

# Teacher Shortages: Top 10 Ideas from the First State ESSA Plans

Earlier this month, the first deadline for states to submit their [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) Consolidated State Plans passed. [Seventeen state education agencies](#) submitted their plans, laying the foundation for states' educational priorities for years to come. American Institutes for Research (AIR) is conducting an analysis of the state plans as they are submitted, and this is the first in a series of summaries and analyses.

The ESSA plans cover a wide swath from assessments and accountability to supports for all students. But when it comes to student success, more important than school report cards or testing opt-out policies is whether a capable teacher is available in every classroom.

A large body of research over the last decade points to the [critical importance of teachers](#). Yet recent AIR [research for the National Center on Education Statistics](#) adds to the mounting evidence-base that shows students from poor and minority backgrounds are systematically shortchanged in their access to qualified, experienced, and excellent teachers.

## Behind the Plans

Under the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), every state must submit a state ESSA plan to the U.S. Department of Education.

Under the law, these plans are intended to help states think comprehensively and collaboratively about their ESSA programs to ensure equity and excellence for all students, including a fair, equitable, and high-quality education that closes achievement gaps.

States are required to engage stakeholders in the process of developing their ESSA plans and obtain sign off from their governors.

States could submit their plans either by May 3 or September 18, 2017.

The first 17 state to submit ESSA plans:

- Arizona
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Illinois
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Nevada
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- North Dakota
- Oregon
- Tennessee
- Vermont
- Washington, DC

*Note: Vermont did not include strategies for filling teacher gaps.*

These challenges with ensuring students have equitable access to great teachers are exacerbated by [teacher shortages](#), which AIR researchers have found to be a growing topic of [policy dialogue](#) and [media coverage](#). There is no better place for states to address this pressing challenge than through their ESSA plans.

Below are highlights culled from the first 17 state ESSA plans to shed light on how states will address critical teacher shortages areas to ensure every student has access to the teachers they need:

1. **Marketing the teaching profession.** Two ESSA plans, **Connecticut** and **New Jersey**, mention plans to attract talent to the profession through marketing. Marketing is not a new approach to addressing teacher shortages. This strategy has been used by large districts, such as [Dallas-Fort Worth](#), and by countries such as the United Kingdom. The Ad Council, PSA Central, and Teach.org have partnered in producing [teacher recruitment videos](#) (featuring kids telling recent college grads, “I dare you to be the teacher I will never forget.”). And as noted in a brief from [the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality](#) (the predecessor of the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders), some states previously produced videos of governors and education chiefs praising the profession.
2. **Strengthening the Pre-College Teacher Pipeline.** A growing policy priority seeks to curb [declining teacher preparation enrollment](#) by nurturing early interest in teaching – among high school students. **Colorado** will provide districts with guidance, resources, professional development, and planning support for building local teacher cadet programs in high schools. **New Jersey** dedicated a state-level staff member to, among other things, continuously engage with prospective teachers (although it was unclear if this refers to high school students, college students, or both). But **Tennessee** stands out as focusing heavily on grow-your-own strategies. It is promoting “Teaching as a Profession” courses and, pending adequate levels of funding, investing \$100,000 in innovation grants for targeted districts to develop plans to recruit diversity in the teaching force. Tennessee is also exploring partnerships with Educators Rising, which recently launched an Academy to cultivate high school students’ interest in the profession, [micro-credentials](#) and [standards](#) for what aspiring teachers should know and be able to do.

3. **Supporting Strategic, Purposeful Teacher Recruitment.** Eleven of the first 17 state ESSA plans more generally address teacher recruitment. Two states—**Delaware** and **New Jersey**— plan to improve the availability of teacher recruitment data and promote dialogue among districts, preparation programs, state leaders, and others. And Delaware and **Tennessee** point to support for online teacher recruitment portals ([JoinDelawareSchools.org](http://JoinDelawareSchools.org) and [www.teachers-teachers.com](http://www.teachers-teachers.com)) that make applying for a teaching job (or searching for candidates) simpler. **Connecticut** will collaborate with the Department of Labor to develop a repository of teacher recruitment and retention strategies for three categories: high school students, college students, and career changers.

