

# Can Immigrant Professionals Help Reduce Teacher Shortages in the U.S.?



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report looks at the challenge of teacher shortages facing public schools across the U.S., and the role that internationally educated and trained immigrant and refugee professionals can play in addressing these shortages. The discussion focuses in particular on “alternative teacher certification” initiatives that seek to attract a diverse group of career changers and subject matter experts into the classroom—immigrant professionals among them. The report also offers policy recommendations at the local, state, and federal levels that would help advance such efforts, and support the development of a skilled and diverse teacher workforce that meets the needs of increasingly diverse schools.

At a national level, the supply of teachers has remained stable in recent years—however, at the state and local level, school districts have been wrestling with long-standing teacher shortages in a number of specific fields, including science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects; career and technical education (CTE); bilingual education; and special education. Schools and students in low-income and minority neighborhoods often face particularly significant challenges in terms of recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff subjects.

In a country that is increasingly diverse and an economy that is increasingly dependent on STEM training and technical skills, there is widespread recognition of the pressing need to address critical gaps in the supply of teachers by subject and by school. Strategies proposed for addressing these shortages include strengthening the student pipeline into traditional teacher preparation programs; expansion of financial aid and other incentives; and improved teacher salaries and professional development opportunities.

In recent years, alternative teacher certification programs have become another important tool in the battery of policies that states, school districts, and the federal government are employing to fill gaps in critical areas and to grow and sustain a trained and committed educational workforce.

## ALTERNATIVE TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS AND IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS

Alternative teacher certification policies are in place in some form in almost every state. Currently nearly one-third of teacher preparation programs nationally are alternative certification programs, and their number is growing. These initiatives seek to attract and fast-track into the teaching profession diverse and nontraditional candidates, including industry professionals, career changers, and paraeducators—individuals, in other words, who often already have significant experience in STEM and CTE fields. Many of these candidates also have bilingual and bicultural skills. While requirements for admission vary by state and program, most alternative routes to certification require candidates to have at least a bachelor’s degree. On the way to full teaching certification, these candidates must typically complete course work in key subject areas and pedagogy, and obtain relevant classroom teaching experience and professional mentoring.

Alternative certification programs vary widely in their level of targeted outreach to and support for specific populations. But a growing number of these initiatives are seeking to leverage the talents and the cultural and linguistic diversity of immigrant communities, including foreign-trained professionals, especially those with experience in STEM and CTE fields as well as bilingual and bicultural skills. The potential for these highly skilled individuals, many of whom are underemployed, to make a significant dent in labor shortages among the teaching workforce is significant: There are almost four million immigrant professionals in the U.S. labor force with a foreign bachelor’s degree or higher, 29 percent of them unemployed or working in low wage or low-skilled jobs. This includes more than 260,000 immigrants with teaching degrees, 41 percent of whom are unemployed or underemployed.

This report profiles efforts across the country to address shortages in STEM/CTE instruction and in other areas, and to increase teacher diversity through alternative certification programs, with a particular focus on those that are already reaching out to, or are positioned to reach out to, foreign-educated immigrants. We explore programs in Washington State, California, Oregon, and New York City, along with promising initiatives in several other states. We also look at policies and funding streams at the federal level that seek to support and expand alternative certification options, and examine a number of national non-profit programs that work to draw nontraditional candidates, including career changers, into the teaching profession.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The report closes with recommendations in two areas. First, we point to promising program and policy models that can facilitate the entry of more foreign-trained professionals into the teaching workforce in the U.S. These include:

- Expanded outreach to foreign-trained immigrants in the context of existing alternative certification programs
- More targeted and fully articulated pathways that meet the unique needs of immigrant professionals
- Policy or regulatory changes to make requirements for education, work experience, and testing more flexible and streamlined for skilled immigrants

Second, we propose ways that local, state, and national education stakeholders can work together to leverage the unique assets that immigrant professionals bring and the opportunity they represent in helping to address urgent teacher shortages in this country's schools. These strategies include:

- Convening stakeholders across the K-12 and higher education system to share perspectives and best practices in this field
- Research and communications that elevate public and policymaker awareness of best practice program models
- Cross-sector collaborations among stakeholder groups to cross-fertilize the field by aligning program and policy strategies, long-term goals, resources, and conceptual frameworks

Building and strengthening bridges into the teaching profession for immigrant professionals will call for leadership, collaboration, commitment, and creativity across all parts of the educational system. Given the centrality of state policy and funding streams in teacher preparation and certification requirements, state policymakers and other state education stakeholders have a particularly key role to play in this process. But school districts, especially in immigrant-rich communities, are also positioned to advocate for and creatively leverage programs and policies that tap into the foreign-trained talent in those locales. The wide-ranging initiatives profiled in this report suggest we may be at a tipping point in terms of recognizing and promoting the potential contributions of internationally trained professionals in U.S. classrooms. In a K-12 education system working to address challenges on many fronts, immigrant professionals can become an important part of the solution to creating a teacher workforce that meets the needs of all students, and the demands of the 21st century economy those students are entering.

# INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

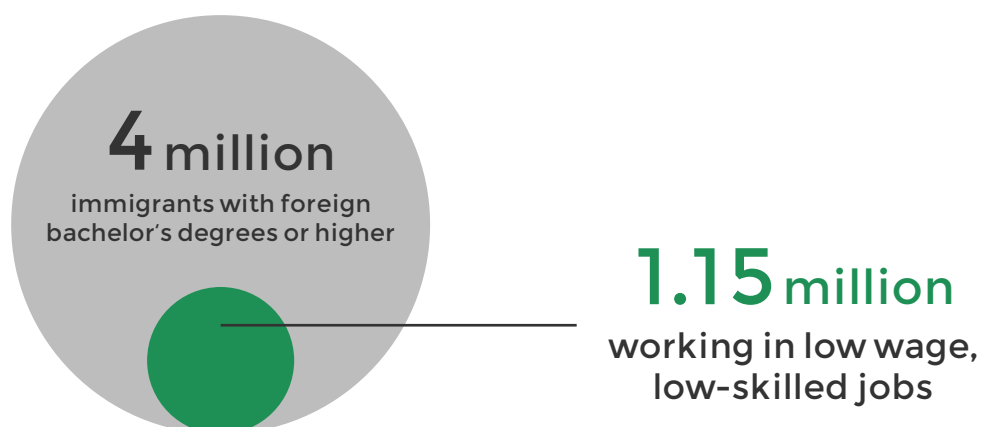
With teacher demand surging in the past decade, and projections of increased demand in coming years, there has been much media attention to the threat of teacher shortages around the country.<sup>2</sup> Despite the widely reported challenges facing schools in many locales, however, from a national standpoint the issue is less clear. On the whole, as one 2016 study noted, “The supply of teachers nationwide is not significantly different than it was five years ago.”<sup>3</sup> Yet this national picture belies the situation in many classrooms.

Much recent research has, in fact, highlighted dramatic teacher shortages in states and school districts across the U.S. But these shortages are selective, varying by state, by subject, and by school. While nationally more teacher licenses are being awarded, 20 states have seen decreases in recent years, some by one-third to almost one-half.<sup>4</sup> And all around the country, educators and policymakers are devising strategies to strengthen the pipeline of teachers into science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) as well as career technical education (CTE) and other subject areas, including bilingual/English learner education, special education, and early childhood education.<sup>5</sup> Alongside shortages by state and subject area, schools in many parts of the country face an even bigger gap in the share of the teaching workforce who are minorities or individuals of color—in all fields.<sup>6</sup> And all these burdens, not surprisingly, fall most severely on students at schools in poor and minority neighborhoods, where teacher hiring and retention historically face greater obstacles.<sup>7</sup>

In a country that is becoming ever more diverse, and with career opportunities for students and young adults increasingly dependent on STEM training and targeted job skills, such shortages pose a particularly dire challenge. A growing body of research indicates, moreover, that a diverse teacher workforce that reflects the student population is a key component of student success.<sup>8</sup>

States and localities across the country as well as federal agencies are pursuing a variety of strategies to address such teaching shortages. Between 2015 and 2017, at least 11 state task forces and other working groups were convened to examine these issues and provide potential solutions to policymakers.<sup>9</sup> Among these are solutions that can tap into the talents and experience of almost four million immigrant professionals in the U.S. labor force with a bachelor’s degree or higher earned outside of the U.S.<sup>10</sup> Some 29 percent of these highly educated and high-skilled immigrants are currently unemployed or under-employed, working in low wage or low-skilled jobs.<sup>11</sup> This includes more than 260,000 immigrants with teaching degrees, 41 percent of whom are unemployed or working in low-skilled jobs.<sup>12</sup>

To understand the potential career pathways for high-skilled immigrants and refugees into teaching, it is important to have a clearer picture of the wide range of approaches that states and localities are exploring and implementing to meet teacher shortages in particular subjects and particular schools. These solutions include





strengthening the traditional pipeline of individuals into teacher preparation programs through expansion of tuition grants, financial aid packages, and other incentives; increasing recruitment of international teachers; and better support of the existing teaching workforce through improved salaries and professional development opportunities.

