



# ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO STRONG TEACHERS:

## IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE STATE ACTION PLAN

BY RACHEL METZ | MAY 2015

Strong teaching can help all students soar academically. And there are excellent teachers in every community who, in their schools and classrooms, are proving that it can be done. But too often, low-income students and students of color are shortchanged when it comes to teacher quality.

As the unit of government charged with the governance of public education, states have a responsibility to correct this longstanding problem. And federal Title I law requires states to end the disparate assignment of inexperienced, out-of-field, and unqualified teachers to low-income students and students of color.

So what would a good state plan of action look like? When most hiring, compensation, and promotional decisions are made at the district or even school level, what can states really do?

---

This short guide, based on what we have learned from two decades of work on this issue, provides a few ideas on what could be included in a good plan. Our recommendations are grouped into three categories:

1

### ANALYZE

Analyze the data in ways that build understanding and urgency.

2

### BUILD

Disseminate results to build stakeholder buy-in and connect identified gaps to underlying root causes.

3

### CREATE

Create policies to spur action and progress.

---

In the end, of course, it's what state leaders do with their plans that matters. But having a solid plan is a good place to start.

---

# ANALYZE

---

## ANALYZE THE DATA IN WAYS THAT BUILD UNDERSTANDING AND URGENCY

---

The first thing state plans should do is provide a data-rich overview of how teachers are currently placed throughout the state. The **following indicators**, all linked to student achievement, are a good starting point. (The first three generally are required by federal law. By adding others, state leaders and stakeholders will have a fuller picture.)

### USEFUL INDICATORS

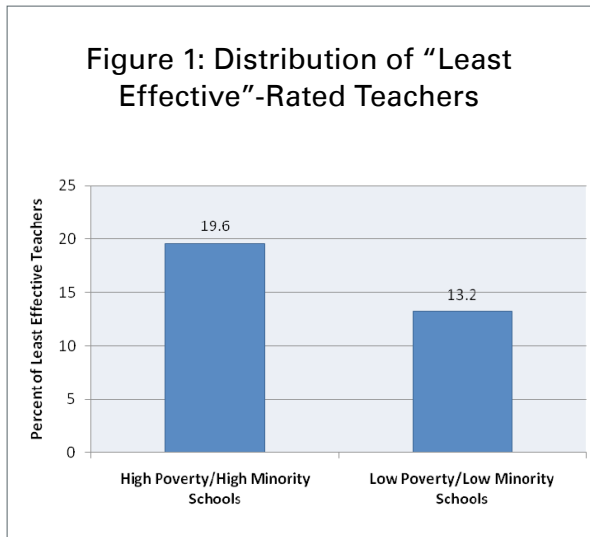
- **Inexperience.** Given how steep the learning curve is for first-year teachers, states should focus specifically on the percentage of teachers who are in their first year of teaching.<sup>1</sup>
- **Out-of-field teaching.** Because knowledge of the content area is particularly important at the secondary level, states should define out-of-field teaching based on the percent of secondary core academic courses taught by teachers who have neither a certification nor academic major in that subject area.<sup>2</sup>
- **Unqualified teachers.** While using the Highly Qualified Teacher indicator (required under No Child Left Behind) may be a necessity in the near term, states should consider using evaluation results, when ready, to fulfill this requirement — an idea that first came from the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>3</sup>
- **Evaluation results.** Many states are just now in the midst of rolling out new evaluation systems, so they may not be ready to use the results from these systems in their equity plans. But once evaluation systems are generating stable, reliable data, states should incorporate evaluation results — with a focus on the top and bottom ratings — into the suite of indicators they examine.
- **Turnover.** States should report a three-year average of the percent of full-time teachers who leave their school each year. One year of turnover data doesn't necessarily say much; a three-year average will show a pattern.
- **Chronic teacher absenteeism.** States should collect and examine data on the percent of teachers absent 10 or more days per year. In doing so, states should be clear on what counts as an absence, including whether professional development days do or do not count.<sup>4</sup>
- **Late hires.** District hiring start data are intertwined with teachers' readiness to teach effectively and in the momentum of the learning experience. If states don't have data on late hiring, that may be something to add over time.

