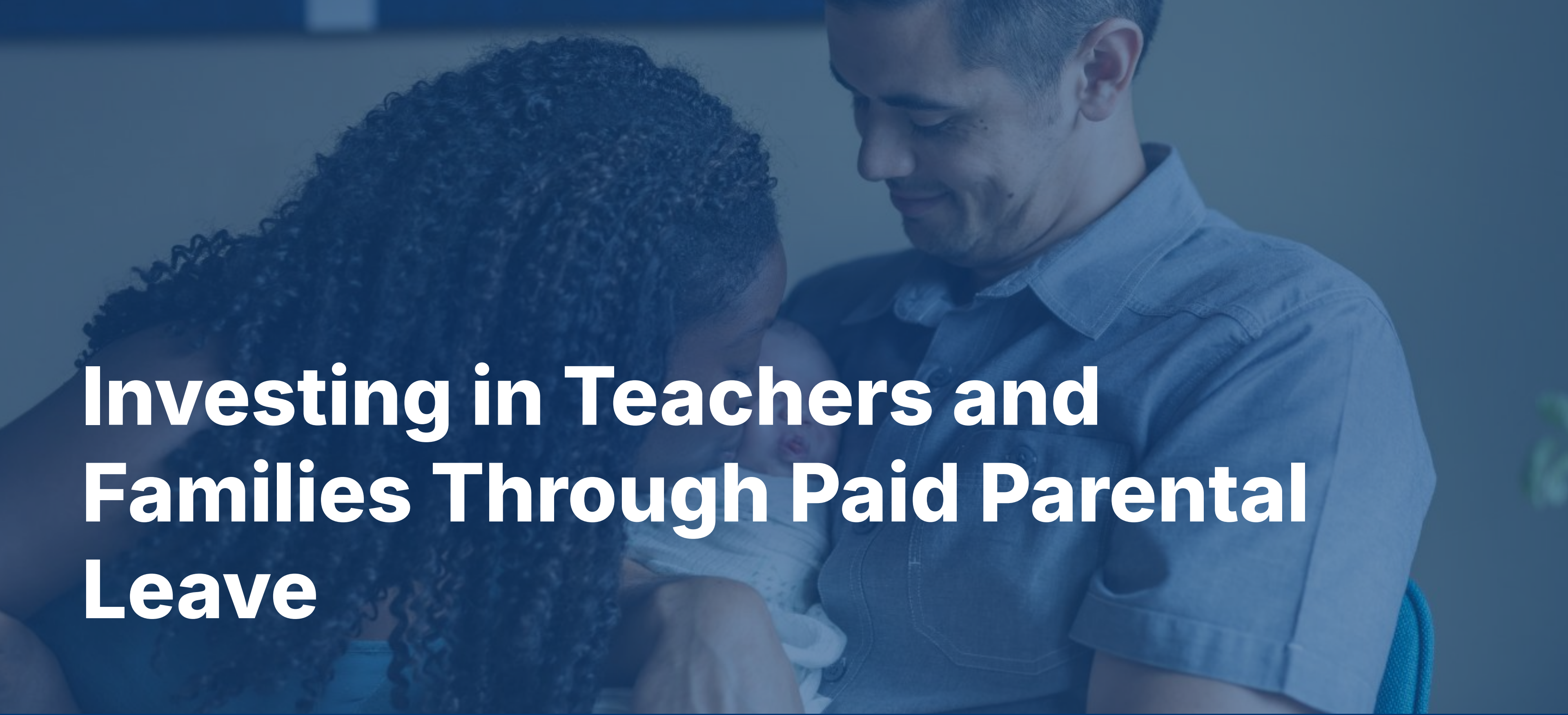


Investing in Teachers and Families Through Paid Parental Leave

New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee

July 2026

National Council on Teacher Quality

When states and school districts don’t offer paid parental leave, they are asking teachers to choose between their students and their own children.

The United States is the only high-income country without guaranteed paid leave for new parents[1]—leaving many teachers, nearly 80% of whom are women,[2] without the support they need to care for their families.