Another increasingly popular strategy involves expanding alternative teacher certification programs that seek to attract and fast-track diverse and nontraditional candidates into the profession, especially in STEM and CTE subjects. Such candidates include industry professionals, career changers, and paraeducators—immigrant and refugee professionals among them.

This report profiles efforts across the country to address shortages in STEM/CTE instruction and increase teacher diversity, focusing primarily on alternative certification pathways. The report explores programs in Washington State, California, Oregon, and New York City, along with promising initiatives in several other states. Representatives of many of these state and local programs came together in late 2016 to share their experiences and discuss the possibility of coordinating efforts to create pipelines for internationally educated STEM professionals into in-demand teaching careers in the U.S. Many of the insights and recommendations that emerged are reflected in the discussions here. We also look at federal policies and funding streams that seek to support and expand alternative certification options, and at national non-profit programs that work to draw new faces and new talent into the teaching profession.

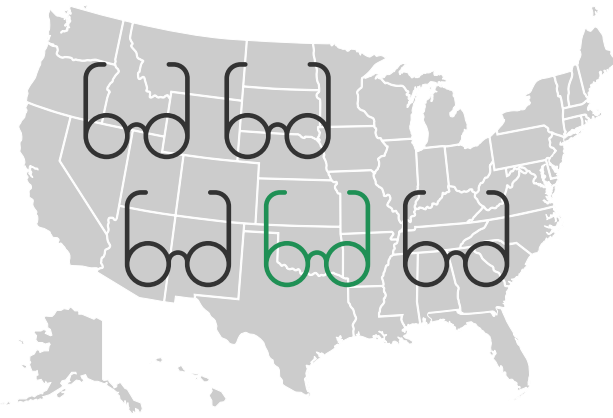
This report closes with recommendations in two areas. First, we point to promising program and policy models that can help facilitate the entry of more internationally trained professionals into the teaching workforce in the U.S. Second, we propose ways that local, state, and national education stakeholders can work together to leverage the unique assets that immigrant professionals bring and the opportunity they represent in filling urgent teacher shortages in this country's schools.

## **EXPANDING THE PIPELINE: Alternative Routes to Teaching Careers**

The variety of initiatives designed to address teacher shortages is as wide-ranging as the causes of the shortages themselves—causes that vary by state, district, and community. Among those that recent research has highlighted are:

- A “leaky pipeline” of high school and college students into STEM/CTE teaching fields (especially students of color)
- Challenges in recruitment and retention of existing teachers because of low salaries, poor working conditions, and limited opportunities for professional development
- High teacher attrition due to retirements (one-third of annual leavers)
- Increased levels of teacher transfers from high need schools
- The greater appeal, and pay, of jobs in private industry
- The low standing of the teaching profession in the U.S.
- Cuts to district budgets during the recession
- Differences in teacher pay across states
- A confusing state-to-state patchwork of laws and regulations governing the training and certification of teachers that creates barriers to entering the profession within states and moving into jobs across states<sup>13</sup>

One response to these challenges has been the growth of alternative certification options for recruiting and training new teachers outside of traditional teacher preparation programs. Present now in some form in almost every state, alternative certification programs first became



**In 2013, alternative programs produced one of every five teachers in the U.S.**

popular in the 1980s, when they were seen as a hedge against projected teacher shortages. In recent decades, alternative certification has become an increasingly mainstream model for bringing into the teaching profession individuals not served by traditional teacher preparation programs. Alternative certification programs especially seek to recruit individuals to work in high-need schools and to teach high-demand subjects such as STEM and CTE, as well as bilingual and special education. These programs typically seek to recruit individuals with bachelor's or graduate degrees in relevant areas, as well as mid-career professionals, including those who are attracted to teaching but are not ready to bear the cost of tuition or forgo earnings associated with completing standard teacher education programs.<sup>14</sup>

Currently nearly one-third of teacher preparation programs nationally are alternative programs offered by institutes of higher education, private and non-profit providers, local and state education agencies, and other partnerships.<sup>15</sup> In 2013, alternative programs produced one of every five teachers in the U.S.<sup>16</sup>

As with teacher certification requirements in general, the required course of study in alternative certification programs varies widely from state to state. Typically candidates must complete additional college course work, ranging from short-term training to a graduate degree program, and must also gain relevant part or full-time classroom experience. These requirements

typically need to be completed either before or during the candidate's first year of full-time teaching.<sup>17</sup> Participants often receive a stipend, a scholarship or tuition reduction, or other financial incentives. Residency programs, modeled after the concept of medical residencies, are an increasingly popular alternative option for teacher preparation. These programs assign teacher candidates to spend a year as a "resident" in the classroom, working alongside an experienced teacher mentor. They also require teaching candidates to pursue concurrent instruction in both pedagogy and required subject areas. Residencies are specifically designed to help districts accelerate the entry of professional talent into high-need schools, especially in particular in-demand subject areas, and often include a multiyear commitment to working in high-need schools or districts.<sup>18</sup>

As we will discuss, alternative certification initiatives are increasingly viewed as a means for professionals with strong content knowledge to transition to working as K-12 educators in their fields of expertise. These programs may be designed to attract professionals who have a background in areas affected by teacher shortages, such as STEM and CTE subjects, and those who are looking for low-cost, streamlined pathways into another profession. Such options can represent a win-win for districts. In addition to bringing real world skills into the classroom, alternative certification programs can provide an attractive pathway into teaching for many individuals, including males and people of

color, who are less likely to attend traditional teacher preparation programs.<sup>19</sup> Some research comparing student achievement in classes led by alternatively certified teachers and teachers with standard traditional preparation has shown no significant difference in the quality of teaching,<sup>20</sup> and teachers with alternative certifications often score higher on licensing exams.<sup>21</sup>

In an effort to address the persistent shortages of minority teachers and teachers of color in high-need schools, an increasing number of states and school districts are also exploring Grow Your Own (GYO) programs. National efforts to create pathways into teaching for individuals of color working as paraeducators or teaching assistants go back to the Pathways to Teaching Careers initiative of the late 1980s and 1990s, funded by DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.<sup>22</sup> The GYO model originated as a community-based initiative in Chicago, focused on bilingual paraeducators. Such programs partner school districts, higher education institutions, and community-based groups to actively recruit and train racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse candidates to enter and persist in teaching careers in their own communities.<sup>23</sup> Illinois funded the first statewide GYO program in 2004; since then, GYO initiatives have expanded to states across

the country. Most recently a number of states, including Tennessee, Mississippi, Missouri, and Pennsylvania, have proposed exploring the development of GYO programs as part of their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) state plans.<sup>24</sup>

GYO programs can be as different as the communities they serve. Some seek to provide introductory course work or mentoring to high school students to interest them in a teaching career; others may offer financial incentives for racial or ethnic minority college students to enter teacher education programs. Many GYO programs also seek to engage school support staff (such as paraeducators), parents, or other community members, providing them with the wraparound financial, academic, and social supports they need to earn their teacher certification. In this context, alternative teacher certification programs also provide an important tool for attracting adult career changers and professionals from local communities. This includes leveraging competency-based approaches for advancing paraeducators—the most diverse segment of the educator workforce, and one that often includes foreign-trained teachers and other skilled immigrants—toward obtaining full teaching credentials.<sup>25</sup>

## Grow Your Own Programs





As the examples that follow will demonstrate, tapping into the opportunities that alternative certification programs and GYO initiatives represent must be a collaborative effort. Such efforts call for creativity and coordination on the part of state agencies and policymakers, school districts, higher education institutions, and community partners, as well as a resourceful braiding of state, federal, and sometimes private funding streams. Strengthening and better integrating such initiatives into state teacher pipelines also often require legislative and regulatory changes to create more streamlined and flexible certification requirements. Such programs can call as well for new cross-sector partnerships to support new recruitment, training, financial aid, teacher induction, and residency options.<sup>26</sup>

Alternative teacher certification and GYO programs vary widely in their level of targeted outreach to—and support for—specific populations. But an increasing share of these initiatives are seeking to leverage the talents and the cultural and linguistic diversity of immigrant communities, including internationally trained professionals, with a primary focus on individuals with experience in STEM and CTE fields and those who worked as educators in their home countries.

