

## Reconsidering Teacher Recertification in Maryland

by Mark Procopio

### Executive Summary

Every five years, all public school educators in Maryland are required to renew their licenses to teach. This ubiquitous process is meant to ensure that teachers maintain competent practice and engage in career-long learning, development, and growth. Given the ambiguous relationship between licensure renewal and teacher effectiveness in the classroom—and that it is largely a publicly funded effort, unlike many other regulated, licensed professions—recertification in the state warrants a reexamination.

Generally, to renew or advance a license, Maryland teachers must (1) provide evidence of effective classroom practice through satisfactory performance evaluations, and (2) engage in continued professional learning through either state-approved professional development opportunities or state-approved credit-bearing coursework at colleges and universities. The most costly and time-intensive part of this two-fold process is the latter. Professional development has grown into a vast network of opportunities for teachers with limited guidance and a lack of focus on quality or outcomes, which seldom requires a

principal's buy-in or recommendation and is often disjointed from evidence-based practices. An emphasis on graduate coursework persists despite research largely not bearing out the impact and value of these degrees, while on the job training and development that educators most value, are largely not eligible towards recertification requirements. Recertification practices are also fairly disconnected from other systems with which teachers interact, such as evaluation and compensation.

While Maryland's recertification system falls short in meeting its objectives, districts throughout the state are investing at least \$52.8 million each year in professional development activities. Accounting for the time teachers and other school staff invest in professional learning and development and the direct costs borne by districts, Maryland is likely spending between \$86.28 million and \$1.08 billion on professional development annually.

In the absence of demonstrable evidence that this system is working, the state should remove or minimize the compliance

requirements related to recertification. To achieve the goal of ensuring recertification encourages continued, effective teacher development resulting in stronger instructional practice and student outcomes, the following recommendations are offered:

**1. Create clear, demonstrable, achievable goals for recertification.**

Lawmakers should clarify the purpose and goals of recertification. If it is meant to remain a high-stakes compliance process, streamline. If it is meant to drive teacher growth and effectiveness, clearly define teacher development.

**2. Use data to evaluate outcomes.**

Collect and analyze data around certification and professional development within the Maryland Longitudinal Data System to inform professional development offerings and recommendations to better meet individual teacher's needs.

**3. Align licensure advancement and teacher development to effectiveness and growth.**

Making better use of the existing evaluation system, Maryland needs to update its renewal qualifications and licensure advancement to require demonstration of impact on practice and student learning, or demonstrations of knowledge and skills aligned with performance and curriculum or instructional standards rather than credit accumulation or attainment of graduate degrees.

**4. Ensure professional development incorporates evidence-based practices.**

The state should provide greater opportunities for individualized support that focuses on specific development goals, such as reading instruction that is scientifically based. Maryland should stop prioritizing the

accumulation of time-based credits accrued through formal collegiate coursework or other traditional professional development experiences.

**5. Shift the landscape of professional development offerings.**

Maryland should inventory current development efforts in schools, districts, and at accredited institutions of higher learning, evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts against a new, clearer definition of development, and reallocate funding for particular activities based on their impact.

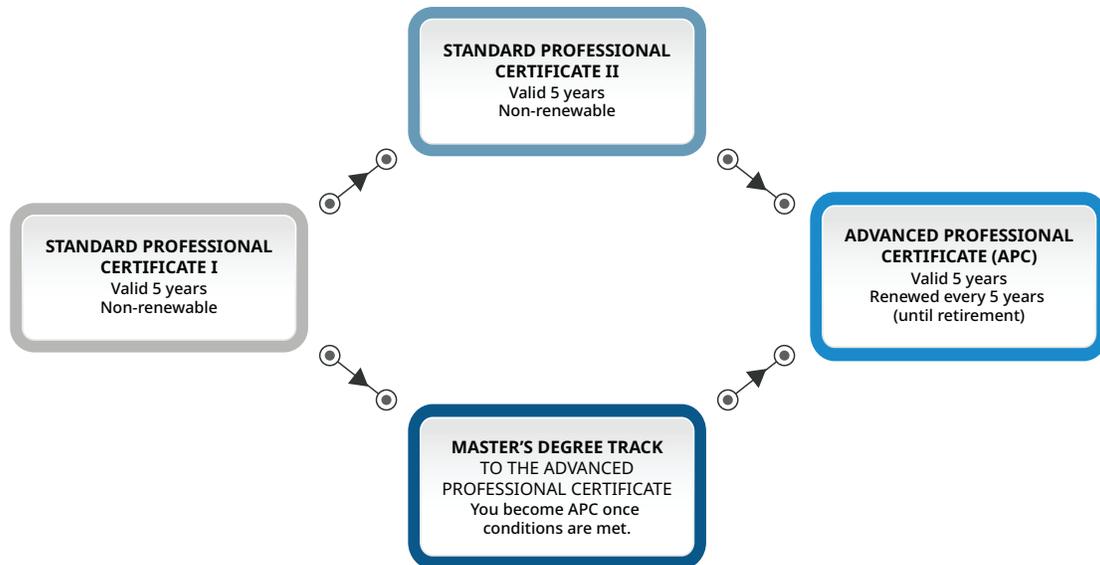
**6. Eliminate redundancy between systems.**

Maryland could link teacher evaluation, professional development, and licensure systems, making the entire process more meaningful and tied to teacher effectiveness.

