

Promoting Inclusive Teaching Pathways

Successful Approaches from the Strengthening Immigrant Inclusion Program's Demonstration Opportunity



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Donahue Institute

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Letter from Our Director, State and Local Initiatives

Schools in the United States are facing a staffing crisis. With 74 percent of public schools having reported difficulties hiring teachers for the 2024/25 school year, classrooms across the country experience challenges providing students with the high-quality instruction they need to be successful. This shortage impacts student achievement, increases burnout among educators, and widens opportunity gaps in underserved communities.

A significant source of teaching talent remains untapped. Many internationally trained educators—professionals with years of classroom experience, subject matter expertise, and multilingual and cultural competence that support diverse student populations—have work authorization and are eager to teach. Yet these educators face obstacles to entering the U.S. workforce, including a lack of pathways that recognize their credentials and support the navigation of complex certification requirements.

World Education Services (WES) and our partners in the Strengthening Immigrant Inclusion Program (SIIP) see removing these barriers as a sustainable pathway to mutual benefit and economic inclusion. Schools can hire experienced professionals to fill critical vacancies, students and the entire education system experience greater stability, and internationally trained educators find meaningful work in their field.

This is the final of three guides highlighting the work of partners in our SIIP Demonstration Opportunity, and it features three organizations: CareerLadder, the City of Tulsa’s Department of Resilience and Equity (formerly known as the Mayor’s Office of Resilience and Equity), and Richard J. Daley College. These three partners developed initiatives to connect immigrants with teaching positions in U.S. classrooms. The strategies outlined in this report are replicable models that can be tailored to work in communities of all stripes.

This guide can be used by local school districts, higher education institutions, workforce development partners, state and local government, and community-based organizations. We hope that this guidance helps readers streamline their own approaches to supporting school staffing strategies while empowering internationally trained educators to contribute their talents.

Sincerely,

Katherine Gebremedhin
Director, State and Local Initiatives
World Education Services

About the Guide

[World Education Services](#) (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants.¹ WES works with a robust network of partners focused on the economic inclusion of immigrants living in the United States and Canada. The organization's U.S.-based Strengthening Immigrant Inclusion Program (SIIP) supports state and local communities in creating more equitable and inclusive workforces. SIIP offers partners customized technical assistance, a community of practice, and program development support to advance promising initiatives that can be replicated in other communities. The SIIP Demonstration Opportunity (SIIP Demonstration) is an extension of SIIP, providing select SIIP communities that have developed promising practices with financial assistance and deeper levels of support and engagement.

WES seeks to share its insights with the broader community of organizations in the immigrant economic inclusion space. To that end, WES and the [University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute](#) (UMDI) created this guide as a resource for community-based organizations and other entities that aim to develop, implement, and scale approaches that increase the inclusion of immigrants in the workforce. The guide focuses on inclusive pathways into the education workforce, highlighting three 2023–2024 SIIP Demonstration partners that developed effective teaching pathways in their communities.

This guide is the third and final in a series, each providing insights and lessons learned from SIIP Demonstration participants. The first guide focuses on [engaging immigrant networks to build inclusive workforces](#). The second centers on [fostering inclusive pathways into the health care workforce](#). This guide discusses strategies for promoting inclusive entry into the education workforce.

In addition to the guides, WES offers a variety of supports and resources for organizations and state and local governments engaged in immigrant economic inclusion initiatives throughout the U.S. Additional information about these resources and supports is available [on the WES website](#).

About WES

WES is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students. For more than 50 years, WES has set the standard for international academic credential evaluation, supporting millions of people as they seek to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through decades of experience as a leader in global education, WES has developed a wide range of tools to pursue social impact at scale. From evaluating academic credentials to shaping policy, designing programs, and providing philanthropic funding, we partner with a diverse set of organizations, leaders, and networks to uplift individuals and drive systems change. Together with its partners, WES enables people to learn, work, and thrive in new places.

About UMDI

Established in 1971, UMDI is a public service, research, and economic development arm of the University of Massachusetts, with a mission of fostering healthy communities and supporting economies that alleviate poverty and promote opportunity. In collaboration with partner organizations and clients, UMDI strengthens its collective impact through research, education and training, capacity building, and direct services. To learn more about the Institute, please visit the [UMDI website](#).

