

Excellent teaching.

Ensure students, especially low-income students, have well-trained and highly effective teachers with effective professional development opportunities.

Improve the process and outcomes of teacher preparation programs.

Restructure teacher preparation programs so that candidates demonstrate content knowledge and instructional skills in order to graduate with teaching degrees.

1 | Refine teacher certification requirements to ensure all pre-K–12 teachers have acquired the content knowledge and skills to be effective, especially with low-achieving students. Provide clear coursework guidelines and expectations and require all elementary and special education teachers to pass the Foundations of Reading and Math assessments.

2 | Require teacher candidates to have more in-classroom field experiences and practical courses with at least one field experience in a high-poverty school with an effective

teacher. Model some graduate teacher licensing programs after yearlong urban teacher residency programs to better prepare them to work in high-poverty settings.

3 | Improve the quality and diversity in teacher preparation programs while meeting teacher shortage area demands. Increase the growth of teacher Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) programs.

4 | Require a uniform format for reporting data on students and graduates of all teacher preparation programs to the SDE and the public annually. Revoke the approval of teacher preparation programs that do not produce enough effective teachers.

Why This Recommendation Is Necessary

Teacher preparation programs must prepare all teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills they need to be effective in the classroom. The four areas of teacher preparation in Connecticut, outlined below, continue to be of considerable concern.

The first area of concern is the teaching of reading and math in elementary grades. Teacher candidate results from the Foundations of Reading Assessment show that many are unprepared to teach reading.⁹⁹ This may occur, in part, because Connecticut elementary teacher certification regulations permit great program discretion in both general academic and professional education courses.¹⁰⁰ We do not know the preparation level of elementary teacher candidates for math because it is not assessed. Providing all elementary and special education teacher candidates with standardized and rigorous coursework, assessed by required Foundations of Reading and Math assessments, would prepare them to better meet the learning needs of students.

The second area is job-embedded field experiences. Connecticut teacher preparation field experience requirements vary widely across teacher preparation programs.¹⁰¹ Urban teacher residency programs with intensive field experience requirements such as Boston's and Chicago's have demonstrated that their graduates not only feel better prepared to be successful teachers, but remain in urban classrooms longer.¹⁰² Modeling some graduate teacher licensing programs after longer duration urban residency programs will provide the system with a supply of teachers better qualified to work in these settings.

The third area is teacher shortages in some content areas. To curb the excessive production of elementary teachers and encourage teacher candidates to teach in content shortage areas, SDE should limit the enrollment in elementary certification programs to the most highly qualified applicants. SDE should partner with philanthropic organizations¹⁰³ to support programs in attracting teachers into content shortage areas. Basing program approval on effectiveness measures would

encourage and attract additional ARC programs with a demonstrated ability to produce highly effective teachers, especially in content shortage areas.

Finally, except for minimal test data, teacher preparation programs are not required to report specific data on the qualifications or effectiveness of their graduates.¹⁰⁴ A transparent system of reporting will reveal which programs are producing effective teachers that also remain in teaching. This data will be useful in several other ways: to inform the SBOE on which teacher preparation programs to expand or close, to inform aspiring teachers about effective preparation programs, and to assist schools and districts in making hiring decisions.

Actions Required

- The SBOE must strengthen and act aggressively on its teacher preparation program approval and allow effectiveness measures to substitute for NCATE standards in approving some ARC programs
- The SDE/SBOE must actively pursue partnerships with philanthropic and other organizations to expand teacher preparation options
- Changing certification regulations requires Commissioner, BOE and AG approval, as well as a legislative regulatory review

Weight teacher evaluation towards student achievement.

Require school districts to institute a teacher evaluation system in which preponderant weight is given to growth in student achievement, in addition to other factors such as classroom practice observations and lesson planning.

1 | Student achievement measures may include variables besides assessment scores, such as demonstrated learning on a project. These evaluation systems should be linked to pay, placement and opportunities for advancement and dismissal.

2 | Institute K–12 data systems capable of linking student, teacher, course and administrative data for use in instructional improvement and performance evaluation. Provide incentives to support districts in utilizing these systems prior to 2013.

3 | These systems must include protections from arbitrary dismissals.

4 | Should workforce reductions be necessary in addition to seniority, teacher effectiveness and evidence of successful training in a school's special theme and instructional needs must also be considered. These decisions must be made at the school level, not the district level.

Why This Recommendation Is Necessary

Connecticut does not currently require the use of student achievement data in teacher evaluations, yet it is a central tenet of current federal education policy and is increasingly accepted as a means of improving both teaching and student achievement.¹⁰⁵ There is also evidence that teachers themselves find the current system of performance appraisal unsatisfactory.¹⁰⁶ Recent legislation requires the SBOE to establish guidelines for districts on a model teacher evaluation program and provide guidance on the use of multiple indicators of student academic growth in teacher evaluations by July 1, 2013.¹⁰⁷ It does not require that the new evaluation systems give student achievement either significant or preponderant weight in teacher evaluation decisions.¹⁰⁸

Actions Required

- Legislation and changes in institutional practice are necessary to require all school districts have teacher evaluation systems with a preponderant weight given to student growth
- Legislation is necessary to require variables besides seniority to be used in teacher layoff decisions and as part of teacher contracts and to require seniority to be school-based

Keep effective teachers teaching.

