

From Urgent to Future

Redesigning the Educator Role for the AI Era

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About FullScale

FullScale’s mission is to unite education leaders and organizations together to drive collective learning, action, and systems transformation. We break silos, bridge divides, lift up new evidence and unseen innovations, and accelerate change for lasting impact for every learner.

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Critical Findings

- **The narrative that AI will replace teachers reflects a fundamental design failure.** Claims about AI-driven replacement obscure the real issue: educator roles have been shaped by policy systems that overload responsibility, constrain professional judgment, and undervalue the human expertise learning requires.
- **Student learning depends on human expertise that cannot be automated.** Progression, growth, continuity, community connection, instructional coherence, and specialized judgment are relational, contextual, and ethical forms of work that extend far beyond task execution—and remain fundamentally human.
- **Educator roles are the cumulative result of policy decisions.** Credentialing, staffing models, accountability frameworks, and funding structures determine who can educate, how expertise is distributed, and whether human judgment can be exercised sustainably at scale.
- **Redesigning the educator role requires redistribution, not expansion.** Durable improvement will not come from asking educators to do more, but from intentionally redistributing responsibility, authority, time, and expertise across teams so that human work is supported rather than absorbed through informal workarounds.
- **Whether AI strengthens or weakens learning is a policy choice.** As AI becomes a permanent feature of education, the future of teaching will be shaped by whether leaders use policy deliberately—as a design tool—to recognize, protect, and sustain the human expertise students need now and in the future.

Introduction

Throughout the history of public education, new technologies have repeatedly been framed as potential replacements for teachers. From filmstrips and educational television to the teaching machines introduced in the early twentieth century, moments of technological change have often been accompanied by a familiar question: if information can be efficiently delivered by tools, what role do human educators still play?

These narratives treat learning as the transmission of knowledge and education as a technical problem of delivery. However, a parallel body of thought has challenged this framing since the early 1900s when Dewey and the Progressives presented a counter-vision of schooling where educators created communities of inquiry similar to those espoused by Pestalozzi and Montessori. For over a century, scholars and practitioners have argued that learning is not a transactional process of depositing information, but one rooted in dialogue, agency, culture, and human development. From this perspective, the “banking model” of education fails not because it lacks efficiency, but because

it misrepresents learning as a simple transaction rather than a social process that values the connections between learners, educators, and their shared experiences.

Today's debates about artificial intelligence (AI) and teaching sit squarely within this longer historical pattern. They surface familiar tensions between efficiency and humanity, scale and connection, tools and the people who use them. Understanding this history matters, because it reminds us that the question has never truly been whether technology can dispense information, but instead, how we might choose to design roles, relationships, and responsibilities that not only enable students to access and engage with information, but also encourage them to apply their learning as technology evolves.

The AI Teacher “Replacement” Narrative Is the Most Recent Misdiagnosis

A growing national narrative suggests that artificial intelligence will “replace” teachers.¹ Often framed as a technological inevitability, this claim reflects the long-standing misalignments between how the educator role has been designed and what teaching and learning actually require.

Educators have been signaling for years that the role, as currently constructed, is increasingly difficult to sustain. Recruitment and retention challenges, rising burnout, and persistent student disengagement all predate generative AI.² Together, the humans at the center of teaching and learning have communicated a consistent message: too much responsibility sits inside a single role; too little authority accompanies that responsibility; and too few structural supports make the work durable over time. **Artificial intelligence did not create these conditions. It made them easier to see and easier for outside observers to misinterpret.**

These pressures are often treated as separate crises, each addressed through isolated initiatives or short-term interventions. In reality, they are tightly connected. They stem from how the system has historically defined educator work, constrained the exercise of expertise, and compensated responsibility without redesigning the role itself. As a result, educators have performed increasingly complex human work while operating within structures designed for a narrower, more transactional vision of teaching. Over time, this mismatch has eroded sustainability for educators and coherence for students. It has also created the conditions under which task automation begins to look like a plausible substitute for human expertise, rather than a support for it.

Current discourse often points to AI's growing ability to support tasks like lesson planning, grading, drafting instructional materials, or analyzing student data. When these activities are treated as the

¹ McClain, C., Kennedy, B., Gottfried, J., Anderson, M., & Pasquini, G. (2025, April 3). How the U.S. public and AI experts view artificial intelligence. Pew Research Center.

² Doan, S., Steiner, E. D., & Woo, A. (2024). [Findings from the 2024 state of the American teacher survey](#). RAND Corporation.

core of the educator role, it becomes tempting for policymakers, vendors, and commentators to imagine technology as a substitute for educators themselves.

That framing misses the point. Tasks like planning or grading matter not because they exist in isolation, but because they serve broader forms of human expertise. They enable adults to notice patterns in student thinking, interpret context, respond to misconceptions, motivate learners, and guide growth over time. These forms of expertise rely on human judgment, cultural understanding, trust, and relational continuity. They develop through experience and are exercised through interaction, not execution.

The traditional conception of “the teacher” that reinforces the AI replacement narrative bundles an expanding set of responsibilities into a single, inflexible role, emphasizing task accumulation rather than expertise distribution, and reducing instructional work to a checklist of activities. When teaching is understood as the exercise of human expertise over time and in relationship with students, the limits of automation become clear. Decades of research and lived experience affirm that student learning depends on adults who can interpret nuance, respond to complexity, and adapt to learners in context.³ Trust, motivation, identity, and purpose do not emerge from tools. They are cultivated through sustained human interaction.⁴

Artificial intelligence can support aspects of this work. It can accelerate analysis, expand access to resources, and reduce administrative burden. What it cannot do is replace the human expertise that makes learning coherent, motivating, and durable. Treating AI as a labor-replacement strategy risks weakening the very capacities students rely on most.