Alternative teacher pathways represent an opportunity for internationally trained teachers and professionals from many different fields, from engineering to business to health care, to employ their experience, expertise, and linguistic and cultural knowledge in new careers that can help both their families and their communities prosper. Compared with other licensed professions in the U.S., teaching has increasingly become a field to which there are multiple paths of entry, and a wide range of local, state, and national initiatives that seek to engage diverse candidates outside of traditional educator preparation programs.

Among the states and localities that have made the most progress in implementing such programs are Washington State, California, and Oregon, and cities like New York City and Seattle.

The following sections explore the efforts in these and other jurisdictions, including federal government programs, to expand and diversify the teaching workforce and the potential opportunities they offer to high-skilled immigrant job seekers.

## **WASHINGTON STATE: How to “Grow Your Own” Educators**

Washington has been among the most proactive and creative states in finding ways to expand and diversify its teaching workforce, including engaging with and supporting its growing population of immigrant professionals.<sup>27</sup> Such a push is not surprising: This bastion of the nation’s high technology industry also faces dramatic teacher shortages. Recent surveys show nearly a quarter of schools in crisis mode, struggling to staff classrooms with fully certified and qualified teachers. Districts are also working to increase the diversity of teachers in a state where more than two of every five students identify as being of color.<sup>28</sup>

The state’s track record of innovation in creating more flexible teacher certification pathways goes back nearly two decades. Since 2001, the state has distributed block grant funding of \$2 million to encourage districts to support its Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification. Through these grants, the state currently funds 19 programs that pair districts with state colleges and universities to develop pathways along four different routes to certification.<sup>29</sup> After the passage of legislation in 2017, Washington State also launched a Paraeducator Board that is responsible for setting policy regarding paraeducator standards, professional development, and career ladders toward earning teaching credentials.<sup>30</sup>

Each of the state’s routes to certification focuses on a different population and a different set of career goals. As described in a 2015 study by the advocacy group OneAmerica, these routes include:

## Alternative Routes to Certification

**\$2 million** More than **has been distributed by Washington State since 2001**

**77%** has gone to the diverse group of paraeducators

**1/3** hold a BA or higher degree

- “1. Paraeducators or emergency substitute teachers who wish to transition their associate’s degree to a bachelor’s degree, the education attainment level necessary to qualify as a lead teacher;
2. Para-educators who already have their bachelor’s degree but still require a teaching certificate;
3. Para-educators who already have their bachelor’s degree but still require a teaching certificate;
4. Those who hold a bachelor’s degree and enter conditional certification agreements with school districts agreeing to complete course work within a set timeframe.”<sup>31</sup>

A full 77 percent of block grant recipients are paraeducators,<sup>32</sup> more than one-third of whom hold a bachelor’s degree or higher.<sup>33</sup> As part of the state’s efforts to support educator diversity and culturally responsive teaching, Washington’s Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB), the body that oversees the state’s teacher certification process (including the Alternative Route Block Grant programs) has also been encouraging school districts to develop GYO teacher programs.<sup>34</sup> Leveraging private funding, the state is also enacting a “GYO Educator Infrastructure Pilot Initiative, which aims to help seven districts develop and implement sustainable plans to diversifying their workforce.”<sup>35</sup>

Current GYO strategies include alternative route programs, redesigned scholarships for current teachers, and teacher academies to support diverse students in becoming educators. Districts are encouraged to recruit and train individuals from within their own communities to become teachers, including high school and college students, career changers, and paraeducators. Such efforts include providing resources and technical assistance to help districts partner with local higher education institutions.<sup>36</sup> PESB is also lobbying the state legislature to expand funding for the Alternative Route Block Grant, fund a statewide GYO initiative, and provide additional state-funded loan forgiveness for teachers working in high-need schools.<sup>37</sup>

The almost 85,000 foreign-trained professionals in Washington State are also beginning to receive more attention as part of these efforts, both from PESB and from immigrant-serving organizations and other community-based groups.<sup>38</sup> Washington’s immigrant advocacy community, which has a strong track record on educational policy, has begun to draw attention to the potential contributions of immigrant professionals in the state, including the ability to strengthen and diversify the state’s teaching workforce. The study mentioned above, *Reducing Brain Waste: Creating Career Pathways for Foreign-Educated Immigrants in Washington State*,<sup>39</sup> was developed by the advocacy group OneAmerica in collaboration with a wide range of state and local stakeholder partners, including the Washington PESB. Among

the recommendations are detailed guidelines for tapping into an accomplished, diverse, and bilingual talent pool desperately needed by the state's schools.

As the study notes, “[f]oreign-educated immigrants may qualify for routes 2, 3, and 4, depending on their degree(s) and work history... The routes, however, are primarily designed for those educated in the U.S.”<sup>40</sup> The report recommends that the Alternative Routes to Certification program should create a fully articulated pathway to help foreign-trained, bilingual teachers and immigrant professionals with degrees in other fields enter the education workforce. Such a pathway would also provide for “funding for recruiting, advising, financial support for credential evaluation and scholarships, accessible teacher education programs, and incentives for school districts” to hire these experienced professionals.<sup>41</sup>

The recommendations in *Reducing Brain Waste* draw both on models in other states, such as the Bilingual Teacher Pathway Program at Portland State University (described in detail later in this report) and local initiatives like the Seattle Teacher Residency Program, which seeks to diversify the pipeline of teachers into Seattle public schools. The Seattle program recruits undergraduate education majors, career changers, and community leaders, blending classroom apprenticeship with aligned graduate-level course work, an intensive resident/mentor partnership, and financial support, leading to a Masters of Education degree from the University of Washington. In return, participants commit to teach for a minimum of five years “in elementary schools serving low-income communities and diverse student populations.”<sup>42</sup>

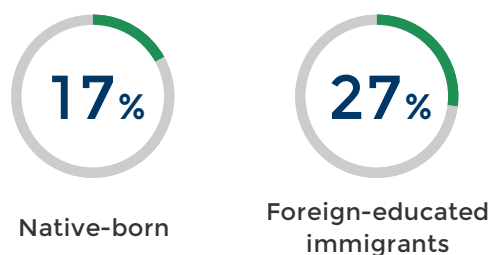
In keeping with these recommendations, the PESB is now working in a number of directions that will support those with foreign degrees looking for accelerated pathways into teaching. PESB has convened a work group to map out pipelines for much-needed bilingual teachers, including immigrants trained abroad. The board is also proactively exploring district,

regional, and state policies and legislation to support high-skilled immigrants who want to enter the educator workforce. Among the options being considered is development of a targeted alternative route that better meets the needs of foreign-trained professionals, including recruitment, advising, tailored teacher training programs, and employment assistance. Finally, PESB is exploring centralized credential evaluation and standard setting, and case management tied to financial aid.<sup>43</sup>

## CALIFORNIA: A Teaching “EnCorps” for Career Changers

California has a population of almost 30 million, four times that of Washington State. It also has almost twice the share of Washington’s foreign-born population (27.2 percent vs. 14 percent), as well as a far higher share of children 5 -17 years of age who are Limited English Proficient (8.6 percent vs. 4.7 percent).<sup>44</sup> The challenges that California faces with regard to teaching shortages are significant and long-standing, particularly in STEM, special education, and bilingual education. The California Department of Education has identified shortages of science, math, and special education instructors almost every year since 1990-1991, with the greatest staffing challenges in schools in urban and low-income areas.<sup>45</sup>

