

Action Guide for State Policymakers

As we learned in [The Opportunity Makers](#), trajectory-changing schools invest in belonging, consistency, and coherence to create a powerful baseline experience for all young people. This guide helps state policymakers incentivize these three focus areas and remove obstacles for schools.

The Case for State Policy Support

State policymakers—including governors, state legislators, state board members, state superintendents, and other leaders in state education agencies—have a critical role to play in helping systems and schools scale the trajectory-changing practices that build belonging, consistency, and coherence.

- **Belonging:** Schools create an emotional climate for learning, activating students' ability to excel.
- **Consistency:** Schools deliver consistently good teaching and grade-level content for all students.
- **Coherence:** Schools build a unified instructional program and set priorities that are clear to all.

All three focus areas intersect, so efforts to improve in one area can reinforce another. For example, investing in safe and supportive schools both builds student belonging and creates the conditions for consistent teaching and learning. We encourage state policymakers to apply these recommendations in an integrated way to create policy conditions that support all three focus areas.

Strengthen and Diversify the Educator Workforce

The [research](#) is clear: [All students](#) benefit from educators of color. This is especially true for [students of color](#) across a broad and meaningful set of [academic](#), [social](#), and [emotional](#) indicators. Teachers of color build students' self-efficacy and deepen [classroom engagement](#), both of which are correlated with [belonging](#).

What's more, to thrive in an [increasingly multicultural world and workforce](#), young people need to learn in diverse environments led by educators who are diverse in many dimensions. Yet while 55 percent of students identify as a person of color, just 22 percent of teachers do.¹ Nearly a quarter of schools nationwide do not have a single teacher of color.² We must cultivate an educator workforce that reflects the racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of our nation.

State policymakers are uniquely well positioned to catalyze efforts to strengthen the educator workforce by recruiting and retaining educators of color. In 2024, the [One Million Teachers of Color \(1MToC\) Campaign](#), of which TNTP is a Steering Committee member, published a [State Action Guide](#) highlighting six policy levers for strengthening and diversifying the educator workforce, with concrete actions for each.

- **Establish clear goals and associated timelines** for increasing diversity within teacher and leader corps.
- **Establish transparent and accessible data collection and reporting** on teacher and leader diversity efforts, including in an online dashboard, school report cards, or a state-developed report on the diversity of the educator workforce. [TNTP's National K–12 Teacher and Student Demographic Dashboards](#) are a valuable resource and example of accessible data reporting.

¹ Teacher data collected by TNTP from state departments of education. Student data collected from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data. Percentages represent the most recent school year where data is available for both students and teachers from each state. Data from 43 states (and the District of Columbia) is from the 2022-23 school year; data from four states is from the 2021-22 school year, data from three states is from the 2020-21 school year, and data from one state (California) is from the 2018-19 school year.

² Based on an analysis from TNTP that leverages data collected on 64 percent of schools nationally from 28 states that make school-level teacher race/ethnicity data publicly available. Data collected from state department of education websites or via public information requests.

- **Support existing or establish high-quality teacher and leader preparation programs** that focus on recruiting and preparing educators of color.
- **Reform licensing regulations and establish financial supports** to reduce irrelevant barriers to entering the profession.
- **Support teacher career pathways and compensation** that leverage and retain teachers of color.
- **Provide evidence-based retention programming** focused specifically on teachers and leaders of color.

We encourage state policymakers to think of these six levers as a coherent collection of mutually supportive strategies. We recommend starting with the first lever: working with system, school, and community stakeholders to establish clear goals and associated timelines. Once those are in place, state policymakers should continue to listen to and learn from the perspectives of stakeholders—particularly of students, teachers, and leaders of color—to determine which policy lever to focus on next.

Incentivize Evidence-Based Strategies for Creating Safe and Supportive Schools

State policymakers are also well positioned to build **belonging** by incentivizing systems to adopt evidence-based strategies for creating a safe and supportive climate for learning. Many studies, including [this report](#) by the Learning Policy Institute, have found that building supportive school communities can improve students' well-being and school safety. State policymakers can incentivize systems to adopt evidence-based strategies for creating safe and supportive schools.

- **Increase student access to mental health resources** by allocating state funds to systems for school counselors and other mental health professionals and for external partnerships with community mental health providers.
- **Prepare all school staff to better support student well-being** by revising standards for teacher and leader preparation programs to reflect whole child development principles.
- **Incorporate measures of student well-being in state data collection.** Collaboration and the sharing of promising practices between systems can be facilitated by regularly and accessibly reporting data on multiple measures of student well-being.
- **Conduct equity reviews of school safety measures and their impact on discipline outcomes** at the state level (as [Maryland](#) and [Massachusetts](#) have done) and provide systems with the funding, training, and guidance to do so.

We encourage state policymakers to consult a diverse set of stakeholders, including school counselors and mental health professionals, as well as to analyze disaggregated data on student well-being and discipline, to determine which of these policy levers to prioritize initially.