## IMPORTANT STATEWIDE ANALYSES

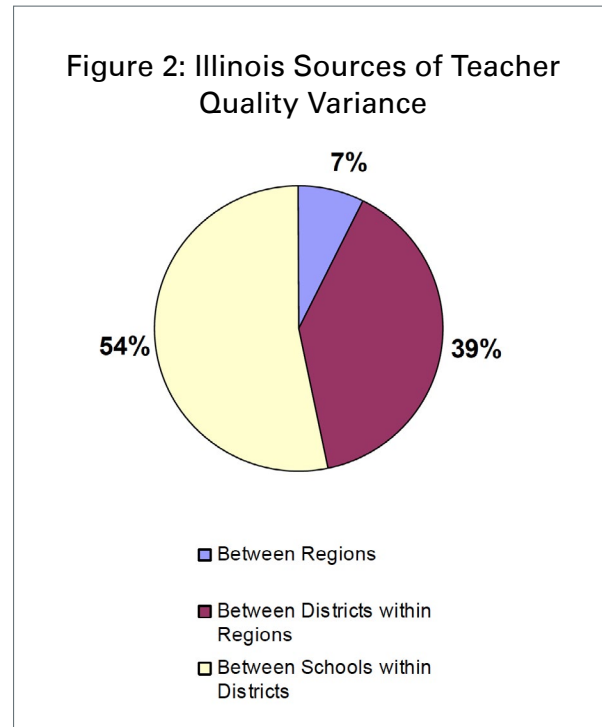
States will want to analyze the data for each indicator as follows (see Figure 1):

1. Distribution across high-, medium- and low-poverty schools (that is, by quartile of low-income student enrollment);
2. Distribution across high-, medium- and low-minority schools (also by quartile);
3. If an indicator doesn't show a lot of variation via quartile analysis, distribution by decile to identify any problems at the extremes; and
4. Distribution by race and income of students (rather than schools), if student-level data are available, so that inequitable access within schools gets included in the analysis too.

When analyzing these data, states should be clear on the sources of any inequities: How much of the differences are the result of differences between regions and/or districts, and which are the result of differences among schools in the same district (or, if student-level data are available, between classrooms in the same school)? (See Figure 2.)



Tennessee State Board of Education, "Tennessee's Teacher Equity Plan 2009-2010," Slide 2A available online at <http://www.tn.gov/sbe/2010Januarypdfs/II%20C%20TN%20Teacher%20Equity%20Plan%20Master%20Combined.pdf>.



Jennifer Presley, "The Distribution of Teacher Quality in Illinois," (Illinois Education Research Council, 2007), Slide 6 available online at [http://ierc.education/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NCCTQ\\_final\\_2007.pdf](http://ierc.education/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NCCTQ_final_2007.pdf).

## Generating Actionable Analyses

The statewide analyses described above are important in providing a statistical portrait of the entire state, but they are hard to act on. Consequently, states should dig deeper into the data to identify patterns of inequity within districts and schools.

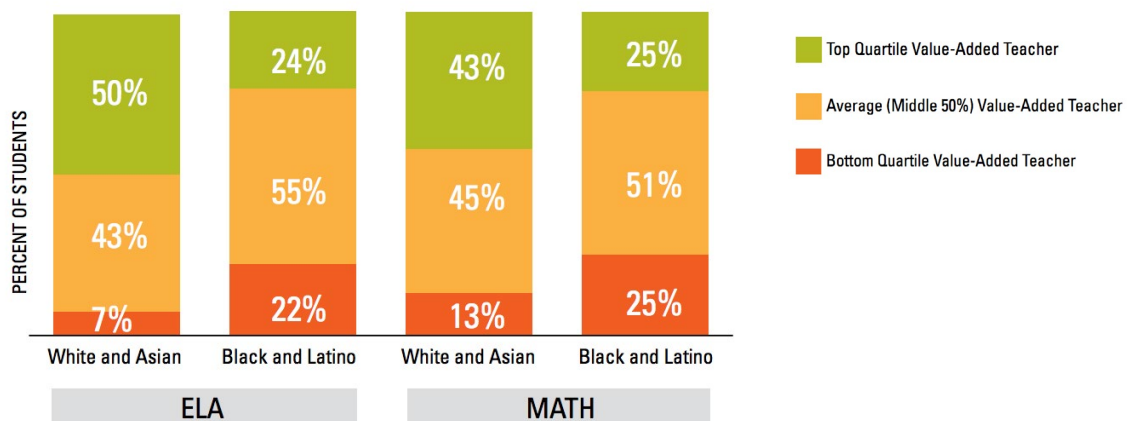
### Identifying District-Level Problems:

#### Key Question:

Which school districts have inequitable patterns of access to quality teachers? For districts large enough (at least four schools per level), states can run a within-district analysis to detect patterns. (See Figure 3.) Depending on the distribution of students in those districts, the state may want to tweak its analyses to better spot inequities. Specifically:

- For diverse districts, it may be useful to perform the analyses separately for each racial group.
- In districts with large numbers of low-income children, it is often useful to perform the analyses separately for students eligible for free lunch.

Figure 3: The Distribution of High and Low Value-Added Teachers in Los Angeles by Student Race/Ethnicity



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, January 2012), Figure 6 available online at <http://edtrust.org/resource/learning-denied-the-case-for-equitable-access-to-effective-teaching-in-californias-largest-school-district>.