In most states, teachers are forced to hoard sick days or try to time their pregnancies around summer break just to avoid unpaid time away from their classrooms.

This lack of support drives many teachers to leave the profession—or never enter it in the first place.

15%

of those who leave teaching cite family/parenting

15% of teachers who leave the profession cite personal life reasons such as pregnancy, childbirth, and caring for family.[3]

1 in 3

teachers has access to paid parental leave

This rate is lower than that of many other working adults.[4]

<1/2

of teachers consider their paid parental leave adequate

Even when teachers do have access to paid parental leave, fewer than half perceive the benefit to be adequate.

$25k

for large districts to replace one teacher

When teachers leave the classroom, districts pay the price. Large districts spend roughly $25,000 to replace a single teacher.[5]

Paid parental leave is a proven investment in healthier families and contributes to a stronger, more stable workforce.

1. Paid leave builds strong families.

Access to leave is associated with reduced infant mortality,[6] decreases in postpartum depression, and improved outcomes for mothers.[7] When fathers have paid leave, they are more engaged in parenting and more likely to build stable families.[8]

2. Paid leave stabilizes the workforce.

Paid family leave significantly boosts the likelihood that workers return to their jobs.[9]

3. Paid leave attracts teachers.

Over a third of educators say stronger benefits, like increased family leave, would draw more talented, diverse candidates into the profession.[10]

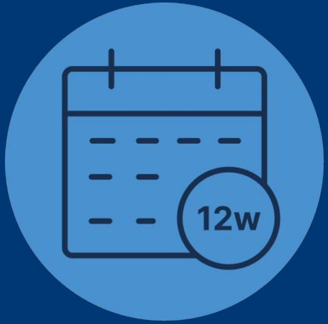
When teachers have dedicated time to devote to the newest members of their family, they can return to the classroom ready to **focus on what matters: improving student outcomes.**

Three policy levers to strengthen and stabilize the teacher workforce

1 Require districts to offer at least 12 weeks of paid parental leave for teachers, beyond sick days.

2 Guarantee teachers on paid parental leave receive their full salary for the entire duration of their leave.

3 Extend leave eligibility and benefits to all teachers welcoming a child–including fathers, adoptive parents, and other types of non-birthing parents.



Policy Lever 1:

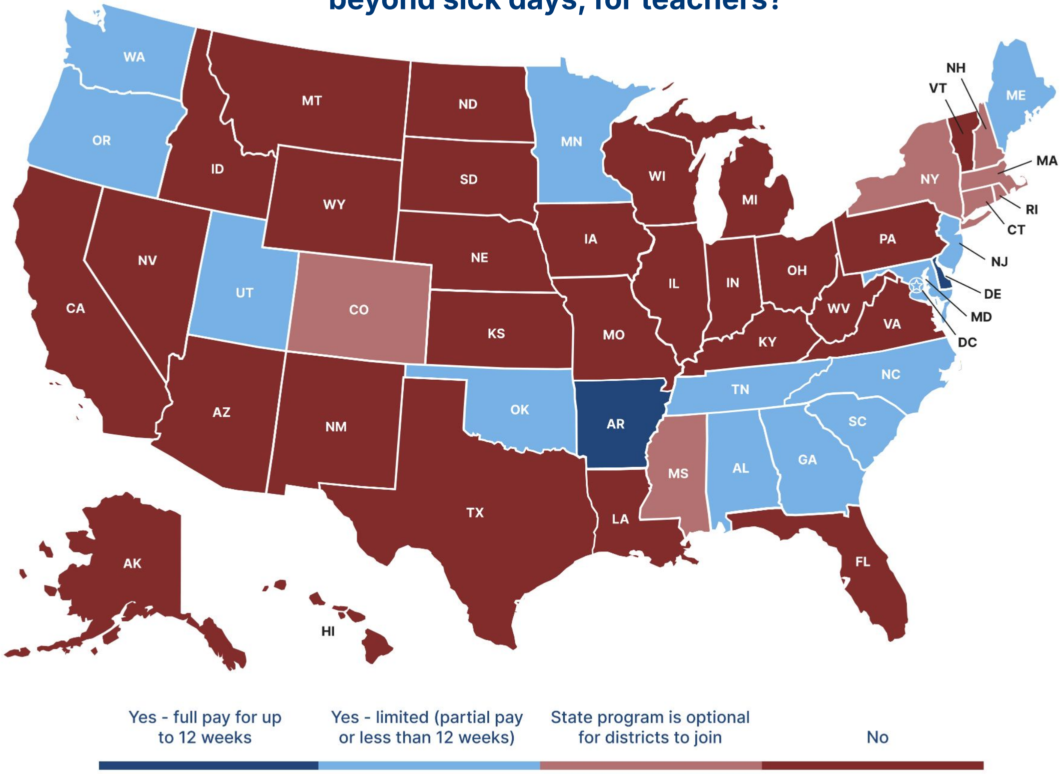
Require districts to offer at least 12 weeks of paid parental leave for teachers, beyond sick days.