Introduction

Strengthening Immigrant Economic Inclusion: A Programmatic Approach

Immigrant workers are a driving force in the U.S. economy, an estimated 20 percent. Their skills and experience represent a significant but often underutilized source of talent. Policymakers, institutions, and organizations are increasingly recognizing an opportunity for shared prosperity and are eager to connect immigrant workers with workforce systems, and advance policies that promote economic, educational, and social inclusion. Inclusion is critical to setting immigrants and their communities up for success—ensuring mutual benefit for immigrants and local communities alike.

Despite this opportunity, communities leading inclusion efforts often struggle with where to start, lack access to best practices, and feel isolated in their work. To address these challenges, WES launched the Strengthening Immigrant Inclusion Program (SIIP) in 2017. The program was built on momentum from the 2016 National Skills and Credential Institute, an initiative of the White House Task Force on New Americans, which brought together national organizations, state and local communities, and federal partners—including WES—to explore strategies for integrating internationally trained immigrants. SIIP was created as an ongoing forum through which state and local communities could share knowledge, develop innovative approaches, and receive technical assistance to advance immigrant economic inclusion. Starting with eight communities in its first year, the program grew into a national network of 45.

In 2021, WES launched the SIIP Demonstration model to further strengthen these partnerships. The SIIP Demonstration offers select partners funding, program development support, evaluation, and additional assistance to build out promising practices. As of this publication, the SIIP Demonstration has supported eight communities, focused on three key issue areas:

- Engaging immigrant networks to build inclusive workforces
- Fostering inclusive pathways into the health care workforce
- Promoting inclusive teaching pathways.

Each of these issue areas plays a vital role in helping immigrant talent thrive—and strengthening the communities and industries they live and work in. This guide focuses on the third: promoting inclusive teaching pathways.

Promoting Inclusive Teaching Pathways

A qualified, diverse, and well-supported teacher workforce is vital to the success of the U.S. education system. Yet many school districts across the country continue to face challenges in recruiting and retaining the educators they need to support students. This has led to widespread teacher shortages, with 74 percent of public schools reporting difficulties hiring teachers for the 2024/25 school year. Teacher shortages not only undermine student achievement but also increase workloads and burnout for all teachers and distress. Work-authorized internationally trained immigrants represent an underutilized pool of skilled professionals who could help

Definitions

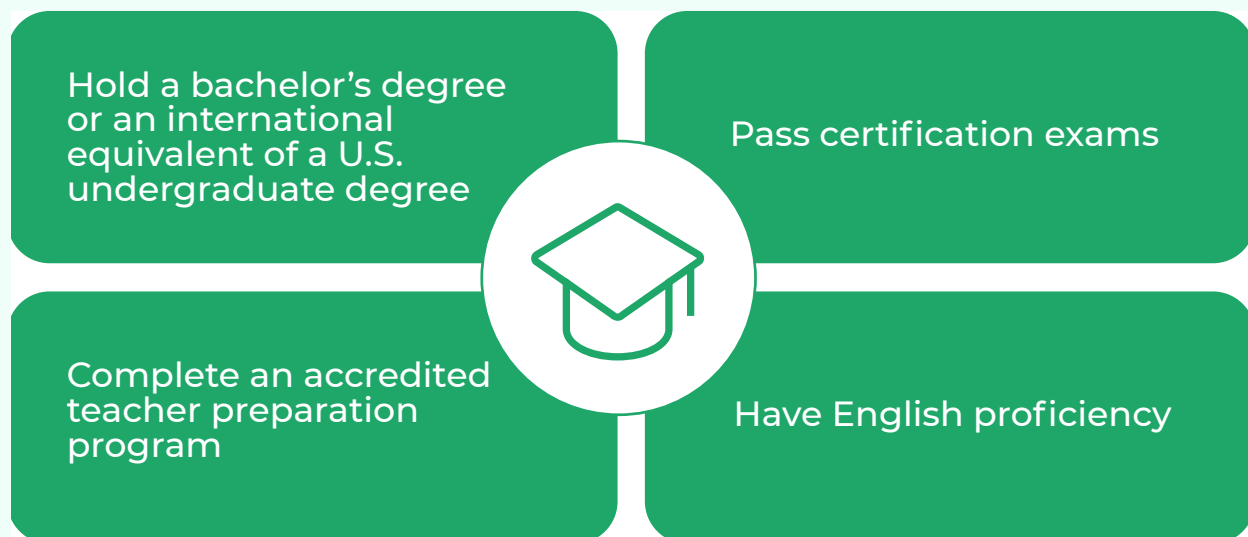
- *Career pathway:* A series of connected education and training programs that help an individual secure a job or advance in an industry or occupation. For more information, see [WES' Career Pathway Tool](#).
- *Grow-your-own:* A program or strategy implemented by a community to cultivate a teacher workforce. These programs are often partnerships between schools, districts, community organizations, and higher education institutions.
- *Alternative certification:* A non-traditional pathway to teacher licensure for individuals who hold a bachelor's degree in a field that is not education.