The more productive question is not whether AI can perform isolated instructional tasks, but whether education systems will redesign the educator role so that human expertise can be exercised fully and sustainably in a changing learning landscape. That redesign is not a matter of writing new job descriptions or asking educators to do more. The roles educators inhabit today reflect decades of cumulative policy decisions that determine who is allowed to do the work, what counts as expertise, how responsibility is distributed, and what schools can realistically sustain.

Seen this way, the AI “replacement” narrative is not a warning about technology. It is a signal about policy design. If education systems want to harness new tools without eroding the human core of learning, policy must be used deliberately to name, value, and protect the human expertise students need to learn, now and in the future, at scale.

How Policy Shapes the Educator Role

³ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *How people learn II: Learners, contexts, and cultures*. National Academies Press.

⁴ Banks, J. A. (2008). *An introduction to multicultural education*. Pearson; Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational leadership*, 60(6), 40–45.

The educator role as it exists today is the cumulative result of policy decisions that determine who is allowed to enter the profession, what forms of expertise are formally recognized, how work is organized and distributed, and what schools are incentivized or constrained from doing. Over time, these decisions have shaped the educator role in consistent ways.

- **Credentialing and licensure systems** have prioritized uniformity, time-based requirements, and narrow role definitions, limiting entry, mobility, and differentiation.
- **Staffing models** have concentrated responsibility within single positions rather than distributing expertise across teams.
- **Accountability structures** have rewarded coverage and compliance more than engagement, growth, or continuity.
- **Funding formulas** have assumed learning happens in fixed times and places.
- **Compensation systems** have reinforced linear career paths and interchangeable roles.

Taken together, these policies form the operating conditions of teaching. They shape whether human expertise can be exercised deeply and sustainably, or whether it is continually crowded out by competing demands. They determine whether schools can design roles around facilitation, mentoring, coaching, leadership, and specialized support, or whether those forms of expertise remain informal, fragile, and dependent on individual effort.

Understanding policy in this way reframes the challenge facing the field. **If education systems want a different educator role, they must change the conditions that shape it.** Policy operates less like a switch and more like an architecture. It defines boundaries, allocates authority, and signals what the system values over time.

The sections that follow build on this understanding. They examine the forms of human expertise students need in order to learn and persist, and explore how specific policy levers either enable or constrain the implementation of that expertise at scale.

The Human Expertise that Drives Student Learning

Students do not learn in isolation. Learning emerges through interaction with adults who can interpret where a learner is, understand the context shaping that learner's experience, and guide progress toward what comes next. This understanding has deep roots in learning science—from Vygotsky and Bandura to Ellmore, Lave, and Wenger. Countless theories describe learning as a social process made possible through skilled guidance that adapts to both the learner and the moment.⁵

⁵ Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall; Ellmore, R. F. (2004). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance*. Harvard Education Press; Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press; Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds. & Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Research and lived experience continue to affirm this reality, yet education systems have rarely been designed to support the full range of human expertise required for powerful student learning. Instead, policy structures have emphasized efficiency, standardization, and task completion, often obscuring the deeper forms of judgment, responsibility, and relational authority that educators exercise every day.

As learning increasingly stretches beyond traditional classrooms—across time, place, institutions, and digital spaces—the need for human expertise grows rather than shrinks. Students require coordinated teams of adults who bring different kinds of knowledge, judgment, and connection to their learning experiences. These capabilities already exist across innovative schools and systems, but they remain fragile and difficult to sustain because policy structures were not designed to recognize, distribute, or protect them at scale.

Table 1, below, identifies the core forms of human expertise that drive learning, describes what each expertise entails, and illustrates how it shows up in practice. Rather than defining job titles or roles, the table surfaces the kinds of professional judgment and responsibility that students need adults to exercise and provides a shared language for understanding what must be supported, sustained, and scaled through policy design, including how those expectations are codified in role definitions, staffing agreements, and negotiated working conditions.

Table 1: Human Expertise Needed To Drive Learning

Expertise	Description	Examples of Practice
Learning Progression	Deciding when and how learning advances based on evidence, context, and readiness.	Interpreting learning signals, adjusting pacing, determining mastery, and guiding next steps over time
Growth and Skill Development	Supporting improvement through feedback, reflection, and iterative practice.	Coaching, formative feedback, motivation, and development of learning and teaching strategies
Learner Development and Continuity	Holding sustained responsibility for a learner’s academic, social, and personal growth.	Advising, mentoring, identity development, and long-term accountability for learner trajectories.
Community and Civic Context	Connecting learning to lived experience, opportunity, and purpose beyond school.	Community partnerships, career-connected learning, real-world application, and civic engagement.

Instructional Coherence and Culture	Aligning people, practices, and values into a shared learning environment.	Curriculum alignment, pedagogy, assessment coherence, shared leadership, and culture-building.
Complex and Specialized Learning Needs	Applying deep professional judgment in high-stakes, sensitive, or specialized situations.	Specialized instruction, mental health support, advanced content expertise, and ethical decision-making.

What follows is NOT a call to add more responsibilities to already overextended educators. It is a reframing of the distinct forms of expertise students need in order to learn deeply and persist over time. Each subsection names a core domain of expertise, explains why it remains uniquely human even as technology evolves, and signals how policy decisions either enable or constrain its enactment. Examples drawn from our partnerships offer concrete illustrations of what it can look like when educator roles are intentionally designed around these capabilities.

Learning Progression

Deciding when and how learning advances based on evidence, context, and readiness.

Students need adults who can make learning visible and navigable. Learning progression requires more than delivering content or assigning tasks. It involves interpreting evidence of learning, noticing misconceptions, adjusting pacing, and deciding when a learner is ready to move forward or needs additional support. This expertise answers a fundamental student question: How am I doing, and what should I do next?

