

All Quiet on the Preparation Front

In our 2011 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) documented unprecedented efforts across states to adopt policies for measuring teacher effectiveness. The focus on using meaningful evaluations to identify effective teachers and provide actionable feedback to build a better teacher workforce is commendable. But it isn't nearly a sufficient strategy for improving teacher quality.

In this paper, drawn from NCTQ's 2011 *Yearbook* analysis of teacher preparation and licensing policies across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, we address the following question: *In a policy environment so focused on teacher effectiveness, along with the new demands of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), how well are prospective teachers being prepared with the skills, knowledge and abilities they need to succeed in the classroom?*

Key Yearbook Findings on Teacher Preparation

Our findings suggest that, with few exceptions, states are failing to establish the strong foundation for teacher preparation and licensure necessary to get teacher effectiveness right from the start. Across the nation, about 240,000 new teachers are hired each year, with almost 90 percent attending teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education. What these programs do to train future teachers ought to matter a great deal to classroom effectiveness, and the standards states set to allow teaching candidates to enter the profession should be indicative of how effective they really expect teachers to be.

Consider the following 2011 *Yearbook* findings:

- **In many states, teachers are expected to meet no higher than middle school academic expectations to receive teaching licenses.** Fewer than half (21) of the states require that basic skills tests be used as a screening mechanism for teacher preparation programs. Almost as many states (20) use these basic tests, which typically assess no higher than middle school-level skills, as the standard for conferring teaching licenses upon completion of a teacher preparation program. Another 10 states do not require any teachers to pass any basic skills assessments at all.
- **The tests used for admission to teacher preparation programs by most states are inherently flawed.** In addition to their low level of rigor, the tests used by nearly all states are normed only to the prospective teacher population rather than to the general college-bound population – which sets a lower expectation for students entering teacher preparation programs. At present, Texas is the only state that uses a generally normed test of academic proficiency for admission to its teacher preparation programs.

Do states require high quality teacher preparation?

2011 Grade

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Florida | B- |
| Tennessee | B- |
| Indiana | C+ |
| Massachusetts | C+ |
| Texas | C+ |
| Alabama | C |
| Arkansas | C |
| Georgia | C |
| Louisiana | C |
| Minnesota | C |
| Mississippi | C |
| Oklahoma | C |
| Pennsylvania | C |
| Connecticut | C- |
| Kentucky | C- |
| South Carolina | C- |
| Virginia | C- |
| West Virginia | C- |
| Kansas | D+ |
| Maryland | D+ |
| Michigan | D+ |
| Missouri | D+ |
| New Jersey | D+ |
| New Mexico | D+ |
| New York | D+ |
| Ohio | D+ |
| Rhode Island | D+ |
| Vermont | D+ |
| Washington | D+ |
| California | D |
| District of Columbia | D |
| Hawaii | D |
| Idaho | D |
| Illinois | D |
| Iowa | D |
| Maine | D |
| New Hampshire | D |
| North Dakota | D |
| South Dakota | D |
| Utah | D |
| Wisconsin | D |
| Arizona | D- |
| Colorado | D- |
| Delaware | D- |
| Nebraska | D- |
| Nevada | D- |
| North Carolina | D- |
| Oregon | D- |
| Alaska | F |
| Montana | F |
| Wyoming | F |
| Average State Grade | D |

■ **Very few states expect elementary teachers to have studied an academic subject outside of education.** Only seven states – Colorado, Indiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Oklahoma – expect elementary teachers to complete a major, minor or concentration in an actual academic content area (not just study education) as part of their preparation for teaching.

■ **Most states neither require nor assess teacher candidates' knowledge of reading and only one adequately tests elementary teachers in math.** Teaching children to read is among an elementary teacher's most important responsibilities, yet the majority of states (32) have no requirements for assessing teacher proficiency in effective reading instruction. And only one state, Massachusetts, adequately tests new elementary teachers' knowledge of mathematics.

■ **Even among states that require specific subject matter tests for elementary teacher licensing, the passing scores are extremely low and fail to ensure across the board knowledge of core subjects.** States often verify only that teachers meet an overall passing score, allowing teachers with an extreme weakness in a particular subject to pass if he or she can compensate in other areas. To make matters worse, the passing scores set by states for teacher licensing tests are, in almost every case, too low. Every state except Massachusetts (for which NCTQ has data) sets the passing score for elementary teacher licensing tests below the average score for all test takers (50th percentile), and most states set passing rates at an exceedingly low 16th percentile or lower – essentially offering a free pass to teach, at least with regard to content knowledge.