fill these gaps. Many bring years of teaching experience, subject matter expertise, and the cultural and linguistic diversity that improve academic outcomes and strengthen socioemotional support for students. Integrating these educators into U.S. classrooms benefits schools which gain qualified professionals to fill critical vacancies, while immigrant educators find meaningful career pathways that put their skills to work.

Despite their qualifications, complex U.S. licensure requirements often pose barriers. Typically, public school teachers must hold a bachelor's degree, complete an accredited teacher preparation program, obtain state licensure or certification, and pass English proficiency assessments. While private and parochial schools may, by comparison, have fewer certification requirements, internationally trained educators still face challenges in navigating unfamiliar cultural norms within the job market. Additionally, while many internationally trained teachers have English language proficiency, they may need additional resources to boost career-aligned English skills, take licensure assessments in English, or navigate technical credentialing documents. Recent initiatives have allowed greater entry into the teaching profession, addressing teacher shortages while broadening and diversifying the applicant pool. U.S.-born educators also stand to benefit from these initiatives—filling teacher workforce gaps reduces burnout across the education system, fosters innovation and collaboration, and provides streamlined processes for all educators. While school districts must adhere to state-level certification requirements, local communities have sought opportunities for flexibility—such as alternative certification routes and “grow-your-own” initiatives—to create more accessible pathways into teaching. These local teacher pathway initiatives are well-positioned to implement programs and policies that help U.S.-born individuals and immigrants overcome systemic barriers and meet local workforce demands.

This guide highlights strategies used by SIIP Demonstration partners to promote inclusive teaching pathways in their communities. Notably, these partners represent three distinct types of public service entities: a non-profit organization, a local government agency, and a public community college. These SIIP Demonstration projects showcase how different sectors can successfully lead immigrant economic and workforce inclusion efforts, alongside initiative to increase the accessibility of teaching careers for U.S.-born workers. The projects also offer an adaptable framework for other communities seeking to leverage the expertise of internationally trained educators as part of their overall efforts to strengthen their teacher workforce.

General Requirements for K-12 Public School Teachers



- **Hold a bachelor's degree or an international equivalent of a U.S. undergraduate degree**
- **Complete an accredited teacher preparation program**
 - Required coursework for specific subjects and grade levels
 - Courses on pedagogy or teaching methods
 - Supervised teaching experience
- **Pass certification exams (such as the widely used [PRAXIS](#)) to obtain state licensure or certification**
- **Have English proficiency (as demonstrated by passing an exam, such as the TOEFL).**

For additional guidance on teacher pathway requirements, see [WES' Career Pathways in Education](#).

About the SIIP Demonstration Partners

CareerLadder and Lincoln Literacy

CareerLadder is a non-profit organization that helps internationally trained professionals secure employment and achieve long-term career goals. The organization also helps address critical workforce shortages in the health care and education fields by fostering economic opportunity for immigrant communities. Lincoln Literacy is a non-profit organization focused on language and literacy skills for people in Nebraska who need support with English language learning (ELL), especially in the context of the U.S. workplace.