Only sixteen states require districts to offer paid parental leave, beyond sick days, for teachers.

Among states that require paid parental leave, just two–**Arkansas and Delaware**–offer full pay up to 12 weeks.

An additional seven states offer paid parental leave programs that are optional for districts to join.

Do states require districts to offer paid parental leave, beyond sick days, for teachers?



Why 12 weeks?

The American Public Health Association, the Society of Maternal-Fetal Medicine, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Pediatric Policy Council recommend a **minimum of 12 weeks** of paid parental leave.[11]

Parents and babies benefit from spending time together postpartum. In fact, returning to work within the first 12 weeks after childbirth is linked to lower rates of breastfeeding and immunizations, as well as associated with more behavior problems in early childhood.[12] Research also suggests that returning to work too soon is associated with lower reading and math test scores in children.[13]

State Spotlight: Arkansas

1 **Arkansas introduced paid maternity leave in 2023 through the LEARNS Act.**

2 **Early implementation used an optional cost-sharing model, but limited district participation prompted lawmakers to strengthen the program.**

3 **In 2025, Act 904 transformed the benefit into a fully state-funded program covering long-term substitute costs.**

Learn more about Arkansas' approach

"

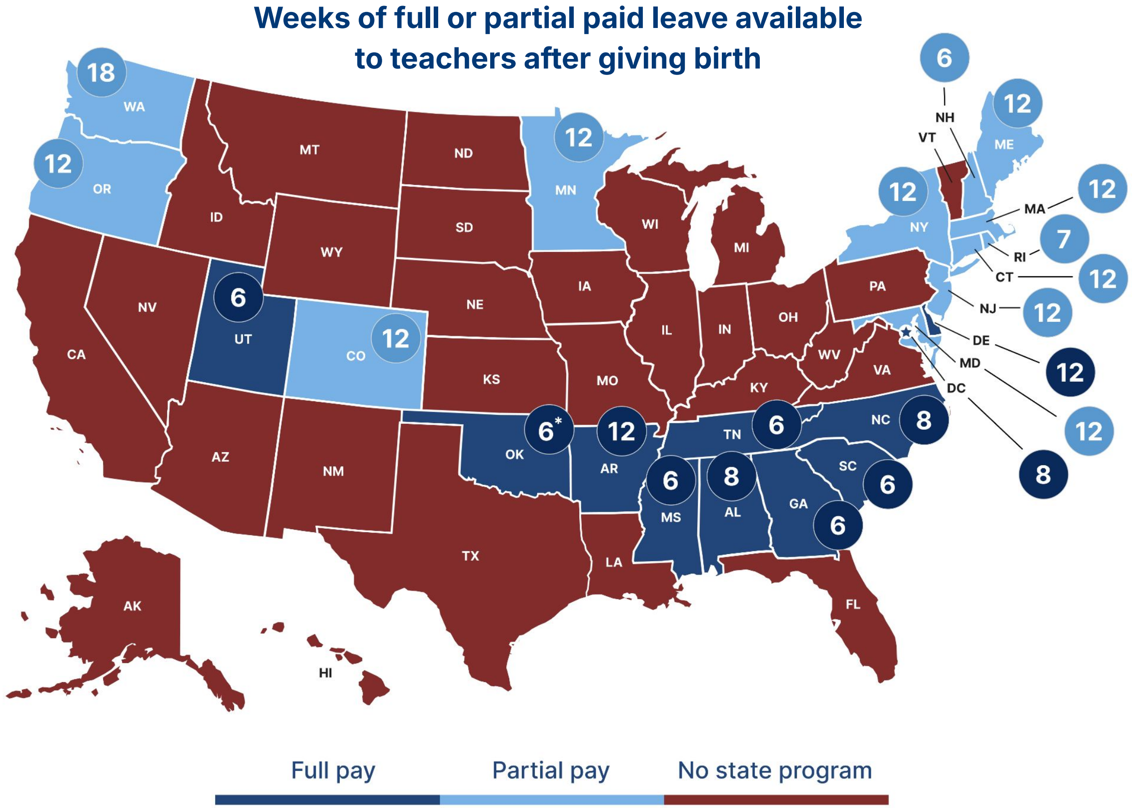
Paid parental leave was one of the good things that came out of the LEARNS Act, and I saw an opportunity to take something that worked and make it even better. It wasn't about partisanship—it was about building on a good idea and making it work for everyone.