Similarly, **Maine** will identify the successful teacher recruitment and retention strategies that emerged from its federal Teacher Incentive Fund districts. **Oregon** plans to recruit more culturally and linguistically diverse teachers and, along with **New Mexico**, to recruit more Native American Indian teachers. Finally, **Nevada** will revise its licensure system to ensure it maintains reciprocity with other states and is looking to create a \$9.8 million [Great Teaching and Leading Fund](#) to support, among other things, the recruitment, hiring, and retention of effective teachers.
4. **Collaborating with teacher preparation programs.** Teacher preparation is cited in every plan, but seven states specifically call out a need for the collaboration to address teacher shortages. **Delaware** and **Louisiana** will strengthen alignment between teacher preparation and school districts with a specific emphasis on producing enough qualified teachers to address shortages. **Illinois**, **Louisiana**, **Michigan**, and **Tennessee** will support teacher residencies, with Tennessee working specifically to ensure that its teacher residencies align with teacher shortage areas. **New Jersey** notes that its Educator Preparation Provider Performance Reports, among other things, provide information about teacher supply as well as plans to partner with teacher preparation programs to analyze and act on these teacher supply data. The state plans to improve the user-interface of these reports so that districts may rely on the data to inform their recruitment and selection practices. Meanwhile, **Connecticut** will hold a summit in partnership with educator preparation programs focused on increasing the number of teachers certified in priority shortage areas and recruiting more teachers from under-represented backgrounds.
5. **Supporting New Teachers.** With teacher shortages exacerbated by new teachers [leaving education](#) at higher rates than need be, one solution is to find better ways of onboarding and

mentoring the newest members of the workforce. In their ESSA plans, **Michigan** and **Arizona** commit to establishing and improving new teacher induction programs, while **Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey, New Mexico,** and **Oregon** commit to continuing their support for their existing new teacher induction programs. **Louisiana** will ask its Board of Education to consider policies that formalize the mentor teacher role in the 2017-18 school year. **Delaware** also plans to provide districts with resources on comprehensive, high-quality induction and mentoring programs, while **Connecticut** will increase investment in its current program, providing more mentor-mentee time and improved mentor-mentee matches in high-poverty, high-minority schools. **Massachusetts** describes how its [annual teacher induction report](#) will share best practices, identify challenge areas, provide resources, and promote reflection and continual improvement at the district level.

6. **Increasing Teacher Compensation.** Six states detail a number of strategies for ensuring teacher pay is sufficiently attractive to recruit enough high-quality teachers. Many of these include performance-based incentives and higher pay for teaching in shortage subjects (such as STEM) or shortage areas (such as high-poverty or rural schools); but a variety of other approaches to increasing pay were also noted. **Nevada** points to new teacher incentives and scholarships for aspiring teachers and **Arizona** mentions new teacher recruitment stipends and the possibility of housing allowances. In contrast, **Maine** describes supporting longevity pay. Maine's plan also includes partnering with the Maine Education Policy Research Institute to identify successful longevity pay approaches in other rural states, approaching the state legislature to fund a pilot, and encouraging districts to partner with local business leaders and community organizations to fund this additional pay. **New Mexico** notes the use of debit cards for teachers to use for classroom supplies. **Tennessee** details the state's continued support for differentiated pay for teachers who take on additional responsibilities. And **Louisiana** describes how 16 rural districts will receive funding via the U.S. Department of Education Teacher Incentive Fund grant to offer more competitive compensation structures. This [brief from The Teacher Salary Project](#) summarizes how teacher salary strategies were included in 24 of the 2015 state equity plans.
7. **Promoting Teacher Leadership.** In the growing policy priority area of teacher leadership, a broad and colorful range of strategies emerged in nine of the first 17 state plans. **New Mexico** describes its

annual Teacher Leader Summit, Teacher Leader Network, Teach Plus New Mexico, and a state-level Teacher Advisory Group. **Delaware** points to the state's district Teacher-Leader Toolkit, its Teacher-Leader Pilot program, and related supports. **North Dakota's** Education Standards and Practices Board is creating a Teacher Leadership Academy. And **Maine** describes its dedicated [teacher leadership website](#), its commitment to Teach to Lead, and encouragement of teacher career pathways. **Tennessee** and **Louisiana** will continue to support their Teacher Leader Networks; Tennessee will develop individualized teacher leadership models for implementation in districts across the state, and **Louisiana** will support its 5,000 Teacher Leaders and 80 Teacher Leader Advisors with an annual summit and monthly newsletter, webinars, among other supports. **Michigan** plans to create a teacher-leader network (and accompanying guidance, coordination, and support) with the support of teachers-on-loan and/or summer teacher fellows housed at the state department of education.