**7. Implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.**

This legislation calls for increased rigor and standards for teacher preparation programs for entry into the profession as well as the creation of a career ladder that not only attracts candidates to the teaching profession with salaries commensurate with education, but also entices them to remain in the classroom by providing opportunity for salary increases for those who meet performance benchmarks.

## Typical Teacher Recertification Pathway in Maryland



1. All certifications and degrees require:

- 3 years of satisfactory evaluations
- 6 semester hours of acceptable credit
- A professional development plan

2. APC for those on the master's degree track can be earned through:

- A conferred master's degree (six credits related to the educator's academic discipline)
- 36 post baccalaureate credits (21 credits at the graduate level and six credits related to the educator's academic discipline)
- National Board Certification and 12 graduate credits in the educator's discipline

## Introduction

Recertification of state licenses is a ubiquitous experience for the nearly 60,000 public school teachers in Maryland.<sup>1</sup> Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia require teachers to renew their teaching certificates, representing a broad consensus that teachers must maintain minimum standards of professional practice.<sup>2</sup> Despite its universality, there is a dearth of research, trade publication writings, or news coverage on the topic.<sup>3</sup> That teacher relicensure requirements and practices are not a greater public policy concern is surprising given that public dollars largely fund these efforts.<sup>4</sup> Education investments make up nearly half of Maryland's state budget with more than \$1.8 billion supporting pre-kindergarten through 12th grade education.<sup>5</sup> Writing over 60 years ago, researcher Anthony LaBue posited the primary assumption on which certification, and thus recertification, was based; it is the idea that "the nature and quality of education is determined largely by the ability and preparation of teachers,"<sup>6</sup> a supposition that has been widely confirmed in the research of the subsequent decades.

Maryland requires teachers to reapply for certification every five years. Educators are also required to advance to higher-tier professional certificates as part of the renewal process. Recertification is a tremendously costly, time-intensive process to teachers and districts with little to no evidence of increased teacher effectiveness or student learning. The recertification process generally entails the submission of annual evaluations which ostensibly demonstrate teacher effectiveness and submission of individual growth plans and continuing education credits which demonstrate continuing professional development.

Teacher effectiveness and evaluation are widely researched and are a key focus of public policy conversations in Maryland. The largest costs, in terms of both time and

dollars, for recertification lay in continuing professional development. Do the time and costs of the recertification process and the continuing professional development they require result in desired outcomes for teachers and students? To better inform conversations around Maryland's teacher recertification processes, this report seeks to examine the desired outcomes, efficacy, and costs of existing requirements, and to provide recommendations for state and local policymakers and researchers.

## The Process & Purpose of Recertification

The modern, regulatory recertification regime was first instituted in Maryland around 1968. At that time, lower-tier or initial certificates, which were issued for three years, could be renewed for seven years upon completion of "six semester hours of acceptable post-baccalaureate graduate credit or its equivalent credit in State-approved in-service workshops," with a notable emphasis on master's programs. Holders of this certificate type were required to qualify for higher-tier certificates at the end of the renewal period, illustrating a desire for the advancement and growth of teacher knowledge, and presumably practice, through formal training and preparation.<sup>7</sup>

Like most states, teachers in Maryland start with an initial license.<sup>8</sup> These certificates are granted to graduates of one of 24 state-approved teacher preparation programs or one of 11 state-approved alternative preparation programs,<sup>9</sup> almost all of which are connected to an institution of higher education (IHE). Initial certification requirements, beyond successful completion of a preparation program, include the passage of basic skills, content, and pedagogy examinations.<sup>10</sup> The state requires teachers to demonstrate aptitude to proceed to more advanced certificates, a practice common in other professions to guarantee fitness for service and a minimum standard of

## A Brief, Early History of Recertification Policies in Maryland

As early as 1765, Maryland colonial law required the certification and annual reevaluation of teachers in county schools.<sup>i</sup> Reforms to teacher certification in Maryland closely mirrored national trends; though practices varied greatly over time, these reforms were characterized by increasing focus on teacher competency, higher standards for entry into the profession, and growing uniformity and professionalization of teaching.<sup>ii</sup> As concern over teacher competency grew dramatically over the first half of the 19th century,<sup>iii</sup> formal teacher examinations for certification and recertification were mandated.<sup>iv</sup>