CareerLadder, in partnership with Lincoln Literacy, joined the SIIP Demonstration to expand its programming to help immigrants become teachers in Nebraska. This initiative guided internationally educated immigrants toward professional licensure and employment by providing teaching pathway courses, career navigation services, and other wraparound supports. The program also established and formalized workgroups with key education partners in Lincoln and South Sioux City to support project development, implementation, and sustainability.

“It’s been great to be able to really invest in the teaching pathway in new ways...We’re building on things we’ve done before, solidifying relationships, [and] expanding programming.” — Executive Director, CareerLadder

The City of Tulsa’s Department of Resilience and Equity

The City of Tulsa’s Department of Resilience and Equity supports strategies that increase economic prosperity, improve health, and enhance quality of life for all who live in Tulsa. As part of its efforts, the department oversees the New Tulsans Welcoming Plan, a comprehensive roadmap for building a more cohesive and equitable Tulsa and fostering connections between new Tulsans and the greater community.

For its SIIP Demonstration, the City of Tulsa worked to bridge internationally trained immigrants into education careers in Tulsa. To promote this pathway, the city established cross-sector partnerships and gathered data from internationally trained immigrants who were current or aspiring educators. Project leaders utilized their findings to provide holistic support that complements existing pathways for immigrants seeking educator positions in Tulsa.

“Our approach in our office and in our team is to build things collaboratively... That’s why we always have a planning group...We want to learn and process information and do something that will be impactful, and that is informed by those directly impacted by the work.” — Chief Resilience Officer, City of Tulsa’s Department of Resilience and Equity

Richard J. Daley College

Richard J. Daley College is a public community college in the City Colleges of Chicago system. Daley College, along with its satellite campus, the Arturo Velasquez Institute, offers associate degrees, short-term certificate programs, free adult education classes, and special interest courses. Daley College also hosts the Center for Immigrant Integration and the Chicago Welcome Back Center within the Arturo Velasquez Institute to serve the needs of immigrants in the community.

Daley College utilized its SIIP Demonstration to expand its Welcome Back Center and develop teaching pathways to support immigrants hoping to return to or enter the teaching profession. This new program offered professional development, resources, and support to participants, with the goal of preparing internationally trained professionals to attain teacher certification in Illinois.

“Our main goal is to identify and support individuals with foreign credentials in teaching...[and to] provide the opportunity for individuals to get back into their professions and diversify the educators that are so greatly needed in our schools.” — Director of Continuing Education, Richard J. Daley College

Successful Approaches Overview

Through their initiatives, SIIP Demonstration partners elevated the visibility of international talent with work authorization and facilitated opportunities to support immigrants seeking employment in the education sector. While each organization faced unique challenges, common strategies for advancing their work emerged. This guide presents three successful approaches that the SIIP Demonstration partners implemented to help internationally trained professionals find employment in the education sector:

- 1. Understand and explore the local education landscape**
- 2. Develop accessible and inclusive teaching pathways**
- 3. Provide holistic support along the teaching pathway**

Organizations can modify these strategies to fit their specific community needs and opportunities. Within each **“Successful Approach”** section that follows, the “Approaches in Action” subsection exemplifies how partners have implemented these adaptable strategies.

Successful Approach #1: Understand and Explore the Local Education Landscape

Immigrants with teaching experience are uniquely positioned to help address teacher shortages to the benefit of communities and their student populations, to support and strengthen the U.S. teaching workforce, and to offer cultural and linguistic support to students and families. Promoting inclusive teaching pathways requires a comprehensive understanding of educational systems, workforce needs, and immigrant skills to create programs that reduce barriers. Promoting successful teacher pathway programs also requires strong partnerships across local education institutions, governments, and community-based organizations.



Understand local requirements.

While the U.S. public education system is highly regulated, there is no national teacher certification process. As a result, understanding individual state requirements is essential to designing a licensure pathway. This should include the consideration of various educator roles—such as paraprofessionals and classroom teachers—as well as the differences between public and private school settings, where certification standards may vary. Teaching pathways must also consider the evaluation and acceptance of international credentials, since requirements for internationally educated teachers vary by state and must entail an official review to determine U.S. equivalency.



Connect with community partners.