State Representative Andrew Collins
Arkansas

Policy Lever 2:

Guarantee teachers on paid parental leave receive their full salary for the entire duration of their leave.

The length of paid leave available to teachers after giving birth varies greatly—and is not always fully compensated.

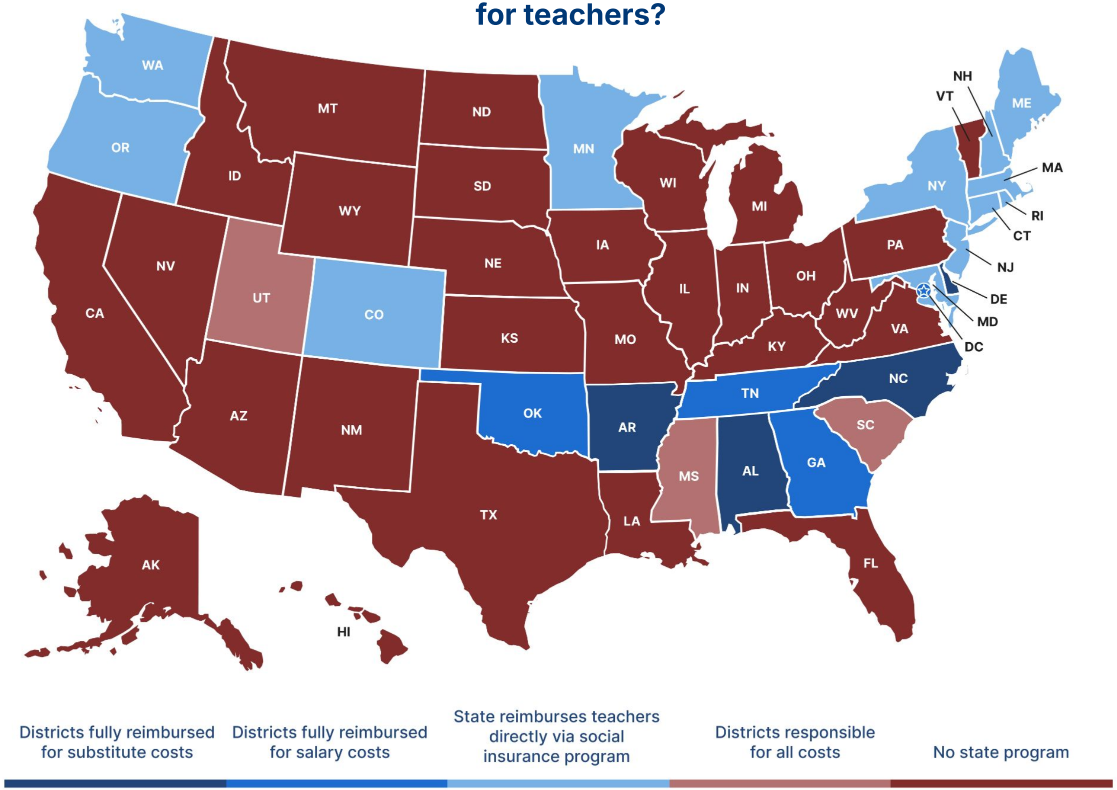


*In Oklahoma, a teacher may request an additional 20 contract days with partial pay after exhausting all maternity and sick leave.