At this time, the first state-funded teacher preparation programs, called Normal Schools, were established in Maryland. Diplomas from these programs were recognized as proof of qualification to teach, and graduates were exempted from reexaminations.<sup>v</sup> This development, a precursor to accepting higher education credentials as equivalent qualifications, would come to greatly influence certification policies in the future. During the first half of the 20th century, certification of teachers was made a state function,<sup>vi</sup> requirements for preservice preparation of teachers were raised, high school teacher-training programs were abandoned, tiered certificates were introduced, Normal Schools were restructured as four-year programs, departments of pedagogy at colleges and universities became common, and professional study at institutions of higher education became required to renew or convert lower-tier certificates.<sup>vii</sup> By 1959, Maryland was enforcing degree requirements for regular certification of teachers.<sup>viii</sup>

i Maryland State Archives. (Bacon's Laws of Maryland) An Act for the Encouragement of Learning and Erecting Schools in the Several Counties within this Province. Volume 75, 1723.

ii LaBue, Anthony. (1960). "Teacher Certification in the United States: A Brief History." *The Journal of Teacher Education*. (Volume XI), (No. 2), 147-172.

iii Maryland State Archives. (Proceeding and Documents of the House) Report to the House of Delegates by the Committee Appointed to Examine into the Propriety of Founding a Normal and Training School at St. John's College. Volume 665, 1858.

iv Major changes to Maryland's education landscape were brought under the 1864 Maryland Constitution, which called for a uniform system of "Free Public Schools" free of expense for tuition. See Maryland State Archives. (Supplement to the Maryland Code Containing the Acts of the General Assembly) Act of 1863. Volume 384, 1865.

v Maryland State Archives. (Supplement to the Maryland Code Containing the Acts of the General Assembly) Act of 1863. Volume 384, 1865.

vi Maryland State Archives. (Acts of 1916). Volume 534, 1916.

vii Teacher Education. (Volume XI), (No. 2), 147-172.

viii Ibid.

professional ability.<sup>11</sup> Maryland's three tiers of professional certificates are all valid for a five-year period, the most common certificate validity period nationwide.<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this report, we will focus on Maryland's most commonly held professional certificates, though the state issues three nonprofessional certificates.<sup>13</sup>

Generally, to renew a certificate or advance to a higher-level certificate, educators must submit three years of satisfactory annual evaluations, an individual growth plan, and proof of a specified number of semester hours of "acceptable" continuing education credits. Maryland educators are required to advance to higher-level certificates over the course of their career as part of the recertification process.<sup>14</sup> Maryland's recertification requirements are similar to those in other states. Nine states also require evidence of classroom experience, and 44 states require continuing professional development for renewal.<sup>15</sup> Melissa Tooley and Taylor White of New America's education policy program write that the rationale for periodic renewal is ostensibly to reaffirm maintenance of minimum standards of professional

competence and fitness while noting that most states require continued professional development for licensure renewal. They argue this indicates that recertification serves an additional, and sometimes unnamed, purpose: "to encourage and verify ongoing professional development and growth."<sup>16</sup>

In Maryland, continuing education requirements are presently satisfied through an accumulation of a set number of credits or units of professional learning, a typical requirement across states.<sup>17</sup> Acceptable credits are meant to be related to an educator's subject or grade level, though in practice the connection is not always clear, and are approved by the district in which a teacher is employed but are generally earned through regionally accredited IHEs or Maryland Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses. Credit hour requirements can range from six to 36 credits. Teachers may not renew the first two professional licenses, except under special circumstances, so must eventually acquire the highest-level professional license. See Appendix A for a table describing advancement and renewal requirements of professional certificates.

Table 1: Type and Quality of PD Opportunities in Maryland

Type of continuing education	Percentage of teachers participating	Percentage of PD opportunities defined as high quality
Workshops	75%	10%
Job-embedded	61%	25%
Graduate courses	34%	10%

Source: Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council. "Helping Teachers Help All Students: The Imperative for High-Quality Professional Development." 2004.

Though educators throughout the state are required to submit recertification information to their district employers or directly to MSDE, it is unclear what, if any, of this data is being collected for analysis at the district or state level.

The state's objectives for initial certification are clear. The Code of Maryland Regulations states that certification is meant to offer public assurances that:

- A.** Professional public educational staff possess the minimum essential knowledge and skills needed to achieve outcomes for the public education declared by the State Board of Education;
- B.** The results of professional preparation and training are united with the instructional practices and outcomes expected for public education;
- C.** Academically successful, multitalented, and experientially diverse individuals are being sought and retained by local school systems; and
- D.** Certificated education personnel maintain competent practice through career long-engagement with their content area, research, best practice, and expert opinion.<sup>18</sup>

Maryland policy indicates that competent practice relies on continued learning and growth, and the state's current requirements demonstrate concern for both continued competent educator practice through the submission of satisfactory evaluations and ongoing professional development and growth through mandatory development plans and evidence of continued professional learning through CPDs and postbaccalaureate course credits.