### College-Educated Labor Force in California Affected by Brain Waste\*



\*unemployed or work in low-skilled jobs

In response to such challenges, the state, local school districts, higher education institutions, and non-profit organizations are exploring a range of strategies to recruit, train, and retain teachers. Immigrant professionals stand to play a significant part in these efforts, especially in a state that is home to 813,000 foreign-educated immigrants in the labor force, 27 percent of whom are unemployed or working in low-skilled jobs (compared to 17 percent of native-born college-educated individuals in the labor force).<sup>46</sup>

As in other states, much of the focus in California is on better supporting and leveraging the existing teacher workforce, and improving the higher education pipeline into high-need subject areas.<sup>47</sup> But California has also developed its own suite of alternative certification programs, including an internship program that allows candidates to complete teacher preparation course work concurrent with their first year or two in a paid teaching position.<sup>48</sup> Other state-sponsored efforts include the Integrated Teacher Preparation program, which provides grants to higher education institutions to create streamlined undergraduate pathways to teaching credentials,<sup>49</sup> and the California Educator Development (CalEd) Program, which provides grants to districts to support professional development for both teachers and school administrators.<sup>50</sup>

California is also expanding efforts to reach out to and recruit a wider range of candidates for teaching, including internationally trained immigrants. The state's TEACH California initiative, launched as CalTEACH in the late 1990s, is designed to engage potential teachers, including career changers, out-of-state teachers, and out-of-country teachers, and to help them to become credentialed within the state system. To achieve these goals, the program partners with the state's higher education system, school districts, and business and community organizations.<sup>51</sup> TEACH California also has a dedicated Web page that details relicensing requirements for individuals who have completed a teacher preparation program outside the U.S. According to the Web page, those who can demonstrate completion of a higher degree, a teacher preparation program including student teaching, and a comparable

teaching credential are immediately eligible for a preliminary teaching license.<sup>52</sup>

Another recently developed tool at the state's disposal is the California Center on Teaching Careers, created by the state legislature in 2016 as a recruitment and resource center for "ethnically diverse/bilingual math, science, and special education teachers."<sup>53</sup> Through seven satellite locations around the state, the center reaches out to teaching candidates and others considering a teaching career, including college students, those in the education field who are not teachers, and those working in industries other than education.<sup>54</sup>

One statewide non-profit in particular has embraced the goal of bringing a new and more diverse cadre of talent into the teaching profession and into classrooms at high-need schools. The EnCorps STEM Teachers Program, founded in 2008, and operating in six locations in central and southern California, selects, trains, and supports STEM industry professionals and military veterans exploring a career change into teaching.<sup>55</sup> EnCorps' two-year program model starts with a full year of pre-service volunteering. Fellows serve as pre-service tutors or guest teachers for two to five hours per week at an EnCorps partner school to experience teaching and working with students firsthand, with the possibility of continuing to work full time.

For their second year, EnCorps fellows, with ongoing support from the program, are able to access two types of California teaching credentials: traditional/core single STEM subjects (with a 12- to 24-month traditional or residency program or internship program, also leading to full-time teaching), or CTE subjects (with a 15-week CTE credentialing program together with guest or full-time teaching, leading to a full-time teaching position). Working closely with partner schools in 50 districts that host EnCorps fellows—and more than 250 schools altogether since its founding—EnCorps also provides ongoing mentorship from EnCorps staff and host teachers; support with exams, the credentialing process, obtaining financial aid, and finding full-time employment; and ongoing professional development resources.

Throughout its history EnCorps has engaged a diverse cadre of STEM professionals and veterans to serve students in California, close to 120 per year in recent years, including dozens of immigrant professionals ready to start down the path of becoming educators. Though the program's outreach does not deliberately focus on immigrants or other populations, the California labor market where it operates is a target-rich environment for foreign-trained STEM professionals. EnCorps' holistic and hands-on approach to providing guidance and support is well designed to meet the complex needs of immigrants transitioning their careers to the U.S., including assistance with evaluating their credentials from their home country. The program is growing and looking to engage with more schools in the districts where it currently operates, as well as beginning conversations about expanding to other states and cities. These include New York City, Charlotte, and Minneapolis,<sup>56</sup> all locales with significant high-skilled immigrant populations.

## OREGON: Building a Bilingual Teacher Pipeline

As discussed, one of the biggest shortage areas for K-12 educators is in bilingual instruction. This is especially the case in underserved schools in low-income neighborhoods, which often struggle to serve a high population of English learners. In the 2017–2018 academic year, 31 states reported teacher shortages in bilingual education, dual language immersion, or English as a Second Language education.<sup>57</sup> Bilingual instruction is also an area in which immigrants, including those who have degrees from abroad, represent a uniquely valuable resource. In recent years, Oregon has developed both an alternative teacher preparation program and an innovative

district-university partnership, that tap into the talents of bilingual and bicultural individuals to meet the needs of the state's increasingly diverse student population.

The Bilingual Teacher Pathway (BTP) program at Portland State University (PSU)<sup>58</sup> is a teacher preparation program designed to fill shortages of elementary school bilingual teachers in the Portland Metro and South Washington regions. Originally funded through a National Professional Development Program (NPD) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, the Bilingual Teacher Pathway program recruits and supports bilingual/bicultural individuals who are eligible for admission to the university and who are also employees of school districts that have a partnership agreement with PSU. Candidates must have either 120 transferable credits or a bachelor's degree, and can enter the university at either the undergraduate or graduate level. The program includes "individualized advising, assessment, student services, financial support, mentors, and community building", as well as a coordinated program of course work and field experience in partnership with PSU, community colleges, and local school districts.<sup>59</sup>

Oregon is also at the forefront of exploring creative GYO partnerships between universities and school districts to develop alternative pathways into bilingual education for nontraditional candidates, including immigrants who earned their degrees abroad. To address urgent teacher shortages in their growing dual language immersion program, the Portland Public Schools partnered with PSU in 2016 to develop an alternative route Dual Language Teacher Fellows Program. The program has provided the opportunity for two cohorts of fellows to earn a master's degree in elementary or secondary education with endorsements for



The **Bilingual Teacher Pathway Program** is designed to bring bilingual/bicultural school district employees with bachelor's degrees into the elementary school classroom.



teaching in the language immersion program, while simultaneously working as classroom teachers, full-time substitutes, or paraeducators. The Teacher Fellows initiative leverages Oregon's restricted teacher license, which allows the fellows to be hired to teach while enrolled in a teacher preparation program.<sup>60</sup>

The Dual Language Teacher Fellows Program, now recruiting its third cohort, draws candidates both from existing staff (for example, paraeducators) and from the local community. To qualify for the program, candidates must have a bachelor's degree and advanced proficiency in both English and another language. Fellows go through a multistep process, including being admitted into a teacher preparation program at PSU (either the BTP or graduate teacher education programs) or Oregon State University (a clinically based elementary program leading to a Master of Arts in teaching) and getting hired by the school district. To reduce barriers to entry and completion, Portland Public School's program coordinator provides candidates support with the application process and ongoing guidance once fellows join the program. The Oregon State graduate program also has an online option that allows students more flexibility in aligning course work with their teaching responsibilities. Although the district is not able to provide tuition assistance, it does cover the cost of exams and application fees, as well as transcript translation and credential evaluation fees for candidates educated outside the U.S.