Artificial intelligence can assist by organizing information, surfacing patterns in student work, or suggesting resources. What it cannot do is take responsibility for deciding how to respond when learning stalls or accelerates. Those decisions require professional judgment grounded in knowledge of the learner, the learning goals, and the broader instructional context.

Policy often constrains this expertise by anchoring learning to fixed schedules, seat-time requirements, and age-based pacing. When educators are required to move groups through identical content at the same pace, progression becomes secondary to compliance. Where policy allows flexibility in pacing, credit attainment, instructional delivery, and assessment, educators can exercise judgment about learning progression as a core responsibility rather than an informal workaround.

Signal from the Field: **Building 21**

[Building 21](#) is a network of competency-based high schools utilizing a [nationally recognized Competency Framework](#) that serves as the backbone for all instructional decisions. In this model, the educator's role shifts from "delivering content" to facilitating a mastery-based journey, where they use detailed performance level descriptors (continua) to interpret evidence of learning and decide when a student is ready to advance. This expertise is anchored by a [daily advisory program](#) where each student is paired with an adult mentor who monitors their 1:1 learning plans and helps them navigate a personalized path toward graduation. To enable this, B21 has moved away from traditional age-based pacing toward [flexible scheduling](#) and credit-earning policies that validate mastery—documented through [Beacon Learning](#), a student-facing LMS designed to make learning visible and navigable for both the student and the educator.

Growth and Skill Development

Supporting improvement through feedback, reflection, and iterative practice.

Growth does not happen automatically through content delivery. Students benefit from adults who help them reflect on their learning strategies, build confidence, and develop habits that support improvement over time. Educators benefit from similar support as they refine their practice. This expertise answers a different question: *How can I get better at learning or teaching?*

AI can generate feedback or suggest next steps, but it cannot be accountable for how feedback is framed, timed, or received. Growth-oriented feedback depends on trust, relational awareness, and an understanding of when to push, when to pause, and how to motivate without discouraging.

Traditional staffing models and accountability systems often limit this expertise by isolating educators and prioritizing evaluation over development. Policies that protect time for collaboration, enable coaching roles, and frame accountability around improvement rather than surveillance create the conditions for growth and skill development to operate as sustained professional practice.

Signal from the Field: **Lindsay Unified School District (LUSD)**

Lindsay Unified built their [performance-based system](#) on the philosophy that "content is leveled, not learners." This stance effectively uncouples student progress from traditional seat time structures. It also shifts the district's understanding of the role of the educator from "delivering content" to "facilitating student mastery." As an outward symbol of this shift, the district refers to educators as "learning facilitators" and students as "learners."

Recognizing that this shift also necessitates a rethinking of teacher preparation and support, [LUSD](#) developed a [grow-your-own teacher residency](#)—a year-long program that immerses new educators in competency-based practices alongside a mentor before they take on their own class. The model ensures that new educators have the capacity to jump into a performance-based model. It also serves

as professional learning for the mentors, and gives learners an adult who understands their lived experience because they recruit from within the community.

Learner Development and Continuity

Holding sustained responsibility for a learner's academic, social, and personal growth.

Learner development requires continuity. Students benefit from stable adult relationships that span academic, social, and emotional dimensions of learning. This expertise answers the question: Who knows me, and who is accountable for my growth over time?

All systems can interact with students, but they cannot hold relational authority or moral responsibility. They cannot be accountable for long-term development, nor trusted to act in a learner's best interest when tradeoffs arise. Sustained responsibility depends on presence, shared history, and mutual obligation.

Many policy structures unintentionally undermine this expertise through frequent schedule changes, high student-to-adult ratios, and staffing models that prioritize subject coverage over continuity. Policies that recognize mentoring and advisory work as legitimate instructional responsibilities make sustained learner development possible. In many systems, this recognition must extend beyond statute into negotiated agreements that define caseloads, time allocations, and expectations for continuity across years.

Signal from the Field: **Da Vinci Connect TK-8**

[Da Vinci Connect TK-8](#) utilizes a hybrid model where consistent advisor relationships anchor a student's experience across both on-campus and home-based learning environments. In this model, the educator's role is to support the co-design of "home learning" led by families while facilitating interdisciplinary, project-based work during on-campus days. This continuity of support is made possible by flexible scheduling and attendance policies—such as the use of weekly learning logs instead of traditional seat-time tracking—which validate the learning and development that occurs in distributed settings beyond the school building.

Community and Civic Context

Connecting learning to lived experience, opportunity, and purpose beyond school.

Students engage more deeply when learning connects to their lives, communities, and futures.

This expertise involves helping learners apply knowledge in real-world settings, explore career pathways, and participate in civic life. It answers the question: Why does this learning matter beyond school?

AI can surface information about careers or simulate scenarios, but it cannot build relationships with community partners or navigate the cultural and ethical dimensions of real-world learning. Contextualizing learning requires humans who can broker partnerships, negotiate meaning, and ensure opportunities are equitable and relevant.

Policy often treats community-based learning as enrichment rather than core instruction. Credentialing, accountability, and funding structures can limit who is allowed to teach, mentor, or assess learning in these contexts. Where policy supports alternative credit pathways and partnerships, this expertise can operate at scale.

Signal from the Field: **Enumclaw School District**

In partnership with the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, the [Enumclaw School District](#) has implemented a model where learning is deeply rooted in [cultural heritage and community-based exploration](#). In this model, the educator's role shifts to that of a community broker—navigating cultural dimensions and brokering partnerships with local elders to ensure learning is equitable and relevant. This connection to a student's lived experience is institutionalized through district policies, such as [Policy 2415](#), which establish performance-based graduation pathways. These policies allow students to earn [mastery-based equivalency credits](#) for community participation, effectively transforming what was once "enrichment" into core instructional progress that validates a student's purpose beyond the school walls.