States fund paid parental leave in several ways, including leaving costs to districts, reimbursing salaries or substitute costs, or creating statewide social insurance programs.

Both states that provide full pay for 12 weeks—Delaware and Arkansas—cover the full cost of long-term substitutes while teachers are on leave. This support allows districts to pay teachers their full salary during leave without creating a significant burden for the state.

How do states financially support parental leave for teachers?



Twelve states use statewide social insurance programs that aren't specific to teachers. These programs provide direct payments to eligible employees and are funded in various ways.

Select examples include:

	Social insurance program description
Colorado	Eligible employees receive up to 90% of the state average weekly wage. Funded via .45% employer contribution and .45% employee contribution
Connecticut	Eligible employees receive up to 95% of wages depending on income, with benefits capped at 60 times the state minimum wage. Funded via .5% deduction from employee pay.
New Jersey	Eligible employees receive up to 85% of average weekly wage. Funded 100% by employee premiums.
New York	Eligible employees receive 67% of wage, up to a cap. Funded 100% by employee premiums.

State Spotlight: Delaware

1. In 2018, Delaware became the first state to guarantee 12 weeks of fully paid parental leave for state employees–including teachers.
2. Advocates–including the state's teachers' union–built a strong, bipartisan coalition to secure inclusion of teachers in the program.
3. The state fully reimburses districts for the cost of substitutes, helping ensure the benefit is both affordable for schools and accessible to teachers.

Learn more about Delaware's approach

"From the moment I was in the hospital bed, it was such a relief knowing my paycheck would continue without interruption. I didn't have to think about money at all—I could just focus entirely on my baby and on healing."

Rebecca, Fourth Grade Teacher
Delaware

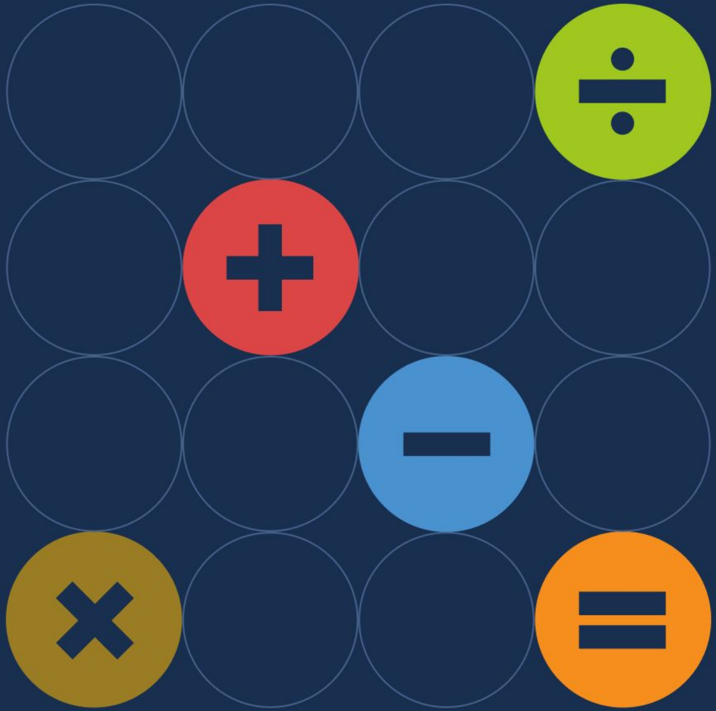
NCTQ Paid Parental Leave Calculator

Paid parental leave is affordable. States have several funding strategies available to ensure that teachers receive their full salary during parental leave.

One effective approach is for the state to cover the cost of a long-term substitute for the district, while the district continues to pay the teacher's salary.