Oregon is not alone in these efforts. A 2015 report by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition on dual language education programs found that four of six states studied had established alternative certification pathways to allow teachers to become certified to teach in dual language programs.<sup>61</sup> In neighboring Washington State, Highline Public Schools and the Woodring College of Education at Western Washington University (WWU) partnered in 2016 to create the Woodring Highline Future Bilingual Teacher Fellow Program.<sup>62</sup> Fellows work as paraprofessionals under the guidance of a

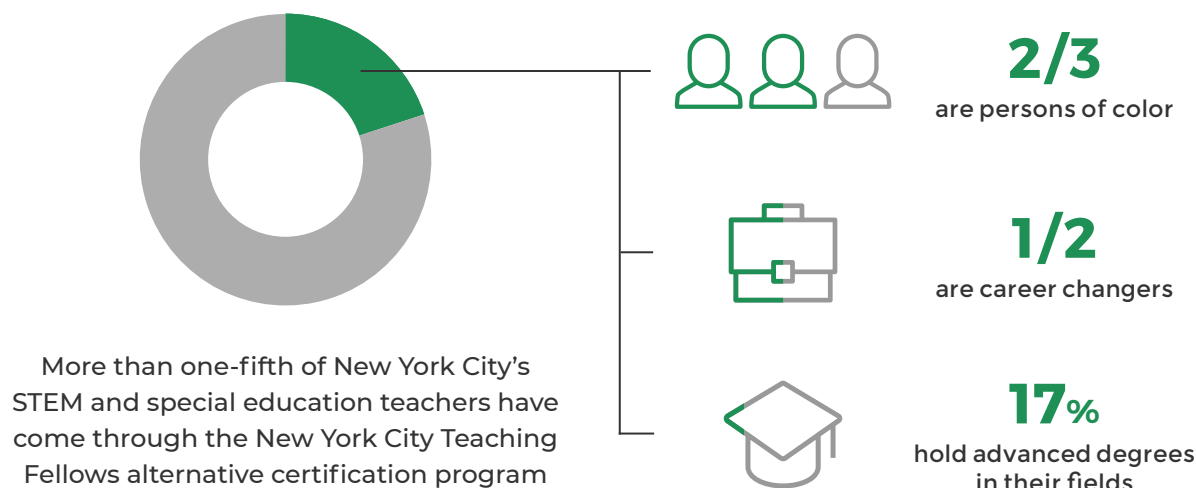
mentor teacher while simultaneously completing their WWU course work toward a teaching certification. Funding from the Washington State Alternative Route Block Grant program supports both fellow scholarships and staffing for program management at WWU and Highline.

## **NEW YORK CITY: Career Paths to Career and Technical Education**

In the largest and one of the most diverse school districts in the country, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) is continuing to expand efforts to diversify its workforce inside of the classroom. Targeting a diverse cadre of less traditional teacher candidates, including recent career changers and immigrant professionals, the DOE is using innovative recruiting tactics to meet the needs of its more than 1.1 million students.

The New York City Teaching Fellows program, started in 2000, is one of the country's largest and most successful urban alternative certification programs. Fellows receive both pre-service training and subsidized tuition leading towards a master's degree, while teaching full time in in-demand subjects in high-need schools. More than one-fifth of the city's STEM and special education teachers are New York City Teaching Fellows—two-thirds of them persons of color, half career changers, and 17 percent with advanced degrees in their fields.<sup>63</sup> The New York City Teaching Collaborative prepares talented career-changers and recent graduates to teach in high-need schools, with four months of training as a "partner teacher" followed by a carefully supervised five-month residency, leading to two years working as a full time teacher while completing a master's degree in their subject area. Partner teachers are committed to teaching for at least four years in the city's high-need schools.<sup>64</sup>

New York City is also making a strong recruitment push in the area of Career and Technical Education (CTE), seeking to attract career changers and retirees with deep industry knowledge of in-demand fields, including



“health care, information technology, computer technology, building trades, hospitality and tourism, and business management and administration.”<sup>65</sup> In a change that could reduce barriers to entry for immigrant professionals and other career changers, the city is leveraging regulations passed by New York State in 2017 to streamline how its schools recruit CTE teachers. The new regulations permit more flexibility in obtaining an initial certificate, known as a “Transitional-A” certificate, to teach in a designated CTE subject area. These certificates allow individuals to teach CTE for three years while completing course work to apply for an Initial CTE Certification, which is valid for five years until candidates complete the course work towards a Professional CTE Certification.<sup>66</sup>

In order to obtain a Transitional-A certificate, candidates in particular CTE subject areas have to demonstrate various combinations of work experience, high school and college degrees, and industry credentials. In 2017 the state Board of Regents approved a new pathway option to a certificate based on a bachelor's degree or higher in the certificate area sought or a related area, along with one year of satisfactory work experience or a relevant industry credential.<sup>67</sup> Internationally trained immigrants and refugees with a bachelor's degree and only limited industry experience in the U.S. stand to benefit by this option. The new regulations also

streamline educational requirements for CTE certification (from 30 semester hours of course work to nine hours of pedagogic course work for the initial certificate and nine for the professional certificate). New York City has also eased its own requirements for CTE instructors who take the city's comprehensive “Teaching All Students” exam, only requiring that they sit for the exam after the professional certificate is obtained, rather than before obtaining the initial certificate.

Like Washington State's Professional Educators Standards Board, the New York City Department of Education's Office of Teacher Recruitment and Quality is working to connect local immigrant professionals with opportunities to teach in Career and Technical Education. The Office has recently convened a working group to identify ways to engage immigrants with industry skills and experience as CTE instructors. In addition, working with the rollout of CTE initiatives in schools across the city, New York's DOE is currently exploring how to support immigrants seeking to navigate the state CTE credentialing process and to market themselves to potential employers.<sup>68</sup> Buoyed by the mayor's strong support for strengthening and expanding CTE programs across the city's schools,<sup>69</sup> these efforts have the potential to engage the talents of hundreds of thousands of foreign-trained professionals in the New York City metro region, both as CTE teachers and as educators in STEM fields.

# FEDERAL SUPPORTS FOR ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATION

The alternative certification models previously described have been developed at state and local levels to address state and local needs. But federal education policies and funding streams also play an important role in supporting and incentivizing new directions in teacher recruitment and training, including reaching out to career changers and STEM professionals as well as individuals with bilingual and bicultural skills. Such policy initiatives include:

- The High School Career and Technical Education Teacher Pathway Initiative, authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006
- The Teacher Quality Partnership grant program, part of Title II of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008
- The National Professional Development Grant program, funded under Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015
- The use of ESSA Title II, Part A funding to develop and strengthen alternative routes to educator certification

These programs can help states and school districts leverage federal support in recruiting and training new sources of teaching talent, immigrant and refugee professionals included.

## HIGH SCHOOL CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION TEACHER PATHWAY INITIATIVE (CTE-TPI)

The Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) oversees state formula and discretionary grant programs to expand and strengthen CTE instruction and the CTE workforce, under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act

(reauthorized in July 2018 as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act).<sup>70</sup> As discussed previously, the shortage of CTE teachers in high-demand occupations is one of the most acute challenges that schools across the country are struggling with, with two-thirds of states reporting shortages.<sup>71</sup> A looming wave of CTE teacher retirements and sharp decreases in the number of CTE-specific teacher preparation programs are deepening the supply challenge.

Probably more than any other area of teaching, CTE programs and policy advocates have championed efforts that reach out to mid-career professionals and industry experts who can bring their training, experience, and practical knowledge to the classroom.<sup>72</sup> Roughly half of CTE instructors enter the field from business or industry.<sup>73</sup> Under the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, federal efforts to address the challenges in CTE educator recruitment include the High School Career and Technical Education Teacher Pathway Initiative (CTE-TPI) grants, which supports creative alternative pathway programs focused on CTE instruction.<sup>74</sup>

Launched in 2017, CTE-TPI provides three-year grants to school boards, state education agencies, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders to increase the supply of teachers in high school CTE programs. The programs must “align to In-Demand Industry Sectors or Occupations in States and communities where shortages of such teachers exist.”<sup>75</sup> Four of the five grants awarded in 2017, to partnerships in five states, place a significant emphasis on recruiting industry professionals as teachers or mentors.

In Portland, Oregon, for example, Portland Community College's High School CTE Teacher Pathway project seeks to increase “recruitment and retention of skilled high-school CTE teachers” in the Portland metro area and elsewhere in Oregon. Under the terms of the grant, the project prioritizes subjects “aligned with the In-Demand industry sectors, including Health Care, Construction, Advanced Manufacturing, and Information Technology.”<sup>76</sup>

The project will develop and implement two models. One involves recruiting industry professionals who have “required industry work experience and/or industry certification... , as well as industry professionals with a Restricted CTE License that require Education course work to advance to the Preliminary CTE License.”

The second model will recruit teachers who are already fully licensed in non-CTE subjects but need “planned and coordinated work experiences to add a CTE endorsement.”<sup>77</sup> Participants in the 15-month program will all have individualized professional development plans that include structured work experiences, two summer training institutes, and ongoing mentoring.

