

SREB

Teacher Career Pathways *and Advancement Options*

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Teacher Career Pathways *and Advancement Options*

Teachers Matter

The work of teachers lays the foundation for young adults to follow the path toward a fulfilling career, prepared for what comes next after high school and beyond.

Teachers matter for a healthy economy. Businesses rely on our schools to produce the skills they need for the workforce. They often locate or expand in places with high-quality educational experiences.

Public schools, in fact, are among the largest employers, especially in rural areas. The teaching pool itself is a workforce and economic driver, one that demands our attention on behalf of our students and our economy. These connections are why SREB's mission is to support states as they advance all levels of education to improve the social and economic vitality of the South.

Yet today there are not enough well-prepared educators for our classrooms. The profession is experiencing a decline in popularity, with fewer people entering and teachers leaving at high rates.

As states face shortages, the number of teachers with emergency, provisional or limited certifications is growing, as is the number who are inexperienced. State policy in all SREB states allows people without education degrees or minimal teacher training to be responsible for teaching critical skills. These stopgap measures worsen the problem as underprepared teachers move on quickly, experienced teachers feel the burden of shortages, and students learn less.

Total Teacher Preparation Program Completions SREB region



↓ 23% 2012-13 and 2021-22

Source: U.S. Department of Education Title II database

In 2022-23, the percentage of teachers who left their state's education system reached its highest point in 4 years.

The cost to districts could exceed \$300 million.

Teacher Turnover



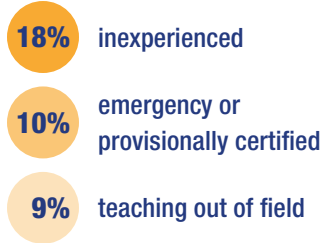
Source: State reports and databases

The solution? Elevate the profession so people want to become and remain great educators, bolstering our workforce and economy. This is a complex undertaking with many facets. One of those is clear career pathways that are readily available to attract more educators, prepare them well and offer options for growth over their careers.

Teacher Quality

SREB Region, 2022-23

Among nearly 1.3 million teachers in the South, **1 in 3** are inexperienced, teaching out-of-field or uncertified.



National Board Certified compared to 3% in the rest of the U.S.

Source: NBPTS.org, state reports and databases

The Importance of Pathways for All Careers, Including Teaching

A high school diploma used to be a passport to the middle class, but this is no longer the case. A growing number of high-wage careers require skills gained in education after high school. Postsecondary education is necessary for workforce success, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report *After Everything*.

“Postsecondary education is no longer the preferred pathway to middle-class jobs; it is increasingly the only pathway.”

— Anthony Carnevale, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

Framed under a common goal to increase college and career preparedness, SREB’s efforts to increase access to the teaching profession have mirrored the approach of federal Perkins legislation encouraging stackable credentials. This allows students to follow a career pathway that scaffolds success skills — often called employability skills — and credentials to prepare students for work or education at each stage. Stacking skills, knowledge and work- or practice-based learning can start early and be available for a lifetime. Newer generations are more apt to switch careers, and many careers change with technological advances and global connectivity, so continuous skill-building and skill transferability are key to workforce success in the future.

Career Pathways

SREB defines career pathways as alignment of elementary, secondary, postsecondary and work-based education and training to increase skill attainment for students and adult learners to meet regional workforce needs that support thriving economies.

Six Key Elements



Alignment



Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation



College and Career Readiness



Stackable Credentials



Systems of Guidance and Support



Employment, Continuing Education and Career Advancement

While teaching has previously required a college degree due to the level of skill needed for success (with the exception of certain career and technical education courses that require an industry credential and experience in lieu of a degree), we need clearer, quality pathways to a teaching degree and teacher certification.

Effective career pathways for any profession make it clear how individuals can reach careers they are interested in. Quality, accessible and transparent career pathway options align elementary, secondary, postsecondary and work-based education so the route to the career is transparent and continued advancement is achievable. More of these quality pathways are needed to ensure an educated, skilled and certified teacher workforce so that all students have prepared, certified teachers in every class.