Instructional Coherence and Culture

Aligning people, practices, and values into a shared learning environment.

Learning thrives in coherent environments. This expertise involves aligning curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and adult collaboration around shared goals and values. It answers the question: What are we building together, and how does it all fit?

AI can support coordination by organizing information or tracking progress, but it cannot decide what coherence should look like or whose values should guide it. Stewardship of coherence requires interpretive judgment, ethical responsibility, and legitimacy within a community.

Accountability systems that prioritize short-term metrics often crowd out this work. Policies that support shared leadership, interdisciplinary collaboration, and long-term improvement enable educators to focus on coherence and culture rather than compliance. Long-term coherence depends on alignment between negotiated collaborative structures, governance policy, and labor agreements.

Signal from the Field: **Mountain View High School**

Mountain View High School utilizes a [Freshman Seminar model](#) and smaller academies to create "schools within a school" that prioritize instructional coherence and a strong sense of community. This approach shifts the educator's role toward teaming and interdisciplinary coordination, where a shared cohort of adults aligns their curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment around a small group of students. By "tucking" students into these smaller cohorts, the model ensures that adult collaboration is centered on shared goals and values rather than siloed subject areas. This coherence is supported by professional development and leadership structures that prioritize long-term community-building over short-term compliance, allowing for frequent, timely feedback and deep relationship-building that anchors the freshman transition.

Complex and Specialized Learning Needs

Applying deep professional judgment in high-stakes, sensitive, or specialized situations.

Students also need access to adults with specialized expertise, including content specialists, mental health professionals, and industry experts. This expertise becomes critical when learning is complex, sensitive, or high-stakes. It answers the question: Who has the depth to help when this really matters?

AI can assist by organizing information or suggesting interventions, but it cannot assume responsibility for decisions that carry ethical, emotional, or professional weight. Specialized expertise requires licensure, accountability, and judgment that extend beyond technical competence.

Rigid credentialing systems, siloed funding streams, and uniform staffing formulas often make it difficult to integrate specialized roles into learning environments. Policy redesign that supports role differentiation and braided funding can ensure students receive the depth of support they need.

Signal from the Field: **Novi Virtual**

Novi Virtual, a K-12 program within the Novi Community School District, utilizes a whole-child development approach to support students who require high-stakes interventions, including those experiencing chronic absenteeism, school avoidance, or behavioral challenges. This model shifts the educator's role toward applying deep professional judgment in sensitive situations, using [restorative practices and social-emotional learning](#) (SEL) to anchor individual student support. To ensure students have access to the depth of expertise they need, the program utilizes a [cooperative contract model](#)—a policy "unlock" that allows Novi to partner with other counties and districts to provide specialized virtual options and flexible [as-needed instructional support](#). By leveraging [empathy interviews](#) and continuous feedback loops, the district has moved beyond uniform staffing formulas to build learning teams that can differentiate and respond to the emotional and professional weight of specialized learner needs.

Across these areas of expertise, a clear pattern emerges. **What distinguishes human contribution in education is not the execution of tasks, but the exercise of professional judgment, relational authority, and ethical responsibility over time. Technology can support this work. It can inform it, accelerate it, and extend its reach. It cannot own it.**

These forms of human expertise already exist across innovative schools and systems. They are visible in practice, supported by evidence, and valued by students and educators alike. However, they remain fragile. Not because they are unproven or aspirational, but because the systems that govern teaching were not designed to recognize, distribute, or sustain them.

As a result, these expertises often survive only through extraordinary effort (e.g., individual leaders bending rules, educators absorbing additional labor), or short-term funding that disappears just as models begin to stabilize. Over time, this fragility becomes exhaustion, and innovation becomes unsustainable.

If these expertises are essential to learning, then relying on exceptions is not a strategy. Durability requires design, and design must be supported by policy.

Redesigning the Educator Role Through Policy Levers

Redesigning the educator role is not a matter of asking educators to do more, nor is it about substituting technology for people. It is about **redistributing responsibility, authority, and expertise** through intentional policy design so that the human expertise students rely on can be exercised coherently and sustainably.

Maintaining the current role is not a neutral choice. Concentrating instructional, relational, and coordination responsibilities inside a single position has proven costly and unstable. It contributes to turnover, burnout, staffing shortages, and reliance on short-term fixes that are difficult to govern and expensive to sustain. Redesign, in this context, is not expansion. It is **system maintenance**.

Policy is the primary lever through which this redesign can occur. It determines what kinds of expertise are recognized, how work is distributed, and where responsibility ultimately sits when learning succeeds or fails. **As federal leadership in this space remains uncertain, states now play a central role in building coherence across workforce policy, instructional expectations, and accountability systems.** State education agencies, funders, researchers, intermediaries, labor organizations, and local leaders all influence how policy is interpreted, enacted, and experienced on the ground, particularly where redesign requires changes to roles, time, and responsibility.

Four policy domains shape whether human expertise in education remains fragile and informal, or becomes durable and governable at scale. Rather than prescribing solutions, each section surfaces **policy design questions** intended to help system actors interrogate current assumptions, identify constraints, and explore where existing policy may be misaligned with stated goals.

Entry, Credentialing, and Preparation

Who is allowed to educate—and under what conditions.

Credentialing systems signal what the system recognizes as legitimate expertise. Historically, these systems have prioritized uniformity, time-based requirements, and narrow role definitions. As a result, many of the forms of expertise students increasingly need—mentoring, coaching, facilitation, community connection—are under-recognized, under-credentialed, or excluded entirely.