Effective initiatives rely on robust collaborative partnerships among schools, higher education institutions, state and local governments, and community-based organizations. Each partner brings distinct expertise and connections within the community. By working together, these diverse perspectives inform accessible and sustainable pathways into teaching careers.



Identify existing programs and policies.

To address teacher shortages, many states and local communities have introduced initiatives such as alternative certification programs and grow-your-own models. Additionally, various organizations—such as community colleges, immigrant-led organizations, and job centers—offer workforce development support to immigrants (for example, English language classes). [Mapping these](#) existing resources helps identify gaps, opportunities, and resources within the broader teaching pathway.



Gather input from immigrant educators and school leaders.

Aspiring and current immigrant educators bring valuable firsthand perspectives on navigating teaching careers in the U.S. Their experiences can highlight both challenges and opportunities within the profession. Local schools also offer critical insights beyond hiring logistics—such as HR processes and job openings—by identifying specific workforce needs like filling vacancies, recruiting bilingual and bicultural staff as needed to support students and parents, and uncovering internal opportunities. Incorporating input from those directly impacted by the teaching pathway ensures that programs are equitable, responsive, and aligned with true needs.



Assess capacity to support inclusive teaching pathways.

Organizational structure plays a key role in project startup, service delivery, and resource utilization. Therefore, entities pursuing teaching pathways should strategically assess their staffing, funding, and organizational capacity.

Resources on State-Level Teacher Data and Policies

- [Teacher Recruitment and Retention Data](#)
Education Commission of the States
- [State Policy Levers to Address Teacher Shortages](#)
Education Commission of the States
- [Grow-Your-Own Policy State Scan Data](#)
New America
- [Guide on Teacher Workforce Credentialing](#)
WestEd

Approach in Action: City of Tulsa

Essential Strategies:



Understand
the local
requirements



Engage a
diverse group
of partners



Identify existing
programs
and policies



Gather input
from immigrant
educators and
school leaders



Assess capacity
to support
inclusive teaching
pathways.

Seeking to tap into the talent and experience of internationally trained educators, the City of Tulsa’s SIIP Demonstration project focused on supporting these professionals’ return to careers that align closely with their training and expertise. Tulsa conducted three in-person focus groups—facilitated in Spanish, Dari, and Pashto—to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing internationally trained educators. These sessions collected perspectives from immigrants, including aspiring and current teaching professionals, on employment barriers and classroom experiences. Findings from the focus groups revealed key themes, such as financial instability and the need for flexible career pathways, access to English language programs, a centralized resource hub, and sustained workplace support to promote belonging. In conjunction with the focus groups, the City of Tulsa connected with Tulsa Public Schools to learn about employer needs and existing programs, including the Tulsa Teacher Corps Program, which supports all aspiring teachers in becoming educators.

Community collaboration was a cornerstone of the City of Tulsa’s SIIP Demonstration project. This partnership approach, combined with focus group findings, guided the creation of programming and supports to complement existing teaching pathways. Working with Tulsa Public Schools, ImpactTulsa, and other community providers, the city defined key steps for internationally trained educators, including specialized assistance like English language instruction, certification exam help, and workplace experience opportunities. Through the project, a new training course was developed to help educators prepare for certification and connect with existing resources, such as the Tulsa Teacher Corps Program. Project leaders shared that forming partnerships and employing a data-informed strategy, though time-intensive, yielded a teaching pathway that was inclusive, efficiently structured, and supported by key stakeholders while addressing critical teacher shortages.

“We wanted to make sure that we hear from the community, that we hear from our actual immigrant and refugee community, and that we don’t assume things. So, we decided to do a focus group study and ... that’s how we found out more about their backgrounds and ... what they are really struggling with.” — Immigrant and Refugee Affairs Manager, City of Tulsa

2 Successful Approach #2: Develop Accessible and Inclusive Teaching Pathways

Effective teaching career pathways offer internationally trained immigrants a clear framework for obtaining the education, credentials, and skills required for teaching in the U.S. To be successful, these pathways must account for accessibility and support, ensuring that immigrant educators can navigate and benefit from them. Collaboration with local partners is essential for aligning goals, maximizing resources, and creating opportunities that benefit immigrants, local school systems, and the broader teaching workforce alike.



