

National Association of State Boards of Education

➔ Leveraging Relicensure Policies to Advance Deeper Learning

By Don Long

An effective teaching workforce and students' acquisition of deeper learning competencies are widely regarded as crucial to preparing students for careers, college, and life.¹ Many states, however, appear headed in the opposite direction—lowering the bar to a “safe to teach” standard so more teachers can enter the field and stay there.²

State boards of education should counter with strong initial licensure policies to improve teacher preparation. This is a long-term strategy, however.³ The more immediate, powerful lever for developing current teachers and transforming schools and classrooms is relicensure policy.⁴

A BROKEN SYSTEM

Relicensing affects the 3.5 million public school teachers with a standard license, but until recently its potential for advancing the

profession has been little studied or used. In 2017, Louisiana was the only state to require objective evidence of effectiveness for both advancement from a provisional to a standard license and for its license renewal policies. Just seven other states—Delaware, Idaho, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania—require this evidence for licensure advancement.⁵ License renewal is tied to evaluations in only a few states.

Teacher licensure and relicensure requirements vary from state to state in a confusing, inconsistent patchwork that generally fails to require rigorous content and pedagogical knowledge. The system thus fails to support the profound instructional shifts required for advancing deeper learning skills such as applied and self-directed learning, growth mind-sets, teamwork, and leadership.⁶

Some states are doing away with relicensure altogether. In 2017, Wisconsin joined four other states—Missouri, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia—in giving

lifetime licenses, removing a key tool of accountability for ineffective teaching. Meanwhile, more than half of state boards focused on teacher shortages during their meetings in 2017, often approving emergency licensure waivers.

FRESH LOOK AT RELICENSURE

State boards can leverage relicensure policy—directly or indirectly—to help districts meet the twin challenges of transforming professional learning and requiring evidence of effective teaching. There are promising state efforts to use relicensure to support effective professional learning and develop career progressions toward increasing mastery and expert judgment.⁷ For example, the National Council on Teacher Quality ranked Rhode Island and Louisiana highly in 2015 for integrating licensure, licensure renewal, and educator evaluations based on evidence of effectiveness.

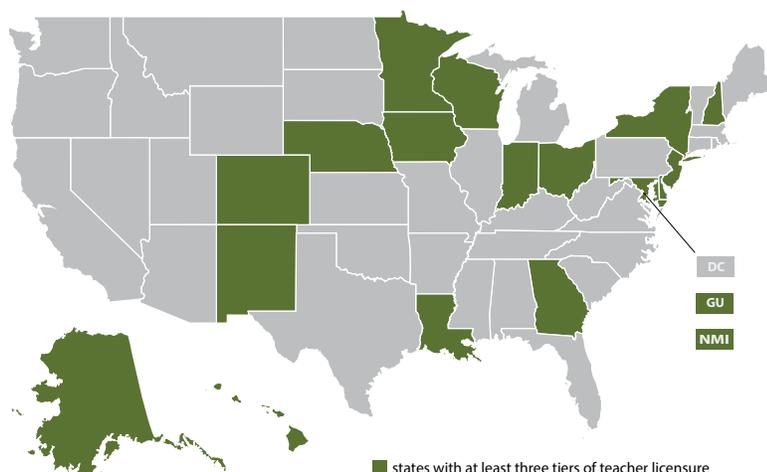
Thoughtful relicensure policy can support teacher leadership and build a diverse workforce. Relicensure can help drive continuous improvement in school quality when embedded within it is the notion of organizing schools around cycles of goal setting, professional learning, changes in classroom and school-wide practice, reflection, and evaluation.

Yet professional development for educators must overcome a legacy of minuscule impact on student outcomes.⁸ In overhauling Title II, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defined effective professional learning as “sustained, intensive, job-embedded, collaborative, classroom-focused, and data-driven.” ESSA requires districts to demonstrate how their professional learning “improved teacher, principal, or other school leader effectiveness.” Only a fifth of current professional development practices meet this new definition.⁹ And few states incorporate evidence of effectiveness in licensure advancement policy.

TOWARD MULTIPLE TIERS

An interstate licensure reform workgroup in 2017 recommended performance assess-

17 States with Multitiered Teacher Licensure



Sources: National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, “KnowledgeBase: Teacher Certificates” (August 3, 2015); information sent from NASDTEC to author, January 5, 2017; scans of state websites.

ments for strengthening licensure. But it failed to reach consensus on use of multi-tiered licensure aligned to a coherent developmental continuum.¹⁰ This ambivalence reflects the wide variation in how states define the tiers between entry-level and accomplished teaching (the north star of which has long been certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards). The lack of consensus provides an opening for state innovation.

