

Policy Ideas for Consideration

This is a non-exhaustive list of potential policy ideas to consider, drawn from the ideas the commission surfaced in its Year 1 report, the February ERIC meeting, what we heard in our initial interviews with commissioners, content we’ve shared in our weekly resource emails, and what we know about work other states are doing. This list is meant to be a thought-starter rather than an exhaustive set of policy solutions; you should feel free to add your own ideas. With alignment from the group about a set of ideas to dig into, we’ll do more research and share additional content and resources in the coming weeks.

Policy area	Short description
Competency-based learning	Competency-based learning (CBL, also sometimes referred to as Mastery-based learning) is an educational approach that promotes academic achievement and educational equity by restructuring the way we think about how students learn and demonstrate their learning and growth. The approach is grounded in the belief that all students can succeed in rigorous learning environments, though they may require varying amounts of time and differentiated support to meet learning goals. In traditional classrooms, students progress through curricula at a single pace, which can make it difficult for teachers to balance the needs of students who are struggling with the needs of students who are grasping content with ease. CBL departs from this model. It “prioritizes flexible pacing along various pathways and requires students to demonstrate mastery of complex and transferable learning targets before moving on to new material.” ¹
Curriculum/instructional materials	Research shows that high-quality curricula, when implemented well and with fidelity, can positively affect student achievement. ²
Early college high schools/other early postsecondary options	Early postsecondary options allow students to begin earning postsecondary credits while in high school. One type, early college high schools (ECHS) are partnerships of school districts, charter management organizations, or high schools and two- or four-year colleges or universities. They are a type of dual enrollment program that offers students the opportunity to earn an associate’s degree or up to two years of college credits toward a bachelor’s degree in high-school—at no or low cost to students. ³
Early literacy	Early literacy initiatives focus on ensuring that young children have access to high-quality language and literacy programs beginning well before they enter kindergarten and continuing through the period when children are building foundational reading skills to enable them to transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”. Effective early care and education programs as well as family literacy strategies for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers can help close the gap. These efforts are aimed at ensuring children are reading at grade level by third grade (research shows that students who are reading at grade level in third grade are more likely to graduate from high school on time). ⁴
Education funding/resources	States allocate and distribute funding and resources to education institutions using a variety of approaches and formulas.

Educator compensation	Traditionally, teachers are paid using a “step-and-lane” system, in which pay raises are associated with increased experience and education. More recently, some states and districts have experimented with various forms of “performance” or “incentive” pay, where teachers are given bonuses or higher salaries based on their students’ outcomes or to increase comp in shortage subjects or for other high need roles.
High-quality teachers	Research shows that teacher quality has measurable and significant impact on student performance and that the effect of having a high-quality teacher is greatest for students with the greatest educational disadvantages. ⁵ Improving teacher quality includes a range of policy efforts ranging from strengthening the teacher preparation program approval process to hold programs accountable for the quality of the teachers they produce to providing high-quality clinical experiences to pre-service teachers to improving the content and learning science that is taught in teacher prep programs. ⁶
Out-of-school time	After school programs, summer programs, tutoring programs, and other opportunities to enhance students’ out-of-school time have gained traction as states have looked for ways to address learning recovery. ⁷
Social-emotional learning	Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, feel and show empathy, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. ⁸
System flexibility/ reform	System reform is one type of innovation that states and districts have embraced. It includes implementing new governance models (e.g., “innovation zones”, “empowerment districts”, “portfolio models”, etc.). States have a role to play both in creating a policy environment to foster system reform and in removing barriers that can make it difficult for systems to undertake and sustain ambitious reforms. ⁹
Teacher and/or school accountability	Accountability systems hold teachers and/or schools accountable for the performance of their students. Schools and/or teachers that do not meet expectations may experience consequences.
Technology/ virtual learning opportunities	States can consider a variety of technology-related policies ranging from connectivity and device access to online learning (where students engage in all of their course content virtually) and blended learning (where students take part of their course content online and part in a traditional in-person setting).
Work-based learning/CTE/ career pathways in high school	CTE programs, work-based learning, and high school career pathway programs can provide students with real-life work experiences through internships, pre- and youth apprenticeships, co-ops, and other programs that enable students to learn and apply technical skills and develop their employability skills.

¹ Evans, Landl, and Thompson, "Making Sense," <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/cbe2.1228>.

² <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2019/09/20/474711/successful-implementation-high-quality-instructional-materials/>

³ <https://www.air.org/project/evaluating-impact-early-college-high-schools>

⁴ <https://www.nga.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/NGA-Literacy-v5.3.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.educationnext.org/in-schools-teacher-quality-matters-most-coleman/#:~:text=the%20quality%20of%20teachers%20shows,and%20curricula%5D%20to%20pupil%20achievement.&text=The%20finding%20that%20%E2%80%9Cteacher%20quality,consistent%20with%20more%2Drecent%20research>.

⁶ [https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/NCTQ_BestPractices_FINAL_\(2\)](https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/NCTQ_BestPractices_FINAL_(2))

⁷ See, for example, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR366/RAND_RR366.pdf;

⁸ <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>

⁹ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED574091.pdf>