Map the requirements, steps, and supports needed for the teaching pathway.

To help immigrants become teachers in the U.S., it is essential to identify the full range of requirements and necessary supports. This includes understanding local licensure components (coursework, exams, and application processes) as well as additional education or training that may be required based on individual career goals. Equally important is incorporating wraparound supports such as credential evaluations, English language learning, and career navigation services, which help educators transition successfully into the U.S. education system.



Align pathway components with existing programs and policies.

Mapping requirements and potential pathways provides a framework for identifying local teaching resources and opportunities. Because no single organization can meet all needs, successful teaching pathways require collaboration, clearly defined roles, and coordinated efforts across state and local systems. When developing new initiatives, it is essential to connect with existing programs to leverage established resources, programming, and expertise.



Prioritize usability and flexibility.

Recognizing that teacher candidates have diverse backgrounds, experiences, and needs, the education field requires adaptable career pathways. These pathways should feature flexible entry points and varied opportunities for engagement, development, and advancement. This flexibility ensures that all aspiring teachers, regardless of background, can advance in their careers at a pace and in ways that align with their personal journey.



Consider barriers that may prevent immigrant educators from utilizing the pathway.

Education and certification costs can be major obstacles to immigrants seeking teaching careers. Many also face the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities while pursuing their careers. Inclusive teaching programs should identify common barriers and incorporate programmatic support to ensure that participation and career growth are accessible to all.

Challenges Immigrant Educators May Encounter on the Path to U.S. Teaching Positions

- ✔ Navigating the process of aligning international credentials and experience with state certification requirements
- ✔ Becoming familiar with the structure, expectations, and culture of U.S. school systems
- ✔ Identifying funding options for required coursework and professional development
- ✔ Accessing clear and comprehensive information about teacher preparation programs and career pathways
- ✔ Learning job search strategies commonly applied in the U.S. education sector
- ✔ Refining English language skills to meet professional requirements for employment, academic coursework, and certification exams
- ✔ Engaging with support services that address professional, logistical, and personal needs
- ✔ Acquiring classroom teaching experience within U.S. school environments to strengthen readiness and confidence

Approach in Action: Daley College

Essential Strategies:



The SIIP Demonstration project provided a timely and strategic opportunity for Daley College to expand the reach and impact of its Chicago Welcome Back Center by launching a dedicated teaching pathway for immigrants modeled after its existing pathway for internationally trained nurses. Through this initiative to help fill vacancies in Chicago schools, Daley College developed a comprehensive career pathway program that offers professional development, career navigation, and tailored resources to support internationally trained educators seeking to attain licensure and employment.

Recognizing the holistic needs of educators, Daley College’s teaching pathway addresses not only formal licensure requirements—such as completing coursework, registering with the state licensure board, and passing exams—but also critical programmatic supports that facilitate success. These include credential evaluations, English language learning support, identification of missing courses, interim employment opportunities as paraprofessionals or substitute teachers, and relevant coursework. Daley College developed curricula focused on topics for teacher candidates such as the U.S. education system, classroom management, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and differentiated instruction. Daley College built in flexibility and ensured that courses were offered at times and in formats that would accommodate the needs of teacher candidates and limit barriers to participation (by offering weekend sessions, in-person instruction, and multilingual delivery).

“We’ve expanded [our teaching pathway] to develop and provide key components outside of just test prep. We’re doing new courses outside of the initial workshops that individuals [can take while] ... getting their credentials validated and translated and all that has to happen.” — Director of Continuing Education, Richard J. Daley College

A major strength of Daley College’s SIIP Demonstration project was the strategic alignment of the teaching pathway with existing institutional structures and partnerships. Within the Chicago Welcome Back Center, project leaders integrated supports such as ELL instruction and credential evaluation to maximize resources for both the nursing and teaching pathways. They also worked to embed the teaching pathway within the broader City Colleges of Chicago system, ensuring long-term sustainability and scalability. Another notable partnership was with the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools, which not only had a pressing need for educators but also offered greater flexibility in placements. Project leaders emphasized that collaboration—both within the college system and with external partners—was essential to developing a sustainable teaching pathway that empowers immigrants to re-enter the teaching workforce and address critical staffing needs to best educate students.