What Influences an Individual to Pursue a Particular Career Path?

To rebuild our educator workforce, we must make teaching an attractive profession for those passionate about young people and lifelong learning.

Attractive professions are ones that provide four key factors as laid out in author Daniel Pink's theory of motivation: autonomy, purpose and mastery, and fair pay.

Most workers want a career or job that:

- ✓ Allows reasonable ownership and control of the outcome of their work and ability to exercise some independence and self-sufficiency on the job
- ✓ Has a purpose that aligns with their personal interests, passion, values and desire for impact
- ✓ Provides opportunities to prepare and develop the skills to succeed in the profession or industry
- ✓ Offers a fair wage that allows for a sustainable quality of life for themselves and their families.

Teaching ranks extremely high in purpose, with the potential to impact hundreds of young people's futures. However, teaching professionals have reported experiencing less autonomy due to efforts to mandate curricula and implement impersonal education solutions rather than responding to direct needs of individual students, according to various reports synthesized by SREB.

Teachers report feeling less prepared and supported to be masters of the craft. A decline in teaching salaries and the spending power of teachers has further contributed to the decline in interest, according to research from SREB and studies from the Regional Education Laboratory.

Improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession overall is a major undertaking that takes multiple complex solutions. (See [A Blueprint to Solve Teacher Shortages](#) for recommendations.) Meanwhile, there is a clearer strategy to develop as many high-quality pathways into the teaching profession as possible.

This begins with examining traditional, non-traditional and more innovative pathways to teaching for what works and what does not, as well as providing stackable learning and credentialing options that lead to a full professional teacher certification and employment as a successful educator.

High-Quality, Accessible Pathways Into the Teaching Profession

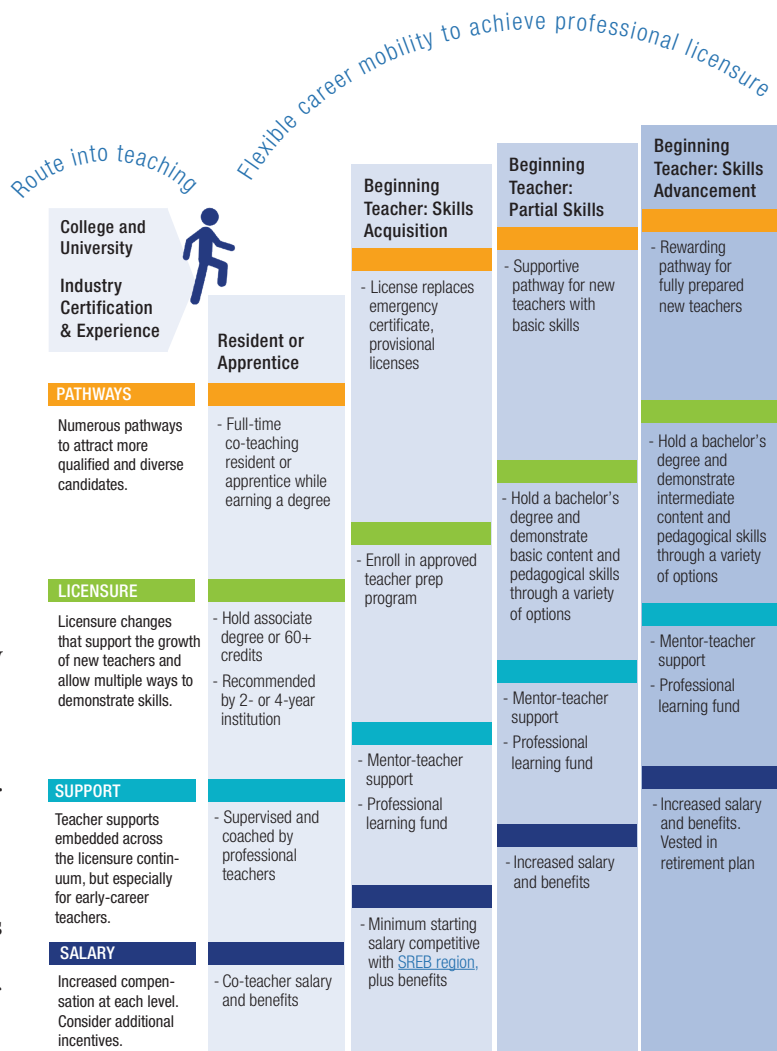
There are four main pathways into the teaching profession — a traditional pathway with a degree in education and three non-traditional pathways:

