www.cedr.us/papers/working/CEDR%20WP%202014-4.pdf; Dan Goldhaber, Vanessa Quince, and Roddy Theobold, "Has It Always Been This Way? Tracing the Evolution of Teacher Quality Gaps in U.S. Public Schools," The Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research Working Paper 171, December 2016, http://www.caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/WP%20171.pdf.

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