

# EMPOWERED EDUCATORS

HOW HIGH-PERFORMING SYSTEMS SHAPE  
TEACHING QUALITY AROUND THE WORLD

THE TEACHING CAREER AND  
LEADERSHIP FOR THE PROFESSION

*POLICY BRIEF*



This paper is part of a series of policy and country briefs produced as part of *Empowered Educators* – a landmark, international comparative study of teacher and teaching quality in the world’s top-performing education systems, commissioned by the Center on International Education Benchmarking® of the National Center on Education and the Economy®. For a complete listing of the materials produced by the *Empowered Educators* project, including a searchable database of recorded interviews and authentic tools, please visit [www.ncee.org/empowered-educators](http://www.ncee.org/empowered-educators).

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Research for the *Empowered Educators* study was coordinated by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) at Stanford University. SCOPE was founded in 2008 to foster research, policy, and practice to advance high-quality, equitable education systems in the United States and internationally.

## The Teaching Career and Leadership for the Profession

In high-performing systems, teaching is more than a set of skills teachers develop. Teaching is a profession, one that highly capable individuals enter and remain in throughout their careers, and one that provides them with the kind of satisfaction and rewards that other professionals, such as lawyers and engineers, enjoy.

The systems do this in several ways. First, they create structures within schools and school systems that promote professional learning and enable teachers to take on new responsibilities based on their interests and skills. Teachers have opportunities to develop curricula, write assessments, mentor younger teachers, oversee professional development, and much more. They do not have to leave teaching and move into administration in order to advance in their careers.

Second, the systems use appraisal processes to identify talent and accomplishment. One major goal of the process is to enable schools and school systems to find teachers with particular skills, and to enable teachers to demonstrate their competencies so that they can make a case for advancement.

The effects of these policies are substantial. They make teaching an attractive and rewarding profession, one that highly-capable individuals are eager to join. That, in turn, enables preparation programs to be even more selective in choosing candidates. The policies also strengthen teaching overall by enabling veteran and well-qualified teachers to use their experience and knowledge to support less-experienced colleagues. And the policies encourage teachers to remain in the profession throughout their careers, reducing the costs and disruption caused by rapid turnover.

This brief examines the career paths of high-performing countries. It considers career pathways, opportunities for teachers to lead learning opportunities with their colleagues, and structures for providing financial rewards to highly accomplished teachers.

### Career Ladders

#### Singapore's Career Ladder

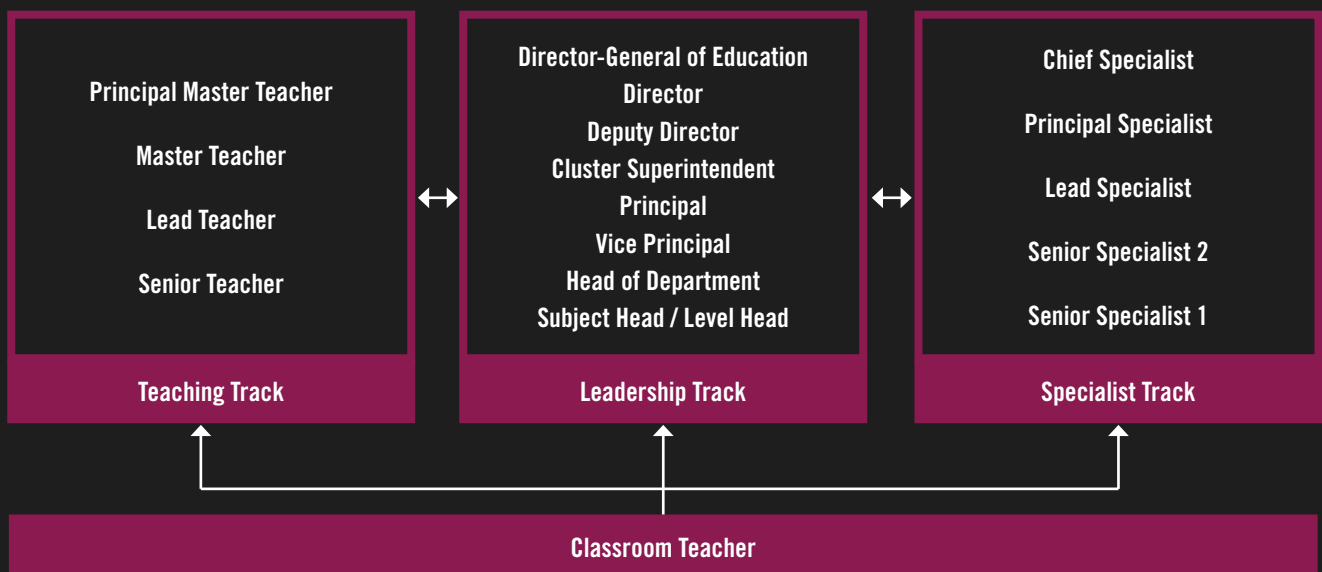
One of the most fully-developed career ladder structures is Singapore's. The Singapore model includes three leadership trajectories teachers can follow: the teaching track, the leadership track, and the senior specialist track (see Figure 1).