- alternative certifications offered by colleges and universities,
- alternative certifications offered by other entities such as for-profit companies, nonprofit organizations, and local school districts (such as a paraprofessional to teacher program), and
- on-the-job pathways such as teacher apprenticeship or job-embedded routes centered around extensive hands-on or practice-based teaching preparation.

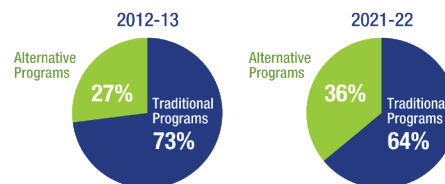
Each of these types have value and can be high-quality pathways into the teaching profession when they are *accessible* — financially, geographically and functionally — and provide thorough preparation for the classroom.

According to data from the U.S. Department of Education Title II database, the number of people completing traditional bachelor's and master's degrees in education is decreasing in the South, while the number of people completing a non-traditional or alternative pathway is increasing.

Traditional pathways are still a dominant point of entry into teaching for white women. Alternative pathways to certification, which typically provide a more economical and less time-consuming route, attract a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic or Latino individuals, as well as men, who often seek degrees in other fields before pursuing teacher certification.



The proportion of candidates completing teacher preparation programs via **alternative pathways** has grown across the South.



Source: U.S. Department of Education Title II database

Pathways that provide early exposure to the teaching profession in high school, with courses such as introduction to teaching, teaching as a profession or teaching as career, are also seeing a rise in male, Black and Hispanic or Latino enrollees. More opportunities to see and experience teaching as a profession earlier in a student's life could be a promising strategy to combat the lack of interest in teacher preparation.

School districts, with the help of postsecondary education and career and technical education, can offer introduction to teaching courses, as well as internships to assist teachers or provide tutoring, to raise interest for the teaching profession.

Essential Elements of High-Quality Teacher Pathways

Several elements of quality teacher preparation should exist in every teaching pathway, no matter the provider. States can work to develop policies that encourage or require these three essentials for quality teacher preparation and pathways:

1. Develop or reinforce strong **content knowledge** in the subjects teachers will teach, as well as essential knowledge for all subjects, such as disciplinary literacy.
2. Provide a strong focus on **pedagogy** — how to teach, engage students and manage a classroom.
3. Require extensive opportunities to **practice teaching** with students, under the supervision of an effective mentor, before being the teacher of record. Many refer to this as clinical practice, student teaching or residency.

These essentials are supported by research showing a need for relevant coursework in teaching and learning theory as well as extensive exposure to practice-based instruction and mentorship. Studies show these develop skills like classroom management, student and community engagement, curricula and assessment implementation, and student data analysis.

All teacher pathways should cover these foundations of teaching thoroughly and lead to similar levels of readiness for teaching. Policy should require each pathway prepare participants to reach full professional certification — meeting all essential requirements set by the state to teach — within the first years on the job. All routes on a state's teacher career pathway roadmap should lead to a highly prepared new teacher.

Teacher Residency

Teacher residency programs can look different across prep programs and their partner school districts, but in general they are rigorous full-year classroom internships for pre-service teachers. They blend practice-based learning with academic coursework closely aligned with the classroom experience. The goal is for teacher residents to learn and practice how to teach by working for an entire year alongside a highly trained, supportive mentor teacher in the school district where they are placed and may eventually work. Having a quality mentor is the most important aspect of any teaching internship, according to the Brookings Institute.

SREB Teacher Induction

SREB has developed several [induction programs](#) for teachers who enter the profession to teach CTE and STEM disciplines without an undergraduate teaching degree. These programs have helped several states increase the retention and impact of new teachers.