Redesigning the educator role requires expanding who is allowed to educate while maintaining rigor and public trust. This includes differentiated and role-specific credentials, residency-based preparation models that provide financial stability for novice educators, and pathways that recognize community-based and nontraditional expertise. These shifts carry real workforce implications, particularly for educator diversity, compensation, and long-term sustainability.

Rather than lower standards or remove licensure requirements, this is a call for credentialing systems to align with the actual expertise schools require, ensuring that responsibility, preparation, and accountability travel together.

Policy Design Questions

Stakeholder	Questions to Consider
State-Level Policymakers (e.g., legislators, governors' offices, state boards of education, rulemaking bodies)	What forms of expertise are formally recognized through licensure, and which remain excluded? Where do credentialing requirements protect quality, and where do they unnecessarily restrict entry, mobility, or role differentiation? How might residency-based pathways provide both rigor and financial stability for novice educators? What are the workforce implications of expanding access to credentials for community-based or nontraditional educators?
SEA Leaders (e.g., chiefs, deputy chiefs, licensure, accountability, and finance offices responsible for policy enactment)	How do current licensure, approval, and endorsement processes enable or constrain differentiated educator expertise? Where could provisional, stackable, or role-specific credentials expand system capacity without eroding expectations? How are new credentialing pathways or differentiated roles communicated to, negotiated with, and supported by labor partners to ensure coherence between preparation, licensure, and working conditions?

Local School Boards (e.g., elected or appointed bodies setting local policy, approving budgets, contracts, and strategic priorities)	How do local hiring policies, job classifications, and contract approvals reinforce or limit the use of differentiated credentials? Where might board policy unintentionally restrict the ability to bring in community-based, specialized, or nontraditional expertise?
Local Education Agency Leaders (e.g., superintendents, cabinet leaders, HR, academic, and operations teams responsible for implementation)	How are credentials interpreted and operationalized in hiring, staffing, and role design? Where could preparation pathways, residencies, or partnerships better align educator preparation with the specific expertise the system needs?
Funders (e.g., philanthropy, state or regional grantmakers, intermediaries managing pooled funds)	Where could targeted investments de-risk new preparation models, residencies, or grow-your-own pathways? How might funding support diversified pipelines while avoiding fragmentation or inequitable access?
Researchers & Intermediaries (e.g., research organizations, technical assistance providers, field-building organizations)	What evidence exists on the effects of differentiated credentials on educator diversity, retention, and effectiveness? How do credentialing systems shape workforce composition over time?

Staffing Models and Time

How educator work is structured and distributed.

Even when systems recognize the importance of multiple forms of human expertise, staffing and time structures often prevent those expertises from operating in practice. Ratios, schedules, and seat-time assumptions frequently presume that a single educator must manage instruction, assessment, relationship-building, coordination, and intervention—all within fixed blocks of time.

Redesign in this domain is not about adding roles. It is about redistributing responsibility. Flexible staffing ratios, team-based models, and redesigned schedules create the conditions for facilitation, coaching, mentoring, and collaboration to function as core work rather than informal workarounds.

Time is not simply a constraint. It is a policy signal. How systems allocate time reflects what they value—and what they make possible.

Policy Design Questions

Stakeholder	Questions to Consider
State-Level Policymakers (e.g., legislators, governors' offices, state boards of education, rulemaking bodies)	Where do staffing ratios, seat-time requirements, or labor policies assume a single educator must perform all instructional and relational functions? What flexibilities or statutory changes would enable team-based staffing models? How do current statutes or guidance interact with collective bargaining agreements to enable or constrain team-based staffing, shared responsibility, and protected collaboration time?
SEA Leaders (e.g., chiefs, deputy chiefs, licensure, accountability, and finance offices responsible for policy enactment)	How do staffing guidance, reporting requirements, and program approvals reinforce or limit distributed responsibility? Where could state guidance support flexible schedules or shared roles without weakening accountability?
Local School Boards (e.g., elected or appointed bodies setting local policy, approving budgets, contracts, and strategic priorities)	How do board-approved staffing formulas, schedules, and contracts shape how educator time is used? Where might board decisions unintentionally crowd out collaboration, mentoring, or shared responsibility?
Local Education Agency Leaders (e.g., superintendents, cabinet leaders, HR, academic, and operations teams responsible for implementation)	How is educator time allocated across instruction, collaboration, coaching, and planning? Where could schedules or staffing structures be redesigned to better align roles with expertise?
Funders (e.g., philanthropy, state or regional grantmakers, intermediaries managing pooled funds)	How might funding support transitions to team-based staffing or redesigned schedules? What investments could help systems treat time as a resource rather than a constraint?
Researchers & Intermediaries (e.g., research organizations, technical assistance providers, field-building organizations)	What staffing configurations are associated with educator sustainability and student outcomes? How does time allocation influence the durability of human expertise in schools?

Accountability and Measurement

What the system signals, it values.

Accountability systems shape behavior by signaling what counts. When systems privilege coverage, pacing, or short-term performance alone, they crowd out forms of human expertise that require trust, iteration, and continuity. Redesign does not require abandoning accountability. It requires broadening it.

Balanced systems value both summative outcomes and formative indicators. They reward improvement, persistence, and learning over time, and they create space for innovation by recognizing leading indicators before long-term outcomes fully materialize. This approach does not excuse poor performance. It clarifies responsibility and supports course correction.