Create a Coherent Statewide Academic Strategy

State policymakers can create policy conditions conducive to **coherence**. Every component of the student academic experience should be tightly aligned and designed to advance core grade-level instruction through a unified instructional program.

To enable a unified instructional program in school systems, state policymakers must ensure there is coherence across state academic standards, curricula, and professional learning. We encourage state policymakers to consult TNTP's [Instructional Coherence](#) guide and to use these key levers:

- **Develop a coherent academic strategy.** The state’s policies and practices on curricula, professional development, and student assessments should tightly align with the state’s academic standards.
 - For example, the [Louisiana Department of Education](#) revised three key systems—curricula, professional development, and student assessments—to ensure that they were high-quality and strongly aligned with the state’s academic standards. Research showed that [teachers in Louisiana](#) were more likely to understand state standards, use standards-aligned instructional materials, and implement aligned instructional practices.
- **Align statewide learning acceleration efforts (e.g., high-impact tutoring strategy and resources) with the state’s Tier 1 core instructional materials.**
 - For example, the Louisiana Department of Education designed their [tutoring resources](#) as proactive, just-in-time supports for upcoming classroom content to ensure all students are ready for grade-level instruction in reading/language arts and math.
- **Provide systems with ongoing communication and resources that help them develop unified instructional programs aligned with the state’s coherent academic strategy.** Once a state has developed a coherent academic strategy, it is essential that leaders of state education agencies provide systems with clear and routine communication that helps systems build and improve unified instructional programs across their schools.
 - For example, [Rhode Island and Tennessee](#) provided systems with guidance and resources on adopting high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) as a first step. Then they developed and communicated a shared vision for reading/language arts instruction and invested time and resources into supporting system and school leaders to bring that vision to life in classrooms.
- **Identify ways to provide system and school leaders with more time to design and implement unified instructional programs.** State policymakers can reinforce their commitment to coherence by eliminating potentially competing priorities and finding opportunities to streamline certain requirements for systems.
 - For example, some state education agencies, such as [Colorado’s](#), have adopted a unified system and school improvement planning process that integrates state and federal accountability and grant requirements. Other states, such as [New Mexico](#) and [South Carolina](#), have audited their paperwork and reporting requirements in an effort to reduce and streamline these expectations for systems and schools.

Require the Adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials

State policymakers should help systems make informed local decisions about the high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) adopted for their schools. High-quality instructional materials align to state academic standards and focus on building knowledge for all students in a language affirming and culturally responsive way. States should select and train local classroom educators to evaluate materials and ultimately develop a list of HQIM for each core subject area, requiring systems to adopt HQIM from these vetted lists. States should also provide guidance and supports for systems to help them engage young people, caregivers, teachers, school leaders and district leaders in their local selection process. Doing so enables states to hold a high, consistent bar for quality while empowering systems to select the high-quality instructional materials that are best for their local communities. This builds **consistency** by increasing access to effective teaching and grade-level content.

In 2017, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) formed the [High-Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Development \(IMPD\) Network](#). The “[IMPD Policy Roadmap](#)” advises state policymakers to develop a strategy for high-quality instructional materials and professional development. The initial strategy should include framing information (including the state’s theory of action, outcome

targets, and timeline) and detailed state plans for communications, HQIM adoption, professional development, and data collection:

- **Communications:** Engaging with, learning from, and building allies for the use of HQIM.
- **Adoption:** Indicating the quality of instructional materials and incentivizing HQIM selection.
- **Professional development:** Increasing teachers' participation in high-quality professional development on HQIM and supporting preparation programs to train new educators on HQIM.
- **Data:** Collecting and analyzing data for continuous improvement and progress monitoring.

We encourage state policymakers to use the IMPD Policy Roadmap to develop a coherent strategy for supporting systems as they adopt and implement high-quality instructional materials. This builds **coherence** by helping schools set a unified instructional program and priorities that are clear to all.

CCSSO and the 13 states in the IMPD Network developed a [library of customizable resources](#) to help state policymakers and state education agency leaders with each component of the road map. The [Collaborative for Student Success](#) also developed [CurriculumHQ](#), which illustrates how each state is supporting systems with high-quality instructional materials and related professional development.

The policy conditions created by state leaders shape the ability of systems and schools to bring trajectory-changing practices to bear for students. We encourage state policymakers to consider these recommendations, in the context of their local priorities and needs, to enable system and school leaders to scale belonging, consistency, and coherence across classrooms under supportive policy conditions.

About TNTP

As a leading education nonprofit, TNTP works side by side with educators, system leaders, and communities across 39 states and more than 6,000 districts nationwide to reach ambitious goals for student success. Our vision pushes beyond school walls, catalyzing cross-sector collaboration to create pathways for young people to achieve academic, economic, and social mobility. Read more at tntp.org/makers-connect

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