### Is Recertification Working?

Maryland awards renewed certificates upon verification of satisfactory classroom experience, to evidence competent practice or minimum requirements, and submission of proof of credit hours, which largely satisfy professional learning requirements. Though educators throughout the state are required to submit this information to their district employers or directly to MSDE, it is unclear what, if any, of this data is being collected for analysis at the district or state level. This is despite the fact that local districts and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) go through the effort and exercise of verifying that credit hours submitted qualify as "acceptable credit" from approved providers and programs. Acceptable credits are defined as credits earned through MSDE-approved CPDs or IHEs and are related to a teacher's grade-level or subject area. There is no attempt to make connections between this data and demonstrated growth in teacher practice, quality programming, or where continued learning may have an impact on teacher practice or student outcomes. Furthermore, the certification system as a whole does not interact with the state's teacher evaluation systems or connect with the Maryland Longitudinal Data System, which the state has invested in over the past decade.<sup>19</sup> The certification system could allow the analysis of certification, evaluation, and professional development efforts in a robust way to evaluate the outcomes of recertification on teacher growth. Given that appropriate data are not being collected or analyzed,

there is no definitive answer as to whether recertification practices are effective.

For many teachers, recertification is an impersonal exercise in compliance. This ritual of submitting paperwork to prove they have sat through a specific number of hours of coursework and paying fees to renew their license has become a costly, redundant, and sometimes frustrating effort on top of high-stakes evaluation systems and professional development mandated by schools and districts unrelated to the renewal process.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, educators nationwide report participating in professional development that is self-initiated or school- and district-mandated, including some experiences described as most meaningful or effective to individual development, that are not eligible for recertification purposes.

Many educators see little connection between recertification requirements and the challenges faced on a daily basis.<sup>21</sup> These recertification requirements often lack any connection to the meaningful Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) teachers annually set as part of their evaluations which measure student growth and a factors in determining a teacher's effectiveness.<sup>22</sup> Though many of these surveys are national, there is no reason to think these views do not express the views of Maryland teachers given the similarities in requirements. Teachers describe a system of recertification—in particular, professional learning—that lacks a coherent vision or strategy.

Current renewal requirements call for evidence of satisfactory classroom experience for three years within the five-year validity period of the teacher's certificate. Over the past decade,<sup>23</sup> MSDE and local districts have made significant changes to teacher evaluation systems, in response to the Education Reform Act of 2010, to make them more rigorous, accurate, and fair.<sup>24</sup> Under current models, teacher practitioners,

supervisors, and districts have access to evaluation, observation, and feedback data that would provide clear evidence of teacher proficiency on clear, specific, and defined educator instructional competencies. Regrettably, Maryland does not require development be linked to the needs identified through classroom observation and feedback as part of existing evaluation systems.

The general flexibility and enormous volume of options available in the current professional learning system make choices difficult to navigate. Confusion about what experiences will count toward recertification given a teacher's grade and subject placement is commonplace. Teachers receive little guidance about the options or resources to support them in meeting continued learning requirements. Since district employers are primarily responsible for verifying continuing education, the availability of support is often dictated by how a district's certification office is staffed. Instead, teachers rely on informal networks by asking colleagues about the quality, effectiveness, and eligibility of learning options. In such a confusing environment, it is unsurprising that convenience and price wind up heavily influencing the decisions teachers make about their recertification learning options. This has created an environment where professional development, or "PD" for short, has a reputation poor enough to be documented.<sup>25</sup> Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute writes, "Perhaps the most damning indictment of PD is that even teachers themselves regard it with contempt."<sup>26</sup> National studies find that only 40% report that most of their professional development activities were a good use of time.<sup>27</sup> A 2014 survey found that only 3 in 10 teachers were highly satisfied with the professional development they engage in.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, few states award credit for the types of professional development educators most value—job-embedded, team-based, and collaborative learning.<sup>29</sup> This type of

job-embedded professional development occurs during the school day, is linked to development goals for students and schools, and is directly relevant to day-to-day practice. Maryland does not presently allow this type of professional development to satisfy recertification requirements, while 23 states do allow these to satisfy requirements at least in part.<sup>30</sup>

Research shines a light on professional development practices that are promising but require additional study.<sup>31</sup> Research indicates sustained, targeted, and personalized learning opportunities are most likely to improve a teacher's performance.<sup>32</sup> Development focused on an educator's demonstrated needs for growth accompanied by meaningful data and evidence for use in goal-setting and progress tracking as well as clear responsibilities between teachers and supervisors can better spur stronger instructional practice.<sup>33</sup> Research illustrates some common themes of evidence-based, teacher education practices. Effective professional development should be relevant to teachers' daily work and content,<sup>34</sup> involve personalized coaching and active learning,<sup>35</sup> provide opportunities for collaboration between colleagues,<sup>36</sup> and include substantive time to learn new knowledge and skills.<sup>37</sup> Many of these characteristics are lacking within existing options for satisfying recertification requirements.