### Identifying School-Level Problems:

Finally, the overview of teacher equity in the state should identify schools with the most urgent teacher quality problems, so actions can be targeted immediately. To do this, states should identify 10 percent of schools in the state with the biggest teacher quality challenges, as determined either by looking across multiple indicators or by conducting successive analyses of single indicators. With this information, states should consider:

- Whether these schools are concentrated in certain districts or regions,
- Who these schools serve, and
- The schools' accountability designations (whether they are "priority" or otherwise low-performing schools).

---

# BUILD

---

## BUILD STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN AND DETERMINE ROOT CAUSES

---

It's critical that states share this overall picture widely. By sharing data, states help create a broader understanding of current patterns of teacher access and, in turn, ownership of a concerted effort to address inequities. This helps build and sustain demand for actions that can be politically difficult.

**First**, states should identify critical stakeholders: district and school officials, teachers and their associations, parent and community organizations, and civil rights organizations. All these people will have important insights about both causes and solutions.

**Next**, state leaders should convene representatives from these groups, making sure to include stakeholders from a range of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Together, the state should work with stakeholders to identify the underlying reasons for the patterns in the data, so these causes can be addressed in any action plan.

### **That isn't simple:**

These are complex problems with multiple, often interconnected causes. For example, where high-poverty and high-minority schools have high rates of out-of-field teaching, there are many possible causes: high turnover caused by unsupportive school leadership; salary differences with neighboring districts; geographic isolation, rendering schools less desirable to teachers; and an inadequate supply from or weak relationships with nearby teacher preparation programs.

Because many of these potential causes could help explain problems with other indicators, states should be sure that their root causes reflect what their data showed about specific indicators, and that their solutions address those specific causes.

Once causes are identified, state leaders should work with stakeholders to identify which problems are most amenable to district action, which to state action, and which to a combination of both. They should also look for opportunities to seek partnerships with outside entities, like institutions of higher education.

Engagement with stakeholders should be ongoing, particularly as the state begins implementing the strategies in the equity plan.

---

# CREATE

---

## CREATE POLICIES TO SPUR ACTION AND PROGRESS

---

Although much of the action for ensuring equitable access to quality teaching needs to take place at the local level, states must take steps to encourage and support that action. Here are some possibilities worth considering:

1

### **Prioritize immediate action in schools with the most urgent problems.**

The children in schools with extremely low teacher quality and/or very high turnover simply can't afford to wait. Together, states and districts must stabilize these schools with strong, collaborative leadership and a high-quality teacher workforce.

One way of doing this is for the state to take responsibility for helping to staff these schools with proven veterans. The state of Delaware has done exactly that by establishing a unit — the Delaware Talent Cooperative — that recruits highly effective teachers to teach in these schools and provides them with additional compensation, formal recognition, ongoing professional development, and leadership opportunities.

States can also provide strong leverage for districts to prioritize these schools by prohibiting disproportionate assignment of inexperienced, lower quality teachers in low-performing schools. In Florida, for example, the state specifies that school districts may not assign a higher percentage than the school district average of temporarily certified teachers, teachers in need of improvement, or out-of-field teachers to schools graded “D” or “F” under the state’s school accountability system.<sup>5</sup> (This parallels federal requirements for states.)

States could also require districts to prioritize hiring in high-need schools before filling other vacancies, then provide bonuses to keep highly effective teachers in these schools.<sup>6</sup> In New York, the Strengthening Teacher and Leader Effectiveness competitive grant program helps medium- to high-poverty districts develop career ladders to give effective educators opportunities for growth.<sup>7</sup>

2

**Make equitable access important to school districts.** If districts are to successfully turn around longstanding patterns, they will need to be encouraged to do so. But pushing for real accountability around the fair access to quality teachers won't be enough. States must couple pressure with support. A good state plan will be very specific about what the state will do on both fronts.

Possible state actions include:

- Adopt a state policy prohibiting the disproportionate assignment of inexperienced, out of field, unqualified or ineffective teachers to low-income children and children of color;
- Including measures of teacher equity in formal or informal accountability for districts;
- Providing competitive funding for districts that want to take on equitable access aggressively;
- Denying discretionary funding to districts that fail to make progress on equity over multiple years;
- Making data public annually, both to celebrate districts that make progress and bring additional pressure on those that don't;
- Facilitating networking, sharing best practices, and providing helpful materials to districts; and
- Providing data on teacher perceptions of working conditions to district leaders so they can strengthen weaknesses. Where teacher surveys covering working conditions already exist, these data can be included alongside the equitable access data to help understand root causes of inequities.