**In high-performing systems, teachers do not have to leave teaching and move into administration in order to advance in their careers.**

The teacher performance appraisal process feeds into the career ladders by highlighting teachers' abilities to collaborate with each other, their emerging leadership skills, and their teaching skills as part of the regular evaluation system. The senior teachers and principals who conduct these appraisals have been coached on how to look for and spot potential, and how to cultivate it by giving various kinds of leadership opportunities to teachers, as well as encouraging them to think about how they would like to develop their skills and to apply for the training and appraisal that accompanies each of the tracks. Cluster leaders and others in the Ministry pay attention to the teachers who are flagged as having leadership potential and help support opportunities for them to take on new challenges and access various kinds of training.

Once a teacher embarks on this journey, each of the three tracks has its own set of performance standards, which are customized versions of the standards used to assess all teachers. These standards are assessed through a professional portfolio the teacher puts together, which includes a personal statement on why he or she wants to take up the higher appointment; a summary of evidence satisfying each accreditation standard; and supporting data to substantiate the evidence (e.g., lesson plans, presentations). The standards build on teaching evaluation criteria such as holistic development of pupils through quality learning, pastoral care and well-being, and co-curricular activities, and the criteria get broader as the teacher advances to the next level to reflect teachers' enhanced expertise and level of responsibility. These include contributions to the school, cluster, zone, and nation; collaboration and networking; and contributions to a culture of professionalism, ethos, and standards. It is important to note that a principal master teacher or a lead specialist earns as much as a principal, so there are strong incentives for expert teachers to choose any of the three tracks, based on their interests and talents.

**Figure 1: Career Tracks for Teachers in Singapore**



Source: MOE, n.d.h.

Through the teaching track, teachers can aspire first to be Senior Teachers, then they can move on to become Lead Teachers, and then progress further to the level of Master Teachers. As they advance up the teaching track, they assume teacher leadership roles within their school or the larger teaching fraternity, serving as guides and mentors to newer teachers or teachers in need of assistance. Master Teachers move to the respective academies and are not necessarily situated in schools. These academies, such as the Academy of Singapore Teachers, were established by the Ministry of Education to enable teachers to lead professional learning for other teachers. This track has just been recently augmented to include a new Principal Master Teacher position as the apex of the Teaching Track and the creation of a new position of a lead teacher in schools.<sup>1</sup>

The senior specialist track is for those teachers who are steeped in their discipline and choose this route to become specialists with deep knowledge and skills in specific areas. Their leadership role often takes them beyond the school to Ministry headquarters, where they may be engaged with curriculum development and evaluation. In that way, they help ensure that Ministry policy reflects the point of view of practitioners. The Ministry sponsors the postgraduate studies of these specialists in areas like curriculum and assessment, educational psychology and guidance, and educational research and measurement.

The leadership track in Singapore, meanwhile, is for teachers who are specifically focused on school administration and is a pathway that takes them into leadership positions in schools and could continue into leadership roles in the Ministry of Education. As leadership is seen as a key enabler for strong schools, much attention and resources are given to identify and groom school leaders. All principals and department heads are fully trained at government expense before they take on their posts. There is also an extensive executive development program for current leaders.

Leaders are identified, cultivated, and recruited from among teachers who demonstrate potential to take on school leadership roles. Each year, teachers are evaluated on their leadership skills as well as their teaching skills in a multifaceted, competency-based process, and the ministry keeps tabs on up-and-coming potential leaders, reviewing evaluations and checking in regularly with principals about which faculty members are ready for additional challenges and learning opportunities. When potential principals are identified, they are given opportunities to take on new responsibilities and to engage in various kinds of training. When deemed suitable by the panel of appraisers, they are recruited into principal preparation programs and are appointed to school leadership positions if they have performed well in the preparation programs.