Maryland's continuing education requirements allow two pathways: credits earned through accredited institutions of higher education or through state-approved learning opportunities called CPD credits. Advancement to the highest-tier professional certificate requires some combination of postbaccalaureate or graduate credit, National Board Certification, or conferral of a master's degree. New America's 2017 report on teacher recertification illustrates that these are common requirements. Forty-three states allow higher education coursework to meet recertification requirements, 42 states allow

other approved opportunities (i.e., workshops, conferences, and stand-alone options), and 17 allow National Board Certification.<sup>38</sup>

Harvard University Professor Heather Hill asserts that the "professional development 'system' for teachers is, by all accounts, broken."<sup>39</sup> Maryland has sought to address issues related to ongoing teacher learning and development for many years. The Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council was established in 2003 to examine professional development policies and programs, set standards to articulate high-quality professional development, and offer recommendations for ongoing improvement of programs and policies.<sup>40</sup> It found a system that lacked vision, clear standards, and sufficient oversight of learning offerings.<sup>41</sup>

CPD credits include a wide range of mediums for professional learning: courses, workshops, institutes, seminar series, conferences, action research, publications of professional articles, curriculum development, mentoring, and peer coaching.<sup>42</sup> But as Melissa Tooley and Kaylan Connally of New America's education policy program note, the American educational system has been more successful at producing professional development "quantity than quality."<sup>43</sup> Maryland has approved more than 1,200 course options for CPD credit from MSDE, local districts, IHEs, and independent or private vendors. MSDE itself is responsible for 275 of these course offerings while districts have created more than 600.<sup>44</sup>

A 2004 report of the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council found that 75% of teachers participated in workshops for continuing education and 61% participated in job-embedded professional development, but only 10% and 25% of those professional development opportunities, respectively, were deemed high quality as defined by the Council's own rubric.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, CPD credits are often awarded

## Continuing Professional Development Credits

# 1,200

Maryland approved  
CPD course options

# 275

CPD options  
created by  
MSDE

# 600

CPD options  
created by  
districts

by verification of participation. This “seat time” approach rewards hours spent but disregards impact and outcomes on teacher practice. Few tools are provided to evaluate the quality of development offerings or guide teachers to more worthwhile options even with more rigorous teacher evaluation systems in place.<sup>46</sup>

The other continuing learning pathway available under existing regulation is through postbaccalaureate coursework, making the state’s recertification processes heavily reliant on the higher education ecosystems. The same 2004 report of the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council found that 34% of teachers reported taking graduate courses as part of ongoing professional development, yet only 10% of those programs were considered high quality under the Council’s definition of high-quality professional development standards. Notably, 85% of teachers taking graduate courses received financial support from their district employers, representing a monumental misalignment of public resources toward programs not tied to common standards.<sup>47</sup> The emphasis on graduate coursework persists despite research that does not bear out the value or impact of such degrees. Research shows that master’s degrees have minimal to no impact on teacher practice.<sup>48</sup>

Additionally, Maryland has made efforts to promote the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards’ (NBPTS) certification process through the Quality Teacher Incentive Act.<sup>49</sup> The NBPTS process incorporates external assessment of a teacher’s professional learning and growth performed by trained reviewers. Many point to this process as a gold standard, but the process is expensive and time-intensive. Researchers Melissa Tooley and Taylor White write that NBPTS certification may prove impractical given the current state of working conditions, compensation, and status.<sup>50</sup> And there are concerns around racial disparities in which teachers successfully achieve NBPTS certification.<sup>51</sup> This may be the direction Maryland is moving with the recommended reforms of the Kirwan Commission; however, it is important to note that while research shows that this certification is effective in identifying strong teachers, it is inconclusive as to whether it contributes to teachers’ existing effectiveness. Currently, Maryland’s recertification process does neither.

On the whole, a confusing and growing professional development marketplace has developed without incentive to ensure quality, measure impact, incorporate evidence-based practices, or demonstrate a clear or coordinated sense of purpose.<sup>52</sup> Though

efforts to improve quality control have occurred, too little analysis regarding the impact of these professional development credits takes place. The evolution and growth of this ecosystem are particularly striking when recognizing how little is known about what drives improvements in teacher practice. Much of the research in the past decade shows that the professional development that takes place does not have an effect on student learning. An often-cited analysis of 1,300 studies found that only nine showed clear, empirical evidence of the effect of professional development on student achievement.<sup>53</sup> As education reporter Stephen Sawchuk writes, “Good training [...] tends to happen despite—rather than because of—certificate-renewal requirements.”<sup>54</sup>

Research shows that teachers can improve practice dramatically in their first several years in the classroom.<sup>55</sup> Generally, teachers’ professional growth plateaus after about five years, though it seems reasonable to assume there is ample room to grow. A recent, multi-district study showed that half of teachers with 10 or more years of experience were rated below effective in some core instructional practices. Teacher development appears to be a highly individualized process,<sup>56</sup> which is not served well by recertification regulations that do not prioritize growth on specific, identified instructional practices. The same study found no common threads that distinguished teachers who improved from other teachers.<sup>57</sup> This indicates just how little is known about effective professional development for teachers.

