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FEW STATES VERIFY THAT FUTURE TEACHERS KNOW HOW TO TEACH ALL CHILDREN TO READ

New data on state policies governing educator preparation and licensure reports stagnation and even retreat on basic teacher quality safeguards

Washington, D.C. — The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) released [new data and analysis today examining recent trends in states' policies governing the preparation and licensure of new public school teachers](#). Among the top findings is that only 11 states currently verify that all teacher candidates planning to teach either elementary or special education have learned the most effective methods for teaching children how to read—arguably the most important skill these teachers need.

Low literacy rates in the United States were a problem before the pandemic, with annual measures reporting that nearly one million 4th grade students are barely able to read, if at all. Instructional loss due to the pandemic is likely to raise this number substantially, elevating the need for more teachers to have expertise in reading instruction.

“As the regulating authority over teacher preparation, states have two important obligations: first, holding their educator preparation programs accountable for imparting reading methods grounded in science; and second, verifying that every teacher candidate has acquired that knowledge before stepping into the classroom,” said Kate Walsh, NCTQ President. “We’re about to face a tsunami, with our backs turned the wrong way.”

While most states (32) have regulations stating that educator preparation programs must address the components of effective reading instruction, these regulations tend to be poorly enforced by states. As NCTQ has [surfaced in earlier studies](#), nearly half of teacher preparation programs still do not require aspiring elementary candidates to thoroughly cover the science of reading in coursework. That’s why 20 states look to licensing tests dedicated to fully assessing knowledge of the science of reading before new elementary teachers enter the classroom (**Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin**).

Bright spots of policy action recently occurred in four states—**Alaska, Arkansas, Maryland, and Texas**—which all recently adopted better tests in reading for their elementary teacher candidates.

Reading difficulties are the primary reason students are assigned to special education, yet states are even less likely to impose reading licensure requirements on aspiring special education teachers. Only 11 of the 20 states with strong licensure tests in reading for elementary teachers extend this same requirement to special education teacher candidates (**Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Virginia**).

Another prominent theme in the new NCTQ analysis was the retreat by an unprecedented number of states on a once popular measure used to assess if aspiring teachers themselves have the reading, writing, and math skills identified as requisite to the job of teaching, the basic skills test. Since 2015, no fewer than ten states (**Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin**) have dropped requirements that all teacher candidates pass a basic skills test at the point of program admission, leaving only 15 states with the requirement in place.

State policy also plays a role in ensuring new elementary teachers have essential language arts, social studies, math, and science content knowledge to successfully teach their students in these areas. National teacher [survey data](#) (reporting that over half of elementary teachers do not feel very well-prepared to teach social studies and science), elementary teachers' well documented "math phobia," and poor performance of American elementary students on national and international benchmarks are all factors that contrast sharply with the veritable absence of measures used by states to ensure teacher content knowledge. Currently only half of states (25) have strong elementary content testing requirements for licensure.

While as many states have strengthened their elementary content testing requirements as those that have backtracked since 2015, the retreats include seven states that have scaled back (**Missouri, New Mexico**) or entirely withdrawn (**Arizona, California, North Carolina, Oregon, Wisconsin**) their requirements.

"States are making poor decisions, often in the name of solving shortages or the critically important goal of increasing teacher diversity, but there is little evidence that lowering standards for entry into the profession is either necessary or advisable," continued Walsh. "Diversifying the teaching profession must be a priority. But these moves do not appear to increase the overall teacher supply, as the profession only becomes less attractive to individuals with higher academic aptitude, including those of color."

Access the new [NCTQ State of the States 2021: Teacher Preparation Policy](#) data and analysis online to see full state data, findings, and recommendations for state education leaders in the following policy areas:

- Entry test requirements for admission into teacher preparation programs
- GPA requirements for admission into teacher preparation programs
- State approaches for encouraging more future teachers of color to enter teacher preparation
- Requirements for knowledge of effective early reading instruction, including teacher preparation program standards and licensure tests for future:
 - Elementary teachers
 - Special education teachers
 - Early childhood teachers
- Requirements for knowledge of content areas, including licensure tests for future:
 - Elementary teachers
 - Middle school teachers
 - Secondary teachers
 - Special education teachers
- Performance assessment (such as the edTPA) requirements for teacher licensure
- Clinical practice and student teaching requirements for teacher licensure

Note: In response to the pandemic, many states modified admissions, testing, and licensure requirements. Data for this report was collected prior to the pandemic and therefore does not reflect COVID-related policy changes. For more information on how states are addressing the impact of COVID on the teaching profession, visit the [NCTQ COVID-19 response hub](#).

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To schedule an interview with NCTQ President Kate Walsh, contact Nicole Gerber at ngerber@nctq.org or 202-393-0020 ext. 712.

About the National Council on Teacher Quality: *The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan research and policy group, committed to modernizing the teaching profession and based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. We recognize that it is not teachers who bear responsibility for their profession's many challenges, but the institutions with the greatest authority and influence over teachers. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, www.nctq.org.*