Leadership development is supported in various ways by work at the university and at the Ministry, as well as in the schools. Educators can develop their knowledge and skills through additional preparation and academic coursework at the post-graduate level in universities. For example, in July 2007, the National Institute of Education

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(NIE) launched the Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) Program. It is designed as a full-time 17-week in-service program meant especially for middle level leaders, mainly those with the potential to be or who are already heads of departments. The selection of these leaders is made by the school principal and cluster superintendent; participants have their fees fully borne by the Ministry of Education and still continue to receive their monthly salaries.

A key feature of the MLS program is Overseas and Industrial trips. Participants are given an opportunity to visit a country within the Asia-Pacific region, in order to study its education system. While there, they also visit the local industries of that country and are provided with the opportunity to observe the operational workings of non-educationally related organizations. The visits offer participants an alternative exposure to education systems and the running of different organizations. This example of a University-based Pathway targets middle leaders who are already engaged in leadership work and school-based reform at their schools.

### Shanghai's Career Ladder

Shanghai also has a well-developed career ladder. Teachers in China are formally classified into four “grades” or ranks: probationary status, second level, first level, and senior teacher. They progress from one grade to the next based on their professional competence and status among their peers. To be promoted on the rank scale, teachers are required to write a summary about their work in the past few years, take written tests to show their language competence, write research papers on teaching, participate in an interview held by the district, and be observed by experienced teachers. Moving up the rank ladder for a teacher brings about a sense of professional accomplishment and pride. Teachers in a school readily know the grade category of other teachers and think of higher ranked teachers as mentors and school leaders. For example, the head of a *jiaoyanzu* (teacher research group) will frequently be an experienced and accomplished teacher of a higher rank. Lower rank teachers are typically beginning their careers.

To advance from one rank to the next, teachers submit an application at the district level. Applications typically include the teachers' current rank and all degrees they hold, an overview of school-based research work in which they are currently engaged, a list of awards and prizes, and recognition of students' accomplishments, and a list of published research and papers. The school must approve the application first, which typically means the principal is in agreement that the teacher has the qualifications to apply. At the district level, a committee of experts—typically subject area coordinators or teacher professional development staff who themselves have

been recognized for their accomplished teaching—review the applications and make the decision about rank advancement.

The highest rank, regarded as the equivalent of a college professor, is a very rare honor: Just under 7 percent of teachers had achieved that level, as reported in a 2010 study.<sup>2</sup> Between 40 percent and 50 percent of teachers had achieved each of the previous two ranks (first and second level teachers). The small remainder (less than 5 percent) were probationary teachers.

Highly ranked teachers are called upon to support and guide veteran teachers who have not moved up in rank to assist in their improvement process. Professional learning opportunities for teachers are also structured for the different teacher rank levels to support them in moving up a career ladder. In that way, the career ladder creates incentives for teachers to pursue professional learning.

In addition to the formal career ladder within teaching, accomplished teachers, such as those who have won teaching competitions, or those who are widely known for their research or mentoring, are often rewarded and publicly recognized for their knowledge, skills, and accomplishments. Teachers' awards and recognitions of accomplishment are frequent and are regularly communicated to the school community. Photos and accomplishments of teachers are routinely posted in the school hallways and on marquees that stand outside of the school buildings. These awards are viewed as adding prestige to the whole school community.

### **Australia's Teaching Career Stages**

Traditionally, the teaching career has been the responsibility of the states, as the employers of teachers in government schools. Salary progression occurred annually following a performance review. More recently however, the teaching career in Australia is increasingly framed by the national professional standards for teachers, given their role in structuring initial teacher education and professional development, and its adoption into balanced scorecards for teacher evaluation. The national standards set out four career stages – Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead – which several states are now using to construct career ladders. New South Wales has linked certification at the Highly Accomplished level to a salary increase.