That being said, there are a few consistent, small but statistically significant, relationships associated with greater improvement.<sup>58</sup> Teacher openness to feedback, positive perceptions of school improvement efforts and of evaluators, and increased numbers of observations all had positive correlations to teacher growth. The single greatest factor tied to teacher growth was alignment between

teacher perception of their instructional effectiveness and their formal evaluation ratings.<sup>59</sup> Commonly, there was a striking difference in third-party evaluations of teacher performance and growth compared to educator self-perception.<sup>60</sup> This misalignment indicates a need for clear information about instructional strengths and weaknesses.

## The Costs of Recertification

Federal, state, and local investments into teacher professional development, a main objective of recertification practices, are estimated to total \$18 billion each year, not counting the cost of time spent by our country’s 3.1 million public school teachers.<sup>61</sup> Given this massive investment of public resources, it is surprising that ongoing educator professional development is not a greater public policy concern. Unlike other licensed professions that require continuing education, public dollars are funding large parts of the training that satisfies relicensure requirements through district- and state-provided offerings and tuition reimbursement arrangements.<sup>62</sup> Despite these investments, recertification and the professional development it demands are characterized by a misalignment of activities unlinked to improved educator practice and, at times, redundant with other systems.

Recertification represents significant investments of time and resources for Maryland’s teachers. Professional learning that satisfies recertification requirements can range dramatically in cost. Maryland-approved CPDs range in price from \$30 to \$249 per credit hour.<sup>63</sup> National Board Certification costs approximately \$1,900.<sup>64</sup> Offerings from higher education institutions, generally required for eventual attainment of the required advanced professional certificate, can be much more expensive. Programs for master’s degrees in education in Maryland can range from \$20,000 to more than \$40,000.<sup>65</sup> These expenses do not account for the cost and value of the

One of the largest costs to districts is tuition reimbursement agreements for advanced degrees and graduate coursework. In its 2019 fiscal year, Baltimore City Public Schools paid \$1,822,173 in tuition reimbursement. Two years later, the amount increased to \$2,064,927.

time teachers invest in recertification and professional development.

In a 2016 report, teachers surveyed reported spending nearly 10% of a typical year participating in professional development.<sup>66</sup> The report's authors noted that the average teacher will spend more than a full school year on professional development after a little more than a decade in the classroom, representing "an extraordinary and generally unrecognized commitment to supporting professional development as a primary strategy for accelerating student learning."<sup>67</sup>

The total cost of recertification is difficult to determine. Any attempt to quantify requires defining the activities to be included. One of the largest costs to districts is tuition reimbursement agreements for advanced degrees and graduate coursework. In its 2019 fiscal year, Baltimore City Public Schools paid \$1,822,173 in tuition reimbursement. Two years later, the amount increased to \$2,064,927.<sup>68</sup> The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education's 2019 interim report estimated that Maryland districts directly spend \$52.8 million each year on professional development costs, some of which counts toward teacher certification, while most likely does not.<sup>69</sup>

Other national studies indicate school districts spend between \$73 million and \$181 million annually on teacher development efforts with the largest investments being in salaries

and other costs related to teachers and the hundreds of people who provide instructional support at all levels of each district.<sup>70</sup> Districts have also built enormous catalogs of workshops and courses for their teachers to give them variety. By all comparisons, school districts spend two to four times more of their budgets and four to 15 times more per employee on support and development than other industries.<sup>71</sup> Though, nationally, districts are spending about \$5,747 per teacher each year on professional development, these investments can range widely from district to district.<sup>72</sup> The New Teacher Project (TNTP) finds that large urban districts were spending an average of \$18,000 per teacher<sup>73</sup> while another recent analysis estimated \$1,438 per teacher annually.<sup>74</sup> Using these bookends as guides, Maryland is likely to invest between \$86.28 million and \$1.08 billion in teacher development each year.

Despite the incredible public investments, and personal investments on the part of teachers, recertification remains meaningfully disconnected from its desired outcomes and misaligned to the meaningful learning experiences that most educators value and desire. As TNTP stated in its report on teacher professional development, "An outsized investment in teacher improvement is not necessarily unwise or unmerited. The problem is our indifference to its impact."<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Recertification is meant to ensure that Maryland teachers maintain competent practice through ongoing professional learning, development, and growth. Its outcomes, however, are not adequately measured. Current practices are viewed by practitioners as an exercise in compliance, disconnected from evidence-based methods for teacher development, to incentivize a marketplace of learning options unfocused on quality. This misalignment, along with the high costs of time and dollars required by recertification, serves to undermine the underlying goals of supporting a culture of ongoing learning and growth.

Policymakers have choices to make. In the absence of evidence of effectiveness of the current system in Maryland, educators and school systems should be freed from time-intensive and costly recertification requirements until the state can demonstrate impact. A compliance-based recertification system could easily be streamlined to demonstrate competent practice by simply submitting satisfactory evaluations. Whether policymakers choose to reform Maryland's expectations and regulations around ongoing teacher professional development within the context of recertification or not matters less than making sure it happens through some policy vehicle. If the goal of recertification is to encourage continued, effective teacher development and growth toward stronger instructional practice and student outcomes, then a more coherent framework for meeting ongoing development goals would focus resources on these processes and make them more impactful. The following recommendations would have tangible benefits for schools, teachers, and students.