Use NCTQ's Paid Parental Leave Calculator to see just how affordable fully paid leave could be in your state:

View Calculator



Policy Lever 3:

Extend leave eligibility and benefits to all teachers welcoming a child—including fathers, adoptive parents, and other types of non-birthing parents.

Despite evidence that paid leave supports all parents, seven states with paid leave programs provide reduced benefits for non-birthing parents—or none at all.

Weeks of full or partial paid leave available to teachers after welcoming a child

	Alabama	Arkansas	North Carolina	Oklahoma	South Carolina	Utah	Washington
Birthing parent	8 weeks	12 weeks	Up to 8 weeks	6 weeks	6 weeks	6 weeks	Up to 18 weeks
Other parent	2 weeks non birthing parent Up to 8 weeks adoptive (only 2 weeks for one parent if both are eligible)	12 weeks foster parent, adoptive parent (no non-birthing parent)	Up to 4 weeks non-birthing, adoptive, foster parent	N/A	2 weeks non-birthing, foster, adoptive parent	3 weeks non-birthing, foster, adoptive parent	12 weeks non-birthing, foster, adoptive parent

Operationalizing Policy for New Mexico

New Mexico

How many teachers and/or school employees should we estimate taking leave?	Estimate 3% of school employees taking leave
Should we include other education professionals?	Arkansas and Delaware both cover teachers and other education professionals or classified staff
Do we only reimburse substitutes for teachers?	Delaware only reimburses substitutes for teachers. (*Arkansas unknown*).
What should be the rate for substitute reimbursement?	A common rate among districts
What should we estimate for growth?	Delaware budgeted a 1% growth in substitute **funds** for the next year.

What about other education professionals?

Delaware does support all school employees with paid parental leave, but only reimburses substitutes for teachers.

What does the data say?

520 school district employees took paid parental leave

320 were reimbursed for a substitute

200 employees or 38% of all school district employees who took the leave, districts were not reimbursed.

What do the districts say?

"It's particularly challenging for paraprofessionals and specialists such as speech language pathologists, etc. to find substitutes and to cover those costs."

How should we reimburse for substitutes?

Section 360. Section 1 of this Act includes an appropriation for Substitute Reimbursement in the Department of Education, District and Charter Operations (95-02-02). Included in said appropriation is funding for paid family leave. For local education agencies, funding available for this program shall be limited to **a maximum value of the daily rate of a Class A substitute as specified in 14 Del. C. § 1326 and current year other employment costs.**

Local education agencies shall submit the request for contractual substitute reimbursement to the Department of Education and funding shall be transferred to the local education agencies for eligible costs.

The Department of Education shall submit a report to the Department of Human Resources detailing the number of persons using paid family leave no later than August 15 following each school year.

Another approach - Virginia

Virginia doesn’t reimburse for substitutes, but rather pays out a weekly wage to all workers.

Workers will receive 80 percent of their average weekly wages, up to a cap. The maximum weekly benefit will be equal to the Virginia state average weekly wage and adjusted each year. In 2026, the Virginia state average weekly wage is $1,507.01.

Substitute approach most likely is less costly to the state.

Additional Considerations for State Leaders

✔ **Require an annual report on the impact of paid parental leave.**
Collecting data on teacher participation in paid parental leave programs helps states assess the impact of these policies and plan budgets accordingly. Delaware, for example, produces an annual report detailing how many teachers—by gender, race, and district—take advantage of paid parental leave.

✔ **Coordinate across state agencies to develop paid parental leave programs that best meet the unique needs of education professionals.**
Paid parental leave programs are often administered by state labor or workforce departments, but teachers face unique circumstances that make implementation more complex. Unlike other state employees, districts must cover the cost of substitutes during a teacher's absence, creating an additional financial burden. Close coordination between state education agencies and labor departments is essential to developing sustainable funding solutions, allocating resources effectively, and ensuring teachers can access leave without straining district budgets.