By establishing the first of the four levels as that of Graduate Teacher, the Standards connect expectations in teacher knowledge, practice, and engagement for new graduates with that of the profession. The establishment of Proficient Teacher as the second level, at which teachers move from provisional to full registration (certification), lays the foundation for standards-based induction and mentoring for early career teachers. The higher levels offer a pathway for teachers to continue developing their expertise and advance their career while remaining in the classroom. Highly Accomplished teachers are those who demonstrate a high level of proficiency



in the standards, while Lead teachers are those that both demonstrate these capabilities individually and show leadership across the school.

While the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) sets guidelines and provides templates for evidence gathering, assessment of whether teachers meet the requirements of the standards are determined by the state-based certifying authorities. New South Wales, for example, has developed career pathways to keep teachers who demonstrate excellent performance in classrooms so they can provide the leadership and modelling of best practice from which other teachers can learn.

To encourage these teachers to stay in schools, the state has linked its salary scale to attainment of the standards. Thus Highly Accomplished teachers are rewarded financially and professionally and have the responsibility at the school level of providing leadership and collaborative professional learning for other teachers. These teachers engage in collaborative lesson preparation, evaluation, and teaching and are well-positioned to observe practice and its effect and to provide feedback to enable teacher professional learning both within and between schools.

### **Ontario's Support for Teacher Leadership**

Ontario's career advancement opportunities for teachers are plentiful but less hierarchical – more like a career lattice than a career ladder, one might say. Teachers can advance through their career through a combination of experience, expertise, further training such as Additional Qualifications (AQs), and changes in assignments. Teachers can aim to move into a range of positions at school, board, and provincial levels, such as being an Associate Teacher to support teacher candidates in their practicum schools, becoming a mentor for newly qualified teachers, developing teacher leadership opportunities, participating in teacher federation or provincial organizations, and moving into school or board leadership positions. Boards also fund positions of additional responsibility, such as teacher coaches, board consultants, and department heads. In addition, there are new teacher opportunities linked to the Ministry's student achievement initiatives, like the Student Success Strategy, which is designed to raise graduation rates among high school students.

The AQ programs aim to develop and recognize teachers' knowledge and expertise and to expand the knowledge and skills available to meet students' needs. For example, popular AQs include special education, English as a second language, and French as a second language. New AQs are also developed to keep current with latest needs and developments in education, such as integrating technology with pedagogy, creating inclusive classrooms, and understanding and supporting First Nations, Métis and Inuit education. Recently, some AQ courses have become modularized to encourage greater participation and access, functioning rather like micro-credentials.



In addition to funding teacher leadership positions for the Student Achievement strategy in schools and boards, the Ministry also seconded experienced educators to work—usually on a time limited basis—in the Ministry to inform strategies and to support implementation in the education sector.

## Opportunities to Lead Professional Learning

As the designs of these leadership opportunities suggest, one important way for teachers to take on new roles is by leading the professional learning of their colleagues. Since much of the professional learning in high-performing systems takes place within schools, teacher-leaders have a particular responsibility to organize the learning and support of their colleagues.

The support by teacher-leaders starts with mentoring new teachers. High-performing systems have structured induction programs in which mentors play an important role in acclimating new teachers to the school culture and providing them with instructional support. To ensure that the new teachers receive the support they need, the systems have clearly articulated the qualifications and responsibilities of mentors.

In Ontario, for example, mentorship is voluntary, although school administrators may invite individuals to take on the role to support a beginning teacher. Mentors must be an “excellent role model of a teaching professional,” skilled in working with both adults and students, knowledgeable about current curriculum and teaching/learning strategies, good problem solvers and collaborators, effective listeners and communicators, able to use feedback, and continual lifelong learners. The province has a structured training program for mentors, and provides them with release time to work with their mentees. Ontario sees the program as an informal way of developing teacher leaders.

Even more expansive is Ontario’s Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP), launched in 2007 as a partnership between the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF).

The goals for the TLLP are to:

- support experienced teachers to undertake self-directed advanced professional development;
- develop teachers’ leadership skills for sharing their professional learning and exemplary practices; and
- facilitate knowledge exchange for spread and sustainability of practices.