3 Successful Approach #3: Provide Holistic Support Along the Teaching Pathway

Providing guidance and facilitating connections are important practices for promoting inclusive pathways into the teaching workforce. Organizations can support and expand immigrants’ access to their teaching pathway by offering comprehensive support, including career guidance, English language learning, contextualized education, and networking. These efforts help to remove barriers, build essential skills, and position immigrant teachers to succeed in the U.S. educational system—while strengthening the overall quality and diversity of the teaching workforce, benefiting students and schools alike.



Help facilitate credential evaluation and recognition.

Credential evaluation and recognition are foundational steps for internationally trained professionals seeking U.S. teaching positions. Early and accessible support for this process helps verify prior learning and experience, allowing immigrant educators to clearly map out subsequent steps in their teaching pathway.



Provide individualized career support.

Tailored career coaching and case management services can provide vital assistance to immigrants as they navigate the complexities of their professional journey, including setting career objectives, sitting for certification exams, and acquiring workforce skills. By clarifying career paths, this guidance empowers individuals to pursue their next educational and career steps.



Offer foundational learning opportunities.

Introductory training programs and curriculum series can offer critical guidance to prospective immigrant educators. These professional development resources help orient participants to the complexities of the U.S. education framework, clarify licensure requirements, and develop critical teaching skills.



Connect to English language learning classes.

English proficiency is a requirement for U.S. education positions. While many internationally trained teachers are proficient in English, they may need additional support to understand complex credentialing processes and to improve their test-taking skills. Connecting immigrants to language support—including advanced ELL classes, translated materials, or tutoring—can help them refine their professional English skills to meet certification and classroom standards.



Facilitate school-based work opportunities.

Work options such as substitute teacher or teacher's aide are an opportunity to gain experience in a U.S. classroom while seeking licensure. Internationally trained teachers not only earn an income but also build professional networks within local school systems. Substitute teacher or aide positions allow educators to develop a deeper understanding of U.S. teaching practices and classroom environments, while providing schools with experienced professionals who contribute valuable global perspectives.



Foster social capital and community-building.

While social and professional networks are essential for career development, many immigrant educators struggle to form new connections. Organizations can play a key role in facilitating the creation of these networks by connecting aspiring educators to local employers, school districts, educational institutions, and experienced professionals. Furthermore, by providing opportunities for collaborative learning and informal peer meetups, organizations can help strengthen these connections and foster deeper engagement within the entire educator community.

Approach in Action: CareerLadder and Lincoln Literacy

Essential Strategies:



Provide individualized career support



Offer foundational learning opportunities



Connect to ELL classes



Facilitate school-based work opportunities



Foster social capital and community building

CareerLadder and Lincoln Literacy partnered to expand services and pilot new programs for internationally trained educators in Lincoln and South Sioux City, Nebraska. Informed by feedback from community partners and immigrants, the project designed its teaching pathway model to be flexible, allowing teacher candidates to begin with steps that match their current circumstances and professional goals. For example, project leaders noted that some candidates needed help with credential evaluations, while others had already met educational requirements but needed English language support. Embedded within this approach was individualized career counseling, which helped teacher candidates assess where they are along the pathway, access resources and support, and identify next steps in pursuit of teaching positions.

“[Our teacher pathway model] is not a one-size-fits-all.... One of the challenges we’ve encountered is that ... people are not on [the same path] ... so we do a custom thing.... It’s very flexible. You can always volunteer. You can always study. There are things you can be doing to work towards your goals.” — Executive Director, CareerLadder

Through coordinated efforts, CareerLadder and Lincoln Literacy delivered targeted support to immigrants pursuing teaching careers. Notably, they offered two Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam preparation courses, one through the University of Nebraska – Lincoln and another via CareerLadder’s Resource Hub, a virtual platform designed to assist internationally trained professionals. To foster a sense of community and ongoing learning, CareerLadder and Lincoln Literacy hosted monthly online teacher meetups, creating space for participants to connect, share experiences, and build professional networks. Project leaders also helped aspiring educators establish connections with colleges, local schools, and community-based organizations, broadening their access to resources and job opportunities while strengthening their social and professional support systems.