**Illinois** wants to clarify the roles and work of teacher leaders. It plans to create district grants for 30-60-90-day research projects through which problems in teacher leadership practice are investigated, and the findings reported. Finally, **Nevada's** plan includes a teacher recognition program and incentives for achieving National Board Certification. New tools, such as the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders' teacher and district teacher leadership [self-assessment and readiness tools](#) and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession's [Teacher Leadership Skills Framework](#), are available to support this growing need.

8. **Thinking Systemically.** The notion that states should move away from piecemeal teacher quality policymaking and toward more [aligned, multi-faceted approaches](#) has been promoted for a number of years, and the first ESSA plans show that this idea is taking hold. **New Mexico** created a "New Mexico Teacher Ecosystem: Map of Initiatives to Attract, Develop, & Retain Teachers," comprised of 20 interconnected teacher quality policy components or initiatives. **Maine** and **Oregon** detail their human capital management systems, which include recruitment, hiring, preparation, evaluation and professional growth, recognition and rewards, and school environment. Meanwhile, **Colorado's** plan describes the state's [Self-Assessment for Healthy Human Capital Systems Tool](#), and how the state will help districts, particularly rural ones, identify and share "what works," and develop a toolbox to support districts with teacher recruitment, retention, distribution, and effectiveness. **Tennessee**

notes that the state has partnered with six other states to share educator talent management strategies across the career continuum and will ultimately, develop a toolkit to share these talent management system strategies more widely.

9. **Supporting local education agencies.** With most states classifying themselves as [“local control,”](#) here is how four state education agencies plan to support districts as they address teacher shortages: **New Jersey** will develop and disseminate teacher recruitment materials to districts and provide them with data about the state’s teacher pipeline. **Tennessee** decided to encourage districts to be more strategic in addressing teacher recruitment and retention challenges with a planning tool to analyze and summarize teacher data. Alongside its annual Excellent Educator Dashboard reports (which provide districts with state, district, and school-level educator effectiveness metrics and progress reports to reduce educator equity gaps. **Delaware** will provide an Educator Equity Planning Toolkit for local education agencies. Finally, **Washington, D.C.**, is exploring a Talent Information Hub that local education agencies can opt into to post vacancies and receive information about teacher candidates; it would also generate information on teacher shortages.
  
10. **Incorporating the 2015 educator equity plans.** Fifteen out of the first 17 ESSA Plans mention their 2015 [State Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators](#) (equity plans), the last major plans that states submitted to the U.S. Department of Education prior to ESSA. They outline how states will ensure that poor and minority students are not systematically shortchanged in their access to effective teachers. Two states emphasize their equity plans as a basis for their ESSA plans: **Tennessee** says its equity work “laid a solid foundation for addressing equitable distribution as [the state] begins implementation of [its] plan under ESSA.” And **Oregon** notes, “In developing plans to improve support to educators, a multitude of recommendations and analysis from Oregon’s Equitable Access to Excellent Educator Plan, the Governor’s Council on Educator Advancement, the Deputy Superintendent’s Advisory Council as well as feedback from districts, schools and practitioners were considered and synthesized to develop the shifts and strategies in this section of the ESSA state plan.” **Delaware** commits to continued meetings of its Educator Equity Working Group while other states, such as **North Dakota**, describe plans to continue or expand implementation of their equity plan strategies. Building on their earlier equity plans allows states to capitalize on the significant stakeholder engagement they invested and the strategy implementation

progress made to date. And it ensures that ESSA is not just another plan layered onto the others but rather part of a multi-year thoughtful, coherent vision for equipping all classrooms with the teachers they need.

As the remainder of states prepare to submit their plans in September, it will be interesting to see what other strategies emerge to address the critical challenge of teacher shortages. . More important, it will be critical for states and stakeholders to reprioritize this issue—through task forces, bold policies, and innovative initiatives—once the ESSA plans dust has settled.

*More information on AIR's review of state ESSA plans and free resources for education leaders can be found at the [ESSA Co-Pilot](#).*

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