**Ontario has a structured training program for mentors, and provides them with release time to work with their mentees.**

Research on the outcomes of this initiative has found that large majorities of teachers reported improved instructional practices, including greater technological and assessment skills, as well as new knowledge and greater collaboration. Fully 97 percent of survey respondents indicated that the TLLP had supported development of their leadership skills.<sup>3</sup>

The emphasis on knowledge exchange has supported teachers to de-privatize their practice and share their learning and practices across classrooms, schools, districts, provincially and, in some cases, internationally. An analysis of recent projects found that the majority were sharing their learning through developing and providing professional learning sessions and also through the use of online media, including Twitter, blogs, and websites. Other forms of sharing included staff meetings, professional learning communities, conferences, modeling, mentoring, communications/publications, and events. TLLP teachers were also developing professional resources and materials including lesson plans, resource lists, assessment tools, and instructional materials.

Similarly, Singapore's career track system provides opportunities for highly capable teachers to lead professional learning within and across schools. The most prominent example of the role of teachers in leading professional learning is the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST). The AST was founded, initially, to pull the master teachers together to support their learning and to enable them to organize professional learning for others. There are currently 15 master teachers in the Academy who were organizing learning around the Skillful Teacher initiative and the mentoring program, among other initiatives.

Shanghai's clearly articulated career ladder also provides opportunities for taking on leadership roles in professional learning. But as observers of that system have noted, the leadership can be implicit as well as explicit. The informal identification of teachers as "backbone teachers" in the *jiaoyanzu* is an example of this implicit form of leadership within the culture of teaching in China.

To some, the structure of the career ladder in China may seem hierarchical. To a large extent, there is a clear status difference in *jiaoyanzu* meetings, with less experienced teachers serving tea, not speaking as much as more experienced teachers, and sitting on the periphery. The head of the *jiaoyanzu* takes a central seat at the conference table, is the first person to provide feedback on a lesson, and summarizes all the feedback at the end of the meeting. Yet, the status differential does not put the more experienced teachers in a position of authority or leader; they are there as experts, not directors. As one study put it, they are "at the center of an eddy rather than at the top of a ladder."<sup>4</sup>

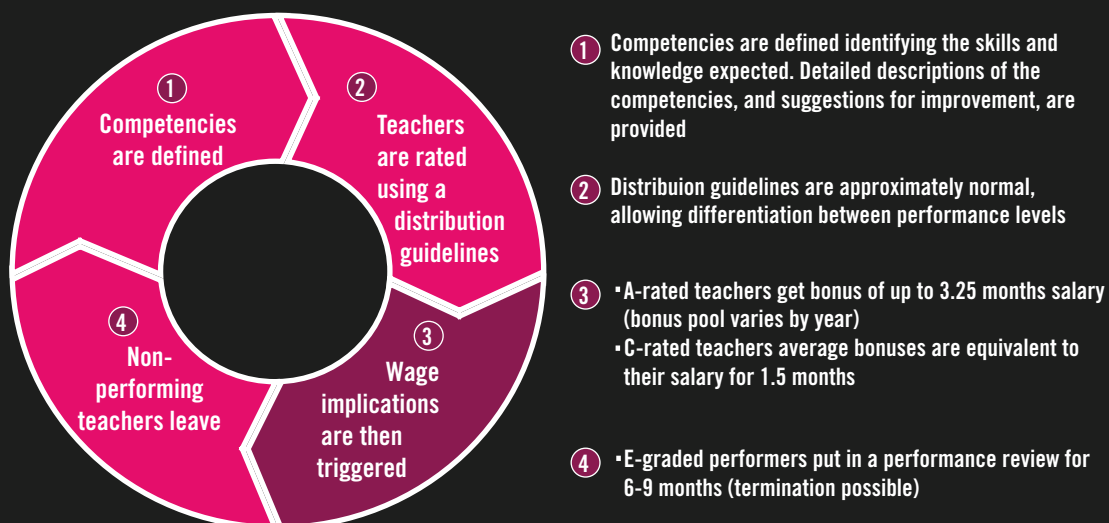
## Link to Compensation

In addition to providing structures for teachers to take on additional roles based on their expertise and interests, several countries, including Singapore, China, and Australia, have also sought to link compensation to professional learning and skills. The nature of the compensation strategy appears to have an influence on how successful this effort has been. A contrast can be seen in Australia, where the federal government proposed salary increments based on teacher performance. In Victoria, the short-lived Liberal government in power from 2010-14 had intended to introduce a form of merit pay by specifying that teachers who are deemed to have adequately met the goals articulated in their plans would receive an annual salary increment. There was some effort to encourage principals to tie these merit pay decisions to student test scores. In practice, trial plans failed to yield improvements in performance, and the merit pay idea caused significant pushback from teachers and school leaders. The plan was ultimately dropped.