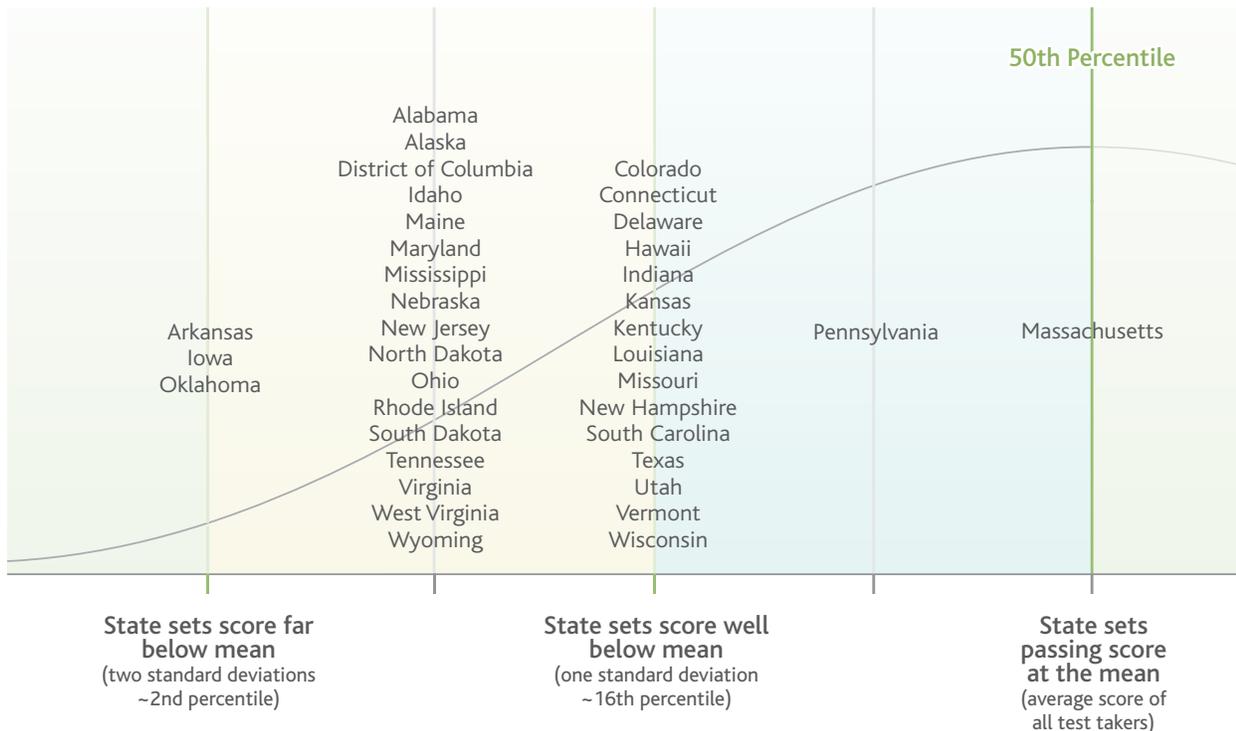
- **A number of states treat teaching in middle/junior high grades the same as teaching early elementary grades.** Sixteen states still offer a generalist K-8 license and six more offer it under some circumstances. Individuals with this license are fully certified to teach grades 7 and 8, although their preparation is identical to that of a teacher certified to teach grades 1 and 2. By offering such licenses, states suggest that the content and pedagogy needed to teach mathematics or science to eighth graders is no different from what is required to teach six to eight year olds these subjects.

- **Most states fail to require all teachers at the secondary level to demonstrate content knowledge in each and every specific subject they are licensed to teach.** In the whole United States, just two – Indiana and Tennessee – require, without any significant loopholes, that all secondary teachers pass a content test in every subject area they want to be licensed to teach. Unfortunately, many of these loopholes are in the critical areas of secondary science.

- **Most states set an exceedingly low bar for special education teachers.** If we use the expectations set for special education teachers in the U.S. as a measure of our expectations for educating students with disabilities, it appears that we don't expect very much. Only 17 states require elementary special education candidates to demonstrate content knowledge on a subject-matter test – just like what would be expected of any other elementary school teacher. Amazingly, 35 states allow special education teachers to earn a generic license to teach special education students in any grade, K-12, and this broad license is the only license offered in 19 of those states.