Compensate, support and develop teachers throughout their careers to improve instructional practice and student achievement.

- 1 | Provide teachers with opportunities for effective mentoring, professional development and collaboration to improve instructional practice. Adequate funding must be provided.
- 2 | Restructure teacher compensation to include career levels with increasing pay and performance bonuses. Career levels shall be attained via a rigorous evaluation process, which includes data on student growth, classroom practice, lesson preparation and planning, and other factors. A career ladder with up to five levels, ranging from novice through intermediate to master teacher, is recommended. Base pay shall be determined by career level. Bonus pay for teachers may be based on school, group and/or individual performance.

Why This Recommendation Is Necessary

High-quality professional development is critical to maximizing the effectiveness of teachers. Connecticut spends significant dollars on professional development each year, but there is no statewide process of collecting data on its quality or impact. Mentoring, coupled with time

for teachers to collaborate, provides them with feedback on how to improve their instructional practice and teach their students.¹⁰⁹

Connecticut does not currently have a requirement to structure teacher compensation using a combination of career levels and effectiveness bonuses. Current compensation systems do not distinguish between an effective and an ineffective teacher.¹¹⁰ As a result, the only way for a teacher to advance and increase compensation beyond the set salary schedule is to leave and teach in a more affluent school or district, accrue additional degrees or certifications, or become a school administrator.

If teacher compensation were based on a combination of earned career levels and compensation bonuses, districts would be better able to keep and develop teacher talent. If this were adopted, it would incentivize teachers to continually improve their instructional practices and to accept additional leadership or professional teacher responsibilities. Several districts and states are creating career ladders for teachers.¹¹¹

Action Required

- Enact legislation requiring a career ladder framework with an aligned base pay and bonus compensation system

Relate teacher tenure to effectiveness.

Demonstrated teaching effectiveness must be at the heart of tenure decisions. Tenure should not be a barrier to the removal of ineffective teachers.

- 1 | The ability of school districts to impose additional training requirements and to terminate ineffective teachers must be tied to teacher evaluations, with the preponderant emphasis on student achievement and without regard to how long a teacher has been teaching.
- 2 | Grant teachers a specific period of time for improvement based on an individualized professional improvement plan as part of this process.
- 3 | Revise the standards and process for dismissal to permit timely action and contract termination, unless such action is arbitrary, with student needs as a dominant component.

Why This Recommendation Is Necessary

State policy must ensure all students have effective teachers in the classroom. Tenure should be granted only to teachers who have earned the distinction of being effective. Currently, teachers are granted tenure after four years, not necessarily because they are deemed effective. Today's tenure termination policy is aimed at the removal

of incompetent teachers, not ineffective teachers, and the process is lengthy, involving multiple hearings and appeals.¹¹² The process needs to be streamlined further to permit the timely removal of ineffective teachers.

Actions Required

- Enact legislation to modify the Teacher Tenure Act so that it permits removal of ineffective teachers in a timely manner
- Legislation is necessary to revise the standards for dismissal to include student needs as a dominant component

Get highly effective teachers to the most challenged schools.

Ensure that the lowest-achieving schools can attract and retain highly effective teachers. Hold school districts accountable for implementing plans to recruit, develop and retain highly effective teachers and place them in low-achieving schools.

1 | Provide additional support and mentoring for teachers in these districts to improve instructional practice.

2 | The state should partner with philanthropic organizations to offer financial incentives to facilitate the process. Philanthropic organizations and businesses must be permitted to participate in strengthening the teaching force in these districts.

3 | Report data on the distribution of teachers by effectiveness to the public without the use of individual names.

4 | Require that teachers inform their school districts of their intent to retire or resign at the end of the school year by March or receive a financial penalty. This will not apply in instances of emergency or illness.

Why This Recommendation Is Necessary

Research shows that the most important factor in students' academic success is the quality of their teachers.¹¹³ The lowest-achieving schools require highly effective teachers, those with a proven track record of helping students cover more than one year's content in one year of schooling.¹¹⁴ Connecticut does not yet have systems in place for identifying highly effective teachers, but current data on district staffing vacancies suggests that incentives will be required to recruit and retain these teachers in the lowest achieving schools. In 2009-2010, the state's neediest districts entered the school year with a 16% vacancy rate compared with a 2% vacancy rate in districts with the lowest need.¹¹⁵

Under current local policies, teachers may retire with little advance notice to their schools and districts.¹¹⁶ Telling

districts of a decision to leave at the very end of a school year places that district at a disadvantage in hiring a talented replacement. A recent Connecticut report found that school districts benefit from recruiting and hiring for teacher vacancies earlier in the school year, as the quality of the applicant pool is greater.¹¹⁷ Since the greatest "outflow" of teachers is from lower-achieving school districts, their hiring burden is greater with the majority of hires occurring over the summer.¹¹⁸

Actions Required

- Increase the types of incentives proven to be effective in recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers
- Legislation is necessary to guarantee that philanthropic assistance can be used for this purpose in any district
- Legislation requiring the earlier notice of plans to leave is necessary