Even if such grant-funded projects prove successful, it remains to be seen whether the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education will continue the CTE-TPI program for another three-year cycle. The provisions of the reauthorized legislation do, however, significantly strengthen policies that will help states and school districts tap into the skills and experience of industry experts and mid-career professionals, including high-skilled immigrants, as teachers. These policies include provisions encouraging states to remain current with industry standards by “assisting those with relevant industry experience in obtaining State teacher licensure or credential requirements.”<sup>78</sup> Career changers—immigrants included—would also benefit from sections of the new law that promote stronger recruitment, retention, and professional development strategies for CTE educators, including improving new teacher mentoring and assisting with licensure and credentialing and career guidance.<sup>79</sup>

## **THE TEACHER QUALITY PARTNERSHIP (TQP) GRANT**

Another federal funding stream that can help promote pathways into teaching for internationally educated immigrants is the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant program. Funded through Title II of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 (amending the Higher Education Act of 1965), TQP supports the development of model teacher preparation

programs that grow the pool of quality teachers. This includes both reforming existing teacher preparation programs and “creating new teaching residency programs for individuals with strong academic or professional qualifications, but without teaching experience.”<sup>80</sup>

The program typically partners higher education institutions and school districts in five-year initiatives, with a focus on underserved urban and rural schools. School systems in regions as distinct as Newark, New Jersey, and central Louisiana<sup>81</sup> have developed integrated recruitment, training, residency placement, and mentorship programs that seek to reach out to both STEM graduates and career changers. Of the 24 TQP grants awarded in 2014, 12 went to residency programs with a focus on improving the pipeline of diverse STEM instructors into high-need schools.<sup>82</sup>

## **NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (NPD)**

Authorized under Title III, Subpart 3 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by ESSA, the NPD Program provides professional development grants for up to five years “to institutions of higher education (in consortia with State educational agencies or local educational agencies)” to “improve classroom instruction for limited English proficient children and assist educational personnel working with such children to meet high professional standards.”<sup>83</sup>

Overseen by the Office of English Language Acquisition, NPD grants may be used, among other purposes, for pre-service professional development programs “to upgrade the qualifications and skills of educational personnel who are not certified or licensed, especially educational paraprofessionals.”<sup>84</sup> Recent NPD grantees are using the funds to support alternative certification pathway programs for bilingual educators, including the Bilingual Teacher Pathway program at Portland State University (PSU) and programs in Ohio and Arkansas (detailed in a later section of this report).

## EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA), TITLE II, PART A

The goal of building a more diverse cadre of teachers—high-skilled immigrants included—can also be served by Title II, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which is designed to provide students from low-income families and minority students with greater access to effective educators. New provisions of the act, as amended by ESSA, serve to support alternative pathway programs, with a strong emphasis on diversifying the teacher pipeline. A recent study from the Center for American Progress highlights how states and districts across the country are leveraging these provisions.<sup>85</sup>

incorporating non-profit “transition to teaching” programs such as the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships, Teach for America, and TNTP’s Indianapolis Teaching Fellows (see the following section of this report, “National Alternative Pathway Programs”).<sup>87</sup>

Tennessee, another beneficiary of Title II, Part A funding, has made one of the five priority goals of its state ESSA plan developing workforce strategies to address critical shortage areas, strategies that include teacher and principal residency programs and targeted efforts to recruit and retain diverse teachers, including mid-career professionals.<sup>88</sup> Other states, like Massachusetts, are leveraging Title II, Part A dollars to support the development of



**Title II, Part A of ESSA promotes alternative certification pathways that reach out to diverse candidates, including those with bachelor’s or advanced degrees or mid-career professionals.**



Under Title II, Part A, entitled “Supporting Effective Instruction,” states may use allocated funds to develop and strengthen alternative routes to educator certification, especially in shortage areas such as STEM instruction and English learner education. These alternative pathways can include seeking to recruit diverse individuals outside of traditional educator preparation programs, including those who already have bachelor’s or advanced degrees or mid-career professionals, as well as paraeducators or veterans.<sup>86</sup>

Indiana’s Roadmap for an Excellent Educator Workforce, for example, leverages Title II, Part A funding to support holistic, targeted strategies that address the entire teaching pipeline, from the recruitment of more diverse teachers and expanded clinical experience, to data-driven professional development and career advancement frameworks. This includes

independent “teacher academies” to recruit and train new cadres of educators, including STEM experts and industry professionals, for specific contexts, such as schools with high proportions of low-income students or English learners.<sup>89</sup>

## NATIONAL ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY PROGRAMS

In addition to the federal, state, and local initiatives discussed earlier, several high profile non-profit alternative teacher certification programs have grown up in recent decades. These programs seek to recruit mission-driven candidates, including recent college graduates, career changers and professionals, to teach in high-need schools around the country. The best known of these are Teach For America (TFA) and the TNTP (formerly The New Teacher Project)



Teaching Fellows program. Both are integrated into alternative teacher certification frameworks in states and school districts across the U.S. TFA is active in 52 low-income communities in 37 states,<sup>90</sup> while TNTP Teaching Fellows are integrated into alternative pathway initiatives in more than 20 cities.<sup>91</sup> Another long-standing national non-profit initiative is the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship, which currently works with partners in Georgia and New Jersey, and over its history has trained teachers in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.

The structure and the mission of these programs vary significantly, especially with regard to how well they are adapted to the needs of candidates who are not recent college graduates, including internationally educated professionals. Unlike teacher residencies and many other alternative certification pathways, all three of the above programs fast-track their members into the classroom as lead teachers after only short-term training. Participants then complete course work at a local college or university toward a teaching certification in their first year of full-time teaching. Though the TNTP Teaching Fellows provides a high level of coaching and oversight of classroom practice and student outcomes, neither TFA nor the Teaching Fellows program emphasize the kind of ongoing mentoring and wrap-around supports available in many other alternative pathway options. Such supports can help high-skilled immigrants and refugees address the barriers they face in navigating a new professional environment and the U.S. higher education system.

TFA and the TNTP Teaching Fellows program also differ in terms of who they recruit and their focus on teaching as a long-term career option. TFA, for example, recruits largely from elite colleges and graduate schools, and instructors tend to remain in their positions for only two to three years. The TNTP Teaching Fellows Program focuses on career changers, with an emphasis on participants who want to make a long-term commitment to the teaching profession. It also has a strong track record in working closely with school districts to develop customized solutions, including outreach to minority communities. The Teaching Fellows

Program reports retention rates that surpass the national average for new teachers in urban schools, and more than one-third of Teaching Fellows are people of color.<sup>92</sup>



**More than 1/3**  
**of TNTP Teaching Fellows are**  
**people of color**

The Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship uses a different model from either TFA or the TNTP Teaching Fellows Program. Launched in 2007 by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the fellowship provides \$30,000 in tuition for both recent college graduates and mid-career or second-career professionals to enroll in master's degree programs at higher education partners in select states, with a focus on STEM subjects.<sup>93</sup> Fellows commit to at least three years of teaching in high-need rural or urban schools, beginning at the start of their graduate programs. They also receive help accessing additional financial support and ongoing mentoring both from their universities and the schools where they are placed. Working closely with higher education institutions, local schools, and community partners in the states where it operates, the program also puts an emphasis on teacher retention and long-term commitment to careers in high-need schools focusing on recruitment from colleges and universities within those states.<sup>94</sup>

Like most other alternative certification pathway initiatives discussed in this report, none of these three programs have identified skilled immigrants and refugees as a specific target of outreach. In many respects, the TFA and the TNTP Teaching Fellows recruitment and training models are also not structured in such a way as to support foreign-educated professionals in joining the teaching profession. The Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship, although more limited in its geographic reach, is a more promising model in this respect. Immigration advocates in Georgia and New Jersey should

consider working with the program to open up opportunities for high-skilled immigrants in those states and others in the future.

There is also some indication that TFA, by far the largest and best-known alternative pathway program in the country, is changing in ways that might help it tap into candidates from a wider population. Responding to criticism of the short-term commitments of its members, most of whom are recent college graduates, and the negative impact of high teacher turnover on students in poor urban schools, TFA has begun a pilot initiative in which participants commit to a five-year term in their teaching positions. The program also reports that a growing share of members have been graduate students or career changers (one-third in recent cohorts), and it has begun to focus more on recruiting members from low-income and minority backgrounds in the communities it serves.<sup>95</sup>

## WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OTHER STATES?

As the previous discussion shows, states and localities have explored a wide range of approaches to create and streamline pathways into teaching careers for industry professionals and career changers, including skilled immigrants. While the number of such programs that explicitly seek to engage with immigrant professionals is still small, interest in this population is growing as states and localities seek to meet the needs of increasingly diverse local student bodies and leverage the talents of increasingly diverse local workforces. We profile below initiatives in Minnesota, Ohio, Maine, and Arkansas that illustrate a range of promising practices for recruiting high-skilled immigrants and refugees into the teaching workforce, building on state and federal funding streams and cross-sector partnerships.