Policy Design Questions

Stakeholder	Questions to Consider
State-Level Policymakers (e.g., legislators, governors' offices, state boards of education, rulemaking bodies)	What outcomes do current accountability systems privilege, and which forms of human expertise remain invisible? How might accountability frameworks balance summative outcomes with formative indicators such as engagement or persistence?
SEA Leaders (e.g., chiefs, deputy chiefs, licensure, accountability, and finance offices responsible for policy enactment)	How is accountability data used in practice – to inform improvement or enforce compliance? Where do current systems discourage innovation even when early indicators suggest positive impact?
Local School Boards (e.g., elected or appointed bodies setting local policy, approving budgets, contracts, and strategic priorities)	How do board-level performance expectations and reporting requirements shape district priorities? Where might local accountability expectations unintentionally narrow educator roles?
Local Education Agency Leaders (e.g., superintendents, cabinet leaders, HR, academic, and operations teams responsible for implementation)	How are accountability measures translated into day-to-day expectations for educators? Where could formative indicators better support learning, iteration, and improvement?

Funders (e.g., philanthropy, state or regional grantmakers, intermediaries managing pooled funds)	How could funding support measurement systems that capture leading indicators alongside traditional outcomes? What investments could help systems build longer runways for improvement?
Researchers & Intermediaries (e.g., research organizations, technical assistance providers, field-building organizations)	What indicators best predict long-term student success? How can accountability systems support learning and adaptation rather than short-term performance alone?

Funding, Compensation, and Sustainability

What the system is willing to resource

Funding and compensation structures encode assumptions about educator roles. Uniform pay scales, rigid allocations, and siloed funding streams often assume interchangeable roles and linear career paths. These assumptions make it difficult to sustain differentiated expertise, flexible work arrangements, or integrated support models.

Redesign in this domain treats educator wellbeing, preparation, and time autonomy as infrastructure rather than perks. Compensation includes not only salary, but also flexibility, working conditions, and authority that allow human expertise to be exercised over time.

Policy Design Questions

Stakeholder	Questions to Consider
State-Level Policymakers (e.g., legislators, governors' offices, state boards of education, rulemaking bodies)	What assumptions about educator roles are embedded in funding formulas and compensation statutes? How do these assumptions reinforce uniform roles or limit sustainability?
SEA Leaders (e.g., chiefs, deputy chiefs, licensure, accountability, and finance offices responsible for policy enactment)	How is educator time treated as part of compensation and working conditions? Where could flexibility allow systems to recognize autonomy and sustainability as core design features?

Local School Boards (e.g., elected or appointed bodies setting local policy, approving budgets, contracts, and strategic priorities)	How do board decisions balance short-term cost control with long-term workforce capacity? What evidence would support changes to compensation or time-use policies? How do negotiated compensation structures support or limit differentiated roles, time autonomy, and long-term sustainability—and where might board policy create space for redesign in partnership with labor?
Local Education Agency Leaders (e.g., superintendents, cabinet leaders, HR, academic, and operations teams responsible for implementation)	How do local budgeting decisions reflect priorities around role differentiation, well-being, and time autonomy? How are new roles sustained once pilot funding ends?
Funders (e.g., philanthropy, state or regional grantmakers, intermediaries managing pooled funds)	Where could braided funding support integrated instructional, wellbeing, and innovation strategies? How might funding help systems pilot differentiated compensation models?
Researchers & Intermediaries (e.g., research organizations, technical assistance providers, field-building organizations)	What evidence links compensation flexibility, time autonomy, and role differentiation to retention and effectiveness?

Taken together, these policy domains determine whether human expertise in education remains an informal workaround or becomes a durable, governable feature of the system. While schools and educators often find ways to enact this expertise despite constraints, its sustainability depends on whether policy is intentionally designed to recognize, distribute, and support it at scale.

Table 2 below summarizes the section above, framing policy not as a set of isolated rules, but as a system of design levers that shape what kinds of expertise are possible, legitimate, and sustainable in practice. Each lever governs a different aspect of how educator work is defined and supported. Rather than prescribing specific solutions, the table surfaces the core tensions policymakers must navigate if human expertise is to remain accountable, supported, and central as learning environments and technologies continue to evolve.

Table 2: Policy as a Design Lever for Human Expertise

Policy Lever	What This Lever Governs	Why It Matters for Human Expertise	Core Design Tension
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Entry, Credentialing, and Preparation	Who is formally recognized as an educator, what counts as expertise, and how people enter the profession	Human expertise depends on judgment developed over time. Credentialing systems determine which forms of expertise are legitimized, which are excluded, and who has access to sustainable pathways into the work	Rigor vs. access; uniformity vs. role differentiation; quality control vs. workforce diversification
Staffing Models and Time	How educator work is organized, distributed, and scheduled	Many human expertise requires collaboration, continuity, and protected time. Staffing and time policies determine whether this expertise can operate as core work or only as informal add-ons	Efficiency vs. sustainability; individual accountability vs. shared responsibility
Accountability and Measurement	What the system signals it values, and how success is defined	Human expertise often produces impact over time, not instant results. Accountability systems shape whether improvement, judgment, and learning are encouraged or crowded out	Compliance vs. learning; short-term outcomes vs. long-term development
Funding, Compensation, and Sustainability	What the system is willing to resource and sustain	Expertise becomes durable only when supported by stable funding, fair compensation, and workable conditions. These structures determine whether roles persist beyond pilot phases	Cost control vs. capacity building; uniform pay vs. differentiated expertise

From Replacement to Redesign

The narrative that artificial intelligence will replace teachers is not, at its core, a story about technology. It reflects education systems that have defined the educator role too narrowly for too long. When teaching is framed primarily as task execution, replacement appears plausible. When it is understood as the exercise of professional judgment, relational authority, and sustained responsibility for learners, it does not.

Artificial intelligence has become a permanent feature of the education landscape. What remains unresolved is whether education systems will adapt in ways that strengthen the human expertise that students need—or whether existing policy structures will continue to erode it by default.