**Address problems beyond district lines.** In many states, the data will suggest serious teacher quality and equity problems in certain regions of the state — for example, isolated regions of the state that don't have a supply of quality applicants — or other problems that are otherwise beyond district control (for example, salaries that aren't competitive because of within-state funding inequities). Here, no amount of finger-wagging at districts will help: For the children in these schools to get the teachers they need, state leaders must own the problem, too — which could mean state policy changes that will help districts overcome barriers to equitable access.

Some examples:

- Where school leadership or climate has been identified as a root cause of inequities, states could:
  - Support the expansion of high-quality school leadership programs and focus them first on the highest poverty schools.
  - Create a significant salary and/or retirement credit increase pool for highly effective school leaders who agree to lead in the highest poverty schools.
- Where lack of incentives have been identified as a root cause of inequities, states could:
  - Award extra compensation or extra retirement credits (for example, 1.5 years for every year of work) to highly effective teachers who teach in the highest poverty schools (if compensation and/or retirement policies are set at the state level);
  - Develop scholarship programs for prospective teachers (and/or loan repayment programs for top teacher preparation graduates) who become certified in and agree to teach hard-to-staff subjects in the highest poverty schools for at least five years; and
  - Ensure state budgets address disparities in local funding, so that high poverty districts have adequate resources to pay their teachers competitive salaries and provide them with the support they need.
- Where state budget timelines have been identified as a root cause of inequities, states could:
  - Provide each district with estimated enrollments for the following year in the spring and guarantee the vast majority of funds needed for hiring teachers to match those estimates. (When Delaware piloted a program to do just that, it saw a 44 percent increase in the proportion of teachers hired before August between 2010-11 and 2011-12.)<sup>8</sup>
- Where misalignment between educator preparation programs and districts has been identified as a root cause of inequities, states could:
  - Provide preparation programs with feedback on their graduates' teaching experience (e.g., placement and retention rates, student achievement data, and surveys of the new teachers and their employers).
  - Expand programs that produce high-quality graduates who teach in high-needs subjects and schools, and shrink those that don't.

---

States have a number of powerful ways of helping to ensure all students have equitable access to effective teachers. They can shine a light on problems and bright spots, work with stakeholders to understand the causes of problems, push districts to act and support them in doing so, and change state policies to reduce barriers. The teacher equity plans are an opportunity to move forward at all those levels.

# NOTES

---

1. This body of work includes, but is not limited to: Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor, "Teacher Credentials and Student Achievement in High School: A Cross-Subject Analysis with Student Fixed Effects," *Journal of Human Resources* vol. 45, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 655-681.; Thomas Kane, Jonah Rockoff, and Douglas Staiger, "What Does Certification Tell Us about Teacher Effectiveness? Evidence from New York City," *Economics of Education Review* 27 (2008): 615:631, <https://www0.gsb.columbia.edu/faculty/jrockoff/certification-final.pdf>; Douglas Harris and Tim Sass, "Teacher Training, Teacher Quality and Student Achievement" *Journal of Public Economics* vol. 95, issues 7-8 (August 2011): 798-812.
2. Dan Goldhaber and Dominic Brewer, "Does Teacher Certification Matter? High School Teacher Certification Status and Student Achievement," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 22, no. 2 (2000); Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor, "Teacher Credentials and Student Achievement in High School: A Cross-Subject Analysis with Student Fixed Effects," *Journal of Human Resources* vol. 45, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 655-681.
3. U.S. Department of Education, "Law & Guidance: ESEA Flexibility," <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/index.html>.
4. Raegen Miller, Richard Murnane, and John Willett, "Do Teacher Absences Impact Student Achievement? Longitudinal Evidence from One Urban School District," *Educational Evaluation and Policy* vol. 30, no. 2 (June 2008): 181-200, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w13356>.
5. This is defined in Title XLVIII, Chapter 1012, section 2315(2) available at [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1012/1012.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1012/1012.html).
6. "Overview of the Delaware Talent Cooperative," <https://sites.google.com/site/detalentcoop/overview>.
7. New York State Education Department, "Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Grant RFP Announced; Grants Will Help Schools Recruit, Support and Retain Effective Educators" June 4, 2013, <http://www.nysed.gov/news/2015/teacher-and-leader-effectiveness-grant-rfp-announced-grants-will-help-schools-recruit>.
8. Kelly Sherretz, Christopher Kelly, Rachel Matos, "Delaware Teacher and Administrator Supply and Demand Survey Analysis Report," (Institute for Public Administration at University of Delaware and Delaware Department of Education, June 2013), [http://www.ipa.udel.edu/publications/teacher\\_supply13.pdf](http://www.ipa.udel.edu/publications/teacher_supply13.pdf).



**The Education Trust**