



Teacher and Leader Quality Early Concept Paper July 13, 2016

Approach

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has convened an action team of diverse stakeholders charged with the integration of the MDE's efforts and priorities to build and support Michigan's educator workforce with the requirements and opportunities of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), viewing educators as one of the key supports to drive improved student outcomes, especially in low-performing schools and districts. This action team is working to identify and make recommendations regarding allowable state, local, and national activities related to teacher and leader quality in ESSA based on alignment and consistency with the MDE's Top 10 in 10 strategic plan and aligned educator workforce programs and supports, including Michigan's State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators.

The Teacher and Leader Quality Action Team is working from the following guiding principles in addition to the common guiding principles of Michigan's approach to the ESSA State Plan development:

- Teacher and leader quality is a key driver of equitable education outcomes for all of Michigan's students.
- As the primary touchpoint for students, educators are the most important resource in Michigan's education system.
- In order to achieve equity, special attention and focus must be provided to the educator workforce in Michigan's lowest-performing schools and Michigan's schools that serve high-poverty and high-minority student populations.
- Equity in teacher and leader quality, as well as the overall health of Michigan's educator workforce, depends on coordination of policies to attract, prepare, develop, support, and retain effective educators.

Areas of Focus

Based on initial work, the action team proposes that Michigan's approach to teacher and leader quality through its ESSA State Plan focus on the following areas. Each of these focus areas is specifically addressed in the MDE's Top 10 in 10 State Plan as well as through various activities in ESSA.

Equity

It is well documented that teacher effectiveness is the most important in-school factor influencing student outcomes. It is therefore imperative that Michigan works to ensure that all students, and especially students of color and students from low-income families, have equitable access to excellent educators, instructional resources, and learning opportunities. This will require a critical look at making decisions about resources in ways that may not be equal, but will be fair and equitable in order to close access and outcome gaps. These decisions must be supported by high-quality data analysis to identify equity gaps, determine root causes of the gaps, and develop plans for targeted support to

close them. Equity is both an end goal and a lens through which Michigan must view all activities and supports related to teacher and leader quality.

Educator Recruitment and Retention

Enrollment in teacher preparation programs dropped dramatically in the last five years. Concurrently, attrition rates of teachers, principals, and district leaders tend to be high, especially in schools serving large populations of students of color and students from low-income families. There is a clear need to invest resources to attract promising candidates to the educator professions, ensure effective pre-service preparation, and support continued growth in order to keep effective educators in classrooms and schools. To those ends,

- specialized, tailored strategies and programs to recruit, train, and support teachers in certain settings, including schools serving large populations of students of color and students from low-income families and early childhood settings, is needed. This may include a focus on alternate route preparation and residency preparation models.
- greater focus on previously un- or under- tapped candidate pools may be needed, including mid-career changers, paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, and other mission-driven individuals from different fields.
- effective retention activities may include improved pre-service preparation and induction support, career pathways (described below), improved professional learning activities, a focus on improving working conditions, and the exploration of compensation incentives.

Career Pathways for Teachers

There is vast untapped talent and potential in expanding both instructional and leadership roles for teachers. The development and support of master teachers, teacher leaders, hybrid school-based roles, and other opportunities for teachers to remain close to instruction while expanding their sphere of influence and impact can have many positive effects on individual teachers, schools, systems, and the teaching profession. Career pathway opportunities:

- increase positive student outcomes via more diverse supports for instructional improvement within schools and systems;
- improve the retention of individual teachers and the teachers with whom they work through increased and improved professional learning and support opportunities, including the development of peer mentorships;
- prompt the development of distributed leadership models within schools and districts to alleviate the strained capacity of individual principals and district leaders while creating a more collaborative leadership approach that empowers teachers; and
- encourage more entrants to the profession while reducing attrition by establishing various career growth opportunities that have not previously been available to teachers.

Educator Evaluations

Evaluation of the professional practice of both teachers and administrators is a critical activity for driving instructional improvement and improved student outcomes. Teachers and administrators across Michigan are invested in making local educator evaluation systems effective tools to accomplish those goals through a focus on high-quality observation and feedback, collaborative professional learning communities, and personalized development opportunities. To that end, many districts need a great deal of support in building and improving their local evaluation systems to fairly measure professional practice, provide appropriate data to guide conversations about professional growth, and establish systemic mechanisms to use evaluations to inform personalized professional learning opportunities for teachers and leaders.

Discussion

Feedback on the areas of focus described above will be critical to the continued development of Michigan's approach to teacher and leader quality through its ESSA State Plan. The teacher and leader quality action team is especially interested in stakeholders' thoughts on the following questions related to its identified areas of focus.

- What is working well in current local educator evaluation systems? What concerns exist about current local evaluation systems? What supports and improvements would mitigate those concerns and move Michigan toward evaluation systems designed to support ongoing collaboration and improvement of professional practice?
- What career pathways should be available to teachers? How would teachers be prepared to move into new roles such as teacher leader or master teacher? How would these roles be supported at the local district and state levels?
- What is high-quality professional learning for teachers and administrators? How should it be developed and supported? How should it be delivered?
- How could high-quality partnerships between local school districts and educator preparation programs be established and supported to improve the transition from pre-service to experienced teacher and/or leader?
- What available data should be analyzed in order to determine root causes of teacher and leader turnover? Is there key data or information that isn't currently utilized or collected that would be important to the examination of attrition?
- What is equity? What does equity look like in the classroom? In the school and district? Statewide?
- What do teachers and leaders need in pre-service preparation programs to develop the skills and dispositions essential to creating culturally responsive classrooms that engage all students in relevant and rigorous learning activities?
- How does Michigan ensure that all students have equitable access to excellent educators and the ability to retain them? How do we specifically attract, prepare, and retain teachers and leaders in high-needs and/or low-performing schools?