To bring this support to teachers in all disciplines, SREB is working to distill the proven success elements of these programs in a universal framework that will especially support and grow teachers with non-traditional preparation in their first two or three years of teaching.

Some teacher residency programs require that candidates commit to teaching in the school for a minimum number of years, especially if the residency is paid. Paying residents a teacher’s assistant salary is increasingly widespread — it aids the school with a full-time learning assistant for a year and increases buy-in and security for the future teacher. Some districts even provide benefits for teacher residents. These factors help establish the employer-employee relationship and teaching career pathway simultaneously.



The [National Center for Teacher Residencies](#) provides a research-based residency model, consulting services, network and research to districts in 30 states. The model includes five areas of focus:

- partnership among the teacher preparation pathway, schools and district
- recruitment and selection, including rigorous selection and support of mentor
- intensive pre-service preparation
- strategic hiring of graduates
- induction support



[US PREP](#), another national center based out of Texas Tech University, is a hub of research, innovation and best practices for teacher residencies and teacher preparation. Its model is evidence-based, and continuous research helps create and build on US PREP services and toolkits for universes and their K-12 district partners.



Students at Dallas Independent School District’s [Sunset High School](#) can earn an associate of arts in teaching at Dallas College prior to graduation — potentially reducing their time to a bachelor’s degree in education by two years. Those who complete the program are awarded a hiring letter of intent to encourage them to seek a K-12 teaching position in their home district.

Teacher Apprenticeship or Job-Embedded Pathways

Registered Apprenticeship is an industry-driven training model that can provide a critical talent pipeline for the education system. The U.S. Department of Labor has approved standards for states to establish a program and use apprenticeship funding to support teacher apprentices.

Apprenticeship includes on-the-job training as early as high school, integrated with coursework through postsecondary education partners.

Registered Apprenticeship is an effective model with a long history of establishing career pathways in various industries, providing structured, paid learning experiences combined with technical instruction and mentorship, which leads to a nationally recognized credential and local licensure. In 2023, there were over 7,450 registered apprentices in education, a 247% increase over the previous five years, according to [Apprenticeship.gov](https://www.apprenticeship.gov).

Apprenticeship has also been adapted by many districts and states to provide other job-embedded pathways to career-changers or those who've already obtained a bachelor's degree. These programs provide similar on-the-job learning with integrated coursework to train teachers and help them to secure alternative certification.

Some districts and states are adopting early career exposure and degree pathways beyond formal apprenticeship, allowing students to begin their college coursework before high school graduation. Examples include Tennessee's Teaching as a Profession courses or TAP, as well as career and technical education courses in teaching across multiple states.



The [West Virginia Grow Your Own Program](#) runs from the beginning of a future teacher's high school career to the end of their undergraduate education, which can be finished in just three years. Students graduate high school with at least 30 dual enrollment or Advanced Placement courses to start college as sophomores. Thanks to four introductory education courses in high school, they are admitted to the education preparation program in their first year of college. After two years of coursework, students complete a yearlong residency before graduating and moving into the teaching profession full-time.



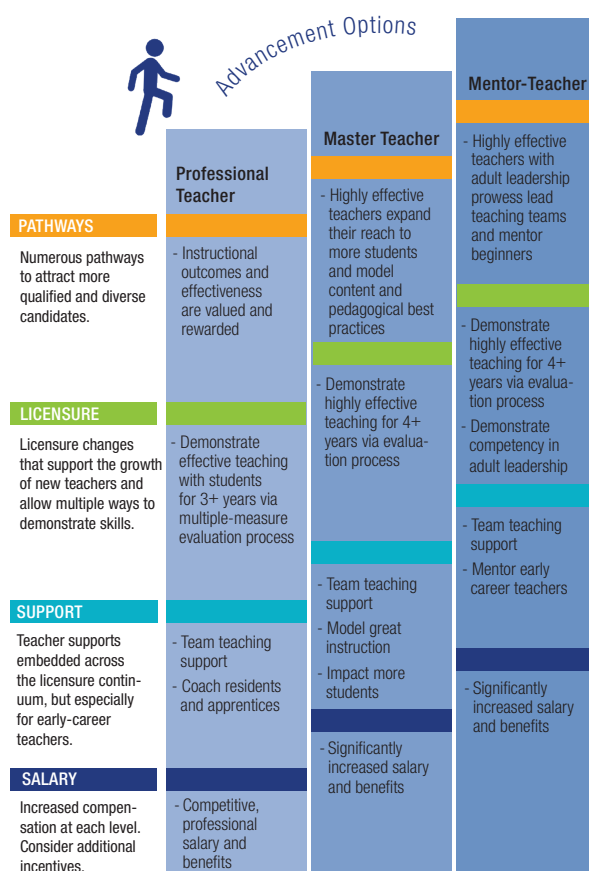
[Tennessee's job-embedded model](#) offers individuals who already have a bachelor's degree a path to become an official teacher of record while completing the state requirements for full licensure. These individuals receive full pay and benefits from day one on a provisional license and are typically enrolled at a Tennessee university to complete state requirements within three years.