Across schools and systems, educators facilitate learning progress, coach growth, mentor development, connect learning to community, steward instructional coherence, and provide specialized professional judgment. These forms of expertise exist within the current system, but they remain fragile—sustained through individual effort, local flexibility, and temporary workarounds rather than durable design. That fragility reflects decades of policy decisions that expanded expectations without redistributing authority; differentiated responsibility without redesigning roles; and layered innovation onto structures built for uniformity. In this context, debates about artificial intelligence risk obscuring the more consequential issue: whether education systems will redesign themselves to support the human expertise they already require.

Redesigning the educator role is therefore a policy challenge, not a technical one. The choices made about credentialing, staffing, accountability, and resourcing will determine whether human expertise remains an informal workaround or becomes a durable, governable feature of the system. The future of teaching will not be decided by technology alone. It will be shaped by whether leaders choose to use policy as a design tool—deliberately, coherently, and in service of the humans at the center of learning.

Appendix A: Role Specific One-Pagers

The tables in this appendix are designed as **role-specific design guides** for leaders and partners shaping the future of teaching and learning. They translate the core arguments of this paper into practical reflection tools, tailored to the distinct responsibilities held across the education system.

Each one-pager focuses on a specific group of system actors—state-level policymakers, state education agency leaders, local school boards, local education agency leaders, funders, researchers, and intermediaries. Across all roles, collaboration with educator labor organizations is essential to translating redesign from policy intent into durable practice.

These guides are not checklists or prescriptions. Instead, they surface **design decision points** that actors in each role already navigate—often implicitly—through legislation, regulation, guidance, funding, research, and implementation. By organizing these decisions around the forms of educator expertise students need to learn, the one-pagers make visible how everyday choices shape who is allowed to do the work of education, how that work is structured, and what the system ultimately values.

Readers can use these guides to:

- Reflect on how their current decisions support or constrain human expertise
- Identify areas where policy, practice, or investment may be misaligned with learning needs
- Support cross-role conversations about coherence, responsibility, and sustainability
- Ground future design work in a shared understanding of what students require from the adults who support their learning

Taken together, these appendices offer a way to engage with the paper not only as an argument, but as a **set of tools for action**—supporting more intentional, human-centered design across the education system.

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State-Level Policymakers

Legislators, governors' offices, state boards of education, and rulemaking bodies.

State-level policymakers set the legal and regulatory conditions that define who can educate, what counts as legitimate expertise, and how learning is formally recognized. These decisions shape the educator role long before implementation begins.

How to use this table

This table is intended as a **policy design reflection tool**. Each row highlights a form of educator expertise that students rely on and the *specific design choices embedded in statute and regulation* that shape whether that expertise can operate at scale.

As you review the table, consider where your current legislative, regulatory, or rulemaking work touches these decision points—even indirectly. Many of these choices are not framed as “educator role” decisions, yet they determine who is authorized to exercise judgment, how learning is defined, and what work is formally recognized.

The purpose is not to prescribe solutions, but to surface **where policy is already making design decisions** about human expertise—and where those decisions may warrant closer attention as learning environments evolve.

Design Decision Points by Educator Expertise

Educator Expertise	What This Expertise Requires	Design Decision Points You Must Navigate
Professional Judgment in Learning Progression	Flexibility in pacing, credit, and assessment	Whether learning progression is governed by seat time and age-based cohorts or by demonstrated learning informed by educator judgment
Relational Expertise in Growth & Development	Time, continuity, and trust	Whether statutes allow advising, coaching, and relationship-centered work to count as instructional time
Sustained Responsibility for Learner Development	Stable adult–student assignment	Whether staffing and accountability policies recognize continuity as core instructional work
Contextualizing Learning in Community & Civic Life	Authorized partnerships and alternative contexts	Who is allowed to teach, mentor, and assess learning beyond traditional classrooms
Stewardship of Instructional Coherence & Culture	Distributed leadership authority	Whether leadership responsibility can be shared across roles or remains tied to positional authority
Specialized Professional Judgment in Complex Needs	Role differentiation and licensure flexibility	Which specialized roles are recognized, funded, and allowed to operate within learning teams

State Education Agency Leaders

Chiefs, deputy chiefs, licensure, accountability, and finance offices responsible for enactment

SEA leaders translate statute into lived reality. Through guidance, approvals, accountability frameworks, and funding interpretation, SEAs determine how policy is experienced by districts, schools, and educators.

How to use this table

This table is designed to support **interpretive and operational reflection**. Each decision point reflects areas where SEA guidance, program approval, accountability design, or funding interpretation meaningfully shape how educator expertise is enacted on the ground.

As you review the table, reflect on how current guidance, templates, approval processes, or monitoring practices reinforce—or unintentionally constrain—these forms of expertise. Consider where flexibility exists in statute but becomes narrow in implementation, and where coherence across offices could better support human-centered work.

Use this table to prompt internal conversation across divisions about how everyday decisions signal what expertise the system truly values.

Design Decision Points by Educator Expertise

Educator Expertise	What This Expertise Requires	Design Decision Points You Must Navigate
Professional Judgment in Learning Progression	Use of formative evidence	How mastery, progress, and flexibility are interpreted in guidance, approvals, and monitoring
Relational Expertise in Growth & Development	Protected collaboration and coaching time	Whether accountability emphasizes improvement or evaluation
Sustained Responsibility for Learner Development	Recognition of mentoring as core work	How student support roles are categorized, reported, and funded
Contextualizing Learning in Community & Civic Life	Approval of alternative pathways	How community-based learning is authorized and quality-assured
Stewardship of Instructional Coherence & Culture	Cross-office alignment	Whether SEA initiatives reinforce coherence or create competing signals
Specialized Professional Judgment in Complex Needs	Integrated supports	How guidance enables specialists to function within instructional teams

Local School Boards

Elected or appointed bodies approving budgets, contracts, and strategic priorities

Local school boards set policy direction, approve budgets, and establish conditions that determine whether redesigned educator roles are viable and sustainable.