- **Very few states put any expectations on teacher preparation programs regarding the quality and effectiveness of the teachers those programs deliver.** Only six states – Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee and Texas – have policy that includes the use of student achievement data to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the effectiveness of the teachers they graduate.

Where do states set the passing score on elementary content licensure tests?¹



¹ From 2011 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* and based on the most recent technical data that could be obtained at that time; data not available for Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon and Washington. Montana and Nebraska do not require a content test. Colorado score is for Praxis II, not PLACE. Indiana, Maryland, Nevada, South Carolina and Utah now require new Praxis tests for which the technical data are not yet available; analysis is based on previously required test.

State Policies that Support the Delivery of Well-Prepared Teachers

| | State requires a test of academic proficiency that is normed to the general college-going population | State requires a basic skills test of teacher candidates prior to admission to preparation program | State measures new teachers' knowledge of the science of reading | State adequately measures new elementary teachers' knowledge of mathematics | State does not allow K-8 teaching licenses |
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| TOTAL | 1 | 21 | 9 | 1 | 29 |

| State requires all secondary teachers to pass a content test in every subject area they will be licensed to teach | State requires the elements of a high-quality student teaching experience | State does not allow generic K-12 special education certification | State connects student achievement data to teacher preparation programs | State sets minimum standards for teacher preparation program performance | |
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Teacher Preparation Policy Checklist for States

1. Raise admission standards.

- ✓ Require teacher candidates to pass a test of academic proficiency that assesses reading, writing and mathematics skills as a criterion for admission to teacher preparation programs.
- ✓ Require preparation programs to use a common test normed to the general college-bound population.

2. Align teacher preparation with Common Core State Standards.

- ✓ Ensure that coursework and subject-matter testing for elementary teacher candidates are well aligned with standards.
- ✓ Ensure that teacher preparation programs prepare elementary teaching candidates in the science of reading instruction and require a rigorous assessment of reading instruction.
- ✓ Require teacher preparation programs to provide mathematics content specifically geared to the needs of elementary teachers.

3. Improve clinical preparation.

- ✓ Ensure that cooperating teachers have demonstrated evidence of effectiveness as measured by student learning.
- ✓ Require summative clinical experience for all prospective teachers that includes at least 10 weeks student teaching.

4. Raise licensing standards.

- ✓ Eliminate K-8 generalist licenses.
- ✓ Require subject-matter testing for middle school teacher candidates.
- ✓ Require subject-matter testing for secondary teacher candidates.
- ✓ Require middle school and secondary science teachers to pass a test of content knowledge that ensures sufficient knowledge of science.

5. Don't lower the bar for special education teachers.

- ✓ Do away with K-12 special education teacher licenses.
- ✓ Require special education teachers to pass a subject matter test for licensure that is no less rigorous than what is required of general education candidates.

6. Hold teacher preparation programs accountable.

- ✓ Collect data that connect student achievement gains to teacher preparation programs.
- ✓ Gather other meaningful data that reflect program performance.
- ✓ Establish the minimum standard of performance for each category of data.

NCTQ Recommendations for States on Teacher Preparation and Licensing

NCTQ's National Review of Teacher Preparation Programs

Effective teachers make a fundamental difference in the lives of our nation's students. Yet for decades little attention has been paid to how teachers are prepared to succeed in the classroom. It's time to focus on building better teachers right from the start. That is why NCTQ, in partnership with U.S. News & World Report, is undertaking a groundbreaking review of the nation's teacher preparation programs. Our findings are due out in early 2013.

For more information on this project, including our review standards and methodology, see:
<http://www.nctq.org/p/edschools/home.jsp>

What these findings suggest is that there are good reasons to believe that many of our nation's teachers—who fulfill all of the obligations of teacher preparation and successfully pass all requirements for teacher certification and licensing—are not student-ready before they enter the classroom. While it is the case that not everything that makes a great teacher can be taught, NCTQ believes that states can establish a stronger policy framework for preparing talented and motivated candidates to be great teachers.

NCTQ recommends a straightforward recipe for improving teacher effectiveness from the start:

1. States need to raise standards for admission to teacher preparation programs. If we expect teachers to be academically capable, we need to seek out such candidates.