### MINNESOTA: Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educator Program

Created by the state legislature in 1998, this state-level grant program overseen by the

Minnesota Department of Education provides funding to recruit, retain, and support diverse teacher candidates in state teacher preparation programs, including alternative certification programs.<sup>96</sup> Grants for up to two years totaling \$220,000 are awarded yearly to four or five programs. Leveraging additional private and public funding sources, these grants help support collaborative initiatives among school districts, higher education institutions, and non-profit entities. Two of the programs supported by this funding stream are Concordia University's Southeast Asian Teacher (SEAT) Program,<sup>97</sup> and Augsburg University's East African Student to Teacher (EAST) Program.<sup>98</sup>

SEAT offers an accelerated bachelor's degree program leading to teacher licensure for candidates of Southeast Asian origin (foreign and U.S.-born) who already have a bachelor's or graduate degree. The program began in response to the shortage of Minnesota teachers representative of the state's growing population of students of Southeast Asian origin. Open to individuals currently employed in Minnesota schools as paraeducators, educational assistants, and teaching assistants, the program provides enrolled students with partial tuition funding and textbooks, and allows them to remain employed full time in their positions while taking late afternoon and evening classes.

Augsburg University's EAST program covers tuition costs toward initial licensure for undergraduate and graduate students of East African descent (and preferably bilingual) who are admissible to the university's teacher licensure program. Awardees must be U.S. citizens or work-authorized permanent residents, and must commit to teaching in Minnesota schools for at least three years after obtaining a teaching license.

### OHIO: Central Ohio English Learners' Education Collaborative (COELEC), English Learners Career Ladders Initiative

Launched in 2012 and funded by a five-year National Professional Development grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Otterbein

University's COELEC English Learner Career Ladders program helps foreign-born candidates complete Ohio's requirements for a teaching credential, toward the goal of better serving English learner students in the state's schools.<sup>99</sup> The program creates higher education degree pathways at Otterbein for central Ohio English learners to earn associate's and bachelor's degrees and complete teacher licensure, at no cost, with university staff serving as academic advisors.

### **MAINE: Newcomer Extended Teacher Education Program (ETEP)**

The Newcomer ETEP at the University of Southern Maine (USM) was created "to recruit language minority candidates with teaching experience who want to become certified teachers in Maine."<sup>100</sup> It is one of a number of Multicultural Education Programs at USM funded by a State Personnel Development Grant through the Maine Department of Education. The two-year Newcomer ETEP program offers individualized support and professional development, and streamlines entry into USM's Extended Teacher Education Program, which provides for simultaneous course work and classroom experience leading to a master's degree.<sup>101</sup> Newcomer ETEP candidates may have been teachers in their countries of origin, currently work as educational technicians or language facilitators, or both. They must also have a bachelor's degree, demonstrate English proficiency, and show a strong commitment to becoming a teacher.

The Multicultural Education Program also provides study guides, tutoring, and financial support for Newcomer ETEP candidates taking the state's Praxis teacher certification tests, as well as the option of additional testing time for those whose primary language is not English.

### **ARKANSAS: Project REACH (Retooling Educators and Paraprofessionals to ACHieve Teacher Credentialing)**

Funded through a 2017 National Professional Development grant, the University of Arkansas' Project REACH initiative is an "online and

site-based professional development program for K-5 in-service teachers serving English learners to earn an ESL endorsement or a TESOL Certificate."<sup>102</sup> The program is also launching a GYO program focused on bilingual and bicultural paraeducators leading to either an associate's or bachelor's degree in elementary education with an ESL endorsement. Project REACH also includes built-in support services such as online coaching and exam preparation for teachers, and enhanced advising and mentoring for paraprofessionals.

## **WHAT ARE IMMIGRANT ADVOCACY GROUPS DOING?**

As the example of Washington State and GYO efforts in other states demonstrate, immigrant advocacy groups and community-based organizations can be key partners with other educational stakeholders in advancing the potential of immigrant professionals to address regional teacher shortages. Immigrant and refugee-serving organizations in a growing number of states, including Massachusetts,<sup>103</sup> Illinois,<sup>104</sup> Idaho,<sup>105</sup> Pennsylvania,<sup>106</sup> and Maine<sup>107</sup> have created dedicated programs that support the career advancement of skilled immigrants through policy analysis and advocacy, resource development, and collaborations with state and local educational and workforce development partners. The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians and Global Talent Idaho, for example, have published state-specific career guides specifically to assist foreign-trained immigrants interested in licensing or relicensing in a range of professions, including teaching.<sup>108</sup>



**Download the report:**  
<https://bit.ly/2laW7aE>

In addition to these local organizations, national advocacy groups and resource providers such as World Education Services (WES) Global Talent Bridge,<sup>109</sup> UpWardly Global,<sup>110</sup> and IMPRINT<sup>111</sup> are part of a growing, U.S.-wide movement to advance the contributions of immigrant talent, working with partners in cities and states across the country.

- WES Global Talent Bridge has recently published a guide for skilled immigrants entitled *Career Pathways in Education: Using Your Foreign Education in the U.S.*<sup>112</sup> that surveys the structure of the profession and licensing requirements nationally, including alternative certification options.
- Upwardly Global has published professional licensing guides for skilled immigrants in a wide range of professions for five states (California, Illinois, Michigan, New Hampshire, and New York), including guides to the teaching profession in three states (California, Illinois, and New York).<sup>113</sup>
- IMPRINT, a national coalition of service providers and advocacy groups focused on immigrant professional integration (including WES Global Talent Bridge and UpWardly Global), has mapped more than 80 programs across the U.S. that help immigrant and refugee professionals achieve success through career advising, ESOL programs, higher education counseling, and licensing and credentialing guidance.<sup>114</sup> These include programs based at nonprofit advocacy

organizations, higher education institutions, workforce development and adult education providers, and government agencies.

WES Global Talent Bridge is also working with partners on the ground to advance local and statewide initiatives and build sustainable cross-sector collaborations supporting immigrant professional integration. In 2018, the organization launched year one of its Skilled Immigrant Integration Program,<sup>115</sup> which brought together stakeholder networks in Denver, Louisville, Santa Clara, St. Louis, Boise and its regional partners Twin Falls and Salt Lake City, and the states of Ohio, Michigan, and Maryland. Made up of diverse partners, including immigrant and refugee-serving groups, nonprofit service providers, state and city workforce agencies, local and state executives, and higher education institutions, each of the networks received coaching and technical assistance from WES Global Talent Bridge and other national experts (including Upwardly Global) to meet specific immigrant integration goals. These range from improved career resources and information sharing to stronger service provider partnerships and closer employer engagement. Two of the networks, in Louisville and St. Louis, plan to develop state-specific career pathway guides into teaching. Year two of the Skilled Immigrant Integration Program will be launching in 2019 with a new round of partner networks.



**Alternative teacher certification pathways for foreign-trained professionals can be part of broader efforts to address gaps in STEM, CTE, bilingual education and other fields, as well as to increase teacher diversity.**



## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS: Building Teacher Bridges for Immigrants and Refugees

The previous examples illustrate a wide range of promising initiatives that can help address gaps in the teacher workforce by tapping into the talent and experience of foreign-educated immigrants and refugees. These efforts involve varying groups of local, state, and federal government partners as well as private sector and non-profit stakeholders. Some are more targeted than others in their direct engagement with and support of immigrant professionals. One thing they have in common is that they function as part of broader efforts to address gaps in STEM, CTE, bilingual education, and other fields, as well as to increase teacher diversity, by fostering alternative certification pathways into teaching for nontraditional candidates or those from underrepresented populations.