### 1. Create clear, demonstrable, and achievable goals for recertification.

Maryland would benefit from additional clarity around the desired outcomes of recertification. A clearer understanding of recertification's objectives should be developed with input from stakeholders. Define teacher "development" clearly, as observable, measurable progress toward an ambitious standard for teaching and student learning.<sup>76</sup> A clear goal would allow the state to discontinue license requirements with no direct connection to teacher growth or classroom effectiveness, in line with the National Council on Teacher Quality's recommendations for state policy.<sup>77</sup> Armed with clear objectives around teacher effectiveness, Maryland could better measure progress and focus development requirements and practices on individualized aspects of teacher growth.

### 2. Use data to evaluate outcomes.

Maryland has invested considerable resources into improving longitudinal data collection and analysis in education over the past 10 years with the creation of the Maryland Longitudinal Data System.<sup>78</sup> If teacher license and professional development data are included in this system, they can be leveraged to evaluate the relevance and impact of certificates and professional development at a more macro level. Data could be collected and analyzed regarding different forms of professional development including format, providers, instructors, and assessments. This information could be made available to help districts, school-level administrators, and teachers make decisions about what professional development to offer or recommend and to whom.

### **3. Align licensure advancement and teacher development to effectiveness and growth.**

To focus recertification practices on growth in teacher practice, Maryland needs to update its renewal qualifications to require demonstration of impact on practice and student learning, or demonstrations of knowledge and skills aligned with performance and curriculum or instructional standards.<sup>79</sup> Maryland can utilize existing teacher evaluation systems, which provide a clear, deep understanding of individual performance and progress.<sup>80</sup> Several states have introduced individualized professional growth assessment to their renewal processes.<sup>81</sup> Georgia's 2017 recertification reforms have a clear objective: a more intentional, personalized culture of professional learning statewide. It requires teachers to develop and make progress toward individualized goals for professional learning based on growth needs identified in their previous performance evaluations.<sup>82</sup> These efforts are not unique.

In 2016, Maryland's Teacher Induction, Retention, and Advancement Act workgroup recommended individualized and differentiated professional development focused on growth and improvement in instructional practice.<sup>83</sup>

Policymakers can focus schools and systems on deliberate actions that prioritize regular feedback with policy that encourages reflection, collaboration, and skill and knowledge development.<sup>84</sup> Maryland should become increasingly clear about who does what, why, and when it comes to teacher development. In systems that engage in measurably effective teacher development, a small number of central office staff support teachers through observations and feedback, but most central office staff are not dropping in and out of teachers' classrooms. Central

offices focus primarily on setting instructional expectations, overseeing and coaching school leaders on progress toward those expectations, generating data to support teachers and school leaders, and organizing systemwide professional learning experiences. Principals in these districts view themselves primarily as managers of their assistant principals, whose primary responsibility is coaching teachers and ensuring that high-quality instruction is occurring.<sup>85</sup> Maryland can create robust systems to manage the creation and assessment of personal growth plans and explore incentives to promote meaningful professional development as part of renewal.<sup>86</sup>

Additionally, the rationale for advanced licenses should be clear. License advancement should be based on evidence of teacher effectiveness and demonstrated competencies rather than credit accumulation. Research is clear that master's degrees generally do not have any significant correlation with classroom performance. The National Council on Teacher Quality suggests removing the mandate that teachers obtain a master's degree for any level of license advancement.<sup>87</sup> Many educators identify the value of master's conferring programs not necessarily due to their content but more for the cohort-driven experience of collaborative learning, which could still be accomplished through more job-embedded, school- or district-based professional learning community models.

### **4. Ensure professional development incorporates evidence-based practices.**

Frequently, licensure policies contradict what is known about best practices in adult learning and discourage more effective professional development pathways. But the evidence also reveals the broader nature of the problem: Having a meaningful impact on teacher performance over time depends as much on the conditions in which development

takes place as on the nature of the development itself.<sup>88</sup> Maryland should create an environment where school systems are constantly working toward better instruction. The state should provide substantively greater opportunities for individualized support that focus on specific development goals. Maryland should end the practice of prioritizing the accumulation of time-based credits accrued through formal collegiate coursework or other traditional professional development experiences. Policy should prioritize, instead, experiences that are characterized by what is known about effective teacher practice. Professional development experiences should be relevant to teachers' daily work and content,<sup>89</sup> involve personalized coaching and active learning,<sup>90</sup> provide opportunities for collaboration between colleagues,<sup>91</sup> and/or include substantive time to learn new knowledge and skills.<sup>92</sup>

### **5. Shift the landscape of professional development offerings.**

Maryland's current licensure and professional development system is heavily reliant on a higher education ecosystem that is, disconnected from K-12 classrooms. The state should reevaluate existing professional learning support and programs within schools and districts as well as within accredited institutions of higher education in light of a better-defined understanding of teacher professional development and its more refined outcomes.