Many states are already moving toward tiered licensure to develop and strengthen teacher pipelines and career progressions (see map). The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification estimates that 10 states use a single certificate, 21 use an initial and a professional license, and 17 states use three or more tiers. Georgia has a four-tiered system: preservice, induction, professional, and advanced.

Multitiered licensure encourages teachers to improve their practice and pursue added responsibilities, and it recognizes the developmental needs of teachers at each stage of their careers.

By one estimate, a U.S. teacher makes 1,500 decisions a day regarding what to do next in applying content and pedagogical knowledge and student interactions.¹¹ To master their profession and make good decisions, teachers need time to collaborate, observe colleagues' classes, and receive feedback.

Teachers in nations with high-performing education systems have far more time than their U.S. peers for job-embedded professional learning, sharing insights and successes with colleagues, engaging in research, and connecting their learning to school improvement efforts. In high-performing nations, teachers spend 10 to 17 hours in the classroom per week; U.S. teachers, in contrast, spend 27 hours in front of students.¹²

PORTFOLIOS AND INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PLANS

New Mexico no longer counts "seat time" (such as completion of a set number of continuing education units) for relicensure. It instead requires teachers to submit a work portfolio that shows their principals, mentors, and two

independent reviewers that they possess required skills. These portfolios may include lesson plans, reflections on teaching, and assessments showing student learning gains.

Fourteen states are exploring other strategies to do away with seat time. For example, this summer the Georgia Professional Standards Commission enhanced its multitiered licensure system by requiring individualized professional learning plans—with goals, strategies, and evidence of effectiveness—for recertification. Teachers must also participate in professional learning communities.

MICROCREDENTIALS

Microcredentials (or badges) for relicensure are performance-based assessments of specific competencies that can be mapped to a variety of school needs and to all stages in a teacher's career. They are a targeted, flexible way to develop deeper learning competencies in teachers and leaders—for example, inquiry-based pedagogy for developing students' critical thinking or project-based learning to develop communication and collaboration skills.¹³

The Delaware State Board of Education is in year one of a pilot to count microcredentials toward license renewal. The Tennessee State Board of Education already permits teachers to gain credit toward renewing their licenses using microcredentials. In its ESSA plan, Tennessee described them as "online modules designed to develop and to assess specific skills . . . [and] a way for teachers to demonstrate competencies aligned to their individual needs and interests, and to provide evidence of outcomes from professional learning." A handful of other states are giving teachers the option of counting microcredentials as continuing education units.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

An effective teacher workforce is essential to getting students ready for college and careers. Conversely, weakening or waiving teacher relicensure risks sending the wrong message to the public and undermining a commitment to equity. State boards can use their powers of licensure to support teacher pipelines and career progressions toward mastery. Since relicensing affects all public school teachers, it can advance the profession immediately and powerfully.

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NOTES

1 Ace Parsi, "How States Can Advance Deeper Learning for All," *Education Leaders Report* 2, no. 2 (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, 2016); Pedro Noguera et al., "Equal Opportunity for Deeper Learning" (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 2015).

2 Madeline Will, "You No Longer Need a Teaching Degree to Teach in Utah," *Education Week* blog (June 14, 2016).

3 Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School* (New York: Columbia Teachers College, 2012).

4 Andrew Croft et al., "Job-Embedded Professional Development: What It Is, Who Is Responsible, and How to Get It Done Well" (Dallas: Learning Forward, April 2010); Michael Fullan, "Change Processes and Strategies at the Local Level," *The Elementary School Journal* 85, no. 3 (1985), http://www.project2061.org/publications/designs/online/pdfs/reprints/6_fullan.pdf.

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7 Linda Darling-Hammond et al., *Empowered Educators: How High-Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality around the World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2017).

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9 Elizabeth Combs and Sarah Silverman, "Bridging the Gap: Paving the Pathway from Current Practice to Exemplary Professional Learning," (Malvern, PA: Frontline Research and Learning Institute, 2016). On how professional learning often fails to meet teachers' needs, see Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, "Teachers Know Best: Teachers' Views on Professional Development," webpage, 2014, http://k12education.gatesfoundation.org/learning/teacher_views_on_pd/.

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12 Ben Jensen et al., "Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems" (Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy, 2016).

13 In "Developing a System for Microcredentials: Supporting Deeper Learning in the Classroom," Digital Promise maps its microcredentials to the Hewlett Foundation's six deeper learning competencies.

14 Jenny DeMonte, "Microcredentials for Teachers: What Three Early Adopter States Have Learned So Far" (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, 2017).