These alternative pathway programs are in turn part of larger, system-wide strategies to address teacher shortages that are being developed and implemented in states and localities across the country. Such strategies include strengthening the traditional teacher preparation pipeline and creating supports and incentives to retain teachers in the education workforce and in high-need schools.<sup>116</sup> These approaches can vary significantly depending on differences in demographics, labor markets, and educational policies and politics at state and local levels. But they collectively reflect a growing and research-driven consensus among public sector agencies, educators, higher education institutions, and academic researchers about what can work in the near and long term to help build and sustain a teaching workforce that meets the needs of all students.<sup>117</sup>

For immigrants and immigrant advocates looking to teaching as a potential career pathway, this policy environment points to the need for different strategies than when considering other professional options, as well as a conceptual

shift. For the most part, career pathway programs and policies that seek to assist internationally-educated professionals focus on helping them return to the professions they held in their home country, or on finding occupations in the same sector that make use of their original training and skills. Policy advocacy often focuses on reducing licensing and other structural barriers to reentering those professions, as well as creating more targeted, sector-specific support systems (such as Welcome Back Center for those in health care). Advocates also work to raise awareness among policymakers, the public, and workforce development stakeholders about the experience, skills, and cultural competencies that immigrant professionals can bring to the meeting the needs of state and local labor markets.

With regard to teacher shortages, by contrast, promoting the talents and contributions of foreign-trained immigrants is not just focused on getting immigrants who were trained as teachers back into the classroom. Rather, it is about engaging and training high-skilled immigrants from a wide range of other professional backgrounds as well, including scientists, engineers, industry experts, health and finance and business professionals, and many others, most of whom may have never considered teaching as a professional option.

Such efforts are also taking place in an environment where there is already pressure from the public and policymakers, as well as from education experts and educators themselves, to create more flexible and streamlined workforce pathways and improved professional supports that can address urgent teacher shortages in specific fields and specific communities. These solutions include placing a high value on the diversity and the linguistic and cultural competencies that a new cadre of teachers can bring to the classroom, along with their professional expertise.

In creating “teacher bridges” for immigrants and refugees it is therefore critical to understand, engage with, and leverage the broader local, state, and national policy and program contexts in which alternative certification programs



are operating. Within these contexts—as the examples from Washington State, Oregon, New York City, and other locales demonstrate—it is possible to be simultaneously targeted and intentional about how high-skilled immigrants fit into the larger fixing-the-teacher-shortage story, highlighting the unique assets they bring and addressing the unique workforce barriers they face. Policymakers, educators, and community-based actors can meet three goals at once here:

- Help drive policy solutions that lead to the increased and meaningful utilization of foreign-educated professionals
- Build a stronger cadre of STEM and CTE instructors to address teacher shortages in those subjects, especially in underserved areas
- Create a more diverse educator pipeline to help meet the needs of the growing number of students who are immigrants or English learners

The policy models, case examples, and research evidence presented in this report point to recommendations in two areas: first, promising policy and program models that can help states and localities tap into the talents and experience of immigrant professionals in addressing teacher shortages; and second, steps that local, state, and national stakeholders can take to advance these approaches and identify and promote other, more system-wide policy solutions.

Policy and program models that are well positioned to help transition internationally trained professionals into teaching careers include:

- Expanded outreach to skilled immigrants and refugees in the context of established public sector and non-profit alternative certification initiatives, especially residency-based programs, leveraging available state and local data on immigrants and refugee professionals (Washington State, New York City, California/EnCorps, TNTF Teaching Fellows)
- Legislative or regulatory changes to make educational, work experience, and testing requirements for state or local alternative

certification programs more flexible and streamlined for foreign-trained professionals (Washington State, New York City)

- More targeted and fully articulated alternative certification pathways to meet the educational, financial support, and advisory needs of foreign-trained immigrants and refugees (Washington State, Minnesota, New York City, Seattle, and Portland)
- Leveraging HEOA Title II and ESSA Title II, Part A to create teacher “academies” and residency-based programs for skilled immigrants and refugees, with a focus on STEM and CTE teaching in high-need schools (Tennessee, Massachusetts)
- Expanded outreach to and program supports for foreign-trained immigrants and refugees at higher education institutions in the context of more traditional teacher preparation programs (Maine, Ohio)
- Leveraging non-Title II federal and state professional development or diversity-focused funding streams to support alternative pathway programs inclusive of skilled immigrants and refugees (Maine, Oregon, Ohio, and Arkansas)
- Strengthening partnerships with immigrant advocacy groups and other community-based organizations to identify the needs of high-skilled immigrants, and advocate for policy and program solutions that open up opportunities for them in the teaching profession (Washington State, New York City)
- Working with local and national immigrant advocacy groups to build local and statewide stakeholder networks, including community-based organizations, nonprofit service providers, state and local government agencies, and higher education institutions, in order to strengthen coordination of services and develop new program and policy resources to support skilled immigrant pathways into teaching and other professions (WES Global Talent Bridge)

Stakeholder actions that could help advance more system-wide policy solutions to these issues include:

- Convening K-12 educators, school leaders, higher education institutions, federal and state education and workforce agencies, education research and policy advocacy groups, immigrant advocates, non-profit and private sector organizations, and other stakeholders to share perspectives and best practices and explore areas of common interest
- Research and communications that elevate public and policymaker awareness of existing program models and track their impact
- Mapping state and federal policies and funding streams supporting (or inhibiting) development of high-skilled immigrant pathways into teaching
- Identifying, collecting, and publishing state and local data on teacher shortages aligned with data on immigrant and refugee professionals
- Cross-sector collaborations among stakeholder groups to cross-fertilize the field by aligning program and policy strategies, long term goals, resources, and conceptual frameworks
- Seeking foundation or academic support for a white paper and/or series of case studies to advance knowledge of issues, articulate shared values, and define research needs and policy and program opportunities

As with the broader K-12 policy environment in which the initiatives discussed operate, building and strengthening teacher bridges for immigrant professionals will call for leadership, collaboration, commitment, and creativity across all parts of the educational system.

Given the centrality of state policy and funding streams in teacher preparation and certification requirements, state policymakers and other state education stakeholders have a particularly key role to play in this process. But school districts, especially in immigrant-

rich communities, are also well-positioned to advocate for and creatively leverage programs and policies that tap into the foreign-trained talent in those locales. Education researchers and policy analysts as well have a lot to explore and a lot to teach us here about program success and sustainability.

The wide-ranging set of initiatives profiled in this report—including both well-established programs and promising new directions—suggests that we may be at a tipping point in terms of recognizing and promoting the potential contributions of internationally trained professionals in U.S. classrooms. In a K-12 education system working to address challenges on many fronts, immigrant professionals can become an important part of the solution to creating a teacher workforce that meets the needs of all students, and the demands of the 21st century economy those students are entering.

# ENDNOTES

- 1 Sincere thanks to the following individuals who generously shared their experience and insights in the writing of this report: Johann Uvin, president, Institute for Educational Leadership, former acting assistant secretary for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), U.S. Department of Education; Alexandra Manuel, executive director, Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB), Washington State Department of Education; Chelsea Whealdon, program manager, Equity in Educator Preparation and Pathways, Washington State Department of Education; Carol Aguirre, policy manager, Office of Teacher Recruitment and Quality, New York City Department of Education; David Taus, San Francisco Bay Area program and recruitment director, EnCorps; Steve DeWitt, deputy executive director, Association for Career & Technical Education; Amaya Garcia, deputy director for English learner education, New America; and Alma Morales-Galicia, teacher fellows coordinator, Portland Public Schools.
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# ABOUT

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Jeff is a policy consultant for World Education Services Global Talent Bridge, where his work focuses on research and policy advocacy to advance the contributions of skilled immigrants in the U.S. Jeff has had a long career as a nonprofit program director, public policy researcher, educator, and private sector project manager. From 2012 to 2017 he directed the New Americans Integration Institute at the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition, which drives policy-oriented research and program development to support the civic, social, and economic integration of the foreign-born in Massachusetts. Jeff's career prior to MIRA includes a decade as a project manager in the high tech sector and many years as a college humanities teacher and ESOL instructor. He holds a PhD in Medieval Studies from Harvard University and a Master in Public Policy from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University.

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## WES GLOBAL TALENT BRIDGE

**WES Global Talent Bridge** is dedicated to helping skilled immigrants fully utilize their talents and education in Canada and the United States. We join with institutional partners, community-based organizations, and policymakers to help skilled immigrants use their talents and skills, leverage their training, and achieve their career and professional goals.

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