Pathways for Teachers to Advance in the Profession

Traditionally, the only option to advance in the education field beyond a standard teaching career has been promotion to an administrative role such as instructional coach, specialist or leader at a school or district. While some educators find these options compelling, many desire to stay in the classroom, working with children and young adults and directly impacting academic achievement.

Many models for career advancement pathways now allow teachers to stay in the classroom and teach their students while taking on additional leadership roles. Teacher-leaders provide broad, regular feedback to their colleagues on content, pedagogy, student engagement, management, assessment, data use and more. Mentor teachers maintain their classroom roles at least in part and are more connected to the students and classroom environments than full-time specialists or coaches who are no longer teaching.

Leading a successful school takes a team of leaders working together to ensure the school environment is positive and responsive to all needs. Principals wear many hats — they supervise faculty and staff, act as instructional lead for all disciplines, manage transportation logistics, budgeting and discipline, lead parent and community engagement, direct school culture and more. Advancement options for teachers to act as leaders while remaining a practicing teacher add capacity and specialized strength to school leadership.



Career Advancement Options

Teacher leadership roles, which allow excelling classroom teachers to take on leadership responsibilities as extensions of the administrative team, are increasingly used in districts across the U.S. There are many models for these roles, allowing schools and districts to set roles and requirements that fit their needs. The most successful models, according to Georgetown University, offer more than one type of advanced role to teachers and are supported through state policy that allows flexibility, adaptation, strategic staffing, strategic scheduling and budget innovations.

Districts and states instituting advanced teacher roles use various names and descriptions, which fall into two general categories:

1. Teachers who demonstrate effective classroom instruction and the ability to take on more students or lead in content expertise or curricula for their team or school. These include

roles like **content leaders or department chairs, lead teachers, extended-reach teachers,** or **teacher ambassadors.**

2. Teachers who demonstrate effective classroom instruction and the skills and characteristics needed to be effective instructional coaches and mentors to one or more colleagues. These advanced roles continue to provide classroom instruction part-time, but also provide coaching, mentoring, co-teaching, professional development, and induction support to new and struggling teachers. Role types include **master teacher, mentor teacher, multi-classroom leader** and more.

Advanced teacher positions in districts across the South include both formal and informal roles in 10 different categories, according to the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. Informal roles, lacking formalized processes, responsibilities, development and pay, are less sustainable and effective.

Expansion of the role of teachers into these advanced roles is strongly associated with improvements in student achievement, regardless of the type of school, according to the study *School Leadership Counts*.

Advanced teacher roles require states and districts to formalize policies that are adaptable yet set key conditions for success. These conditions include a commitment to planning and collaboration time, access to quality professional learning, lighter workloads for teachers in their early years, robust induction, supports for teacher leaders and mentors, and supports for school and district leaders to develop strategic and innovative schedules, staffing and compensation plans.

Essential Elements of Advanced Teacher Roles

To make advanced teacher roles work, policymakers and school leaders can consider these essential elements.

1. **Selection:** Not all teachers have the characteristics, capabilities or desire to be advanced teachers. District and school leaders should be deliberate regarding identification of teachers who fit the roles. State policy can encourage or require, through certification policy, basic qualifications for general lead content teacher and mentor teacher roles.



