RESEARCH continues to confirm that without excellent teachers consistently, most students who start behind stay behind, and too few middling and advanced students leap ahead. Even solid teachers who achieve one year of learning progress leave achievement gaps intact. Schools that consistently provide all students with excellent teachers — those in today’s top 20 to 25 percent who achieve well over one year of learning progress — can close most gaps fast.

Rigorous recruitment, development, and retention, and necessary dismissals will improve teaching. Among other nations making education surges, the United States especially needs it most — because not only do many teachers lack the ability to achieve, but many exhibit other qualities needed in our economy,

To ensure the teachers “extend their reach” to more pay, with efficient student learning.

WHAT POLICY LEADERS CAN DO

How can state and district leaders create policies that help excellent teachers reach more students? By better identifying top teachers;

By freeing schools and districts to redesign jobs; paying excellent teachers more; proactively retaining top teachers; and building instructional and data systems, policymakers can put excellent teachers in front of more students — consistently, and within budget.

IDENTIFY EXCELLENT TEACHERS

- Require districts to identify the teachers in the state’s top 25 percent, in all grades of high-priority subjects, using multiple measures, including student learning growth as the main element. Untested grades and subjects in which policymakers want students to make strong progress will need new or alternative growth measures.

- Identify alternative measures of teacher performance — such as behavioral competencies — that correlate with student growth and with success in traditional and new teaching roles. This will aid in the identification of excellent teachers, development of all teachers, and appropriate promotion along new career paths.

- Require reporting of the number of children in different subgroups reached by teachers with different levels of prior effectiveness.

REDESIGN ORGANIZATIONS AND JOBS TO INCREASE EXCELLENT TEACHERS’ REACH

- Provide state funding for schools as fungible lump sums, including funding for teacher pay. This will allow schools to pay for the best combination of teaching roles and technology.

- Eliminate class-size limits for excellent teachers; or, require average class-size limits across districts or schools, rather than absolute limits per classroom. This lets willing, top teachers teach more students.

- Eliminate or reduce “seat time” requirements for students to be with licensed staff, focusing on student outcomes instead. This will allow, for example, unlicensed staff to monitor digital labs, freeing funds to pay more — within budget — to the excellent teachers in charge.

- Revise licensure rules to make excellent out-of-state teachers automatically eligible to teach.

PAY EXCELLENT TEACHERS MORE

- Amend statewide salary scales, leaving districts and schools free to pay excellent teachers more for reaching more students within available budgets.

- Implement state-level incentives for schools and districts that reach more students with excellent teaching and share rewards with those teachers.

- Pay more per pupil for achieving student growth on par with that produced by today’s teachers in the top 25 percent. Weight the rewards to pay more for learning growth by disadvantaged children, up to and beyond basic proficiency.