Another key component of this SIIP Demonstration work was the Internationally Trained Teachers Course offered through Lincoln Literacy. The course equipped 27 participants with essential knowledge, resources, and support to pursue their teaching careers. Notably, by the end of the SIIP Demonstration, course participants had achieved meaningful outcomes: One teacher was admitted to a university, another was in the admissions process, two were completing credential evaluations, eight were employed as paraprofessionals, and others had found work in childcare or case management roles.

Conclusion

Promoting Inclusive Teaching Pathways

Amid persistent teacher shortages across the U.S. education system, leveraging the skills and experience of internationally trained professionals represents a strategic opportunity for communities nationwide. Immigrants bring immense value to U.S. classrooms, including years of teaching experience, multilingual capabilities, diverse cultural perspectives, and subject matter expertise that can help fill critical vacancies while creating an engaging learning environment for all students. By implementing flexible pathways into teaching, local communities can help these educators put their skills to work—strengthening the teacher workforce, supporting positive student outcomes, and contributing to local economies.

Through the WES SIIP Demonstration Opportunity, three public service entities—a non-profit, a government agency, and a community college—led meaningful efforts to connect immigrants and refugees to teaching careers. Their work highlights three key approaches that other organizations and communities can adopt to promote inclusive teaching pathways:

- **Understand and explore the local education landscape.** Identify local educational systems, workforce needs, and immigrant talent to better understand your education landscape. Work to establish diverse, cross-sector partnerships with education institutions, governments, and community organizations to help inform teaching pathways.
- **Develop accessible and inclusive teaching pathways.** Work with partners to outline pathway requirements, connect them with existing programs, and incorporate flexible options to accommodate diverse backgrounds. Seek to embed wraparound supports to reduce common barriers and ensure access.
- **Provide holistic support along the teaching pathway.** Offer comprehensive guidance to support credential recognition, professional English language development, and foundational training. Create opportunities for school-based experience and professional networking to help develop skills, acquire classroom familiarity, and foster community connections.

A Call to Action

The U.S. education system is at a period of critical challenge but also significant opportunity. While widespread teacher shortages threaten student success, highly qualified immigrant professionals with work authorization stand ready to teach, bringing experience and expertise that could address the needs of classrooms nationwide. The barrier is not talent, but access. WES calls on partners across all sectors (including organizations, governments, and educational institutions) to evaluate ways to implement these replicable and adaptable inclusive teaching pathways. Recognizing the experience of internationally trained immigrants and working to integrate them into U.S. classrooms will fill teacher labor force gaps, support improved student outcomes, and contribute to more resilient economies that benefit entire communities.

Successful approaches, such as those demonstrated by SIIP and its partners, provide a proven framework for mobilizing immigrant talent. To engage with WES, join our networks, and learn more about our partners' work, email us at us_policy@wes.org.

Endnotes

1. In this guide, the term “immigrants” includes refugees, asylees, legal permanent residents, and naturalized citizens as well as immigrants.
2. See <https://usafacts.org/articles/how-many-immigrants-are-in-the-american-workforce/>.
3. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, School Pulse Panel 2021–2022, 2022–2023, 2023–2024, and 2024–2025. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/spp/results.asp>.
4. J. Gross, Can Immigrant Professionals Help Reduce Teacher Shortages in the U.S.? World Education Services (WES) Global Talent Bridge (2018), <https://knowledge.wes.org/rs/317-CTM-316/images/globaltalentbridge-report-can-immigrant-professionals-help-reduce-teacher-shortages-in-the-US.pdf>.
5. A. Rafa and M. Roberts, Building a Diverse Teacher Workforce, Policy Brief, Education Commission of the States, (August 2020), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED607005.pdf>
6. G. Mottes and M. Wylen, Guide on teacher workforce credentialing: A look into the traditional initial license requirements, diverse pathways into the teaching profession, and reciprocity policies, WestEd (2025), https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/15104352/Report-State-Education-Agency-Guide-on-Teacher-Workforce-Credentialing_FINAL_ADA-1.pdf.



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