✔ **Develop or update state paid parental leave programs to allow teachers to take leave flexibly to better meet modern childcare needs.**
It is important to design parental leave programs that offer parents flexibility in when they take leave—particularly to help reduce long-term childcare costs, which accounted for roughly 9% to 16% of families' median income for just one child as of 2022.[16] Allowing two-parent households to stagger their time off enables families to delay childcare costs, reducing financial strain and saving money.

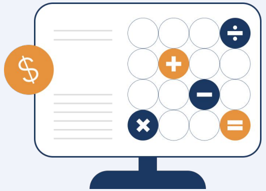
Companion Resources

State Specific Recommendations

Learn more about paid parental leave policies in your state

View Recommendations

Paid Parental Leave Calculator



Discover how affordable paid parental leave could be in your state.

Learn More

Research Summary

Explore the research behind these recommendations.

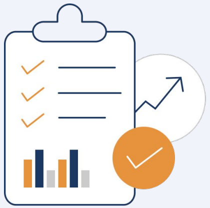
View Research

Model Policy Language

Model policy language to support introducing paid parental leave policies in your state.

View Model Language

Fact Sheet



Use this fact sheet to help build the case for expanding paid parental leave.

View Fact Sheet

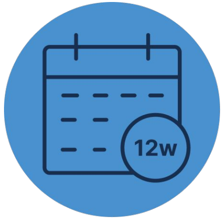
Summary and Next Steps

- **Paid parental leave for teachers is good for students, families, and the economy.**
- Support for paid parental leave is overwhelming—**over 80%** of national survey respondents said they favor such a policy.[15]
- At a time when so many issues divide us, paid parental leave stands out as a rare area of bipartisan agreement—making it a **prime opportunity for meaningful advocacy.**
- While states are starting to make progress on paid parental leave policies for teachers, **significant gaps remain** in how many states offer it, how much compensation they provide, and whether teachers receive the full 12 weeks they deserve.

- **Recommended key points of advocacy:**
    - Length of time off: **Minimum of 12 weeks**
    - Districts compensate: **Full teacher salary**
    - States fund: **Cost of long-term substitutes**

Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendations



Policy Lever 1:

Require districts to offer at least 12 weeks of paid parental leave, beyond sick days, for teachers.

Providing teachers with at least 12 weeks of paid parental leave, beyond sick days, would deliver clear benefits for teachers, families, and schools. Paid leave is consistently linked to improved maternal health, reduced infant mortality, and stronger family stability— especially when both parents can take time to bond with their child.

These programs also make sound economic sense: employees with access to paid parental leave are far more likely to return to work, reducing costly turnover for districts. Establishing a uniform, statewide requirement of at least 12 weeks of paid parental leave aligns state policy with public health recommendations and will likely help stabilize the teacher workforce while promoting healthier, more equitable outcomes for families.

Policy Recommendations

Policy Lever 2:

Guarantee teachers on paid parental leave receive their full salary for the entire duration of their leave.

Ensuring teachers receive their full salary during paid parental leave is essential to making these programs equitable, accessible, and effective. When leave is only partially paid, teachers, particularly those early in their careers or in single-income households, are more likely to shorten or forgo their leave entirely due to financial strain. Full salary coverage not only supports teachers' financial stability but also helps close racial wage gaps.

States should consider their unique political and fiscal contexts to identify sustainable mechanisms for funding paid parental leave while ensuring teachers can care for their families without financial hardship. One effective and sustainable model is for states to reimburse districts for the cost of substitutes, allowing them to maintain business-as-usual expenses. This ensures teachers can take fully paid leave while minimizing the overall cost to the state.

Policy Recommendations

Policy Lever 3:

Extend leave eligibility and benefits to all teachers welcoming a child–including non-birthing parents, adoptive parents, and foster parents.

Extending paid parental leave to non-birthing partners such as fathers or same-sex partners, as well as adoptive and foster parents, is essential to promoting equity, supporting all families, and strengthening the teacher workforce. Research shows that when both parents have access to paid leave, families grow stronger, children are healthier, and women experience greater career outcomes. Ensuring equal leave duration and benefits for all parents recognizes the shared responsibilities of caregiving, supports early caregiver-child bonding, and helps retain talented educators in the classroom.

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