- **Require teacher candidates to pass a test of academic proficiency that assesses reading, writing and mathematics skills as a criterion for admission to teacher preparation programs.** Teacher preparation programs that do not screen candidates end up investing considerable resources in individuals who may not be able to successfully complete the program and pass licensing tests.
- **Require preparation programs to use a common test normed to the general college-bound population.** To improve the selectivity of teacher candidates—a common characteristic in countries whose students consistently outperform ours in international comparisons—states should require an assessment that demonstrates that candidates are academically competitive with all peers, regardless of their intended profession.

2. If states expect students to meet the expectations of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) they need to get teacher preparation programs aligned with the expectations of the standards, including by providing rigorous training in reading instruction and mathematics.

- **Ensure that coursework and subject-matter testing for elementary teacher candidates is well aligned with standards.** If effective teachers are expected to teach students to the CCSS, states must ensure that teaching candidates will complete coursework relevant to the common topics in elementary grades and demonstrate their mastery of the knowledge and skills on an assessment that adequately measures each subject.
- **Ensure that teacher preparation programs prepare elementary teaching candidates in the science of reading instruction and require a rigorous assessment of reading instruction.** States should ensure that teacher preparation programs adequately prepare elementary teacher candidates in the science of reading by requiring that these programs train candidates in the five instructional components of scientifically based reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Elementary teachers who do not possess the minimum knowledge in this area should not be eligible for licensure.
- **Require teacher preparation programs to provide mathematics content specifically geared to the needs of elementary teachers.** States should require teacher preparation programs to provide mathematics content specifically geared to the needs of elementary teachers. This includes specific coursework in foundations, algebra and geometry, with some statistics. States also need to require teacher candidates to pass a rigorous mathematics assessment. Teacher candidates who lack minimum mathematics knowledge should not be eligible for licensure.

3. If states are going to more rigorously assess teacher performance and expect effectiveness in the classroom, they need to require teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to be effective in the classroom.

- **Ensure that cooperating teachers have demonstrated evidence of effectiveness as measured by student learning.** In addition to the ability to mentor an adult, cooperating teachers should also be carefully screened for their capacity to further student achievement.
- **Require a summative student teaching experience of at least 10 weeks for all prospective teachers.** Student teaching should be a full-time commitment, as requiring coursework and student teaching simultaneously does a disservice to both. Alignment with a school calendar for at least 10 weeks ensures both adequate classroom experience and exposure to a variety of ancillary professional activities.

4. States need to raise their licensing standards. If they want more effective teachers, states need to expect strong content knowledge as a minimum.

- **Eliminate K-8 generalist licenses.** States should not allow middle school teachers to teach on a generalist license that does not differentiate between the preparation of middle school teachers and that of elementary teachers.
- **Require subject-matter testing for middle school teacher candidates.** States should require subject-matter testing for all middle school teacher candidates in every core academic area they intend to teach as a condition of initial licensure.
- **Require subject-matter testing for secondary teacher candidates.** As a condition of licensure, states should require its secondary teacher candidates to pass a content test in each subject area they plan to teach to ensure that they possess adequate subject-matter knowledge and are prepared to teach grade-level content. States should also require passing scores on subject-specific content tests, regardless of other coursework or degree

requirements, for teachers who are licensed in core secondary subjects and wish to add another subject area, or endorsement, to their licenses. While coursework may be generally indicative of background in a particular subject area, only a subject-matter test ensures that teachers know the specific content they will need to teach. For example, in many states, secondary teachers take science assessments that combine subject areas without reporting separate scores for each subject area. Therefore, candidates could answer many—perhaps all—chemistry questions, for example, incorrectly, yet still be licensed to teach chemistry to high school students.

- **At the middle school level, require middle school science teachers to pass a test of content knowledge that ensures sufficient knowledge of science, as a condition of initial licensure.** A general subject-matter test that combines literature/language arts, mathematics, history/social studies and science—without reporting separate scores for each subject area—does not ensure that middle school science teachers possess adequate knowledge of science, as it may be possible to answer many—perhaps all—science questions incorrectly and still pass the test.

5. It defies logic to set lower standards for teachers assigned to students with special needs. States must expect special education teachers to meet at least the same standards set for other teachers.

- **Do away with K-12 special education teacher licenses.** While there may be an argument to be made for such a broad umbrella for teachers of low-incidence special education students, such as those with severe cognitive disabilities, it is deeply problematic prospect for high-incidence special education students, who are expected to learn grade-level content. And because the overwhelming majority of special education students are in the high-incidence category, this type of certification is unacceptable.
- **Require special education teachers to pass a subject matter test for licensure that is no less rigorous than what is required of general education candidates.**

6. States can't implement the CCSS and raise their expectations for teacher effectiveness without higher education institutions playing a critical role. As a result, states must hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the effectiveness of the teachers they produce.