MSDE can inventory current development efforts and begin to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts against a new definition of development. The state can reallocate funding for particular activities based on their impact, and explore and test alternative approaches to development.<sup>93</sup> If necessary, the state can revise its accreditation requirements to encourage higher-quality offers and the promulgation of evidence-based

programming. If individualized teacher growth is prioritized through more job-embedded learning opportunities, this may require an effort to move professional development from colleges and universities to inside the walls of classrooms and schools. Greater collaboration and partnerships between districts and higher education institutions could help facilitate stronger learning if incentivized and resourced by the state.

### **6. Eliminate redundancy between systems.**

Currently, Maryland teachers must navigate licensure requirements, additional professional development requirements unrelated to their certification, as well as goal setting and evaluation requirements. Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh asked in a 2015 blog, "Why should educators have to establish multiple demonstrations of knowledge, skills, and growth for different purposes?"<sup>94</sup> Maryland could link teacher evaluation, professional development, and licensure systems, and move the entire process to a greater and more meaningful one tied to teacher growth. These systems could require demonstration of impact on practice and student learning, or demonstrations of knowledge and skills aligned with performance and curriculum or instructional standards.<sup>95</sup> Several states have introduced individualized professional growth assessment to their renewal processes.<sup>96</sup>

### **7. Implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.**

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which came out of the recommendations of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (more commonly referred to as the Kirwan Commission), details a number of reforms aligned with this report's recommendations.<sup>97</sup> The legislation calls for increased rigor and standards for teacher preparation programs for entry into the

profession and the creation of a career ladder that attracts candidates to the teaching profession with salaries commensurate with the required education, and entices them to remain in the classroom by providing opportunity for salary increases for those who meet performance benchmarks.

These reforms would have implications for initial certification and recertification, including moving away from master's degree requirements and holding the NBPTS as a gold standard for certification, eventually requiring teachers to achieve this standard for advancement. The legislation does much to address education researcher Melissa Tooley's stated concerns around the practicality of utilizing NBPTS at scale, including raising teacher compensation across the state

and attempting to increase the status of the profession.

If Maryland wants to best serve its educators and students, it must ensure that its professional certification processes are meaningful supports toward teachers' ongoing growth. An eloquent and impassioned call to action in an 1858 committee report to the Maryland House of Delegates reads: "Without competent teachers, the best meant and most wisely devised plans for general education, will serve no useful end. The most, liberal endowments, the most admirable constructed and judiciously located buildings, the most carefully selected books, will all utterly fail of their purpose, without the well trained teacher to give life and power to the whole..."<sup>98</sup>

## About the Author

**Mark Procopio** holds degrees in International Economics and International Finance from The Catholic University of America and earned a teaching certificate from the Johns Hopkins University School of Education. A former public school educator and non-profit leader, Mark is a consultant in policy, education, and nonprofit management.

## Appendix A<sup>99</sup>

<b>Standard Professional Certificate I (SPC I)</b> <i>5-Yr. validity</i>	<b>Standard Professional Certificate II (SPC II)</b> <i>5-Yr. validity</i>	<b>Advanced Professional Certificate (APC)</b> <i>5-Yr. validity</i>
<p><b>SPC I &gt; SPC II</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete 6 semester hours of acceptable credit*</li> <li>• Complete 3 years of satisfactory experience</li> <li>• Complete a professional development plan</li> </ul>	<p><b>SPC I/II &gt; APC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conferred master's degree related to public school education (6 credits related to the educator's discipline)</li> </ul> <p><b>OR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 36 post baccalaureate credits (minimum 21 graduate level credits, of which 6 are related to the educator's discipline)</li> </ul> <p><b>OR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Board Certification and 12 credits of graduate coursework related to the educator's discipline</li> </ul> <p><b>OR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Technical Education (PTE) teachers who do not possess a bachelor's degree shall complete a planned program of 36 credits (a maximum of 12 CPDs for the trade related or reading coursework may be applied)</li> </ul> <p><b>AND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete 3 years of satisfactory experience</li> </ul> <p><b>AND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a professional development plan</li> </ul>	<p><b>APC Renewal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete 6 semester hours of acceptable credit*</li> <li>• Complete 3 years of satisfactory experience</li> <li>• Complete a professional development plan</li> </ul>

\*Acceptable credit shall be approved by the local superintendent of schools if the educator is employed by the local school system or if the educator is not employed, the credit is:

- Earned or taught at a regionally accredited Institution of Higher Education or through Maryland approved Continuing Professional Development credits (CPDs). (These credits must be submitted on an official transcript or on a Maryland CPD form);
- Related to a school assignment;
- Earned within 5 years preceding the date on which the certificate is issued; and
- Earned in reading course work if not already completed (teaching areas and library media specialists only.)

## Endnotes

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by Mark Procopio

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