

Building a Teacher Career Ladder through Collaboration

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Summary

Teachers are critical contributors to the welfare and advancement of our society. Yet, teaching is associated with little prestige¹, few professional advancement opportunities², and a demanding workload³. Altogether, these factors impede schools' ability to recruit and retain quality teachers⁸. In 2019, Maryland's Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education proposed a career ladder to address the prestige, advancement opportunities, and workload of teaching⁹. However, evidence suggests that career ladders are not guaranteed solutions to this confluence of challenges¹⁰. Together, Maryland PDS 2025 Project collaborators will draw on the Commission's recommendations, scholars' insights, and the expertise of local school system partners to explore and establish career ladder features that are responsive to the needs of Maryland schools, teachers, and students.

The Issues

Teaching garners less respect and admiration from the public than other traditional professions (e.g., law, medicine)¹, in part due to its low salary⁴. Further, teachers are often given equal professional status, regardless of their qualifications and expertise⁵, and are often asked to perform a multitude of tasks beyond teaching (e.g., mentoring teacher candidates and peers)⁶. This intensification of teachers' roles may lead to scarce teaching preparation time and lower teaching quality⁷. Altogether, these challenges impede schools' ability to recruit and retain diverse, high-quality teachers⁸.

Addressing the Issues

Maryland is working to improve the quality and quantity of its teacher workforce by addressing the prestige, advancement opportunities, and workload of teaching. In 2019, Maryland's Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education proposed that the State adopt a career ladder system (Appendix B) that: 1) raises the social status of a career in teaching; 2) creates positions for teachers to serve as mentors and content and pedagogy experts; and 3) ensures that talented individuals from non-education backgrounds may become school leaders⁹. In addition to elevating the prestige of teaching and increasing teachers' advancement opportunities, the career ladder may also de-intensify teachers' workloads by distributing their many roles across career ladder tracks and levels. Some Maryland school systems have already created positions that aim to de-intensify teachers' roles, but these positions span a wide range of titles, responsibilities, and compensation. For instance, Maryland PDS 2025 Project partners Prince George's County Public Schools and Montgomery County Public Schools have created a variety of positions (Appendix A) to fulfill teachers' roles as mentors of teacher candidates, supervisors of struggling teachers, and instructional support specialists for

teachers in various content areas.

Although Maryland school systems have begun to modify teachers' roles in an effort to address their demanding workload, it is unclear whether and how these roles will fit into the Commission's proposed career ladder. Further, it is unclear whether and how the proposed career ladder will successfully elevate the prestige of teaching, increase teachers' advancement opportunities, and de-intensify teachers' workloads. Evidence suggests that several factors may undermine the effectiveness of career ladders, including ambiguous structure, limited funding, and persistent egalitarian norms in teaching¹⁰. Consequently, the development and implementation of the Commission's proposed career ladder must be attentive to scholars' insights about this policy and the existing structure of professional roles in Maryland schools.

Progress and Insights from the Maryland PDS 2025 Project

The Maryland PDS 2025 Project team will draw on the Commission's recommendations, scholars' insights, and the expertise of local school system partners to propose a career ladder that is responsive to the needs of Maryland schools, teachers, and students. In May 2021, we will commence a workgroup with University of Maryland (UMD), Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Prince George's County Educators' Association (PGCEA), and Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) stakeholders to explore and establish career ladder features.

Together, we will work to ensure that this proposed policy is not *done to* Maryland school systems, but *created with* them. Many policies fail at implementation because contextual realities undermine their idealistic intent¹¹. By prioritizing collaborators' knowledge, needs, and recommendations, we hope to realize the promise of career ladders as a mechanism to improve the quality of education in Maryland.

Appendix A

Role/Responsibility	Title <i>Montgomery County Public Schools</i>	Title <i>Prince George's County Public Schools</i>
Mentor and supervise teacher candidates in university teacher education programs	Mentor Teacher	Mentor Teacher
Mentor and supervise new and struggling teachers	Mentor Teacher Consulting Teacher	Instructional Lead Teacher Mentor Teacher Consulting Teacher Coach
Support all teachers, or teachers in particular content areas, in their instructional practice and growth	Reading Specialist Math Content Coach Content Specialist Staff Development Teacher Resource Teacher	Academic Resource Teacher Reading Specialist ESOL Teacher Coach Instructional Coach (Science, Math, Reading/English Language Arts)
Mentor and supervise teachers who mentor and supervise struggling teachers	Instructional Specialist Co-Lead Consulting Teacher	N/A
Shared teacher between university and district	Shared Master Teacher	N/A

Appendix B

Level I	Title/Description	
1	State Certified Teacher (SCT)	
2	SCT pursuing 1) a master's degree, or 2) 30 credits of a program of study approved by the State Board, or 3) National Board Certification (NBC)	
3	An NBC teacher, or, if there is no assessment comparable to NBC for the teacher's subject area, a teacher with an advanced professional certificate or a master's degree in the teacher's subject area	
4	Lead Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Teaches in the classroom on average of 50% time · Mentors newer and struggling teachers · Leads workshops and demonstrations at the school level
	Distinguished Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Teaches in the classroom on average of 40% time · Mentors Lead Teachers · Leads workshops and demonstrations at the school level
	Professor Distinguished Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Teaches in the classroom on average of 20% time · Serves as a mentor and instructor of teachers in training · Mentors new teachers during induction · Designs and leads professional development

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