- **Collect data that connect student achievement gains to teacher preparation programs.** To ensure that programs are producing effective teachers, states should consider academic achievement gains of students taught by the programs' graduates, averaged over the first three years of teaching.
- **Gather other meaningful data that reflect program performance.** In addition to knowing whether programs are producing effective teachers, other objective, meaningful data can also indicate whether programs are appropriately screening applicants and whether they are delivering essential academic and professional knowledge. States should gather data such as the following: average raw scores of graduates on licensing tests, including basic skills, subject matter and professional knowledge tests; satisfaction ratings by school principals and teacher supervisors of programs' student teachers, using a standardized form to permit program comparison; evaluation results from the first and/or second year of teaching; and five-year retention rates of graduates in the teaching profession.
- **Establish the minimum standard of performance for each category of data.** Programs should be held accountable for meeting these standards, with articulated consequences for failing to do so, including loss of program approval after appropriate due process. To inform the public with meaningful, readily understandable indicators of how well programs are doing, states should present all the data it collects on individual teacher preparation programs.

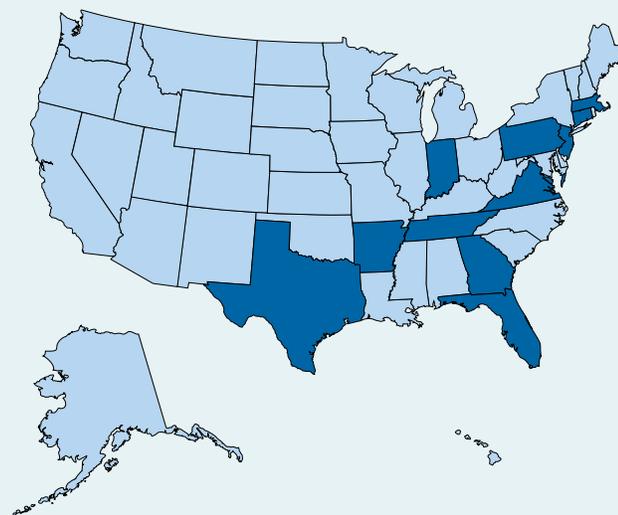
There are some states that have addressed pieces of this policy framework.

Indiana, for example, made important strides in 2011 by closing loopholes and ensuring that all teachers demonstrate knowledge in every subject matter they teach – without exceptions. **Massachusetts**, with its exemplary tests for teacher licensing in reading and mathematics, goes further than any other state to ensure that elementary-level teachers master content before entering the classroom. When it comes to accountability for teacher preparation, **Florida** stands out in its efforts to measure the performance of teacher preparation programs. Florida requires that teacher preparation programs collect data that include completers’ “impact on student learning” and applies transparent, measurable criteria for conferring program approval. Teacher preparation programs in Florida must also continue to offer support to their graduates. Programs are expected to provide additional coursework, free of charge, if employing districts consider new teachers to be in need of remediation.

Conclusion

The demand for highly qualified teachers is being replaced by a call for highly effective teachers. The change is significant because it is no longer enough for teachers to show their credentials to demonstrate that they are student ready. But the onus shouldn’t be on the teacher alone. Many teachers will successfully complete preparation programs and pass all licensing exams only to find that, when they are evaluated in the classroom, they aren’t really effective at what they do. The responsibility for changing that reality lies with state policymakers and teacher preparation programs. Building a more effective teacher workforce demands that states and teacher preparation programs take responsibility for teacher effectiveness and reconsider the quality of the standards they set and the preparation they deliver. The landscape is changing, but much work is left to be done by states to design and adopt policies to consistently promote and ensure teacher effectiveness.

| Yearbook Goals for Teacher Preparation | States with Best Practices |
|---|--|
| Admission into Preparation Programs | Texas |
| Elementary Teacher Preparation in Reading Instruction | Connecticut Massachusetts Virginia |
| Elementary Teacher Preparation in Mathematics | Massachusetts |
| Middle School Teacher Preparation | Arkansas Georgia Pennsylvania |
| Secondary Teacher Preparation | Indiana Tennessee |
| Secondary Teacher Preparation in Science | New Jersey |
| Secondary Teacher Preparation in Social Studies | Indiana |
| Teacher Preparation Program Accountability | Florida |





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