The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders has a [toolkit](#) with a variety of criteria to evaluate if a teacher is ready to move into a teacher-leader role. Those criteria include:

- Critical elements of effective mentoring, including use of data and understanding standards
- Attitude and dispositions, including a commitment to growth and reflection
- Professional competence and experience, including classroom management and collaboration with peers
- Communication skills, including attentive listening and explicit feedback
- Interpersonal skills, including courteousness, approachability and rapport

2. **Rigorous training:** Successful instruction of students does not immediately align or translate to successful leadership of adults, so those identified for advanced roles need professional learning to equip them with the skills, knowledge and tools to lead as advanced teachers. States can require agencies to develop training guidelines and minimum training requirements for educators to be certified and hired in advanced teacher roles. Training can lead to stackable credentials and certifications that build instructional skills, specialty and leadership skills for advanced teachers and beyond to administration and district leadership roles.



South Carolina offers the year-long [Foundations in School Leadership](#) to develop instructional leadership and team capacity-building skills for teacher-leaders around the state. Additional development programs are offered by the state for collective leadership, first-year and experienced principals, and district administrators.

3. **Policy and processes:** Clearly documented policies and practices bring structure, consistency and accountability to advanced teacher roles. Schools, districts or even states can create a set of formal advanced roles with requirements, expectations and processes such as mentor-mentee matching guidance and dedicated time for advanced teachers to engage in their roles. These policies should be flexible enough to accommodate different school contexts and needs.



North Carolina recognized a lack of career opportunities for classroom teachers and responded with [Advanced Teaching Roles](#) in 2016. The program transforms classrooms with a modern take that replaces the “one teacher, one classroom” model. Instead, an advanced teacher can specialize in a particular role that helps fuel the school’s success, serve as a teacher lead for five to seven other teachers in a pod (known as multi-classroom leadership), or accept a larger roster of students. Advanced teachers are compensated for additional duties.

4. **Compensation:** Increased monetary and non-monetary benefits can aid in recruiting and retaining talent. Teachers who take on advanced teacher training and duties should receive an increased salary for increased impact, workload and responsibility. Furthermore, according to the report *Designing a Strategic Compensation Model*, numerous models for strategic compensation positively impact student learning. States can create scaffolded advanced teacher pay scales or grant districts the flexibility to adjust their budgets to offer variable pay for differentiated teacher roles.



New Mexico established a [three-tiered licensure and advancement system](#) with [differentiated pay levels](#) to promote teacher growth and reward leadership.

- Tier I teachers receive a provisional license for the first three years, requiring formal mentorship. Tier I teachers are paid a minimum of \$50,000.
- Tier II teachers hold a full professional license. Requirements include participation in the mentoring program and being evaluated as a successful teacher for three years, plus demonstration of specific sets of competencies. Tier II teachers are paid a minimum of \$60,000.
- Tier III teachers who apply for and meet requirements for advancement hold a master teaching license. Requirements include three years of successful teaching at Level II, National Board Certification or master's degree, plus demonstration of specific sets of competencies. Tier III teachers are paid a minimum of \$70,000.

Roadmap to a First-Rate Educator Workforce

Career pathways provide a roadmap from envisioning oneself in a career to pursuing and thriving in a career.

High-quality pathways into a career in education, combined with deliberate career advancement options and coaching and mentoring from colleagues, can help attract and keep passionate teachers who care about student success and positively impact their students.

Not only can these teacher career pathways help open the doors to more people who are interested in teaching, but they can also help to raise the awareness and attractiveness of teaching so others can see themselves as educators. Additionally, career advancement options can also urge educators already in the profession to dedicate more time in their career to impacting students.

There is additional work needed to make teaching not just intrinsically rewarding, but a valued, respected career that allows those who choose it to find professional fulfillment and financial security. This requires a complex set of solutions. One of those is clear — effective career pathways and advancement options that can invite more people to imagine themselves as teachers and give them roadmap to achieve the goal.

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