How to use this table

This table is intended to help boards reflect on **governance-level design choices** that shape educator roles over time. Budget approvals, policy adoption, labor agreements, and strategic priorities all encode assumptions about how educator expertise should operate.

As you review the table, consider how board decisions affect continuity, time use, and role differentiation—even when those impacts are not explicit. Ask where local policy reinforces flexibility and coherence, and where it may unintentionally prioritize short-term efficiency over sustained human expertise.

The goal is not to manage implementation, but to clarify how governance decisions create—or limit—the conditions educators need to do their work well.

Design Decision Points by Educator Expertise

Educator Expertise	What This Expertise Requires	Design Decision Points You Must Navigate
Professional Judgment in Learning Progression	Flexible schedules and grouping	How pacing, assessment, and credit policies are set locally
Relational Expertise in Growth & Development	Time for feedback and reflection	Whether calendars and schedules prioritize coaching and advising
Sustained Responsibility for Learner Development	Stable relationships	How student assignment policies support continuity
Contextualizing Learning in Community & Civic Life	Local partnerships	Whether policy authorizes learning beyond school walls
Stewardship of Instructional Coherence & Culture	Shared leadership	How governance supports alignment rather than fragmentation
Specialized Professional Judgment in Complex Needs	Embedded expertise	Whether specialists are integrated or siloed

Local Education Agency Leaders

Superintendents, cabinet leaders, HR, academic, and operations teams

LEA leaders design and operate the systems that turn policy into daily practice. Your decisions determine whether educator expertise is operationalized or remains aspirational.

How to use this table

This table is meant to support **practical system design reflection**. Each row points to operational choices that LEA leaders navigate daily—scheduling, staffing, role design, accountability, and support structures.

As you review the table, consider how current systems distribute responsibility, authority, and time across roles. Reflect on where educator expertise is formally supported and where it depends on informal workarounds or individual effort.

Use the table as a cross-functional tool—particularly across HR, academics, and operations—to examine whether your systems align with the kinds of expertise you expect educators to exercise.

Design Decision Points by Educator Expertise

Educator Expertise	What This Expertise Requires	Design Decision Points You Must Navigate
Professional Judgment in Learning Progression	Flexible pacing and grouping	How learning progression is structured in daily schedules
Relational Expertise in Growth & Development	Time and role clarity	How roles prioritize coaching and feedback
Sustained Responsibility for Learner Development	Continuity across contexts	How students are assigned to adults over time
Contextualizing Learning in Community & Civic Life	Partnership infrastructure	How learning connects to community and workforce
Stewardship of Instructional Coherence & Culture	Shared leadership	How teams align goals and expectations
Specialized Professional Judgment in Complex Needs	Integrated roles	How specialists are embedded in learning environments

Funders

Philanthropy, grantmakers, pooled fund intermediaries

Funders shape which forms of educator expertise are tested, scaled, and sustained through investment decisions.

How to use this table

This table is designed to help funders reflect on **how investment design shapes educator expertise**. Funding timelines, reporting requirements, and program structures all influence whether expertise becomes durable infrastructure or remains temporary innovation.

As you review the table, consider how your funding decisions affect continuity, role stability, and professional judgment. Reflect on whether investments allow time for expertise to develop, or unintentionally incentivize churn and fragmentation.

The intent is to surface where funding choices amplify—or undermine—the human work systems they are trying to sustain.

Design Decision Points by Educator Expertise

Educator Expertise	What This Expertise Requires	Design Decision Points You Must Navigate
Professional Judgment in Learning Progression	Time and experimentation	Whether pilots allow educators to exercise judgment
Relational Expertise in Growth & Development	Long-term investment	Whether coaching models are funded beyond short cycles
Sustained Responsibility for Learner Development	Stability	Whether funding supports continuity rather than churn
Contextualizing Learning in Community & Civic Life	Partnership infrastructure	Whether community learning is resourced as core
Stewardship of Instructional Coherence & Culture	Systems thinking	Whether investments reinforce alignment
Specialized Professional Judgment in Complex Needs	Integrated funding	Whether supports are braided or siloed

Researchers & Intermediaries

Research organizations, TA providers, field-building organizations

Researchers and intermediaries shape what the field studies, values, and scales.

How to use this table

This table is intended as a **field-shaping reflection tool**. The ways research questions are framed, outcomes are measured, and evidence is translated into guidance influence what the field sees as legitimate expertise.

As you review the table, reflect on what your work makes visible—and what it leaves out. Consider how measurement choices, analytic frames, and dissemination strategies shape policy and practice decisions about educator roles.

Use this table to interrogate how evidence-building efforts can better capture the human expertise that supports learning over time, not just short-term outputs.

Design Decision Points by Educator Expertise

Educator Expertise	What This Expertise Requires	Design Decision Points You Must Navigate
Professional Judgment in Learning Progression	Measurement beyond test scores	What evidence captures judgment
Relational Expertise in Growth & Development	Developmental indicators	How trust and growth are studied
Sustained Responsibility for Learner Development	Longitudinal analysis	Whether continuity is examined over time
Contextualizing Learning in Community & Civic Life	Context-sensitive methods	How learning beyond school is valued
Stewardship of Instructional Coherence & Culture	System-level analysis	Whether coherence is treated as an outcome
Specialized Professional Judgment in Complex Needs	Ethical framing	How responsibility and care are accounted for