NSW, by contrast, revised its salary structure to tie compensation to higher levels of professional accreditation based on the standards. Under this award, teachers receive significant increases in pay when they are accredited at the Proficient Standard and are paid a salary in excess of \$100,000 when they achieve the Highly Accomplished and Lead Standard. This reform, unlike Victoria's, has been undertaken with the full support of the teachers' union, which is strongly supportive of more rigorous professional standards at entry and a system of advancement tied to standards throughout the career.

Singapore's compensation system is also tied to standards for teaching. Based on the annual evaluation of teachers, which examines their performance on a broad range of professional competencies, teachers can earn salary adjustments and non-monetary awards, such as the Caring Teacher Award and the President's Award for Teachers. The Ministry of Education also distributes grants—worth \$3,000 (US) for individuals and between \$3,000 and \$10,000 (US) for teams—for outstanding contributions by teachers. Figure 2, below, illustrates performance-based compensation in Singapore.

**Figure 2: Performance-based Compensation in Singapore**



**A study in Beijing found that the merit pay system was not a motivating program for teachers to perform differently than they had in the past. The career ladder and other recognitions of and roles for teachers appear to have more substantial motivational effects.**

In Shanghai, China's merit pay requirements, which call for annual differentiation of 30 percent of salary based on performance, are viewed as somewhat frustrating by some school leaders and less helpful to the support of expert teaching than the career ladder itself.

The merit pay rules enacted in 2009 were part of an overall increase in salaries. In Shanghai, base pay (70 percent of the total) is distributed to teachers primarily based on the number of classes they teach, as well as the additional tasks and responsibilities that the teacher takes on, such as being the *banzhuren* (advisor) for a class, being the head of the *jiaoyanzu* (teacher research group), or conducting demonstration lessons for colleagues in the school or at other schools.

The merit determination process varies from school to school. There are no specific metrics or weighted formulas used to determine the merit salary allocation for individual teachers. Principals rely on many different sources of information and indicators of success including performance of the teachers' students and professional advancements that the teacher makes. The introduction of merit pay appears to have made the evaluation process more frustrating for some principals.

A study conducted in Beijing after the merit pay system was implemented found that, overall, the merit pay system was not a motivating program for teachers to perform differently than they had in the past. The career ladder and other recognitions of and roles for teachers in other countries appear to have more substantial motivational effects.

## **Lessons Learned**

High-performing systems view teaching as a profession, one that is attractive to enter and remain in and one that offers rewards—intrinsic and extrinsic—to those who excel. In doing so, the systems help ensure that well-qualified individuals go into teaching, thus enhancing the respect for the profession throughout society.

As people in other professions do, teachers in these systems take on additional responsibilities based on their interests and abilities. This is valuable for teachers: it enhances their interest in teaching and keeps them stimulated. At the same time, it is valuable for the education system: it distributes leadership and enables teachers to play important roles in building the capacity of their fellow teachers. In that way, the career-ladder structures are integral parts of the human capital systems in high-performing systems.

The policies and practices described here differ from country to country, but they share some common themes. These include:

*Career paths allow teachers to take on leadership roles.* Teachers know the opportunities they have to advance in the profession and what they have to do to move ahead. They have choices and can follow their interests. They can remain in their schools, take on additional learning opportunities, or work on policy. In some countries this is a very formal progression; in others, less formal. In all, however, teachers' roles and opportunities to share their skills evolve as they continue in the career.

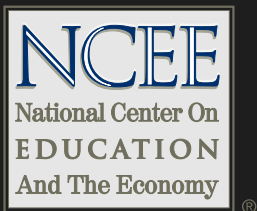
*Teacher advancement is tied to professional learning.* The career paths serve as a key component of the learning systems. Knowledgeable and experienced teachers lead professional learning for newer and less-knowledgeable teachers. They become part of the school leadership team and help manage instructional leadership in the school and, in some cases, beyond the school.

*Leadership development is intentional.* High-performing systems proactively recruit prospective leaders and provide them with support and learning opportunities to take on leadership roles. They seek strong teachers with knowledge of instruction and a demonstrated ability to lead adult learning as well as student learning.

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## Notes:

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2121 K Street, NW  
Suite 700  
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